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Vietnamese parents' opinions and viewpoints toward English Language Education at Finnish primary schools.

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<p>At modern language education, parental roles have been recognized as one of the significant contributors toward the success of children's English language learning. In order to understand about how influential parents' role are, there have been a growing studies that aims at exploring opinions, perspectives or experiences of parents toward the learning English of their children.</p> <p>This study aims to explore the perspectives and opinions of Vietnamese parents living in Finland about their children's English language education at Finnish primary schools. 10 Vietnamese parents (n=10) who have been living in Finland from 5 – 20 years and having children age 7 till 13 (primary-school age in Finland) participated in interview process. The majority of parents (n=8) whose children study at normal Finnish schools with English classes starting at grade 2 or 3 while two parents (n=2) are enrolling their children at English bilingual schools which English teaching starts from grade 1 and accounts for larger amount of time compared to normal schools. 10 participants are interviewed through in-person and online mode. All interviews are first recorded and then transcribed and qualitatively analyzed. Analysis process is inspired by ground theory approach which mainly utilizes techniques of open coding and constant comparison.</p> <p>The results reveal three main themes concerning: <i>firstly</i>, parents prefer English learning to follow other mother tongue(s) language because they believe that mother tongue(s) language creates a solid cornerstone in which learning of English and other languages can thrive. <i>Secondly</i>, parents value English learning which occur in authentic environment and meaningful interaction. <i>Lastly</i>, parents show their trust toward language teachers in particular and Finnish schools in general which can be manifested in different ways. The findings indicate that Vietnamese parents have overall positive attitude and trust toward their children's English education at Finnish primary schools. Furthermore, it also suggests that the role of social and cultural context which impacts on parents' attitudes and opinions. The knowledge found in the study is expected to contribute to the mutual dialogue between teachers and groups of parents with immigrant backgrounds in achieving better cooperation for the sake of pupils' holistic development. Therefore, it would be quite interesting for future research to involve perspectives of other immigrant groups of parents or to delve into how parents practically support their children's English learning in other social and cultural contexts.</p>				
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1. INTRODUCTION

The viewpoints, opinions and expectations of parents regarding early English language education have been extensively investigated in recent years. The fact that English has gained more important status in all walks of life, especially in the field of education has significantly influenced how parents perceive and view about foreign language education at early stage. There is a large body of previous research focus on parents' opinions under the context of Asian countries where English is mostly taught as a Foreign Language (EFL). For example, Chang (2008) examined Taiwanese parents' attitudes toward the starting age for learning English language; or Hong Kong, Taiwanese and Korean parents' willingness to send their children to English native speaking countries, expecting an authentic learning environment for their children (Hsieh, 2008; Park, 2009). As a matter of fact, it seems like a great attention has been drawn to study viewpoints and experiences from a group of parents under Asian-EFL settings. Little of empirical knowledge is known from the group of immigrant parents who have children learning English in the EFL contexts outside Asia. This has resulted in a gap which could be investigated further regarding the perspectives of immigrant parents about early English education in non-Asian EFL settings.

Finland is similar to other Asian countries mentioned above in a way which English is taught and spoken as a foreign language. According to Latomaa & Nuolijärvi (2002), the availability of various compulsory languages (i.e: English, German, Russian, etc.) and optional language to choose from grade 3 up till the end of elementary level has significantly contributed to the promotion of multilingualism in the country (p.157). Despite the multilingual idea, English is recognized as a most popular foreign language taught at schools. (Nuolijärvi, p.112). Given the status of English among other foreign language, the issue of English education has received attention within Finnish academia. For instance, in one of their studies from Määttä (2014), attempts have also been made to see any correlation between Finnish parents' attitudes and the English performance of their primary school children. Yet, parents' attitudes are generally treated in this study and thus, accounts from parents regarding English learning are insufficiently mentioned.

At the same time, Finland also emerges as a new immigration country which still faces certain issues related to integration, particularly in how to adopt an effective educational policy for children with immigrant backgrounds. (Kilpi, 2010). One of the elements proposed in this policy, as mentioned by Latomaa & Nuolijärvi (2002) is equality. (p.132). The

difference between Finnish and immigrant pupils in terms of family backgrounds is much likely to impact the achievement of equality. Under this circumstance, the lines of studies concerned with the voices of immigrant agents, for example: from immigrant parents or pupils' perspective are particularly informative for educational policy maker during this process.

Nevertheless, as admitted by Saarela (2013) that there is a restriction in the number of studies regarding learning of immigrant pupils under the context of Finnish schools. To name a few, there were Master theses studying about motivation and attitudes of immigrant pupils in learning English (Hirvonen, 2010; Nakar & Salvanto, 2012). Studies center on attitudes and experiences of immigrant parents are even less discussed, at least with those presented in English language. Meanwhile, viewpoints of immigrant parents about raising kids in Finnish cultures and society have also been taken into account as mentioned by Degni, Pöntinen & Mölsä (2006) and Pham (2016). Despite not being directly connected with opinions about English learning at Finnish school, the earlier investigations toward opinions and attitudes of immigrant parents shed light for later research to get involved the voice of immigrant parents for the sake of home-school cooperation toward children's holistic development (National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2014).

Given the status and increasing impact of English in Finnish society and the dearth of topic investigating perspectives of immigrant parents toward English education, this research aims to explore the viewpoints, opinions and expectations of immigrant group of Vietnamese parents about English language education within the context of Finnish primary school. In addition, this paper also seeks to learn about their hopes and expectations toward English education for their children.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Upon reviewing the literature related to English language education under the lenses of parental opinions and attitudes, it is quite reasonable to trace back to the origins or similar branch of research largely because it helps pave the foundation for later studies. Gardner (1985) has been known as one of the pioneers who started to highlight the significance of parental attitudes and motivations toward children's language learning, specifically how these factors shape children's own attitudes & motivation at acquiring the second language (p.108). Despite his social-psychology oriented approach into the roles of parents' attitudes and scale of study areas remain under English as Second Language (ESL) contexts, his earlier works has made a vital contribution to the subsequent studies in the way which places emphasis on parents' attitudes as an important agent in children's foreign language learning.

In responding to a call for more empirical studies as stated by Gardner (1985, p108) as well as given the influence of parents' beliefs, views and attitudes toward children's English language learning (Gao, 2006), there have been considerable studies examined parents' attitudes in the field English education, they yet primarily remain under the ESL context. In order to make the literature review relevant to the scope of this study which aims at parents' opinions about English education under the context where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), most studies presented in this literature review found *under EFL settings* in general and *Asian EFL setting* in particular.

The literature review will consist of 4 main parts: *the first part* is an overview of research domain related to parental views and attitudes toward early English education. *The second part* is to review about parents' views and perception about the role of English education. *The third part* is to present how parents view the optimal period for starting English. *The last part* is about parents' attitudes and opinions toward teaching quality of English language programmes. The review of previous research under EFL settings is expected to provide a point of reference or the theoretical framework for this study.

2.1 An overview of research domain concerning parental views and attitudes toward early English education.

In order to navigate the position of this study within the broader scholar literature, it is important to discuss the research domains which deal with parents' attitudes and opinions toward English education. From the majority of literature found under Asian EFL settings, it can be observed that the initial interests emerge from the national language policy which prohibited English teaching at kindergarten like in some Asian EFL contexts (Oladejo, 2006;

Chang, 2008 & Lee, 2008). From this point, several studies started to seek for the parental responses toward the “top-down” policy. The most worth mentioning response related to an appropriate age for children to expose to English, from which there has been a divergence in parents’ opinions and attitudes. While some are quite doubtful or even opposed to the idea of early exposure to English, a majority number of parents believe in the benefits of such. After Oladejo (2006) - the first author to examine this issue in his study at a large scale with 1160 participants (p. 156), Chang (2008) then followed by giving further details about how parents support or oppose to the policy by examining the real ages which parents register their children in English courses.

As it is argued that parents’ attitudes and opinions are manifested through their behaviors (Hong & Ho, 2005; Hung, 2007; Phillipson, 2010), therefore it seems like there is a shift in investigation from seemingly abstract themes of parental attitudes into a more concrete ways by providing how parents are getting involved and what practices they have done related to their children’s English learning. Several practices such as Chinese parents search for English resources or collaborate with teachers (Lee, 2008); or Hong Kong parents get engaged in their children’s literacy activities at home by reading English story or vocabulary, or watching video games (Forey et al., 2016). Later on, attempts have been made to give more insights about the issues of early English education by examining on parent’s perception about their roles during their children’s English learning process (Lee, 2010; Lan, 2013). Within this research orientation, attention has also been particularly paid to maternal perspectives in regard with how they perceive their own roles as first English teachers for their preschoolers at home (Lan, 2013); or what motivates them for teaching English at home (Lan et al., 2012). Personal experience of Taiwanese parents when learning foreign language is also taken into account at Lee (2008)’s study, providing further insight into how this aspect can impact their opinions and attitudes of English language education. Intrinsically, the trend has moved gradually from merely offering overview of public opinions about a matter of “for or against” English education before primary school to delving into parents’ own voices, practices and their justifications for having such attitudes.

2.2 Parental opinions about the role of English education.

Under the investigated contexts, parents’ views toward English language bear quite many similarities in the way that English holds such a prominent position in children’s academic learning. In Korea, parental opinions toward the importance of English learning are examined through “English fever” phenomenon (Park, 2009). As referred by its name, the phenomenon’s heat is so severe that it has speeded up the race among parents for providing

children with English language learning from early stage. This heat is much closely associated with the earlier of so-called “education fever” which was expected to be the most powerful tool for upwarding social mobility in Korean society. (Park, 2009). In order to achieve this expectation, Korean parents are not hesitant to send their primary-age children to English native speaking countries for language acquisition in spite of having to spend such a big amount of money. Moreover, they even sacrifice their accompany with their children abroad so that the children can stay in almost zero Korean language-environment. Needless to say, this trend shows parents’ great devotion and investment in children’s English learning-like Kim (2006) mentioned that it is for children’s sake of absorbing language from authentic environments (as cited in Park, 2009, p. 53). In general, Korean parents choose to make an early and big investment to their children’s English learning because of its immensely high held status which is believed to bring higher social status for their children in the future.

Other anecdotal research from contexts of Iran, Greece or Turkey also mentioned parents’ opinions toward English learning at kindergarten and primary level. The broader influence of language policy has also been mentioned in three studies in which compulsory English learning at public schools starts from grade 3 at Greece (Griva and Chouvarda, 2012) and at Iran (Hosseinpour, Sherkatolabbasi & Yarahmadi, 2015) and grade 4 at Turkey (Tavil, 2009). Despite the official ban of English teaching before primary school, a great number of parents in these studies agreed upon the prominent role of English that they emphasized English to be introduced as earlier as possible. Parents in Iran are growing more interest in English learning for their children from early age and some even consider it as the second most important language (Hosseinpour et al., 2015, p.177). A number of Greece parents show positive attitudes toward the earlier start of English learning; nonetheless, they are aware of the fact that this should go along with suitable teaching methods. (Chouvarda, 2012, p.6). The similar themes are also recorded in Tavil (2009)’s study about attitudes of Turkey parents having children at English kindergarten: learning English from the early years gives children a great acceleration or more advantages to compete in the future job market. Without much doubt, a great number of parents in these EFL contexts highly regard the crucial roles of English learning. It could be likely the case that beliefs to start English earlier is synchronized with the level of importance of English which is perceived by these parents, whether it is associated with social upwarding or job competitiveness.

2.3 Parents’ opinions about the optimal periods for starting English

There has been a proliferation of studies into parental responses toward the optimal period for children to start English. According to the majority of opinions from investigated

parents, the most critical period for a second language (rather than a mother tongue language) to be acquired certainly fall far earlier than the timeline introduced by language policy or school curriculum. Oladejo (2006) has been among many authors to explore the public responses, reporting that Taiwanese parents' attitudes are much more of support toward English learning started before 3rd grade. In his study, among 1,160 participants surveyed, 32,7% of parents who supported language education from kindergarten level, which is significantly higher compared to those who preferred the starting level at 1st grade (17,8%) or 3rd grade (26,3%). The percentage of supporters suggests the most preferred period to start English is from kindergarten (p.160). This favorable attitudes about early English education before formal schools is comparable to those found in Chang (2008)'s study conducted two years later, in which more than 40% out of 489 surveyed parents want English teaching for their children from kindergarten. It is worthwhile noting that the population of participants from both mentioned studies are heterogeneous including parents who have children from elementary until the end of high schools, which generally shows the supportive trend not inclusively among parents of pre-primary and primary children, but among a large population of Taiwanese parents for early English instruction programs.

In addition to the support for starting English prior to primary school can be dominantly shown in statistic numbers above, there has been considerably positive attitudes toward the so-called "the earlier the better" among most parents. In Chang (2008)'s study, among the total of parents who were reported to get their children start English at kindergarten, most of them selected kindergarten age (about 40%) outweighed the percent of those who are for grade 1 (29%) or even 3 (12,7%) as stipulated in government's timeline. A majority of parents believed that earlier start, i.e: at kindergarten would be beneficial for children's language development since it is the most appropriate time for absorbing another language (Lin & Chen, 2016); or the earlier the start it is, the more likely that children can master the language later at higher level. (Lee & Chou, 2014, p.7).

As such, "the earlier the better" idea is also associated with parents' widespread beliefs that learning English from younger age will enhance ability to acquire native-like accent; or self-image, thus the outcomes would be brighter future lives or gain great advantages in future job competitiveness. (Shang et al., 2007; Tavit, 2009; Griva, & Chouvarda, 2012; Lin & Chen, 2016). Moreover, the advantages of earlier start can include getting children ready for school demands (Lan, Torr & Degortadi, 2012; Lee, 2008; Chang, 2008). This perception has also motivated parents to get involved in various practices for English at home. Some of them includes teaching English for their preschool children at

home; helping their children with homework or reading vocabulary; or merely providing English materials (Lee, 2008; Lee, 2010; Forey, Besser & Sampson, 2015; Lan et al., 2011; Lan, et al., 2012). It appears that the majority of parental wishes for children to engage in English education ended up in short slogan “the earlier the better” that much likely associates with benefits of linguistic acquisition and school readiness which deems vital for pre-school children in many Asian contexts.

By contrast, there is also an insignificant number of parents who do not find it necessary to dedicate the critical period to acquiring a second language. In Oladejo’s study, although a small number of parents do not necessarily agree with government’s policy in terms of timeline to start English at the age of 10 (grade 3), they are not entirely supportive of English exposure at early age, being persuaded by the reason that English would hinder the natural development of mother tongue. (p. 161). Parents in Griva and Chouvarda (2012)’s study also argued that their children’s brains are not maturely developed to process two language simultaneously; therefore, do not find earlier start of English beneficial for their children. (p.6).

Recently, Lin & Chen (2016) also compared two groups of parents who sent their children to kindergarten with English class and those who chose kindergarten without English class. They found that the second group acknowledged the importance of critical period for language learning, yet they didn’t find it necessary for their children to get exposed to English instruction the whole day at school (p.65). Furthermore, it is also pointed out the second group of parents do not want their children to be under pressure from so-called “English learning” while still on the process of acquiring mother tongue language (Lin & Chen, 2016, p. 66). These doubtful attitudes not only exist among parents who did not choose English kindergarten but for those who did not choose to teach English at home as underscored in Lan et al. (2011)’s study. These parents stated that they would rather engage the children with mother tongue for five years before starting English because they concern that early English learning would affect children’s ability to remember or make them lose interests in mother tongue language (Baker & Sienkewicz, 2000; Lan, 2013, p.138).

Whether the belief that critical period should not be dedicated to a second language (i.e: English) but merely the development of mother tongue language is justified by either brain immaturity or the unnecessary pressure of extra language, there is a likelihood that parents want their children acquire each language in sequence to make sure that English should be followed once there is a solid pavement of mother tongue language.

2.4 Parental opinions and attitudes toward English language programmes.

The language policy which regulated compulsory English teaching from primary onward in many EFL countries has given the space for researchers to delve into parental responses about different issues. As parents' real voices and attitudes are revealed, the most frequently discussed topic related to appropriate starting time for English language. Other than this issue of starting time, there has been an emergence in the topic examining an effectiveness of language programme from perspective of teachers and pre-service teachers (Nguyen & Hudson, 2010) or pupils (Nguyen, Hamid & Renshaw, 2016) or evaluating the implementation of policy into teaching practice at primary levels (Nguyen, 2011). The closer view at how parents react toward the quality of English language programmes has been uncovered by Nguyen et al. (2016). In this case study, some issues in English language education in Viet Nam have been mentioned by parents, for example: the effectiveness of teaching methods. Parents in this study generally show their dissatisfaction toward the poor quality of English language programmes offered by public schools. Nguyen et al. (2016) maintained that though English teachers' qualification was not directly articulated, parents' attitudes toward English teaching at primary public schools in Viet Nam are certainly not positive (p.207). It is most likely the reason why parents seek private classes where their children can both have communicative teaching with English native teachers and consolidate grammar knowledge with Vietnamese teachers. (p. 201)

Similarly, dissatisfaction about ineffective methods for teaching English communication is also shared among Korean parents (Park, 2009). As previously mentioned, it has been considered a trend when Korean parents send young children to native English-speaking countries as well as highly value a so-called "only English" environment (free zone of Korean language). A possible explanation can be tracked back to their discontent at the English teaching quality at public school, or more precisely the teaching methods that are not deductive to communicative ability. Therefore, Korean parents would have good reasons to send their children to English native environment in pursuit of better chances to pick up native-accent pronunciation (Choi, 2005). Griva & Chouvarda (2012) also reported that Greece parents were not satisfied with English teaching at public primary schools, specifically teaching methods used for teaching young children. They emphasized on child-appropriate methods, namely: game and communicative-based teaching. (p.6), which teachers probably failed to implement properly. Likewise, Turkey parents do not believe in teachers' qualification at their children's kindergarten (Tavil, 2009, p.340). Indeed, given the importance of early year education, parents of preschool children would highly consider

teachers' English competence as one of crucial matters in early English language education. (Lin & Chen, 2016, p.65).

