



# A Comparative Study on Basic Education Curricula of Finland and Turkey in Foreign Language Teaching

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## Abstract

This study aims to provide information for researchers and policy-makers targeting at improving foreign (English) language education in their countries by showing the differences between the foreign language curricula of Turkey and Finland. Finnish National Core Curricula, along with the new curricula launched by the Finnish National Board of Education in August 2016, were analyzed. Document analysis was used as a method, and necessary documents and links were provided by the Embassy of Finland in Ankara, the Finnish National Board of Education, and Republic of Turkey the Ministry of National Education via e-mail and mail services and Amazon. This study is unique as the reform in Finland is a brand-new issue and required to be investigated further in terms of English Language Teaching.

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**Keywords:** English language teaching policies; phenomenon-based learning; information and communication technologies; transversal competencies

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. (Language) Education situation in Finland and Turkey

Finland has been and continues to be one of OECD's top PISA performers since 2000, with students performing in the top ranks in reading, science and mathematics between 2000 and 2009, and low impact of students' background on educational performance (OECD, 2013). Due to this internationally competitive success, it has recently been the focus of researchers and educationalists.

Finland's success in education can be attributed to many factors including steady educational policies, equity, class size, literacy and reading rate, and teacher quality. According to Sahlberg (2007), the basic (compulsory) education policy in Finland has not

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seen any dramatic changes since the 1970s. This provides both teachers and students with a consistent way of teaching and learning. All students are provided with free education, including all of the materials they need (for example, books and pencils). The students study in heterogeneous classes of relatively small sizes (an average of 20-23 students) with no streaming of separate groups based on differing abilities (Jaatinen & Saarivirta, 2014). Reading and writing have been recognised as basic human needs for the last 100 years, and there is a cultural tradition of reading (Linnakylä & Malin, 2006). Finns borrow more books from libraries per capita than any other nationality in the world (Sahlberg, 2007). Being one of the most respected professions in Finland, teaching is highly valued and difficult to attain. Moreover, in general education all teachers are required a Master's degree ([www.oph.fi](http://www.oph.fi))

Like other parts and subjects of education, foreign language learning is an important phenomenon in Finland. English is the dominant foreign language in Finland nowadays. Every Finnish child studies English at school and almost everyone in Finland can speak English. Trade, sciences, cultural life and media all use English (Jaatinen & Sarivirta, 2014). As the country is bilingual with its Finnish and Swedish speakers, they tend to be more willing to learn other languages, and in doing so they have many advantages over monolinguals according to some research (Ben-Zeev, 1977; Feldman & Shen, 1971; Ianco-Worrall, 1972; Bialystok, 1986; Bialystok, 1988).

According to the action plans of the European Union and the objectives of the Council of Europe, every citizen should know two foreign languages in addition to his/her mother tongue (Pöyhönen, 2008). Finland is a good example which realizes that objective. It is true that Finns are good in foreign languages, for in Finland 69% of the population can speak more than one foreign language, 47% at least two languages and 23% even three foreign languages. In Finland, the foreign language skills are above the European average. The fact that in Finland there are two official languages has surely influenced the language attitudes. Anyway, the mother tongue of most Finns is Finnish (88,7%), so the country is more homogeneous linguistically than most of the European countries (Official Statistics of Finland).

In an atmosphere where educational success seems to be a sustainable and an indispensable outcome due to nation's excellent education system, the Finnish National Board of Education with distinguished teacher trainers, researchers, schools and teachers launched a reform in national curriculum of the country in August 2016 ([www.oph.fi/english](http://www.oph.fi/english)). Because Finland's PISA scores in reading, math, and science have declined since 2006, educationalists have assumed that the reform in Finland will cover more lesson hours, a high-stakes test after basic education, more disciplined teachers, and so forth. However, they surprised the world of education by implementing a freer, more autonomous, and full of activity curriculum. They seem to recognize the necessity to create a global, futuristic and real-world learner before it is too late. With the reform in

2016 in National Curriculum Framework, the Finnish National Board of Education embraces a more student-centered, school-centered, built-on-trust and digitally-transformed understanding of education.

In Turkey, however, the situation is different due to a number of reasons. Turkey has disadvantages compared to Finland in terms of population (which is 15 times as large as in Finland); tolerable class size (according to OECD report in 2012, it was 26-28 in 2010); standardization and equity in education, and steady language policies. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that Turkey has been making drastic changes and improvements in its teaching policies and applications in real classroom settings. According to OECD report (2013: 4), Turkey has made significant improvements in PISA mathematics and science assessments, but remains below the OECD average in reading, mathematics and science.

