

**Phenomenon-based Learning in Finnish and Vietnamese
Upper Secondary School Curriculum for English as a
Foreign Language**
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ABSTRACT

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With the central ideology of incorporating real-life events into school concepts, phenomenon-based learning has received wide media coverage and publicity (Sahlberg, 2015; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016). This paper, thus, firstly outlines the main characteristics of phenomenon-based learning and considering affiliated learning theories. Then, the present study aims to compare similarities and differences of Finnish and Vietnamese curricula and analyze them from the perspective of phenomenon-based learning. Three selected curricula from two countries have been examined according to four paired dimensions: viewpoint and mission of education, learning goals and objectives of upper general secondary education, content areas, and instructional techniques. The study conducts a qualitative theory-driven content analysis.

The findings identify a variety of similarities and differences between Finnish and Vietnamese curricula in the four paired dimensions. The results provide some implications for educators from the perspective of phenomenon-based learning. The enhancement of students' critical cognitive and socio-emotional capabilities alongside with academic performances was thoroughly discussed on the basis of the findings. This study also suggests the reconsideration of teachers' autonomy in creating interesting and meaningful learning environments. The findings can provide teachers with pedagogical benefits and insights for lesson designs and directions towards the lifetime and holistic development of students' intelligence, competencies, agency and motivations. These findings also give some academic ideas on how diversely phenomenon-based learning can be realized in national core curricula.

Keywords: phenomenon-based learning, national curriculum, Finland, Vietnam

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1 INTRODUCTION

On a normal teaching night shift of two years ago at the HCMC University of Education Foreign Language Center – Branch 2, my manager-cum-university lecturer, Mr Le Huy Lam, called me in his office and asked, *“Have you heard about phenomenon-based learning of Finland?”*. *“No, Sir”* I replied. *“Then, remember to spend some time researching that field since it will benefit your classrooms”* he suggested. Since that very moment, I have been nourishing a plan to study painstakingly on this interesting topic. I was initially impressed by online articles of Grover (2016), Sahlberg (2015), Silander (2015a, b) and Strauss (2015) describing phenomenon-based learning as an innovative way of teaching that moves away from decontextualized school subjects towards interdisciplinary topics, encouraging students to take more responsibility for their own learning and share new perspectives with classmates, pushing them to make use of own intelligences and competences to resolve real-world phenomena of study, work and life. It is, however, still much uncertainty existing about the nature and the characterization of phenomenon-based learning and on what basis this new approach to learning is different from previously established methodologies and approaches. This question is the main reason for me to decide to delve into this topic and make best attempts to seek for an answer.

Before that epochal meeting, I had been mesmerized by the excellent performance in education of Finland with the least test anxiety (-.41) and the most students’ life satisfaction (7.89) in PISA 2015 but still ensure the high rates of students’ academic achievements (mean reading, mathematics and science are all considerably above OECD average of 15.3) (OECD, 2016, p. 5; OECD, 2017, pp. 9, 11; *“Study Finds Significant Stress”*, 2014, para. 5). I had also heard many stories from colleagues and friends have spent some time living and working in Finland that students in general are honourably regarded as active social beings and their imagination, creativity, agility and enthusiasm are supremely promoted thanks to a variety of playing-to-learn activities, but not high-stakes

examinations. This curiosity had indeed inspired my young soul of English foreign language teacher to explore deeper and make question relating to the specific viewpoint and missions of education, learning objectives, content areas and instructional techniques of that country that could bring about excellent performance of Finland in the worldwide level. More interestingly, a full scholarship of the two-year international master's degree programme in Educational Sciences at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland, fortunately, gave wings to my dream and enabled me to do a satisfactory study on my topic.

The present study, conducted at the time of my studying in Finland, compares and analyzes Finnish and Vietnamese national core curricula for upper general secondary education. This comparative analysis aims to offer two countries' high school teachers pedagogical insights for their mainstream classroom teaching and learning activities. It also examines closely English language curriculum for high schools of Finland and Vietnam, which thus hopes that English foreign language instructors in both countries can reflect on the pedagogical benefits found in the present study to design learning modules in an effective manner to both meet the basic requirements of each national schooling system and more importantly, support the holistic development of students' knowledge, competencies and motivations. Finally, the present study investigates the various realizations of nature and characterizations of phenomenon-based learning in both national core curriculum and English curriculum for high school level of both Finland and Vietnam.

There are, concisely, two primary aims of this study: 1) To outline the main characteristics of phenomenon-based learning; 2) To compare similarities and differences of Finnish and Vietnamese curricula and analyze them from the perspective of phenomenon-based learning. To achieve the goals of the purpose statement, two research questions were formulated:

1. What is the stance of phenomenon-based learning among ELT methodologies?
2. How is phenomenon-based learning realized in national core curriculum between Finland and Vietnam?

To cope with the first question, I analyzed and synthesized a variety of theoretical underpinnings about ELT methodologies in order to deduce the possible stance of phenomenon-based learning among already existing ones. Even though Finland's 2016 National Core Curriculum states that phenomenon-based education should be designed and provided at least one such study-period per school year for all grade level students, English written research on this issue was almost non-existent when I began this study in 2017 (Halinen, 2015; Halinen, 2016). The generalisability of some works at the point, such as Grover's (2016), Sahlberg's (2015), Silander's (2015a, b), Strauss' (2015) and of Zhukov (2015), is insufficient for revealing the true nature of phenomenon-based learning. Hence, I decided to expand the research area towards examining Finnish-written manuals, books, presentations and other relevant web-based articles and blogs, which are hard to tell for the completely scholarly acceptance yet made a major contribution to my study. It was my well-intentioned purpose to have kept exploring those resources for the sake of my study even though I fully understand the common critiques for non-academic works.

Starting with the key term *ilmiöpohjaista oppimista*, I began my exploration with the published master thesis of Kivelö (2015) from the University of Applied Sciences - HUMAK, the presentation of Cantell (2012), Head of Education for Elementary Education OKL - University of Helsinki, two publications of Linturi (2014) and Roiha, Härkönen, Ikäheimo, Määttä and Yrjänheikki (2016), and some other similar resources written in Finnish exclusively, in a clumsy manner owing to my insufficient language skill - Suomi. Fortunately, Riikka Pitkälä, a design engineer, and her parents (my Finnish friendship family in Jyväskylä), Dr. Juri Valtanen and Dr. Eleni Berki, two assistant professors at the University of Tampere, and Marja Kinnunen, my Finnish classmate at the University of Jyväskylä, offered to become Finnish-English translators to help me overcome the language barrier. Their assistance reinforced, serendipitously, the value of credibility for those translated studies since translators are from different fields of profession and thus could give a degree of neutrality to the translation, not my biased or intentioned falsification. In the beginning months of 2018, other valid

and trustworthy author names of Bobrowsky, Korhonen and Kohtamäki (2014) and Moilanen (2015) came to me thanks to my supervisor, Prof. Riikka Alanen, which significantly helped me finish the literature review. In the next few lines, readers will read, experience my past journey and find the answer to my first research question.

Investigating what principal attributes of phenomenon-based learning are displayed in the legislative documents of education in two mentioned countries, on the other hand, requires me to rigorously observe into and conduct a comparative analysis on different sections and headings of two national core curricula. However, I did not analyze every singular part of those texts intensively due to the limited scope of a master thesis. Rather, the points of the convergence and distinction were analyzed in relation to four paired dimensions of viewpoint and mission of education, learning goals and objectives of upper general secondary education, content areas of English curriculum (themes and topics), and teaching methodology and varied instructional techniques. I chose these categories for my cross-national analysis because they are essential components in both national and English curriculum of two countries, which thus can be used for a meaningful comparison of similarities and differences among their educational systems (Allan, 1996; Arreola & Aleamoni, 1998; Prpic, 2009; Richards, 2017; Volmari, 2012). On the basis of these dimensions, the second research question has been subdivided into the following questions:

- a) What attributes of phenomenon-based learning are present in the viewpoint and mission, learning goals and objectives of general high school curricula between Vietnam and Finland?
- b) What attributes of phenomenon-based learning are present in teaching techniques and content areas of English curriculum between Finland and Vietnam?

In addition, these four paired categories also allow national core curricula of both countries to be critically analyzed through the lens of phenomenon-based learning. This study, particularly, will address how phenomenon-based learning is reflected in each paired dimension. It will be meaningful to investigate what

opportunities there exist for teachers to devise classrooms and pedagogical activities and utilize the given materials towards more learner-centered, meaningful and efficacious way for the sake of the sustainable and holistic development in students' intelligence, competencies and agency through this comparative study.

The overall structure of the study takes the form of five chapters. After the introduction, chapter 2 will outline theoretical backgrounds and pedagogical ideologies behind phenomenon-based learning, the role of the core curriculum as a national level of Finland and Vietnam, previous studies on cross-national curriculum (including English foreign language curriculum) analysis between Finland and Vietnam and suggest the significance of this study. In Chapter 3, the methodology of the research task, implementation of the study and ethical solutions are explained. Chapter 4 presents the qualitative content analysis findings and discussions on the results in relation to the existing literature about phenomenon-based learning. The final chapter then wraps up the study, suggesting implications for the field of knowledge, recommending for further research work. On the basis of this, limitations of the study are taken into account and practical implications for teachers' developing feasible lessons and classrooms to both cover the basic requirements of each national schooling system and enhance students' manifold competencies, intelligence and inspirations are also elaborated.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The following part of this paper moves on to describe a comprehensive literature review underpinning phenomenon-based education, reveals background information leading to statement of the problem and attempts to offer an answer for the first research question of discovering the stance of phenomenon-based learning among previously established ELT methodologies.

This chapter has been divided into three parts. The first six headings begin with several theories on the identification of phenomenon-based learning and its

stance among existing ELT methodologies. The second part of three headings then proceeds with laying out previous studies on the important roles of the national core curriculum and English curriculum in the educational system of two countries, Finland and Vietnam. The remaining heading highlighting a knowledge gap in the field of study and stating the significance of the present study will end the chapter.

2.1 Phenomenon-based learning in pedagogy: An overview

2.1.1 What is phenomenon-based learning?

Despite a contention in some circles about a precise definition for the new term, phenomenon-based learning indeed refers to an innovative, essential and timely form of learning is deserving of praise since it has introduced phenomenon-based learning as, not simply a method but, a new way of thinking (Kivelö, 2015; Linturi, 2014; Roiha et al., 2016). This new vision originated from the learners' curiosity, self-motivation, autonomy and individual observations to seek for and explain the holistic real-world phenomena around them (Kivelö, 2015; Silander, 2015b). Holistic real-world phenomena in this context concerns with the practical and realistic topics of life, such as human relationship, media and technology, natural resources and other related sociocultural issues that could bring and make alive for teaching targets and learning goals in pedagogical environment to become affordable, concrete and meaningful to learners (Roiha et al., 2016; Silander, 2015b). Moreover, this ideology also refers to a revolutionary reorganization of teaching so that learning can take place in problem-solving-based contexts during which learners are constantly and continuously encouraged to actively participate in finding and handling with given academic information, pondering inquiries and ambiguities around with peers or groups, practicing discussion and negotiation skills, deducing conclusions, obtaining results and reflecting their own experiences for the whole learning process (Kivelö, 2015; Roiha et al., 2016). By practicing investigating real-life problems from various angles and trying different strategies to solve them collaboratively,

students are steadily familiarized and well-prepared for their future encountering with real-world situations that are commonly known as being complicated to fully understand (Bobrowsky, Korhonen & Kohtamäki, 2014; Moilanen, 2015). Under these conditions, phenomenon-based learning has created its own teaching framework and offered a potential positive learning environments for learners in which they have ample opportunities to generate their personal insights and factual experiences in connection with academic concepts, theories and principles to effectively solve the emulated contexts and ultimately achieve true meanings of their learning goals (Roiha et al., 2016).

2.1.2 Integrative teaching and multidisciplinary learning modules

Apart from understandings about phenomenon-based learning as a new way of thinking or a reorganization of teaching and learning, it is vital to grasp the fact that when mentioning this term, two others of *“integrative teaching”* and *“multidisciplinary learning modules”* also occur and play roles in explaining the full picture of the phenomenon. The major aim of those two techniques is, through flexible teaching disciplines, to create relationships between studied topics and the pragmatic applications, and thus holistically improve learners’ perceptions about the world, increase their intrinsic motivations in self-exploring for knowledge and eventually develop themselves as independent and responsible information seekers (Huber & Hutchings, 2004; Roiha et al., 2016, p. 7). It should be, however, important to point out that the principles of integrative teaching and multidisciplinary learning modules are not to supersede the in-progress subject-based teaching in traditional schools. Rather, they assist teachers to incorporate various approaches and relevant topics into school’s values and students’ preferences, which in turns help learners formulate and expand their viewpoints of the world and insights about self-identity efficiently (Grover, 2016; Roiha et al., 2016; Sahlberg, 2015). On the basis of the capability level and developmental needs of learners, teachers would set up beneficial learning materials and design scaffolding teaching techniques in multidisciplinary modules. These techniques can then guide and facilitate learners to collaborate

what they academically studied at schools with their own lives and experiences, leading to their significant production of multi-perspective intelligence about the society as a consequence (Pfeifer, 2017; Roiha et al., 2016; Zhukov, 2015). More interestingly, the novel addition of multidisciplinary learning modules in Finnish national core curriculum (2014) resembles phenomenon-based learning in two principles. First, they both bridge knowledge from various school subjects and connect the content of different subjects with selected authentic phenomena to involve students' lens, experiences, questions and interests in understanding the surrounding world and the society. Second, they both promote a real meaningful, motivated and participatory learning environment for students to play, learn and grow as fully developed individuals and active members of own community (Halinen, Harmanen & Mattila, 2015; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

Generally speaking, the key ideology of phenomenon-based learning is to create an encouraging learning environment in which learners are constantly motivated to actively engage in, contributively discuss and collaboratively propose suppositions to resolve simulated situations in order to fully comprehend the academic concepts they learnt in schools and meaningfully apply them to deal with contextualized phenomena of the world, subsequently elevating their multifaceted competences as the final pedagogical outcomes. During this cooperative problem-solving based learning progress, the significant role of teachers and peers working as social assistance should also be recognized for it provides the crucial supports for learners to achieve their learning goals. Remarkably, the principles of granting opportunities for learners to think for themselves and articulate their thoughts as well as regarding them as active participants to engage in real-world and practical communal contexts in which they would be able to demonstrate knowledge towards the topics through creativity, collaboration and interactions with the whole society serendipitously correspond to major theories of learning, intriguing me to self-discover the theoretical underpinnings for this new way of thinking.

2.2 The pedagogical ideologies behind phenomenon-based learning

Linturi (2014) illustrated phenomenon-based learning as a huge tree with a colorful umbrella on top and its base is constituted of a plethora of roots and stems labeled with the names of methodologies, such as constructivism of Piaget, sociocultural theory of Vygotsky, and other significant philosophical ideologies of some famous names of Freire or Husserl. Linturi's illustration (2014), put in another word, serves as a reminder that phenomenon-based learning consists of not only various pedagogical approaches but also complicated philosophical insights to benefit most to learners throughout their everlasting journey of conquering knowledge and honing self-competencies. One must not neglect to mention that some studies in the same year or afterwards, such as of Bobrowsky, Korhonen and Kohtamäki (2014), Moilanen (2015), Roiha et al. (2016), Silander (2015a) and Symeonidis and Schwarz (2016), also discussed constructivism, sociocultural learning theories and phenomenology as primary learning theories and pedagogical models behind phenomenon-based learning. For that reason and also for the sake of the study limited size, the approaches that have been most relevant to the development of phenomenon-based learning will be introduced in this section.

2.2.1 Pedagogy of freedom and activities

Perhaps the most indispensable theoretical basis underpinning the main feature of phenomenon-based learning in granting opportunities to learners to freely participate in a meaningful learning environment, actively explore and seek for the relevant knowledge and efficiently promote both neurological development and versatile skills by flexibly connecting academic concepts with contextualized situations and communicative collaboration originated from the "progressive perspective in educational practice" of the pedagogy of freedom, which was passionately and inspiringly advocated by Paulo Freire (Freire, 1998, p. 21).

The most essential theoretical ground in the pedagogy of freedom, according to Freire (1998) is the pursuit of a utopian future of education in which

humanitarian potentials are enhanced and each of unique characteristics, values, beliefs, and special needs of learners are respectfully considered in order to support and elevate learners to become critical, epistemological and effective knowledge users, but not merely the passive knowledge consumers. Not only students are freed but teachers are also encouraged and challenged to free themselves from their monotonous teaching styles. Specifically, teachers are urged to become educational pioneers to incentivize their students to freely raise curious questions about the world, to critically self-reflect and self-manage the knowledge and information they are attaining and cooperatively discussing and negotiating with others to reach the final satisfactory results, and to confidently contribute their prior knowledge and experiences in opening up and contributing innovative venues of ideas and presuppositions to the society and the whole world (Freire, 1998; Giroux, 2010; Soler-Gallart, 2000).

It, however, is vital to grasp the fact that the pedagogy of freedom and activities of Freire (1998) was not a completely new area but indeed in consensus with the fundamental principles of freedom in the pedagogy of Montessori (1965) and Gardner (1990). The latter had already acknowledged and strongly recommended the allowance of freedom for self-exploration about individual identities, self-discovery about the world and creativity in learners in a comfortable, friendly and socially cooperative learning environment (O'Connor, 2012). This principle of freedom in pedagogy also reflected the central role of empowerment to learners in student-centered theme, which required all educators to constantly listen to, pay respects to and mindfully involve learners' own perspectives, emotions, experiences and capabilities in contributing, building and choosing the most applicable knowledge to themselves (Frymier, Shulman & Houser, 1996; Weimer, 2014). From the available evidence, one thereby can draw a general truth about the ideology of a pedagogy of freedom and activities is that it aims to build an effective and meaningful student-centered learning environment through which learners' initiatives, autonomy and abilities are all embraced. Inside that special learning environment, learners are also empowered to cope with real-life challenging and risk-taking situations, share

experiences and collaborate to discuss, negotiate and elaborate solutions, and consequently independently and competently develop themselves as holistically critical information controllers and knowledge users.

2.2.2 Phenomenology

Another theoretical explanation for the huge tree of phenomenon-based learning perhaps can be referred to phenomenology, proposed and developed by Edmund Husserl. Despite the reality that phenomenology is definitely a philosophy and requires a sophisticated and holistic insight to completely perceive the supreme meaning of it and its complicated connected elements and relations, it is a personally considered opinion to explore this philosophical doctrine of phenomena with the expectation of lending a hand in disclosing the origin of this topic.

Phenomenology is often defined in terms of the study of phenomena or “factual situations” people experience in their life, put in another term, it examines how reality and effectiveness would occur to a man when he interacts with the world through his experiences (Linturi, 2014, p. 16; Sloan & Bowe, 2014, p. 1294). It is a method of scientific research that deals with things themselves and on an individual basis, i.e. an individual acquires and builds up their knowledge about everyday life-world from their own perspectives and through direct experiences, rather than memorizing the established experiences of others (Selvi, 2008).

In this way, phenomenology, firstly coined as the term phenomenological approach by Husserl (1970), critically challenged the theory-centric outcomes proposed by Descartes in the scientific revolution about the “*ontological reversal*”, which highlighted the isolated strength of humanitarian intellectual thinking in everyday observations, experiences and consciousness about the world and generating subsequent theories as a consequence of innermost cognitive process, not in the phenomena themselves (Østergaard, Lieblein, Breland & Francis, 2010, p. 28). Instead, it advocated the Aristotelian doctrine of “*re-reversing*” the ontological priority implying the influential role of the lived experiences of

humans in grasping the lifeworld philosophy, put in an easy term by doing and acting in relation to the world people generate their perception and consciousness (Francis, Breland, Østergaard, Lieblein & Morse, 2013, p. 66; Østergaard, Hugo & Dahlin, 2007, pp. 124-125). Under this condition, just as students can find interests in discovering and learning scientific education since it satisfies their preferences and meaningfully assists their comprehensions about real-life phenomena, so too can teachers notice and enhance their students' embodied intelligence and experiences in order to reach their academic concepts in the most efficacious and engaging way (Østergaard, Lieblein, Breland & Francis, 2010).

In summary, freedom and activity pedagogy and phenomenology uncovered and provided a substantial theoretical support for phenomenon-based learning about a complete student-centered learning environment in which students are encouraged to promote their self-identity, autonomy, motivations and cognitive thinking skills through actively returning things to themselves. They support learners' learning by allowing individuals to build up knowledge about everyday life-world from their own viewpoints and through direct experiences, and thus self-expanding both perceptions about the world and human potentials. Yet, they are still general and abstract philosophical terminologies. In fact, those ideologies and beliefs were dreams of those advocating for a utopian educational system built for learners, but have not yet mentioned or apparently explained how learners can develop their intellectual thinking abilities and potentials. More importantly, they have not precisely demonstrated the significant role of teachers and social learning contexts in facilitating and boosting students' learning process, which intrigues me to continue searching for another better answer.