Summary

The aim of this review is to justify the need for more empirical studies in investigating viewpoints and attitudes of parents about early English education under EFL settings, particularly outside Asian EFL countries. The review is divided into 4 main parts: firstly, providing an overview of how the issue of English education from parental perspectives is being studied. It generally focuses on public responses using quantitative approach toward the appropriate starting time for English. The abstract themes of opinions and attitudes are gradually shifted into more concrete topic by investigating what actual practices parents are doing to get involved in their children's English learning. Another orientation of study is to gain insights about parents, particularly mothers' perception about their own roles toward English learning process of their children. By taking consideration into more qualitative aspects of parents' perspectives, more lights are shed toward how parental attitudes and opinions are formed.

The second part of literature deals with how a role of English appears to parents. There has been a profound impression that parents under the Asian EFL contexts consider English as one of the supreme subjects at school. The success of English learning can significantly influences their children's prospects. This mindset substantially has impact toward the timeline which parents prefer their children to start English. It is also part three of the literature review in which the majority of parental opinions about optimal period for English is prior to primary school age. A dominant number of responses show parents' favor that sooner children can start with English; the better they will gain in terms of linguistic or school readiness. The small percentage of parents is more determined about consolidating the mother tongue language before embarking English, therefore learning English should be probably consequence after children get into primary school. Last part of literature review discussed the teaching quality of early English education at public schools. Evidences from previous studies show parents' dissatisfaction in teaching methods delivered at primary public schools. They suggested that the communicative approach and game-based teaching should be applied for teaching English young learners. Since the public schools can barely meet this expectation, parents are more likely to seek for private classes or other types of English education institutions.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Philosophical assumptions

The viewpoints and beliefs toward nature of reality and how to capture that reality is generally considered as philosophical assumptions in doing research. According to Greener (2011), the position of viewing reality can be assumed as *either* external, independent from human *or* internal, constructed by human experiences. With such former assumption, reality is deemed to be out there, objective and separate from individuals while latter one indicates reality to be more subjective, personal and well-matched with individual experience. (p.6). Accordingly, such different worldviews have led to two assumptions of how that reality can be captured or how us human can acquire that reality. If the reality is independent, thus it can only be measured and observed from the objective position. This view is as oppose to the idea that reality can only be seized through understanding human and their experiences in case it is constructed by individual human experiences. (McKay, 2006)

In the field of science, these philosophical assumptions taken by researchers can essentially impact the way of viewing the phenomenon as well as studying into it. (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2011, p.5; McKay, 2006, p.7). For example, if the assumption is that the social reality is already there and separate from human experience, hence the methods like measuring or quantifying should be included in order to capture it (Mukherji & Albon, 2010, p.251). By contrast, if reality is constructed by personal and subjective experience, thus it should be retrieved by asking questions and listening to involved individuals. (Sikes, 2004, p.21). The two dichotomies of philosophical assumption correspond to what Creswell (2009) put as quantitative and qualitative approach, respectively.

Beside these two ends of philosophical assumption, the rise of “pragmatism” viewpoint place emphasis on the utility of the research questions to yield the useful answers to the real world problems. (Cohen et al., 2011, p.26). As such, there are several possibilities that researchers can adopt depending on their worldviews and nature of research questions. Furthermore, being aware of and able to articulate the philosophical assumptions enable researchers go beyond conducting the research just as the mechanical task, rather expanding the understanding about the world and the way we view it (Cohen et al., 2011, p.3). And more importantly it lends a great support for the choice of research approach, research design and methods of data collection and analysis (Sikes, 2004) which will be presented in the next part.

The aims of this research are to determine the opinions of immigrant Vietnamese parents toward foreign language learning as well as to explore their experiences regarding their children learning English in Finnish schools. As such, the study focuses to learn about different meanings which parents perceive from their own situations of having children learning English at Finnish primary schools. As a result, it would be logical to adopt the philosophical perspective which highlights the subjectivity and construction of personal experience into studying this topic. In another word, based on the philosophical assumptions along with the essence of the study, qualitative research approach is chosen and will be clarified more in the following section.

3.2. Qualitative approach & interpretive paradigm

The choice of qualitative approach has been justified above due to the philosophical assumption and study aims. Gibbs (2007) has defined qualitative research: “Qualitative research is intended to approach the world “out there” (not in specialized research settings such as laboratories) and to understand, describe and sometimes explain social phenomena “from the inside”. The terms “from the inside” infer much about the characteristics encompassed by qualitative approach which are to be mentioned now. First, it is the *aim of qualitative approach* which is underscored by Mukherji and Albon (2010, p.251) as to obtain the detailed information like people’s experiences, attitudes, motivation, so on so that researcher can understand some aspects of phenomenon or social life. Moreover, the qualitative approach also enables researcher to examine the phenomenon by using the *research methods* that generate words, rather than numbers, for example: in-depth interview, observation or questionnaires. These types of methods allow participants to describe their experiences and viewpoints. Additionally, McKay (2006, p7) also noted the *role of qualitative researcher* as to become part of what being studied or like Creswell (2007) acknowledged as “an instrument of data collection” (p.45). The term indicated the natural involvement of qualitative researcher as staying “inside” with what being studied while obtaining the data. In this manner, a qualitative researcher possesses the position which allows him/her to make sense or interpret viewpoints of other individuals about the world. (p.21). A position and viewpoint of researchers within the meaning-making process has led to another feature of qualitative approach – in which the process of *data analysis is based on interpretation*. That is to say, researcher begins to give meaning to the data by “making inferences, develop insights, attaching significances, refining understands, drawing conclusions” (Hatch, 2002, p.180). To sum up, by adopting the qualitative approach and

interpretive paradigm in this study, researcher believes that this would provide such a rigorous tool to answer the research questions.

3.3. Research questions and research design

From an initial interest of research in accordance with philosophical assumption, qualitative approach and interpretive paradigm which serve as theoretical foundation, three research questions have been generated as follows:

1. What are Vietnamese parents' views of foreign language education at the early age?
2. What are Vietnamese parents' opinions and viewpoints regarding English education at Finnish primary schools?
3. What are Vietnamese parents' hopes and expectations about English language education at Finnish primary schools?

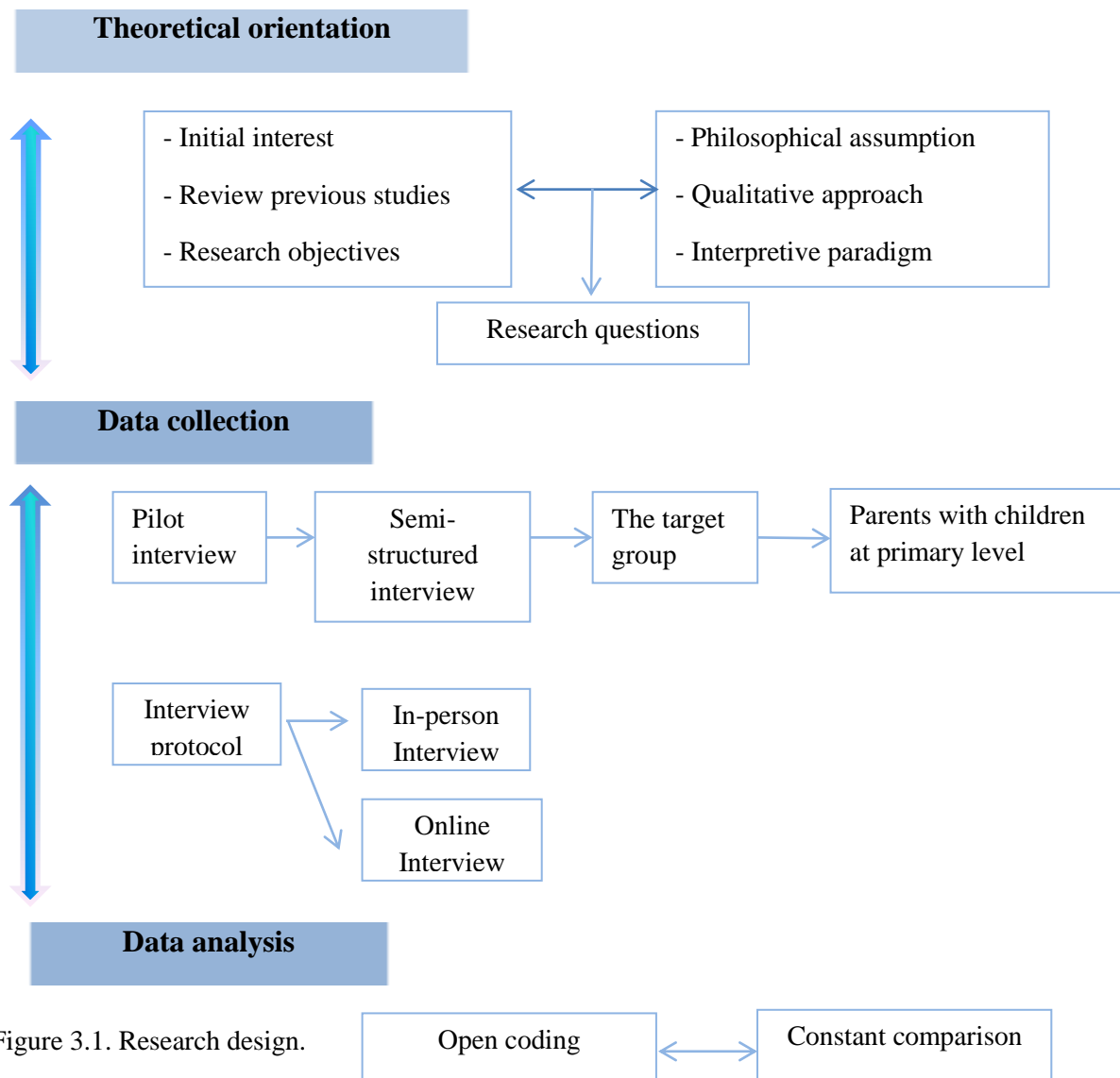


Figure 3.1. Research design.

3.4. Data collection process

3.4.1. Participant recruitment and interview modes

The target informants for this study are Vietnamese parents who are currently in Finland and having children learning English at Finnish primary schools. The participant recruitment ends up with 10 eligible parents who are living throughout various cities in Finland. 3 out of 10 informants from Joensuu are interviewed face-to-face while other 7 informants are interviewed through social network as their wishes. Snow-ball technique is used as a tool to seek for informants.

All out of 10, there are 8 participants whose children are attending in non-English bilingual schools. These are Finnish primary schools with normal English classes starting from grade 2 or 3. The other two participants whose children are enrolling in English bilingual primary school. These are schools with a majority of time dedicated for English language and English instruction programme and can be considered English bilingual schools.

3.4.2. Background information of interviewed parents

The following table gives description about the background of interviewed parents, specifying at their living locations; number of their children; children's grades and numbers of official languages they are learning; and the type of schools which their children are attending.

Table 3.1: Summary of parents' information backgrounds.

Participant	City	Length of living in Finland	Number of children	School level	Numbers of foreign language(s)	Types of primary school
#1 – P1	Joensuu	~40 years	1	Grade 4	(1) English	Non-English bilingual
#2 – P2	Joensuu	~5 years	1	Grade 3	(1) English	Non-English bilingual
#3 – P3	Joensuu	~20 years	4	Grade 4	(1) English	Non-English bilingual
#4 – P4	Oulu	~20 years	2	Grade 2	(2) English & Vietnamese	Non-English bilingual
#5 – P5	Vantaa	~11 years	2	Grade 3	(2) English & Vietnamese	Non-English bilingual
#6 – P6	Helsinki	~10 years	2	Grade 3	(2) English & Vietnamese	Non-English bilingual

#7 – P7	Kaunianen	~14 years	2	Grade 6	(2) English & Swedish	Non-English bilingual
#8 – P8	Tempere	~ 11 years	1	Grade 3	(2) English & Vietnamese	Non-English bilingual
#9– P9	Espoo	~14 years	1	Grade 1	(2) English & Vietnamese	English bilingual
#10 – P10	Helsinki	~ 14 years	2	Grade 1	(2) English & Vietnamese	English bilingual

3.4.3. Interview questions

Obtaining data is primarily undertaken using interviewing question. The questions are divided into three main parts featuring the logics of a conversation like mentioned by Hatch (2002): starting with “*background questions*” would enable participants to talk about things that are familiar to participants, for example:

- Since when did you move to Joensuu Finland?
- Which cities/municipalities are you living in Finland now?
- How many children do you have? How old are they? Which grades are they in?
- What languages do your children study at the moment?

The background information at the beginning can be followed by “*essential questions*” which aim to get the key data for the study. This part was further divided into two sub-parts attempting to retrieve information which helps answer research questions: the first part aims to investigate how English learning and teaching are viewed by parents; the second part asks what experiences Vietnamese parents have toward English language teaching at Finnish schools. (For the interview questions *before* pilot interview, see appendix 1)

The essential questions were designed in a way that ask the participant direct information, for instance: their opinions and experiences about their children learning English at Finnish schools; but also expected to reveal the nuances and thoughts that parents might indirectly express, e.g: questions ask about their experiences related to their children using English. By paying attention to “what” and “how” parents react to their children’s English performance, it is expected to help researcher cross-check information, particularly in terms of interpreting parents’ attitudes and viewpoints more precisely.

The pilot interview was conducted with a Vietnamese parent whose children are learning English at Vietnamese primary schools and one Vietnamese parent who are living in Finland and has a child at the age of two. The two interviews showed much contrast in society and

cultures between two countries, then obviously insert influences toward parents' thoughts about English language learning. Moreover, the fact that primary school children are encouraged to learn more than one language in Finland makes it distinctive from that in Viet Nam. Taking this into consideration, the interview questions have been adjusted so that it could cover the position of English learning in the realm of multilingualism within Finnish schools. At the same time, wording for question was also modified so that it becomes short and direct (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 204)

After first few interviews, there seems quite obvious for participants that early language education for their children not necessarily consists of English but other languages. As a result, more attention is also paid to this aspect in subsequent interview- which finally ends up with one extra theme: opinion of parents about foreign language education at early age.

The modified version of interview questions *after* pilot interview includes the questions about parents' opinions and attitudes toward foreign language education at early age. (See appendix 2)

3.4.4. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interview was chosen for both in-person and online interviews. Salmons (2015) noted that this type of interview provides balance between pre-identified guideline with flexible follow-up on the interview spot. Therefore, choosing this interview structure allows researcher to actively pursue the answer for the research questions, at the same time keep mind opened for the significant information which can be produced during the conversation.

Regardless of in-person or online interviews, the same procedures are strictly implemented to ensure the ethics of doing research. Before each interview brief statements including study's purposes, usage of collected data, and anonymity principal were presented, together with requesting participants' permission for the interviews to be recorded. All participants were fully informed that they had rights to ask interviewer any questions during or at the end of the interview as a matter of "equally exchanging information" (Klave & Brinkmann, 2009, p.128).

Face-to-face interviews

There were three interviews (N=3) conducted on face-to-face basis. The informed consent has been verbalized to participants through telephones before meeting schedule. All of three parents wished to have in-person interviews and the time and location were arranged up to

participants' convenience, for instance: at home, working office and café shop. Two out of three were willing to be recorded while the third one was hesitant. This participant accepted to be recorded only after when researcher explained the usage of data and ensured that participant's identity would be strictly respected.

Though researcher has acquainted three informants before, engaging in such deep conversation has never occurred. Bearing in mind that "interview is a social, interpersonal encounter, not merely a data collection exercise" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 421), researcher attempted to initiate a conversation in the most natural way by not rushing into asking questions immediately. Researcher took necessary time for both sides to get familiar with each other. The act of taking enough time for both sides is driven by the thought that "at certain point of the interview, there is no such specific method prescribed for the interviewer, rather interviewer has to make decision right on the spot" (Klave & Brinkmann, 2009, p.16). The purpose is to try to build up the relaxed, non-threatening and trusted ambiance for both researcher and participants (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 433). In fact, it's interesting to note how different these three interviews started, particularly the way participants posed the first concerns. Interviewee at home setting tended to be really engaging in telling "the story of the son" in general academic learning, which appeared very good. Researcher had to politely bring back the key topic and ask permission for interview record. The next interview at working office went straight to the point which researcher can re-introduce about the purpose of the study. The last face-to-face interview at café shop in which participant initially expressed her concern about the child's Vietnamese competence as well as expectation of finding a Vietnamese language teacher for the child. Again, researcher politely waited until interviewee finished and kindly remind about the study topic. She then was hesitant being recorded and only granted permission when the ethics of anonymity and confidentiality were re-explained.

Online interviews

Other potential informants are identified through social network (e.g: Facebook groups). Short messages presenting basic background information of the study have been sent to 7 potential participants through their Facebook messengers. All those who replied (N=7) to the messages agreed to participate and wished to have interviews through Facebook messenger as the most convenient ways. Indeed, online interview is helpful in this study for it allows researcher to access to several informants who live in such distant areas (Klave & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 149).

Admittedly, the fact that researcher and interviewees got in touch for the first time and verbal communication were only via Facebook messenger made it tricky for both sides to build such “virtual” trust and supportive relationship. Nevertheless, researcher attempted to create the rapport with interviewees by being honest with them, showing genuinely interest in their responses and effort for the study. Moreover, researcher’s mentality when conducting online interviews was not as an interviewer seeking for answers, but in the similar position with participants in a way that we are both Vietnamese people living in Finland for certain number of years. Attempting to approach all interviews from this position is expected to bring closeness to interviewees, hence helping to build a more trust relationship.

Language of interviews

The language used for all 10 interviews was Vietnamese – a native language of both researcher and participants. The usage of the same mother tongue language is certainly advantageous for participants to feel relaxed when communicating as well as easier for them to describe things and thoughts, while researcher was more able to seek the intentions or meanings from interviewees’ answers.

Interview schedule

The table below shows a timeline for in-depth interviews and the approximate length of time for interviews.

Table 3.2: Timeline and length of interviews.

	3 in-person interviews	7 online interviews
Time	April, 2018	June & August, 2018
Length of interview	1 hour – 1,5 hours	45 mins – 1,5 hours

3.5. Data analysis

3.5.1. Processing data

Right after each interview was conducted, a summary depicting how the interview was conducted, what main emergent themes are as well as researcher’s initial impression about the whole interview were jotted down. This form of summary can be deemed a very initial step immersing into the data, which can be used for examining the phenomenon later. (Charmaz, 2006, p.181) or for enhancing the data at later stage (Gibbs, 2007, p.5). Transcription was undertaken only after all the interviews have been completed. Despite not being transcribed verbatim, the aim was to keep the transcripts to be as loyal to the original words as possible.