### *1.2. Previous studies on Finnish and Turkish language education*

Previous studies on Finland education system focus on the reasons of the steady progress in education system performance (Sahlberg, 2007). Some of the studies analyze latest changes and future perspectives in educational policy in Finland (Rinne, 2000). Finland's having a multicultural education also attracts the attention of researchers and the concept of intercultural competences is also reviewed in some studies (Dervin, Paatela-Nieminen, Kuoppala & Riitaoja, 2012; Räsänen, 2005; Holm & Londen, 2010). Comparative studies were also conducted by Solak (2013); Childress (2010); Vibulphol, et al. (2015); In these studies, multiculturalism, minorities in education, and cultural diversities in Finnish context are accentuated; and according to these studies, they ought to be included in the curriculum more.

Studies carried out on Turkey's English language education, however, are shaped around the problematic issues that make teaching English difficult (Oktay, 2014; Kocaoluk & Kocaoluk, 2001; Işık, 2008; Kırkgöz, 2007), its historical development and improvement throughout the years are analyzed and some solutions are suggested by the researchers (Sarıçoban, 2012; Kırkgöz, 2005). For instance, Sarıçoban & Sarıçoban (2012: 39) suggested that foreign language teachers should be professionally competent and well-trained in order to close the gap between policy rhetoric and classroom reality.

### *1.3. Aim of the study*

The main aim of the researcher is to explain these discrepancies between Turkey and Finland's basic education curricula in terms of English language teaching, and provide information for researchers, language teachers, and policy-makers. By analyzing factors that make up successful English language teaching in Finland, Turkish educators, teacher trainers, and stakeholders can also figure out the problems which inhibit a perfect English language learning environment in Turkey.

The research questions guided in this study can be given as follows:

1. What are the differences between Turkish and Finnish Basic Education Curricula in terms of general principles and regulations?
2. What are the differences between Turkish and Finnish Basic Education Curricula in terms of methods and approaches that are used in English language teaching?
3. What are the differences in the curricula of these two countries in the way that English is evaluated and assessed?

## 2. Method

For this study, document analysis was performed after surveying the literature. Documents related to Finnish foreign language education system, 2016 Finnish Educational Reform, and Turkish foreign language education system were scanned and analyzed meticulously. The necessary documents, and links were provided by the Embassy of Finland in Ankara and the Finnish National Board of Education, and Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE). The government websites of the Finnish National Board of Education and MoNE were also analyzed. Since National Core Curriculum for Basic Education cannot be retrieved from any websites, the researcher bought the kindle version from Amazon. Documents in Turkish were translated into English by the researcher. A descriptive analysis technique was used to analyze all documents.

## 3. Data analysis and discussion

Data analysis was done in the domains of (1) A general look on basic education: Standardization and Equal Opportunities; (2) Foreign Language Teaching Curricula; (3) Approaches and Methods in Foreign Language Education; (4) Evaluation and Assessment in English language education.

### 3.1. *A general look on basic education: Standardization and equal opportunities*

One of the basic principles of Finnish education is that all people must have equal access to high-quality education and training. The same opportunities to education should be available to all citizens irrespective of their ethnic origin age, wealth or where they live. In Finland, education is free at all levels from pre-primary to higher education. In primary and basic education, the textbooks, daily meal and transportation for the students are free for the parents. Besides, both the teachers and the schools have the autonomy in deciding class size, what to include in the curriculum, methods of teaching as well as textbooks and materials (Finnish National Board of Education, 2012).

In Finland, Basic Education lasts for nine years beginning from the age of seven to sixteen (see Figure 1). Basic Education is compulsory, and pre-primary education is

considered to be made compulsory with the reform movement in curricula by the end of 2020. There are no national exams during or after Basic Education, the first and only exam being matriculation exam which is held at the end of upper-secondary education.