2.2.3 Constructivist school of thought - a major stem but not all

According to Linturi (2014) and Roiha et al. (2016), constructivism should be labeled as the second essential root of phenomenon-based learning for the reason that it can combine both principles of cognitive psychology and humanistic

approaches in pedagogy of freedom and phenomenology and modern theories of learning in explaining how this ideology helps learners build up perceptions about the world and enhance (non-)cognitive skills applicable to their real life.

Developed by Jean Piaget (1896–1980), constructivism regarded learning as a dynamic process constituted of successive stages of “assimilation, accommodation and equilibrium” during which learners actively construct knowledge by assimilating new experiences, integrating them into existing funds of knowledge, accommodating and testing their own theories with the newly attained concepts of the world and consequently achieving or equilibrating the new understandings and (non-)cognitive ability (Kaufman, 2004, p. 304; O’Loughlin, 1992, p. 794). Even though constructivism is a philosophical explanation of the nature of knowledge, it yet provided an epistemological framework describing how one attains, promotes and exploits perceptive processes. Particularly, it depicted the image of learners as intellectual individuals constructing their own version of meaning and every life-world from their understandings and knowledge. Knowledge, from the constructivist view, is no longer an independent entity of the knowers. Rather, knowledge is produced by the knower thanks to interactions between his/her existing beliefs or experiences and new ideas they encounter, located in their innermost thoughts, conceptually processed and actively expressed by them (Airasian & Walsh, 1997; Brown, 2000; Cobb, 1994; Sarem & Shirzadi, 2014). In this sense, one thereby can conclude that cognitive constructivism of Piaget and his followers regarded one’s learning as “individual conceptual reorganizations” and emphasized on the individual neurological development as a “relatively solitary act”, which is constructed inside the knowers’ head and discovered in their interactions with the environment (Bonk & Cunningham, 1998, pp. 32-33; Sarem & Shirzadi, 2014, pp. 63-64).

From the available evidence, those advocates for individual cognitive constructivism of Piaget may now feel self-confident about their strong theoretical groundwork for phenomenon-based learning as it has uncovered the truth that learners are active scientists who are on their own expedition to explore

the universal intellect (Jaramillo, 1996). Moreover, this thought remarkably proved that the ideology of a utopian learning environment of freedom and activity pedagogy only be achievable once learners are put in challenging contextualized situations of phenomenology and challenged to construct their own understandings from existing knowledge and experiences (Jaramillo, 1996). While honorably intended, this way of thinking yet neglected to mention two counter questions. First, the segregation of the individual cognitive development as a solitary act can be problematic in reality since learners in phenomenon-based learning are not lonely scientists but they interact and collaborate with peers to learn about the surrounding world. Second, there is the noteworthy of teachers in assisting them to reach levels just above their current competence rather than leaving them to struggling with own “sensory-motor and conceptual activity” (Cobb, 1994, p. 14; O’Loughlin, 1992, p. 791; Sarem & Shirzadi, 2014, pp. 63-64). These arguments, as a result, urged me to move towards the last hypothesis for theoretical background and also finish the picture of this huge tree, sociocultural theory.

2.2.4 Sociocultural theory and principles - final piece of puzzle

Developed by Vygotsky, sociocultural theory, as the name suggests, put a high emphasis on interpersonal interactions in constructing and developing communication and learning progress (Behroozizad, Nambiar & Amir, 2014). Despite the reality that Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory also lent a hand in considering learners as active constructors of their own learning environment and explaining the nature and development of human intelligence (Zuengler & Miller, 2006; Behroozizad, Nambiar & Amir, 2014), it did not follow the same track of prioritizing individual conceptual reorganization. Instead, it emphasized in the hands-on interactions within the social community of learning contexts, the shared experiences and collaboration between individuals and their surroundings, and the effective support from both teachers and colleagues so that they can become effective members of the society and consequently efficiently expand their brain-based skills and multifaceted competences (Zhang,

Fanyu & Du, 2013). Ellis (2000) and Edwards (2005), for instance, argued that individual's learning can only emerge in interpersonal interactions and they should be continuously enchanted to participate in these crucial communal communicative activities (with both teachers and peers) to develop their competences. In a similar pattern of argument, Packer and Goicoechea (2000) and Ajayi (2008) also concurred that through dynamic interactions and enculturation learners can effectively and meaningfully create interrelations and interconnections between theories and practice, thus reinforce and strengthen their perceptions and capabilities and make the learning process become relevant to each learner's special needs.

It is also of inestimable importance to mention zone of proximal development (ZPD) whenever discussing the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky since it reflected his perspectives about the influential impact of mutual communications and scaffolding from experts, teachers and competent peers, on individuals' mental development and learning progress. Vygotsky (1978) defined ZPD as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). This ideology of this zone, indeed, is vital in teaching and learning activities because it can not only provide social assistance (scaffolding from both teachers and peers) for learners, who already possess their in-built intellectual ability to learn new information, to reflect and guide their perceptions and actions towards the stage of affordances (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Antón, 1999; Fahim & Haghani, 2012; Lee, 2015).

It should be born in mind that sociocultural theory did not supersede constructivism as the primary philosophy underpinning phenomenon-based learning. Instead, it combined with and supported the prior one to finish the entire picture of this new teaching technique. This assertion stems from the growing consensus that these two perspectives are at least "partially complemented" (Cobb & Yackel, 1996, p. 175). The sociocultural theory should be considered as a bridge to connect cultural and historical contexts with

learners' complex learning environment, and thereby be able to offer ample opportunities for learners to socially interact with peers and negotiate about effective solutions for simulated situations. It, in addition, empowers learners to integrate academic guidance and scaffolding from the milieu with their internal cognitive ability to eventually help them construct own interpretations about the world and holistically self-promote learning process (Airasian & Walsh, 1997; Jaramillo, 1996; Kaufman, 2004; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). More significantly, advocates of phenomenon-based learning, namely Cantell (2012), Linturi (2014), Roiha et al. (2016) and Silander (2015b) reached a consensus on socio-constructivism as the starting point for this practice. Particularly, within the phenomenon-based learning environment, learning will occur through interactions between learners and real-life and real-world situations. Hands-on and minds-on explorations of learners to think about problems from various angles and trying different strategies to solve them are highly facilitated. Learners, most importantly, are considered as active knowledge builders with innate intellectual capability engaging in those such authentic contexts, receiving accessible supports from peers and experts, ultimately constructing right perceptions about the life-world and upgrading beneficial life-skills, motivations and autonomy in long-term learning process (Cantell, 2012; Linturi, 2014; Roiha et al., 2016; Silander, 2015b).

2.2.5 A quick summary of phenomenon-based learning

In view of all that has been mentioned so far, one may suppose that phenomenon-based learning offers a meaningful learner-centered learning environment allowing learning to occur through explorations of contextualized phenomena. It, in addition, offers critical and socio-constructive learning opportunities, within which students are incentivized to actively build up knowledge and essential competencies. The starting point of phenomenon-based learning is the real-life and real-world observation of learners into a phenomenon from different points of view. Then, they are empowered to try various strategies to solve the problem, perhaps by themselves or in cooperation with peers depending on how

the specific approach is implemented in a classroom, conditions of learning contexts and unique personalities and purposes of participants. Through those problem-based inquiry learning situations, learners are able to continuously and considerably practice posing their own questions, collaboratively constructing new knowledge and necessary skills during the learning process. This learning process will eventually arrive at the stage where the learners themselves plan the holistic, authentic, critical and contextualized learning tasks and tools in accordance with teachers learning tasks and tools to supremely advance their manifold competences, valuable intelligences, positive identity and intrinsic motivations for future study, work and civic activities (Freire, 1998; Linturi, 2014; Østergaard, Lieblein, Breland & Francis, 2010; Roiha et al., 2016).

In that sense, one may also recognize at the same time teachers in phenomenon-based learning are expected to be facilitators of learning missions and activities making use of their expertise to guide, comment and inspire learners to confront with problems themselves. Teachers can start by posing questions or problems and support their learners to build slowly but steadily answers together concerning the phenomena that interest them most. Teaching is, under that circumstance, embedded in a problem-solving based environment under the role of the provision of meaningful learner-centered learning conditions and contexts so that principles of constructivism and sociocultural learning theories can blossom. To put it simply, teaching in phenomenon-based learning also works in harmony with constructivism and sociocultural learning theories in the way that it does not solely consider learners as active knowledge builders and information but flexibly supplies timely scaffolding for students to move beyond what they currently know towards higher and further levels (Moilanen, 2015; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

On this point, another inquiry befell to my mind that whether or not principles of constructivism and sociocultural learning theories of phenomenon-based learning recognized and discussed in established English Language Teaching (ELT) methodologies. Whether or not the notions of constructivism-based teaching and problem-solving learning environment for the sake of

learners' activeness and collaboration in building knowledge and competences fit into any modern ELT approaches in the goal of enhancing communicative competence for English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Despite the reality that teaching methodologies or approaches and learning strategies are two distinct areas of research (and I do not have the intention to conflate them at all), an attempt to discover if an innovative way of education has had a stance in existing pedagogical practices is to be welcomed. It, then, should provide valuable insights and benefits for both teachers and learners to refer to, examine and evaluate what should work best for their own purposes. It is of inestimable importance to remind readers that teaching in phenomenon-based learning is embedded into and oriented towards constructivism, sociocultural learning theories and problem-solving inquiry learning, hence a strategic investigation for similar voices can also be recommended. Most importantly, the totality of the situation requires understanding that the ultimate goals of teaching are to promote learning and to assist learners to construct effective meanings from their brains and make connections with the real-life world in the pursuance of sustainable and holistic development of intelligences, competencies, agency and motivations (Clay, 2005; Elmaifi, 2014; Mansfield, Wosnitza & Beltman, 2012). As a consequence, there should be a great deal to be said for the following sections of exploring potential correlation between phenomenon-based learning and modern English Language Teaching (ELT) methodologies and approaches, and thus answer the first research question of this study.

2.3 Current major trends in ELT around the globe

Nowadays, English is becoming the global language that occurs and controls in almost every aspect of the world, as seen in media, education and other of human's entertainment (Crystal, 2003). Just as this global English phenomena offered a multifunctional key for those living in outer and expanding circle countries, whose English is not their mother tongue but utilize in terms of foreign or second language, to have a chance to enter into, communicate and make

business with others in the expanding globe (Schmitz, 2012), so too has it created challenges and requirements for its users to self-discover optimal ways to fully take advantage of this magnificent key.

With changing time and growing language learning needs, traditional language teaching practices, such as Grammar-Translation Method, Direct Method or Audiolingualism failed to give the desired outcome expected of them. Knowing a language involves more than mastering grammatical structures and lexical repertoires, rather it involves learners' capability to make use of the learnt language as a communicative tool in given social encounters confidently and effectively. Learning a language does not simply employ a memorization of decontextualized dialogs, substitution drills and various forms of native speakers' accents without paying attention to the pragmatic level of social communication. Most importantly, language learning should not be regarded as a passive transfer of knowledge with the help of boards and rules in language classrooms. Rather it is as a skill to empower learners to be able to develop meaningful communicative competence – the ability to use the target language they are learning, appropriately, under various conditions and contexts of life. For that reason, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach was born to suggest a new pathway (Bashirov & Veretina, 2012; Celce-Murcia, 2014; Tamura, 2006; Teodorescu, 2013; Walia, 2012).

2.3.1 Communicative Language Teaching approach: A focus on communicative competence

As the name suggested, the major aim of this approach is to enhance learners' communicative competence, the capacity of language users to understand and utilize the linguistic features in the contextualized discourse appropriately and effectively, or in another term "knowing when and how to say what to whom" (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 122). Rather than merely training students to master the linguistic rules, communicative approach bridge semantic notions and social functions, i.e. combining abstract concepts of time, sequence, location, frequency or quantity over the communicative purposes of language in making

requests, complains, offers or denials, in every communication-led activity. Just as learners, in CLT classrooms can understand the complicated structures of linguistic usage, so too are they able to employ them also in purpose to perform, generate and maintain different communicative functions within a wide range of cultural and social contexts in a proper and efficient manner (Bashirov & Veretina, 2012; Richards & Rogers, 2001; Thornbury, 2006). Thereby, one can see that English learners in communicative approach are constantly encouraged to actively and confidently involve in the continuous communication process, interacting with others through the target language, promoting their fluency and acceptable English level within simulated ecological contexts and consequently reinforcing their autonomy, identity and intrinsic motivation for learning and achieving English as a tool for the communicative purpose (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Richards & Rogers, 2001; Verikaitė, 2008).

Language learning and the role of learners, in addition, have been viewed from interesting perspectives. Language learning is, on the one hand, seen as resulting from processes such as purposeful interactions between learners and the social encounters that require their negotiations, collaborative creation of meaning and trying out different ways of expressing ideas. It is associated with learners' focusing on the language they hear, attending to the given feedback on their language usage and making efforts to incorporate new forms into existing funds of knowledge in exchange for meaningful communication. Its main purpose is to help learners acquire communicative competence, that is to say, the series of skills which allow users of the target language to communicate with others in an appropriate and effective manner (Celce-Murcia, 2014; Richards, 2006; Thornbury, 2006). In short, language learning in CLT might be described in three principal elements: "1. Communication - Activities that involve real communication promote learning 2. Tasks - Activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning and 3. Meaningfulness - Language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process" (Richards & Rogers, 2001, p. 161). Learners, on the other hand, are regarded as active "communicators" that are engaged in utilizing the learnt language,

negotiating the meanings with peers in trying to make themselves understood, being responsible for their own learning after all (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 130). Most significantly, CLT requests educators to consider English learners as active participants who are unique in own personalities and capabilities that demand appropriately chosen teaching materials and interactive activities in order to ultimately promote their innermost potentials and prepare them to become effective language users in various interpersonal interactions. This interesting consumption will then be closely contested in the next section (Celce-Murcia, 2014; Richards, 2006; Richards & Rogers, 2001; Verikaitė, 2008).

2.3.2 A brief discussion on post-method pedagogy of ELT

When the English as a global language of Crystal (2003) became greatly influential in its forms, functions and expansions into every aspect of life, it also lead to the “nativization”, a simple process of flexibly indigenizing the linguistic system of English to adapt to peculiar contexts, and the “decolonization”, a more complex process of completely manipulating the core principles and practices of teaching and learning English and dethrone the Western imperialism over ELT industry (Kumaravadivelu, 2003b, pp. 539-540). As a result of these revolutionary acts for equal independence in using and maneuvering English as a global language, there emerged successively a universal desire in teachers for actively and critically pursuing their own approaches or techniques in teaching and learning activities. Post-method pedagogy came to life to make that dream come true, a dream of teachers rupturing the constructs of marginalization, disguised in the polished name of methods (Kumaravadivelu, 2001; Kumaravadivelu, 2003b; Kumaravadivelu, 2006a).

Method pedagogy was defined as “a single set of theoretical principles derived from feeder disciplines and a single set of classroom procedures directed at classroom teachers” (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, p. 29). It, therefore overlooks the knowledge and experiences of teachers in critically evaluating the most feasible methods that can fit well for their learners, leaving no room for creativity and autonomy of teachers in taking ventures of devising something new, diminishing

the varied senses of plausibility, self-confidence and positive attitudes of educational practitioners (Kumaravadivelu, 2006b; Richards & Rogers, 2001). Post-method pedagogy, on the contrary, values teachers' competence in selecting what is best for their students, empowers them to implement their own theories of practices based on their rigorous observations and analysis of complex sociocultural and contextualized features of their own classrooms and learners, inspires them constantly renegotiate their own teaching acts. This will, subsequently, influence the independence of their students as well as potentially intrigue their motivations and attitudes for lifelong learning of English (Arikan, 2006; Can, 2009; Didenko & Pichugova, 2016; Hazratzad & Gheitanchian, 2009; Kumaravadivelu, 2003a; Prabhu, 1990; Richards & Rogers, 2001).

In short, what post-method pedagogy offered to ELT field is a teaching and learning environment in which teachers can include their personal perspectives and experiences in determining and constructing practical theories for their own classrooms and students can freely advance their knowledge, competences and autonomy through meaningfully need-based designed lessons. This, then, can lead to the co-growth in understandings, performances and holistic personalities of both parties. There might still be contentions in certain circles about the incompatibility of method and post-method pedagogies whether or not the latter is killing the former. The impracticability of postmethod itself in realistic applications due to complicated pedagogical barriers of textbooks, assessment examinations, policies, structures and teachers' capabilities and willingness to follow the reformations is also a high stakes question (Akbari, 2008; Bell, 2003; Didenko & Pichugova, 2016). Yet, they are not the initial intentions of my study to deeper get involved in. What I personally appreciate from this section is the valuable understanding about one of the major trends in ELT field and the underlying value that teachers should have rights to freely adopt any methods or follow any innovative approaches or theories of practice that match well to their own teaching contexts. This ideology also lends me a hand in explaining an interesting fact that phenomenon-based learning and other problem-based inquiry learning approaches, whose major aim is to put emphasis on the

continual process of students' learning and how teachers can implement most appropriate and feasible activities in teaching, did not label themselves as methods but new ways of thinking since they only opened their house, welcomed guests to enter but left them complete freedom to do or not.

2.3.3 From communicative approach to communication as a social act

From the very beginning stage of introducing and implementing communicative approach into use, researchers and advocates required an adequate emphasis on "speech acts" or "communicative acts" in target language classrooms (Richards & Rogers, 2001, pp. 172-173). That is to say, the primary focus of teaching and learning activities should involve students in participating in a learning process of making trials and errors and utilizing the target language as a tool for communicating and solving social functional interaction situations based on their own needs, abilities and experiences and learning process (Richards & Rogers, 2001). In a similar argument, Alrabadi (2012) asserted "language is not only a means of communication but a tool of social action at the same time" (p. 1), meaning the supreme goal of learning the target language should not end with acquiring the decontextualized skills but move further to using the emerged language as an effective communicative tool to act with and fulfill the social tasks that ultimately develop learners to become active and meaningful language users (Delibaş & Günday, 2016). Interestingly, the notion of communicative acts or communication as a social act described above was in congruence with the one of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, namely "action-oriented approach" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 9). This approach regards communication as a social activity specially designed for learners to fully engage in with the role of active "social agents", resolving the assigned problems, fulfilling the obligations, and supremely achieving the final objectives – a wide range of competences embracing both general and particular communicative language competence (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 9; Curriculum Services Canada, 2012; University of Cambridge, 2011, p. 7).

In brief, those official documents revealed two fundamental principles in English language teaching-learning activity. Firstly, they have showed that learning is a non-linear process of doing and developing skills and have associated the abstract conceptualizations in the academic environment with the active experimentation of learners, which demands their both thinking process for notional concepts and body actions for functional activities to holistically promote their understanding (Kohonen, 2001). Secondly, they require understanding that both teachers and students are expected to play roles of active participants in this shared process. Teachers, particularly, are expected to play roles of analysts and organizers who think of authentic and meaningful communication-based activities for learners to engage in and of facilitators and counselors for aiding necessary resources and providing relevant feedback for students' own performances. Students now are *social agents* who are required to dynamically contribute their personal traits of characteristics, knowledge and experiences to collaboratively join in the real-world problems, resolving it and effectively improving their independent communicative competence as well as the general English learning progress (Council of Europe, 2001; Richards & Rogers, 2001). From those available evidence, one thereby may recognize that this learner-centered and experience-based viewpoint of English as Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning activities in communicative approach is remarkably in concord with the fundamental principle of engaging authentic actions and individual experiences in solving practical pedagogical issues and enhancing learning ability of action-based teaching, urging this writer to explore about it in the following section.

2.3.4 Action-based teaching in the context of language teaching

According to van Lier (2007), second language teaching and learning these days has moved towards active participation of learners in engaging and meaningful interactive activities for which they are expected and encouraged to use the language to do, say and cope with contextual situations in order to deepen their comprehension and capacity in the target language. Action-based teaching, in

addition, inspires learners to immerse in the language-using experiences with their own personal traits and abilities, apply their pre-existed knowledge about the world and collectively and freely make tentative interpretations about the different aspects of the same issue in order to effectively resolve it at the end (van Lier, 2007; van Lier, 2008). For that reason, action-based teaching assists learners in not only self-formulating the correct concepts and experiences about the target language, which can prepare for them in dealing with similar future occasions but self-improving their communicative competence, autonomy and motivation through simulated situations also (van Lier, 2007).

Also in his study, van Lier (2007) restated the definition of learners in the new era as “agency” in the center of attention, who with their own traits and needs actively choose what and how they learn the target language by entering into meaningful activities and consequently strengthening their communicative competence and other related linguistic skills in the most rational and effective way (p. 46). Language learning was also redefined as a non-linear process during which learners are expected to enhance their insightful thoughts about academic concepts through actions and by truly experiencing the relevant contextualized phenomena could learners upgrade their separate interactive skills, yet cognitively and intellectually utilized them to function appropriately in real-life social situations (van Lier, 2007).