3.5.2. Data analysis

Data analysis is inspired by few techniques used in grounded theory analysis, namely: open coding and constant comparison. (Gibbs, 2007). The following figure gives further illustration for how the data is qualitatively analyzed:

Table 3.3. Summary table for analyzing the data.

Coding techniques	Specific steps	Products
Open coding & refining codes	Step 1: Read and label the text transcripts	1 st coded transcripts
	Step 2: Read interview summary & 1 st coded transcripts	2 nd coded transcripts (more refined coding)
	Step 3: Read 2 nd coded transcripts & listen to interview records simultaneously.	3 rd coded transcripts (more refined coding) & emergent themes
Constant comparison	Step 4: Compare and contrast the emergent themes with 3 research questions	3 general categories corresponding to 3 research questions
	Step 5: Cross-tabulate the codes under 3 general categories	- A table displaying codes from all interview transcripts - The creation of more sub-categories
	Step 6: Refine 3 main categories & sub-categories (Make sure it’s a good fit between coded texts and categories)	A finely match of codes under sub-categories and main categories which answer research questions.

Step 1: Each transcript is read for the first time and open coding is applied at this step. As both Charmaz (2006, p.48) and Dey (2007, p.85) agreed upon that open coding at the beginning allows researcher to generate as much new ideas and thoughts as much as possible. With such choice of coding method, it is aimed to spark all the possibilities which shed light to the research topic. That is to say, while researcher tried to keep mind open to all possibilities at coding, it is quite certain that coding process should be driven by certain criteria inferred from research questions.(Cohen et al., 2011, p. 561). Hence, in this step, the criteria might related to parents' opinions of English and other foreign learning, their experiences and wishes related to English education at Finnish schools.

The transcripts were coded from the basis of "line-by-line, phrase-by-phrase, sentence-by-sentence, paragraph-by-paragraph" (Cohen et al., 2011, p.561) with particular attention to above- mentioned criteria.

Step 2: Coded texts in step 1 are re-read and re-assigned so that they becomes more refined under the criteria mentioned. Along with this, the reading of summary is also taken into consideration. This process of going back and forth is necessary as mentioned by Cohen et al., (2011) as: "to ensure consistency and coverage of the codes and data." (p.560).

Step 3: More refined coded in step 2 are re-read and interview records are listened at the same time. Meanwhile coding involves examining the transcripts several times, which provides researcher with closer insights of the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006, p. 181); there is a likelihood that nuance from non-verbal expressions (which are not shown up in the transcript) as well as the broader views about the issues are neglected. Therefore, Cohen et al., (2011) has suggested that listening back to the record while coding the data is a good way to look at the phenomenon from broader perspective (p.537). In this step, participants' emotions expressing through voice and high pitch when recalling experience of their children using English are significantly highlighted and more refinement is made to coded texts in step 2.

Up to this step, an iterative process of re-reading, refining and re-assigning the codes has ended up with 4 the emergent of themes: 3 themes roughly related with research objectives and 1 theme related with parents' experiences when learning foreign languages (i.e: Finnish or English) which is set aside.

Step 4: Three emergent themes are constantly compared and contrasted with research objectives, resulting in more refined themes which generally respond to three research questions.

Step 5: All codes are re-read and cross-tabulated. According to Gibbs (2007), cross-tabulation in qualitative means that putting data, which can present various characteristics of individuals into cells of tables for the purpose of systematic comparison (p7).

The rows consist of 10 respondents and each column which contains coded text responds to three coarse themes identified above, namely: (1) opinions toward foreign language education at the young age; (2) opinions toward English education in Finnish schools; and (3) hopes and expectation regarding English language education.

Next, constant comparison is made by reading cross cells under each column – which means the codes are compared and contrasted among 10 respondents. (Gibbs, 2007, p. 8). By doing so, researcher is able to observe how responses among respondents differ or resemble in the same theme/category; hence ending up with generating more sub-categories (Dey, 2007, p.88). Up to this point, it can be observed that while the main categories are mutually shaped based on the research questions, the sub-categories starts to arise during the analysis (Klave & Brinkmann, 2009, p.203)

Step 6: Re-read and compare the newly created sub-categories with existing categories, which helps make sure the consistency between coded text and categories (Cohen et al., 2011, p.600). Also, coded texts might also be re-arranged to fit with the subcategories/categories. This step ends up with whole sets of categories or subcategories which are ready to answer research questions.

4. FINDINGS & DICUSSION

This section is to present the results from the analysis in previous part. There are three main categories found corresponding to three research questions. The first question aims to explore what views and opinions of Vietnamese parents about *foreign language learning at the young age*. The second question specializes at parents' attitudes and perspectives toward *English language education in Finnish primary schools*. The last question is to understand what *parents expect and wish for their children's English language learning*. After three main themes are identified, the process of constantly comparing and contrasting results in similar themes that are put together to create sub-categories. (Like mentioned in step 6, part 3.5.2)

4.1. Parental views and opinions toward foreign language education at the early age

The first research question: “*What do parents view foreign language education at the early age?*” aims to identify opinions and attitudes of parents toward learning English at primary school level. 4 sub-categories of parents' opinions and attitudes have been identified as related to children's learning English with other languages at the same time.

Table 4.1. Subcategories for research question # 1.

4.1.1. The role of learning English toward young learners.

4.1.2. The optimal period for starting English

4.1.3. Interference of learning more than one language at the early age.

4.1.4. Factors facilitate English language learning

4.1.1. The role of learning English toward young learners.

There are different ways that parens view English learning and its roles toward their children now and in the future. Most of the parental view represent utilitarian role of English in their children's life and study:

P2

Without English, the child becomes “isolated” to the world

P7

English is a medium language through which the child completes other subject's task

P1, P9,
P10

English is the important step toward multilingualism and multi-culture

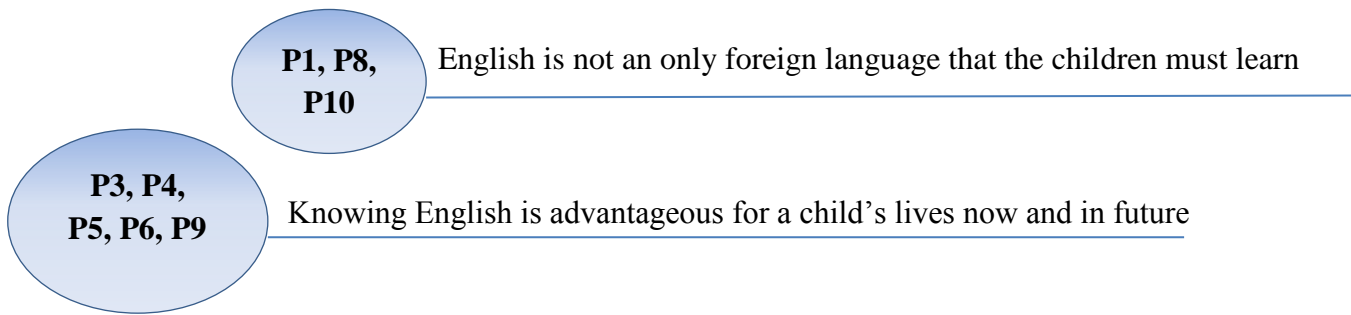


Figure 4.1. Overview of parents' opinions about the role of learning English.

It could be seen from the majority of parents' response is that it is a great advantage for children when travelling or applying for future job if they are to communicate English efficiently. In particular, it was well-noted that being proficient at English allows their children to even live and work abroad:

“Bây giờ thấy con mình đi đâu cũng có thể sử dụng được tiếng Anh, như hỏi đi Tiệp hay sân bay Hồng Kong cháu là người gọi taxi và hỏi đường thì chị thấy tự hào và chị tin rằng về sau nếu có tiếng Anh thì vút đâu con chị cũng có thể sống được” (4)

I feel proud to see my child as the main communicator using English when we travelled to Czech or at Hong Kong airport, then I believe that he will be able to live anywhere in the world. (P4)

Being able to orally communicate in English is obviously important to many parents, especially at international environment. This proves that the child can adapt to new places by using English to ask for help when needed and it is consider as an **initial advantage for a future life**. Therefore, one parent considers **without English the child will become “isolated”** to the rest of the world:

Ồ, nếu không học tiếng Anh mà chỉ học tiếng Phần thì chị nghĩ bé sẽ rất “isolated to the world” bởi tiếng Phần chỉ có 5 triệu người nói thôi, mà nó nói tiếng Việt còn được 91 triệu người. Chưa kể đến đa số người Phần cũng có thể sử dụng được tiếng Anh. (P2)

Oh, if the child only learns Finnish she will be isolated to the world because there are only 5 million of Finnish speakers. Compared to 91 million of Vietnamese counterparts in the world, it is far better to learn Vietnamese. Not to mention that a majority of Finns can also speak English. (P2)

Indeed, several parents shared similar thoughts about the crucial status of English as a dominant international language and certainly it is important for the young generation to know the language to position themselves as global citizens.

Parent whose child is attending bilingual English school discussed the position of English among other languages that their children might need to learn later:

Mặc dù tiếng Anh là ngôn ngữ quốc tế nhưng nếu sau này con chị có học giỏi tiếng Anh chị nghĩ nó không phải là cái gì quá to tát. Với chị tiếng Anh đơn giản chỉ là một ngôn ngữ như bao ngôn ngữ khác thôi. Khi đã học tốt tiếng Anh rồi thì việc học các ngoại ngữ khác không có gì khó khăn cả. (P10)

I think it is not really big deal even when my child is good at learning English – a “considered” international language. For me, English is simply a language like any other languages which are used for communication. Also I think when the child is good at it, he will be good at other languages also. (P10)

Quite apparently, one parent (P10) acknowledged the popular status of English in international communication; yet she does not just expect English as the ultimate foreign language which her son can learn. Rather she believes that the start of **learning English opens to door to learning other languages also or multilingualism**. For her, being able to be competent at English should be something taken for granted for her son- which later should leads to learning of other foreign language also.

Another parent (P8) viewed learning English in relation with other foreign languages. This is what she explained to her daughter about the significance of learning several languages:

Lâu lâu bé cũng hỏi tại sao phải học nhiều ngôn ngữ. Lúc đó chị giải thích rằng việc đó sẽ làm giàu cho bản thân con. Chị bảo là con hơn các bạn Phần Lan khác vì con được thêm tiếng Việt. Thí dụ bạn Phần Lan được học tiếng Phần, tiếng Anh, tiếng Thụy Điển thì họ hiểu được 3 ngôn ngữ còn con vừa tiếng Phần, tiếng Việt, tiếng Anh, tiếng Thụy Điển hoặc sau này khả năng còn còn học thêm tiếng Pháp, tiếng Đức thì con có nhiều ngôn ngữ nên có thể giao tiếp với nhiều người ở nhiều văn hóa khác nhau. Như vậy là làm giàu cho bản thân con. (P8)

Sometimes my daughter asked why learning several languages? I explained that it will be beneficial for yourself. Compared to other Finns peers, you always possess one extra language which is Vietnamese. While Finn peers have three languages, i.e: Finnish, English and Swedish, you have four. Later, you might also need to learn French, German. The more languages you learn the more you can communicate with people from various cultures. In this way, you are enriching your life experience. (P8)

It is quite clear that for this parent that English is not only language that her child needs to learn. Learning English together with other foreign language provides the child with linguistic and cultural experience when she grows up.

From parents (P8 & 10), two important ideas might be inferred about the status of English: firstly, **English should not be deemed as supreme language to learn** and secondly, that English is **an intitial step toward learning other languages in the future**.

However for now; the child can benefit from learning English, not merely as a language but as **an effective tool to expand learning in other areas**:

Những chương trình hướng dẫn trò chơi điện tử, hoặc hướng dẫn làm bài hoặc làm gì đấy chị đều thấy nó xem video trên youtube bằng tiếng Anh hết. Hỏi nó nó có hiểu không thì nó bảo nó hiểu hết. Những cái nghiên cứu này kia chị thấy nó hay xem trên youtube lắm.(P7)

My son watches a lot of Youtube videos instructing about games or homework-related stuffs in English. I asked if he understood then he said yes. It is English youtube videos that he turns to when he needs to learn something. (P7)

In this case, English is not just practiced itself as a foreign language subject but rather serves as a medium for the child to acquire knowledge in other subjects. It is quite interesting to realize that learning at school has contributed to the child's competence to understand the English video, but in other way, the frequent exposures to and usage of such video may also unconsciously enhance the child's English competences.

While the majority of parents mentioned about the instrumental benefits of English in a quite concrete manner like its usefulness when travelling or living abroad or accessing to learning materials, it is not surprising that parents who sent their children to English bilingual school tend to consider English more than communicative competences:

Việc học ngôn ngữ là mình phải trực tiếp tiếp xúc với văn hóa và con người đó thì nó sẽ hiệu quả hơn rất là nhiều. Sự tiếp xúc đó vừa giúp các bé biết được ngôn ngữ vừa biết được đất nước đó như thế nào con người ra làm sao (P9)

Learning English as a foreign language requires exposing to culture and people of that language. This exposure makes learning more efficient by giving the child with authentic images of how the language is interconnected with that culture and people. (P9)

Parents expect that through learning and using English to communicate with peers at school, their child can get in touch with both sameness and differences of other cultures and people. This is much important for a child to learn about “**non-discrimination and develop respect toward other cultures**” (P9)

In another note, a parent (P1) expressed a similar opinion about the role of English that being able to use English is like a bridge for a child to reach to the world outside Finland:

Nếu con chị có thể đến một nơi nào khác sử dụng tiếng Anh thì chị nghĩ thì môi trường sống sẽ khác rất nhiều Phần Lan và nó sẽ thấy được suy nghĩ lối sống khác nhau của mọi người. Càng đi nhiều gặp nhiều người trên thế giới thì con người càng trở nên linh hoạt, cởi mở và dễ cảm thông cho người khác (P1)

If my sons can use English somewhere outside Finland then it would definitely help him experience life more, about how different people's lifestyles and thoughts are. The more people he meets, the more flexible, open-minded and sympathetic he will become. (P1)

Despite being articulated in different ways, both parents (P9 and P1) **show that English language plays a role as a bridge in promoting their children's awareness of cultural diversity as well as developing the tolerance toward cultural differences.**

Summary and discussion for sub-theme one. It aims to clarify parental views toward the role of English. Parents all agree that knowing and being able to communicate English are of great advantage for their children, especially when traveling or living abroad in the future. Furthermore, English can become an instructional tool to learn other subjects or simply a tool for broadening children's pool of knowledge. Parents who chose English biligual schools for their children mentioned the benefits of learning English, e.g: their children are highly exposed to other cultures and people with different thoughts and lifestyles, hence develop the sense of cultural awareness and tolerant attitudes.

Given the status of English as the global language, it is not surprised to see that Vietnamese parents recognize the importance of learning English as a versatile tool in their children's school life now and in the future. In spite of high-held position, they place English equally with other subjects or languages at school. Bearing this in mind, these parents might find it strange to see the case that Korean parents associated English learning with upwarding social status (Park, 2009), or to question what motivates lots of parents in Hong Kong, or Korea make big financial investment to send their children abroad for English study. (Hsieh, 2008; Park, 2009). Indeed, parents' view toward the role of learning English differs depending on the social contexts where they have been living and brought up. From previous studies it can be indicated that parents living under context of Asian EFL environments are much likely to associate successful learning English with educational success. The success in both English and education is believed to bring about better or well-paid career in the job market which is deemed paramount in Asian countries. Meanwhile, it is not evident that Vietnamese parents in Finland have associated current English learning with any job prospects or social status but merely view it as one of the school subjects that their children need to study. It is clearer that Vietnamese parents link English learning with expansion of knowledge or personal growth, e.g: being open-minded or tolerant toward culutral differences.

4.1.2. Parent's opinions about the optimal period for learning English

In responding to the first research question "*What do parents view foreign language education at the early age?*", parents also expressed their opinions about the most appropriate

time to start their children learning English. Parents have different ideas about the optimal period for starting English as illustrated in three groups below:

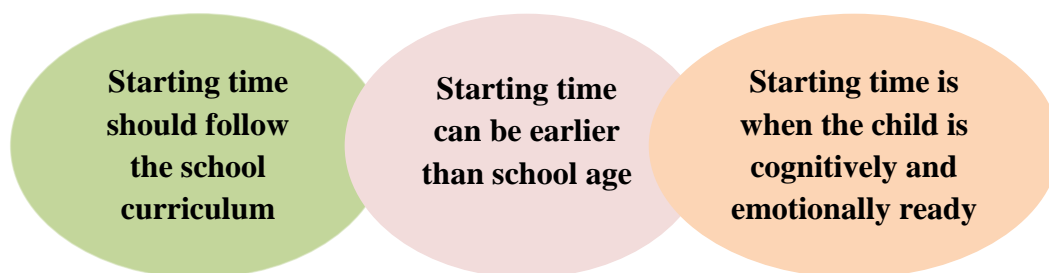


Figure 4.2. Overview of parental opinions about optimal periods for starting English.

4.1.2.1 Starting ages should follow the school curriculum

A half number of parents apparently support the timeline introduced by Finnish schools. According to a new national curriculum, the starting age of the first foreign language in Finland is from grade 1 (Autumn 2019 onward). And given the fact that English is the most chosen foreign language at Finnish primary school, learning of English normally starts from from grade 1 under new national curriculum (Autumn 2019 onward).

