



Sustainable transition and skilled employees – Opportunities and challenges for Finnish vocational education export know-how

Case Vietnam

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Abstract

The United Nations member states are committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, but globally the goals are seriously off the track. Vietnam is one of the countries significantly affected by climate changes, striving for sustainable economic growth and a green transition while working life, and the demographic structure are changing. Finland and Vietnam have good relations which have changed from development funding to bilateral trade. Legislation on the export of Finnish vocational qualifications came into force in 2021, preceded by a pilot project. In Finnish vocational education and training (VET), the SDGs are considered, and its customised implementation can respond to local challenges outside the EU-countries. Fee-based VET export know-how includes the export of qualifications or their parts, different solutions from teacher training to curriculum work. It can also include training the workforce to Finland.

The research was carried out as a qualitative case study using semi-structured interviews and observation. Based on the results, it can be concluded that Finnish actors face many challenges related to fee-based vocational training export know-how both in Vietnam and in Finland. These are set by different laws and practices and the lack of appreciation of vocational training in Vietnam. One of the biggest is the contradiction between goals, laws, and practical actions in Finland. Another is the lack of funding comparing to the countries such e.g. Germany and Japan. More experts and collaboration is required when international environments demand versatile skills from cultural understanding to productisation.

By integrating SDGs, deepening co-operation, removing legislation barriers, and understanding Vietnam's context, there is possibility to overcome the challenges and create impactful educational export of know how between the two nations. The Finnish flexible, working-life oriented education model, enables lifelong learning and different paths also for adult education.

At best, the co-operation and solutions of vocational education can meet the development needs of Vietnam's education and working life, the challenges of sustainable growth and the economy. At the same time, the own expertise of Finnish operators increases, the export of educational expertise generates income, and it can also partly solve the skills shortage of Finland.

Keywords/tags (subjects)

Sustainable development goals (SDG) 2030, Finnish education, Vietnamese education, Vocational education and training (VET), Education export, Education export know-how

Miscellaneous (Confidential information)

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Holm Pauliina

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Tiivistelmä

YK:n jäsenmaat ovat sitoutuneet kestäväen kehityksen 2030 tavoitteisiin, mutta globaalisti käytäntöönpanosta ollaan pahasti raiteiltaan. Vietnam on yksi niistä maista, joihin ilmastonmuutos vaikuttaa merkittävästi ja joka pyrkii kestäväen talouskasvuun ja vihreään siirtymään työelämässä väestörakenteen ollessa muutoksessa. Suomella ja Vietnamilla on hyvät suhteet, jotka ovat muuttuneet kehitysyhteistyörahoituksesta kahdenväliseksi kauppasuhteeksi. Tilauskoulutusta koskevien ammatillisten tutkintojen vientiä koskeva lainsäädäntö tuli voimaan vuonna 2021, jota edelsi pilottihanke. Suomalaisessa ammatillisessa koulutuksessa huomioidaan kestäväen kehityksen tavoitteet, ja sen räätälöidyllä toteutuksella voidaan vastata paikallisiin haasteisiin myös EU-maiden ulkopuolella. Maksullinen ammatillisen koulutuksen vientiosaaminen sisältää tutkintojen tai niiden osien vientiä, sekä erilaisia ratkaisuja opettajankoulutuksesta opetus-suunnitelmatyöhön. Se voi sisältää myös työvoiman kouluttamista Suomeen.

Tutkimus toteutettiin kvalitatiivisena tapaustutkimuksena käyttäen puolistrukturoituja haastatteluja ja havainnointia. Tulosten perusteella voidaan päätellä, että suomalaisilla toimijoilla on edessään lukuisia maksullisen ammatillisen koulutuksen vientiosaamisen toteuttamisen haasteita sekä Vietnamissa että Suomessa. Nämä liittyvät erilaisiin lakeihin ja käytäntöihin sekä ammatillisen koulutuksen rooliin ja arvostuksen puutteeseen Vietnamissa. Yksi suurimmista haasteista on ristiriita suomalaisten tavoitteiden, lakien ja käytännön toimien välillä. Toinen on rahoituksen puute verrattuna esimerkiksi Saksaan tai Japaniin. Lisää koulutusvientiosaajia ja yhteistyötä tarvitaan kansainvälisten ympäristöjen vaatien monipuolista osaamista kulttuurisen ymmärryksestä tuotteistamisosaamiseen.

Integroimalla kestäväen kehityksen tavoitteita, syventämällä yhteistyötä, poistamalla viennin esteitä ja ymmärtämällä Vietnamin kontekstia on mahdollisuus ylittää haasteita ja luoda vaikuttavaa koulutusosaamisen vientiä maiden välille. Suomalainen joustava, työelämälähtöinen koulutusmalli mahdollistaa elinikäisen oppimisen ja eri polut myös aikuiskoulutukseen.

Parhaimmillaan ammatillisen koulutuksen osaamisviennin ratkaisut voivat vastata Vietnamin koulutuksen ja työelämän kehittämistarpeisiin sekä kestäväen kasvun ja talouden haasteisiin. Samalla suomalaisten toimijoiden oma osaaminen lisääntyy, koulutusosaamisen vienti tuo tuloja ja se voi myös osittain ratkaista Suomen osaamispuolaan liittyviä kysymyksiä.

Avainsanat (asiasanat)

Kestäväen kehityksen tavoitteet 2030, suomalainen koulutus, vietnamilainen koulutus, ammatillinen koulutus, koulutusvientii, koulutusosaamisen vientii

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1 Introduction

The global focus in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 in education agenda has shifted inclusive, equitable and effective learning, aiming to recognise life-long learning at all levels of education. In many countries, the critical role of education for sustainable development has been recognised and understood, and the countries are encouraged to transfer the global goals in action to their unique national situation. Unfortunately, according to Sachs et al. (2023) it seems that at this moment the world is seriously off-track to meet the Paris agreement of climate targets. Vietnam is one of the countries most affected by the climate change.

The outbreak of Covid-19, wars, and natural disasters have affected on education and working life leaving number of children and young people out of education, or their studies have been interrupted. This has caused a break in good development in numerous countries at different educational levels. On the other hand, as Hatanpää (2024) highlights, many countries, such as Vietnam, have been forced to move to the use of digital devices and digital learning environments enabling learning during various crises. This has accelerated digital education which has grown into a trend.

Finland has had a representative office in Vietnam since 1974 and for more than forty years Finland has given development aid for Vietnam taking special care of its water and sanitation projects according to Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Finland (2024). As the economy of Vietnam grows, cooperation between Finland and Vietnam gradually changes from development cooperation to the development of trade relations.

Among others, due to the previous reasons working life is also changing, new professions are emerging, and sustainable working life rules are needed. All this challenges both learning and education systems. There is a need for academic knowledge and innovations, but at the same time the need of vocational expertise and lifelong learning is growing rapidly. (e.g., OECD, 2023)

1.1 Background and the motivation for the research

To make it easier for a reader to understand the subject area of the research, this chapter briefly describes why vocational education export and the cooperation between Finland and Vietnam are topical right now. In chapter two concepts and insights about SDGs, Vocational education and training (VET) in Vietnam and Finnish education and Finnish vocational education export are presented. The key challenges and opportunities arising from the field are discussed in more detail in chapter four.

Exporting Finnish vocational qualifications did not come into effect until year 2021. It was preceded by an experiment in the export of education since 2017, which initially involved 11 education organisers in Finland (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2024). Therefore, it is natural that there is not much academic research or comprehensive statistical information about it yet.

This research is aiming to raise and bring together perspectives and information that are especially needed in the export of Finnish vocational education, in breaking down export barriers, challenges, both in Finland and for Vietnam, and in finding a common direction, possibilities, with Finnish actors, legislation and its interpretations and understanding the connections with sustainable development goals and working life requirements. In part, this research can also highlight Finnish expertise and know-how for possible co-operation in Vietnam for win-win situation for both countries and participants to implement strategies.

One goal of the research is to bring information which can be utilised with different actors more broadly, both education organisers and companies in Finland and targeting to Vietnam or other non-Eu-countries, and bodies implementing legislation and strategies of Finnish education export.

Commercial export of education is also on the agenda of the current government of Finland, which highlights the demand arisen in the world should met by promoting the export of the education sector on commercial basis (Finnish government programme, 20.6.2023). Some legislation changes are going to affect to the higher education export, Vocational education export expecting to follow later.

The import of experts to Finland is also linked to the export of vocational education and the questions and practices related to it have recently been discussed a lot by various operators such as education providers, education expert companies, and different agencies and enterprises. According to the Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat (Kuokkanen, 20.2.2024), Vietnam is a newcomer as a partner country for the government's international recruitment attracting special experts in the IT sectors and start-up entrepreneurs. Finland is targeting the study marketing to India, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

In November 2023, and January 2024, the virtual workshops brought together nearly 100 participants from Vietnam and Finland on promoting partnerships between Finnish and Vietnamese organisations in technical and vocational education and training. According to Finnpartnerships (2024), who was organising the SDG Booster workshops in collaboration with Embassy of Finland in Vietnam, Vietnam Association for Vocational Education and Training & Social Work (VAVET) and Finnish National Agency for Education the event supported connections and dived deeper into practical dimensions.

SDG Booster was preceded by a small study (Nummela & Holm, 2023) in which the author of this thesis was allowed to act as the second author, and its presentation during the education export "morning coffees" events to various education export operators.

The goal of this study is to bring out perspectives and, also to open new research or development targets in Finnish vocational training export, or more broadly in the export of know-how, thus serving Finnish education providers, entrepreneurs in the education sector, and those office holders who in their own work are responsible for the implementation and interpretation of legislation. Without forgetting, obviously, the sustainable development goals, the transform in working life and the education and skills cooperation between Vietnam and Finland.

Gummesson states that getting close to the research topic is a skill and art, but it is also the privilege to access information (2017). Personal motivation for this research arises from the researcher's own career which includes more than 25 years of experience in the Finnish education system and education reforms in Finland, development and management of vocational education, and currently being responsible of vocational education export. I believe that this research will

also benefit those who are not familiar with the Finnish vocational education or education export know-how and its possibilities. Participating as one of the Finns in the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning training called Using learning assessment data to monitor SDG4 progress made me think about how self-evident both the SDG and the quality of education have been taken in Finnish education.

1.2 Research question, objectives, and delineation

The research problem is focusing on the challenges and possibilities for Finnish vocational education export, considering the Sustainable Development Goals, and working life needs in Vietnam.

The research objective is to provide information and examples about the challenges and possibilities for the Finnish education providers and companies in Vietnam. Key concepts in this thesis are Sustainable development goals (SDG), Finnish education, Vietnamese education, Vocational education and training (VET), Education export, and Education export know-how.

Research questions may originate from many sources and are typically refined through reviewing the scientific literature and existing theory.

The research questions are:

RQ1: What kind of challenges there are for Finnish VET export in Vietnam, also considering SDG goals and the demands of working life?

RQ2: How can Finnish VET providers and companies to overcome these challenges (possibilities)?

The empirical case study focused on gathering insights from experienced key informants and practitioners by using qualitative case study research method, semi-structured interviews, and observation.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

Thesis is composed of five chapters. First, chapter one gives an introduction on the thesis topic with researcher's motivation for the research and research questions. Chapter two reviews the relevant literature and the key concepts. The methodology and research questions are presented in chapter three with the explanation on how the empirical data is collected, analysed, and verified, not forgetting the ethical aspects of the research. The data is analysed providing answers to the research questions and literature data in chapter four. Finally, in chapter five the discussions are made on the empirical findings ending up to future research recommendations.

2 Opportunities and challenges for Finnish Vocational education and training export in Vietnam

In this section, the focus is on key areas from the perspective of the research questions, to find a reference framework for the challenges and opportunities of Finnish vocational education export to succeed in Vietnam considering SDGs and needs from the changing world of work.

The systematic information retrieval for the literature chapter was done as stated by Creswell & Creswell (2023), by using Jamk University of Applied Sciences Online Library resources, internet search and AI search. The advanced search functions by key words, such as SDGs, Education export, Vocational education and training (VET), Technical vocational education and training (TVET), Vietnam education system, Finnish education, and Education policy. Combinations of these key words were used both in English and Finnish language. Also, Google Scholar were used for searching articles. Artificial intelligence (AI) supported search pages, such as ChatGPT were also used for finding relevant and additional sources. The search for sources were carried out over several months, starting from the initial ideation of the research subject area and title to its final shaping and delineation.

The priority in the searches was given to international and Finnish peer reviewed articles, which has been published during the last 5 years. Many publications older than that were also checked, and several publications were rejected for using as the reference material, for example, from the

point of view of insufficient or old sources. This was important to consider because of the rapid changes e.g. in legislation. The information retrieval was expanded to e-books, printed books, and newspaper articles, if the sufficient information was not retrievable from peer-reviewed articles. This applied especially to information retrieval needs regarding the key concepts, such as the vocational education and training and the education policy in Vietnam. The accepted time range in the search of articles and books were expanded in information seeking, if the recent articles and books were referring to older sources, or more information was needed.

Due to short history and experiences of Finnish vocational education export and especially export of Finnish vocational qualifications, often used the expression on fee based commissioned training for the groups outside the EU countries, it is understandable that there has not been either a chance to get a comprehensive study, or there is not much research, statistics or academic literature about Finnish vocational education export or its implications and co-operation in Vietnam. Most of the studies about Finnish VET export really focus more into internationalisation of education in certain country, or for example, so called educational travel to Finland, international project, or networking, and most of them concentrate on early childhood, basic education, or specific academic level issues. Quite a few recent academic studies on the export of education and especially vocational training export to Vietnam can be found.

Newspaper articles and internet websites were accepted when other materials supported the information found on the internet sites and newspapers, and the identities of the organisations, institutions, writers, and publishers could be verified.

2.1 Sustainable development goals 2030 (SDGs) and education

As UNESCO (2023) states the SDGs established in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly are a set of 17 goals (Appendix 1) to promote sustainable development in the areas such as health, gender equality and poverty eradication to achieve a better and more sustainable future. The fourth goal, SDG4, promotes lifelong learning for all by 2030 and ensures inclusive and equitable education.

As UNESCO's roadmap in action highlights the universal agenda and collective commitment, the governments play a key role in implementation in their policies and frameworks (UNESCO, 2020). The growth target in Vietnam and the commitment to sustainable development and clean energy transition implied challenges and opens great opportunities for innovations and advanced technology in the future. There is lot of potential for energy sector like solar power but like Baum (2020,p.2) highlights achieving the remaining SDGs will be challenging in Vietnam by 2030.

For learning and development commitment of the country to SDGs creates a foundation for sustainable development and lifelong learning where educators across the world have the crucial role. In the case of Vietnam, there is no implementation information available, and this especially applies to vocational education and training (see e.g. Sachs et al., 2023)

As shown in the Figure 1 where Vietnam is presented first and Finland second, there are differences between the commitments and policy efforts for SDGs in Vietnam and Finland. According to Sachs et al. (2023) commitment and achievement of SDG goals by a country have a profound impact on learning, the facilities, and possibilities in all levels of education. It ensures access to quality education, promotes social inclusion, alleviates poverty, empowers women and girls, improves health and well-being, and fosters environmental sustainability. By embracing the SDGs, countries create a foundation for lifelong learning and sustainable development.

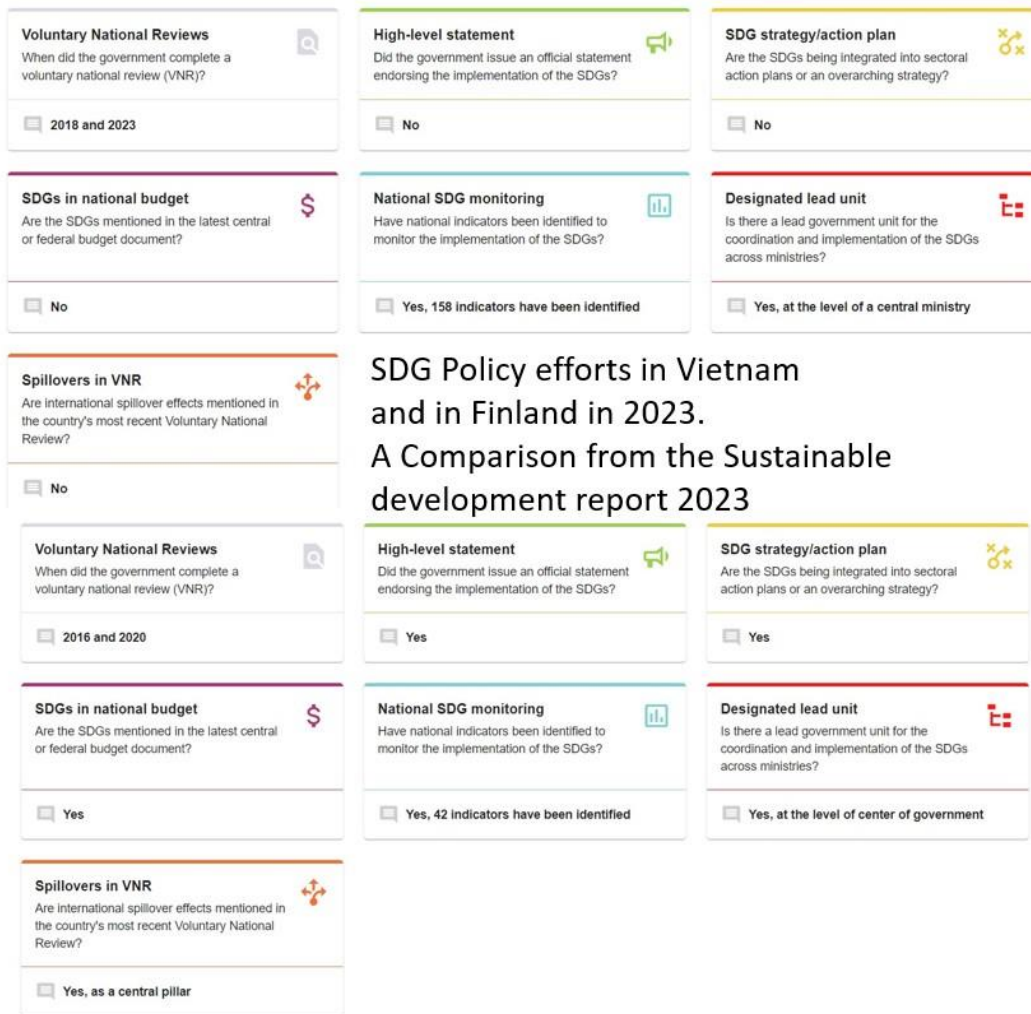


Figure 1. SDG policy efforts in Vietnam and Finland in 2023. Source: Sachs et al.(2023). Enhanced by author, 2024.