Interestingly, the recognition of language skills as essential means of performing actions and functioning in contextualized discourses in action-based teaching theory of van Lier (2007) concurred with the action-oriented approach proposed in The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), for which language learners are viewed as “social agents who have tasks to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action” and those designed action-oriented activities must be built on the specifically “cognitive, emotional and volitional resources and the full range of abilities applied by the individual as a social agent” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 9). Put in another term, CEFR similarly advocated for a learner-centered pedagogical scaffolding in the primary foci on the students’

own preferences and realistic social encounters within which students can actively use knowledge and experience to solve the required missions and enhance their abilities naturally and effectively (Piccardo, 2014).

On the basis of two recently discussed parts, one thus can notice the major goals in language teaching of action-based teaching of van Lier (2007) or action-oriented approach of Council of Europe (2001) that are learning results from the initiative, activity and individual needs of learners and the concrete use of the target language can only be learnt best in real-life social situations (van Lier, 2008; Piccardo, 2014). In fact, van Lier (2007) believed that by immersing in the practical and meaningful actions, students can make use of their holistic “kinaesthetic perception”, in resolving the demanded situations and thereupon complement their understanding of the target language (p. 54). Council of Europe (2001), moreover, furthered the role of action-based teaching in the way that it not only consolidates the learners’ communicative competence but considerably promotes their multifaceted general competences including “declarative knowledge, skills and know-how, existential knowledge and ability to learn” (Piccardo, Berchoud, Cignatta, Mentz & Pamula, 2011, p. 35).

2.4 The transitive correlation among phenomenon-based learning, action-based teaching and communicative language teaching approach

From the available evidence, it might be said at this stage that action-based teaching or action-oriented learning activities were all founded on the communicative approach principles for the following reasons:

1. They share primary goals of inspiring learners to confidently participate in real-world and real-life social interactions and enhancing learners’ significant socio-emotional competences;
2. They both show that learning is a non-linear process of learners’ doing and being, which demands learners’ not only thinking process for notional concepts but also utilizing the learnt knowledge for functional activities on the basis of their own needs, abilities and experiences to holistically construct intelligence;

3. They coincidentally regard learners as active and meaningful knowledge users who are expected to fully engage in various social encounters, resolving the assigned problems with peers and scaffoldings from teachers, honing a wide range of competences embracing communicative language skills;
4. Action-based learning, in addition, integrates learners' unique abilities and demands into specially designed learner-centered and meaningful learning situations in order to involve participants in seeking for resolutions by the means of communication;
5. Just as learners can self-realize the concrete use of the target language, so too can they self-promote positive intrinsic motivations and enthusiasm in learning and explorations for newer horizons of human wisdoms thanks to interactive and real-world communicative activities.

(Council of Europe, 2001; Delibaş & Günday, 2016; Kohonen, 2001; Pham, 2000; Piccardo, 2014; Richards & Rogers, 2001; van Lier, 2007; van Lier, 2008)

It is also vital to mention the reciprocal relation between action-based teaching and phenomenon-based learning under these following main points:

1. They both start from the same point of constructivism and sociocultural learning theories that consider learners as active participants. These active constructors are encouraged to get involved in a plethora of hands-on interactions and communicative activities, collaborating with their surroundings, resolving the social simulated situations, self-elevating individual human potentials eventually;
2. A meaningful learner-centered learning environment, in which freedom in thinking and creativity and freedom in pedagogy are highly respected so that learners can fully participate into purposeful learning activities with specific outcomes and individually enhance their identity and motivations throughout the learning process;
3. Both of these approaches emphasize the role of strategic scaffolding from teachers and peers in assisting individuals to acquire new intelligence and skills. Depended on learners' unique abilities, the teacher would alternate tasks and activities to learners, encouraging them to take dynamic roles in cooperatively developing original insights, contributions, ideas and actions to not only further the tasks but, more importantly, enhance the natural flow of their competences and knowledge;

4. The fundamental principles of action-based teaching, which include i) learning by acting in the world and ii) one's acting on the basis of his/her own experiences in transcending scientific knowledge into concrete situations, are similar to that used in phenomenon-based learning, namely emphasis on the occurrence of the natural and genuine phenomenon to urge for learners' integration of conceptualized theories and funds of knowledge into resolving the problem;
5. Lastly, they unanimously aim to build up a new image of learners, through systematically acting in this world with the assistance of scholarly resources, can draw up and elevate their own consciousness and viewpoints independently from their own knowledge rather than vibrating existing intelligences and curbing own imagination in the end.

(Adirika, 2014; Cuma, 2014; Delibaş, 2013; Finkbeiner, 2000; Freire, 1998; Østergaard, Lieblein, Breland & Francis, 2010; van Lier, 2007)

For those reasons, in some extent, a rhetorical mathematical induction of transitivity should be applied here to comment that phenomenon-based learning, an archetype of action-based learning in transcending scientific concepts of learners into contextualized settings through real-life actions, can also be potentially believed to benefit EFL learners in the most communicative and meaningful manner. Or in the more accurate term, phenomenon-based learning, in the particular context of language teaching, serendipitously correspond to action-based teaching, a further branch of Communicative Language Teaching approach, from the same base of sociocultural theory. In that sense, they all aim to provide relevant, authentic and functional contextual phenomena in the most meaningful and free learning environment for students to immerse in. Within which, students are expected to work in concomitance with academic resources and assistance from teachers and peers to collaboratively to resolve the real-life and real-world situations, thus significantly expanding their comprehension for the context use of the target language and the multifaceted competences, including communicative competence as a portion.

This argumentation should not be regarded as an abrupt allegation since Dabell (2016) and Silander (2015b) once asserted that phenomenon-based learning facilitates active teaching and learning process with hands-on, minds-

on and hearts-on activities, promotes learners' transferable learning skills and increases their appreciation for the interconnections between subjects. This new way of thinking, more interestingly, can be referred to an anchored learning, in which questions and issues are anchored in real-world phenomena (Silander, 2015b). It, in addition, can create a fundamentally relevant situational environment for students to perform meaningful functions in order to cope with the situations effectively and thereupon improve their communicative skills naturally as a part of their holistically developmental multifaceted competences (Council of Europe, 2001; van Lier, 2007; Piccardo, 2014). In that sense, one can deductively recognize that both the "cycle of action-perception-understanding" of action-based teaching of van Lier (2007, pp. 55-57) and the profound principle of fundamentally meaningful communication in social contexts in communicative approach significantly influenced and affected the idea of phenomenon-based learning in EFL teaching and learning (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Richards & Rogers, 2001). Particularly, they agree upon the same point of borrowing purposeful interactive activities in order for learners to apply their experiences to work upon together and resolve the contextualized phenomena, which will consequently reinforce students' perceptions about the world and in turn naturally improving communicative competence as one essential achievement throughout the whole learning process.

2.5 Phenomenon-based language learning and teaching vs. Other problem-based inquiry language learning and teaching

Through a rigorous review of literature, I myself discovered that the ideologies of engaging learners in authentic and contextualized situations and helping them self-enhance their perceptions about the phenomena as well as competences for critical analysis and evaluation in phenomenon-based learning closely resemble the pre-existent "*deep approach*" to learning. The latter, specifically, aims to encouragingly push students towards promoting holistic and true understandings that allows them to use and reuse in a variety of situations instead of simply memorizing and reproducing the contents in high-stake

examinations (Biggs & Tang, 2011, pp. 24-29; Dolmans, Loyens, Marcq & Gijbels, 2015, pp. 1088-1089; Donnison & Penn-Edwards, 2012, pp. 10-11; Marton & Säljö, 1976, pp. 4-9; Offir, Lev & Bezalel, 2008, pp. 1174-1175). That advanced viewpoint of learning, furthermore, has already been embodied in task-based learning and problem-based learning. Therefore, I pondered if phenomenon-based learning bore any differences from or echoed the earlier theories, the latter of which would thus make this study insignificant. With that curiosity, I decided to invest some more pages into scrutinizing this issue and find a satisfactory answer.

In task-based learning, for instance, the core unit of planning and instruction is based on the use of tasks for which teachers facilitate learners' language learning by immersing them into a variety of meaningful activities, challenging them to communicate with others, incorporate old and new knowledge and experiences and make use of the target language to achieve the tasks in the end (Candlin & Murphy, 1987; Foster, 1999; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Powers, 2008; Richards & Rogers, 2001). Types of the task can range from academic or non-academic activities of writing an essay or making a phone call to open-ended discussions or closed-ended exercises of spot-the-difference as long as they generally resemble real-life language use. The main focus is on the advancement of communicative abilities of learners and involving them in comprehending, manipulating, producing and applying effectively the target language in different situations of life so that they can both complete the tasks and promote insights, skills and motivations (Nunan, 1989; Powers, 2008; Richards & Rogers, 2001; Skehan, 1996; Thornbury, 2006).

Compared with task-based learning, problem-based learning triggered students to join in a continuous cycle of complex and contextualized problems. In that cycle, they are motivated to identify and delineate the correct problems, formulate and analyze the problems, and cooperatively work with others to solve problems in light of what they have learnt (Duch, Groh & Allen, 2001; Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Savery, 2015; Takahashi, 2008; Wood, 2003). At the completion of each problem, they will advance reflecting on the abstract knowledge they have acquired and elaborate understanding to continue on other real-life situations

and self-advance personalities (Albanese, 1993; Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2005; Duch, Groh & Allen, 2001; Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Thereby, this approach allows learners to experience the genuine feeling of selecting which problems relevant to their life. It, moreover, can strengthen versatile problem-solving competence of learners, promoting their self-directed abilities and responsibilities, consolidating their collaboration skills. On the basis of that, learners are able to independently construct own perceptions about the world, enhance multifaceted competences and self-elevate into efficient knowledge users and deeply motivated lifelong learners ultimately (Dochy, Segers, Bossche & Gijbels, 2003; Hung, Jonassen & Liu, 2008; Kilroy, 2004; Kwan, 2009; Savery, 2015).

From the available evidence, one thereby can realize that task-based learning and problem-based learning manifest themselves no more than “action learning” approaches that immerse learners in actively, critically and effectively working on real-time problems (DeFillippi, 2001, pp. 5-7). Even though there exist certain differences in terms of pedagogical activities and the level of freedom of learners in managing and solving the issues, the discussed strategies do share the same root of constructivism of Piaget and Vygotsky. Specifically, learners are challenged with a process of inquiry about contextualized situations, prompted to apply problem-solving skills in encountering the situations and finding solutions, incentivized to collectively communicate with the social community and eventually urged to self-construct and self-enhance developmental knowledge and competences (Duch, Groh & Allen, 2001; Ganta, 2015; Hung, Jonassen & Liu, 2008; Kwan, 2009; Littlewood, 2004; Savery, 2015; Takahashi, 2008). Furthermore, they all agree upon the major academic goals of advancing autonomy, identity, positive emotions and intrinsic motivations of learners and recommending the facilitating role of teachers as approachable and useful guides providing necessary scaffolding assistances and sustaining the dynamics of learners (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2005; Markham, 2011). Interestingly enough, those idealistic qualities can all be identified in phenomenon-based learning.

Perhaps the recent article of Symeonidis and Schwarz (2016) that intricately described the emergence of phenomenon-based teaching and learning through the pedagogical lenses of phenomenology is the most instructive example unambiguously proving the intertwined and overlapping qualities of the mentioned approaches. Starting from the same point of constructivism plus elements of sociocultural theories of learning like task-based and problem-based learning approaches, phenomenon-based learning also pays high respect to learners as active knowledge builders. Learners in phenomenon-based learning, specifically, are empowered to independently and effectively self-initiate and self-improve both cognitive and social abilities once they are sufficiently encouraged to participate in and resolve meaningful, authentic and contextualized issues of life with the available expertise scaffolding assistances (Silander, 2015a; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016). Alternatively, phenomenon-based learning vividly reverberates the precedent images of instructional methodologies that put great emphasis on designing a competent learner-centered environment featuring with the progressive inquiry. It virtually inherits the quintessence of constructivist and socio-cultural philosophies in encouraging learners to collaboratively interact with society in order to independently foster understandings, competences and holistic potentials. It also elaborates further the principle of learning and achievement of knowledge and competencies by and through exploration of practical phenomena in action learning theories. Yet, it extraordinarily represents itself in a new term, phenomenon-based learning (Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

2.6 Final words on the first research question

In the preceding chapters, I have examined a number of influential theories that have contributed to the illustration of phenomenon-based learning. Phenomenon-based learning, in my imagination, is like a huge apple tree built on, nurtured and flourished properly on the fertile land of the pedagogy of freedom and phenomenology with its strong roots of socio-constructivism. Its

stems and branches function as sufficient but effective social assistance (including both teachers' and friends' scaffolding) in order to support adventurers (a metaphoric image of learners) on their journey to the top whilst its dense foliage represents the integrative and multidisciplinary learning modules in which learners can connect their academic concepts with the emulated real-life contexts. The juicy and adorable fruits on its top waiting for explorers to conquer and enjoy stand for stage of perfect emancipation, at which learners can transform the external powers of interpersonal interactions and discussions with peers plus facilitations from teachers, internalize them into and combine with their intrinsic cognitive functions to self-produce and self-develop holistic knowledge and competencies.

I have also introduced to readers typical faces among current major ELT methodologies around the globe, namely CLT and action-based teaching and demonstrated the transitional correlation among phenomenon-based learning and those two approaches. This argumentation is on the basis of that fact that these three pedagogical practices originated from the same bases of constructivism and sociocultural learning theories. They, in addition, all aim to provide relevant, authentic and functional contextual phenomena of daily life in the most meaningful and free learning environment for students to immerse in, employ their own experiences, personal traits, capacities and preferences. They agree upon integrating academic resources and assistance from teachers and peers in a flexible manner into learners' various activities in order for them to collaboratively interact with and act upon to resolve the situations. Most importantly, they reach the same goal of helping learners expand their comprehension of the context use of the learnt knowledge and the multifaceted competences, including communicative competence as a portion.

In those senses, I have answered the very first question of my research, namely *What is the stance of phenomenon-based learning among ELT methodologies?* However, I have also, ambiguously, included a brief comparison between phenomenon-based learning and other problem-based inquiry language learning and teaching, such as task-based learning and problem-based learning.

My aim was to reveal to readers the true nature of phenomenon-based learning, which is similar in some aspects to existing approaches but indeed possesses certain differences necessary for thorough studies and discussions. I ended the chapter with another inquiry in mind that whether or not principal attributes of phenomenon-based learning, such as learning by doing things, learners are considered as active participants, exploiting contextualized activities to fully develop learners' perceptions and capacities and other relevant features are mentioned or recognized in different education systems of Finland and Vietnam, my motherland. To find the answer, I guess I should start from examining previous studies on the national core curriculum of two nations.

2.7 The role of national core curriculum in Finland and Vietnam

The following two chapters will work as the background information to answer my second research question seeking for *How is phenomenon-based learning realized in national core curriculum between Finland and Vietnam?* Investigating what principal attributes of phenomenon-based learning are displayed in different legislative documents of education, nevertheless, requires researchers to rigorously observe into and conduct a comparative analysis on different sections of two national core curricula. In order to achieve this goal, I hence need to acknowledge, firstly, the role of the national core curriculum in guiding and mentoring the educational activities in Finland and Vietnam and then seek for, if any, past voices that also mentioned and commented on the same topic to argue for the significance of my research. The following sections will review a variety of studies on the national core curriculum comparative analyses which are in line with the present study.

Just as two national core curricula demonstrated transparently missions, visions, underlying values, philosophies, internal and external conditions, implementations and possible outcomes of education, so too did they depicted meticulously the structures of studies, general objectives of education as well as recommendable teaching and learning practices that should serve best for the

corresponding levels, grades, abilities and potentials of students and instructors. Both of the two mentioned national core curricula, in addition, were established and elaborated thanks to the dramatically increasing advancements of intranational and international social factors, including economy, technology, politics, demographics and the momentous impacts of globalisation and the perpetual needs for sustainable developments of human civilization (Halinen, 2016; MOET, 2014). Furthermore, both of the examined documents shared a similar considerable task in education systems of two countries that is guiding, streamlining and suggesting the objectives, contents of lessons, recommended teaching practices and learning styles and prerequisite requirements for the implementation in tune with nationwide and localized contexts of pedagogy, learners' capacities and teachers' qualities (Nguyen, 2011; Shadoian-Gersing, 2015; Vitikka, 2015).

However, in contrast to Finland's regarding the national core curriculum as a framework and thus enabling local administrators and educational institutions to run own appropriate pedagogical objectives, contents and methods to serve best for their students, Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has the complete jurisdiction over designing, organizing, delivering and elaborating education services, including setting policies and promulgating regulations affecting curriculum of the whole country. This situation stems from the major difference in the *distributed leadership* of policies and management styles of Finland and the heavily *hierarchical bureaucracy* in legislative system of Vietnam (Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017; Radivojevic, 2010; Runckel, 2011; Truong, 2014; Truong & Hallinger, 2017). Moreover, compared with the supportive and entrusting *participation* and *collaboration* the Finnish educational leadership implies in teachers' qualifications and commitments on students' achievements, the multilayer sociocultural context of Vietnamese context reminds people that *power distances* and *collectivism* in hidden social values, beliefs and cultures still cast big roles in any decision-making processes and leadership. This implicitly discouraged teachers or school principals alone to break the deep-rooted

established hierarchy in the pursuance of a cutting-edge pilot program or an original idea in education without paying acceptable and satisfactory regards to higher levels of power (Finland overview, n.d.; Kivinen, 2012; Truong & Hallinger, 2017; Truong, Hallinger & Sanga, 2017).

2.8 Previous studies on national core curriculum of Finland and Vietnam

A large and growing body of researches has investigated the curriculum, both national and school-based level, of two nations in the past few decades.

The cross-national comparative analysis of the reformed school curriculum over a decade between 1980s and 1990s of countries in Asia, the Pacific and other regions, initiated and organized by the National Institute for Educational Research of Japan (1999), pointed out that Vietnam was among the countries that received a complete government regulatory control of the curriculum. Curriculum development and level of implementation in Vietnam were generally centralized with a small degree of influence from local authorities, schools and teachers. Vietnam was also known in designing the content or topic-based approach, which defines the aims and objectives for the subject area and expects students to achieve by the end of the period of schooling, rather than the outcome-based approach of Australia, New Zealand and Thai in designing the curriculum. No significant change was reported in this study about school structures, assessment and monitoring (paper-and-pencil examinations for every level with percentage or grades as common methods of reporting) in Vietnamese curriculum policies over a decade, except for the integration of natural and social sciences in grades 1-3 and the expansion of some elective subjects in primary and secondary to provide more subject choices for students. However, the gradual but considerable progress of integrating environmental education and values education (international understanding / education for career planning / moral and ethical issues) into existing subjects of the curriculum could be regarded as the most remarkable change in Vietnamese curriculum to strengthen both of

academic understanding and real-life skills of students at that time of the study (National Institute for Educational Research, 1999).

The studies of Nguyen (2011) and Tran and Stoilescu (2016) are among the most recent investigations on how Vietnam built and constantly improved its national educational system. Instead of looking at the national core curriculum for the general education system, those researches rather investigated specialized school subject curriculum. Particularly, the former examined closely the implementation of English a foreign language curriculum in primary level in addition to her case study in two primary schools featuring in grade three whilst the latter authors profoundly conducted a cross-national and cross-cultural comparative analysis study of the national ICT curriculum between Australia and Vietnam. Despite the reality that Vietnamese school policy is highly centralized and bureaucratic, both of those researches indicated several considerable improvements in the curriculum development. What stood out in the findings of the study of Tran and Stoilescu (2016) was the agreement of two inspected countries in following global educational reform agenda, advocating for outcome-based rationale, attempting to bring constructivism principles into content and investing several alignments in assessment practices. Nguyen (2011), on the other hand, pointed out significant changes in the policy and responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in increasing the studying English hours in school a week for third graders, underscoring the inculcation of basic English communicative skills and enhancement of pupils' positive attitudes towards the subject, and designing specific directions and guidelines for teaching and learning contents, materials and evaluation types. In the discussion section, however, both of those studies recommended additional training programmes for the quality of in-service and pre-service teachers and democracy in curriculum development for local schools and teachers to contribute their voices.

The qualitative studies aiming to compare physics curricula in basic education between Finland and Turkey of Ustün (2010) and to compare categories of learning outcomes in general education between Finland and

Norway of Mølstad and Karseth (2016) could be considered as instructive instances of how Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (FNBE, 2004) and for Upper Secondary Education (FNBE, 2003) were scrutinized in depth by means of content analysis. Apart from presenting and analysing similarities and differences in content, purpose, objectives, learning outcomes and assessment in the school subject curricula between Finland and other nations and drawing a final conclusion in accord with the specific purpose of the studies, those researchers also revealed some interesting main points about Finnish curriculum. In particular, they both reported that Finnish education system has been decentralized since the 1980s, which offers more responsibilities, authorities and flexibility to local education providers to develop own curricular on the basis of the national framework or guidelines but sensitive and appropriate to the regional characteristics. Contents and goals, in addition, were presented for grades or grade clusters and classified in two groups of as compulsory and specialization courses instead of being separately assigned for each level like of other countries. More importantly, they also found out that the National core curricula devoted attention to the principles an effective learning environment including knowledge-based instructions, inclusive education and well-being of learners and the “culture of trust” as well as the “consistent and long-term policies” should become main cornerstones of Finnish educational *policies* instead of national testing or school ranking lists (Mølstad & Karseth, 2016, pp. 339-340; Uusitalo, 2010, p. 2791-2792).