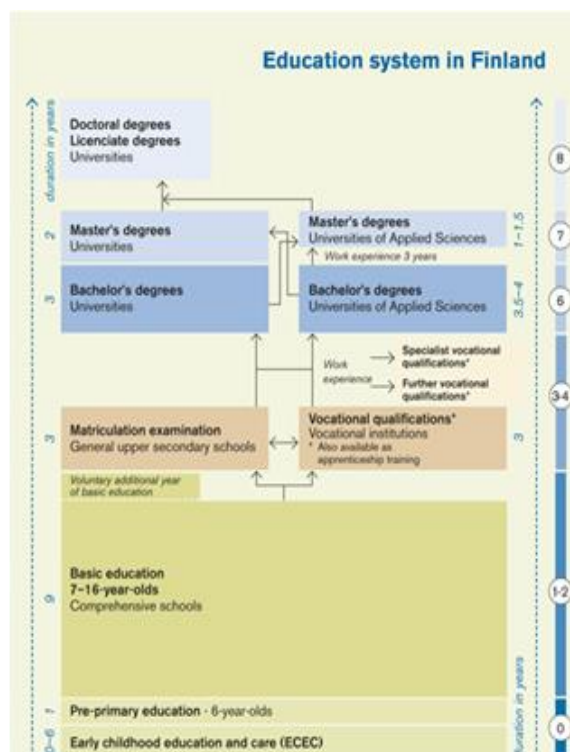


Figure 1. Education system in Finland (Finnish National Board of Education, 2012)

The general outline of Turkish national education curriculum is similar to this in Finland. A report was prepared by OECD examiners who visited Turkey from 1 to 8 October 2003 and was published by the OECD in 2007 with the name of "Reviews of National Policies for Education: Basic Education in Turkey". According to this report, the basic principles of Turkish National Education include generality and equality (educational institutions are open to all regardless of race, sex, or religion); meeting the needs of the individual and society; orientation (individuals are directed towards programmes or schools depending on their interests, talents, and abilities); ensuring that everybody enjoys the right to basic education; providing equal opportunities; continuity (it is essential that the general and vocational education of individuals lasts for a lifetime); conformity with Atatürk's reforms and principles, and Atatürk's Nationalism; democracy education, secularism, etc. However, the increasing rates in private schools make equality and standardization difficult to establish. The elements like class size, health care, daily meals (if any), teacher quality, even distribution of English lesson hours are very different from each other in these private and state school contexts. Especially, English language teaching education quality is so different that it can be

clearly seen in TEOG (Transition from Basic Education to Secondary Education) results of the pupils.

In Turkey, Basic Education lasts eight years from the age of six to thirteen (see Figure 2). The system is 4+4+4 which separates primary, secondary, and upper-secondary education into three. However, it is compulsory to finish them all (12 years). Similar to Finland, pre-primary education is not compulsory, yet. There is a national exam at the end of secondary education which is called TEOG. It consists of six core lessons: mother tongue (Turkish), Mathematics, Science and Technology, Foreign Languages, History and Religion-Ethics.

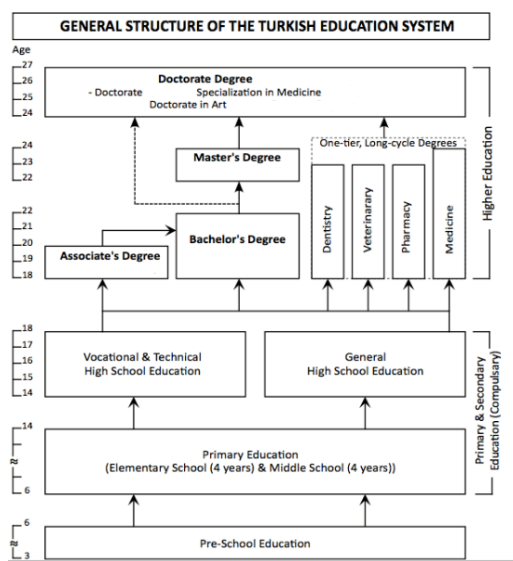


Figure 2. Turkish national education system (The Council of Higher Education, 2013)

### 3.2. Foreign language education curricula in Turkey and Finland

#### 3.2.1. Finnish National Basic Education Curriculum

Core curriculum in Finland is like a guidebook; it explains the objectives that need to be met instead of giving recipes on how to reach them. Local curriculum (schools and teachers) has the autonomy to decide on how to teach English or any other lesson. The national core curriculum for Basic and Upper Secondary education is determined by the Finnish National Board of Education and is renewed every ten years ([www.oph.fi](http://www.oph.fi)). This study covers the national core curriculum for basic education which was prepared in 2014, and put into practice with the reform in National Curriculum Framework in August, 2016. The changes cover pre-primary education, basic education and voluntary additional basic education.