Globally the SDGs are seriously off-track, the progress being already very slow during the five years until to 2020 even before COVID-19. According to the annual SDG Index, global achievement of the SDGs rose only slightly, from 64 percent in 2015 to 66 percent in 2019 which is far too slow to meet the goals by 2030, and with highly uneven progress within and between countries (Sachs, 2023). However, Vietnam has been able to progress (see Figure 2) and is now number 55 internationally, Finland being the number 1. Still, there is a lot to do both in Vietnam and in Finland, so that the things could continue to develop and not to take steps backwards.

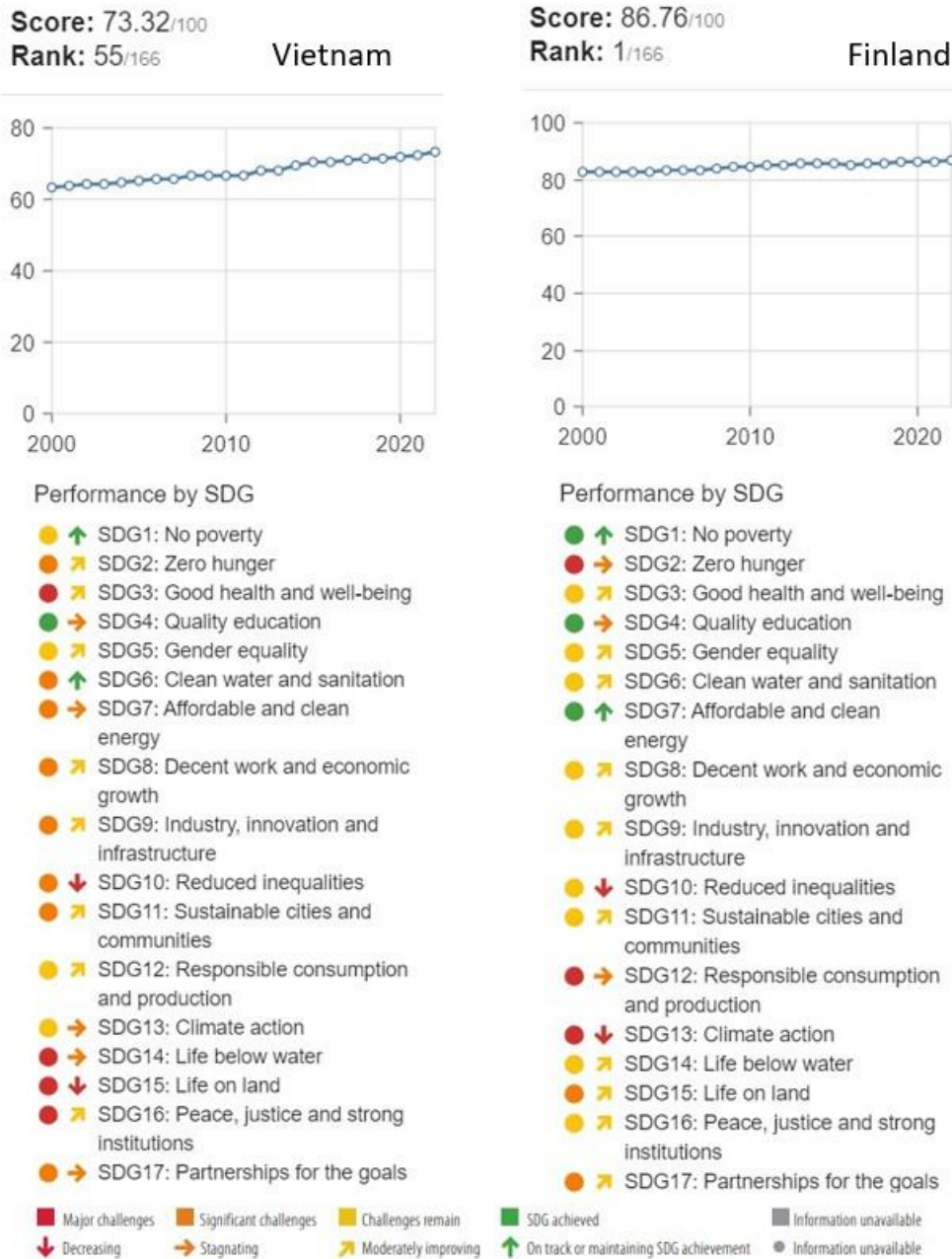


Figure 2. Vietnam and Finland Sustainable development goals overall performance of all 193 UN member states. Ranking in progress towards all SDG 17 goals. Source: Sustainable development reports. Rankings. (2024). Modified by author, 2024.

As stated in the UNESCO technical guideline (2016), the terms are often used interchangeably when it comes to the "implementation" of SDG4, different terms, such as mainstreaming, streamlining, translating, and integrating the goals into national education policies and plans are also often used. Regardless of the terms used, it is important to emphasise that, due to its sector-specific coverage, SDG4 cannot be implemented differently and separately from national education sector development activities.



Figure 3. How the UN is supporting Sustainable Development goals in Vietnam in 2024. Source: United Nations. Vietnam. (2024). Modified by author, 2024.

In 2024, the United Nations (2024) will allocate a total of 90 million dollars in aid money to Vietnam. Programmatic interventions (see Figure 3) will be implemented by several organisations, e.g. International Labor Organisation. Many of the projects focus on the SDG 8 goal, decent work, and economic growth. SDG 4, quality education, receives 3.8% of the aid money, total 3.4 million dollars.

According to Reimers (2024) the SDG4 benchmark indicators contain only seven indicators in five domains. Those are early education, basic education, equity, quality, and financing. For early education the indicator is the participation rate in pre-primary education. For basic education they are out of school rate, completion rate and learning proficiency. For equity the gender gap in completion. For quality the trained teachers. And for finance education spending as a percentage of total public spending and of GDP. For target 4.3., technical and vocational education, higher education, adult education, for target 4.4., skills for work, for target 4.6., adult literacy and for target 4.7., education for sustainable development, or for learning environments, scholarships, and qualified teachers, there are no indicators yet.

According to National Agency for Education (Education export roadmap 2020-2023, 2020) the development policy, among other things, Agenda 2030 has been elevated to a central part of Finland in the government program foreign and security policy and to the SDG4 goal of the agenda, an

open, equal, and high-quality good education and lifelong learning opportunities. In its own development policy and in its influence on the EU, Finland is also committed to the fact that partnerships for sustainable development of developing countries include, for instance private finance education and companies and the know-how they bring along.

The most important level of decision making remains at the nation level holding the primary responsibility for achieving the SDGs. The Nordic countries and European Union have shown considerable support for the SDGs, as well as many developing countries in the G20 (Sachs, 2023, p.10).

In the long term, COVID-19 has potentially widened gaps in implementing SDGs like poverty rate of ethnic minorities in remote areas, decent work and economic growth, and equity in education because of the unequal capacity of schools across the country. Jobs of the future will require greater digital skills, but there are gaps in use of digitalisation and inclusion. Wealthier households are better able to participate in the digital economy.

Human capital, being a combination of the education, skills, and health factors that largely determine labour productivity has been a major driver of sustained economic growth and is also a key ingredient in breaking intergenerational poverty traps. For children, the education they receive and how healthy they grow up to be affecting their future earnings, life expectancy, and human capital as adults (World Bank, 2018).

Rapid economic growth has lifted many Vietnamese out of poverty, but a large group of the population remains economically vulnerable. The rapid speed of developmental change nonetheless left behind those with less opportunity to join the most vibrant sectors of the economy and created a large class of people who are not poor but are not yet middle class.

Countries can create a foundation for lifelong learning and sustainable development. The Vietnamese strategy for development of Vocational education during the period of 2021-2030 with vision 2045 considers SDG targets such as regional and equal possibilities for learning, lifelong learning, and quality of education (Nummela & Holm, 2023).

2.2 Vietnam as a potential country for Finnish vocational education export

To be able to cooperate and achieve opportunities in the export of education in different countries, the actors must understand each other, their history and culture, operating methods, legalities, business practices, so that the cooperation has a chance of success. Challenges can also often be caused by the fact that not all backgrounds or details are easily available, for example, in common language, e.g. English. In this paragraph, the most central themes about Vietnam as a target market for Finnish educational actors have been highlighted, which pose challenges, as well as opportunities for the Finnish vocational training in Vietnam and with Vietnamese stakeholders and partners. Those are geographical and regional differences and distance, understanding cultural and business environment, economic growth for middle income country, working life changes, and population development.

Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a distant country with many geographical and climatic differences and affected by the climate change. The influence of the neighboring countries such China (see Figure 4) can be seen in different ways in different parts of Vietnam. Livelihoods and agricultural opportunities also vary a lot from region to region. Vietnam is divided into 58 provinces. The capital city is Hanoi (BBC News, 2023).



Figure 4 Map of Vietnam. Source: BBC News. Vietnam country profile (2023).

Understanding different culture and the business environment

Language and cultural norms, values, history, and beliefs, can often create a gap between people doing business from different backgrounds and countries, even the globalisation has helped us to understand and learn from each other better. There are quite a lot of different research from cultures, also used in business and management context.

Beveridge (2021) describes cultural knowledge and awareness of culturally ingrained human behavior being a vital for success of multinational organisations as business continues globalising and operating in international markets.

Recently, Minkov and Kaasa (2022, pp. 6-11) analysed culture-related items and showed them in two-dimensional map testing Hofstede's dimension philosophy done two decades ago (see Figure 5). In this individualism-collectivism versus flexibility-monumentalism map 20 different national indicators e.g. transparency versus corruption in 2015, political freedom in 2016, gender equality, skilled labor force percentage of total labor force in 2020, and IT and computer technologies adoption by 2019 were tested. Finland scores 88 and 77, Vietnam -78 and -1. It can be concluded that there are considerable differences between the countries.

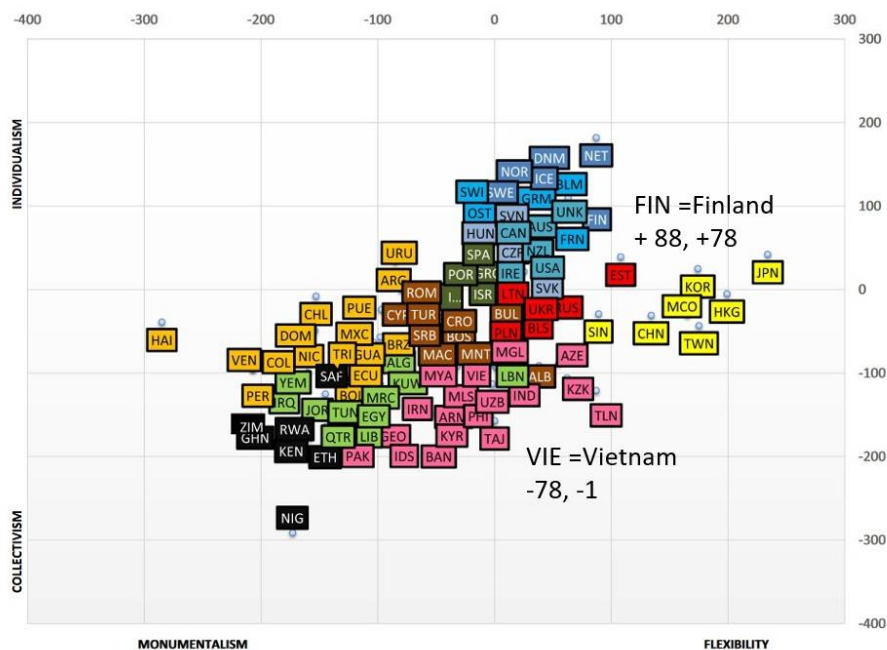


Figure 5. Vietnam and Finland using Minkov & Kaasa (2022) Cultural map of the world: Monumentalism-Flexibility versus Individualism-Collectivism in Vietnam and Finland. Modified by author, 2024.

Business culture refers to a combination of values and behaviors and interaction from official policies to interactions influenced by employees, employers, clients, and business partners. Guirdham (2009, pp. 17-18) defines business culture as of business-related values, beliefs, attitudes, meanings, and practices shared by a business community. One can locate business culture in same position as occupational cultures including workplace, management, ownership, strategy and business relations and competition, and other influences. Values and practices are equally important, and they are different in different cultures.

Business culture also includes the political atmosphere and possibilities for co-operation. According to Doan (2020, p.38) the current position of Finnish education and its products and services in Vietnamese society is low, and many things must be done to approach the market, but the policies allow Finnish education providers and companies to enter and improve national education system.

Economic growth for middle-income country

Vietnam is vulnerable for natural hazards, such as floods, storms, and drought. This forms a major risk to the economy and infrastructure of the country (Asian Development Bank, 2024).

Many sources states (e.g. Baum, 2020) that Vietnam has reached lower middle-income status and has had a rapid economic growth. According to Asian Development Bank (ADB) there are still many assistance programs going on in Vietnam, even Vietnams economic activities rebounded rapidly after COVID-19 restrictions growing the economy by 8 % in 2022 which was the highest since year 2011. (Asian Development Bank, 2024)

Vietnam has been a development cooperation partner, but then it has tried to become a so-called middle-income country and today it is rather a regular trading partner. We have a good foothold there, since we have been cooperating with the Vietnamese on development cooperation issues for a long time (Nikula, 2024).

ADB (2024) is continuing its lending and nonlending support for Vietnam for project portfolio worth 3.34-billion-dollar for climate-resilient transportation, promoting sustainable urban development and improving rural connectivity being also committed to facilitate access to quality education, improving health security, supporting environmental sustainability and climate change

adoption, gender equity and digital transformation. This is possible by public loans, grants, funds, and technical assistance. ADB has created a core pipeline of project 2023-2025 helping Vietnam to transit to green economy, harness the private sector and promote social equity.

According to World Bank (WB) in Vietnam (2023) Vietnam has grown bolder in its development aspirations, aiming to become a high-income country by 2045. To achieve this goal, the economy should grow about six percent per capita per year the next 25 years. The GDP growth target for 2024 is 6-6,5% (Matters, 2024).

For decades, Finland has cooperated in development projects financing them in Vietnam. According to Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Finland at the same time when Vietnam's economy is growing, Finland's development cooperation financing is turning into commercial cooperation (2023). This can be seen both an opportunity and a challenge for Finnish operators.

Working life changes and population development

In Finland, the population is ageing and, correspondingly, in Vietnam, it is still growing. The statistics shows that the population in Viet Nam is 103.8 million (BBC news, 2024) and growing annually. The large population of youth and young adults in Vietnam can be seen as an important asset for the labour market, both in Vietnam but in other countries like Finland as well (Nummela & Holm, 2023). However, when we look further, Vietnam will be one of the aging countries in the world and the population in Vietnam is not evenly distributed across the country. Historically, due to the favourable conditions for important economic activities, such as agriculture and fisheries, the Red River Delta and Mekong River Delta areas have the largest concentrations of inhabitants (Statista, 2024).

Vietnam has ratified 25 International Labour Standards conventions concerning e.g. right to bargain, social protection and child labour convention. Government of Vietnam has developed a decent work country program 2022-2026 with its partners (ILO, 2022). In 2022 a socio-economic development plan and knowledge plan for country to move towards digital society and economy capacity building programs supporting the development of climate change adaptation such as water security and women owned small and medium size companies were executed. ADB (2024) who continues to play an active role to support these efforts in Vietnam.

Viet Nam's economy has engaged in a new wave of economic reform moving towards a higher value-added, knowledge-based economy. This achievement can also be seen as risk for increasing consumption of resources which effects the environment and climate change. There is also a significant shortage of skilled workers when the services have become the biggest sector, and many employees have left from the agriculture sector (Nummela & Holm, 2023).

Changes in the population and working places, environment and the development of technology will inevitably bring rapid changes to working life throughout Vietnam. Even the proportion of untrained workers in the age group of 22 years is still high, over 59 percents, in recent years participating in learning and training has increased in line with the needs and requirements of working life (Nummela & Holm, 2023). Unskilled workers face many difficulties in finding a job and therefore adopting the profession.

2.3 Education systems and vocational education in Vietnam and Finland

Like many other countries, Vietnam has undergone many education reforms related to textbooks, basic education, and methodology. Currently, the reform of vocational education is topical, and the government has been investing in it. Vocational education in Finland strives to respond to changes in working life, as well as Vietnam, although the situations in both countries are quite different.