Studies of Namgung (2016) and Prpic (2009) are also deserving of praise since they examined closely the English curriculum in the higher secondary education of Finland and other nations and disclosed several essential findings in objectives and outcomes of instruction, assessment, courses and themes. Namgung (2016), in his comparative analysis of English curriculum between Finland and his home country Korea, noted that there was no separate section for English as a school subject in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Education (2003) but considered one of foreign languages, such as German or French, which he argued would give municipalities and school

boards the autonomy, creativity and initiative to specify appropriate English curriculum on the basis of the national guidelines to local students. Prpic (2009), on the other hand, observed the English curriculum in Finland and concluded that the instruction and learning activities in the foreign language classrooms highlighted the cross-curricular themes that offer ample opportunities for students to practice utilizing the target languages to engage in and cope with real-life situations and issues and therefore self-improve personal interactions, confidence and fluency in communicating and promote human relations. This finding strikingly resonated with what Ustün (2010) discovered despite the differences in subject examined. Both Namgung (2016), and Prpic (2009) agreed that the significant characteristic in English curriculum of Finland was to highlight the continuous enhancement of students' intercultural and communication skills, the capabilities for independent study of the target language, self-awareness of strengths development needs as communicators and language learners and appropriate strategies to successfully apply the learnt languages in not only school tasks but individual preferences and social life.

2.9 The significance of the present study

Two chapters so far have attempted to draw a brief summary of previous studies on the contents of national core curricula of Finland and Vietnam and provided pedagogical knowledge and implications for development and elaboration of the curriculum as the national legal framework and guidelines that should function as a supportive and facilitative tool for educators. In addition to these, a number of other studies were examined to say about English as a foreign language instruction in the curriculum in every level of schooling and its influential impacts on many aspects of society.

No previous comparative study on general upper secondary school curriculum, especially the recently reformed ones, between Finland and Vietnam or no previous studies examining a theory-driven content analysis of the English curriculum on two countries has been conducted before. Much less is known

about the modifications of the Finnish reformed national core curriculum in 2016 and how educational components of missions, underlying values, learning objectives and core contents have been affected, except for studies of Korhonen (2010), Namgung (2016) and Prpic (2009) on National Core Curriculum in both Basic and Upper General Secondary Schools of Finland in 2003. Likewise, several studies have shown the empowering effects of MOET's curriculum policy on ELT in primary schools in 2003 (Nguyen, 2011; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2007) or have reflected on the MOET's curriculum goals for English language instruction in Vietnamese Secondary Schools in 1997, which emphasized on language learners' autonomy, motivation and competences (Le, 2004; Nguyen & Crabbe, 2000; Trinh, 2005). Yet, there is still insufficient data for viewpoints, learning goals and principles for building and developing the educational program in Vietnamese reformed national core curriculum in 2012 and the pilot English curriculum in upper secondary level in 2014.

For those reasons, it would be worthwhile to point out any points of convergence and distinctions in two national core curricula on high school level, including English curricula since I was teaching English in some Vietnamese public high schools for four years 2012-2016, knew so well the legislative documents related to the subject teaching and thus could find at ease to link the present study and his experiences. By analysing and comparing documents and components in terms of phenomenon-based learning, the results of the study seeks to give some academic ideas on how diversely attributes of phenomenon-based learning can be recognized in two national curricula. It also can provide English teachers with pedagogical insights on which they can acknowledge and evaluate any potential empowering opportunities or restraining difficulties in two national systems for lesson designs to both meet the basic requirements of education and assure the significant improvements in students' knowledge, abilities and identity.

3 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

3.1 Context of the study

I decided to choose Finland and Vietnam as the available contexts for this present study for two reasons. First, the terminology phenomenon-based learning originally came from Finnish ideology (as clearly described in the previous sections), despite the interesting fact that the Finnish curriculum is cautious in not endorsing any specific methods that ought to be used in the classroom. Second, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in Vietnam has been searching for a new teaching program that emphasizes in the development of both critical thinking abilities and socio-emotional skills for learners and trains them to become dynamic and meaningful knowledge users. Under those conditions, I felt curious to know how the ideology of phenomenon-based learning has been understood and recognized in both two national core curricula, especially in English curriculum.

Before describing the spectacular features of the research data, it is also vital to grasp the overview of two national educational systems. It must be recognized from the Appendix 1 - *An overview of national education systems in Finland and Vietnam* that these two countries serendipitously correspond to each in terms of framework and system levels despite the certain distinctions in the chosen titles and legitimations as well. Specifically, the figures told an interesting tale of the two national schoolings sharing nine years of Basic Education plus three additional years of Upper Secondary Education level. However, Vietnam divides the term basic education into two separate labels of Primary and Low Secondary Education and does not provide Pre-Primary Education as a preparation stage for those having left Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) as carefully done in Finland. This incident, indeed, decreases the average age of Vietnamese children when entering schools as six or in some special cases five whereas Finnish kids officially start a real academia around seven or eight. In addition, the maps exhibited one bonus point for Finnish education system in offering a

voluntary additional year of basic education for those feeling unsure about personal capabilities to invest additional time and effort in improving talents and skills before enrolling in upper secondary education. The Matriculation Examination at the end of upper general secondary education of Finland, resembling the National High School Graduation Examination of Vietnam, marks a transition forwards higher education or students can decide on their own Vocational Institutions and preparing for work in real life.

The recent visit of Vietnamese Minister of MOET Phùng Xuân Nhạ to Finland, observing, conferring with the home country Minister of Education and Culture Grahn-Laasonen, and considering applying and transferring potential, probable and pertinent innovative ways in teaching and learning practices of Finland into Vietnam significantly implied that two countries have met some notably corresponding principles, viewpoints and characteristics in the educational system. This condition, hence, has indeed opened doors and floors for me to try investigating closely the national curricula and the English instruction syllabi of two countries and seek for a satisfactory answer for this study (Phan Thao, 2017; Vinh Ha, 2017).

3.2 Research questions

There are, concisely, two primary aims of this study: 1. To outline the main characteristics of phenomenon-based learning 2. To compare similarities and differences of Finnish and Vietnamese curricula and analyze them from the perspective of phenomenon-based learning. To achieve the goals of the purpose statement, two research questions were formulated:

1. What is the stance of phenomenon-based learning among ELT methodologies?
2. How is phenomenon-based learning realized in national core curriculum between Finland and Vietnam?

The previous literature review answered the first question. I already analyzed and synthesized a variety of theoretical underpinnings about ELT methodologies

in order to deduce the possible stance of phenomenon-based learning among already existing ones.

From now on, my study attempts to seek for an answer for the second research question. The similarities and differences in the national core curriculum of two countries were analyzed in relation to four different paired dimensions, which are of viewpoint and mission of education, learning goals and objectives, content areas of English curriculum (themes and topics), and teaching methodology and varied instructional techniques. I chose these categories for my analysis because they are essential components in the national core curriculum and English curriculum as well of two countries, which thus can be used for a meaningful comparison of similarities and differences among their educational systems (Allan, 1996; Arreola & Aleamoni, 1998; Prpic, 2009; Richards, 2017; Volmari, 2012). On the basis of these dimensions, the second research question has been subdivided into:

- a) What attributes of phenomenon-based learning are present in the viewpoint and mission, learning goals and objectives of general high school curricula between Vietnam and Finland?
- b) What attributes of phenomenon-based learning are present in teaching techniques and content areas of English curriculum between Finland and Vietnam?

3.3 Research data

Whereas Vietnam has a separate English curriculum from the general one for the thorough system, upper general secondary education, Finland does not. In Finland, English as a subject is included in foreign languages in Finnish curriculum. This difference suggests that the Vietnamese MOET more strictly sets guidelines for the English curriculum. This difference might be best explained from the previous discussion that Finnish national board of education just suggests the core curriculum, but leaves municipalities and schools autonomy and options to specify the English curriculum in accordance with their contexts and conditions whilst Vietnamese system reminds teachers and schools

to follow regulations and policies in making any decisions relating to educational activities and leadership (Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017; Radivojevic, 2010; Runckel, 2011; Truong, 2014; Truong & Hallinger, 2017; Truong, Hallinger & Sanga, 2017).

Followed is the table describing types of document examined in my study:

TABLE 1 National Core Curriculum of Finland and Vietnam on Study

Country	Document	Target group	Publisher	Year
Finland	National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools 2015 of Finland	Upper Secondary Level	Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE)	2016
Vietnam	Final Draft on National Core Curriculum for General Education 2014	Upper Secondary Level	Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET)	2012
	National Pilot Curriculum of English Subject in Upper Secondary Level on 23th November 2012	Upper Secondary Level	Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET)	2014

A number of studies have suggested potential benefits the Finnish reformed core curriculum could bring to increase the motivation and autonomy of learning of students, enhancing the meaningfulness of learning and integrating hands-on and minds-on experiences, feelings and interactions of students within the remit of lessons, establishing an inclusive, safe, and inspiring school culture for all. Among them, key changes of “rethinking transversal competences” to support students’ identity development and ability to pursue for a sustainable life, “rethinking learning conception and structure of school subjects” towards diversity and emphasis on content-areas in relation to real-life objectives and students’ own emotions, experiences, activities and collaboration have been much underscored (Halinen, 2014; Halinen, 2016; Kaihari, 2015; Kauppinen, 2015; Kauppinen, 2016; Kauppinen, 2017; Vitikka, 2016).

Central to the entire reformed national core curriculum of is the concept of “a new portrait of Vietnamese students”, who possess qualities of “patriotism and dedication to family and homeland; compassion and tolerance; earnestness,

self-esteem, self-reliance and self-confidence; responsibility to individual life, surrounding community, global mankind and natural biodiversity and high respect for national laws and obligations of a citizen” and *ten multifaceted socio-emotional skills*, divided into three main groups of *self-management and self-development skills*, *social and civic skills* and *application skills* (Khanh Nguyen, 2017; Nguyen, 2017; Thuy Linh, 2016). Furthermore, the introduction of *active and experiential learning activities* bridging academic theories with real-life experiences, the augmentation of education and career guidance in upper secondary schools and the diverse methods in instructional techniques, lesson designs, distribution of lesson hours, assessments of students’ learning outcomes and capabilities and conditions of the establishing and developing the new curriculum in local schools are also significant modifications in the reformed program (Thao Nguyen, 2017; Tue Nguyen, 2015).

As indicated previously, the English curriculum has an enormous impact on the practice of English education in Vietnam and Finland. It is, therefore, also meaningful to compare and analyze high school English curricula of both countries and seek for meaningful similarities and differences. There is a growing consensus between two English curricula in offering several opportunities for students to make use of linguistic repertoires in real-life situations and empowering active agency, autonomy, confidence and creativity of students in utilizing the target language and participating into social encounters. Further information about the points of convergence and distinctions between national core curriculum for upper general secondary education and English curriculum of two countries will be revealed in next section of Research Findings and Discussions (Mattila, 2016; Trung Anh, 2017).

3.4 Research method

The present study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach to scrutinize the national core curriculum in Finland and Vietnam.

This approach is expected to verify and seek for convergence and corroboration with the evidence from the previous literature review section about the recognition of phenomenon-based learning in the curriculum of different national education systems. In addition, this approach can be utilized to provide data on the specific contexts so as for me to adequately conclude a unanimity in theory and practice that supports and enhances the credibility of my own study (Angrosino & Mays de Peñerez, 2000; Eisner, 1991). There is also enormous value in the advantages of qualitative documentary analysis approach that the documents I chose to analyze and contest are all available in the public domains, widely covered information that is necessary for both current research and further reassessment and reconsideration of the validity and reliability of the data, less costly than other researching methods, unobtrusive and non-reactive. In that sense, the achieved data should be stable and exactly reflected what I determined to examine (Bowen, 2009).

In particular, the present study will investigate missions, viewpoints learning goals and objectives in general upper secondary education together with content areas and techniques of English instructions as well in national curriculum of both Finland and Vietnam and then apply the directed or theory-driven content analysis on them in the specific lens of phenomenon-based learning. These categories represent key features of national core curriculum in both countries (Allan, 1996; Arreola & Aleamoni, 1998; Prpic, 2009; Richards, 2017; Volmari, 2012). By using this approach, I could rely on the existing theories in the literature review and base future findings or categories onto and consequently inferring the existence of characteristics and manifestations of phenomenon-based learning in national core curricula two examined nations. Not only can this strategy support and enrich my theoretical framework, by finding supports for existing theories but it also assists to guide my subsequent part of the discussion of findings in an explicit and correct way, avoiding naïve or irrational perspectives (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

3.5 Data analysis

Even though a standardized qualitative content analysis needs a prolonged research time and complete methodology that would investigate and compare every unit of analysis in each document in order to possibly produce satisfactory findings and conclusions, this study's major aim is to scrutinize certain headings, sub-headings, paragraphs and sentences and exhibit similarities and differences in national core curricula of two nations owing to the limit of a master thesis.

Specific to the study, I started searching for relevant documents last summer and was careful to filter sections, with a particular set of themes in mind: viewpoint and mission of education, learning goals and objectives, content areas of English curriculum (themes and topics), and teaching methodology and varied instructional techniques (as was explained in the Research Method) to see if characteristics of phenomenon-based learning are manifest or latent there.

Under this condition, sections of guidance and support students, conditions of curriculum implementation, and general school works were eschewed in this paper since they should have led to deeper understanding and developing curriculum in practice. The literature on the role of assessment in teaching and learning has highlighted several benefits in the curriculum operation and practice; however, this issue was not closely examined in the study either. This can be best explained by the fact that assessment refers to a process of obtaining information in curriculum operation and assessing the effectiveness of programs in order to make decisions on particular education policy matters (Frank, 2012; Jabbarifar, 2009; Lee, 2016; Mikre, 2010; van den Akker, 2003). In that sense, this issue seems to go beyond the scope of this study that mainly focuses on discovering how diversely attributes of phenomenon-based learning can be recognized in two national curricula. As a consequence, I decided to eschew this topic in favor of my pre-selected themes.

Having contemplated the relevance and irrelevance of sections of analysis, I was left with a much more limited set of data as followed:

TABLE 2 The Data Set Chosen for Closer Analysis

Type of document	Sections of analysis	Pages	Word counts
National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools 2015 of Finland	Heading 2 – The mission and underlying values of general upper secondary education (paragraphs 1, 2, 4, 7 and 8)	12-13	539
	Heading 5 – Learning objectives and core contents of education		3895
	Sub-heading 5.1 – General objectives of education	34	
	Sub-heading 5.5 – Foreign languages (except for sections of Changing syllabi and Assessment) Sub-headings 5.5.1, 5.5.3, 5.5.4. and 5.5.5	114-115 117-119, 121-126	
Final Draft on National Core Curriculum for General Education 2014 of Vietnam	Heading 1 – Viewpoint of general educational development	1-2	1616
	Heading 2 – Goals of general education and in each level	2-3	
	Heading 3 – Qualities, competences and outcomes of learners in each level	3-4	
National Pilot Curriculum of English Subject in Upper Secondary Level on 23th November 2012 of Vietnam	Heading 1 – General issues		2470
	Sub-heading 2 – Principles for building and developing English curriculum	5	
	Sub-heading 3 – Learning objectives	6-9	
	Sub-heading 4 – Content area (focus on Themes and Topics exclusively)	10-11	
	Sub-heading 5 – Teaching methodology	15-16	

Then, I applied the directed or theory-driven content analysis on the pre-existing themes of viewpoint and mission of education, learning goals and objectives, content areas of English curriculum (themes and topics), and teaching methodology and varied instructional techniques in the specific lens of phenomenon-based learning. To put it simply, I relied on the existing reviews regarding the nature and characteristics of phenomenon-based learning in the literature review to observe the data, determine the sections of analysis, identify and categorize all findings into pre-determined themes, discussed the extent to which the data were supportive of existing theories and summarized how phenomenon-based learning manifests itself in different national core curricula at the end (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017).

In the following sections, each pair of the prescribed dimensions is outlined in more detail. The way in which each dimension was operationalized in the research process is also described.

3.5.1 Mission and viewpoint of education

It is worth noting here that Finland described explicitly the mission of basic education as an integral part of the national inclusive educational security. Its main tasks are 1) To offer individuals the chance to complete their educational obligations 2) To provide a viable and multicultural learning environment for all students to learn and enhance own knowledge, competencies, well-being, a healthy sense of belonging and self-esteem. Basic education of Finland, in addition, highlights the values and principles of human rights, equality, democracy, inclusiveness and creativity in their schooling. This implies their establishing and promoting an active, goal-oriented and collaborative learning environment where children are highly regarded as independent, competent and motivated problem-solving actors and learning is expected to occur through shared knowledge, healthy interactions and meaningfully integrated learning modules (FNBE, 2004; Järvinen, 2007; Ravitch, 2008).

Vietnam, on the other hand, chose to begin the description of its reformed core curriculum by presenting and discussing the viewpoint of governmental authorities on education, which implicitly encompassed the mission, underlying values and principles of developing a complete educational program for the country. This situation might stem from the fact that authorities in this country regard education as “a concept that can be divided in different respects, with respect to other concepts” and requires a thorough consideration and frugal evaluations from educators and essential stakeholders (Kant Dictionary, 2008). In order to successfully identify and achieve fundamental missions and values of education, educators are expected to initially bear in mind a righteous viewpoint, such as considering general education is the primary national policy and investments in education is a strategic and potential method leading to the sustainable development of the country (Nghiem, 2017).

Despite the importance of mission and values in basic education, there remains a paucity of evidence on discussing the same topics on the reformed core curriculum for the general upper secondary education of Finland and Vietnam. The current study attempted to fill in that gap by investigating the chapters of *missions and underlying values* and their contents in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools 2015 and comparing with corresponding section of *viewpoint of general education development* in Final Draft on Programme of National Core Curriculum for General Education on 23th November 2012 of Vietnam.

The National Core Curriculum of Finland drew a parallel description between mission and underlying values of general upper secondary education whilst Vietnam integrated the latter into one big chapter of the viewpoint of general educational development and implicitly discussed between lines. The primary mission of cultivating and promoting students' *transversal general knowledge and ability* and the fundamental values, such as studying is supposed to make the society better and schools are places learners can equally pursue knowledge, abilities, identity and motivations for sustainable way of life, were clearly defined and emphasized in the Finnish core curriculum. The idea of transversal general knowledge and ability, however, differently exhibited in the compound nouns of *năng lực* [capacity] and *phẩm chất* [personal qualities] in Vietnamese core curriculum whereas the underlying values of the inclusive learning environment for students all to learn and grow independently and creatively were kept similar to the Finnish ones. The current study made attempts to analyze and discuss on similarities and differences in viewpoints, missions and values between two national core curricula and their implications through the lens of phenomenon-based learning.

3.5.2 Learning goals and objectives

In the Final Draft on Programme of National Core Curriculum for General Education, Vietnamese MOET initially indicated a broad goal of student competencies, then narrowed to more specific and precise subordinate learning

objectives of qualities and competences students will cover during three years of high school and concluded with the realistic outcomes students are expected to achieve at the end of the syllabus. This arrangement of terminologies can be understood as the top-down specificity methodology in describing educational goals, objectives and outcomes. It helps teachers and students classify their learning objectives and learning outcomes on the basis of the national learning goals so as to easily reflect on the progressive learning milestones and timely adjust objectives with general course content and evaluation methods (Allan, 1996; Arreola & Aleamoni, 1998).

This interpretation is different from that of Finnish National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools, in which the general objectives were mentioned as areas of cognitive and socio-emotional competences students are supposed to acquire and develop at the end of the program. The mode of explicitly stating learning objectives of Finland might be best explained by regarding learning objectives as a clearly established academic statement for students to know exactly what they will be able to learn throughout the program. By looking at these academic expectations, the audience can label the instructional materials, teaching and learning activities and how the system will help students achieve required knowledge and capabilities (Dick, Carey & Carey, 2005; Learning Objectives, 2014).

This study investigated possible points of convergence and distinctions between these two modes of describing learning goals and objectives in the national core curriculum of two countries and also examined what characteristics of phenomenon-based learning might have been recognized in those educational principles. Chapter of *general objectives of education* and its contents in Finnish curriculum was analyzed and compared with the corresponding headings in Vietnamese program, namely *goals of general education and in each level and qualities, competences and outcomes of learners in each level*. It is important, however, to bear in mind that outcomes essentially refer to the final products of the course or measurable tools to determine how effective the program has been, which I personally thought belong to larger areas of assessment and evaluation and may

exceed the acceptable limits of this study (Allan, 1996). Therefore, three last sentences in the chapter *qualities, competences and outcomes of learners in each level* about Vietnamese standardized learning outcomes in each level were intentionally excluded in my data analysis.