With the new curriculum in Finland, at school, studies in the first foreign language (generally English) usually start in the third grade. However, educators, teachers and

other people or institutions that are in charge of designing local curricula may decide language education start earlier (in the first or second grade). In 2005, the first foreign language was studied in grade 1 by 8.6% and in grade 2 by 14.7% of the pupils (Kumpulainen & Saari, 2006). When pupils graduate from Basic Education, they are required to have a B1 level of English according to Common European Framework (CEFR) criteria. They take English lessons two hours in grades 3 to 6, and four hours in grades 7 to 9 per week.

Lessons are not skill-based; in the curriculum objectives related to multiculturalism, multiliteracy, democracy, development as a human being and as a citizen are accentuated. With the reform, a term called transversal competencies is included in the curriculum, and the lessons are shaped according to this philosophy (NBoE, 2014). It is explained in detail in the next section.

### *3.2.1.1. Transversal competencies*

According to National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (NCCBE, 2014), transversal competence refers to an entity consisting of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and will. Competence also means an ability to apply knowledge and skills in a given situation. The increased need for transversal competence arises from changes in the surrounding world. Competences that cross the boundaries of and link different fields of knowledge and skills are a precondition for personal growth, studying, work, and civic activity now and in the future.

There are seven competence areas which are frequently interconnected: (T1) thinking and learning to learn; (T2) cultural competence interaction and self-expression; (T3) taking care of oneself and managing daily life; (T4) multiliteracy; (T5) Information and Communication Technology (ICT) competence; (T6) working life competence and entrepreneurship; (T7) participation involvement and building a sustainable future.

#### *(T1) Thinking and learning to learn*

According to Bransford, Stein, Shelton & Owings (1980), and Brown (1980), learners must learn about their own cognitive characteristics, their available learning strategies, the demand of various learning tasks and the inherent structure of the material. They must tailor their activities finely to the competing demands of all these forces in order to become flexible and effective learners. In other words, they must learn how to learn. Finnish curricula integrate these learning-to-learn activities in which students develop their own strategies to learn the languages with the help of their teachers.

NCCBE (2014) states that thinking and learning skills underlie the development of other competences and lifelong learning. The way in which the pupils see themselves as earners and interact with their environment influences their thinking and learning. The pupils are guided to realise that information may be constructed in many ways, for example by conscious reasoning or intuitively based on personal experience. It is crucial

that the teachers encourage their pupils to trust themselves and their views while being open to new solutions. Playing, gameful learning, and physical activities, experimental approaches and other functional working approaches and various art forms promote the joy of learning and reinforce capabilities for creative thinking and perception. Each pupil is assisted in recognizing their personal way of learning and in developing their learning strategies.

*(T2) Cultural competence, interaction and self-expression*

In NCCBE (2014), it is stated that the pupils are growing up in a world where cultural, linguistic, religious, and philosophical diversity is part of life. Preconditions for a culturally sustainable way of living and acting in a diverse environment are possessing cultural competence based on respect for human rights, skills in appreciative interaction and means for expressing oneself and one's views. The pupils are guided to consider cultural diversity a fundamentally positive resource. In school community, the pupils experience the significance of interaction for their personal development. They develop their social skills and learn to express themselves in different ways and present and perform publicly in various situations. School work encourages the use of imagination and creativity. The pupils are guided to act in a manner that promotes aesthetic values in their environment and to enjoy their various manifestations. Teaching languages is seen as the most important catalyser for achieving and having cultural competence and interaction. Cultural and intercultural competences are sought after by many researchers and one of the main advocates of these terms is Michel Byram (1997). For Byram (2000: 9), intercultural competences symbolise the capacity "to see relationships between different cultures-both internal and external to a society-and to mediate, that is interpret each in terms of the other, either for themselves or for other people." Pupils can manage to have good relationships with others from different cultures through languages.

*(T3) Taking care of oneself and managing daily life*

In basic education, pupils have opportunities to practice making choices and acting in a sustainable way. If a student is self-sufficient and self-confident in daily life; they are probably more successful in learning languages. Harter (1983), Beane and Lipka (1984), Chapman (1988), Marsh, Byrne and Shavelson (1988) maintain that self-esteem influences achievement; and a positive correlation is found in many studies (Solley & Stagner, 1956; Klein & Keller, 1990; Rennie, 1991; Auer, 1992; Benham, 1993; Lawrence, 1996; Lerner, 1996).