Lứa tuổi tiểu học là phù hợp để đưa trẻ bắt đầu học tiếng Anh và dần dần nó sẽ tiếp thu được , không đến mức chậm chạp đâu. Trẻ con Phần Lan lớp 2 lớp 3 mới học tiếng Anh nhè nhưng tiếng Thụy Điển, Tây Ban Nha tiếng gì nó cũng biết được một ít. Nghĩa là lứa tuổi tiểu học là tiếp xúc được rồi chứ không nhất thiết phải trước đó. (P4)

Primary school age is appropriate for a child to start English. S/he is capable of learning at that age and gradually s/he will acquire language more. Only until grade 2 or 3 do Finnish children start learning English, yet they also know a bit of Swedish or Spanish. That is to say, children can start English when attending primary school, and there is no need to start earlier (P4)

Based on her observation of Finnish children learning different languages, she was quite assertive that children can fully manage to start English at primary schools and be convinced that the child can even acquire several languages also. Hence, there is absolutely no need to initiate English earlier. More importantly, she found it unusual in case English is taught prior to primary school:

Việc đề cao dạy đưa trẻ tiếng Anh từ 3, 4 tuổi vì họ cho rằng đó là độ tuổi đưa trẻ tiếp thu tốt tiếng nước ngoài thì chị cảm thấy vẫn có gì đó lạ lùng. Bởi vì người Phần Lan và giáo dục Phần Lan cũng vậy họ không hài lòng khi một người không nói ngôn ngữ đó mà lại dạy đưa trẻ ngôn ngữ đó từ sớm, giống như ở Việt Nam. Họ luôn đề cao đưa trẻ phải thành thạo tiếng mẹ đẻ đã.(P4)

Overvaluing early English education from the age of 3 or 4 due to the belief that this is the critical period seems unusual for me. Finnish people and education are not really supportive for English teaching from early age, especially when teachers are

not native English speakers, just like in Viet Nam. In here, they emphasize on the solid of mother tongue language before any other foreign language is taught.(P4)

As mentioned, there are possibly two reasons why she is against English teaching earlier. Firstly, it's much likely that it came from her experience in Vietnam (as she evidently stated "just like in Viet Nam"), where English for young children is commonly taught by non-native speaking teachers – which is not her preference. Secondly, it seems like the "prior-to-primary-school" period should be dedicated for mother tongue language rather than introducing any new foreign languages.

Two parents (P5 and 6) also emphasized the suitable age for her son to start English is at grade 3 – only after when her son had spent previous years for Vietnamese and Finnish:

Thời điểm bắt đầu tiếng Anh tầm lớp 3 hoặc 4 là được. Tại vì lớp 1 nó mới tiếp xúc ngôn ngữ mà học một lúc 2, 3 thứ tiếng thì nó lộn xộn. Cách phát âm tiếng Anh, tiếng Phần Lan, tiếng Thụy Điển khác thì nó sẽ khó, còn nếu nó học lớp 1 xong rồi thì nó đã vững phát âm một thứ tiếng rồi đó thì sau đó nó sẽ tiếp tục ngôn ngữ thứ 2, thứ 3 thì sẽ tốt hơn (P5)

English can be started at grade 3 or 4 like at school now. Learning 2 or 3 languages (i.e: English, Finnish and Swedish) simultaneously right from grade 1 will make the child confused, especially in terms of pronunciation. Therefore, the child should spend enough time in grade 1 to be solid at one language pronunciation before starting 2nd or 3rd language. (P5)

Chị nghĩ là lớp 1 nó mới bắt đầu tập đọc và viết tiếng Phần nên phải để con có một thời gian để nó ngấm đã. Vì tiếng Việt và tiếng Phần có thể cũng liên quan với nhau nên đến lớp 2 con bắt đầu học tiếng Việt. Sau đó một năm, tức là lớp 3 khi con đã ngấm tiếng Việt và tiếng Phần hơn thì mới cho học tiếp tiếng Anh. Chị thấy lộ trình như thế là rất ổn.(P6)

The child first started reading and writing Finnish from grade 1 so he needed some time to absorb this language. At grade 2 he started Vietnamese which is possibly related with Finnish. At grade 3 he started English at school after getting some foundation of Finnish. This pathway for learning languages is suitable. (P6)

Both parents agreed that the timeline for English to be introduced was fitting for the child as there was an interval among each language, hence allowing the child to familiarize with one language before embarking a new one.

There is no need to start English earlier than primary-school age is what a following parent approved. What she believed is:

Trẻ có thể bắt đầu học tiếng Anh lúc 6, 7 hay 8 tuổi đều được mà vì ở tuổi đó trẻ học ngôn ngữ rất nhanh. Giả sử ở nhà nó chắc tiếng Việt, đến trường được làm quen với tiếng Phần rồi và nếu học thêm tiếng Anh nữa thì cũng là bình thường. Trẻ con tầm 6, 7 hay 8 tuổi học được.(P7)

Children can start English at the age of 6, 7 or 8 when they attend primary school because they are such fast learners at those ages. It is quite natural that a child learns Vietnamese at home and Finnish and English as a foreign language subject at school. He can totally learn three languages at those ages. (P7)

The starting of English from primary school onward is possible given their natural abilities to learn several languages simultaneously. Generally, as it can be seen from parents who support the viewpoint of “**no need for starting earlier**” that the **time prior to primary should be spent for basic foundation of Finnish and Vietnamese**. It has never been considered late to start English at primary level because of the child still possesses natural ability to acquire different languages at this age.

4.1.2.2 Starting age can be earlier than school age.

For the majority of parents who supported the timeline of starting English it is much likely to see that they want to dedicate certain years before primary school for their children to learn Finnish or Vietnamese. Nevertheless, benefits of early start to a language are also pointed out among the other half of parents.

One parent (P5) who has two children at preschool and primary age observed how quickly her young children absorb language through “off-school” environment:

Thường con nít sẽ tiếp thu nhanh hơn người lớn nên việc học ngôn ngữ sẽ dễ hơn, giống như thằng con nhỏ của chị ở nhà nó coi chương trình hoạt hình tiếng Anh trên tivi không, rồi nó cũng nói tiếng Anh ào ào, nói tiếng Anh tùm lum á. (P5)

Young children can absorb language much faster than adults do, so learning a foreign language is much easier for them. Just like my second child who watches English cartoon program on T.V and he could be able to mimic some simple and repeated words.(P5)

She compared ability in learning a foreign language between children and adults. Children with their natural inclination can learn the new language much easily compared to adults. She might consider the start of English not necessarily as formal way of “teaching-learning”, but rather daily exposure to English through TV or internet. If this “non-formal” way help the children learn English, then she would agree that starting age for exposure to English can be earlier than school age.

Another parent (P6) who has one child at kindergarten and other at primary school stated that:

Trẻ con học và tiếp thu rất nhanh nên chị nghĩ ko có vấn đề gì cả . Chị nghĩ nếu con mình phát triển đặc biệt giống như thiếu năng hoặc chậm phát triển gì đấy cơ thì mới phải ái ngại nhưng con mình bình thường nên chị nghĩ nó sẽ vượt được hết các thứ ấy, kho có gì khó khăn cả. (P6).

Children are well-absorbed to new language and fast learners so I think it shouldn't be problematic. It would feel worried if my child had difficulty learning, i.e: mental retardation. But my child is normally developed so I believe he will overcome all initial difficulties of language learning process (P6)

She commented on why early start of English together with other languages should not be any troubles for normally developed children. Also, though none of her sons attended any English preschool, it seems very likely that early exposure to English has contributed to their current English performance at class – which consolidates her belief about the benefit of early exposure:

Chị cũng không hiểu tại sao cháu có thể đạt kết quả tốt cũng như tự tin nói tiếng Anh như thế. Có thể do gốc có sẵn hoặc trước khi học tiếng Anh được nghe các anh chị nói chuyện hoặc xem phim tiếng Anh thì trong đầu nó đã định hình một số từ cơ bản về tiếng Anh rồi. (P6)

I am also not really sure how he can achieve that good result at English and speak English so confidently like that. Probably he had something already before starting English at school due to such exposure, i.e: listening to siblings speaking English or watching English movies. This exposure might have engrained him with a few basic English words (P.6)

It should be noted here that both parents (P5 and P6) have older children at primary and the younger one at normal public kindergarten. Though they did not send any of their children to English kindergartens/preschools, they develop the beliefs that early exposure, i.e: watching media or engage in English environment, have certain good impact on children's learning. For both of them, **early exposure to English before school is beneficial** at certain aspects and most parents deemed **it as a non-official way to supplement for their children learning**. Hence they were in favor for the view that “starting age” for exposing can be earlier than school age.

4.1.2.3 Starting age is when the child is cognitively and emotionally ready.

One parent (P10) who has a child enrolling in bilingual English school thought that starting age tends to be more associated with their own evaluation whether the children are willing or not to start a new language. Similarly, other parents (P2 and P3) also emphasize the importance of letting the children on their own pace when learning:

Việc bắt đầu học tiếng Anh ở thời điểm nào cần phải phù hợp với khả năng tiếp nhận của con mình ở thời điểm đó. Ở tuổi nhỏ mới bắt đầu học và làm quen một ít rồi dần dần lớn thì mới học nhiều thêm chứ ở đây không có học nhiều như ở Việt Nam. Ở đây bé được học từ từ theo khả năng tự nhiên chứ không phải bắt ép học quá với khả năng của mình. (P2)

When to start English needs to fit with the child's ability to learn at that time. When the child is still young and is getting used to English, the start should be little by little, not so much like that in Viet Nam. Here, at the beginning English is introduced to the child a bit by a bit which matches with his/her own pace/ability.(P2)

Parent (P3) saw the difficulties of embarking English when her daughter is not ready:

Chị không muốn ép con phải bắt đầu học tiếng Anh khi cháu đang cùng lúc “struggling” với hai ngôn ngữ là tiếng Việt và tiếng Phần. Ở Việt Nam bé mới có học một chút xíu tiếng Việt thôi rồi qua đây lại học thêm tiếng Phần nữa thì nó bị “struggle” giữa hai ngôn ngữ nên chị không có muốn ép con học thêm tiếng Anh sớm trước khi nhà trường bắt đầu. (P3)

I do not want to force my child to start English when she is struggling with Vietnamese and Finnish at the same time. She just started learning Vietnamese a little bit in Viet Nam and got familiar with Finnish upon arriving here. She is struggling with two languages, hence I do not want her to start English before it is officially introduced at school. (P3)

Two parents (P2 and P3) are aware of the fact that the start for **English should emerge at the time when the children are cognitively ready**. It is emphasized that the start should be in par with the child' cognitive readiness: the younger the child the more gradual step to introduce the new language should be taken (P2). The other one (P3) obviously did not want her child to start English at the same time when struggling to adapt to a new language (i.e: Finnish or Vietnamese).

Upon being asked when to start the child at English preschool, one parent (P10), who intuitively based on her own experience of home-teaching Vietnamese and the feedback from Finnish teachers, believe the starting for the third language should be when:

Chị nghĩ không nhất thiết bắt đầu một ngôn ngữ khác ở một độ tuổi nào cả mà nên bắt đầu khi cháu đã sẵn sàng. Cô giáo nói tiếng Phần của cháu rất tốt, ai cũng ngạc nhiên khi nghe cháu nói tiếng Phần còn tiếng Việt thì chị tự biết là cháu rất tốt tại vì cháu có thể hiểu, có thể diễn tả được cảm xúc của mình rồi có thể nói chuyện. Ví dụ là cháu thắc cháu hỏi thì chị giải thích cháu đều hiểu hết. Vậy tức là chị biết cháu đã sẵn sàng cho một ngôn ngữ nữa là tiếng Anh. (P10)

I think there should not be any fixed age to start English but rely on his/her readiness. Teacher said his Finnish is very good. His Finnish competence surprised lot of native people. I believe his Vietnamese is good either because he can understand well what I explain, also he can describe his feelings. So, I know that he is now ready for English (P10)

This mother confidently concluded the starting time is when the child is observed to use both Finnish and Vietnamese well at certain standard. For her the starting time for English does not depend on age number or school decision but more on her own observation of the child's language ability.

Summary and discussion for sub-theme two. Parents' opinions about the optimal time for English might be divided into three groups: a majority of parents agree with the timeline introduced by school curriculum, let say English should be taught from grade 2 or 3. Before this age children need to consolidate their mother tongue language whether it is Vietnamese or Finnish. Parents who support this viewpoint tend to believe that in order to start any new language; children need to have at least one firm language. A few parents approve the benefits of early exposure to English before officially starting English at schools. The daily exposure, i.e: listening and watching English definitely help their children acquire a lot. Some parents maintained that when to start English depends much on your own children's pace of development. It means that the children are cognitively and emotionally ready after they should confidently speak Finnish or English.

A predominant viewpoint that finds it appropriate to start English at primary school can be generally observed among 8 (out of 10 parents). Even though there are few parents who are advocate of starting age earlier than primary level, they believe that learning and teaching should occur in the form of natural exposure to English programmes in TV or Internet. A large number of parents believe that there is no need to learn English before primary level which is quite contradictory to what have been found in literature earlier. In Asian EFL contexts, a starting age for English is enormously important as it is expressed in the short slogan "the sooner the better" which is supported by the majority of Asian parents found in the literature. It is assumed that earlier start come with several advantages such as better absorption for native-like pronunciation and importantly for getting their children prepared for the demand of formal schools. (Lan, Torr & Degortadi, 2012; Lee, 2008; Chang, 2008). Another purpose of so-called "the sooner the better" is for "school readiness" which can convey different meanings for parents in different contexts. In Finland it might be inferred as teacher should welcome children to grade 1 as naturally as the way they are (Sahlberg, 2015); whereas in aforementioned Asian contexts it is more likely to be a serious preparation for fear that the children will lag behind if they are not well-equipped with knowledge in advance. That fear could even lead to the fact that many parents still decide to send their children to English classes in kindergarten even though they are not really supportive of the viewpoint "the sooner the better". They do it simply because of being influenced by the large crowd or social norms. (Lee, 2008, p.88)

4.1.3. Interference of learning more than one language at the early age

From previous part, parental opinions about children's English education are not simply restricted within English subject, particularly toward the significance of learning English or

when to start appropriately. In fact, the starting time for English is influenced by several variables, among which other languages like Vietnamese or Finnish is taken into consideration. Following part will present more specifically how English learning is viewed in association with learning of other languages. It is more about the importance of each language and how interactional they are toward each other.

4. 1. 3. 1 The stepping stone language(s) for learning English

A most commonly held belief about starting age for English is after the children have acquired basic level of Vietnamese, Finnish or both. To put it in another way, English learning can be made easier for the child to learn when they have prior “stepping stone” languages, which undoubtedly are Vietnamese or Finnish or both depending on parents’ own preferences and expectations.

The preference for stepping stone means the medium language through which English will be learnt and explained to the child. As such, the dominant numbers of parents (6 out of 10) prefer Finnish to become an indispensable language for their children to acquire English:

Học ở trường là học từ tiếng Phần qua tiếng Anh, còn ở nhà chỉ dạy từ tiếng Việt qua tiếng Anh. Dù sao thì tiếng Phần cũng là nền tảng quan trọng hơn khi cháu phải học tiếng Anh ở trường (P5)

At school, English learning is mediated through Finnish while I help my child with English through Vietnamese. I suppose it might cause confusion at some point. However, needless to say, Finnish should be a more important basis through which English is instructed at school (P5)

Tất nhiên khi cháu đang ở Phần Lan thì ngôn ngữ tiếng Phần Lan phải đạt chuẩn rồi. Chị muốn tiếng Phần là tiếng chuẩn, tiếng mẹ đẻ. Ngoài ra ngôn ngữ này sẽ là ngôn ngữ trung gian để trợ giúp cháu học tiếng Anh về sau này. (P7)

It is certain that his Finnish competence should meet standard level because he is living in Finland. I would like my son to possess such standard Finnish which also become a medium language for his English learning at school. (P7)

Tiếng Phần Lan coi như là tiếng mẹ đẻ của bé rồi. Dù ở nhà vẫn nói chuyện tiếng Việt nhưng những chữ hoặc câu nào bé không hiểu thì phải chuyển sang tiếng Phần. Việc học tiếng Anh ở trường thông qua tiếng Phần cũng như vậy thôi (P8)

Finnish has become her “mother tongue” language now. Even though we are communicating in Vietnamese at home, sometimes I have to switch into Finnish to explain so that my child can understand. I think the same applied for learning English at school, which Finnish is used as a medium language to explain every now and then. (P8).

Parents have a tendency to prioritize Finnish as a stepping stone language while Vietnamese is mother tongue language for parents. More parents consider the competence of Finnish language is more important than Vietnamese in acquiring English.

In contrast, there are only two parents who clearly highlighted about the importance of Vietnamese as the stepping stone language for any subsequent languages:

Giao dục Phần Lan người ta đề cao tiếng mẹ đẻ, cụ thể là họ bỏ ra một khoảng chi phí dành cho việc dạy tiếng mẹ đẻ cho trẻ em nước ngoài. Ngoài ra, chị biết có một cuộc khảo sát rằng những đứa giỏi tiếng mẹ đẻ thì học các ngôn ngữ khác rất nhanh. Như con chị 3 năm đầu ở nhà chị dạy và nói với con bằng tiếng Việt thôi, năm 3 tuổi mới chính thức tiếp xúc tiếng Phần nhưng từ đấy học tiếng Phần chuyện bình thường. Sau đó bây giờ học tiếng Anh cô giáo cũng đánh giá ở khung cao nhất. Vậy nên ngôn ngữ mẹ đẻ chính là bước đệm quan trọng để trẻ học các ngoại ngữ khác. (P4)

Finnish education highly evaluates the role of mother tongue language. The government has spent large amount of money for mother tongue language education. Moreover, it has been shown that a child who has a well-founded level of mother tongue language can learn other languages very quickly. My child's first three years was dedicated for Vietnamese and later his Finnish learning appeared a piece of cake. Now his English's learning is well-assessed by teacher. Hence I believe that being good at mother tongue is a first key to learn other languages.(P4)

This parent (P4) puts high emphasis on the role of a mother tongue as Vietnamese, based on her own experience as a mother and a Vietnamese language teacher. She observed that once her child's Vietnamese is good at listening and speaking comprehension, he will be able to master other languages easily. Another parent (P10) was of great support for Vietnamese as a stepping stone language:

Chị ưu tiên tiếng Việt và có yêu cầu tiếng Việt rất cao vì theo chị khi cháu biết một thứ tiếng giỏi thì các thứ tiếng khác không là vấn đề nữa. Lý do chị đặt ưu tiên tiếng Việt vì đó là ngôn ngữ chị có thể điều khiển có thể dạy cháu giỏi nếu như chị muốn. (P10)

I strongly believe that once the child is good at his mother tongue language (Vietnamese) then learning other languages will not be big problem. Therefore, I prioritize Vietnamese learning the most. And also it is my native language and I can totally teach my son well if I want. (P10)

It is interesting to see how she justified the reason for her preference. As she can confidently teach Vietnamese to her son well, she is much convinced that it will become his stepping stone toward any further languages.