The major goal of establishing a meaningful, friendly, healthy and secure academia for all students to fully develop their well-being and capacities is reflected in both Finnish and Vietnamese core curriculum. On the basis of that learner-centered learning environment, both systems encourage the steady and sustainable development of students' transversal general knowledge and abilities, *năng lực* [capacity] and *phẩm chất* [personal qualities] through diversities of inquiry-based, theme-based, project-based activities and empower teachers to reform their own teaching styles to refresh their classrooms constantly. The composition of transversal general knowledge and abilities, *năng lực* [capacity] and *phẩm chất* [personal qualities] was also investigated and discussed in this part. Moreover, the present study made further attempts to examine the evidence on the emphasis on the growth of students' agency and intrinsic motivations of two national core curricula.

3.5.3 Content area in English curriculum (themes and topics)

There are two reasons why this study chose *themes* and *topics* as two main components for further analysis. First, a theme not only contains general information regarding knowledge and skills students need to develop in particular but also make connections with real-life and situational contexts that should prompt students' interactions and usage of the target language in an authentic and pleasant manner (Prpic, 2009). Second, both of two countries described themes and topics in their content area of English instruction. Compared with the thorough and precise illustration of themes and contents for each level in the Finnish curriculum, names of smaller and specific topics are defined in Vietnamese one in a general pattern. Nonetheless, there existed a notable definition for the usage of two terminologies, themes and topics, in Vietnamese curriculum that should help teachers and students apparently

understand the purpose of their lessons. Particularly, a *theme* refers to a central conception about socio-cultural aspects of life that challenges students to self-explore whilst a *topic* is a clear-cut explanation of the theme and broken down on the basis of the level of understanding of learners (MOET, 2012, p. 10; Tucker, 2001, 2017).

TABLE 3 Themes of English Language Instruction in Finnish Curriculum

English Syllabus	Themes
A	(Compulsory courses) 1. English and my world (ENA1) 2. People and their networks (ENA2) 3. Cultural phenomenon (ENA3) 4. Society and the surrounding world (ENA4) 5. Science and the future (ENA5) 6. Study, work, and livelihood (ENA6) (National specialisation courses) 7. Sustainable way of living (ENA7) 8. Speak and influence (ENA8)
B1	(Compulsory courses) 1. The language and my world 2. Well-being and relationships 3. Culture and the media 4. Our diverse living environments 5. Studying and working (National specialisation courses) 6. Speak and influence 7. Sustainable way of living
B2	(National specialisation courses) 1. Important things in life 2. Many kinds of life 3. Well-being and care 4. Culture and the media 5. Study, work, and the future 6. Our common globe 7. International activities 8. Speak, write and influence
B3	(National specialisation courses)

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Getting to know each other and the new language 2. Travelling in the world 3. Important things in life 4. Many kinds of life 5. Well-being and care 6. Culture and the media 7. Study, work, and the future 8. Our common globe
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TABLE 4 Cross-Curricular Themes Common to All Upper Secondary Schools in Finland

active citizenship, entrepreneurship, and the world of work well-being and safety sustainable way of life and global responsibility	knowledge of cultures and internationality multiliteracy and the media technology and society
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TABLE 5 Themes and Topics of English Language Instruction in Vietnamese Curriculum

Themes	Topics	Grade
Our Lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family life • Healthy lifestyles • Entertainment, ... 	10
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The generation gap • Relationships • Becoming independent, ... 	11
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaving school and choosing a career • Life stories • Cultural identity, ... 	12
Our Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serving our communities • Inventions that have changed our lives • Gender and equality, ... 	10
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current social issues • Caring for those in need • Vietnam and ASEAN, ... 	11
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urbanization • The mass media • Vietnam and international organisations, ... 	12
Our Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural diversity • Preserving the natural environment 	10

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eco-tourism, ... 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People and the environment in conflict • Global warming • Preserving our heritage, ... 	11
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endangered species • Ecosystems • The Green movement, ... 	12
Our Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New ways to learn • Colonising other planets • Using the World Wide Web for learning, ... 	10
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further education • Health care and longevity • The future of cities, ... 	11
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifelong learning • Artificial Intelligence (AI) • The world of work, ... 	12

The characters of A, B1, B2 and B3 in Finnish National Core Curriculum not only inform readers themes and their contents covered in each English syllabus but also remind examiners of the language proficiency objectives students are expected to achieve at the end of each level. It is worth noting here that general objectives of the instruction in foreign language of both countries emphasize in supporting students to accomplish the certain levels of proficiency of Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in using the target language (Korhonen, 2010; Ngoc Ha, 2014). Vietnam generally defined the communicative language competencies of high school students at the end of grade 12th is Level 3, which is approximately Level B1 in CEFR, with smaller branches of 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 for three grades but no clear illustration for sub-categories of communicative activities for each level. Finland, on the other hand, built a particularized Evolving Language Proficiency Scale with a classified level set for language proficiency for every specific syllabus and explicit descriptors for sub-categories of communicative language competences (FNBE, 2016, p. 115; MOET, 2012, p. 6). This point of distinction is described in the following table:

TABLE 6 English Proficiency Levels in Accordance with CEFR of Finland and Vietnam

Countries	Grade / Syllabus	Proficiency level (in accordance with CEFR)		
		Interaction skills	Text interpretation skills	Text production skills
Vietnam		Interaction skills	Text interpretation skills	Text production skills
	English 10th	Level 3.1 - Independent User B1		
	English 11th	Level 3.2 - Independent User B1		
	English 12th	Level 3.3 - Independent User B1		
Finland	English B3	B1.1	B1.1	A2.2
	English B2	B1.1	B1.1	B1.1
	English B1	B1.2	B1.2	B1.2
	English A	B2.1	B2.1	B2.1

As can be seen from the table, students at the end of English Syllabus A in Finnish curriculum are expected to reach Level B2.1 in every aspect of communicative activities, particularly being able to communicate fluently under various communication situations despite certain difficulties met in vocabulary repertoire. High school students in Vietnam, on the contrary, are generally required to reach Level 3 (or B1 in CEFR) to deal with most social encounters actively and effectively. Readers are suggested to refer also to the appendices of the Finnish evolving language proficiency scale and the Common Reference Levels: Global scale in Vietnam for further investigation and comparison (FNBE, 2016, p. 115, pp. 252-261; MOET, 2012, p. 6, pp. 32-33).

From the available evidence, it might be said that there exist similar scale values of language proficiency in two countries. This scale values, specifically, help teachers not only assess the progressive communicative language competences of students but also direct language curricula, courses, syllabi and qualifications towards promoting learners' essential sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences sustainably. The idea that both countries mentioned the assessment of performance, assessment scale of Finland is from 4 to 10 with a numerical grade 8, meaning good performance whereas in Vietnam is from 5 to 10 with adjustable good standard in accord with specific contexts, is also of

decisive importance here as it argues for the previous statement that there are standardization-based language objectives in two national curricula.

Even though examining the layers of communicative language proficiency in each syllabus of two countries might lend some help to comprehend better general and specific objectives of the instruction in English as a foreign language, this account should be approached with some caution because it might go beyond the scope of the current study. It is important to bear in mind this study only aims to seek for what principal attributes of phenomenon-based learning may be recognized in different categories of the national core curriculum of Finland and Vietnam. Rather, it does not investigate how learners' communicative language competences are assessed or how teachers in two countries design and monitor language curricula to help students achieve standardized scale values in English communication.

As a consequence, my study only listed the name of English syllabus in each national curriculum and closely read for the content of *themes* and *topics* covered in the chosen syllabus. I also warned readers against the size restriction of the master thesis that allows me to present only compulsory and national specialization themes in English A syllabus and suggested for their further reference to National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools 2015 of Finland, pages 121-126, for more information for other syllabi. The comparison, overall, reveals that Finnish curriculum provided apparent learning objectives in every theme-based course for every English language syllabus with noticeable teaching and learning activities to support students' multifaceted competences, including communicative skills, whilst there is no similar description or interpretation recorded in English curriculum of Vietnam. Many values of supporting students' sustainable way of living, promoting the well-being of the environment and citizens in the content of theme-based courses in English A syllabus of Finland that resonates to that of underlying values in the same document also received some analysis and discussion in this part.

3.5.4 Teaching methodology and varied instructional techniques

Finland seems to have chosen the pathway of the post-method pedagogy of Kumaravadivelu (2003a, b; 2006a, b) to build and develop their national core curriculum. This situation stems from the fact that the Finnish curriculum outlines exclusively the general goals and aims of foreign language learning with a vast array of themes and recommendations to authentic materials utilization in teaching without an explicit referral to any teaching methods. This finding is not new since the *National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools 2003* witnessed the same phenomenon and. There has been a consensus among social scientists that combinations of versatile pedagogical approaches can create flexibility, creativity and freedom for both students to determine when they will learn and for teachers to intellectually choose their own ways of teaching (Korhonen, 2010; Lopez, 2012; Vasagar, 2010).

By contrast, Vietnam unambiguously put the phrase *teaching methodology* in its English curriculum for Upper Secondary Level in 2014 (MOET, 2014a, p. 15). It, however, deserves to be acknowledged that the teaching method Vietnamese MOET was mentioning refers to Communicative Teaching Approach (CLT). As an approach, its underlying principles are to enhance learners' communicative competencies and to enable users to involve in the continuous communication process proactively and confidently. It also allows English instructors to adopt and apply it in many different ways to fit into their contexts and purposes of education (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Richards, 2017; Richards & Rogers, 2001; Verikaitė, 2008). As a consequence, ones may safely say that there existed no obvious teaching method in English curriculum in Vietnam, which is relatively similar to the one of Finland.

Nevertheless, what is not yet clear is the vivid descriptions of similarities and differences between the not mentioning specific teaching methods in Finnish curriculum for English language instruction and the CLT-oriented approach in Vietnamese one and how those pathways should shape the English teaching and learning activities in upper secondary schools. The present study attempts to fill in that gap by deeply analysing sections of *principles for building and developing*

English curriculum and teaching methodology in English curriculum of Vietnam and comparing with the *introductory paragraphs about principles of varied foreign language instructional techniques* in Finnish one. The major goal of foreign language instruction in two national English curricula was initially analyzed. Then, the points of convergence and distinction in characteristics of instructional techniques were analyzed and commented on. By way of illustration, both countries highlighted the relevance of a meaningful learner-centered learning environment constituted of purposeful and needs-oriented themes and topics for learners to practice and self-promote competences. Another good example is how Communicative Teaching Approach of Vietnamese curriculum concur with blurred teaching methods of Finnish one in the way of enhancing students' communicative competency and boosting their individuality and self-esteem.

3.6 Ethical issues and trustworthiness of the study

Notwithstanding that the national core curriculum of Finland has already been translated into English and publicly published, one should not forget to understand that the abridged version cannot be absolutely identical to the original one. In the same manner, I could not guarantee the complete accuracy of the previous sections of data descriptions, analysis and the following discussions despite his original nationality, Vietnamese.

In contemplation of overcoming that tricky ethical issue and possibly achieve neutral or unbiased results, I planned to design a continuous "*audit trail*" record in details for any data analyzing, theme reading and any vague terminologies that may challenge or hinder my final findings and discussions. Then, I would ask for expertise assistance from professors, colleagues and friends to help me double check my initial and emergent themes I had generated, or if possible suggest me proper translations for any terms or principles, as well as review and examine on behalf of audits reviewing my inferential discussions to ensure the trustworthiness of the research before the final submission (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017). The most proper way to deal with

this ethical issue, in my theory, is to transparently inform readers the problem and warn the public against that fact that biased or subjected ideas are, to some extent, are irresistible in qualitative content analysis like mine. And this is what I am doing at this moment.

The obtained results will doubtless be much scrutinized for the reasons that they were my inferences and most of my work involved translations, but there are some immediately dependable conclusions for what I found and what I argued. Particularly, what I interpreted about similarities and differences in two investigated education systems was supported and backed up with direct and precise excerpts of paragraphs from the national curricula of Finland and Vietnam, not my *fabrication*. My observation and commentaries, in addition, for the qualities of a meaningful learner-centered learning environment, improvement of students' transversal knowledge and ability, agency and motivations available in specific sections of analysis were examined under the light of previously developed theories and studies, not my *falsification*. Ones must not also forget to mention that value of *credibility* and *confirmability* for my earlier literature review, the basis for the latter comparative analysis, thanks to a degree of various resources applied and trustworthy Finnish translation from native speakers of different professions, not my intentioned manipulation. Furthermore, the values *authenticity* and *dependability* of the current study have been guaranteed owing to the fact that the two national core curricula are public documents that everyone can access without much effort and the consistency of the research findings is maintained in parallel with the stability of those documents. Therefore, this research study seems to have maintained the value of *trustworthiness* of a qualitative content analysis and thus should deserve of praises for further consideration (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Even though one can recognize flaws in this study, I still hold a desperate faith in the promising outcome this current paper may bring to education, at least to my career as an English instructor. Particularly, just as it can clear my personal pondering about the definition of phenomenon-based learning, so too can it make attempts to illustrate how different educational systems of the world (in

the limited scale of this study, Finland and Vietnam) has understood this innovative teaching practice in their own standpoints and contexts.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of comparative analysis on national core curriculum for upper general secondary schools and English curriculum of Finland and Vietnam. The second research question of *How is phenomenon-based learning realized in national core curriculum between Finland and Vietnam?* is answered in this chapter. On the basis of the analysis criteria explained in the previous part, the curricula have been scrutinized in four paired dimensions of viewpoint and mission of education, learning goals and objectives, content areas of English curriculum (themes and topics), and teaching methodology and varied instructional techniques. The results of the qualitative theory-driven content analysis on curricula of both countries in the perspective of phenomenon-based learning were also shown in this chapter. Comments on findings were intentionally embedded throughout this chapter for two purposes: 1) To highlight my interpretations on each significant datum found on the basis of phenomenon-based learning forthwith without skipping them to an additional discussion section; 2) To facilitate reading process of those interested in following the flow of my argumentation without being distracted by another separate part of discussion. Nonetheless, a short summary was made to finalize the chapter and transition to the conclusion in the end.

4.1 Viewpoint and mission of education

Titles in the sub-headings of 4.1.1, 4.1.2 and 4.1.3 are written on the basis of the present research result. Ideas of *Heavy emphasis on the development of transversal competences; Increase of identity, autonomy and motivations in learning; and Focus on inclusive learning environment and multi-literacy development* are major significant emphases of viewpoint and mission in education of both two national curricula.

The reason, however, these values were intentionally entitled before detailed descriptions about data findings comes from the research literature I made earlier on prominent attributes of phenomenon-based learning. In particular, a meaningful learner-centered learning environment, ample critical and socio-constructive learning opportunities, and students' autonomy and motivations for lifelong learning are all underscored as primary features of phenomenon-based learning (Kivelö, 2015; Linturi, 2014; Roiha et al., 2016; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016). In that sense, these those main points in the first paired dimension seem to have the high degree of validity in the perspective of phenomenon-based learning. Consequently, I started with a heading generally summarizing the main points and proceeded with more precise descriptions so as to highlight this considerable relation.

The current section, in addition, requires readers to understand that even though I labelled it as *viewpoint and mission of education* (with the intention of balancing two comparative units), the national core curriculum of Finland transparently drew a parallel description between mission and underlying values of general upper secondary education. Vietnam, on the contrary, integrated the latter into one big chapter of viewpoint of general educational development and implicitly discussed between lines. Therefore, the underlying values of education in both national curricula were investigated and interpreted carefully in this part also.

4.1.1 Heavy emphasis on the development of transversal competences

What stands out first from the analysis is the diversity in lexical word usage of two national curricula. Specifically, Finnish educational providers coined the *transversal general knowledge and ability* as an entity comprised of *values, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and will* whereas *năng lực* [capacity] and *phẩm chất* [personal qualities] of learners are essential elements of what Vietnamese experts named for the same concept. Both countries, nevertheless, pay attention to strengthening and raising this crucial multifaceted set of knowledge and skills for all learners

in a comprehensive way, preparing them to become not only competent human beings but effective citizens also.

The mission of general upper secondary education is unambiguously defined by FBNE (2016) as to *strengthen students' transversal general knowledge and ability* (p. 12). In order to achieve this mission, Finnish curriculum requires educators to fulfill these underlying values in education. The foremost value is that schools should be a meaningful, goal-oriented and learner-centered learning environment to reflect on and resemble the society and culture so that students can come to learn, practice encountering with the tensions between the publicly expressed values and the reality and enhance both intelligences and competencies:

The underlying values of the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools are built on the Finnish tradition of education, knowledge and ability (*Bildung*), in which studying and learning are deemed to regenerate the society and culture.

Upper secondary school education develops competence on values by dealing with the tensions between the publicly expressed values and the reality.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 12)

Secondly, school is the place to empower a diversity of capabilities of individuals to make decisions for daily realistic circumstances on the basis of 1) their knowledge and experience; 2) their skills and willingness to deal with realistic conflicts; and 3) their loving-kindness cares for others in their life-long journey of pursuing of truth, humaneness, and justice for themselves and for the world:

General knowledge and ability mean that individuals and communities are capable of making decisions with the help of ethical reflection, putting themselves in the place of another person, and consideration based on knowledge;

General knowledge and ability include the skill and willingness to address the conflicts between human endeavours and the prevalent reality ethically, compassionately and by searching for solutions;

General knowledge and ability merge as caring for others, being open-minded, perceiving the reality comprehensively, and being committed to activities for creating positive changes.

The educational ideal of the upper secondary school comprises the pursuit of truth, humaneness, and justice.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 12)

Thirdly, school should be the place where transversal general knowledge and ability is taken for granted as a talented privilege that some may happily possess whilst others lament over lacking for. Rather, it requires understanding that these multifaceted competences are the result of each student's interdependent, active and continuous communication and interactions with the society and the world:

General upper secondary education guides the student in understanding the complex interdependencies prevalent in life and the world as well as in analysing extensive phenomena.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 12)

Lastly, the most fundamental value of education is reached when students are able to both manage their life issues initiatively, creatively and persistently and feel empathetic towards as well as offer assistances to needs of other members in their narrow surrounding community. More importantly, they can grow matured in pursuing the fundamental pillar of "*learning to live together*" of UNESCO (n.d.) in self-elevating into responsible, communal and helpful members of the inclusive society, concerning about and taking care of sustainable developments of the humanity and biodiversity apart from chasing after individual successes:

In upper secondary school, students are encouraged to feel empathy for and take care of one another. Creativity, initiative, honesty, and persistence are valued.

The student understands the significance of his or her own actions and global responsibility in the sustainable use of natural resources, mitigation of climate change, and preservation of biodiversity. Upper secondary school education encourages the student to participate in international collaboration and to assume global citizenship in line with UN goals for sustainable development.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 13)

Despite not having been intricately explained in the Vietnamese core curriculum, the ideology of *transversal general knowledge and ability* unambiguously existed and received sufficient focuses from educational providers and the government. Transversal competences, however, exhibit themselves in the compound form of *capacity and personal qualities* and described in the resolution of the Central Steering Committee of Communist Party of Vietnam in 2013 as an essential goal of the educational reform in the new era. This implies that an adequately

designed and endorsed educational program must be constructed taking account of students' well-being, unique personalities and multifaceted potentials, including both talents and skills:

Đổi mới chương trình giáo dục phổ thông nhằm phát triển năng lực và phẩm chất, hài hòa đức, trí, thể, mỹ của học sinh.

[Changes in education programs aim to raise the capacity and personal qualities of learner in every aspect]

(MOET, 2014, p. 1)

Even though Vietnamese core curriculum did not ever mention directly the supreme goal of education is to develop learners to be a knowledgeable and skillful human being as well as an effective citizen, transversal general knowledge and ability are yet positioned as the crucial backbone of pedagogy and the termination of education (Central Steering Committee of Communist Party of Vietnam, 2013; Pham, 2009). It is to strategically help students promote their own source of personality, ethics, lifestyle, awareness, fundamental values of culture, traditional customs human culture, core values and humanity. Thanks to these values, students will be able to self-achieve the utmost universal values of truth, beauty and goodness and being productive and helpful world citizens who can devote their life to the communal and collective benefits:

Chú trọng giáo dục nhân cách, đạo đức, lối sống, văn hoá pháp luật và ý thức công dân, tập trung vào những giá trị cơ bản của văn hoá, truyền thống và đạo lý dân tộc, tinh hoa văn hoá nhân loại, giá trị cốt lõi và nhân văn của chủ nghĩa Mác-Lênin và tư tưởng Hồ Chí Minh, (tăng cường) kiến thức quốc phòng, an ninh và giáo dục thể chất (hướng nghiệp).