According to NCCBE (2014), managing daily life requires an increasingly wide range of skills. This area covers health, safety and human relationships, mobility and transport, acting in the increasingly technological daily life, and managing personal finance and consumption, all of which are elements of a sustainable way of living. Basic education encourages the pupils to think positively about their future. The pupils are guided and

supported in developing their consumer skills and capabilities for managing and planning personal finance. Pupils are taught to be self-sufficient in different cultural environments with the help of some school activities.

#### *(T4) Multiliteracy*

In NCCBE (2014), multiliteracy is explained as the competence to interpret, produce and make a value judgement across a variety of different texts, which will help the pupils to understand diverse modes of cultural communication and to build their personal identity. The pupil's multiliteracy is developed in all school subjects, progressing from everyday language to mastering the language and presentational modes of different ways of knowing. In learning situations, pupils use, interpret and produce different types of texts both alone and together. The pupils examine the texts that are meaningful to them and interpretations of the world that arise from these texts. This allows the pupils to rely on their strengths and utilise contents that engage them in learning, and also draw on them for participation and involvement. Foreign languages can be taught by using various texts in various forms. With this reform, students are also required to be computer literate (digital literacy). Hampel and Hauck (2006: 11) suggest that online environments can be conceptualized as —packaged resource kit[s], language learners as —agents or —designers and the learning process as —a process of design. These tools and environments put new demands on teachers and learners in terms of multimodal communicative competence (Royce, 2002) and multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2003). They have an important role in making students more autonomous and self-sufficient.

#### *(T5) ICT competence*

In NCCBE (2014), competence in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is considered as an important civic skill both in itself and as part of multiliteracy. It is an object and a tool of learning. Basic education ensures that all pupils have possibilities for developing their ICT competence. ICT provides tools for making one's own thoughts and ideas visible in many different ways, and it thus also develops thinking and learning-to-learn skills. The pupils are supported in familiarising themselves with various ICT applications and uses and in observing their significance in their daily life, in interpersonal interaction and as a channel of influence. During their years in basic education, the pupils gather experiences of using ICT in international communication. They learn to perceive its significance, potential, and risks in a global world. According to Kent "ICT in education point of view refers to "information and communication Technology (ICT) such as computers, communications facilities and features that variously support teaching, learning and a range of activities in education (QCA Schemes of Work for ICT in Kent Country Council, 2004). Moreover, the term information and Communications Technologies includes technologies in which the computer plays a central role, i.e. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), the Internet, and variety

of generic computer application (Fitzparick & Davies, 2003). Digital transformation as a term is an important thing to be achieved in this new curriculum. Children who start school are provided with necessary skills that are required in using computer. CALL helps great a lot in learning languages; students have autonomy in using the programs, websites, web applications themselves if teachers teach how to use them. One innovation that comes up with August new curriculum is the abolishment of cursive handwriting. From August 2016, students won't have to learn cursive handwriting or calligraphy, but will instead be taught typing skills. "Fluent typing skills are an important national competence," says Minna Harmanen from the National Board of Education. The switch will be a major cultural change, Ms. Harmanen says, but typing is more relevant to everyday life (<http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-30146160>). As one of the main aims of this reform movement in curriculum is to prepare students for the future, it is a sound decision.

#### *(T6) Working life competence and entrepreneurship*

Working life, occupations and the nature of work are changing as a consequence of such drivers as technological advancement and globalisation of the economy. Anticipating the requirements of work is more difficult than before. Basic education must impart general capabilities that promote interest in and a positive attitude towards work and working life. School work is organized to allow the pupils to accumulate knowledge of working life, learn entrepreneurial operating methods and understand the significance of competence acquired in school and in leisure time for their future careers. The pupils learn team work, project work, and networking. The pupils are encouraged to grasp new opportunities with an open mind and to act flexibly and creatively when faced with change. They are guided to take initiative and to look for various options (NCCBE, 2014).

As a complementary of this competence, Me & MyCity which is a Finnish education innovation that has received international acclaim aims at sixth-graders and ninth-graders, covering society, working life and entrepreneurship. The Me & MyCity learning environment for sixth-graders is a miniature city where students work in a profession and function as consumers and citizens as part of society. The learning concept includes teacher training, learning materials for ten lessons and a day-long visit to the Me & MyCity learning environment. In Finland, sixth-graders aged 12 to 13 participate in Me & MyCity under the direction of their teachers (<http://yrityskyla.fi/en/me-mycity/>). By doing so, students create their own economy at Me & My City, and they can choose their career path before it is too late. Besides, they learn about the real life and how money is earned at first hand. They also become aware of the necessity of knowing English at work place.