4. 1. 3. 2 Vice versa, English also becomes a stepping stone for learning another language(s).

The majority of parents believed that English should be started only when the children have acquired basic level of Vietnamese, Finnish or both. By following this “language path”, English learning can be made advantageous thanks to the repertoire of previous language, i.e: Vietnamese or Finnish. However, parents also believe that the early acquisition of English would enable learning of other foreign languages also. Not surprisingly, this pattern of attitude is prominently articulated among those who are enrolling children at English bilingual schools.

Chị nghĩ việc học tốt tiếng Anh sẽ là một cơ hội tốt để học sang các ngôn ngữ khác, ví dụ những ngôn ngữ gần với tiếng Anh như tiếng Thụy Điển, tiếng Pháp, tiếng Đức. Chị không muốn giới hạn con trong 3 ngôn ngữ tiếng Việt, tiếng Anh và tiếng Phần đầu mà chị mong với nền tảng tiếng Anh tốt cháu sẽ sử dụng ít nhất là 6, 7 ngôn ngữ thành thạo. (P9)

Learning English first is a good opportunity to learn other languages because English has many “relatives” with other languages such as Swedish, French and Germany. I don’t want to restrict my child in only Vietnamese, English or Finnish but I expect she can be fluent at least 6 or 7 languages based on a good English foundation. (P9)

Quan niệm của chị là trẻ con nếu tiếp xúc với nhiều thứ tiếng khác nhau ngay từ nhỏ thì khả năng ngoại ngữ của cháu sẽ tốt hơn thành ra chị nghĩ là ko cần thiết phải học tiếng Anh nhưng vào trường preschool tiếng Anh sẽ là bước đầu để cháu có điều kiện tiếp xúc với nhiều ngoại ngữ hơn. (P10)

My opinion is that children’s language ability will be much enhanced if they are exposed to different languages at young age. Thus, the main purpose of enrolling my child in English school is not for English learning, but rather a first step to get him involved in such linguistic diverse environment. (P10)

Compared to the majority of parents who have children already attended public primary schools, parent 9 & 10 enrolled their children in English bilingual schools not merely because of English environment or programme. For them, English language is not an ultimate linguistic goal but rather a stepping stone to acquire further languages as well. Their opinions have significantly shed light toward the topic of multilingualism which will be discussed in later part.

4. 1. 3. 3 Learning English together with other languages might result in certain obstacles

Parents are aware of that children are going to learn different languages at Finnish school, which inevitably do pose certain obstacles. It is the concern about the medium language (i.e: Finnish) which her child can base on to acquire English:

Khó khăn là bé học tiếng Anh thông qua tiếng Phần cho nên nó bị hạn chế vì tiếng Phần của bé chưa có tốt. Nó chỉ tiếp xúc tiếng Phần rất là giới hạn trong trường thôi còn về nhà là nói tiếng Việt 100% cho nên ngôn ngữ không được mở rộng. Ngôn ngữ rộng hơn về khoa học xã hội địa lý ở ngoài thì nó hoàn toàn không có nên cũng hạn chế nhiều (P3)

The child learns English through Finnish and her Finnish is not that good. So this is the challenge. She just learns Finnish at school and speak 100% Vietnamese at home, thus her Finnish vocabulary is much restricted. The lack of Finnish vocabulary in social science or broader areas might have affect on her understand in English lesson (P3).

She mentioned the child learn English through explanation in Finnish at class. Finnish plays a role like a bridge to gap children's understanding between two languages. Nevertheless, what might strike this parent is that lack of Finnish vocabulary probably affects the acquisition of English when it comes to more abstract terms. Again, it can be shown that parents acknowledge the significance of stepping stone language in learning English.

Furthermore, several parents also expressed concern about the extra work which is a result of simultaneous language learnings. The following parent (P7) compared the number of languages that Vietnamese and Finnish children have to manage:

Đối với hội Việt Nam phải học 2 ngôn ngữ là tiếng Việt và tiếng Phần nên nếu học tiếng Anh thì thành ra 3 ngôn ngữ và tiếng Thụy Điển là 4. Như vậy là thiệt thòi hơn so với hội Phần Lan thì chỉ học 3 ngôn ngữ thôi. Nếu mình chọn thêm 1 ngôn ngữ thành ra 5 ngôn ngữ trong khi hội kia chỉ là 4 ngôn ngữ thôi (P7)

Vietnamese children have to learn at least Vietnamese and Finnish and if English and Swedish are counted then there are 4 languages in total; whereas Finnish counterparts only learn 3 languages. In case if optional language is added then total number of languages for Vietnamese and Finnish children are 5 and 4, respectively. That is to say, there is always more extra work for Vietnamese children. (P7)

Other parent (P8) is well aware of her own child's ability and the burden possibly created by learning extra language, so she decided to remain only English for her child when choosing other optional language is possible:

Hiện tại bé đang học tiếng Việt và tiếng Phần. Hồi lớp 3 thì có thể chọn một ngôn ngữ ngoài tiếng Phần và lớp 4 thì được chọn một ngôn ngữ nữa tức là 2 ngôn ngữ nhưng mà chị chọn tiếng Anh thôi vì bé học tiếng Việt nữa nên nó quá nhiều.(P8)

Now my child is learning Vietnamese and Finnish. It is possible to choose extra languages in grade 3 and 4, so the children can learn two more extra language (apart from Vietnamese and Finnish); however I only chose English otherwise it will be too much for a child to learn 4 languages simultaneously. (P8)

Both parents (P7 and P8) were more possible to imply that the more languages are offered, the more choices their children have, but at the same time the more efforts were put. **Learning many languages provides several benefits but requires more work and sometimes “burden” for the children.** This is particularly true when parents compared the number of languages learnt between their children and Finnish counterparts.

Other parents (P5 & 6) also related the obstacles with possible confusion that their children might encounter at pronunciation:

Lên cấp 2 tiếng Thụy Điển là ngôn ngữ bắt buộc vậy nên trước đó chị nghĩ các tiếng Anh hay Phần Lan phát âm phải vững trước đã. Khi đó thì việc phát âm tiếng Thụy Điển sẽ đỡ bị nhầm lẫn hơn. (P5)

Swedish is a compulsory language at secondary school. It is better for the child to be good at the pronunciation of English or Finnish before starting Swedish because it will help avoid confusion at pronunciation. (P5).

Hồi mới học tiếng Anh thì do cách đọc tiếng Anh khác với tiếng Phần nên cũng có chút nhầm lẫn. Tiếng Phần dễ đọc hơn. Ví dụ tiếng Phần chữ “a” đọc là /a/ còn tiếng Anh đọc là /ei/. Cơ mà chỉ hồi đầu thôi chứ về sau bé quen dần và phân biệt được. (P6)

My child experienced a little confusion at pronunciation when she started learning English. Finnish is much easier to pronounce. While letter “a” is pronounced as /a/ in Finnish, it is pronounced as /ei/ in English, which resulted in confusion at the beginning. Yet, the child now is getting used to it and it should not be problematic now. (P6)

One of the parents’ concerns is **pronunciation confusion**. Parents are aware that this is something inevitable, particularly when learning of more familiar language collides with the new ones. However they found it manageable for the child as they will get used to it. The firm foundation of prior languages is much likely to help the child compare and contrast with the new language, thus help deescalate the confusion.

Summary and discussion for sub-theme three. This sub-theme deals with how parents view children learning different languages at the same time. A great number of parents highlight the necessity of mother tongue(s), regarding them as stepping stone for learning English.

Parents claimed that this stepping stone language, whether it is Vietnamese or Finnish, it will enormously assist the children to acquire English. It has also been revealed by some parents, especially those who sent their children to English bilingual schools, that English is not just an ultimate foreign language but the stepping stone for their children to acquire other foreign languages also. However, few parents can not help admitting possible obstacles when learning several languages at the same time, e.g: children might get confused at pronunciation or extra work at school or home.

It is worthwhile to discuss parents' view of how learning English should occur together with other languages. Since English is taught as a foreign language at school it will be certainly introduced after other mother tongue languages whether it is Finnish or Vietnamese. Parents perceive this as logical sequences for their children to gradually acquire each language. Compared with previous literature, a minority of the parents in studies of Lin & Chen (2016) and Lan et al. (2011), similarly, also prioritized a critical period for a mother tongue language and would expect their children to have a firm foundation of mother tongue language before English learning is initiated.

4.1.4. Factors facilitate English language learning

The bar graph below illustrates the factors which parents found facilitative toward their children's English learning. There are five factors namely informal inputs; authentic environments; individual efforts; age-appropriate teaching methods; external motivation. Generally, it can be observed that the majority of parents agreed that factors (1) & (2) can be the most conducive to English learning. Less than a half number of parents proposed (3) & (4) as necessary factors leading to effective learning. The smaller number of parents dedicated (5) to make children more engaged in learning.

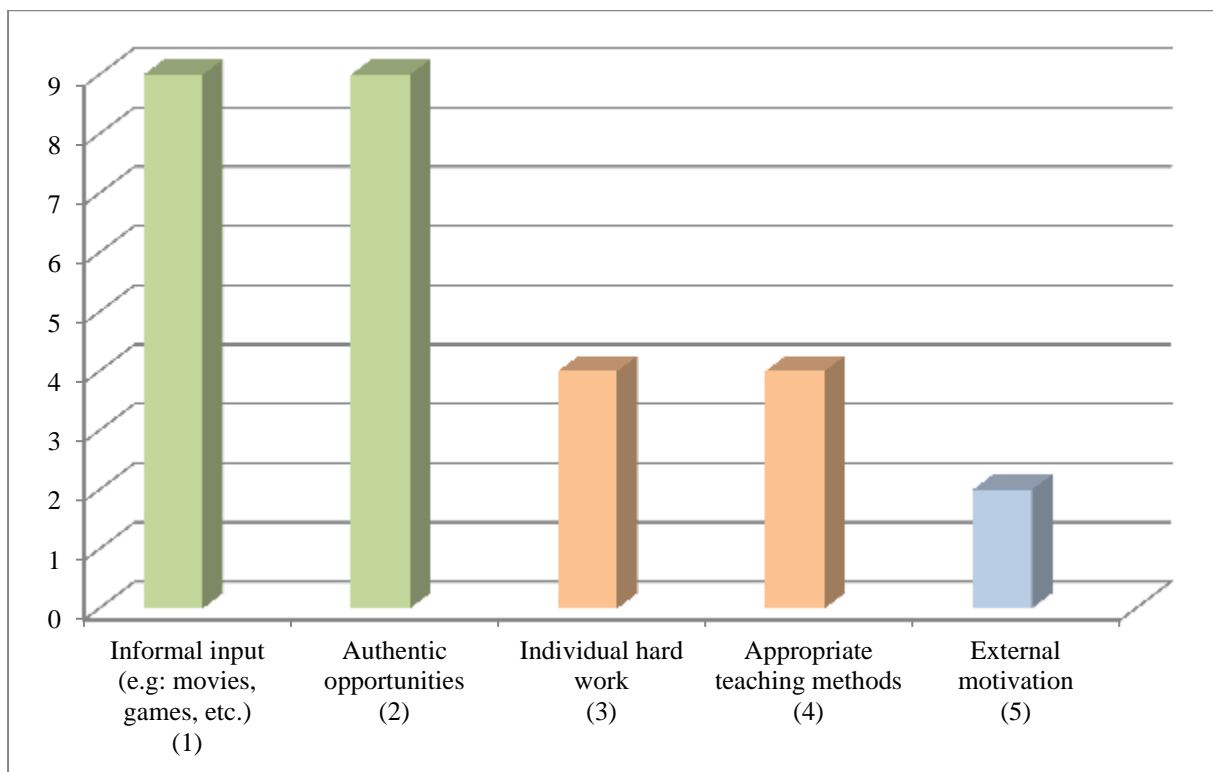


Figure 4.3. Factors contribute to effective English learning.

4.1.4.1. Informal input refers to exposure to English programme out of school context. Nine out of ten parents reported observing their children exposed to English through videos or movies in Youtube or TV, playing online games with friends. These channels are of great sources for children to watch and listen to English in native accents. Many parents believed that children’s abilities to comprehensively listen and speak English are much benefited from these sources:

Ngoài việc học tiếng Anh ở trường thì chị nghĩ cháu đã có “background” từ trước rồi. Đó là những cái tiếp xúc qua games hay internet bằng tiếng Anh vậy. Rồi phim tiếng Anh ở đây không có lồng tiếng nên cháu vừa nghe được tiếng Anh vừa đọc phụ đề tiếng Phần ở dưới nên thành ra giúp cho cháu giỏi tiếng Anh á. (P1)

I think my son already had certain “background” before English is started at school. The background was built through playing games using English or exposing to English in Internet. Also, there is no dubbing in English movies in T.V which benefits his listening comprehension. This background helps my son to learn English well at school (P1)

Chị thấy bé coi phim manga bằng tiếng Anh nhiều nên nghe nói tốt, đặc biệt là bị ảnh hưởng bởi các động từ mạnh trong phim vì phim có nhiều cảnh đá đấm. Có lần nói chuyện với bạn chị là người Hàn Quốc và bé sử dụng các động từ mệnh lệnh mà không có chủ ngữ nên chị thấy nó trống. Dù hiểu là bé không có cố ý nói trống nhưng do ảnh hưởng từ phim ảnh thành ra quen. (P2)

Watching English manga enhances my daughter’s listening and speaking skill. She quickly acquires “strong” verbs from the movies and uses them in her communication. It seems rude some times to speak using such “demand verbs”

(without having subjects). She has been absorbed from the movies though she was unaware of it. That to say watching English movies has much influence on her spoken language. (P2)

Chị thấy học sinh bây giờ giỏi tiếng Anh là từ điện tử mà ra, với con gái thì chị không rõ nhưng với con trai thì từ điện tử mà ra. Ở trường chị có 1 bạn lớp 4, tuy trên lớp cảm tưởng bạn ấy không lắng nghe gì đâu nhưng nói tiếng Anh siêu hay luôn. Bạn ấy đã từng được cô hiệu trưởng cử làm phiên dịch trước toàn trường nữa cơ. Đó là vì chơi rồi bắt chước giọng trong điện tử đấy.(P4)

Nowaday, children are good at English because of playing online games, at least for boys. At school where I work, there is a grade-4 boy who has a very beautiful English accent though little does he pay attention at English class. He used to be selected to be an interpreter for the school when some foreign students visited. His ability to mimic English accent is due to being exposed to online games. (P4)

As it is shown, those parents (P1, P2 and P4) all emphasized children abilities of using English gained from informal inputs. The exposure on daily basis must have helped kids acquired a wide range of vocabulary and picked up the native pronunciation. Parents are much appreciative about the informal exposure that has incredibly contributed to language competences.

5.1.4.2 Authentic opportunities imply situations which children engage in using English for communicative purposes or meaningful interaction. For instance: many parents found their children communicate when traveling or talk to English native speaking people:

Hồi đi du lịch Pháp chị có nói chuyện với người trong khách sạn bằng tiếng Anh thì lúc đấy con chị cũng hiểu và sau đó cũng có thể nói lại một số câu chào hỏi giới thiệu. Lúc đó chị rất ngạc nhiên vì trước đây chưa từng nghe con nói tiếng Anh. Ngoài đi du lịch thì ngay trong Phần Lan tiếng Anh cũng được sử dụng ở nhiều nơi như xem phim, internet hoặc đa phần người dân Phần Lan cũng nói được tiếng Anh. Em hiểu không nó có môi trường giao tiếp nên phát âm của nó chuẩn.(P6)

I used to speak English when family travelled to France. At that time I found it surprising that my child could not only understand but also communicate with waiter in the hotel. Apart from travelling, English is also common in movies, internet or widely spoken in Finland. It's the real communicative purposes in authentic environment that enhance speaking skill and accurate pronunciation. (P6)

Chị muốn cháu học ngoại ngữ ở tất cả các hoàn cảnh để cháu hiểu ngôn ngữ là cái rất là tự nhiên và hiển nhiên để cháu có thể giao tiếp với mọi người xung quanh. Ví dụ khi cháu đến nhà bạn thân chơi có bố là người Anh mẹ là người Phần thì cháu nói chuyện với bố bằng tiếng Anh rồi switch sang nói chuyện với mẹ bằng tiếng Phần một cách hết sức tự nhiên. Lúc đấy chị cũng hơi ngạc nhiên vì hồi đầu cháu không biết một câu nào. Xong chị quay sang hỏi bố của bạn thực sự đây là lần đầu tiên tao thấy cháu nói chuyện bằng tiếng Anh với mẹ, xong bố bạn bảo ơ cháu toàn nói chuyện với tao bằng tiếng Anh mà. (P10)

I want my child to learn foreign language under any circumstances so he understands language is something natural when communicating with people. There was a time he visited his close friend whose father is English and mother is Finnish. He could switch between English and Finnish very naturally when communicating with friend's father or mother. I was surprised to see him could utter English that spontaneously. I was also informed by the father that my son used to communicate with him in English. (P10)

Almost parents mentioned about the positive impact of having such authentic opportunities in their children's speaking skills. By getting involved in real contexts they are more encouraged to use English for certain purpose and also more aware about the nature of language learning. At the same time, this communication will further shapen their language skills, hence parents think this serves as two-way benefits.

4.1.4.3 Individual hard work. When giving accounts about what might contribute to good English learning at young age, quite lots of parents included "personal effort" which basically emphasizes the process of drilling and doing exercises at home. According to some parents this process is crucial for young children to remember vocabulary which deemed necessary for later communication.