[Focus on education about personality, ethics, lifestyle, law, and citizen's awareness. Focus on fundamental values of culture, traditional customs and morality, human culture, core values and humanity in Marxism and Ho Chi Minh's ideology. Enhance physical education, provision of knowledge about national defense and security, and career guidance]

(MOET, 2014, p. 1)

The large amount of attention was paid in the viewpoint and mission (also underlying values) of education to the growth of students' *transversal competences* or students' *năng lực* and *phẩm chất* can be interpreted as the reflection of the idea of phenomenon-based learning. In the perspective of phenomenon-based learning, the major aim of education is to help students improve proper

understandings about the real-life phenomena of the world and sharpen their multifaceted competences, which will then facilitate their future studies and professions (Dabell, 2016; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

Certain differences in the word choice and the manner of description for one shared goal between two nations was evident. Finland explicitly labelled the interconnect and interdependent capabilities of taking care of oneself and concerning about problems of other people in the society, and being audacious to think originally and taking actions for the sake of a better future life. This interpretation, literally, slightly different from that of Vietnam which identified transversal competences of students as a constellation of righteous, skillful and personalized capacities and qualities that can embrace not only ten multifaceted socio-emotional skills but also several considerable ethical values (which will be discussed in the section of learning goals and objectives). The totality of the situation, nonetheless, requires understanding that there is a consensus between Finland and Vietnam in underscoring the reinforcement and enhancement of transversal general knowledge and ability or capacity and qualities of students as the essence of the mission and viewpoint of high school education. In that sense, both Finnish and Vietnamese core curriculum seem to reflect the goal of development of multifaceted competences of phenomenon-based learning nicely (Ikonen, 2017; Kauppinen, 2016; Kauppinen, 2017; Khanh Nguyen, 2017; Nguyen, 2017; Parviainen, 2017; Thao Nguyen, 2017; Thuy Linh, 2017; Vitikka, 2016).

4.1.2 Increase of identity, autonomy and motivations in learning

Another striking result detected in the Finnish mission of education is the primary intention to empower students to build their own status. In particular, the Finnish core curriculum explicitly states that:

During general upper secondary education, the students are building their identity, their understanding of humanity, worldview, and philosophy of life and finding their place in the world.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 12)

Vietnamese MOET, in a similar vein, determined to cultivate the land of students' agency, encouraging the learners' independency, activeness, creativity, initiative and innermost enthusiasm as well as inspirations for lifelong learning:

Pha^ot huy ti^onh ti^och cực, chủ động, sa^ong ta^oo cu^oa ho^oc sinh; thực hiện phương châm "giảng ít, học nhiều", khắc phục lối truyền thụ áp đặt một chiều, ghi nhớ máy móc; tập trung đa^oy ca^och ho^oc, ca^och nghi^o, khuyến khích và rèn luyện năng lực tự học, tạo cơ sở để học tập suốt đời, tự cập nhật và^o đổi mới tri thức, kỹ năng, phát triển năng lực.

[Keep radically changing the teaching and learning methods towards modernism and "teach less, study more" ideology; avoid imposition of knowledge, passive learning, rigid memorization; encourage the learners' independence, creativity and enable them to continuously update knowledge; improve skills and capacity and prepare for lifelong learning]

(MOET, 2014, p. 2)

The final destination, as a consequence, of the progressive advancement in students' agency, identity and motivations in own learning is students are equitably and adequately able to promote individual interests and motivations, pursue further studying chances and improve appropriate competencies for the world of work. Both of two national curricula highlight this value clearly:

General upper secondary education advances the student's interest in the world of science and the arts as well as develops capabilities for the world of work.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 12)

Ba^o đảm cho học sinh có trình độ trung ho^oc cơ sở (hết lớp 9) có tri thức phổ thông nền tảng, đáp ứng yêu cầu phân luồng mạnh sau trung học cơ sở; trung học phổ thông phải tiếp cận nghề nghiệp và^o chuẩn bị cho giai đoạn ho^oc sau phổ thông có chất lượng.

[Ensure that students having finished lower secondary education (Grade 9) possess rudimentary knowledge and be capable of enrolling in high schools while upper secondary education students have opportunities to approach potential jobs and are prepared for higher education adequately]

(MOET, 2014, p. 1)

From the available evidence, it might be said that not only do two national educational systems pay high regards to investing the students' sustainable development of transversal skills, knowledge and personalities, but they also orient teaching and learning activities towards facilitating students to self-establish and self-enhance their identity and enduring intrinsic motivations for higher education and future occupation. They acknowledge that learners would

be capable of making decisions, resisting unfavorable issues, evoking changes to current situations or even intervening in an event autonomously and meaningfully as long as they have already been trained to build up and promote an effective agency interdependent on the sociocultural context (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi, 2014; Kira & Balkin, 2014).

How students' agency and inspiration are presented and strengthened throughout the viewpoints and missions of education in high school gives another point to evaluate national core curriculum of both Finland and Vietnam in the perspective of phenomenon-based learning. This situation stems from the fact that learners, in phenomenon-based learning, are always regarded as dynamic information seekers and critical language users whose own characteristics and special needs are respected and enhanced. They are empowered to jointly engage in activities, confidently perform tasks and independently construct own knowledge and language abilities. Just as their learning process should be considered as a non-linear procedure that requests sufficient scaffoldings from teachers and friends to holistically upgrade multifaceted skills, so too should their social communicative learning environments that facilitate students to actively and meaningfully interact with the world receive proper attentions from educators, in the light of phenomenon-based learning (Kivelö, 2015; Roiha et al., 2016; Silander, 2015a; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

4.1.3 Focus on inclusive learning environment and multi-literacy development

Last but not at the least is the theme of diversity in learners' socio-cultural backgrounds and their uniqueness in linguistic ability and other potentials in education. The single most striking observation to emerge from the data comparison was both of two nations pay considerable attention to welcoming and embracing the heterogeneity in cultures and languages. They both navigate the ship of education towards the direction of establishing an inclusive and learner-centered academic space where students, regardless of their gender,

ethnic, and other socio-economic backgrounds can afford optimal learning opportunities equitably and meaningfully.

In particular, FNBE (2016) transparently labels inclusive education for all students to learn, cooperate and develop together as one among underlying values on the basis of which students should be built:

Each upper secondary school is a community allowing people with diverse linguistic, worldview and religious backgrounds to recognise mutual values and principles for good life as well as to learn to cooperate.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 13)

In addition to that, Vietnam offers many helps to those residing in rural areas to afford both international (or official) language and languages of own ethnic minorities (both in oral and written forms):

Bảo đảm năng lực tiếng Việt đồng thời quan tâm dạy tiếng mẹ đẻ của học sinh các dân tộc thiểu số (Quan tâm dạy tiếng nói và chữ viết của các dân tộc thiểu số; dạy tiếng Việt và truyền bá văn hóa dân tộc cho người Việt Nam ở nước ngoài).

[Ensure the communicative competency of Vietnamese and other ethnic mother tongues of students from rural minorities (Pay attention to teaching languages of ethnic minorities; teach Vietnamese language and Vietnamese culture to Vietnamese overseas)]

(MOET, 2014, p. 1).

The inclusiveness in education will not only provide a safe, secure and welcoming learning space for all students to learn and grow but also offer more chances for students to exercise their rights equally, learning respects for others and themselves, having controls over their lives and responsibilities for the community. This is what phenomenon-based learning also seeks to have in the meaningful and practical learning situations for developing students' cognitive and meta-cognitive competences. One must not forget that a phenomenon-based learning classroom should be built upon and supported by the sturdy base of the pedagogy of freedom in which learners' sui generis traits are respected and they are also encouraged to fully develop innermost potentials. In that sense, both Finnish and Vietnamese core curriculum seem to reflect the idea of phenomenon-based learning nicely in how to prepare an inclusive and meaningful learning

environment for students equitably (Freire, 1998; Giroux, 2010; Kabeer, 2005; Linturi, 2014; Slee, 2001; Weimer, 2014).

Overall, results in the first paired dimension of mission and viewpoint of education suggested that both Finnish and Vietnamese educational providers aimed to achieve was an inclusive learning environment in which students are all welcomed to learn, play and grow up. They are actively involved in hands-on and minds-on learning activities that can blend academic theories and learning goals with contextualized phenomena. They are challenged to critically bridge their funds of information, personal experiences and newly learnt concepts over a variety of meaningful interactions with the community. Through those communicative situations, they are able to self-construct knowledge and self-promote transversal abilities and competences or righteous personal qualities and capacities. Furthermore, they are invigorated to advance their identity, agency and motivations in addition to cognitive thinking skills thanks to situational and practical learning modules (FNBE, 2016; MOET, 2014).

4.2 Learning goals and objectives of upper general secondary education

It is apparent from the analysis that both Finnish and Vietnamese upper secondary school education draws our attention to their learner-centered learning environment. In this special learning space, every student's uniqueness in abilities and personalities is acknowledged. Academia, hence, is urged to hold responsibilities to provide them with available, affordable and accessible learning opportunities so that they are able to grow into skillful, knowledgeable and successful members for the communal society:

Upper secondary school education strengthens the students' identity and guides him or her in understanding and appreciating his or her uniqueness. Understanding gender and sexual diversity creates preconditions for gender and equality conscious instruction. The instruction provides the student with knowledge and experiences of educational opportunities, society, and the world of work, supporting him or her in planning his or her future, further studies, and future profession. The education strengthens the students' equal for their competence and making choices during their studies and on their future.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 35)

Chương trình giáo dục phổ thông nhằm tạo ra những con người Việt Nam phát triển hài hòa về thể chất và tinh thần, phát huy cao độ tiềm năng của bản thân.

[The national core curriculum aims to produce a new generation of Vietnamese people who are fully developed in both physical and mental health, and determined to highly advance individual potentials]

(MOET, 2014, p. 2)

The fact that both national core curricula underscore the establishment of a learner-centered environment implies that a variety of learners' voices, lens and insights are welcomed in daily learning sessions. Inside that environment, students are empowered to keep pondering curious questions about the surrounding phenomena, critically self-reflect and self-manage the knowledge and information they have been attaining, and creatively coordinate with others to co-resolve real-life missions. Also, a meaningful learner-centered environment implies a real learning space where learning is mediated and controlled by learners and any working methods should function to guide and facilitate the learning of students towards proving their competences in different ways (Freire, 1998; Giroux, 2010; O'Connor, 2012; Soler-Gallart, 2000; Weimer, 2014). In that sense, the focus on a meaningful learner-centered learning environment in both national core curricula seems to have the high degree of validity in the perspective of phenomenon-based learning. The reason stems from the fact that several lines of evidence have, thus far, demonstrated that phenomenon-based learning refers to a new, multiple-perspective, authentic problem-solving and real-world learning environment where the uniqueness of learners' personalities and abilities and their autonomy and creativity are embraced and empowered (Linturi, 2014; Roiha et al., 2016; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

On the basis of the meaningful learner-centered learning environment, both Finnish and Vietnamese schooling emphasized the significant roles of constructivism and sociocultural theories in educational contexts. Its essence is to offer learners opportunities to collaborate and communicate with surrounding contexts and communities in order to self-improvise new ideas, self-criticize individual insights and self-advance skills, which is desirable from the

perspective of phenomenon-based learning (Bobrowsky, Korhonen & Kohtamäki, 2014; Cantell, 2012; Linturi, 2014; Moilanen, 2015; Roiha et al., 2016; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

The Finnish core curriculum, on the one hand, highlighted the sufficient provisions of opportunities for students to not only actively engage in the systematically structured learn-by-doing lessons from multiple perspectives but also wisely act in various social encounters in pursuance of evolution for own critical thinking abilities and competences as well as for a more just and sustainable society and world. The Vietnamese core curriculum, on the other hand, also urged teachers to invent a diversity of versatile and adaptable teaching and learning activities on the basis of constructivism and socio-cultural theories to both satisfy the requirements of national education and facilitate learning progress of students in an effective manner:

Upper secondary school education reinforces the student's awareness of the impacts of human activities on the state of the environment. The instruction guides the student in understanding the necessity and complexity of the sustainable way of living. The instruction encourages the student to recognise and discuss ethical questions, conflicts, and tensions from a number of viewpoints. It encourages the students to become involved and act for a more just and sustainable society and world with more respect for human rights.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 34)

Tiếp tục đổi mới mạnh mẽ phương pháp dạy và học theo hướng hiện đại; vận dụng các phương pháp, kỹ thuật dạy học một cách linh hoạt, sáng tạo, hợp lý, phù hợp với nội dung, đối tượng và điều kiện cụ thể của cơ sở giáo dục phổ thông; phát huy tính tích cực, chủ động, sáng tạo của học sinh; thực hiện phương châm “giảng ít, học nhiều”, khắc phục lối truyền thụ áp đặt một chiều, ghi nhớ máy móc; tập trung dạy cách học, cách nghĩ, khuyến khích và rèn luyện năng lực tự học, tạo cơ sở để học tập suốt đời, tự cập nhật và đổi mới tri thức, kỹ năng, phát triển năng lực.

[Keep radically changing teaching and learning methods towards modernism and “teach less, study more” ideology; implement teaching techniques flexibly and creatively and appropriately to meet requirements of all levels, educational programs, and the need for lifelong learning of everyone; encourage the learners’ independence, creativity, and application of knowledge; avoid imposition of knowledge, passive learning, rigid memorization; focus on teaching learning and thinking methods, encourage and enable the learners to update knowledge themselves, improve their intellect, skills, and capacity and prepare themselves for lifelong learning]

(MOET, 2014, p. 2)

The balanced development of the students’ transversal competences, autonomy and motivations in general goals and objectives of education in two national curricula also reflects the idea of phenomenon-based learning. This can be best

explained for the reason that the major aim of education, in the light of phenomenon-based learning, is to support students to strengthen own understandings about the real-life phenomena, to sharpen their multifaceted competences and to nurture their social active agency and inspiration that for both further studies and future professional careers (Dabell, 2016; Kivelö, 2015; Moilanen, 2015; Roiha et al., 2016; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

The explicit presentation of the value of general knowledge and ability in Finnish core curriculum is again noticeable in the perspective of phenomenon-based learning. *Transversal general knowledge and ability* sometimes occur when students energetically immerse in interactions and communication with surrounding community and personally strengthening interaction, cooperation and expression skills:

Upper secondary school education contributes to togetherness, participation and well-being by strengthening interaction, cooperation, and expression skills. The students gather experiences of goal-oriented activity and peer learning in teams and projects during their studies.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 34)

Sometimes they emerge when students challenge themselves to understand the linguistic features of different fields of science and arts or to produce different texts, which thus are able to self-reinforce multi-literacy capacities:

The instruction reinforces the student's multiliteracy, allowing him or her to understand the languages characteristic of different fields of science and arts as well as to produce and interpret different texts. The student becomes accustomed to assess the reliability of information. Languages are valued and made visible in a versatile way in upper secondary school education. The student learns to act both in the two national languages and in foreign languages.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 34)

They may as well exhibit when students work individually on particular complicated issues that require their intensely critical analysis and deduction, resulting in their self-improvement in problem-solving abilities:

During upper secondary school education, the student gathers experiences of diverse ways to build new knowledge and ability, also across the boundaries of individual subjects. The student develops his or her information acquisition and application capabilities and

problem-solving skills. The student gathers experiences of inquiry-based learning and participation in conducting science and research.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 34)

Ones should also forget to mention the moment those transversal competences shine when students are able to self-realize responsibility and commitment in their own studying, self-recognize their strengths and weaknesses as potential learners, and wholeheartedly trust that they can fully develop their innermost possibilities and become skilled in using them one day:

The student learns to recognise his or her strengths and development needs as a learner and to trust in his or her possibilities as learners. The student understands the significance of commitment for his or her learning, which reinforces his or her self-regulation. Upper secondary school education helps the student recognise learning strategies best suited for him/her and become skilled in using them.

(FNBE, 2016, pp. 34-35)

And they will probably happen once students are properly motivated to combine academic concepts with realistic phenomena of life, to take advantage of and make extreme use of ICT in accessing any types of, and to take care of themselves as well as managing daily life:

Physical activity and a healthy lifestyle are understood as the basic preconditions for health and well-being.

The instruction guides the student in advancing his or her knowledge on information and communication technology and using it appropriately, responsibly and safely both when working alone and with others.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 34)

From the perspective of phenomenon-based learning, however, it can be said that Vietnamese core curriculum deals with the description of transversal competences development in a more different way, compared with what Finnish one does. As indicated previously, the Vietnamese government considers the multifaceted competences of as a solid entity of *năng lực* [capacity] and *phẩm chất* [personal qualities]. Therefore, the general objectives of education are all aim to cultivate and raise both the capacities and personal qualities of learners in every aspect. Specifically, the national education attempts to produce a new generation of students with patriotism and dedication to family and homeland; compassion

and tolerance; self-esteem, self-reliance and self-confidence; responsibility to individual life, surrounding community, global mankind and natural biodiversity; respect for national laws and obligations of a citizen; sufficient funds of general knowledge and abilities of interdependence; self-management of daily life and studies; problem-identifying and problem-solving skills. The Vietnamese equivalent terms can be found below:

- Yêu gia đình, quê hương, đất nước;
- Nhân ái, khoan dung;
- Trung thực, tự trọng, chí công vô tư;
- Tự lập, tự tin, tự chủ và có tinh thần vượt khó;
- Có trách nhiệm với bản thân, cộng đồng, đất nước, nhân loại và môi trường tự nhiên;
- Tôn trọng, chấp hành kỷ luật, pháp luật và thực hiện nghĩa vụ đạo đức.

(MOET, 2014, p. 3)

In addition, ones can also name a diversity of capacities accompanying with the recently identified personalities (Vietnamse original ones can be found below), such as the independent critical thinking skills for understanding and analyzing real-life phenomena and for learning; self-management for studies and personal issues; initiative, creativity and application of knowledge in accord with other fundamental values of culture, tradition and morality that help navigate and lead learners forwards the path of being successful humans; skills of self-expression, communication and collaboration in social interactions; and mathematical competence and basic competences in ICT:

a) Nhóm năng lực làm chủ và phát triển bản thân:

- Năng lực tự học
- Năng lực giải quyết vấn đề
- Năng lực sáng tạo
- Năng lực tự quản lý

b) Nhóm năng lực về □ quan hệ xã hội:

- Năng lực giao tiếp
- Năng lực hợp tác

c) Nhóm năng lực công cụ:

- Năng lực sử dụng công nghệ thông tin và truyền thông (ICT)
- Năng lực sử dụng ngôn ngữ
- Năng lực tính toán.

(MOET, 2014, pp. 3-4)

From the available evidence, it can be said that just as Vietnamese curriculum underscores the holistic development of students' transversal competences so too does this national education system advance the general ability and knowledge of learners upwards a further and essential level of refined personalities and capacities. Thanks to that, students themselves can become efficient knowledge users and multifaceted-competence citizens in the new globalized context, which is one of crucial purposes phenomenon-based learning seeks in general education (Dabell, 2016; Roiha et al., 2016; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

Turning now to the evidence on the emphasis on the growth of students' agency and intrinsic motivations, the results obtained show that both Finland and Vietnam aim to help students continually and considerably promote their autonomy and inspirations for lifelong learning and future occupations. Finland, in particular, encourages students to audaciously get involved in communal interactions, take initiative in thinking for real-life and real-world issues and be capable of developing and enriching proper knowledge and multifaceted skills on their own. Eventually, students will recognize that by actively and mindfully participating in learner-centered, goal-oriented and real contexts of learning, they build up and nurture themselves perpetual positive motivations, autonomy and agency for lifelong learning and future work:

The objectives emphasise the importance of transversal general knowledge and ability and understanding entities, and encourage the student towards ethically responsible and active agency at the local, national, and international level.

During upper secondary school, the student gains strong skills and interest in lifelong learning.

(FNBE, 2016, pp. 34-35)

In a similar vein, Vietnamese students are not only enabled to grow mature in vision, justification, decision, creation and action and unfold their own multi-sensory and many-sided competences but also prompted to ultimately exalt autonomy, identity and motivation for lifelong learning and future career thanks to a plethora of learning-by-doing learning modules and real-world phenomena offered. The Vietnamese equivalent translation can be found below:

Học sinh được phát triển hài hòa về thể chất và tinh thần, con người cá nhân và con người xã hội trên cơ sở duy trì, tăng cường và định hình các phẩm chức và năng lực đã hình thành ở cấp trung học sơ sở; có kiến thức, kỹ năng phổ thông cơ bản được định hướng theo lĩnh vực nghề nghiệp phù hợp với năng khiếu và sở thích; phát triển năng lực cá nhân để lựa chọn hướng phát triển, tiếp tục học lên hoặc bước vào cuộc sống lao động với phẩm chất, năng lực của một công dân.

(MOET, 2014, p. 3).