#### *(T7) Participation, involvement and building a sustainable future*

Since 1992, an international consensus has emerged that achieving sustainable development is essentially a process of learning. At major UN conferences of the 1990s,

including those on human rights in Vienna (1993), population and development in Cairo (1994), small island developing states in Barbados (1994), social development in Copenhagen (1995), women in Beijing (1995), food security in Rome (1996), and human settlements in Istanbul (1996), the critical role of education was stressed (UNESCO, 2002). Participation in civic activity is a basic precondition for an effective democracy. Skills in participation and involvement as well as a responsible attitude towards the future may only be learned by practicing. The school environment offers a safe setting for the pupil's growth into active citizens who use their democratic rights and freedoms responsibly. The mission of the school is to reinforce the participation of each pupil. The pupils take part in planning, implementing, assessing, and evaluating their own learning, joint school work and the learning environment. The pupils understand the significance of protecting the environment through their personal relationship with nature. The pupils develop capabilities for evaluating both their own and their community's and society's operating methods and structures and for changing them so that they contribute to a sustainable future. (NCCBE, 2014). They may meet this objective by using languages interdisciplinarily.

### *3.2.2. Turkish Basic Education Curriculum*

In Turkey, the national core curriculum is determined by the Ministry of National Education. Renewal time is not predetermined like in Finland where curriculum is renewed every ten years. The latest curriculum which was prepared in 2013 was used as a tool for this research.

English Language Education in Turkey starts in the second grade, which is earlier than in Finland. Pupils in basic education take English lessons two hours in grades 2 to 4, three hours in grades 5 to 6, and four hours in grades 7 and 8 per week. In the curriculum, it is strictly recommended that the focus will be on listening and speaking skills instead of reading and writing especially in the 2nd and 3rd grades (see Figure 3). The use of course books is not suggested as the learning environment is formed by plays, hands-on activities, songs, drama, role-play, etc. However, in practice it can be observed that course books specially designed for second and third graders are in use at most schools around the country.

Gradually, the focus becomes on reading and writing in the 7th and 8th grades, but again as secondary skills. At the end of basic education, pupils are required to have A2 level of English according to CEFR criteria. Language learning environment in Turkey is said to be characterized by some communicative features: communication is carried out in English as much as possible; communication is focused on the creation of real meaning; students listen and speak just as they would in a target language community; students develop communicative skills in English by “doing things with the language” rather than by “learning about the language”.

When compared to the curriculum in Finland, Turkish basic education curriculum for English language teaching can be regarded as more directive. Teachers and schools have little autonomy in determining how and what to cover in English lessons as most of the things are predetermined and given prepared unit by unit.

**Model English Language Curriculum**  
(2<sup>nd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Grades)

Levels [CEFR*] (Hours / Week)	Grades (Age)	Skill focus	Main activities/ strategies
1 [A1] (2)	2 (6-6.5)	Listening and Speaking	TPR/Arts and crafts/Drama
	3 (7-7.5)	Listening and Speaking	
		Very Limited Reading and Writing°	
2 [A1] (4)	4 (8-8.5)	Listening and Speaking	Drama/Role-play
		Very Limited Reading and Writing°	
		Listening and Speaking	
	5 (9-9.5)	Limited Reading°	
		Very Limited Writing°	
3 [A2] (4)	6 (10-10.5)	Listening and Speaking	Theme-based ∞
		Limited Reading°	
	7 (11-11.5)	Primary: Listening and Speaking	
		Secondary: Reading and Writing	
4 (4)	8 (12-12.5)	Primary: Listening and Speaking	
		Secondary: Reading and Writing	

Figure 3. Model English language curriculum in Turkey's basic education (MoNE, 2013)

The methods and techniques which are used to teach English in Finland and Turkey are analyzed and explained in the next chapter.

### 3.3. Approaches and methods in foreign language education in Finland and Turkey

#### 3.3.1. The Finnish case

With the new curriculum, along with already implemented methods and approaches such as Communicative Language Learning (CLL), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), new approaches and methods were also introduced the first one being “language shower approach”. In the first grades of basic education, i.e. in the first, second (if local curricula decide to start English lessons earlier) or the third grade, curriculum leads teachers to use language shower approach in which the pupils learn the basic of a language or languages by means of songs, plays, games, and physical activities. The topics are selected together with the pupils based on their interests. The instruction may be provided in connection with lessons in other subjects, as part of multidisciplinary

learning modules, or during specifically allocated lessons or teaching periods. Language showers may also be organised in higher levels.