Tiếng Anh học là phải học siêng và phải chịu khó một chút, ví dụ phải luyện viết từ, thường xuyên nghe người ta đọc rồi mình bắt chước theo, chịu khó học ngữ pháp nữa. Giống như ngày xưa chị học tiếng Anh đó mà chị cũng không có học giỏi lắm nhưng mà chăm chỉ nên khi nào đi thi chị cũng được điểm cao hết [laugh] (P5)

Learning English requires diligence, for example: being hard-work at vocabulary and grammar, listen and repeat after native speakers. I used to work hard at English so I could get good grades even though I am not really talented at it. (P5)

Interestingly, upon giving opinions about this aspect, one parent (P5) was not the only included the personal experience of learning English in Viet Nam. It was at her time when teaching English were grammar-translation oriented, highly resulting in rote learning that requires lots more diligence to remember vocabulary or sentence structure. This experience helps explain why she attributed hardwork as one of the crucial factors to learn English.

The personal effort not only consists of drilling and memorizing on particular items of language but the purposeful exposure on daily basis:

Để học tốt tiếng Anh thì quan trọng nhất là chăm chỉ luyện tập mỗi ngày. Tức là em phải dành thời gian cho nó, càng tiếp xúc với ngôn ngữ đó thì mình càng giỏi. Có thể em thông minh thật nhưng nếu em không tiếp xúc nhiều với ngôn ngữ đó thì giỏi cỡ mấy em cũng không làm gì được. Việc tiếp xúc này có thể ở nhiều dạng, nếu qua hình ảnh thì em sẽ tốt về khả năng nghe và nói. Nếu bé nào siêng đọc thì kỹ năng đọc sẽ cao, bé nào chịu khó viết thì kỹ năng viết sẽ tốt. (P2)

In order to learn English well, every day practice is important. It means you need to spend time for it, at least get yourself exposed to the language. Learning a language requires such frequent practice rather than being smart itself. Practice can come under many forms, for example: if you get more exposed to visual forms your listening and speaking skill will be improved. Similarly, if you read or write English more then you will be good at that. (P2)

Similarly, this parent (P2) believed that being laborious outweighs being smart. In order to achieve good level at language skills whatever they are, i.e: reading, writing or speaking, you had better practice it every day. The more you practice at certain skill, the better you will be at it.

4.1.4.4 Appropriate teaching methods

As it is indicated previously, parents tend to associate English learning with inputs that their children are exposed to on daily basis and real-life situations. They believe regular contact with the language makes learning English more effective, at least at certain skills.

When it comes to teaching methods that lead to effective learning, about a half number of parents agreed the teaching should be age-appropriate:

Chị được biết thì từ mẫu giáo đến bây giờ thì việc học tiếng Phần Lan hay tiếng Anh chủ yếu là các hoạt động trò chơi rất đơn giản như ghép từ, tìm từ để giúp con học chữ không phải ngồi ngồi a, b, c, d rồi bắt học thuộc lòng giống như mình đâu. Ví dụ họ vẽ hình con này con kia hoặc xếp chữ a, b, c, d rồi bắt đầu từ đó mình ghép từ. Và những cái đó rất nhiều màu sắc, bé rất là thích.(P8)

As far as I know, language learning, i.e: Finnish or English from kindergarten up till primary is largely based on games. For example: simple games like looking for letter or blending letters which can help children learn much, not necessarily the rote and passive learning like in Viet Nam. The learning materials are also very eye-catching for children. My child enjoys this way of learning a lot. (P8)

The most child-friendly approach to teach languages in general and English in particular in Finland as perceived by this parent is using lots of games. Teaching children is specialized in a way that it does not necessarily requires so-called mechanical drills that can be boring sometimes (as when she compared with teaching approach in Viet Nam). Instead fun games can enhance the child's learning motivation and language memory. Another parent (P4) also stressed on the role of diverse activities at class:

Điều giúp học hiệu quả tiếng Anh là phương pháp dạy của giáo viên. Giáo viên Phần Lan biết cách làm cho tiết học tiếng Anh thú vị, khơi dậy sự hứng khởi của học sinh, từ cách dạy từ mới, đồ nhau, chơi trò chơi, đi ra khỏi lớp học chứ không ngồi một chỗ, chia lớp thành các nhóm nhỏ để làm việc nhóm. Cách dạy của họ làm cho học sinh vừa ganh đua, vừa vui mà lại vừa học được (P4).

Effective English learning chiefly relies on teaching methods. Finnish teachers know how to make English lesson more engaging, motivating and efficient by applying different activities like games, quizzes, group work or group rotation, etc. These teaching methods make student compete while lessons become fun and educational as well. (P4)

In a more specific manner, this parent thought of appropriate teaching as differentiating activities which definitely makes engaging lessons and motivating pupils. Much surely that when various activities are introduced, pupils with various learning style are likely to achieve.

4.1.4.5 External motivation indicates children are rewarded based on their performance. The following parent (P5) realized that young children sometimes need physical rewards to keep on their learning:

Việc cô giáo có thể tạo hứng thú cho học sinh học tiếng Anh cũng quan trọng. Chị nghĩ trẻ con cũng cần được tạo cảm hứng để học tiếng Anh một cách vui vẻ, kiểu học mà không hẳn là học. Chị nhớ có lần con chị khoe là cô giáo hứa nếu bạn nào nào học giỏi nhất, cô giáo chọn ra 4 bạn thì cô sẽ cho mỗi bạn một cuốn sách tiếng Anh để hè mang về đọc giống như một giải thưởng. Thế là chúng nó đua nhau để đạt giải thưởng (P5)

It's important for English teachers to trigger learning motivation. Indeed, children also need inspiration to learn English. There was a time the English teacher promised to give English books as rewards to four best students at the end of semester. The rewards indeed make children more motivated and inspired in learning the language (P5).

The idea of external motivation like giving reward is essentially important to young children. Once they are not yet independent learners then rewardings like English book keep them motivated. More importantly, a gift like an English book can help the child gradually become more autonomous in their learning. Thus, one act of rewarding yet serving two purposes.

Summary and discussion for sub-theme four. This sub-theme presents parents' thoughts about what might lead to learning English effectively. For them the ideas of learning through natural and informal exposure to media, TV or Internet, together with the real-life chances are rated as the most productive ways to learn the language. They are followed by personal hard-work and appropriate teaching methods given by teachers. Last but not least, external motivation like rewarding is significantly crucial for young children who are becoming more independent learners. As such, it is quite obvious that Vietnamese parents put particular emphasis on natural exposure. They consider daily exposure, for example: watching films or listening to music in English, or more "authentic" opportunities like travelling and studying exchange abroad, etc., as effective ways for children to acquire English naturally. From

parents' point of view, the ultimate purpose of English learning is more likely to serve for real-life communication, thus learning English whether under formal instruction at schools or informal exposure at home should fulfill this goal. This perspective of Vietnamese parents quite resembles with that of parents in Asian EFL contexts in the way that they both expect their children learn English in an authentic environment and able to orally communicate and have meaningful interaction is far more crucial than doing language exercises.

4.2 Parental opinions toward English education at Finnish primary schools

The second research question: “*What are parents’ opinions and viewpoints regarding English learning and teaching at Finnish schools?*” aims to explore parents’ thoughts and experiences about English teaching and Finnish teachers who are teaching English under the context of primary schools. Research question # 3 will be answered under these 3 sub-categories:

Table 4.2. Summary of subcategories for research question # 2.

4.2.1. General patterns found related to English learning at Finnish primary schools.

4.2.2. The image of English teachers at Finnish schools

4.2.3. The “Trust” toward Finnish teachers and schools.

4.2.1. General patterns found related to English learning at Finnish primary schools.

The common patterns of opinions can be found among Vietnamese parents are being satisfied with children English learning. The attitude is generally emerged throughout parental accounts; however is specifically expressed in the following:

Tiếng Anh của thằng nhóc thì chị thấy hài lòng nói chung, chị thấy thế cũng đủ rồi không có đòi hỏi gì khác. (P1) | *Generally, I am satisfied with my child’s English learning. The teaching and learning are sufficient for his English learning at schools. (P1)*

Bây giờ các cô đã làm rất tốt, so với cái expect hay mong muốn của chị như vậy là đạt rồi, không có yêu cầu hơn (P2) | *What the teachers are doing at school is beyond my expectation (P2)*

Nhưng mà theo chị thấy thì hệ thống giáo dục Phần Lan là rất tốt rồi vì theo những người chị biết có con lớn rồi thì tiếng Anh tụi nó giỏi lắm, nói như người Mỹ, nó phát âm rất là chuẩn, mới có 13, 14 tuổi gì đó là nói với nhau rất là chuẩn rồi (P8) | *Finnish education is very good. I know that my friends’ children at upper grades are very good at English, especially at speaking and pronunciation skill. They can speak English fluently at the age of 13 or 14. (P8)*

When expressing satisfaction toward English education at Finnish schools, parents tend to give lots of compliments as mentioned above. Nevertheless, it seems like when taking personal experiences into consideration, parents have more basis to add their opinions:

Chị thấy cô giáo không cho viết tập nhiều từ tiếng Anh vì trên lớp không có nhiều thời gian. Vấn đề là mình phải tự học ở nhà chứ trên trường thầy cô giáo giảng rồi giao bài tập về nhà chứ không có chỉ cho cách nào để học thuộc từ, vậy nên ở nhà chị kêu nó tự học bằng cách viết tập từ nhiều lần (P5)

I know the chance for practicing English vocabulary in class is limited due to the lack of time. English teachers can only give basic introduction within the given time at class but not the methods of how to remember new vocabulary. That's why I ask my child to learn vocabulary by keep writing those for several times. (P5)

Thời gian học tiếng anh trên lớp một tuần có 1 hay 2 tiếng không có nhiều vậy nên thành ra phim ảnh cũng rất là quan trọng cho mấy đứa nhỏ học ngôn ngữ tiếng Anh á. Về nhà làm bài tập thì cũng chỉ từng ấy thôi còn đâu là nó tiếp xúc nhiều hơn qua games, phim hoạt hình, qua những cái đó nó học nhiều lắm đó (P1)

Learning time is not much with just 1 or 2 hours per week. And homework is also limited in checking certain things learnt at schools. That is to say, the most exposed environment comes from games, movies and he can learn a lot from that exposures. (P1)

It seems like both parents (P1 and P5) agreed on the restricted amount of time dedicated for English at school. While one parent (P5) found that the limited time for English in class has not allowed teacher to provide sufficient methods for learning vocabulary, another parent (P1) admitted the restricted in-contact teaching was not sufficient for the child to acquire languages but the daily exposures, e.g: games, movies did play a big role.

Interestingly, although both of them mentioned about the restricted amount of time in class, they did not seem to insert much concern if such thing could influence toward their children's learning. The explanation possibly resonates with other parent's observation:

Ở đây chúng nó học rất mở, như là nói chuyện, trò chơi hay là có chủ đề nào đó và nói theo chủ đề đó thôi. Cứ tự nhiên chém gió như thế hay lắm. Chị thấy chúng nó cũng chẳng cần học nhiều, sách vở bài tập cũng ít làm 5 phút là xong rồi mà kiểm tra vẫn cứ tốt hết (P6)

The learning activities at class are much about games, topic-based conversation. So they learn mostly through oral practice. I see that the learning is not heavily textbook-based and homework is so few that it can be finished within 5 minutes. Despite such "relaxing" learning style, they are still able to do well in the exams.(P6)

Parents are much aware that time for learning at class and homework is so few. However, this should not restrain the children from having a good English performance because they are frequently exposed to English through non-classroom settings, i.e: media, Internet, movies, etc.

Additionally, parents' thoughts about English education are associated with the type of schools their children are attending. One parent was able to see the difference between the two schools where different amount of money were invested into education:

Hồi trước học ở trường cũ chị thấy bạn bè ít trao đổi bài tập và nói chuyện với nhau nên việc học có vẻ xao nhãng. Sang trường mới chị thấy cô giáo quan tâm và nói rằng các bạn trong lớp cũng nói chuyện trao đổi với nhau nên tinh thần học tập cũng cao hơn. Cái khu Kauniainen là khu con nhà giàu nên nó dành mọi điều kiện tốt cho con cái, từ chương trình học đến việc đầu tư cho bọn trẻ con tự học, tự tìm hiểu và update nên thành ra bọn trẻ ở đây nói tiếng Anh và tiếng Thụy Điển cũng khác hơn với cùng tuổi ở trường khác. Trường này được xếp là một trong những trường tốt nhất ở Phần Lan đấy. (P7)

In the old school learning seemed to be neglected because there is few group work or discussion among pupils. In contrast, more attentions are paid to learning, for example there are more groupworks that helps to boost up learning motivation in the new school. Kauniainen is such a rich city that more financial investment can be put for education which explains more innovative learning approach in comparision with the previous schools. For example: I can see the more outstanding features in terms of curriculum, teaching methods that encourage learning autonomy. As a result, children at this school are more different with those in other schools. This school is ranked as one of the best school in Finland. (P7)

This parent (P7) whose child attended two various schools compared how teaching approaches differ due to the financial resource. According to her, schools with more financial resources are likely to offer a wide array of facilities that support teaching and learning. Teachers' method in this school tends to be more innovative and encourage learning autonomy. Furthermore, she acknowledged ranking existed among Finnish schools and proudly concluded that pupil in higher-ranking school would be able to have more outstanding English performance.

To sum up, the majority of parents feel satisfied about their children's current English education in Finnish schools. There is a noticeable comment from one parent (P7) who saw the English education closely connected with the ranking status and financial resources.

4.2.2. The image of English language teachers at Finnish schools.

The images of English language teachers through parental lenses are characterized by four elements: strong pedagogical skills, followed by ability to understand pupils' psychology and positive traits, and finally their alike-native pronunciation.

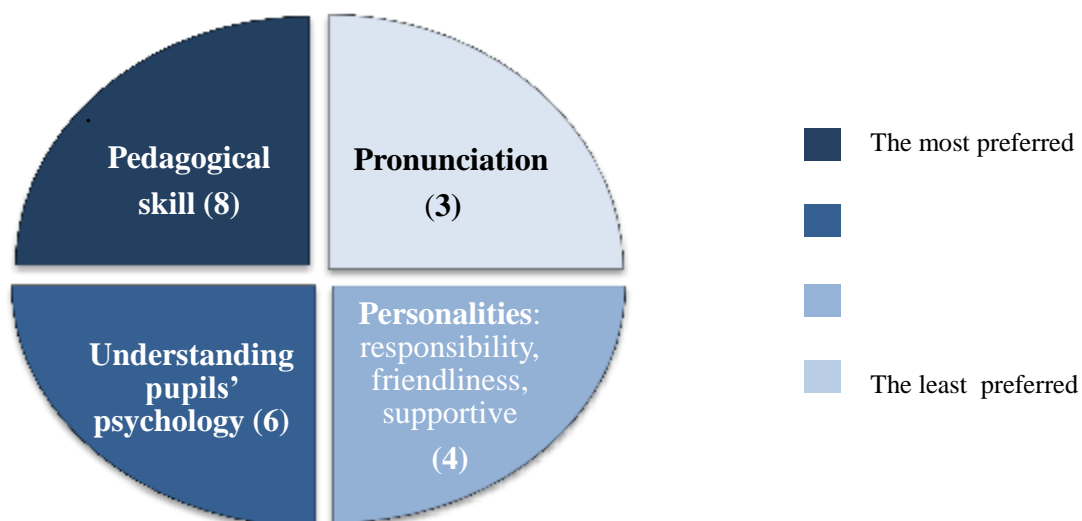


Figure 4.4. Image of English language teachers at Finnish primary schools.

4.2.2.1 Pedagogical skills: The impression about how strong pedagogy English teachers was expressed among the large majority of parents. By featuring this element, it means that an English teacher is able to motivate pupils' learning:

Việc cô giáo có thể tạo hứng thú cho học sinh học tiếng Anh cũng quan trọng. Chị nghĩ trẻ con cũng cần được tạo cảm hứng để học tiếng Anh một cách vui vẻ, kiểu học mà không hẳn là học. Chị nhớ có lần con chị khoe là cô giáo hứa nếu bạn nào nào học giỏi nhất, cô giáo chọn ra 4 bạn thì cô sẽ cho mỗi bạn một cuốn sách tiếng Anh để hè mang về đọc giống như một giải thưởng. Thế là chúng nó đua nhau để đạt giải thưởng (P5)

It's important for English teachers to trigger learning motivation in students. Indeed, children also need inspiration to learn English. There was a time the English teacher promised to give English books as rewards to four best students at the end of semester. The rewards indeed make children more motivated and inspired in learning the language (P5).

This parent deemed giving external reward as an effective ways to motivate children's learning. It is crucial trait that should be possessed by teachers with strong pedagogy skill. Another parent (P10) could not help herself exclaiming how happy she was when their children's teachers have such good pedagogical ability:

Chị cảm thấy rất may mắn vì hầu như những người dạy con chị đều có trình độ sư phạm rất tốt. Thầy giáo chủ nhiệm bây giờ của con chị có trình độ sư phạm rất cao, cách xử lý tình huống, cách họ quan sát, lên chương trình và chú trọng vào những cái mới và cập nhật thường xuyên cho phụ huynh biết. Ví dụ như bây giờ thầy bảo sẽ đưa tiền vào giảng dạy, chị thấy đó cũng là một cách hay để dạy cháu về thực tế, hay việc đưa cờ vua vào giảng dạy. Nói chung chị thấy họ luôn luôn tìm tòi để hướng tới một kết quả tốt nhất. Cái thứ 2 họ theo hướng của

giáo dục Phần Lan là phát triển theo cá nhân, nghĩa là họ sẽ cố gắng quan sát để xem học sinh này cần phát triển thêm về cái gì, đương nhiên là vẫn dưới một cái dàn chung. (P10)

I feel very lucky because all my children's teachers are highly qualified. The teacher at English preschool has a good pedagogical competence, which can be proven by how he handles pedagogical situation, plans syllabus or constantly updates the teaching methods. For example: he has planned to teach about money or include chess as an official subject – which I find very practical and useful. Generally they always experiment all possibilities to make the best learning outcome. Another thing is that they focus on individual development but still following national curriculum. (P10)

Through the eyes of parent 10, teachers with good pedagogy are not hesitant to introduce new ways of teachings. What they aim is to make learning as practical as possible and find ways to develop children's potentials. The outcome of this experiment is yet to come; however parent do appreciate teachers' open mindset to new ideas and that makes the most desirable trait in a good teacher. Besides that, parent also highlights flexibility as an important trait of an effective teacher:

Chị nghĩ điều quan trọng nhất của người giáo viên là sự mềm dẻo trong giảng dạy. Trình độ không phải bạn nào cũng giống nhau, ví dụ nếu nó không học được thì không thể bắt nó làm đúng theo cái giáo trình cô giáo đã lập ra. Ví dụ khi cô giáo yêu cầu thuyết trình trước lớp nhưng có bạn xấu hổ không muốn nói trước lớp thì cô giáo sẽ mềm dẻo lôi kéo những khán giả thân thuộc với nó nhất ra một góc khác để nó có thể bộc lộ khả năng. Cái buổi hôm đó chị và cô giáo tiếng Anh phải nói rằng các em có biết các em nói rất hay, phát âm tiếng Anh rất chuẩn. Lúc đó mình vừa khen vừa khích lệ để tăng sự tự tin. Ngày xưa chị nghĩ thầy cô giỏi là phải nói tiếng Anh hay như người Mỹ người Anh nhưng bây giờ chị thấy phương pháp mới là cái quan trọng. (P4)

I think the most important factor of a teacher is flexibility. It's impossible for all pupils with different abilities to follow the same teaching plan. For example if the plan is to ask pupils to present in front of the class and some pupils are too shy to do it, then the teacher flexibly allows those pupils to speak in another room, with only some close friends as "audience". At the end, I and the English teacher gave compliments and encouragement to those pupils. I used to think that good English teachers must have native-like accent and pronunciation, but now I believe that flexibility in method is the crucial key.(P4)

One parent (P4) has a hands-on experience as an assistant at Finnish primary school, thus she is able to observe how flexible the teachers are during English lesson. In case if pupils refused presenting in front of the class due to being shy and if teacher compromised with their wishes, then possibly those shy ones will miss the chance to equally learn and fail to understand about their own abilities. That is to say, teacher's flexibility in handling classroom

situation has encouraged pupils' confidence. In order to acquire this quality teacher must have such good understanding about pupils' psychology also.