In the perspective of phenomenon-based learning, this “social interaction-cognitive-reflective” learning environment can be said to help prevent the emergence of *ill-intentioned and irrelevant learning activities, passive learning styles* and *authoritative teacher-centered environment* (Adirika, 2014, p. 367). It, addition, can support students to strengthen their individuality and intrinsic inspirations in learning for the reason that students themselves are demanded to draw up and elevate their own consciousness and viewpoints independently from their own knowledge and experiences, but not aimlessly vibrating existing intelligence (Østergaard, Lieblein, Breland & Francis, 2010; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

Taken together, the results indicate that despite the unparalleled contents and materials, Finland and Vietnam started from the same point of establishing the meaningful, friendly, healthy and secure academia for all students to fully develop their well-beings and capacities. Specifically, they both built a dialogic and distributed leadership pedagogy in which both instructors and learners manifest and evolve themselves as active agents. They are both highly expected

to confidently, committedly, critically and communally contribute own insights in order to co-manage learning missions and assist each other to self-advance capacities as well, which is also meaningful in the perspective of phenomenon-based learning to open more space for students' autonomy and motivations for long-term learning progress (Bobrowsky, Korhonen & Kohtamäki, 2014; Linturi, 2014; Moilanen, 2015; Roiha et al., 2016; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016). They then create an integrative teaching and learning environment where students are frequently and appropriately challenged to deal with a diversity of inquiry-based, theme-based, project-based activities whilst teachers are intrinsically self-inspired to renegotiate and reform their own teaching styles, which phenomenon-based learning also seeks to have in the mainstream classrooms for developing students' valuable intelligences and manifold skills (Dabell, 2016; Kivelö, 2015; Roiha et al., 2016; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016). Above all, they consequently directed the system towards the top-notch goal of education in general, steadily and sustainably developing students' not only knowledge and capabilities but also autonomy and ambition for continuing learning and future work, in which sense they seem to have the high degree of validity in the perspective of phenomenon-based learning (Østergaard, Lieblein, Breland & Francis, 2010; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

4.3 Content areas of English curriculum (themes and topics)

The single most striking observation to emerge from the section is that no obvious description or interpretation addressed in English curriculum of Vietnam about what essential knowledge and skills students are able to gain after learning modules. Readers can label various themes and topics in the curriculum without much effort, yet see no clear reciprocal relationship between them. What type of activities students and teachers can do to practice the target language meaningfully and effectively during lesson hours blurred as well in the curriculum. On the other hand, every theme-based course for every English

language syllabus is explicitly characterized with apparent and noticeable learning objectives in Finish curriculum for the similar school levels.

Four main themes, in general, focus on the essential image of active social actors of learners through the repetitive use of possessive adjective *Our*, reflecting the gradual evolution in both physical and mental abilities of students who will fully participate in and contribute to the development of the whole Vietnamese society. Themes and topics in the learning program also reflect the intertwined cultures between Vietnam and other regional or international countries. Moreover, the totality of the situation requires understanding that each big theme is comprised of many practical, engaging and thought-provoking smaller topics that were cautiously designed to not only meet students' personal preferences, characteristics and abilities but satisfy also the increasing growth of society and of the world (MOET, 2012, p. 10). This implication is clearly suggested in the English curriculum for high school education as followed:

Hệ thống chủ điểm được cụ thể hóa thông qua các chủ đề (topics) ở mỗi khối lớp, trong đó có xét tới yếu tố độ tuổi và tâm sinh lý của học sinh. Chương trình tiếng Anh THPT đề xuất một danh mục chủ đề cho mỗi chủ điểm của mỗi khối lớp. Người biên soạn tài liệu giảng dạy và giáo viên có thể thay đổi, bổ sung các chủ đề sao cho phù hợp với chủ điểm, đáp ứng nhu cầu, sở thích và khả năng học tập của học sinh để đạt được các mục tiêu đề ra trong chương trình.

[Major themes are specialized and divided into minor learning topics for each grade, which pay attention to age and psychophysiological characteristics of students. The National Pilot Programme of English Subject in Upper Secondary Level suggested appropriate topics for each theme in each grade. The compiler of teaching references and classroom instructors can make any changes to the ones recommended or supply additional topics to agree with the main themes, satisfy social needs, interests and capabilities in learning of high school students, which subsequently can assist learner to achieve the pre-determined learning goals of the whole programme]

(MOET, 2012, p. 10)

For that reason, ones might say that content areas of English curriculum of Vietnam may possibly seek for the creation of a meaningful, captivating and intriguing learning environment for students and encourage them to self-improve language proficiency, personalities and qualities an optimal manner. This interpretation, nevertheless, should be taken cautiously due to three reasons. First, there is a lack of adequate descriptions for the content of each theme and topic, fields of knowledge, language-learning skills and other

necessary metacognitive and socio-emotional competences that the program expect students to achieve in the end. Second, no particular types of classroom activities to enable students to practice utilizing the target language in coping with various real-life and real-world situations is clearly demonstrated. Third, there is a relatively large volume of articles addressing that Vietnamese high school teachers have been struggling, within this ambiguity in the content of the English curriculum and the insufficiency of teaching time per week, to balance between the students' development of beneficial communicative language competences and their satisfactory performances in high-stakes examinations during three-year-time academy (Bao Uyen, 2017; Hoang Huong, 2017; Manh Tung, 2017; Ngoc Quang, 2015; Nguyen Cao, 2017).

On the contrary, readers can find precise information of the content, desired learning objectives, versatile ways of teaching and learning activities, various text genres and interactive situations exhibited explicitly in each theme-based and problem-based course of four English syllabi in the Finnish core curriculum. Owing to the size restriction of the study, I present only some of the main characteristics in the content area gained from the observation and analysis of compulsory and national specialization courses of English A syllabus. Readers are suggested to refer to the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools 2015 of Finland, pages 121-126, for more information for other syllabi.

To begin with, ENA1 allots sufficient time for students to re-consider and reinforce their prior funds of knowledge and personal language-learning skills in order to build up most proper and efficient learning styles, achieving the final learning goals of own. Moreover, students, in the course, are involved in complex, critical and challenging written texts or speeches with topical or simulated situations to practice negotiating the meanings of complicated issues and concepts and effectively upgrading multicultural and multi-literacy competences of own in English:

1. English and my world (ENA1)

This course places emphasis on charting the student's knowledge and skills and development targets in the different areas of language proficiency as well as analysing and assessing personal language-learning skills, setting goals for learning English, and searching for ways to develop personal as well as shared knowledge and skills. In this course, the students reflect on the linguistic diversity of the world, English as global phenomenon as well as language proficiency as a tool for increasing cultural competence. The themes and situations are related to studies, young people's lives, and needs for language use.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 117)

Next, ENA2 guides students to a new land of human networks. In this land, particularly, learners will encounter with various linguistic and cultural interactions of different real-life and real-world topics about communication channels. They will get involved in, present own ideas, listen to and negotiate with those of others and act as *“active interlocutors”* and competent *“language users”* of the learnt target language in a proper and confident way on their own. Students, moreover, can also have chance to approach, experience and apply the essential inventions of technology and digitalization in mutual interactions and other aspects of human society:

2. People and their networks (ENA2)

This course includes practice of linguistically and culturally varying interaction in different interactive situations, including the international context, using different communication channels. The students enhance their ability to act as active interlocutors and language users who listen to what others have to say. They develop their skills in forming opinions and negotiating meaning. They diversify the selection of strategies needed in different interactive situations. Themes related to interpersonal relationships and, in this context, mental, physical and social well-being are dealt with in the course. The students also reflect on the significance of technology and digitalisation to interaction and well-being.

(FNBE, 2016, pp. 117-118)

ENA3 course then brings in a slightly different taste of interactive situations for students. Specifically, the course will extend and advance students' multi-literacy and multicultural awareness in communicating with others from different cultural backgrounds. They also urge learners' usage of English as an effective language media to produce different text genres to solve complicated international and intercultural phenomena of this globe, more critically, creatively and completely:

3. Cultural phenomenon (ENA3)

The students' multiliteracy is expanded and advanced in the course. The students produce texts in different genres, emphasising linguistic accuracy typical for each genre. Themes include different cultural phenomena, English language media, and creative activity.

(FNBE, 2016, pp. 117-118)

If three beginning courses of the syllabus emphasize in the reinforcement and enrichment of study skills, language proficiency and communicative competences by repeating some common or familiar topics, courses 4-6 ask for the participants to invest more efforts in evolving and elevating their information acquisition skills, critical literacy, interpretation and production of texts abilities. They, moreover, enrich and extend students' flexibility, initiative and creativity in coping with contextualized phenomena of life so that they can monitor their personal lives and contribute to the sustainable development of the human society. Specifically, in course ENA4, just as students will have chances to strengthen their critical thinking abilities, so too will they be empowered to enhance initiative, creativity, problem solving skills and agency as a result of a vast array of social interactions and contextualized phenomena. ENA5, on the other hand, urge students not only to practice and elaborate their comprehension, interpretation and production of texts but also to engage in sharing ideas and discussing exciting topics about technology and digitalization, and the status of English as an effective international communicative tool. At the end of the compulsory courses ENA6, students' cognitive and metacognitive competences are deepened and learning agency, autonomy and intrinsic motivations of students are intensified thanks to various text genres relating to the widespread workforce and economic phenomena:

4. Society and the surrounding world (ENA4)

In this course, the students develop their information acquisition skills and critical literacy as well as practise active agency through the English language medium. They familiarise themselves with different discussions on societal phenomena, particularly from the viewpoint of active citizenship. They consider individuals' and communities' responsibilities and opportunities to act, including human rights issues and opportunities to become involved in the civic society.

5. Science and the future (ENA5)

The students advance their skills in the interpretation and production of texts as well as their skills in the acquisition of information through investigating fields of knowledge and science that are of interest to them. They learn to share viewpoints based on their

knowledge or opinions. They reflect on different visions of the future, particularly from the perspectives of technology and digitalisation as well as the status of English as the international language of science and technology. The themes emerge from different fields of knowledge and science.

6. Study, work, and livelihood (ENA6)

The students deepen their understanding of language proficiency as social capital and a working life competence. The students familiarise themselves with text genres that they may encounter in their possible further studies or in working life. They reflect on plans for further studies or career plans, including working in the international context. They discuss economic issues related to the life of an increasingly independent young person entering the workforce as well as more widespread economic phenomena.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 118)

The last two national specialization courses of A syllabus continue to promote and further learners' language proficiency in producing written-form texts on different topics of social life and the world meaningfully, effectively and effortlessly (yet self-correction and some ambiguous expressions are still accepted at certain levels). Simultaneously, students' productive skills in expressing individual thoughts and debating various theme-based or contextualized phenomena in the human society orally also receive high emphasis in the last two specialized courses.

7. Sustainable way of living (ENA7)

In this course, the students advance their ability to interpret and produce English in a variety of interactive situations and for different audiences. Texts of different genres, such as fiction or non-fiction, narrative, descriptive, reflective, instructive, or argumentative texts, are analysed or produced in the course. The themes of the compulsory in the syllabus continue to be dealt with from the perspectives of an ecological, economic, and socially and culturally sustainable way of living, taking into account the students' needs and interests.

8. Speak and influence (ENA8)

The students advance their skills in producing language orally, understanding spoken language, and building dialogue. They strengthen their fluency of speech and practise oral production that requires preparation. The themes dealt with in the compulsory courses are revised or complemented according to the students' needs.

(FNBE, 2016, pp. 118-119)

It is also of decisive importance to mention the flexible integration of national cross-curricular themes and integrative instructions into every course of English A syllabus. This situation, indeed, encourages not only students to actively, critically and meaningfully use English as a tool and material for thoughts in

order to explore and learn about the world but teachers also to make best attempts to continuously invent and design new and interesting situational lessons for their learners:

In each course, there is room for discussing topics of current or local interest, to be decided on jointly. Instruction across subjects or on cross-curricular themes may be part of all courses. Both oral and written interaction is practised in versatile ways, although emphases may vary between courses.

The student advances his or her ability to use English for different purposes. In these courses, the students practise interpreting and producing texts alone and together, and revise language knowledge according to their needs. A written or oral fairly extensive English section or entity related to other studies may be integrated in the courses.

(FNBE, 2016, pp. 117, 118)

A large volume of underlying values on students' general knowledge and ability, autonomy and intrinsic motivations are, taken together, nicely reflected in English A syllabus courses in Finnish core curriculum. In light of phenomenon-based learning, this idea is also deserving of praise since ones should remember that students are seen as active, responsible and autonomous social actors to manage, orient and lead their own study, work and civic activities (Cantell, 2012; Linturi, 2014; Østergaard, Lieblein, Breland & Francis, 2010; Roiha et al., 2016; Silander, 2015a; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016). The Finnish curriculum clearly showed that English language instruction should provide students with opportunities to become active society members to make use of the learnt target language to participate into a variety of world-life issues, pursuing for the collaborative relationships among people, enhancing individual cognitive and social capabilities, cultivating perpetual positive inspirations for own goals (FNBE, 2016). How course content is classified in a certain order to help promote steadily students' competences in communication through a plethora of hands-on and minds-on phenomena gives another point of value in the perspective of phenomenon-based learning. This results from the fact phenomenon-based learning also seeks to provide meaningful and practical world issues and situations anchored in daily academic theories in order to encourage learners to collaboratively interact with others and thus independently improve knowledge and skills (Bobrowsky, Korhonen & Kohtamäki, 2014; Moilanen, 2015; Silander,

2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016). The inclusion, moreover, of current world issues into mainstream classrooms grants valuable opportunities for students to interact with the surrounding society in a purposeful manner, which is also preferable from the perspective of phenomenon-based learning for improving not only students' communicative language competences but also related socio-emotional and metacognitive abilities (Kivelö, 2015; Roiha et al., 2016; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

On the other hand, Vietnamese curriculum does not provide a similar clear-cut description for recommended themes and topics in English language instruction, except for a long name list of real-world phenomena students of three grades can have chances to experience and a brief depiction of characteristics of themes and topics applied in the program that assumedly respects students' social needs, capacities and personalities. In some extent, ones may say that that variety of real-world phenomena presented offers several opportunities for students to possibly engage their acquired learning strategies in and activate their learnt target language to accomplish the situational tasks and thus evolve their multifaceted competences, which also seems to have the high degree of validity in the perspective of phenomenon-based learning. Nonetheless, the failure of Vietnamese curriculum of cautiously specifying learning aims and objectives in the content area has made me cast critical doubt on this interpretation.

4.4 Teaching methodology and varied instructional techniques

Foreign language instruction, illustrated in the English curriculum of Finland, underscores the pragmatic uses of target languages as well as effectively meaningful real-life communicative skills. It supports students to make use of the target language as an effective communicative tool to manage different types of intercultural interactions, to allow people to understand their statements and to analyze others' feelings, attitudes and expectations from conversed messages.

Moreover, it is expected to empower students to control their own language processing within appropriate contexts and self-promote proficiency and agency, of varying degrees, in both linguistic and cultural repertoire (Coste, Moore & Zarate, 2009; Kalliokoski, 2011; Patterson, 2011). To put in an exact definition, Finnish educational system labelled the major mission of teaching and learning foreign languages as followed:

The teaching and learning of foreign languages advances the language education and development of language awareness started in basic education. The students are guided in developing their proficiency in different languages and expanding their plurilingual competence as well as developing their metalinguistic skills.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 114)

In a similar vein, English curriculum of Vietnam also pays high attentions to the holistic developments of students' communicative and metacognitive skills through a variety of creative, contextualized and experiential learning. Communicative proficiency of students, described by Vietnamese education system, is an individual competence in applying both linguistic and communicative capabilities to engage in a diversity of circumstances in the most sensible and efficient way. In that sense, this definition resonates with ideologies about plurilingual competence and metalinguistic skills in Finnish system, as recently discussed (FNBE, 2016; MOET, 2012). Just as the student's communicative language skills, positive affections and aspirations are improved, so too are their socio-emotional and cultural competences are enhanced thanks to those learning opportunities:

- Đáp ứng nhu cầu học tiếng Anh của học sinh trong độ tuổi THPT, cũng như nhu cầu nhận thức, nhu cầu xã hội và tình cảm của học sinh, đồng thời trang bị cho các em các khả năng ngôn ngữ để đáp ứng nhu cầu công việc trong tương lai và học tiếp tục học tập ở trình độ cao hơn;

[Satisfy students' unique needs in learning English, in obtaining and expanding knowledge, social emotions and attitudes as well as prepare for students' adequate communication skills to comply with future requirements of work and further studies]

- Nâng cao năng lực giao tiếp bằng tiếng Anh thông qua việc phát triển đồng đều và tích hợp 4 khả năng: nghe, nói, đọc, viết;

[Enhance multi-faceted communicative competences in English, particularly the 4 essential integrated ones of listening, reading, speaking and writing]

- Tiếp tục phát triển thái độ tích cực đối với việc học tiếng Anh và giúp học sinh có những trải nghiệm học tập tích cực, thú vị nhằm đáp ứng các mục tiêu của chương trình.

[Continually improve learners' positive attitudes, affections and aspirations in learning English and offer ample opportunities for them to experience meaningful and captivating extracurricular activities in the pursuance of meeting with predefined objectives of the system]

(MOET, 2012, p. 5)

Moving on now to consider the instructional technique(s) practiced in English curriculum of two nations. Despite certain differences in word choice of between Finnish and Vietnamese curriculum for English instruction recorded, the most considerable observation to emerge from the section was both nations highlighted the relevance of a meaningful learner-centered learning environment. Inside this learning space, not only can students experience the genuine joy of learning by getting involved in sharing ideas and resolving real-life issues of the globalized world but they are also prompted to monitor, refine and advance own attitudes, values and other crucial cognitive and metacognitive skills:

The instruction strengthens the students' confidence in their own abilities in learning languages and using them confidently, and provides possibilities of experiencing the joy of learning. The instruction strengthens the students' desire and ability to act in culturally, internationally and linguistically diverse environments and contexts.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 114)

- Đảm bảo hệ thống chủ điểm/chủ đề phù hợp với nhu cầu hiện tại và tương lai của học sinh;

[Ensure the selected themes/topics work in accordance with learners' unique needs at present and in future]

- Đảm bảo phương pháp dạy học phải lấy việc học làm trung tâm (learning-centred);

[Ensure to establish and provide a meaningful learner-centred learning environment for students equally]

- Đảm bảo tính linh hoạt và mềm dẻo của chương trình nhằm đáp ứng nhu cầu và điều kiện đa dạng học tiếng Anh khác nhau giữa các vùng miền.

[Ensure the flexibility and adaptability of the core program, teaching methodologies and facilities in order to correspond to the diversities and conditions of approaching English between regions]

(MOET, 2012, p. 5)

This finding is also desirable from the perspective of phenomenon-based learning in the pursuit of a new, multiple-perspective, authentic problem-solving and real-world learning environment. Within which, learning is all conscious, purposeful and needs-oriented activities and learners can see on their own the utility value in the theories and information meaningfully acquired in a vast array of contextualized and authentic learning situations (Linturi, 2014; Moilanen, 2015; Roiha et al., 2016; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

Another remarkable reported finding was that Finnish curriculum outlines exclusively the general objectives of foreign language learning with a vast array of themes and recommendations to authentic materials utilization without an explicit referral to any teaching methods. This implies the initiative and freedom for both students to determine when they will learn and teachers to actively choose their own ways of teaching. This fact is also exemplified in the curriculum undertaken by certain paragraphs empowering teachers to utilize any student-oriented instructional techniques in favor of guiding students to bridge between students' funds of knowledge and experiences and the target language in a purposeful and effective manner. Teachers, furthermore, are required to help students in perceiving and assessing the progress of their learning and self-promoting beneficial language-learning skills and socio-emotional competences. Well-intentioned and sufficient investments in those deep-learning instructions and needs-oriented and learner-centered approaches can result in the student's active involvement in the international world, competences for being helpful and effective global citizens and autonomy, agency and motivations in self-managing and self-controlling own life and studies afterwards:

All of the students' language proficiency is utilised, and instruction also builds bridges between different languages as well as the students' language use in their leisure time. The students are guided in reflecting on the significance of attitudes and values and developing their skills in acting constructively in different contexts.

The instruction helps the students to develop their capacity for participation and active involvement in the international world, and develops the students' competences of global citizenship.

The language instruction utilises inquiry-based learning by using diverse and student-oriented methods. The students are guided in acquiring, assessing, and processing

information in the languages they know. Information and communication technology is used as a natural part of the learning environments.

The language instruction deals with themes through which language learning becomes part of multidisciplinary work and the command of entities in upper secondary school studies. The students are offered meaningful, open-ended, and sufficiently challenging tasks.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 114)

More interestingly, the Finnish curriculum openly suggests the introductions of thematic studies and other multidisciplinary studies for the sake of students' improvement in cognitive and metacognitive abilities, increase in general transversal competences, and growth in autonomy and intrinsic motivations, even when their skills at some moments are limited:

Cross-curricular themes, thematic studies, and other multidisciplinary studies encourage the students to utilise their language skills, even when their skills are limited, and their plurilingual competence.