Education system and vocational education and training in Vietnam

Vietnamese education system is introduced at glance in Figure 6. Primary school or elementary education in Vietnam lasts for five years and is compulsory for all children whereas it is not mandatory to continue to secondary school education or upper secondary education. The studies can be continued in lower secondary education or in short term vocational training programs. Students will be granted the Lower Secondary Education Graduation Diploma upon completion of their lower secondary education (Nummela & Holm, 2023).

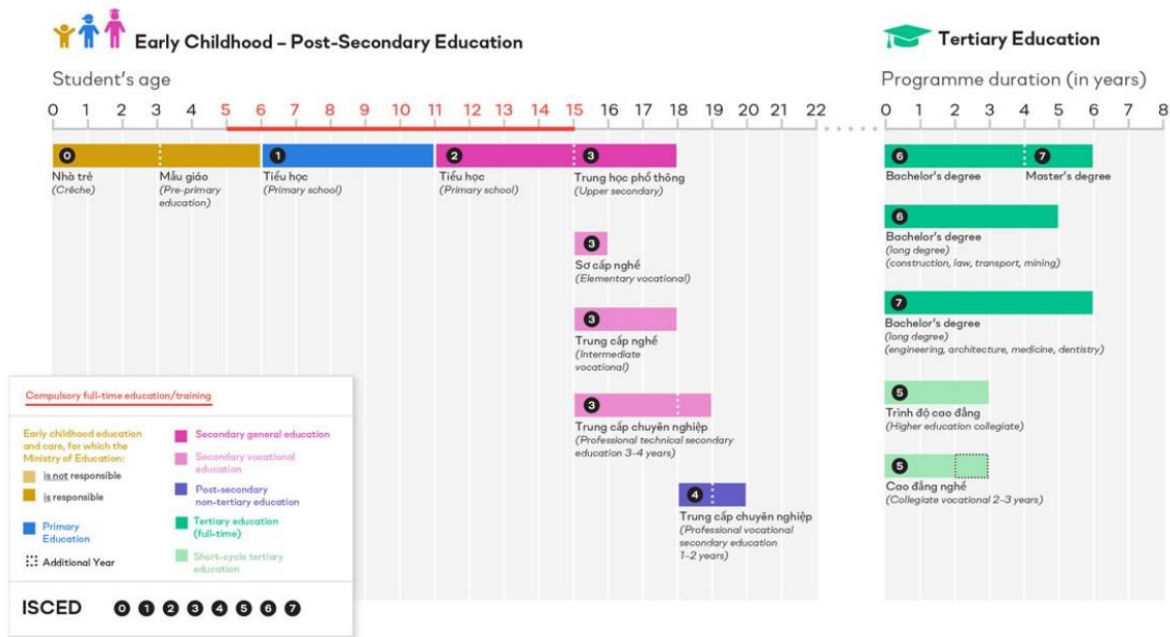


Figure 6. Structure of education system in Vietnam. The International standard classification of Education to ISCED 2011. Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2023)

Doan (2020) states that education in Vietnam has been under pressure, and the quality of education provider had been insufficient to meet the demand of internationalisation. Because of that talented students have moved to study abroad e.g. the United States, Australia, France, and the United Kingdom.

As Ho & Dimmock (2023) bring up from the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) 's and the Vietnamese government's perspective, there is a serious need to improve the quality of education with a long-standing concern that the school system is too entrenched in traditional ways of teaching and outdated curricula. That makes it inadequate for preparing the workforce with the skills needed to meet important economic, political, and social goals going forward.

Vocational education and training under development process at the time being. Vietnamese-German program called Reform of Technical Vocational Education and Training in Viet Nam II is funded by the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development and Vietnamese Government. The program aims to better align TVET to the changing needs in the world of work (GIZ, 2023). According to Nummela and Holm (2023) there are three main outputs to be achieved. First to interconnect state actors, TVET staff, institutes, and business. Second to have the regulatory

framework of TVET aligned to the requirements of the changing world of work. Third, the concept of high-quality TVET institutes is successfully implemented in selected TVET institutions.

Table 1. Development targets for VET staff and managers from the decision of Prime minister of Vietnam no: 73/QD-TT-G. Nummela & Holm (2023).

Development of Vocational education staff and managers regarding quantity and quality. Decision no: 73/QD-TT-G Prime minister of Vietnam 10.2.2023.

	2020	2023	2025 goals	2030 goals
I VET teaching staff				
1.1 regarding quantity				
1 number of teachers	N/A	N/A	70000	67000
of which craftsmen.. In all levels	N/A	N/A	14000	50000
2 number of managers	N/A	N/A	26000	25000
including managers in VET centers	N/A	N/A	400	800
1.2 regarding quality				
Teachers				
Teachers have Mastes degrees or higher %	N/A		50	70
Teachers have VET qualification higher than required for VET teachers %	N/A		20	30
Teachers have ASEAN-4 and G20 level %	N/A		60	65
Managers				
Managers degree level and requirements?	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Managers fo high quality schools acting as national centers and practice approach qualification level ASEAN-4 and G20 %			30-40	70
1.3. Regarding composition				
Women managers holding leading positions in local governments %			60	75

Table 1 presented by Nummela and Holm (2023) highlights the qualitative and quantitative targets related to teaching staff and leadership in Vocational education and training in Vietnam in 2025 and 2030 as written in the strategy and the decision of the Prime minister of Vietnam. It emphasizes the quantitative changes highlighting e.g. the comparability to ASEAN-4 and G20 countries levels. One of the significant changes, in all levels, can be seen in the number of the craftsmen, experts, and TVET teachers. All these goals presented can be challenging to reach because of the comparable figures of year 2020 or 2023 have not been available.

As Nummela and Holm (2023) states, the Vietnamese strategy for development of Vocational education during the 2021-2030 period with vision 2045 also considers SDG targets, such as regional and equal possibilities for learning, lifelong learning, and quality of education. In the same vision, the general goal is to quickly develop vocational education to meet the various requirement of labour market and the increasing requirement on quantity, structure, quality of human resource with vocational skill for the development of the country.

Education system and vocational education and training in Finland

The Finnish education system is known for its flexibility, autonomy, and equal opportunities for all learners, regardless of age, gender, or place of residence. As the Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland highlights (2022), education is one of the most important cornerstones of Finnish welfare society. The education system (see Figure 7) consists of early childhood education, pre-primary education, elementary school covering grades 1-9, secondary education consisting of both vocational education and upper secondary education as well as professional qualifications, and higher education by universities of applied sciences and universities.

In Finland, according to Finnish National Agency for Education (2024) about half of the students after completing their basic education continue in vocational education instead of high school. Vocational education and training (VET) also enable students to continue in higher education after graduation. It supports lifelong learning and students' development as citizens and members of society providing students with the knowledge and skills required for postgraduate studies and promotes employment.

EDUCATION SYSTEM IN FINLAND

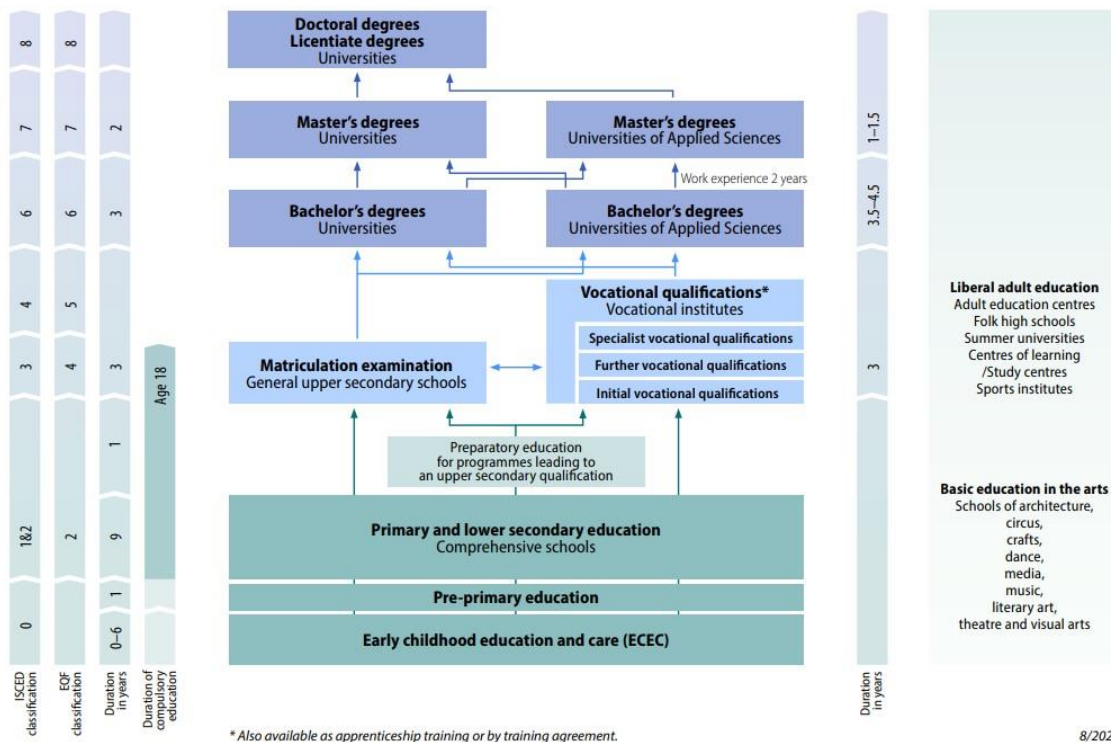


Figure 7. Finnish education system. Source: Ministry of Education and Culture (2022).

Finnish vocational education and training ensures skilled professionals for all sectors and supports job creation through entrepreneurship. VET offers qualifications at European Qualifications Framework levels 4 and 5. For young people without upper secondary qualifications, as well as for adults throughout their careers, there are upskilling or reskilling options. VET provides students with strong general and vocational competence. Another key principle is continuous competence development. All qualifications, are based on the national level competence framework, updated regularly together with the assistance of industry.

In Finland vocational education and training is organised mainly through institutions which are typically multidisciplinary education providers. Learning and assessment at a workplace is always included. The Finnish vocational qualification gives general eligibility for continuing studies at university of applied sciences and university studies level (see e.g. Finnish National Agency for Education and Ministry of Education and Culture).

Finnish Vocational Qualifications

- Modular and competency-based qualifications
- Built around professional processes
- Recognize prior learning
- Adhere to national learning outcomes and competencies
- Must include work-based learning
- Must be assessed combining theory and practice by two assessors in authentic work tasks
- Offer individual flexible learning opportunities
- Offer access to higher education
- Cover EQF4 and 5 levels

Figure 8. Finnish vocational qualifications. Source: Finnish National Agency for Education. (2024)

The most important aspects of Finnish vocational education and training are listed in Figure 8. Those are modularity and competency-based qualifications, recognising students prior learning, work-based learning, and offering individual and flexible learning opportunities for all.

Key differences in Vocational education and training system between Vietnam and Finland

In Vietnam, vocational education and training is organised within a centralised system (see Table 2). In Finland, on the contrary, training is organised based on regional working life needs, and the education providers are autonomous. In Vietnam, there are various levels of organisers and various programs. In Finland, every learner has their own individual development plan and prior learning is recognised.

There are differences in learning methods, pedagogy and learning places, too. In Finland, the focus is on working life orientation, and this is reflected in both the content and implementation of curricula, learning and assessment in the workplace, various projects and forecasting of workforce needs. Vocational education in Vietnam still does not enjoy nearly as strong an appreciation as

Finnish vocational education does due to decades of development work in terms of quality, teachers' skills, and different practices (Nummela & Holm, 2023).

Table 2 Comparison of Vietnamese and Finnish Vocational Education and Training. Source: Nummela & Holm. (2023)

Structure and Organization:	VIETNAM: Vocational education and training in Vietnam is primarily organized within a centralized system, overseen by the Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA). It consists of various vocational training centers and schools, both public and private, offering a wide range of vocational programs	FINLAND: In Finland, vocational education and training is decentralized and highly integrated with general education. It is based on a dual model, combining school-based education and workplace training. VET is offered by vocational institutions known as vocational colleges or schools, and they work closely with local industries and employers.
Duration and Pathways:	VIETNAM: VET programs in Vietnam typically last for two to three years, providing students with specific technical skills and knowledge for a particular occupation. There are various levels of VET, including intermediate, college, and university-level vocational programs.	FINLAND: Vocational education system in Finland flexible and is available for young and adult learners. VET programs usually last for three years, but every learner has their personal development plan. Prior learning is taken into account, and it shortens the study time. Finnish students can choose from a broad range of vocational programs, and after completing their studies, they can progress to higher education or enter the workforce.
Pedagogy and Teaching Methods:	VIETNAM: Traditional teaching methods and rote learning are often prevalent in Vietnamese vocational education. Classroom-based instruction is dominant, with a focus on theory and technical knowledge. Practical training is also provided, but it may have limitations in terms of equipment and resources.	FINLAND: Vocational education in Finland emphasizes a student-centered approach, with a strong focus on practical, hands-on learning. The curriculum combines theoretical studies with authentic workplace experiences. Learning takes place in well-equipped vocational institutions, simulated work environments, and actual workplaces through apprenticeships or internships.
Working life collaboration and Work-Based Learning:	VIETNAM: While there are partnerships between vocational schools and industries in Vietnam, the level of collaboration and work-based learning opportunities can vary. Some programs offer internships or apprenticeships, but there is room for further development in terms of industry involvement and practical training.	FINLAND: Work-based learning is a central aspect of vocational education in Finland. Vocational institutions have close ties with employers, ensuring that students receive practical training and work experience relevant to their chosen field. Apprenticeships and internships are integral components of the curriculum, allowing students to apply their skills in real work settings.
Perception and Status:	VIETNAM: Historically, vocational education in Vietnam has been perceived as a secondary option compared to general education or university studies. However, there has been a shift in recent years, with efforts to improve the status and recognition of vocational education as a viable career pathway. Strategy 2021-2030 emphasizes the importance of vocational training in all decision-making and at different levels.	FINLAND: vocational education enjoys a high level of prestige and is considered a respected career pathway. It is valued for its strong alignment with the needs of the labor market and the emphasis on practical skills development.

2.4 Finnish education export and vocational education export

Education Finland (2024) programme, developed in collaboration with Team Finland, coordinated by Finnish National Agency for Education and financed by Ministry of Education and Culture has the task to showcase Finland's education system globally and assist Finnish education exporters. It boosts the export of Finnish educational products and know-how including enhancing the visibility of the Finnish education system by organising events, providing information, and developing broader service concepts together with education export operators. The target markets are South-east Asia (Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia), China, Latin America, GULF region and Central Asia.

Education export is a commercial activity carried out by educational institutions and companies' activities related to education, the education system or skills to its transfer, and related products and services, where the payer is a foreign entity (Eksymä et al., 2020). According to Suhonen et al. (2022) education export is not a clear-cut concept and narrowly meaning the international movement of students and teachers the resulting export of education across national borders.

In a thesis discussing about risks in education export in University of Applied Sciences, Pusa (2022) describes education export being a business that is based on the strengths of Finnish education and its international reputation. Products and services are delivered from early childhood education to company personnel development. The development of education exports and various sales concepts have increased its turnover and strengthened its role, especially in higher education.

As a term, education export is not entirely without problems, as there are already numerous educational companies and educational institutions in Finland who exports various educational products and services. Nowadays, the export of education is also connected to the import of talent to Finland and ensuring the availability of labour. The forms can also be consulting, offering different learning platforms and solutions, quality, and curriculum work, etc., in addition to training teachers, managers, and students.

The Finnish Association for the Development of Vocational Education and Training, AMKE, is the guardian of interests and the service organisation for vocational education and training providers in Finland (AMKE, 2024). There is a statement in their webpages that securing sufficient resources

for vocational training requires expanding the funding base which can be expanded by promoting the export of education, also enabling the sales of degree-oriented education and degrees.

As the national qualification authority, the Finnish National Agency for Education (2024) decides how Finnish VET qualifications' competence requirements will be modified for international markets. Usually, the modifications relate to language requirements or other specifications related to Finland. All Finnish qualifications or modules of initial, further or specialist qualifications must be offered by or through a partnership with a Finnish vocational education training provider who has the license granted by the Ministry of Education and Culture. If a Finnish education provider is interested in offering qualifications to group of non-EU citizens, a permit needs to be applied for organising fee-based or commissioned training leading to official vocational qualification. Public funding for this kind of training is not allowed. Non-EU citizens can complete Finnish vocational qualifications or modules through different types of arrangements; third party, such as government, enterprise or an association sponsoring commissioned training for groups of students.

As Figure 9 shows, the quality and operating conditions of vocational education exports are promoted together with Finnish National Agency for Education by a three-year committee. The members are elected in such a way that they represent the authorities, education organisers engaged in vocational qualification export and other operators in the education sector. In addition, the Finnish National Agency for Education appoints permanent experts to the degree export committee based on the committee's own proposal (VETQA, 2024).

What is VETQA?

VETQA has a maximum of 9 members and is appointed by EDUFI for three-year periods. VETQA is the official partner to EDUFI to ensure the high quality of Finnish VET qualifications internationally.

VETQA duties and responsibilities:

1. Quality assurance related to Finnish vocational qualifications implemented internationally, including signing memorandum of understandings with relevant partner country authorities.
2. Advise EDUFI on VET qualifications' competence modifications required for international implementation.
3. Participate in EDUFI licensing process for Finnish training providers offering qualifications internationally.