In grades 3-6, all pupils receive instruction of mother tongue and at least 2 other languages (one being the national language). Many pupils use English in their free time. The pupils and pupil groups are provided with opportunities for networking and communicating with people from different parts of the world. ICT provides a natural opportunity for implementing language instruction based on authentic situations and the pupils' communication needs. The instruction also helps the pupils to develop their capacity for participation and active involvement in a global world. Multiliteracy is developed and diverse texts are discussed in the teaching and learning of languages. This leads the students to understand other cultures, being tolerable to others and learn more about different accents and dialects of English which is called World Englishes.

In grades 7-9, the objective of the instruction is to support the pupil in enhancing the proficiency acquired in grades 3-6 and in developing his or her linguistic reasoning skills while promoting language-learning skills. The pupil's perception of cultural diversity is enhanced by discussing different value-based phenomena related to language communities. The instruction of English may be integrated with different subjects and multidisciplinary learning modules and vice versa. The pupils are encouraged to search for information in English in different subjects.

At this point, phenomenon-based learning which was introduced by the reform in curriculum needs to be mentioned. It is mainly a constructivist approach. Marlowe and Page (2005) summarizes the foundation of a constructivist approach as about constructing knowledge, not receiving it; about thinking and analyzing, not memorizing; about understanding and applying, not repeating back; being active, not passive. Similarly, in phenomenon-based learning students study inter-disciplinary topics such as the European Union, community and climate change, or 100 years of Finland's independence by analyzing the topics (phenomena) themselves. It would bring in multi-disciplinary modules on languages, geography, sciences and economics. What will change in 2016 is that all basic schools for seven to 16-year-olds must have at least one extended period of multi-disciplinary, phenomenon-based teaching and learning in their curricula (NCCBE, 2014). Schools should teach what young people need in their lives. Students work alongside teachers to develop projects as opposed to passively receiving knowledge from their educators. For instance, students' questions, ideas, and theories serve as starting points when conceptualizing and planning essays or presentations. Another component of PBL is the integration of modern technology. Online instruction, including game-based learning, is being worked into the national and local curricula as part of this approach. Use of technology is meant to better prepare students for the ever-evolving demands of higher education and a changing workforce. Additionally, PBL emphasizes other important 21st century skills, such as communication, collaboration,

creativity, critical thinking, sustainability, and international understanding (Zhukov, 2015).

### 3.3.2. *The Turkish case*

In Turkey, in basic education curriculum for language teaching a variety of instructional techniques and methods have been implemented. English is regarded as a means of communication and interaction (MoNE, 2013).

At the earliest levels, comprising grades 2 through 4, the main emphasis is on listening and speaking. It is strongly suggested that only speaking and listening skills should be taught (see Figure 3). Reading, writing and grammatical structures are not a focus at this stage, in line with research indicating that younger children learn languages best through songs, games, and hands-on activities (Cameron, 2001). In this respect, it has similarities with language shower approach that Finnish curriculum suggests. However, there is a recent trend toward skill integration. That is, rather than designing a curriculum to teach the many aspects of one skill, curriculum designers are taking more of a whole language approach (Brown, 2001: 232). Besides listening and speaking, reading and writing should also be adopted in English lessons. At the earliest stages, learners are introduced to English through cognates; these are believed to provide a bridge between languages, helping learners to transition from the known to the unknown using terms that are easily recognizable (Rodriguez, 2001). This concept is supported by Krashen's (1988) argument that language input must be interesting, relevant and comprehensible to stimulate comprehension.

In the 5th and 6th grades, as students continue to develop their language skills, exposure to short texts is introduced. At the same time, these learners may participate in controlled writing activities such as filling out a club membership registration card with their name, date of birth, address and other concrete, factual information (MoNE, 2013). In the 7th and 8th grades, older students who have formed the necessary foundation for an understanding of literacy issues will then be exposed to reading and writing as an integral aspect of language learning, such as reading simple texts or writing short, simple stories about their friends (Bayyurt & Alptekin, 2000).