(FNBE, 2016, p. 114)

The evidence presented thus far supports the idea that theme-based, inquiry-based and other student-oriented language instructions in Finnish national core curriculum can be interpreted as the reflection of the idea of phenomenon-based learning. One reason is that they comparably engage learners in authentic and contextualized situations and help them self-enhance their perceptions about the phenomena as well as competences for critical analysis and evaluation through collaborative communications with others. They similarly aim to encouragingly push students towards promoting holistic and true understandings that allows them later to use and reuse in a variety of situations. They generally put great emphasis in designing a competent learner-centered environment featuring with progressive inquiry and implementing constructivist and socio-cultural learning elements in encouraging learners to collaboratively interact with society. Above all, they share major academic goals of advancing autonomy, identity, positive emotions and intrinsic motivations of learners and recommending the facilitating role of teachers as approachable and useful guides on the side in providing necessary scaffolding assistances and sustaining the dynamics of working

individuals (Dabell, 2016; Kivelö, 2015; Linturi, 2014; Moilanen, 2015; Roiha et al., 2016; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

Returning briefly to the prior discovery in the analysis, it is of inestimable importance to reiterate the fact that the teaching method Vietnamese MOET directly refers to Communicative Teaching Approach (CLT) in the section of teaching methodology. CLT, in the perspective of Vietnamese MOET, is built upon a meaningful learner-centered learning environment reinforced and decorated by “cá thể hoá” (individualized) learning missions and activities (MOET, 2012, pp. 15-16). This condition not only can fit well with unique language proficiency and perception ability of students but also offers ample opportunities for students to exhibit their agency through a variety of relevant and competitive language learning activities. CLT, in addition, is expected to inspire students to willingly practice using the target language in order to present personal ideas about social issues, critically reflecting on own repertoire of knowledge and experiences, effectively resolving any real-life and real-world problems. CLT, more importantly, should instil into students minds the initiative, autonomy and motivations to actively and continuously interact with diversities of resources, peers and teachers and to self-elevate their maturation in responsibility for personal learning process and reinforcement of multi-faceted competences:

Đường hướng này nhấn mạnh đến quá trình luyện tập hình thành và phát triển các kĩ năng giao tiếp thông qua các phương pháp, quy trình hoạt động học tập phù hợp với điều kiện, hoàn cảnh dạy học và khả năng của học sinh. Giáo viên phải xem học sinh là những chủ thể tích cực tham gia vào quá trình học tập và vai trò của giáo viên là người tổ chức và hướng dẫn quá trình học tập của học sinh;

[All teaching practices should be oriented towards learner-centered environment and the improvement of students' communicative skills through diverse teaching methods and learning procedures that comply with students' special needs and current conditions of learning. Teachers will work as facilitators, activity organizers and consider learners as social active agents participating into their own learning process]

Các nhiệm vụ học tập được thiết kế có tính linh hoạt, có khả năng cá thể hóa, giúp học sinh có thể liên hệ với cuộc sống và môi trường xã hội của bản thân, sử dụng được những hiểu biết và kiến thức nền của mình trong luyện tập ngôn ngữ. Các hoạt động học tập được thiết kế nhằm tăng cường ý thức tự chịu trách nhiệm về việc học tập của bản thân, đồng thời hình thành và rèn luyện một số kĩ năng và chiến lược học ngoại ngữ cơ bản cho học sinh.

[Learning missions and goals should be designed to meet qualities of flexibility, practicability and individualization so that learners can individually reflect what they have

been studying with their ongoing social life and make adequate applications of academic knowledge and funds of experiences in practicing the target language and solving real-life issues as well. Learning activities, in addition, should pay serious attentions to both maturation in responsibility for personal learning process and reinforcement of multifaceted competences, including skills and strategies in learning foreign languages]

(MOET, 2012, pp. 15-16)

Continuing on this line, Vietnamese MOET further embraces any teaching and learning activities in CLT-directed classrooms that are relevant for the sake of students' frequency, initiative and motivation in using English as the target language in not only academic environment but also daily social situations. Those instructional techniques are welcomed to integrate relevant and contextualized phenomena of life into academic lessons to grant a variety of learning-by-doing chances for students to self-initiate and self-improve both cognitive abilities and multifaceted competences:

Các hoạt động luyện tập ngôn ngữ cần kết hợp tăng cường độ trôi chảy, ma□ch la□c với độ chính xác trong sử dụng ngôn ngữ. Việc sử dụng ngôn ngữ có ý nghĩa là yếu tố cơ bản để đạt được trình độ thành thạo bất kì mức độ năng lực giao tiếp nào. Điều này đòi hỏi học sinh phải tương tác với giáo viên, bạn□n họ□c cùng lớp, sách giáo khoa và các nguồn học liệu khác. Để phát huy tính tích cực trong hoạt động của họ□c sinh, giáo viên cần tổ chức nhiều hình thức hoạt động trên lớp như: luyện tập cá nhân, luyện tập theo cặp, luyện tập theo nhóm và luyện tập cả□ lớp;

[The increase in both fluency and accuracy in communication is a must for any interactive activity or lesson designed in the classroom. To achieve that mission as well as to significantly elevate activeness and critical thinking skills of students, teachers are requested to devise several thought-provoking learning activities in class to constantly challenge learners to practice interacting with diversities of resources and collaborating with peers and teachers, such as individual works, pair works, group works and whole-class practices]

Các hoạt động luyện tập ngôn ngữ có thể được thiết kế dưới các hình thức khác nhau, mang tính thi đua, cạnh tranh nhằm tạo hứng thú cho học sinh, phù hợp với đặc điểm tâm sinh lí học sinh. Học sinh cần được khuyến khích sử dụng tiếng Anh tối đa trong lớp học và các tình huống giao tiếp thường ngày.

[Learning activities can be arranged in several ways that need to be relevant and competitive to engage students in practicing the target language more frequently. Students are also encouraged to intensely utilize English in classrooms and in daily interactive situations of life]

(MOET, 2012, p. 16).

In summary, CLT-oriented approach in Vietnamese curriculum aims to bring natural and authentic situations and encourages students to synthesize their funds of knowledge and experiences into dealing with social encounters, which is noticeable also in the perspective of phenomenon-based learning (Dabell, 2016;

Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b). In addition, it provides relevant, authentic and functional contextual life issues in a meaningful learner-centered learning environment for students to immerse in, interact with and act upon with others to practice resolving real-world phenomena critically and creatively, which is also preferable from the perspective of phenomenon-based learning (Dabell, 2016; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b). The supreme purposes of the whole learning procedure in CLT-oriented classrooms are to not only hone students' communicative competency naturally and effectively as a part of their multifaceted competences but also boost their identity, individuality and self-esteem in future social life, which phenomenon-based learning is seeking to have in its classrooms for developing students' holistic capacity and personalities (Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

Comparing the two results, it can be said that many significant recurrent themes of phenomenon-based learning are recognized in the way of teaching English in the curriculum of two countries. First, both of national curricula encourage thematic and multidisciplinary studies in mainstream classrooms to engage students in practicing the target language more frequently and meaningfully even though they do not explicitly discuss the term phenomenon-based learning. Second, both of national curricula ensure the provision of a meaningful learner-centered learning environment, in which not only can students practice joyfully interacting with the surrounding community but they are also motivated to assess and elevate own knowledge and skills despite no direct mention of the term phenomenon-based learning addressed. Most significantly, the well-intentioned inclusion of elements of autonomy, agency and intrinsic motivation in every designed learning activity and language instruction of two national English curricula can be interpreted as the reflection of phenomenon-based learning, nicely, since the final destination of education is but the sustainable development of students' autonomy, agency, positive emotions and intrinsic motivations (Dabell, 2016; Linturi, 2014; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

4.5 A quick summary of research findings

Thus far, the present study has attempted to answer the second research question of *How is phenomenon-based learning realized in national core curriculum between Finland and Vietnam?* The study has identified, compared and analyzed points of convergence and distinctions between Finnish and Vietnamese national core curricula and English curricula as well. The similarities and differences were investigated in four paired different dimensions: viewpoint and mission of education, learning goals and objectives of upper general secondary education, content areas of English curriculum (themes and topics), and teaching methodology and varied instructional techniques. This study also investigated the various realizations of the phenomenon-based learning qualities in national core curricula of the two countries.

The findings revealed that both national core curricula on upper general secondary education have points of convergence in *three* pairs of viewpoints and missions of education, learning goals and objectives of upper general secondary education, and teaching methodology and varied instructional techniques due to three reasons.

First, it was found that both Finland and Vietnam give priority to the holistic development of transversal competences as well as capacities and qualities of students in the missions, values and viewpoints of education. Through flexible integrations of goal-oriented and realistic learning situations, students are encouraged to apply what they have acquired in peculiar circumstances, interact and communicate productively with surrounding communities and practice solving a plethora of issues of real life. In learning contents and teaching practices of two nations, ones can also discern that the multifaceted skills, the in-class instructions and learning objectives are interconnected with contextualized phenomena of life and manifested in several forms of thematic studies and communicative language teaching approach. Students, specifically, are inspired to actively and critically use the learnt language and own experiences to solve situational problems and thus naturally and autonomously self-improve knowledge and competences. Just as students

are enabled to realize and relate new concepts, ideas, experiences and ways of thinking to their existing pictures of world, so too are they encouraged to assimilate, construct and generate original and creative ideas, concepts or theories (Barnes, 2008; Pierce & Gilles, 2008). As a result, students have many chances to learn to self-strengthen and self-elevate essential transversal competences, mental agility, initiative, creativity, self-esteem and become living critical thinkers (Lunenburg, 2011). This point remarkably reflects a principle of phenomenon-based learning that the major aim of education is to help students improve proper understandings about the real-life phenomena of the world and sharpen their multifaceted competences, including communicative and other considerable socio-emotional capabilities (Dabell, 2016; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

Second, the comparable focus on the establishment of an inclusive community and multi-literacy development is explicitly identified in missions, underlying values and viewpoints of two curricula in order to embrace students' diversities of *sui generis* abilities and expectations and aspire for their imagination and innovativeness. Learning goals and objectives of upper general secondary education of two nations were also recorded to correspondingly underscore the construction of a meaningful learner-centered environment. This sense seems to have the high degree of validity in the perspective of phenomenon-based learning since phenomenon-based learning refers to a new, multiple-perspective, authentic problem-solving and real-world learning environment where the uniqueness of learners' perspectives and abilities and their autonomy and creativity are honored and empowered (Linturi, 2014; Roiha et al., 2016; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016). On the basis of that learner-centered learning environment, both Finnish and Vietnamese schooling emphasize the significant roles of constructivism and sociocultural theories in instructional techniques whose essence is to offer learners opportunities to collaborate with surrounding contexts and communities in order to self-improvise new ideas, self-criticize individual insights and self-advance skills, which is desirable from the perspective of

phenomenon-based learning (Bobrowsky, Korhonen & Kohtamäki, 2014; Cantell, 2012; Linturi, 2014; Moilanen, 2015; Roiha et al., 2016; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016). Whereas different teaching techniques were addressed in the findings, both of national curricula encourage thematic and pragmatic communication-oriented learning activities in mainstream classrooms to engage students in practicing the target language more frequently and effectively. They ensure the provision of real-life and real-world learning situations for students to, to a wide extent, participate in and take actions. They involve teachers also into designing versatile and adaptable teaching and learning activities on the basis of constructivism and socio-cultural theories to both satisfy the requirements of national education and facilitate learning progress of students in an effective manner.

How students' agency and intrinsic motivations are presented and strengthened throughout the viewpoints, missions and values of education in high school gives the last point to evaluate two national curricula in the light of phenomenon-based learning. Just as students are empowered to jointly engage in activities, confidently perform tasks and independently construct own knowledge and language abilities, so too is their learning process rightly considered as a non-linear procedure that requests sufficient scaffoldings from teachers and peers (Kivelö, 2015; Roiha et al., 2016; Silander, 2015a; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016). The results obtained from the learning goals and objectives, in addition, revealed that both Finland and Vietnam aim to help students continually and considerably promote their autonomy and inspirations for lifelong learning and future occupations. By providing a variety of needs-oriented, authentic and meaningful theme-based learning situations, Finnish upper general secondary education encourages students to audaciously get involved in communal interactions, take initiative in thinking, self-regulate and self-monitor learning styles. In a similar vein, Vietnamese students are not only enabled to grow mature in vision, justification, decision, creation and action and unfold multi-sensory and many-sided competences but also prompted to ultimately exalt autonomy, identity and motivation for future life. In that sense,

both Finnish and Vietnamese curricula seem to remarkably reflect the goals of phenomenon-based learning in supporting students to draw up and elevate their own consciousness and viewpoints independently from their own knowledge and experiences (Adirika, 2014, p. 367; Østergaard, Lieblein, Breland & Francis, 2010; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016). Different instructional techniques applied in two countries, moreover, were also reported to highlight the steady and significant improvement of students' autonomy and motivations. Both of national curricula encourage thematic, problem-based, goal-oriented learning phenomena to engage students in practicing the target language more frequently and effectively. Both of national curricula ensure the provision of a meaningful individualized learning environment, in which students can both practice communicating with others and steadily self-improve attitudes, values and capabilities. Those conditions, as a consequence, help to facilitate and promote elements of autonomy, agency, positive emotions and intrinsic motivations development for students which, from the perspective of phenomenon-based learning, is essential for the sustainable development of students' further studies and future professions (Dabell, 2016; Linturi, 2014; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

In contrast to what was detected in the previous three paired dimensions, findings from content areas (themes and topics) in English curriculum of Finland and Vietnam witnessed notable points of distinction. No obvious description or interpretation is addressed in English curriculum of Vietnam about what essential knowledge and skills students are able to gain, in what extent themes and topics correlate and support each other to improve multifaceted competences of students and which type of activities students can do to practice the target language. Every theme-based course for every English language syllabus, by contrast, is explicitly characterized by apparent and noticeable learning objectives in Finnish curriculum for the similar school levels. The large amount of emphasis on the development of students' autonomy and intrinsic motivations and the systematic provision of authentic and goal-oriented learning phenomena explicitly described in English A syllabus courses in Finnish core

curriculum, taken together, can be interpreted as the reflection of the idea of phenomenon-based learning (Cantell, 2012; Kivelö, 2015; Linturi, 2014; Moilanen, 2015; Roiha et al., 2016; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016). Even though Vietnam offers a variety of real-world themes and topics in the English curriculum for students to activate their learnt target language to practice dealing with, which also seems to have the high degree of validity in the perspective of phenomenon-based learning, it fails to fully define learning aims and objectives in the content area.

4.6 Final words on the second research question

On the basis of the research findings, there are some issues to deserve discussion. First of all, Finland and Vietnam highly appreciate the establishment of an inclusive and meaningful learner-centered learning environment. They both underscore a needs-oriented, goal-oriented and real-phenomena academia for all students to fully develop their well-being and capacities. They, in addition, emphasize a dialogic and distributed leadership pedagogy in which both instructors and learners co-manage learning missions and assist each to foster competences. It, therefore, seems to be a good plan to design classrooms and pedagogical activities towards *that* way, particularly involving students in consciously seeing utility value in the theories and practical sides in every learning situation. In those classrooms, students will then be empowered to actively assimilate and accommodate own understandings with the newly attained theories in order to conceptualize better perceptions about the world, responsibly monitoring and regulating own learning procedure, perpetually refining own thinking abilities, myriads of skills, attitudes and ambitions (Dabell, 2016; Kivelö, 2015; Linturi, 2014; Roiha et al., 2016; Silander, 2015a; Silander, 2015b; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016).

Second, it seems to be worth bringing up the influence of agency and intrinsic motivations of students in designing classroom lessons and activities. Both Finland and Vietnam regard students as dynamic information seekers and

critical language users whose own characteristics and special needs are respected and enhanced. Both investigated nations empower students to jointly engage in activities, confidently perform tasks and independently construct own knowledge and language abilities. And both countries facilitate students to establish and enhance their identity and enduring intrinsic motivations thanks to several purposeful and realistic learning phenomena. This sense can also be best explained in the perspective of phenomenon-based learning that an active and inspiring learning space can support students to both strengthen their individuality in learning and nourish their passion for own sustainable development (Adirika, 2014, p. 367; Østergaard, Lieblein, Breland & Francis, 2010; Symeonidis & Schwarz, 2016). This situation, furthermore, interestingly implies the consensus between two educational systems in considering students as fully developed, autonomous and competent citizens in the society, which requires better and more holistic teaching techniques and approaches (Honig, 2009; James, 2009; Leonard, 2009; Rutanen & Siippainen, 2017). As a consequence, I would like to suggest that learning modules and activities need more goal-oriented contexts and more considerate to learners' preferences, personalities and abilities for enhancing not only students' competencies but also their identity and inspirations for a longer term.

Finally, the present study found the prominent difference in English curriculum between Finland and Vietnam in the way of presenting content areas (themes and topics). It is not difficult for readers to precisely find information of the content, desired learning objectives, versatile ways of teaching and learning activities, various text genres and interactive situations and values of students' general knowledge and ability embedded in each English-syllabi-based course of the Finnish core curriculum. This situation contrasts with that of Vietnamese curriculum which does not provide a similar clear-cut description for suggested themes and topics, but a long name list of situational learning activities students will have a chance to experience during the three-year-time study. Vietnamese teachers, therefore, are recommended to cautiously contemplate this difference to invent appropriate learning activities that can satisfy the limit of allotted time

and resources but will also ensure the holistic development of students' knowledge and competencies. However, the current study also suggests Vietnamese curriculum illuminate what essential knowledge and skills students are expected to gain after learning modules and how themes and topics implemented mutually correlate to improve knowledge and skills of students. In addition, teachers and students should be offered more autonomy in creating and engaging in individualized, contextualized and needs-oriented learning situations in order to utilize the target language more purposefully and effectively. Under these conditions, it is believed to benefit the holistic development of students' understanding of real-world phenomena and multifaceted competences, embracing communicative language skills.

5 CONCLUSION

The present study, thus far, has answered two research questions at the beginning:

1. What is the stance of phenomenon-based learning among ELT methodologies?
2. How is phenomenon-based learning realized in national core curriculum between Finland and Vietnam?

The chapter of *Theoretical background* has drawn that phenomenon-based learning, a transitive correlation among phenomenon-based learning, action-based teaching and communicative language teaching approach on the basis of the idea that they all aim to provide relevant, authentic and functional contextual phenomena in the most meaningful and free learning environment for students to immerse in. They, in addition, agree upon the same point of borrowing purposeful interactive activities in order for learners to apply their experiences to work upon together and resolve the contextualized phenomena. Just as they focus on the steady improvement of students' perceptions about the world and multifaceted competences, among which communicative competence is

regarded as one essential achievement, so too do they invest in the sustainable enhancement of agency and motivations of learners.

The theory-driven content analysis was also conducted to investigate missions, viewpoints learning goals and objectives in general upper secondary education together with content areas and techniques of English instructions as well in the national core curriculum of both Finland and Vietnam through the lens of phenomenon-based learning. The study has shown several realizations of the phenomenon-based learning qualities in national core curricula of the two examined countries. The similar priority given to the holistic development of transversal competences and qualities of students, the comparable focus on the establishment of a meaningful learner-centered space, and the congruent goal of promoting the student's agency and intrinsic motivations in three out of four paired dimensions have illustrated the point clearly.

There are certain limitations in the current study. Considering the important components of the national core curriculum and the circumscription of a master thesis, the present study only selected four key paired dimensions for a comparative analysis. However, those dimensions are not absolute criteria for a comparative analysis on national core curricula. There still remain many other significant criteria of school culture and typology, national/provincial/local socio-economic demographics and legislation, assessment and support for students and other similar minor and macro values of pedagogy that are necessary for an analysis of comparative and international education (Alexander, 2001; Crossley, 2000; Hans, 1967; Larsen, 2011; Sobe & Kowalczyk, 2014). Which criteria to select for a cross-national core curriculum analysis is still an open-ended and ongoing research task that seems to be worth being explored in future studies. Furthermore, it deserves to be acknowledged that the development of students' multifaceted competences, agency and intrinsic motivations can be strongly influenced by other factors rather than content areas or instructional techniques solely. For example, how teachers actually design learning activities and make use of the available materials, how frequently students are enabled to utilize the target language to communicate in and out of classes, and how

different learning situations teachers are able to create to encourage students' actual actions and solutions might be essential to investigate further. The effect of high-stakes examinations and public ideology on students' level of achievement would also be a fruitful area for future work (Khai Trong, 2012; Thai Hoang, 2016; WISE Channel, 2015). As a matter of fact, educators are suggested to consider criteria set in the national core curriculum as guidelines to find their own proper way of using and adapting them into specific contexts to meet with learners' unique needs, abilities and potentials (Curriculum, 2015).

The present study has been built on the basis of both individual experience of a 4-year-time English teacher in Vietnam and self-efficacy in English using as the main communicative tool for academic purposes. The experiences inside of the educational system of hometown country helped me gain more understanding of national curriculum and other related legislative documents. The competency in English as a foreign language, moreover, assisted me to perceive and assess available information referring to the current investigation. It was not an easy task for an EFL user like me to read a large volume of academic studies and express personal ideas in a formal written style. Yet, it is certain that the efforts for revealing how diversely phenomenon-based learning can be realized in national core curricula will not go in vain. Notwithstanding mentioned limitations, I hope the findings of this thesis will be able to contribute to the better understanding of teachers in delineating learning modules in harmony with each national schooling system, yet still support students' manifold competences, valuable intelligence, positive identity and intrinsic motivations for future study, work and civic activities. I also hope that the present study will provide a framework for the further exploration of comparative pedagogy between Finland and Vietnam, which thus can encourage more systematic cooperation in the education of both countries.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 An overview of national education systems in Finland and Vietnam