Figure 9. Vocational Education and Training Quality Assurance. Source: Finnish National Agency for Education. (2024)

2.5 Opportunities and challenges for Finnish vocational education and training

In the previous chapters, the key challenges, and crucial points of view to be considered for the export of Finnish vocational education and training to Vietnam have been described to respond to the research questions and to form a reference framework for the qualitative section and the analysis. The key challenges can be found both in the convergence of domestic legislation and operating methods, and the globalisation and localisation of Finnish education and qualifications to the needs of the target country, i.e. Vietnam, the differences in Vietnam's and Finnish education system practices.

Since the legislation is relatively new in Vocational education and training export, it is important to have programs such Education Finland and actors like VETQA who inform Finnish actors, education providers and educational companies about the practicalities. According to Haapanen and Harjula

(2021, p.31) to really be able to export Finnish education, there is a strong hope that the decision-makers will dismantle the obstacles which still occurs. Many felt that the bureaucracy was the biggest obstacle in making education export possible.

As Al Hamad (2020, p.68) has listed the key challenges facing Finnish VET providers in United Arab Emirates, one can see similarities with the challenges in Vietnam. The listed ones are strategy challenges including lack of internationalisation, socio-cultural challenges including language problems and gender inequality and low status of VET, economical, and political gaining governmental support. Also, knowledge-based challenges e.g. lack of information about vocational education and training benefits, and management and human resources challenges, such as unavailability of motivated, bilingual educators occurs.

Alen (2021) identified Finland's strengths being the quality of education, working life co-operation and digital services and networking with other education providers and companies. Vocational education has had a small role, and as obstacles he brings out the challenges of sales and marketing, the small number of operators among educational institutions, the amount and ambiguity of bureaucracy, and the financial aspect.

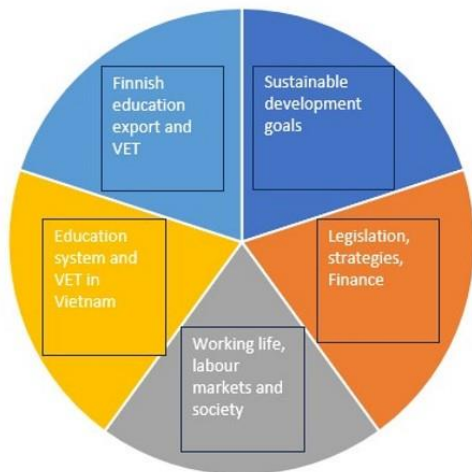
As Nummela and Holm (2023) brings up the Vietnamese Vision 2045 for vocational education and training, there will be less vocational education schools and training centres in Vietnam. The qualifications offered in future will be wider with more content reaching towards multi-talent qualifications. The changes in working life and in vocational education put pressure and there is a need for teacher training related to pedagogy and demands of combining the study fields and widening the qualifications' content. Therefore, there could be possibilities for the Finnish educational providers to collaborate with Vietnamese vocational schools and institutes. On many occasions, vocational teacher training, supporting the schools to build partnerships with the companies to prepare for working life, curriculum work, or providing opportunities for Vietnamese student groups to study Finnish qualifications in Vietnam or in Finland would be the opportunities.

In Vietnam Finland is known as a knowledge-based society investing in quality education and leverages high technology according to Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Finland (2024). The education sector can be seen providing an opportunity to align these strengths with Finland's image,

whether it's about mobility of experts and students or offering education-related services in Vietnam. The business environment remains challenging and complex despite Vietnam's significant integration into the global economy.

In Figure 10 key challenges for Finnish vocational education exports in the research context are analysed and summarised. From the left sustainable development goals, legislation, strategies, and financing VET export, working life and society changes, Education system and VET's role in in Vietnam and last Finnish education export and VET export. There are a lot of differences in these categories in both countries. In the same figure from the right, the main challenges and related sub-challenges from the literature and research are summarised.

Challenges for Finnish VET export in Vietnam



Main Challenges for Finnish VET export in Vietnam	Sub-Challenges for Finnish VET export in Vietnam
C1. SDGs off the track	C1.1 SDGs not implemented in education and other targets affecting VET and working life (Covid-19, strategies)
C2. Skills does not match due the working life and demography changes	C2.1 New technologies (AI, robotics) challenges the skills and professions C2.2 Curriculum and competences does not match, not enough working life connections C2.3 Young population – unemployment C2.4 Aging people 2060
C3. VET is not flexible and image not attractive	C3.1 Quality of VET needs improvement (qualified teachers, managers, curriculum, working life equivalence) C3.2 Life-long learning and flexibility is needed in VET for different learners C3.3 Academic path is more attractive than vocational
C4. Education system, VET in Vietnam	C4.1 Quantitative goals and decisions for the future (2025, 2030 and vision 2045) but little available information on the current state C4.2 Different qualifications and criteria, legislations. not easily found for comparison
C5. Finnish VET export needs improvement	C5.1 Finnish legislation and implementation needs actions to encourage VET export C5.2 Finance challenges Finnish VET export C5.3 Why to co-operate with Finland instead of other countries?

Figure 10. Challenges for Finnish Vocational Education and Training export in Vietnam. Enhanced by author, 2024.

There are five main challenges in the framework. First, SDGs are off the track and sub challenge is that they are not implemented in practice from strategies in education and other targets affecting

on such Vocational education and training working life practices. Secondly, skills do not match to the needs of the working life and there are four sub challenges, including new technologies, curriculum and competences, young population at this moment, but rapidly ageing people in the future. Third, VET is not attractive. The quality of vocational education and training needs improvement e.g. teacher and manager training, curriculum changes, and co-operation with working life. Also, there is a need for lifelong learning and flexible study paths that are missing. Fourth, the whole education system and the strategies and development plans. One cannot easily find enough information about the current situation, the criteria of curriculum, and the fact that there is not SDG assessment of VET done. which makes it difficult to compare the situation and the real need for co-operation and development. The final, and a big challenge is the current legislation of Finnish vocational education export in Finland including the finance and the image of Finland abroad.

Possibilities for strengthening Vietnamese vocational education and training, also for Finnish vocational education export, can be seen investing the infrastructure, developing, and implementing strategies and plans for transitions for online training and needed equipment and knowledge, training the trainers, modernisation of curriculum to align the needs from working life including soft skills, quality assurance and international co-operation in VET (Nummela & Holm, 2023). An education provider that exports qualifications or its modules localise the education to suit the target country and tailors it to the needs of customers. Understanding customer needs, purchasing processes, and creating new business models is challenging but rewarding long-term work.

3 Methodology

The methodology employed in this thesis is described as follows; qualitative case study research using semi-structured key informant interviews and observations for data collection. This approach is presented and justified in the following chapter. There is no clear formula for case study but the choice I made was the topic and the nature of qualitative research trying to answer to the questions “how” and “why” (e.g. Hennink et al., 2011, Yin, 2018). The processes of data collection and analysis are also described. The empirical data is collected by interviewing six key informants

representing different organisations to allow for a rich data set to be collected. At the end of this chapter the verification of the findings and research ethics are shown.

3.1 Research approach: qualitative case study research

Doing the research involves a lot of preliminary considerations and several decisions even after the topic has been selected during the whole process. Therefore, as Creswell & Creswell (2023) highlights it is crucial to inform the audience about the philosophical assumptions, which methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation are used on the study.

Qualitative research is guided by concepts from the interpretive paradigm, while quantitative research from the positivist paradigm. There are also key differences between the data collected; qualitative research is concentrating for the textual data, study population being small and selected purposively for the interviews and the outcome developing an initial understanding. Observations or group discussions can also be used. As Hennink et al. (2011) states the purpose of the study is to gain detailed understanding of reasons, beliefs or motivations of the phenomena or topic. Quantitative research on the other hand, aims for another; it quantifies the data to a broader population sample size being large and data usually numerical.

Qualitative research explores and tries to understand the meaning of individuals or groups of social or human problem. Hennink et al. (2011) brings out that typically qualitative approach is used for providing in depth understanding for new topics or complex issues, identify processes and it can be used for a wide range of applications. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023, p.5) the research process involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. This means that the research process includes asking questions, collecting data in real word settings, analysing the data, and interpreting its meaning.

The Figure 11 provides a presentation how the qualitative research process can be visualised as Bryman and Bell (2015) has described. This picture gives insights about the research's iterative nature.

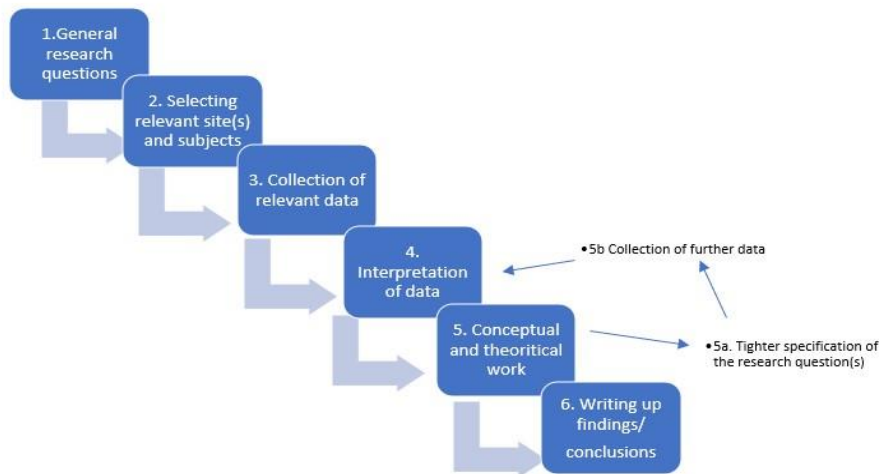


Figure 11. An outline of the main steps of qualitative research process. Source: Bryman & Bell (2015, p.395). Modified by author, 2024.

Even there are different steps from general research questions ending up writing the findings, the process could be shown also as a circle (see Figure 12) providing deeper understanding that the different stages of the research are not isolated but rather interconnected and subject to re-processing. By this figure one can better understand the nature of qualitative case study research and the need of re-planning, re-designing, and re-preparing the research and its implementation during the research process.

Case studies can employ any of the qualitative methods on offer – with observation, interviewing and document analysis the most likely elements of to be brought into play. (Davies, 2007, p. 185) Single case study, as it is in this research, can provide valuable insights usually into complex phenomena. It is important to be able to express the reality of one’s research process and the way analysed the data used. As Saunders et al. (2019) states in relation to the structure of the report, in an inductive research approach it is likely that the emergence of themes during data analysis will lead to consult new strands of literature.

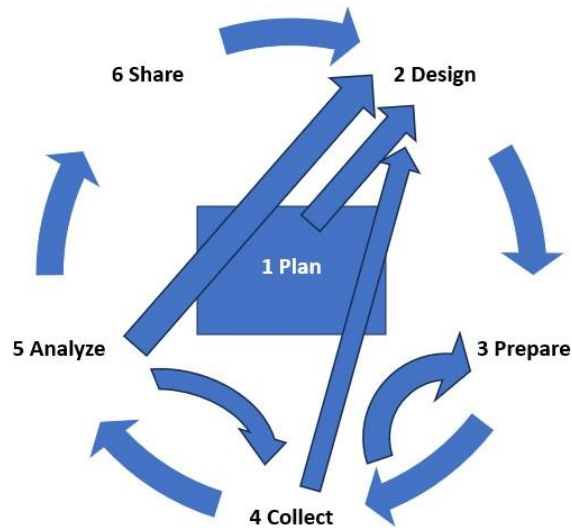


Figure 12. Doing a Case Study Research: A linear but iterative process. Source: Yin (2018). Enhanced by author, 2024.

A case study is one of the most challenging of all social science aspirations when the goal is to design a good case research, collecting, presenting, and analysing the data, and finally compose an article or report. A common misconception is that the various research methods should be arrayed hierarchically, but as the Figure 12 above shows the process is linear but iterative (Yin, 2018).

The approach shown in Figure 13 gives an opportunity to change the direction during the process clarifying the original topic or problem, research questions and even changes can be made to implementation method, data collection and theoretical framework.

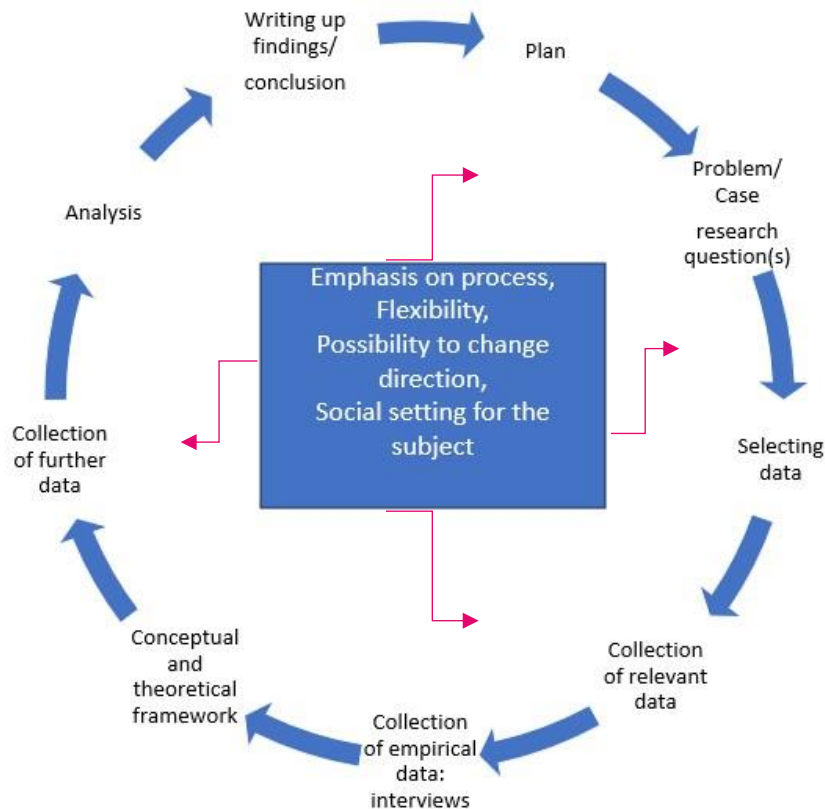


Figure 13. Qualitative analysis in Case study research, where the researcher has years social setting for the subject. Source: Bryman & Bell (2015); Yin (2018). Enhanced by author, 2024.

Adopting ethnography, or observation as a fieldwork approach is done for example, when researchers wish to get a holistic picture of a situation or understand the cultural meaning attached to the research issues (e.g. Bryman & Bell, 2015; Hennink et al., 2011). In participatory action research the researcher conducts the research with people, not on people. Ethnographic approach is thus a mixed of methods, such as key informant interviews, observation and quantitative data can be also part of this approach. Existing material can be a rich source for cases e.g. books, reports, articles, records, notes, photographs, internal memos, internet data and websites (Gummesson, 2017).

For researcher it would be important to spend considerable amount of time with informants of the organisation being studied (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013). Bryman and Bell (2015, p.393) point out that ethnography and participant observation are often treated as synonymous.

In this study I use term observation researcher being inside the subject and having social setting for the subject. Researcher has long hands-on experience and long close observation from vocational education and training and education export in Finland, and one can describe it as a social setting, meaning ethnographic and participation observation, for the subject as shown in Figure 13.

The methodology, used in this thesis, allows researcher to explore subject deeply, identify gaps and contribute valuable insights to both theory and practice. There is not clear formula for case study but the choice I made was the topic and the nature of qualitative research trying to explain “what”, “how “and “why” questions. Not only with data collection but constantly during this whole research process those questions have been asked. According to Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) business and management studies have been slow to accept a single case study as a method but this approach has expanded also with doctoral studies.

3.2 Research context

The context of this study was Finnish educational export, particularly vocational educational export, aiming to consider SDGs and changes in working life from the perspective of challenges and opportunities in Vietnam.

This study discusses a case or topic, not only from the perspective of a single organisation, but aims to provide information that benefits vocational education providers, education export companies, different parties both Finland and Vietnam, and those stakeholders responsible for legislation and its implementation. Many qualitative studies are aiming to provide very detailed information what is going on in the settings being investigated. In this case the title and research problem are broad, and the research purpose is to produce thematic information and bring up insights of the challenges and opportunities that emerge both literature and data in this moment. This limitation was justified due the relatively short history of Finnish vocational education export legislation and implementations, as well as the lack of extensive research in this area, which hopefully provides a good overview and increases more understanding of the subject and enables more detailed future research and data collection in this field.

The researcher's role was related to work position involving education export conducting participant observation during the working years. This also justifies the nature of the research with the researcher being within the subject of Finnish education, especially the changes in vocational education over the last 25 years, making observations on the choice of research topic from its perspectives and context, and target subjects to the compilation of the framework.

3.3 Data collection, interview process and interviewees

This section explains how the empirical data was collected and how the interviewee selection and process was implemented.

Semi-structured interview and observation as a data collection tool

The empirical data in this thesis was collected using both interviews and observation. Observation produces requests on current documents and statistics to authorities such as The Finnish National Agency for Education and Education Finland to get the information which has not been published yet at the time of writing this thesis. Also, SDG Booster seminar held online on 16th January 2024, the material and Nordic day seminar material was used to complement the content and increase understanding of the subject area. The Nordic day seminar was held in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi 20-21.3.2024 and it was organised by Embassy of Denmark, Embassy of Finland, Norwegian Embassy, Embassy of Sweden, Fulbright University and Ho Chi Minh Academy. Seminar held in 20th of March was open to public.