4.2.2.2 Understand pupils' psychology. For parents, good English teachers should not only be competent at delivering effective method at her subject but they should understand pupils' psychology generally. It means that good English teacher should persuade with reasonings rather than enforcing:

Ở tuổi này tụi nó ít khi nghe lời lắm, mình nói thì phải dịu dàng, giải thích để nó nghe chứ mình ra lệnh là nó không có nghe. Con chị bây giờ cũng hay cãi lại lắm. Vậy nên giáo viên cũng cần hiểu được tâm lý của tụi nhỏ ở tuổi này. (P5).

Children at this development stage starts to become independent; hence they prefer reasonable explanation rather than "being forced" to listen. My child now starts to argue a lot about different things. That is why I think it's important for teacher to understand about children's psychological development. (P5)

Moreover, it is essential for teachers to understand pupils' fear for making mistakes, hence aiming at "trail-and-error" learning environment:

Chị thích một hình mẫu thầy cô giáo trẻ trung, có khả năng tạo tình huống giúp học sinh cảm thấy cởi mở và không có sợ sệt khi học. Khi học sinh nó sợ nó đâu dám nói. Như chị ngày xưa học tiếng Anh vừa nhát vừa sợ sai nên chẳng bao giờ nói. (P2)

I prefer the image of my child's current English teachers now. She is able to create situation which makes pupils engage in learning and feel non-stressful. Once the pupils feel stressful of making mistakes, they will be unable to speak. This is what I have experienced when learning English in the past (P2)

Many parents would expect teachers not only being good at pedagogical methods but also have strong knowledge about developmental psychology like mentioned by parent 5. Surely parents are aware of teaching English as not only duty for teachers, but equally important it is how they handle the changes related to children's psychological development. Parent 2 emphasized that it is important for teachers to put themselves in position of learners so that they can understand their difficulty learning a foreign language. With such psychological and pedagogical competence, teachers are more likely to send the message that mistake is a natural part of learning a language and pupils should feel no serious about making mistakes at learning.

4.2.2.3 Personalities. Other traits which parents prefer from English teachers can be named as responsibility, friendliness, supportive. Some parents admitted that they have never been in direct contact with English teachers, thus hardly could give any comments about this issue. Nonetheless, they were able to extend their wishes about an ideal English teacher:

Chị thấy rằng quan trọng là khi tiếp xúc với một cô giáo cách cô giáo tỏ ra thân thiện hay cách nói giải thích dễ hiểu và nhiệt tình giúp đỡ (P3).| *Being friendly and supportive as well as able to explain well are important things that I first notice in a teacher (P3).*

Chị thấy khi đi họp phụ huynh hay con mình đi học cũng rất thoải mái vì nó cảm thấy thầy cô thân thiện giống như người thân ý, không có nhiều khoảng cách hoặc là gì đấy thì chị thấy cái đó rất là hay (P9)

I can see how friendly the teachers are when attending parent meeting or through my child's account. I do not feel any distant with teacher at all. (P9)

Showing friendliness is seen as important given parents' status as foreign parents. The friendly manner that is expected by one parent (P3) while experienced by another parent (P9) much likely creates the mutual, supportive basis for home-school communication. Many parents also appreciate the responsibility and support, particularly toward slower-pace learners. As stated:

Mỗi đứa trẻ có trình độ nhận thức khác nhau, có đứa nhanh có đứa chậm thì những đứa chậm cô giáo sẽ luôn giúp đỡ và chú tâm để em bé có thể hoàn thành chương trình mà cha mẹ không phải lo lắng gì. Chị biết cái đấy là chung của Phần Lan rồi. (P9)

Each child has his/her own pace of learning, some are slow and others are fast. For the slow ones, teachers always give supports so that they can catch up with the whole class. It's nothing much parents have to worry about it because teachers are aware of their own responsibilities. It's a popular thing in all Finnish schools (P9)

Ở đây người giáo viên khi học dạy á là họ có tinh thần trách nhiệm và bổn phận của người ta dạy học sinh phải đủ tiêu chuẩn và khả năng tới đó là học sinh phải biết hết còn đứa nào mà kém quá thì người ta sẽ tìm cách kèm thêm chứ không phải người ta cứ bỏ lơ nó muốn học sao thì học (P1)

Teachers here assume high sense of responsibility, thus they are committed to teach pupils to national standard and his/her potentials. No pupils no matter how weak/slow they are will be left behind. (P1)

The personalities such as friendliness, supportive or responsibility can be referred as the nature of teachers as person, but rather can be seen as teachers' own perception about their jobs and duties under the context of Finnish education and society.

4.2.2.4 Pronunciation. A 30% minority also mentioned that it is crucial for English teachers to have good pronunciation:

Ngoài các yếu tố như điện tử, internet hay truyền hình cáp các thứ thì các thầy cô giáo bên này dạy phát âm đúng chuẩn của bọn Anh luôn chứ không phải phát âm là người Việt Nam. Mình so sánh vậy thôi. Khi chị nói tiếng Anh với con chị ấy nó bảo sao mẹ nói tiếng Anh buồn cười thế. (P7)

Apart from factors such as internet, games or cable TV that expose the child to English environment, teacher's pronunciation does play a part. Compared to English teachers in Vietnam, English teachers in Finland have more native-like accent and pronunciation. My son used to tease me when I spoke English. (P7)

This parent (P7) acknowledged that her son has a more native-like accent than her. One of the contributing factors is that his pronunciation has been influenced by his English teacher with native-like accent. She realized that whereas English teacher in Finland might have more native accent, the counterparts in Viet Nam might not. This is also a feature of an English teacher that she is impressed about. Other parent (P8) also shared the same opinion about this aspect:

Chị nghĩ việc tiếp xúc sớm với laptop, ipad trong trường giúp mở rộng giao lưu, nói chuyện với thế giới bên ngoài. Ngoài các yếu tố này thì thầy cô giáo phát âm rất chuẩn thành ra dạy học sinh phát âm cũng rất chuẩn. (P8).

There are several things helps to enhance English ability, for example: early exposure to laptop, ipad has enabled worldwide communication that utilizes English as a main tool. Other than that, teachers who have precise pronunciation also can teach their pupils pronounce correctly as well. (P8).

She also noticed the influence of teachers' native accent toward her daughter and acknowledged it as a necessary part of an English teacher. Both interviewed parents (P7 and P8) complimented on teachers' ability to vocalize sound-like English accent and emphasized this as more outstanding features of English teachers in Finland compared to the counterparts in Viet Nam.

4.2.3. The “Trust” toward Finnish teachers and schools.

There is no question asking about trust directly but it has been emerged when parents recalled their experiences with teachers or their children using English, i.e: travelling, interacting with foreign friends or using English as medium language. In general, the theme of trust arises and has been concretized under three aspects. Each aspect has also been counted to generate the frequencies so that it can show where parents are likely to put trust the most.

Order of introducing English and other FL is reasonable (3)

Knowledge provided at school is sufficient for the children, hence no extra learning needed (4)

Multilingual learning can be made possible with teachers' pedagogical skills and competences (4)

TRUST TOWARD FINNISH TEACHERS AND SCHOOL SYSTEM

Figure 4.5: Level of trust shown in parents' viewpoints.

4.2.3.1 Parental trust is shown in how they agree with the schools about the starting age for learning English.

Chị hiểu về giáo dục Phần Lan nên chị không có giống các bà mẹ Việt Nam khác. Chị không có chuẩn bị bất kỳ cái gì trước cho các con cả, chị luôn tin tưởng vào giáo dục Phần Lan và các thầy cô. Vậy nên từ tiếng Phần Lan, tiếng Anh hay tiếng Pháp chị chưa bao giờ nghĩ là sẽ phải cho các con chơi hay học trước khi nó chính thức học ở trường cả thành ra 2 đứa con của chị không hề có một sự chuẩn bị nào hết. Đứa lớn của chị theo chương trình cũ thì bắt đầu học tiếng Anh từ năm lớp 3 còn đứa nhỏ thì chính thức học tiếng Anh từ năm lớp 2 vừa rồi. (P4)

I've got to learn about about Finnish education thanks to my experience working at Finnish schools. I always believe in Finnish schools and teachers. Hence, I see there is no need to pre-teach or to "play" with language or anything to prepare my children for school in any languages, i.e: Finnish, English or French. My older and younger children started English at grade 3 and grade 2, respectively. (P4)

Thực ra nếu ở Việt Nam thì chị cũng đợi đúng chương trình của nó để học ở trường ấy chứ không cho đi học trước đâu. Theo chị không phải đơn giản mà bộ giáo dục ra quyết định học TA từ năm nào vì người ta cũng nghiên cứu rất kỹ rồi nên mình không cần thiết phải đi trước kể cả quan điểm cho con học chữ trước thì chị thấy cũng không cần thiết (P6)

Regardless of staying in Finland or VietNam, I find the starting age for English introduced by schools acceptable. I think the decision regarding when English should start at schools have been thoroughly studied by Ministry of Education, therefore it is not necessary to pre-teach or anything about it. (P6)

These two parents (P4 and P6) are two representatives who expressed trust in schools' decision about starting age. In parent 4's case, her strong statement "*I always believe in Finnish schools and teachers*" truly reflects what she trusts and how it can be translated into her action "*no need to pre-teach or to "play" with language*" prior to formal school. Likewise, the parent (P6) found a good reason to follow the school's timeline because it has been carefully studied. It is quite obvious to see that parents expressed trust not only toward schools and teachers but the educational system.

4.2.3.2 Parents put trust on the sufficient knowledge delivered by teachers at schools, hence there is no need for extra learning.

Upon asking the question: "Do you think it is sufficient for your children to learn English at school?", parents' responses has communicated the trust they put on teachers and schools:

Chị thấy giáo dục ở đây thì không có gì phàn nàn, chị thấy trên trường có nhiều yếu tố khác nhau là dạy đầy đủ hết: nấu nướng, dọn dẹp vệ sinh, đi vào rừng tìm tòi, thể thao, văn nghệ, ngôn ngữ toán, địa lý, nói chung là ngoài cuộc sống có gì thì trong trường dạy hết. Về sau kiến thức càng lên lớp cao càng khó hơn nhưng mà họ cũng sắp xếp hết rồi nên chị cũng rất là tin tưởng ở nhà trường ở đây. (P1)

There is nothing to complain about the schools or education system in Finland. What is necessary for practical lives have been all introduced through school subjects, for example: cooking, exploring nature, sports, arts, maths, and languages. The knowledge can be more difficult at upper grades, but I believe that the curriculum has been properly scheduled so that the children can gradually learn. (P1)

From the general experience of the child's learning at school, one parent (P1) believed that whatever skills or knowledge are introduced is to match with their practical needs; therefore learning under teachers' instructions at schools is adequate for the children. The belief is applied to all subjects and English is not an exception.

Hiện nay việc học tiếng Anh ở trường vậy là tốt rồi chị cũng không có nhu cầu nhiều vì chị muốn con học một cách tự nhiên thôi chứ không muốn ép buộc hay muốn con thành giỏi xuất sắc cho nên nó tiếp thu đc chừng nào thì tốt chừng đó còn nó học đờ cũng không sao, đối với chị là như vậy. Bây giờ các cô đã làm rất tốt so với mong muốn của chị. (P2)

What my child is learning at school now is sufficient for her. I prefer my child to learn what is sufficient for her, not to expect my child become outstanding by learning much more than that. What the teachers are doing is beyond my expectation now. (P2)

Other parent (P2) shared the similar thought with previous parent that what are being taught at school now is sufficient for the children to absorb. It is also appropriate with her child's cognitive development. Therefore, definitely parents have no reasons to worry about if extra English teaching is needed for their children.

4.2.3.3 Multilingual learning can be made possible thanks to teachers' pedagogical skills and broader social context. In following lines, one parent (P8) responded to the question of suitable age for starting English:

Chị không có quan điểm cá nhân vì chị tin tưởng giáo viên và hệ thống giáo dục ở đây. Lên lớp 1 tuy chưa bắt đầu học ngoại ngữ liền nhưng chị cũng cứ theo thầy cô giáo vì chị tin tưởng thầy cô giáo và hệ thống giáo dục ở đây theo sát việc học lẫn tâm lý của con mình. Đến khi được chọn thêm ngoại ngữ thì thầy cô giáo sẽ tư vấn nếu bé học được thì cứ đăng ký cho học thêm ngoại ngữ. Nếu thầy cô nói bé yếu chưa có khả năng học thêm ngoại ngữ thì mình không cho nhưng đa số giáo viên ở đây họ khuyến khích học ngoại ngữ chứ không có cấm. (P8)

I do not have any personal opinions because I trust teachers and schools in Finland. It does not matter that children do not start English even in grade 1 because I trust teachers and schools. Teachers will also give advice whether the child is ready to learn more languages. If s/he is yet ready, of course I should listen to the teachers. Nevertheless, learning different languages are much encouraged by teachers. (P8)

This parent constantly repeated that she puts trust on teachers & schools in encouraging multilingual learning. Normally, parents might end up with worrisome if their children need to learn extra optional languages while basic languages are yet solid. Parent 8, by contrast, thought that it should not be any problematic because teachers in Finland prioritize exposure

to different languages. It is hardly the chance that teachers will restrain their pupils, at least from exposing to other languages given the reason that pupils need to be excellent at Finnish or English first. The attitude of worry-free can be explained by parental trust toward the qualified teachers that can give support for slow pupils or deliver appropriate teaching methods.

Perspective about their children learning multi-languages also appears like:

Chị tin là với môi trường học ở Phần Lan, với sự khuyến khích của các cô giáo và môi trường đa ngôn ngữ hiện nay thì chắc chắn chị nghĩ nó sẽ yêu thích học ngôn ngữ chứ sẽ không cảm thấy đây là áp lực. Chị nghĩ là vậy và chị có một niềm tin rất là lớn vào hệ thống giáo dục Phần Lan vì chị biết học sinh Phần Lan nói được rất nhiều ngôn ngữ. (P9)

I believe that my child will develop the love, not pressure for different languages. It is thanks to a more diverse society and teachers' encouragement. I strongly believe that Finnish education system has been doing a good job at promoting multilingualism at schools.

Like many other parents, this parent (P9) is significantly optimistic about the perspective that her daughter can learn several languages apart from English. It can be realized from not only this parent 9 but all parents that multilingualism will be made enjoyable to young pupils by using appropriate methods. Consequently, parents seem to have nothing much to worry about the number of language learning because they entirely put trust on teachers in Finnish schools.

Summary and discussion research question #2: “What are parents’ opinions and viewpoints regarding English education at Finnish schools?”

The answers to this question include three sub-themes: firstly, it is the general patterns of attitudes found related to English learning at Finnish schools: all parents are satisfied with their children’s English learning at school as well as with the English language teachers. Secondly, it is the image of English language teachers at Finnish schools, emerging directly from parents’ experiences or their ideal image. The seemingly complete picture of a teacher can be depicted with four elements. The most desirable trait is having strong pedagogical skill which can be translated as ability to motivate learners, to be innovative in teaching approach and to be flexible at managing class activities. The second trait emphasized by 6 out of 9 parents is ability to understand pupils’ psychology. Teachers’ ability is not only limited to language teaching but also to understand pupils psychologically then give right support. Other personalities are also listed such as responsibility, friendliness and supportive. Pronunciation is the last (but not least) piece that parents would highlight in a teacher. The

third theme is all about trust parents have toward teachers and schools. The trust is manifested in different ways. By agreeing with the starting timeline for English, parents show trust toward school programme. By requiring no extra class, parents believe that knowledge provided at school is sufficient for the children. And in spite of little concern about obstacles related to learning several languages, parents whose trust is put on teachers and their expertise believe that multilingual learning can be made possible.