During the lessons, drama and role-play are also suggested as instructional techniques since it fosters positive atmosphere in the classroom and provides young learners with fun activities in language learning classes. Peregoy and Boyle (2008) suggested that acting out stories and events is a highly motivating approach for students to process and to share information. Wright and her colleagues (2007) agreed and added that dramatizing stories is not only motivational but allows students to think in more sophisticated ways. They also enable communicative activities which is one of the main objectives of basic education curriculum for English lessons.

### 3.4. Assessment and evaluation in foreign language classes in Finland and Turkey

In Finland, neither schools nor teachers are evaluated as inspections were abolished in the early 1990s. Both teachers and schools are autonomous in their assessment of themselves, which is self-evaluation. Likewise, students are also not assessed in traditional ways. In basic education, students' self-assessment is an important part of evaluation. Teachers are trusted and in charge of preparing a home report each year mostly verbally. Teachers are free to give oral feedback or verbal assessment between the grades 3-6; however, after the grade 7 plus, they are required to do final assessment by grading. They may use Common European Language Portfolio as an assessment instrument or they may utilize from peer-assessment, and self-assessment methods. There are no national tests until matriculation test taken at the end of upper secondary school.

In Turkey, as suggested by CEFR, self-assessment is emphasized as learners/users are encouraged to monitor their own progress and achievement in the development of communicative competence (CoE, 2001). In addition to self-assessment, formal evaluation will be carried out through the application of written and oral exams, quizzes, homework assignments and projects in order to provide an objective record of students' success (MoNE, 2013). In practice, traditional exam questions are predominant in the assessment of English language lessons. Since there is a national examination, TEOG, at the end of basic education, students need to get prepared for multiple choice question types in English language questions (see Figure 4).

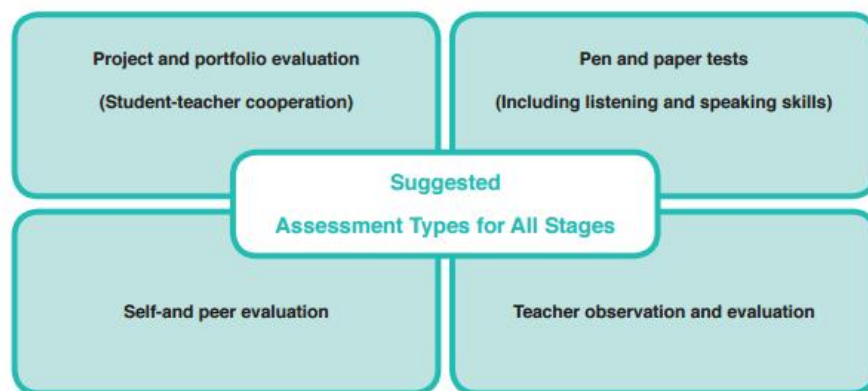


Figure 4. Assessment types in basic education curricula for English lessons (MoNE, 2013)

## 4. Conclusion

Within the light of this study's findings, it can be deduced that Finland is trying to achieve something that no country before has attempted. The objective of Finland is to create students who have computer skills, intercultural competences, multiliterate, self-

sufficient both in their private lives and in the classroom, respectful and tolerant to other people's ideas and have knowledge about what is going on around the world. The main aim of English lessons in basic education is not just teaching them listening, speaking, reading and writing, but by introducing them with interdisciplinary areas and themes which have been regarded as important issues throughout the world.

In Turkey, there have been great changes going on in curriculum; however, they need to be seen in the real classroom settings. Some of Finland's current reform ideas can be borrowed and implemented into basic education curriculum for English lessons by tailoring them in accordance with our students' needs. It reminds Bamgbose's statement "no matter how desirable language policies may be, unless they are backed by the will to implement them, they cannot be of any effect" (2003: 478). Although it is not suggested to focus on reading and writing especially in the first grades, teachers inevitably use course books and test-like activities in their English classes as students will take TEOG examination including multiple choice English questions. Otherwise, students will not get used to exam tactics and practice, which might lead them to fail in the exam.

This study is not without its limitations. The differences between these two countries' basic education cannot be restricted to curriculum; the success in basic education is also affected by teacher education, bilingualism, literacy rates, and culture. Further research may focus on these domains, so that discrepancies between these two countries' English teaching are analyzed by focusing on different perspectives.

Finally, further studies can utilize a questionnaire which is applied to Finnish teachers to investigate the attitudes and perceptions about the new curriculum. Since it has been just a few months, the questionnaire can be applied at the end of the year. The same can be done with Turkish teachers and their satisfaction with the curriculum may be evaluated comparatively.

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