Observations traditional domain has been in primitive societies, and the method comes from ethnography and anthropology, but it is increasingly applied to market and corporate life. Unstructured and semi-structured observation produce qualitative data. Saunders et al. (2019, 378-382) points out that formerly neglected observation as a method for business and management is yet seen rewarding and enlightening adding the richness of research data.

As Gummesson (2017) describes on observation one needs all senses to listen, ask and watch, and it requires intensive field work. He continues that shadowing is a method to study organisations in

their everyday activities and interactions. In this case the researcher is part of the studied environment or case; vocational education expert and takes part in the work and social life, and therefore have a social setting for the study as described earlier.

Complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant and complete observer are the four dimensions or roles what Saunders et al. (2019) highlights adding fifth element as a collaborative observer (see Figure 14).

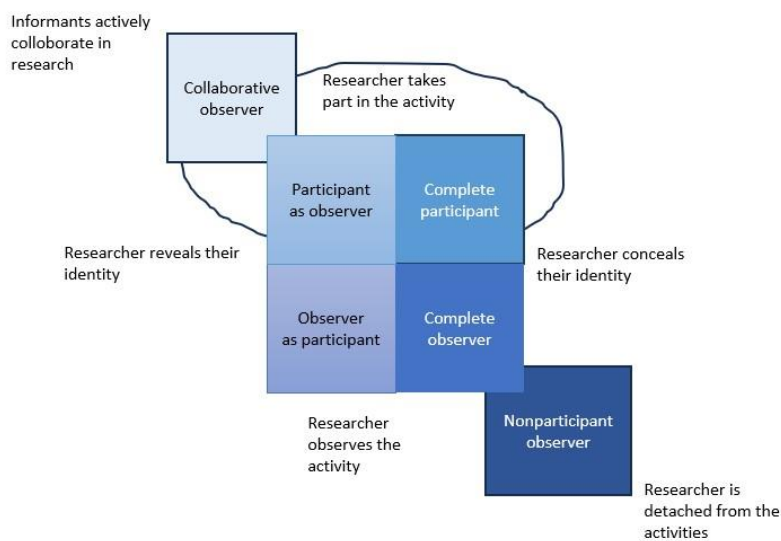


Figure 14. Collecting data through observation. Observer roles. Source: Saunders et al., (2019, p. 388) enhanced by author, 2024.

In this research process researcher acted as complete participant or complete observer and sometimes also collaborative observer as people knew beforehand that researcher is conducting the research and wanted to give insights about the ongoing matters. Considering the initial purpose of observation from research planning to design is to gather information and insights, observe, learn from events, focus on specific areas within a natural setting, and apply this understanding throughout the thesis process.

As Gummesson (2017) points out, sensitivity and openness combined with preunderstanding is a productive vantage point. The social setting researcher has been with Finnish education export practicalities and having insights from Vietnamese education helped to better understand the

initial situation starting from the title of this study and the original research questions and to outline thematic areas and the structure of the interview. As Hennink et al. (2020, p.171) presents there are several benefits in using observation, for example when exploring a new topic of research, complement other methods of data collection and provide contextual understanding to the findings.

Qualitative interviewing is a very broad topic in terms of describe wide range of interviewing styles. According to Bryman and Bell (2015) ethnography or participant observation typically engage in a substantial amount of qualitative interviewing. Using semi-structured interviews which consist of pre-formulated question patterns is easy flexibly being utilised. The interviewee can take questions in a different order, skip some, and make observations not only of what is said but how things are said.

Research questions are different from interview questions. While research questions are more abstract and conceptual, using academic language, interview questions are understandable by an interviewee and are more collegial style (Hennink et al., 2011). Bryman and Bell (2015) encourage proper preparation and they also warn novice researchers of inefficient questions that might lead only to simple yes or no answers. Semi-structured interview question patterns can be seen in Appendix 2.

Interviewee selection, interviewees, and interview process

Researcher has some earlier experience about semi-structured interviews from other international projects, and that experience was considered when designing the interviewee selection and process. In this research the interviewees were selected from the author's network using purposive samplings which e.g. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) recommends ensuring the knowledge about the specific topic. In total, six interviews were conducted. A summary of the interviewees can be seen in the Table 3 below where the most important information is gathered. Background of the interviewees is described in the text to ensure the anonymity of the interviewees.

Table 3. A summary of the interviewees.

Interviewee, key informant	Work experience	Gender	Background	Interview time
A	15 +	Male	Governmental, executive	55 min
B	30 +	Male	Governmental, executive	55 min
C	30 +	Male	Educational, managerial	65 min
D	15 +	Female	Educational, managerial	60 min
E	20 +	Female	Educational company, managerial	35 min
F	25 +	Male	Educational company, executive	35 min

There were certain criteria set for selected participants for interviews. Each six key informants were required to have some experience or knowledge about current affairs in Vietnam. Secondly, each selected interviewees needed to possess deep information or experience either in Finnish education export or vocational education and training in Vietnam, or broader knowledge and experience of cooperation between Vietnam and Finland. The quality of the interviews was more important than their quantity since the topic is complex and requires deep understanding and experience from both Finnish education and co-operation between Finland and non-EU countries as Vietnam. Two experts of this topic were asked to recommend another from their network to be interviewed. Researcher has been testing this same method earlier with non-academic interviews and this worked with two interviews in this research.

Six experts were interviewed, each having work experience ranging from fifteen years to over thirty years (as indicated in the table, with an average of 15 + - 30 + years). Two of the interviewees were female, and four were male. Two of the interviewees resided in Vietnam, while four lived in Finland. All Finnish participants had experience with non-EU countries as well as Vietnam. The interviewees represented various background and knowledge, including vocational education, higher education, companies engaged in educational exports, and broader Finnish-Vietnamese relations.

The flexibility enabled by semi-structured interviews was utilised, however, each interview followed the same main sequence. As recommended by Bryman and Bell (2015) piloting allows required changes to be made to the interview frame. In this research grouping the themes was done using previous experience about semi-structured interviews and observation of the topic. The flow of the interview was improved by grouping questions according to themes to create a logical flow to help the data processing and analysing later.

Participating these interviews and answering the questions was voluntary. Video camera recording was on during the whole time apart from three interviews when the network did not support using that option.

During the interviews, the answers of respondents was written down by hand or Word, and Teams transcript was made which the researcher checked soon after the interview ended for any possible errors or translation mistakes. Later, interviews were also checked by playing and pausing the recordings and comparing the written notes with the Teams transcript.

Five interviews were conducted in Finnish and one in English with Vietnamese interpreter. As Bryman & Bell has pointed out (2015) it is important to remember that if there are people from different cultures using different language some identifiable sociocultural gaps may occur between the interviewer and interviewee. From a reliability standpoint, nuances of the interview answers may be lost in the process of translation and therefore it is important to ask the questions that are understandable and that the interview situation allows both ask clarifying questions.

3.4 Data analysis

As Hennink et al. (2011) highlights the qualitative data analysis is interpretive, whereby researchers seek to interpret the meanings that participants themselves give to their views and experiences. Initially, the data analysis was started using a data-driven basis. There were pre-selected units of analysis. The first reading rounds were completed with no other intention than to become familiar with the data and the themes. During the next reading rounds, similarities in the interviewee comments were systematically raised using the semi-structured interview themes.

In almost all interviews, the interviewees spoke more broadly and went beyond several themes and questions of the thematic interview, sharing their experiences and opinions. The purpose of the thematic interview is precisely to get key information about a certain topic or phenomenon. This approach enables a deep understanding and a versatile perspective when the interviewees can openly talk about their own experiences and thoughts. In this way, rich and versatile information can be collected, which was exactly the purpose of the semi-structured interviews, to allow the interviewee to bring out the important perspectives from their point of view. The focus was on, what, at times also, on how things were said.

Next preliminary categories were marked using the framework with 5 different challenge and opportunities areas shown in chapter 2. Those were 1) SDGs, 2) Legislation, strategies, and finance, 3) Working life, labour market and society, 4) Education system and VET in Vietnam and 5) Finnish education export and VET (see Figure 15).

Challenges and opportunities – from framework to organizing the data for results



Figure 15. From framework “Challenges for Finnish VET export in Vietnam” to “Challenges and opportunities for Finnish VET export know-how”. Enhanced by author, 2024.

The practical process of data analysis was performed using Word and Microsoft Excel. First, the transcripts of the interviews were marked according to the themes used in the interview. This was important to do, because each interviewee did bring up different themes in a different order. Secondly, original comments were marked using the theoretical framework. The most relevant comments from the interviews were marked. Then the comments were organised under the four

main categories which arose both from the analysis of the interviews and from the observation. The categories were 1) Sustainable labour market, green and digital transition 2) Mutual direction, implementing strategies, legislation, and finance 3) Finnish way, quality VET and 4) Cultural understanding and collaboration (see Figure 16).

Challenges and opportunities – from framework to organizing the data for results

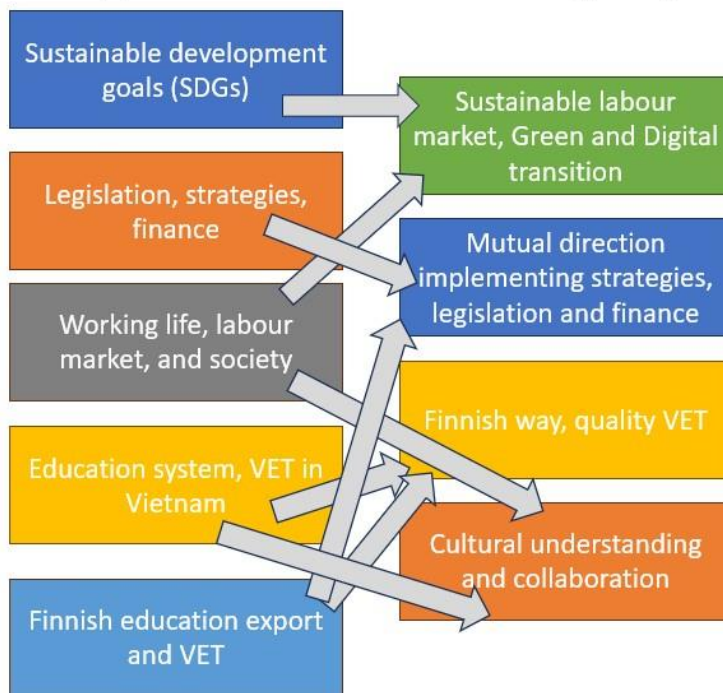


Figure 16. Organising the data according to interview findings and observation. Themes, challenges and opportunities are interconnected. Enhanced by author, 2024.

Observation can be seen as a crucial part of research process providing valuable insights even when the researcher has been working in the field. In this case it brought new aspects and helped the researcher to see the approach with fresh eyes by engaging discussions with other experts, participating conferences and reading widely the relevant literature. As Gilham (2008, p.7) points out in a similar manner than surveys offer a broader context within which more detailed interviews are embedded, observation can also contribute to a comprehensive descriptive framework.

This approach exposed the ideas and perspectives in this research paying attention to the context and exploring the relations between the phenomena. At preliminary stage there were notes and sketches done to lead the process and, also direction changes were made during the process as

described earlier in Figure 14. During the trip to Vietnam, which was made after the interviews, the notes, observations, and photographs helped critically to examine the interviews and the framework and to discover and connect specific phenomena.

Next, the data and findings and original framework were organised on four themes which included the key challenges, sub challenges and solutions (see Figure 17). Those are presented in chapter 4.

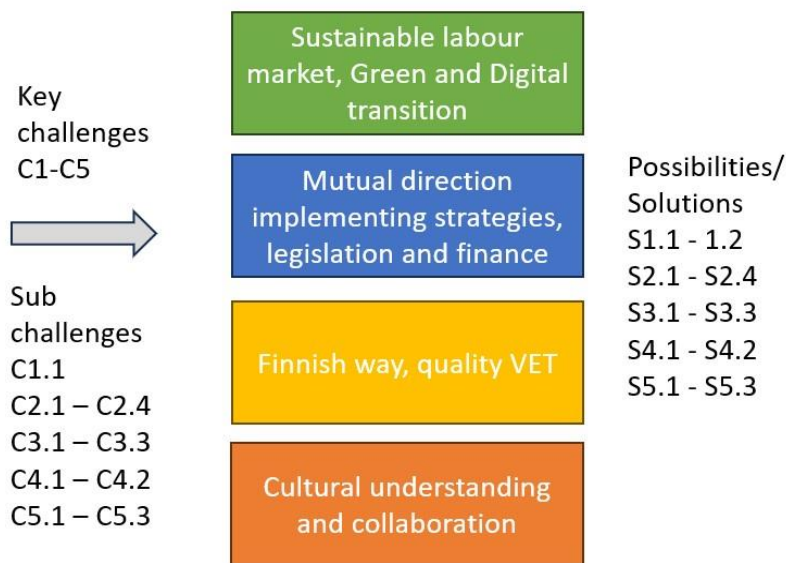


Figure 17. Organising the data, key challenges and sub-challenges, solutions and the findings for four main themes. Enhanced by author, 2024.

Finally, the findings were organised for sub-themes, including both the challenges and possibilities raised from the data (see Figure 18). Challenges C and solutions S are presented in the beginning of the chapter 4 following analysed data presented in written format.

Finnish VET know how export
Challenges and opportunities – process from literature framework, to analysis and findings

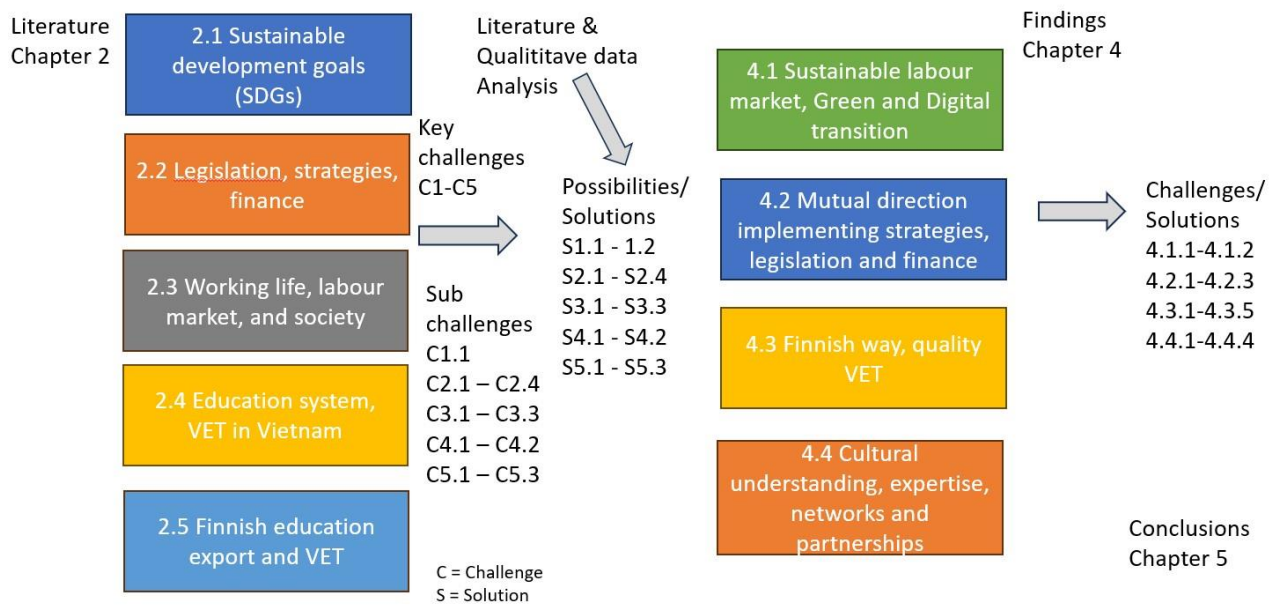


Figure 18. Analysis process. Organising the data from the literature and qualitative data for findings.

Enhanced by author, 2024.

3.5 Verification of findings: trustworthiness, authenticity, credibility, and transferability in qualitative research

External reliability, whether the study can be replicated or not, is difficult criteria to meet in qualitative research. There are some writers who have suggested that different criteria are needed to evaluate qualitative research than are used in quantitative research. Those proposed two criteria are trustworthiness and authenticity (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Four criteria for trustworthiness to assess the qualitative study are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability which can be seen as parallel for internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 400). There are several questions to consider during the process and assess the research as summarised in the following table (see Table 4).

Table 4 Verification of findings in qualitative research (e.g. Bryman & Bell, 2015; Stahl & King, 2020).

Enhanced by author, 2024.

Trustworthiness	Question	Action
Credibility	How congruent are the findings with original data?	The researcher must be honest and explain the process and results well
Transferability	How well can the results be applied to other contexts? Can the findings be relevant in other situations or environments?	The researcher must explain can the results be applicable to other cases
Dependability	How reliable is the research process?	It is important to document the steps and decisions to help to assess the reliability of the process
Confirmability	How objective is the research outcome?	The researchers must be aware of their own role and influences in the research process

Objectivity or confirmability in educational qualitative research is sometimes problematic as Atkins & Wallace (2012) remains because the researcher is often inside the subject, runs the interviews and adds personal reflections. Adopting similar social role than in original ethnographic research can be one suggested strategy to meet the requirement of transferability.