As oppose to the urge of starting English at kindergarten level or earlier, Vietnamese parents in Finland appear to be much more relaxed about their children starting age (e.g: at grade 2 or 3). This attitude could possibly be justified by the trust they put on teachers and schools. Nevertheless, how could Vietnamese parents develop the trust toward language teachers in particular and Finnish education system in general? The answer might not be simply found in a single explanation; yet within the scope of this study, it can be hypothesized that trust could be built based on two factors: the fame of PISA results, and the high-qualified teachers that parents depict (which will be presented in the section 6.2.2). In three successive years of 2000, 2003 and 2006 witnessed the top performance of 15-year-old Finnish pupils in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) (see <https://minedu.fi/en/pisa-2009-en>), which undeniably contributes to the fame of Finnish education. Without much doubt this fame has positively influenced how parents put trust toward teachers and school system in Finland. And it has been well-acknowledged that teachers with their high expertise play the crucial role within Finnish educational system. As Kantelinen & Hildén (2016, p. 168) have remarked that it is necessary for English language teachers to acquire both qualifications as class teachers and subject teachers in order to teach English at primary level in Finland. Indeed, while class teachers are specialized at teaching young learners, subject teachers have expertise at linguistic skills; therefore dual qualifications allow teachers to be competent at both linguistic and pedagogical knowledge. As a result it is understandable why parents have such high appreciation toward teachers who have strong teaching methods and ability to understanding pupils' psychology.

Admittedly, the theme of trust found among Vietnamese participants is considered the most significant as it has resonated with the culture of trust not only in education field but - like commented by Sahlberg (2015) in his book "Finnish lesson 2.0" – has existed within Finnish society where Finns put trust on authorities and government in general. Up to this, it is interesting to reflect about the issue from the perspectives of parents living in Asian EFL countries. Though English is not officially introduced or in some countries English teaching is even banned until grade 3, it is reasonable to claim that it will be taught at some point, just

as similarly as it is in Finland at grade 3 (under the old curriculum before 2016) and grade 1 (as the most updated national curriculum 2016). The point is that by sooner or later English will be introduced to children roughly at age 2 or 3, therefore why adding more “workload” of another foreign language (i.e: English) to children while they are in more need for mother tongue language? In such mentioned Asian EFL settings, the mindset of so-called “the sooner the better” is likely to be justified by the reasons, for instance: social status, school readiness, pronunciation pick-up or simply following the trend (of sending children to English class early) might help reveal a part of the answer. Another part can be explained in terms of trust. It is unknown to what extent trust is put toward teachers and schools in Asian EFL contexts, yet when more parents seek English teaching for their children earlier at private classes or language centers, it should be quite certain that the level of trust remains low toward English instruction program, or broadly speaking, toward teachers and school systems.

4.3. Parental hopes and expectations regarding English language education at Finnish schools.

The third research question: “*What are their hopes and wishes about English language education at Finnish school?*” aim to find out what areas of English parents wish for their children at Finnish school and if parents propose any suggestions to make English learning any better for their children.

In general parents are satisfied with programme, teaching methods and their child’s English learning at schools. There are few wishes which they find necessary depending on their own child’s situation. Parents’ wishes are related to authentic linguistic experience for their children as well as a teaching programme that balances various linguistic skills. In short, three subcategories of wishes and hopes have been mentioned by parents:



Figure 4.6. Hopes and wishes of parents about their children’s English learning.

4.3.1 It seems like apart from being exposed to authentic English in Internet, movies or media parents do highlight the importance of authentic “people to people” interaction. The majority

of their wishes centered on opportunities that their children can put language learning in real-life communication:

Nếu có cơ hội thì chị cũng muốn nó trải nghiệm cuộc sống ở nước ngoài để dùng Tiếng Anh nhiều hơn, ví dụ đi Mỹ hoặc Anh là nơi tiếng Anh được sử dụng hoàn toàn ở khắp mọi nơi còn đi trong các nước Châu Âu thì chỉ sài tiếng Anh với nhóm người nào đó hoặc người làm chung thôi. (P1) | *If possible, I expect my son to experience life in English native speaking countries like USA or England. If he stays in Europe then English usage is just limited within certain group of people. (P1)*

Chị muốn sau này nó lớn có thể tham gia kiều trao đổi học sinh với nhau đó thì cái đó nó bắt buộc nó phải biết rồi. Ví dụ ở Phần Lan trao đổi với Mỹ chẳng hạn thì ít nhất Tiếng Anh nó phải biết giỏi để qua bên đó nó còn tiếp xúc với người ta. (P5) | *I would like my son go exchange in other countries, for instance in the USA. In order to do it, he needs to learn English well from now. (P5)*

Thì chắc chắn là thực hành nhiều hơn, cho nhau nhiều khóa học đi chơi á, giả dụ như là ở cấp 2 bọn nó có trao đổi sinh viên ấy. Ví dụ em học tiếng Pháp thì em được sang Pháp 1 tuần và ở nhà một người nào đó chỉ để nói tiếng Pháp thôi. Hoặc sẽ được chọn đi Anh ở nhà bạn nào đó trong vòng 1 tuần. Kiểu như trao đổi học sinh. (P7). | *Definitely I would like my son practice language more in, for example: exchange programme in other countries. If he learns French he can visit and stay in a French family for a week. Of if he studies English he can go exchange in England. (P7)*

Chị cũng muốn về sau tầm khi con 14 tuổi sẽ đăng ký và nhà trường sẽ chọn ra khoảng 10-20 đưa đi trao đổi các chương trình ở nước ngoài để được thực tập nói chuyện này nọ. (P8) | *I expect my child to join exchange programme when she is around 14 years old. I know schools in Finland organize such program for child.*

It is shown that nearly half of parents expect their children to experience both language and life in English speaking countries. Study exchange in English native speaking family is considered ideal goal for their children when they get upper grades.

4.3.2 Some parents proposed to have extra culture-related activities at schools:

Ngày trước con gái lớn của chị được tiếp xúc với tiếng Anh qua các câu lạc bộ ở trường cũng như trường cháu học là trường thực tập của giáo viên nên có nhiều sinh viên quốc tế. Bây giờ với con trai bé thì lại không được như vậy nên bây giờ bé nhỏ chỉ được học trên lớp hoặc tiếp xúc với các bài hát trên mạng thôi. Nếu có môi trường để tương tác nói thường xuyên thì sẽ tốt hơn (P4)

My older daughter used to expose to English through English club or international students visiting school but my younger son rarely got that chance now. He only got exposed to English through internet or at class. So it would be better if there are such environments for my son to interact with (P4)

Việc học ngôn ngữ là mình phải trực tiếp tiếp xúc với người ta, với văn hóa và con người đó thì nó sẽ hiệu quả hơn rất là nhiều. Chị rất mong là họ có tổ chức thăm quan như thế để các bé vừa biết được ngôn ngữ vừa biết được đất nước đó như thế nào, con người ra làm sao. (P9)

Learning language also means being exposure to people and culture; therefore I expect the school will organize more practice events which allow children to mingle into the real-life culture and people who speak that language. (P9).

As previously mentioned (see section 6.1.1), the concept of English is not restricted to the language lesson but also linked to people with diverse ways of living and thinking. At least for now parents expect schools to organize more activities related to cultural diversity through the means of English language.

4.3.3. Based on her observation, one parent (P2) was able to recognize what her children might need to improve and suggested what school can do to give support:

Bây giờ các cô đã làm rất tốt so với mong muốn của chị rồi. Tuy nhiên nếu được đề suất học thêm thì chị nghĩ có thể tổ chức câu lạc bộ tiếng anh để bé dạn dĩ hơn. Ở đây bé nói tiếng Anh nhưng vẫn ngại chủ yếu là nói tiếng Phần. Rồi con chị bị hạn chế về viết và đọc nên nếu có các club về reading hoặc writing gì đó để con chị tham gia. Càng nhiều hoạt động càng tốt nhưng phải làm các hoạt động thú vị vì con nít rất mau chán, nếu bảo nó đi học để mà viết hay đọc thì nó sẽ không đi. (P2)

Generally what the teachers are doing is beyond my expectation. However, if possible I would expect more English clubs that specializes on oral skill because my daughter rarely has chance speaking English after class. Also, clubs can focus on reading and writing skills and activities should be made engaging and diverse to attract children's attention. (P2)

This parent was able to specify the areas which her daughter needs to practice more which are reading, writing and speaking skills. It seems like while the schools and teachers are doing their good job at teaching the language, there is always something more parents expect if they see any “holes” in their children learning.

Summary and discussion research question Research question #3: “What are their hopes and wishes about English language education at Finnish school?”

It is safe to indicate that almost parents are generally satisfied with their children's English learning at school in terms of teachers and learning methods. A number of parents extended the wishes that their children will be able to attend exchange study overseas. With this programme their children are immersed totally in English speaking environment but be able to earn life experience. Besides, two parents expect that schools would introduce cultural-related activities along with teaching the language so that children can be exposed to different ways of living and thinking. Last but not least, one parent wishes that there should be a balance among different skills in English, for example: reading and writing skills should be

practiced more and setting up English club is the most appropriate way to implement it. It can be indicated that wishes and expectations of Vietnamese parents relatively resemble those of Korean parents found in previous studies in a way that all parents expect their children to emerge into English speaking environment. However, since Vietnamese parents have not really put focus on “the earlier the better”, there is no urge to send their children abroad as young as their Korean counterparts. In addition, it can be observed that parents regardless of being in Finland or other Asian EFL settings, they all want their children to expose with authentic English environment as much as they can, for instance: exchange study abroad or attend private English class or center with English native speaking teachers (Nguyen et al. (2016)).

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Validity and reliability

Given the nature of qualitative research in which researcher has become instrument during the process of study, the issue of validity and reliability of research is always compromised. Research validation means the accuracy or correct reflection of what reality truly is (Gibbs, 2009, p.2) and reliability concerns with to what extent the research can produce the similar results when it is studied by other researchers at another time (Klave & Brinkmann, 2009).

In pursuit of validation for this study, careful inspection through certain stages has been implemented, i.e: stage of research design and data analysis, etc. (Klave & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 248) and the source of bias has also been constantly reflected by researcher. In designing stage, attempts to maintain validation are conducted by thoroughly examining the procedures to make sure the good fit among research paradigm/approach, research questions and the use of interview tool. Attention is particularly paid to how the interviews are undertaken, let say by piloting the interviews; researcher is able to adjust the wording in interview questions and guiding themes (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 205). At the stage of data analysis, technique of “constant comparison” is utilized as a way to check whether the texts have been coded consistently among all the transcripts, hence help enhance validation.(Gibbs, 2007)

In coping with reliability, rather than viewing the phenomenon can be replicable to strive for so-called “uniformity” by different researchers under other conditions (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 202); this study adopts the view which has been mentioned earlier in philosophical assumption, research paradigm and research approach that researcher is embedded within his/her researching world, hence there can’t exist the totally objective view; each perspective is deemed equally valid. As such, the task of researcher is to uncover this subjectivity by a means of being reflective about the study during each single step as much as possible. (Cohen et al., 2011; Gibbs, 2007). Particularly during the step of presenting data, researcher is aware that certain response quotes from participants are intentionally selected. These quotes, on one hand, unavoidably affected by researcher’s subjective thoughts. It means that selecting certain quotes from particular participants could possibly mean neglecting certain nuances from other participants. On the other hand, given the nature of qualitative study which relies on researcher’s interpretation and making-sense process, the depth and uniqueness of phenomenon start to emerge. Thus being driven by this mentality, researcher aimed to balance the choice of quotes in two ways: firstly, deliberately choose the quotes which can

best present the “spirit” of the subcategories/main categories; secondly, try to report and explain the deviant cases or responses from participants.

5.2 Limitations and strengths

In this study, one of the limitations is the lack of information on the relevant literatures that present the similar contexts. It seems like there has been not much research focus on the parental experiences regarding English education under the context of ESL in Finland in particular and other European countries in general. The literature appears rarer when the subjects of study are immigrant parents. The dearth of studies could probably result in certain weak and prone-to-subjective arguments. Also, there is a likelihood that the findings can appear segmented at least when they are presented. It means that the integrity of individual vivid interview has been under compromise when it was categorized and labeled under different themes. Last but not least, despite the diversity of participants’ backgrounds, the study results could not be subject to generalization because of the small participant samples mostly living in big cities.

Nevertheless, this study also possesses considerable strengths that should be taken into consideration. In terms of practical value, the findings from this study would provide information for school leader and Finnish teachers in two significant ways. Firstly, it will keep Finnish school leaders more informed about the concerns, attitudes and expectations of immigrant parents whose children are at the dynamic language learning process. Secondly, it apparently shows that parents are more willing to participate or contribute in school-family partnership because of the enormous trust they put toward Finnish teachers and educational system. Ultimately this cooperation aims at children’s holistic development as highlighted in Finnish Basic National Curriculum. In addition, the process of collecting and interpreting data is made more favorable for researcher due to the usage of the same mother tongue language (e.g: Vietnamese) and understanding of cultural backgrounds. Therefore the content and intention of “researcher-participants” conversation can be more accurately captured, which positively influences the study validation.

5.3 Suggestions for future study

This research has thrown up more light toward the issue of language education from parental perspectives. It directly contributes information to school leaders and educational administrators in better understanding the viewpoints and opinions of parents, especially from a group of parents with immigrant backgrounds. This understanding remains significant in

building a bridge between schools and family in pursuit of the goal for language education. In context of Finnish education, the aspect of foreign language teaching and learning has gradually shifted into language education. The term "language education" that appeared first time in National Core Curriculum (2014) put more emphasis on holistic development based on personal experience, meaningful interaction in social context and own reflection. (Kantelinen & Hildén, 2016, p. 159). As such, it would be essential for future researchers to focus more on groups of immigrant parents and explore how their actual practices support the children in achieving the goals of language education. Alternatively, it would be interesting to examine how immigrant parents perceive their own roles in helping their children attain the ultimate goal of English education.

5.4 Final remark

The study sets out to explore viewpoints and experience of Vietnamese parents toward English education in Finnish primary schools. As presented in section 4.1, the findings suggest that although parents are mostly satisfied with their children's English learning at Finnish primary schools, they show concerns regarding the possible burden at learning different languages simultaneously, particularly when their children always have one more extra language to learn (e.g: Vietnamese) compared to Finnish children. However, they admitted that the burden is unavoidable, especially at the initial stage of learning process when various languages bear certain similarities. As discussed in section 4.3, parents' wishes center on exposing their children to more English native environment and particularly to balance among various skills of English such as reading, writing and speaking. As a result, there follows some suggestions which Finnish schools might consider helpful when dealing with pupils with Vietnamese background:

- To provide support with the teaching of mother tongue (e.g: Vietnamese) before starting of Finnish, English and other languages.
- To proportionate amount of time for different languages so that it serves a child's personal need for linguistic usage as well as meets with a child's language ability.
- To organize more culture-related activities through a means of English language. This should aim at promoting cultural awareness and tolerance toward diversity.
- To balance the development of different English language skills, for example: writing and reading comprehension should be paid as equal attention as oral skill.

Upon writing up the final note for this study, I am recalled of the most highlighted moments when researcher has become so inspired by all the positive experiences and enthusiasm that

are expressed by parents during interviews. I am fully aware that due to the limit of written form of communication, it finds quite challenging some time to convey the vividness of non-verbal languages from parents' responses into academic writing. However, researcher truly believes that Vietnamese parents whose children are enjoying education at Finnish schools would feel much grateful and lucky to have such privilege that many Vietnamese parents in Viet Nam are dreaming of – like one of the parents' remark: ” *I feel very lucky because all my children are studying with such highly qualified teachers* ”.

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APPENDIX 1. Research questions and interview questions *before* pilot interview

Research questions	Interview questions
<p>1. What are parents' opinions and viewpoints regarding English learning and teaching at Finnish schools?</p>	<p><i>Parents' opinions about their children's English language learning:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At what age do you want your own children start learning English? ▪ What supports/facilitates children's English learning at the young age outside school context? ▪ What activities should be included in teaching English for children? <p><i>Parents' opinions & experiences about their children's learning English at Finnish schools:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Describe your ideal English language teacher for young language learner? (E.g: educational backgrounds, qualities, skills) ▪ What knowledge and skills do you want English learning at class would provide for your children? Which is the most/least important? ▪ Do you think your children need any additional support in learning English in class and/or after class? If yes, what kind of supports? Why? <p><i>Parental experiences related to their children using English:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What experience(s) do you find happy/positive regarding your children's English usage? (E.g: daily communication at home, at travelling, special family event, etc.) ▪ What experience(s) do you find disappointing regarding your children's English usage? (E.g: daily communication at home, at travelling, special family event, etc.) ▪ What do you feel if your children can have such good English language performance?
<p>2. What are their hopes and expectations about English language education at Finnish school?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What knowledge and skills do you want English learning would provide for your children? Which is the most/least important? ▪ How does English learning help your children in their future lives, i.e: jobs, study, social relationship, mindset? ▪ How would your children's lives be without learning English? ▪ What other foreign languages do you expect your children to learn besides English? Do you think it will hinder or support your children's English learning?

APPENDIX 2. Research questions and interview questions *after* pilot interview

Research questions	Interview questions
<p>1. What are parents' view of foreign language education at the early age?</p>	<p><i>Parents' opinions and attitudes toward foreign language education at early age?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Would it be advantageous or disadvantageous if the child starts another language rather than a mother tongue language? ▪ At what age do you want your own children start another language? ▪ Would learning other foreign languages hinder or support English learning?
<p>2. What are parents' opinions and viewpoints regarding English education at Finnish schools?</p>	<p><i>Parents' opinions about their children's English language learning:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At what age do you want your own children start learning English? ▪ What supports/facilitates children's English learning at the young age outside school context? ▪ What activities should be included in teaching English for children? <p><i>Parents' opinions & experiences about their children's learning English at Finnish schools:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Describe your ideal English language teacher for young language learner? (E.g: educational backgrounds, qualities, skills) ▪ What knowledge and skills do you want English learning at class would provide for your children? Which is the most/least important? ▪ Do you think your children need any additional support in learning English in class and/or after class? If yes, what kind of supports? Why? <p><i>Parental experiences related to their children using English:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What experience(s) do you find happy/positive regarding your children's English usage? (E.g: daily communication at home, at travelling, special family event, etc.) ▪ What experience(s) do you find disappointing regarding your children's English usage? (E.g: daily communication at home, at travelling, special family event, etc.) ▪ What do you feel if your children can have such good English language performance?
<p>3. What are their hopes and expectations about English language education at Finnish school?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What knowledge and skills do you want English learning would provide for your children? Which is the most/least important? ▪ How does English learning help your children in their future lives, i.e: jobs, study, social relationship, mindset? ▪ How would your children's lives be without learning English? ▪ What other foreign languages do you expect your children to learn besides English? Do you think it will hinder or support your children's English learning?