Bryman & Bell (2015, p.402) noted that qualitative findings are usually unique from contextual, and the significance of the study comes from the social world being studied. According to Stahl et al. (2020) triangulation used through the various processes is one method of promoting credibility. That means using several sources of information and data or procedure from the field to repeatedly establish identifiable patterns.

Sensitivity to context is one of the proposed criteria for authenticity of the study meaning not only the context of social setting but also relevant theoretical positions and ethical issues.

3.6 Research Ethics

Doing a qualitative research project, the ethical issues such collecting data, cultural sensitivity, anonymity, and confidentiality, are important and have been guiding this research process. Avoiding harm or risk and following good scientific practice is essential. Instructions of Jamk University of Applied Sciences (Jamk, 2018) are clear and those has been followed during the thesis process from planning, ideating, searching literature, collecting, storing, and publishing data. Many researchers (Atkins & Wallace, 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2019; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018) consider important to take the ethical approach into account through the whole research especially when involving human participants in business and management and educational research.

The participants took part willingly in the interview, were informed about the research and were made aware of how their information and materials would be used in the study, as well as the importance of anonymity. At the beginning of each interview, permission was sought to record the conversation. The aim was to create a comfortable atmosphere during the interview, allowing the interviewee to express themes and answer questions in their own words, while also encouraging them to ask clarifying questions themselves.

Prior the online interview, individual Microsoft Teams invitation was sent to each participant including a brief overview of the topic. The advance information was beneficial, allowing the interviewees to familiarise themselves with the subject, and saving time during the interview. It also served as a written document between both parties ensuring that pre-information was provided to all interviewees.

As Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) express, the connection between research and ethics is twofold. On the one hand, the results of research affect ethical decisions, on the other hand, ethical perspectives affect the decisions made in scientific work. However, the nature of qualitative research is comprehensive, and methods that emphasise the voices of the participants are favourable.

The central guideline during the whole research process has been not to disclose information about interviewees, organisations or observed events and situations and not to reveal any confidential or harmful information as part of the research.

4 Sustainable transition and skilled employees – Opportunities and challenges for Finnish vocational education export know-how in Vietnam

This chapter presents findings from the interviews and observations and other data. There are many challenges for Finnish vocational education know how export, but on the other hand there are also opportunities in Vietnam. The heading Sustainable transition and skilled workers describes already in itself the connection, opportunities, and possible challenges of vocational education in the transition of working life both globally and locally.

The literature framework had five areas: SDG goals, working life and society, Vietnamese education systems and VET, Legal framework and finance, and Finnish education export and VET. Five key challenges were identified from this basis, and thirteen sub-challenges were found for them from the literature. The following table (Table 5) summarises the most important challenges from the point of view of the reference framework from the literature and the opportunities based on the analysis of the literature, interviews, and other qualitative data.

Based on the data, and the challenges and opportunities connected to them, the findings were next organised and combined into the entities, which better describe the results and the connection of different areas to each other, both in domestic development work and in the export of vocational education and training know how to Vietnam. First Sustainable Labor market and Green and digital transition, secondly Finding a mutual direction both in Finland and Vietnam; implementing strategies, legislations and financing VET export of know-how, thirdly Finnish way, and finally Cultural understanding, expertise, networks, and partnerships.

Table 5. Challenges and solutions for Finnish vocational education and training export know how in Vietnam. Enhanced by author, 2024.

Main Challenges for Finnish VET export in Vietnam	Sub-Challenges for Finnish VET export in Vietnam	Solutions/ Possibilities for Finnish VET export know - how
C1. SDGs off the track	C1.1 SDGs not implemented in education and other targets effecting VET and working life (Covid-19, strategies)	S1.1 SDG4 + SDG8 sustainable transition, decent jobs: Finnish workplace learning and mutual projects models S1.2 Finnish VET and curriculum has the elements inside (equity, recycling, new tech, support working life connections)
C2. Skills does not match due the working life and demography changes	C2.1 New technologies (AI, robotics) challenges the skills and professions C2.2 Curriculum and competences does not match, not enough working life connections C2.3 Young population – unemployment C2.4 Aging people 2060	S2.1 Teacher training, on the job learning and workplace facilities – working life connections. Training for students utilizing project learning and other methods S2.2 VET Reform. Finnish qualifications or models and curriculum work and practices S2.3 Studying qualification in Finland S2.4 Co-operation with Finnish companies in Vietnam to educate workers with Finnish qualification or modules
C3. VET is not flexible and image not attractive	C3.1 Quality of VET needs improvement (qualified teachers, managers, curriculum, working life equivalence) C3.2 Life-long learning and flexibility is needed in VET for different learners C3.3 Academic path is more attractive than vocational	S3.1 Deeper co-operation with Finnish education providers and companies for bigger projects and different solutions S3.2 Modules of qualification or short courses for adults, individual study plans to support students learning S3.3 Finnish examples, pathways to higher education
C4. Education system, VET in Vietnam	C4.1 Quantitative goals and decisions for the future (2025, 2030 and vision 2045) but little available information on the current state C4.2 Different qualifications and criteria, not easily found for comparison	S4.1 cultural understanding and education export knowledge is needed for planning and implementation in collaboration with local actors S4.2 alumni and local actor co-operation for finding and translating relevant information
C5. Finland and Finnish VET export needs improvement	C5.1 Finnish legislation and implementation needs actions to encourage VET export C5.2 Finance challenges Finnish VET export C5.3 Why to co-operate with Finland instead of other countries (e.g. Germany)?	S5.1 Finding a mutual direction with Finnish stakeholders, legislation and practicalities to help Finnish VET education know how S5.2 Finding co-operation clusters and utilize different funding sources (Finnpartnerships, private sector etc.) S5.3 More marketing and presence, Team Finland and embassy co-operation, co-operation with Finnish companies in Vietnam “Happiest country in the world”

In the headings used in this chapter interrelated areas and terms that came up in the interviews and observations have been combined. The term Education export has been replaced by education export know-how and working life, labour market and sustainable development goals have been combined as sustainable labour market, which was the expression used in Vietnam and which is also connected to green and digital transition.

The themes, when re-grouped based on the material, already describe challenges in themselves and, on the other hand, opportunities connected to them, which also in this case was a challenge to classify under only one heading, because they intersect each other. As Interviewee A connected in two sentences Vietnam, its population and productivity, vocational education development needs and sustainable development goals.

Vietnam is interesting, and there is a young nation with an age structure where the population is growing strongly, and challenges identified at the state level in how to get the country's productivity to rise. And then there is the need to develop vocational education, which of course already involves many SDGs (Interviewee A).

In the following paragraphs, the interviewees and other qualitative data material are given voice under four different main themes, in which the challenges and opportunities are described in text form with the help of some figures.

4.1 Sustainable labour market and green and digital transition is topical

Sustainable development and the promotion of these goals, especially in working life, is topical now in Vietnam. Funding has also been allocated to related projects.

The title Sustainable Labor market and green and digital transition combines themes specifically related to SDG8 such as informal employment, decent work and the challenges and opportunities of new technologies and the digital transition. Sustainable labour market and green and digital transition connect also SDG4 goals and quality education and equal opportunities and life-long learning for all.

These themes came up also in the SDG Booster online event organised by Finnpartnership in January 16, 2024, and in the Nordic day seminar organised in Vietnam on March 20-21, 2024. The possibilities and fields of technology were also brought up in the interviews as opportunities for exporting Finnish know-how, especially in relation to water and energy knowledge, as well as from the perspectives of existing good practices and working life cooperation.

4.1.1 Green and digital transition changes the education and the world of work

Both Finnish and Vietnamese actors were collected in November 2023 and January 2024 for SDG Booster workshop. Topical presentations and introductions were also heard, in addition to the fact that the participants strive to find cooperation partners for each other's identified needs and opportunities. According to Pana and Tran both green transition and green jobs in Vietnam are mentioned in Vietnamese National Green growth strategy for period 2021-2030, with a vision 2050 and action plan. The Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) brings up the need of creating green jobs and training human resources to meet the needs of green economic sectors (Maria Pana & Minh Tran, 2024. Personal communication. Green transition and green jobs in Viet Nam. Presentation for the SDG Booster online seminar 16.1.2024).

Pana and Tran (2024) also listed four benefits of green transition for vocational education and training. First, to strengthen the Vietnamese economy and quality of life. Secondly, to enhance competitiveness of enterprises. Third, to increase employment opportunities for trainees. And last, to increase enrolment rates for training institutions. There also brought up three identified challenges; first to identify what green skills are needed, secondly, how to adopt the VET system to green technological developments, and third, the shortage of qualified vocational trainers for new skills and environmental knowledge.

In the interview responses, the SDG goals with green transition did not come up particularly, part of the reason may be, and has also said, that in the Finnish society and Finnish education system, those have already been strongly included in the implementation. In Vietnam, on the other hand, the goals have not yet been so centrally included in the curricula and practical activities, and the projects are separately funded. Also, Finnish companies have been involved with SDG related projects earlier in Vietnam. Therefore, Finnish Water Forum and green tech were mentioned as possibilities for vocational education export know how, too.

Yes, that Finnish green technology and that environmental know-how and these SDG things, they are probably quite visible in everything Finns do, if not quite directly. At least there in the background in our world of values. And yes, Finnish environmental technology is in demand (Interviewee C).

Water related things, Finnish Water Forum. As a content producer. (Interviewee F)

Green jobs and sustainable food chain has seen important in Vietnam. In Figure 19, a photograph from the greenhouse in the courtyard of a vocational school in Vietnam, is shown.



Figure 19. A Photograph from a greenhouse in the courtyard of a vocational school in Vietnam. By author, 2024.

Finnish society and education were highlighted, especially Finnish vocational education and curriculum which includes sustainable development goals already inside responding with the working life and its needs.

SDGs are widely discussed globally and incredibly significant. In our Finnish society and education, they are ingrained, innate. We can largely adopt this model because it is already within us, and considering the cultural context it comes naturally (Interviewee F).

As some of the interviewees brought up, if we want to better understand the recent needs in Vietnam, we need to look back a little in the Finnish education history and remember how it used to be organised, how the learning methods and technology were used, and what were the development issues. Then it is easier to understand the challenges of today's working life and vocational education and the challenges with the digitalisation and transition in Vietnam. Finnish actors could take advantage of the working life-oriented models we have already made in the past and develop further for local needs.

The transition to digitalisation in educational institutions is wanted but is difficult if there is a lack of the necessary technology and devices, or they are malfunctioning especially in remote areas. Traditional study methods and classrooms are widely used.

However, Vietnam as a country has rapid growth goal and need to change traditional work and related production chains to become greener and to move towards high technology country.

It has been highlighted from multiple sources that they aspire to become a new Japan or Korea. There is a strong business-oriented approach, seeking insights from Japan – Korea style growth strategies for rapid state development (Interviewee F).

Relating to green transition in Vietnam from Nordic day seminar (Several Nordic and Vietnamese speakers and panellists, 2024. Personal communication. Adapting Vietnam's Labour market – Lessons learned from the Nordic Region and Implications for Vietnam. Nordic day seminar, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. 20.3.2024) the key messages, both challenges and possibilities, of the Vietnamese situation considering green transition and digitalisation can be summed up in the following direct quotes in Figure 20. Those were the ageing country and the need for active ageing and life-long learning, climate crisis which impacts on health, agriculture and life expectancy, gender inequalities and quality of employment, transforming system innovation and catching the 4th wave of innovation, companies having capacities that schools does not have, IT, AI, globalisation, supply chains, circular economy and greener technology transforming jobs, investors interested in digitalisation and green transition and sustainable growth to foster creativity.

Adapting Vietnam's Labour market – Lessons learned from the Nordic Region and Implications for Vietnam. Nordic Day. Ho Chi Minh City 20.3.2024. Key considerations from the speakers and panelists

"You can't see it, but Vietnam is rapid aging country in the world in 2060. What is needed is active aging and life-long learning"	"The companies have training capacities that schools does not have"
"The climate crisis impact on health, agriculture and life expectancy"	"IT, AI, globalization, trade and supply chains and circular economy and greener technology is transforming jobs"
" Gender inequalities and employment quality are underlying labour market challenges"	"Investors are interested in digitalization and green transition, for example food security, in country to country"
"Challenges and focus are transforming system innovation, ecosystem development and catching the 4th wave of innovation"	"Sustainable growth is now time for Vietnam. Full potential to foster creativity"

Figure 20. Key points relating to green transition in Vietnam from the performers and panelists. Nordic days. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. 20.3.2024. Enhanced by author, 2024.

4.1.2 Towards sustainable labour market, decent work, and education

Towards sustainable development that will benefit all the citizens and how to get there was one of the key questions in Nordic days held in Vietnam in March 20.-21.2024. Also, decent work and corporate responsibility were important topics.

Sustainable labour market, especially the working life conditions, were highlighted by Ingrid Christensen from International Labour Organisation (Labour market outlook – Vietnam. Nordic day. Ho Chi Minh City 20.3.2024. Personal communication.) together with the post-covid recovery in Vietnam. The amount of untrained workforce and low wages is still important issue. The topics she presented (see Figure 21) are also strongly related to the pursuit of sustainable development SDG8 goals decent work.

Underlying labour market challenges




- 
More than **2 out of 3 workers in informal employment.**
- 
Social security coverage (39 per cent of labour force) is below national targets despite expansion.
- 
Labour productivity of domestic private sector and HH businesses below state sector and FDI.
- 
Low wages: Labour income share of GDP (42.7 per cent in 2020 in Viet Nam) below ASEAN and global levels.
- 
Unskilled or low-skilled workers face multiple challenges.
- 
Decent Work deficits exist

Figure 21. Labour market recovery and persisting labour market inequalities and social protection challenges. Ingrid Christensen. Personal communication. Nordic seminar. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. 20.3.2024.

The fact that unskilled and low-skilled workers face multiple challenges were also brought up. The proportion of trained labour force is only 26.8 % and the unemployment rate is only 1.5% but that can be explained with the amount of so-called household business that reduces Vietnam's unemployment figures and with SDG8.31 indicator, more than 2 out of 3 workers are in informal employment. The same number in Nordic countries the is between 1.4-7.6%. That indicates that co-operation among authorities is needed (Christensen, 2024).

The development of different areas is related to each other regardless of the 17 different sustainable development goals, as many of them are also related to education and working life, society, and the opportunities to develop them together. The rules in working life, equality, environmental goals, green tech, and digitalisation can also be seen to be linked to high-quality education, especially the contents, curricula, and practical implementation of vocational education.

Among the interviewees, the insufficient cooperation between Finnish international companies, especially in developing countries such as Vietnam, and Finnish educators was brought up because Finnish vocational education cooperates strongly with working life in Finland. But this rarely happens abroad. When realised, this kind of co-operation could contribute to both the Vietnam's development, the company's social responsibility, getting skilled workers and the opportunities for Finnish education organisers and education export companies in the target country.

Finns are so helplessly late. Not with bitterness. It's great that there are Europeans there before Chinese and Americans. And Germany, it's so organised and so state supported. Industry and education go hand in hand. It is completely missing with Finns in Vietnam (Interviewee C).

There is still a lot to do in corporate responsibility issues in Vietnam. And one can imagine that, for example, Chinese companies do not work the same way as Western companies. The agreement with the European Union will certainly affect the fact that the labor market and workers' rights will go in a better direction and the situation in civil society will be better (Interviewee B).

Finns could train together in the target country and make use of Finnish working life's good habits and the best training practices. This can be seen as a big opportunity for Finnish education know how export, especially for Vocational education and training. But as interviewee C brings out:

We have no Kone, no Wärtsilä, no Metso, no Outokumpu... No one our international companies will take us by the hand and say come and train with us (Interviewee C).

In Vietnam the reputation of vocational education and training is still quite poor, and it also affects the career paths salaries being lower than in many neighboring countries.

Social awareness about the careers is needed. Parents still think that university and academic path gives better salary and income, and in Vietnam the income from VET is still lower than in other countries (Interviewee D).

When the industry develops, the value of professional, vocational skills rises. (Interviewee C)

The interviewees highlighted the ethics of Finnish education and Finnish education export know how companies, as well as the ethical operating instructions issued by the Education Finland program for its member companies.

We have a public education offering and a business derived from it. It is of a very high ethical standard, and it is good and easy to support (Interviewee B).

According to Christensen (2024) Vietnam has ratified 9 out of 11 instruments in terms of fundamental principles and rights at work. In Nordic countries the number is 11. Also, in the interviews the working life conditions and corporate responsibilities in Finnish companies were highlighted.

Still, there is a lot to do in corporate responsibility issues in Vietnam. Furthermore, one can imagine that, for example, Chinese companies do not work the same way as Western companies. The agreement with the European Union will certainly affect the fact that the labour market and workers' rights will go in a better direction and the situation in civil society will be better (Interviewee B).

Direct quotes from seminar speakers (see Figure 22) related to the green transition in Vietnam highlight key messages, challenges, and possibilities. These quotes pertain to the Vietnamese situation considering the labour market, decent work, education, and the connections between these areas (Several Nordic and Vietnamese speakers and panellists, 2024. Personal communication. Nordic day seminar, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.20.3.2024).

Adapting Vietnam's Labour market – Lessons learned from the Nordic Region and Implications for Vietnam. Nordic Day. Ho Chi Minh City 20.3.2024. Key considerations from the speakers and panelists

"You need to experience, not only analyze. It is a key for success"

"We are better when we are partners. Without dialogue nothing is possible"

"Trust in people and institutions. Talent is a key for this"

"We need to connect companies and government and education. "

"After post-covid recovery youth are more likely to be unemployment than adults "

"How to reskill our current workers? Try to interact with one industry – see the results "

"Entrepreneurial discoveries can develop completely new society. Teaching entrepreneurship for everyone will lead to better society and possibilities for all"

"Different areas have different resources and situation"

Figure 22. Key points relating to labour market, decent work and education from the performers panelists. Personal communication. Nordic Days, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. 20.3.2024. Enhanced by author, 2024.

4.2 Finding a common ground in the jungle of legislation and different practices

The key finding based on interviews and observation is as said on the title; the need to find a common ground in the jungle of legislations and different practices. This mutual direction is needed both in the updating of legislation and the implementation of plans in Vietnam, as well as in Finland, so that the operating environment enables the export of vocational education know-how to better remove obstacles and find a common understanding between the authorities and operators.

4.2.1 Laws, reforms and strategies in change in Vietnam

The interviews highlighted Vietnam's desire to move forward, and that the actors have a strong will to reform and cooperate on state and local levels.

Vietnam has been remarkably good at updating partnerships. Development will continue because neighboring countries and nearby regions are even more efficient in productivity and high technology. How then, compared to, say, Taiwan or Korea, is it able to attract higher technology, we'll see soon (Interviewee B).

Then we talked about clean water or energy or the quality of education. On the other hand, it is also linked to the fact that there, at the state level, it is seen as positive that

young people would go out into the world from there to work, to get an education and, on the other hand, to work (Interviewee A).

On the other hand, the fact that laws and their implementation are not easy to find, transparent or their interpretation is even contradictory were seen as a challenge for the export of Finnish know-how. This poses challenges to the operating environment being quite complicated, but it is quite the same in several other countries as well.

Regulatory environment and legislation in general are not transparent. And perhaps the fact that there may be contradictions or complications in the implementation of laws between different stakeholders. And this requires effort depending, of course, a little on the industry (Interviewee B).

The regulations and different decision-making processes starting co-operation has seen complicated since before companies or education providers can fully co-operate, joint agreements between countries regarding education may be needed.

From the point of view of the Finns, and perhaps the authorities as well, somewhat heavy processes such as a joint commission or memoranda of understanding are needed. Otherwise, the discussion cannot go beyond what is known on a good day, unless there is a document, which is a prerequisite not only for the state administration, but also for many actors at the institutional level (Interviewee A).

Vietnam would certainly like to see such a ministerial-level MOU. Yes, our cooperation goes well without it, but it's good to think about what benefit it would have, for example, in work-based immigration or vocational training (Interviewee B).

The role of the private sector in connection to the vocational education reform was seen interesting, because both private and public sectors are needed to move things forward. The opening can also be an opportunity for Finnish export of know-how both in Vietnam but also in Finland.

What is interesting is the role of the private sector in the vocational education reform that is being done. And I understood that the public sector alone cannot make that change, but a considerable part is needed from the private sector and companies. I don't think there are many operators yet, but Finnish education export operators would probably be able to get business from it (Interviewee B).

Hey, no, it's not perceived there as some kind of brain drain idea, whether we were talking about the vocational or higher education side. On the contrary, it seems to be

rising at all levels there, at the city or provincial level or in the local ministry (Interviewee A).

The changes in legislation and the present moment were also seen as an opportunity to make more flexible decisions about cooperation at the local, educational institution level about international cooperation.

Public and national policies are wide open for international friends, schools can make the decisions ourselves in public schools, too. It is now easier than it used to be in the past (Interviewee D).

There are certainly private vocational training providers here with whom one can cooperate. It's a pretty established activity. If both can find common ground and agree on the price, it is possible to work quite freely, but for example the teachers' professional qualifications are monitored (Interviewee B).

For the Finns to be able to cooperate and find out the possibilities not only from the Vietnamese legislation and reform, but it is also important to know about the law and practices that Finnish legislation supports and develops in the best way to enable cooperation with Vietnam.

4.2.2 Finding a mutual direction together in Finland by breaking down barriers and deepening co-operation

The export of Finnish education expertise is related to the Finnish government program, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the National Agency for Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Employment and Economy and their joint and separate programs and support organisations such as Business Finland, the Education Finland program, Talent boost program and the Finnish Immigration Office. Finnish Embassy in Vietnam and their prestige services were also mentioned in interviews in addition to previous stakeholders. All these actors and several others came up in one way or another in the interviews of several respondents, both as providers of support and partly as causes of contradictions or different interpretations. The key message was that a mutual direction and finding the future way is needed.

We want to increase the availability of experts and streamline the permit processes and ensure that we get people to work for us. We have the Talent boost program, again under the guidance of the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, and

through that Business Finland is involved, and then how it relates to this student education is a bit lacking (Interviewee A).

Operational twists and challenges arise from the field, from visa procedures and various documents to legal twists (Interviewee E).

I also see Finnpartnership as a significant partner, I have followed this SDG booster with interest. And more broadly, the Team Finland network and, for example, the new education ambassador are important. Of course, it would be good if all actors were rowing in the same direction and thus supporting each other and bringing synergy benefits (Interviewee A).

Several interviewees highlighted Finland's investments in Vietnam as one of the target countries for cooperation in relation to both the export of know-how and import of talented students.

There are currently four talent countries and one of them is Vietnam. (Interviewee A)

In Finland, the export of education, or the export of know-how, and especially fee-based commissioned training leading to VET qualification, has a short history. From the beginning, however, the purpose has been to enable the commercial export of know-how and to remove obstacles to export. This emerged from the answers of the interviewees.

The word education export is perhaps a bit colored, and it also excludes certain things. Sometimes we talk about commercial cooperation in education or the export of know-how. It can also be for example selling a product or consulting. That's quite a broad concept in vocational education as well (Interviewee A).

Although many good measures have been taken in Finland to promote the export of know-how and a network and supporting measures have been built, it is important to look to the near future and take consistent measures. Also, joint discussion is needed. Considerations were also raised in the interviews about the joint interpretation of laws and operational policies, not forgetting the education reforms.

If you start calculating, where will we get in 5 years from now, when you look at the statistics, that what this education and population development is like somewhere in Finland, for example. It is good to have a discussion so that everyone has a clear tone. And not just the social and health sector, it can be some other industry (Interviewee A).

We always talk about reforming education; it won't stop, and the need won't disappear anywhere. We, too, are constantly being talked about the compatibility of Finnish education with working life, inclusiveness, exclusion. These things have probably been talked about for the last 20 years. And we have gotten better. But is now the culmination point (Interviewee C).

The change has been fast, and I claim that it will not slow down. We must have some kind of vision of what this means in practice, our demographic development and shortage of talent. Inevitably, it is also linked to degree export and cooperation with local education organisers (Interviewee A).

In particular, the possibilities of vocational education, thoughts about when it was started to become possible, and the current legislation aroused thoughts in the interviewees.

When we started thinking about the export of vocational education few years ago, when this export of vocational qualifications was identified, and there is also this Quality committee of Finnish VET under the National Agency for Education, we are already very much at the stage where we are also thinking about where to have experts to come to Finland (Interviewee A).

The field has expanded, and various recruitment operators, health and social services regions, companies or cities are involved. Here, there is a conflict between the current law and the actors (Interviewee A).

It would be good to have the same rules for the qualification export and for trainings carried out in Finland. Now it's a "wild field" (Interviewee E).

Questionable operating methods that the interviewees had noticed especially in new companies that bring students to Finland were also brought up, especially regarding those agency companies that bring students to Finland for training or an apprenticeship contract and which do not necessarily pay the expenses arising from the training. Problems were seen here, e.g. from the perspectives of current legislation and good practices and the competition with prices has been seen.

It should be noted that when we talk about fully commercial export operations, there are also Finnish operators in addition to different countries that operate completely different way. This especially applies to the export of qualifications and training carried out in Finland (Interviewee E).

Of course, as a commercial operator like this, it is impossible to enter that race with lowest possible price tag, and especially when there is not even legal support for it, so that is perhaps a big drawback, which is perhaps a bit of a gray area (Interviewee E).

At the Finnish level, it would be good to discuss about the education that takes place in Finland. There are enough jobs up to a certain limit, but so that the students are not left alone after the education, how can we guarantee support and security and the future when attracting students (Interviewee E).

On the other hand, the respondents wanted to stick to good models and cooperation and further develop good practices which has been already developed with educational organisations and educational companies and stakeholders.

We have a very good model, Education Finland, and Study in Finland, and then Welcome in Finland. I am satisfied with this cooperation, and I hope this can continue. It helps us in our work and companies to do sustainable business and map the risks (Interviewee B).

It is interesting that with suitable models it would probably be possible to meet the needs of both Vietnamese and Finns. (Interviewee A)

It was also seen as important that good models and experiences would be shared mutually even more and with other actors than at present.

A Lessons learns-type things, information sharing and everything like that would certainly be important at this stage. And working together in a field-led way and the state administration as support, such as in the interpretation of the law, for example (Interviewee A).

Legislation upgrades for vocational education export know how is needed and it was also brought up in interviews. Also, the fee-based education programs for groups outside the EU-countries implemented in Finland or apprenticeships in Finland were brought up.

In relation to the attraction of students, one of the big questions is of course, for example, whether an individual student can apply for vocational training. An individual student paying the academic year fee, and this is probably something that will come up, if not this year, then probably now by the midterms, it will probably come up in discussions as part of the government's program (Interviewee A).

At the Finnish level, it would be good to discuss about the education that takes place in Finland. There are enough jobs up to a certain limit, but so that the students are not left alone after the education, how can we guarantee support and security and the future when attracting students (Interviewee E).

Agreements are needed and highlighted to help the Finnish education export know how in Vietnam.

Agreements between different countries. They are very important in my opinion. That's how it brings credibility there in the target country. An agreement related to education, it is important that there is a government strategy and this kind of educational co-operation (Interviewee C).

From the point of view of the Finns, and perhaps the authorities as well, somewhat heavy processes such as a joint commission or memoranda of understanding are needed. Otherwise, the discussion cannot go beyond what is known on a good day, unless there is a document, which is a prerequisite not only for the state administration, but also for many actors at the institutional level (Interviewee A).

If agreements are concluded with other countries, then we will probably put ourselves in a different position. It's good to think if there is something that we haven't done yet. And turn over all the stones to see where we can improve our own performance (Interviewee B).

4.2.3 The biggest challenge is the lack of funding

The interviewees highlighted Finland's history as a supporter and financier of Vietnam, which is remembered fondly, but which can also be seen as an obstacle to the current situation. The interviewees also highlighted private funding, i.e. the partner finances and pays for the fee-based training for groups outside the EU countries, or the possibility to apply for and receive funding from e.g. Asian Development Bank, or a Finnish actor or group of actors applies for funding from Finnpartnership, at least for part of the implementation. Also, the opportunity for the Vietnamese to use the funding channeled to them for education programs was also brought up.

Vietnam is very much a developing country, and Finland has completely dropped its development cooperation funding. On the other hand, Vietnam is interested in cooperation, but then we are like this again, facing the challenge of where to get funding for something, which could partly be to respond in certain situations to the EU, but of course that would then require stronger actions by the Finns (Interviewee A).

Now we are kind of in this kind of commercial bilateral relationship, although using those instruments of investment cooperation. It's kind of an easier and cleaner table. But then we must think about how competitive our products or services are and whether we can offer a financing model such as subsidised credit (Interviewee B).

Well, that's the stumbling block. Finland is insanely expensive. Our products are so expensive. That's probably what it's all about, we've never been able to sell without financing. There has always been some funding behind the cooperation (Interviewee C).

Finland used to be financial supporter of Vietnam for decades, but not anymore. Many entities remember the time when Finland was a significant financier, and it is often the first question asked (Interviewee F).

There is a desire and opportunities for cooperation with Finnish and Vietnamese actors, bilateral ways to learn from each other, but not necessarily for paid export of know-how. All Finnish actors, whether they are training organisers or companies or their larger associations, do not have the opportunity to apply for funding either due to strategy or resources.

Our TVET Board's aim is to bring the best opportunities for students to get higher level working opportunities, scholarship programs and facilities. Partners are needed to support the change to increase the level of teachers, abroad. And invest for training facilities (Interviewee D).

Currently we operate with free or unrestricted funding, and we do not seek financing, instead Vietnam should fund these initiatives independently. The Asian Development bank (ADB) directs various financial resources and loans to Vietnam, which could also be interesting path (Interviewee F).

Competition from other countries that heavily finance Vietnam, such as Germany, Japan, and Australia, came up in the interviews. They also operate strongly with their global companies and with that support like Germany makes it possible to projects and sell know how.

At the same time, it is a challenge how to organise when, for example, Germany and Australia support education financially. (Interviewee E)

In Vietnam, the biggest challenge is the financing of operations. Other operators from other countries come with financing. As our small country, it is difficult to sell our product packages, and it is difficult to become an operator if the customer is not willing to pay (Interviewee E).

Funding the programs in Vietnam has seen as the biggest challenge among the interviewees.

Funding is the biggest question mark in the Vietnamese market because it should get a continuation and expansion. (Interviewee E)

I don't know any institution that has done a purely commercial export of education to Vietnam that didn't use some kind of development cooperation grant. (Interviewee C)

As possibilities, a wider cooperation was raised to enable the funding base, as well as actions by the Finnish government to enable the export of know-how in the future, too. Vietnam is transitioning and the national product and wealth are growing all the time.

I hope that there will be even more boost from the state level. Finnpartnership has done an excellent job, the program and thus the funding. More is needed and follow-up measures in which the Finnish state is also involved, both on behalf of people and financial investment. Anything like this helps (Interviewee F).

As a small country, one solution could be to combine the cooperation of Finnish actors in larger projects with universities of applied sciences and other actors, and more broadly, thinking of Vietnam, for example, at the ministry level, which would better enable access to local funding (Interviewee E).

I hope there will be more soon. Small-scale financing channels of Finnpartnership or Business Finland can be a financing opportunity, but companies think carefully about where to apply and use pilot financing, where certain limits are set annually, which target country and which first pilot (Interviewee E).

Despite all the financial changes and challenges, the interviewees found a common will to solve things and find new ways for implementing program with Vietnamese partners. Vietnam's investment in general vocational education and international cooperation also brings opportunities for the implementation of activities in the future.

Not only for the college, but also wider education in Vietnam. Recent years Government has been investing for Vocational education. It is the foundation for new generation (Interviewee D).

4.3 Finnish way for local needs

As Interviewees brought up, we need to look back in the recent history of Finnish education system and its practices and remember how it used to be organised, what where the learning

methods and technology used. Then we can better understand the challenges of today's working life and vocational education with the digitalisation and transition needs in Vietnam. Thus, Finnish actors could take advantage of the working life-oriented models we have already made in the past and develop further for local needs. Also listening the local people and the needs is crucial.

Listening to the customer is more important than highlighting your own excellence. These are the basic rules of international marketing. Many operators lack these legalities (Interviewee C).

There are many opportunities with different educational fields as Interviewee B brings up, even there are only few Finnish companies operating in Vietnam in this moment.

A few Finnish companies have gained a foothold, related to learning platforms or early childhood education. Student recruitment to Finland takes place especially in the higher education sector, a little already in connection with vocational education, even upper secondary schools. But diploma export-type services are just developing, and it could be exactly what the vocational education reform in Vietnam needs. Close cooperation with companies and business life (Interviewee B).

Also, the Finnish way, the skills and competences for challenges and opportunities are flexible learning pathways, competent teachers, working life fusion, lifelong learning, stakeholder co-operation and systemic quality process were mentioned in interviews.

Perhaps we are in such a turning point with this vocational side. If we are talking about the export of know-how, it can mean that we cooperate in the case of Vietnam. We find some cooperation institute with which we start to cooperate. It can be commercial or non-commercial. But when we talk about the export of education, that commercial cooperation can be, for example, developing the structures of the operations (Interviewee A).

4.3.1 Pedagogy, quality of education and competent teachers in the center

Quality of education goes hand in hand with the competent teachers and pedagogy. In interviews these were widely highlighted.

Another significant area is education and pedagogy regardless the level at which is implemented. Finnish pedagogy is in high demand, it is identified what has done in Finland (Interviewee F).

The pedagogy and individual centeredness used in Finland does not necessarily adapt to abroad for practical reasons, of which funding, the number of students and the number of teachers is central. Efficiency is needed.

Of course, when there is a young population, that information must be shared as efficiently as possible. There can't be personal teaching in groups of fourteen people (Interviewee C).

We should understand that, for example, in Vietnam, they are not capable of such small group activities. The money just isn't enough. That must be brought about in some other way than by saying that teach in small groups. We used to have mass lectures and large teaching groups in Finland (Interviewee C).

However, the need has been recognised and the desire to increase teachers' competence arises from both strategies and practices. Those were international skills, quality training for teachers, and utilising pedagogical skills.

Vietnam's vision and mission aims at larger entities and the integration of educational institutions. In this case, e.g. support for leadership and related training, as well as support for teachers in everyday life (Interviewee E).

There are some limitations or difficulties for teachers and lecturers in Vietnam to teach internationally and giving the ability for students for international skills. (Interviewee D)

There are needs that have arisen through the SDG Booster, and the fact that Vietnamese teachers have a good knowledge of the field, but do not know how to utilise the pedagogical side, that skill is lame. (Interviewee E)

Very important criteria for our college and for other TVET colleges. The quality of training programs for teachers is needed, possibility from abroad to upgrade. Also, exchange programs for teachers, also training in Viet Nam. Finland-Vietnam possibility for teachers (Interviewee D).

4.3.2 Finnish vocational qualifications and modules of qualification as an opportunity

Vocational qualification export is still quite new in Finland and the legislation came into force in 2022, which was preceded by a degree export experiment. It is challenging to get a true overall picture of the export of vocational training skills or the implementation of degrees in the target country or in the Finland, because, for example, training carried out as an apprenticeship is not recorded, and the training organisers do not necessarily announce the commissioned training leading to the degree they have started in the target country or in Finland after obtaining a degree permit. The following figure (see Figure 23) shows the information received from the National Agency for Education about countries and the number of students, which only give a direction, because the information comes afterwards and not everything is recorded.

Top countries 2022-23, Vocational qualification education export, number of students

1. Kenya	198	7. Myanmar	24
2. Philippines	45	8. Palestine	24
3. Russia (2022)	45	9. Ukraine	12
4. Vietnam (2023)	42	10. Georgia	9
5. China	33	11. Morocco	6
6. Sri Lanka	33		

Figure 23. Vocational qualification education export 2022-2023. Top countries. Source: Hanna Autere. 7.3.2024. Personal communication. Translated by author, 2024.

Figure shows very small implementation of Finnish vocational qualifications abroad for the years 2022-2023, but they must be approached critically for the reasons mentioned above. Statistics and the numbers reported by the training organiser are shown afterwards in the Koski system, which a data transfer system for education providers. An apprenticeship contract or shorter customised implementations numbers, or implementations done in Finland with Finnish curriculum instead of

globalised curriculum are not shown here. This is one challenge in Finland and in the field as there were mentioned in interviews earlier that mutual direction is needed.

When we go to Vietnam and implementing Finnish vocational qualifications for students or teachers the working life connections was mentioned from different angles. Interviewee C brings up the challenge with Finnish education providers and Finnish international companies abroad and the lack of co-operation comparing e.g. with Germany.

When we don't have these big tools and equipment suppliers from Siemens etc. we are left at the feet of the Germans when it comes to vocational training. When you go to universities of applied sciences, however, it is a copy of the German-Austrian or Dutch-Swiss model back then. After all, we have a lot of good things, with the help of Pisa we have been able to ride and then this mantra about our student-oriented teaching and working life co-operation (Interviewee C).

But several interviewees highlight Finnish vocational qualifications, and professional qualifications and their opportunities to implement in Vietnam, for both young and adult students and teachers.

Offering vocational qualifications to students, why not teachers too. (Interviewee E)

There are certainly private vocational training providers here with whom one can cooperate. It's a pretty established activity. If both can find common ground and agree on the price, it is possible to work quite freely, but for example the teachers' professional qualifications are monitored (Interviewee B).

Finnish vocational qualifications and professional training are clear, and the goals and contents are understandable and therefore easily sellable and packaged. Only how you want to chop it and what to sell. They have individually useful and interesting content in the parts and sections of the degree. They can be sold anywhere in the world, being useful in your own competence, work, and further studies (Interviewee E).

Finnish degrees and the structure of the degree system can also be exporting products of Finnish education export know how.

We are perhaps in such a turning point with this vocational side. If we are talking about the export of know-how, it can mean that we cooperate. In the case of Vietnam, we find some cooperation institute with which we start to cooperate. It can be commercial or non-commercial. But when we talk about the export of education, that commercial cooperation can be, for example, developing the structures of the operations (Interviewee A).

There are certainly private vocational training providers here with whom one can cooperate. It's a pretty established activity. If both can find common ground and agree on the price, it is possible to work quite freely, but for example the teachers' professional qualifications are monitored (Interviewee B).

Based on my personal experience, there is several themes for Finland's opportunities in Vietnam. Environment and sustainable development, strong focus on vocational education, covering areas like construction, sanitation, and concrete aspects as water management and recycling. Hands on training is essential, requiring expertise on vocational education. Lastly health care and third sector are also key strengths that I could highlight (Interviewee F).

Finnish vocational qualifications and professional vocational qualifications are always implemented with strong co-operation with the working life and its needs. In the following, the issues of working life cooperation will be particularly focused on

4.3.3 Working life needs and curriculum goes hand in hand

Working life orientation emerged in the interviews at many points and for all respondents in one way or another. The topic was not only related to the theme of sustainable transition and green jobs, but directly related to all needs in teacher training, curricula, models of cooperation and especially in the strengths of Finnish education and the needs from Vietnamese schools. The models of working life cooperation are still very different and the concepts of learning in working life open to us in different ways. In Finnish education, periods, and evaluation in working life are included in all qualifications during the studies, in Vietnam it seems that the period of working life, the term internship, is more separate.

The importance of developing collaboration and network with enterprises in Vietnam and internationally. Model 70 % internship either in school or enterprise in Vietnam for example Marriot hotel (Interviewee D).

If we go back to the Vietnamese school education system and everything else, then yes, there is the need, that the correspondence of education with the needs of working life is still lacking, so it's not so many years since or since then I watched that a hundred and twenty students in a room and teacher (Interviewee C).

People must be retrained in companies, because it is so centralised that there is no equivalence there. People don't get jobs corresponding to their education. In the hotel, you see a lot of people who have studied English at university, for example. It is not appropriate (Interviewee C).

The reform of vocational education and training is topical now in Vietnam. One of its central purposes is to increase working life orientation and learning in working life. In support of that, various possibilities were seen for Finnish export of know-how for vocational training.

Reform support and smaller productisation processes within the educational institution, small-scale curriculum reform, bringing business life and cooperation even closer to the daily life of the educational institution even though it exists, but that it would be more concrete (Interviewee E).

Working life connections and entrepreneurial skills are strongly connected in Finnish vocational education and both are needed in future education.

4.3.4 Entrepreneurial skills and life-long learning can develop the society and open possibilities for all

Entrepreneurial discoveries can develop completely new society and teaching entrepreneurship for everyone will lead to better society and possibilities for all. This idea came up strongly in several speeches at the Nordic day seminar (2024). The topic raised a lot of thoughts among the interviewees as well.

Through the line, entrepreneurship education, which is becoming a top priority in many other countries as well. I could see that it would help in Vietnam, too. When you have professional competence and entrepreneurial competence together, it enables you to act as an entrepreneur, when the fact is that there are not ready-made jobs for everyone, but you also must be innovative (Interviewee E).

Growth theories are built on knowledge, but it is just a fuel. Entrepreneurship is the engine for economic innovations and value creation. Novel, new value. Also, sustainability is important. (Quote from a speech. Nordic day, 2024)

Adult education and lifelong learning are something which is still missing in Vietnam and the needs have been identified and wishes are also presented for cooperation. Now, the companies in Vietnam are organising some courses for graduates to increase the compatibility with working life, and it was seen as good cooperation. However, in the Finnish model, working life cooperation and learning at workplaces, adult training, upskilling, and reskilling are included in the education system and previous learning is recognised.

High concerns for co-operation, companies sub course students after graduation, some continue working. Strong co-operation. (Interviewee D)

The need is seen for adult education and for those already in working life, for example due to digitalisation and changes in working life. The Finnish model of adult education and short-term education could have something to offer (Interviewee E).

4.3.5 Studying and working in Finland, in the happiest country in the world, instead of Japan, Korea or Australia

In the interviews, so-called competitor countries for the export of Finnish know-how emerged strongly, both operating in Vietnam or in their home country. Germany's position in the destination country and the visibility of other countries such as Japan, Korea and Australia stood out in Vietnam, both through various student recruitment and cultural events and by offering jobs, accommodation, and information to families in advance. The low visibility of Finland and Finns in Vietnam was brought up.

Vietnam has many partner countries including Germany which has good policies in VET and practices are parallel studies in school and working in enterprises, apprenticeship. Students get qualification and work experience from companies (Interviewee D).

We are not there enough in the target country. We all know these, Germans. GIZ is everywhere you go. I've been to Vietnam and Malaysia so many times, and elsewhere, when I march to a school, there's a GIZ poster on the wall. Then you can turn around and say bye (Interviewee C).

There is nothing left to do as the Germans have had time. First, they bring the education, they bring the machines, then they bring the financing. (Interviewee C)

Same with Japan. There are many privileges for students in Japan for food processing; salary, facilities to work and live. They promote to the students and parents who feel safe and secure about the good facilities. It is an advantage for students (Interviewee D).

Many countries are strongly visible in Vietnam in various ways, such as through cultural cooperation. Various competitions and promotions can also be seen in Vietnam, thus reaching students and their families.

Creating many contests for students for example in tourism, cooking. With these activities passion for students. Also, international skills contest. Media activities and culture activities with embassies for example Australia food festival; learning the culture is important for students, understanding and knowing the country to work in the future (Interviewee D).

However, student exchange to Finland also comes to the fore, although here not as a paid activity, but e.g. as a group studying for a degree, still more as a collaboration at the educational institution level.

Students exchange – high quality training for students to contribute Vietnam and work abroad that Vietnam ranking arises. (Interviewee D)

However, different opportunities were also seen for fee-based training for groups outside the EU or apprenticeship-type training organised in Finland. Nevertheless, the implementation of these requires larger-scale cooperation and identification of needs and legislation, responsibilities, and the funding the apprenticeship training. The question who will be funding the training, for example, in a apprenticeship contract organised by companies, where may be additional costs for the education provider, for example, in terms of language studies or others.

Employment in Finland, training packages and contracts. It is necessary to think more broadly in Finland about which system and method of operation will be used to respond to any need. Also to make it clear to the authorities that which tool is needed (Interviewee A).

The apprenticeship route seems good when there is one company in it that can be one route through integration into Finnish working life, when compared to learning at the workplace, but whether our support measures and structures are enough, that is a bigger question. Interesting and solvable (Interviewee E).

If, for example, crisis sectors are identified, then there would be an open discussion about what the funding pattern is and what the worst situation could be and where. Like the lack of Finnish language skills at workplaces, when the operator comes to the training provider and someone else takes the reward that the group has been imported in the country. After all, then that education will be paid for by the education organiser or the public side (Interviewee A).

As a solution to quick response, existing legislation, responsibilities, and fees, instead, not only apprenticeship training, but fee-based training for groups was highlighted. It can be organised both in the destination country and in the home country.

Fee-based training for the groups outside the EU is a working model in my opinion. If it is done well, it will be able to react much faster, for example, that 150 welders are needed in Northern Savo, or the much talked social and health field and their needs (Interviewee A).

The role of the training provider emerges versus personnel leasing or recruitment companies, which, I'm not saying now, can skim off the cream and get a financial benefit. Education providers do not benefit but may face challenges by offering supplementary training services later (Interviewee A).

Finland's competitive situation with other countries, as well as Finland's still unclear education export legislation and practices between fee-based education for groups and apprenticeship agreement done by companies, as well as the related funding uncertainty were clear challenges. Still, opportunities emerge and interest in Finland has increased, and work is also being done to improve the country's image and visibility.

Well, in Vietnam we have a good reputation since we were one of the leading countries, which recognised Vietnam at the time seventy-five. And yes, Finland's reputation there, especially in North Vietnam, is good. Hanoi has that Finnish water street too (Interviewee C).

Interest in Finland and nowadays the desire to find employment in Finland is also increasing. This question becomes stronger because there is a clear pressure on employment (Interviewee E).

I can see that for Finland digital literacy and these Pisa results raised Finland's reputation as a country of education. (Interviewee C)

There is already a Vietnamese community in Finland, and many Vietnamese students have already studied in universities and universities of applied sciences. This is a clear advantage for Finnish vocational education, too.

Of course, settling in Finland is made easier by the fact that there is this Vietnamese community here that supports settling and life. And many already have family ties to Finland. (Interviewee C)

I have the impression that most of them have stayed in Finland both as entrepreneurs and then as employees. And they are motivated students. (Interviewee C)

Various news from Finland is also apt to raise the interest of the country's education in Vietnam. This was gain up in interviews and local newspaper when Finland was named as happiest country for seventh year in a row (see Figure 24).

Finland is a happy country. Many people want to go to Finland. There are similarities between Finland and Vietnam in the fields of training. (Interviewee D)



Figure 24. Finland- the happiest place on earth. Viet Nam News 21.3.2024. A photograph by author, 2024.

If an opportunity for paid vocational training in Finland opened for individual foreign students, that would be one solution in addition to group-based paid training. It requires a legislative change but would perhaps clarify the funding and responsibility issues raised above also with apprenticeship training. Different models should be available for both groups and individual students both in the target country and in Finland.

In relation to the attraction of students, one of the big questions is of course, for example, whether an individual student can apply for vocational training. An individual student paying the academic year fee, and this is probably something that will come up, if not this year, then probably now by the midterms, it will probably come up in discussions as part of the government's program (Interviewee A).

We want to develop more, create the program for example 1-2 years studies in Vietnam and continue in Finland where there is higher levels of salaries and more opportunities. (Interviewee D)

4.4 Cultural understanding, expertise, networks, and partnerships is crucial

The creation of a customer relationship and trust requires both time and financial resources, and it does not happen instantly based on one or two contacts online. The typical way for Finns to effectively get straight to the point in customer meetings can even appear offensive. For meetings and building co-operation and partnership, it is necessary to familiarise with the business culture, history, and present day of the destination country. Also, strategic decisions should have been made whether to co-operate in Vietnam or not and what kind of expertise and support is needed to operate there.

Vietnam has been chosen as one of our key target countries, with Asia being significant. Vietnam stands among them. As one of the motivators, Finnish state looks toward Vietnam (Interviewee F).

Since Finland has good cooperation relations and development interests also in terms of education exports, it makes it easier for individual operators. Also, international education expertise has also increased in Finland, although the number of operators and experts is still quite small.

4.4.1 Inter-cultural understanding and knowledge of business culture as starting point

Understanding the history and culture of Vietnam is important and highlighted on interviews. Cultural sensitivity was one of the key points highlighted. This is the starting point for all cooperation and interaction between people.

Vietnam is a diverse country ethnically and historically. Positive sense of nationalism. Good cooperative relations. Building the own nation. Maybe Finns can understand this from their own history (Interviewee B).

There should be socio-economic sensitivity instead of cultural ignorance. (Interviewee C)

Sometimes it feels like people don't do their homework well enough. You don't read local history, you don't know local habits or holidays, you don't learn about the legislation even superficially. A superficial understanding is enough (Interviewee C).

From the Finns' point of view, seminars and meetings are still much more official than in Finland, and well-organised, from name signs to meeting techniques and pre-prepared presentations and speeches (see Figure 25).



Figure 25. A Photograph from Nordic seminar held in Hanoi in March 2024. By author, 2024.

But as summarised about the business culture by the interviewees there are still more hierarchy in Vietnam as it is in Finland, but less than in many other Asian countries nowadays. Hard work ethic and the importance of hard work were also brought up.

My comment about hierarchy now of course applies to Vietnam, but it does apply to many other countries as well, that in a way it is not necessarily understood in Finland, why we are asked very carefully who a person is and what is the title, and where it is in the organisation. But when it's so strongly connected, in a way, to who will sit on the other side of the table (Interviewee A).

Vietnam has a culture of work hard which has taken them very far. From a developing country to a middle-income country. And now the aim is to become a high-income

country in 2045, which is indeed a respectable goal, but they will certainly have time for it (Interviewee B).

In Vietnam, Asian culture prevails, but it is more open. Differences arise with the influence of masses during negotiations, a certain old rigidity, but compared with my initial experiences in Vietnam, there has moved toward greater openness in negotiations. Now it is more structured, forward looking, and there is an understanding of Western countries (Interviewee F).

Also, the communication was mentioned. Furthermore, the fact that there is no need for a very big protocol in the discussions compared to some other countries.

From Vietnam. I have experienced that communication is effortless and immediate without a big protocol (Interviewee E).

One thing that, of course, cannot be ignored is the lack of a common language or possible misunderstandings when interpretation is used in its absence. There is still quite a bit of English language skills, depending of course on the backgrounds of the educational institution or the people. Nor necessarily, as in many Asian cultures elsewhere, negative things are not brought up directly. Therefore, understanding the cultural differences and the knowledge of intercultural communication is crucial to reach successful negotiations and a good outcome.

4.4.2 Education export know-how expertise and productisation skills are needed

Several of the interviewees pointed out the lack of Finnish actors' own expertise and the small amount of the Finnish experts, need of the productisation skills, and the lack of resourcing for the education export know how export in the education organisations or companies. Also new types of funding applications, understanding tender processes, and working in wider collaborative networks were raised as a challenge. On the other hand, new types of funding and possibility to act with network or in educational ecosystem was also seen as an opportunity.

As a rule, we have expected that there will be some announcement that such a project will start in Vietnam or elsewhere. At that point, the framework has already been tapped and cannot be influenced, and it has already been thought about who will do what and who will do what (Interviewee A).

Today, information is available online and on ChatGPT, about reforms and other things, but personal influence and using networks is needed. That's the Asian way of doing business. We are too late if we are read about open opportunities, tenders, then we are helplessly late. At that point, it must go through the networks (Interviewee C).

We have a very large education provider with tens of thousands of students, and this education export is still in its infancy in many places. There is only one person doing the export of know-how. It's very challenging and not right for that person. Education providers think that there must first be a reason to start investing more in education exports (Interviewee A).

Over the years, it was also seen that the skills of the operators have increased and the need for support has changed.

Our expertise has increased. We ourselves can operate more in this market. We can get information and we know how to get it and it's more accessible than it would have been 15 years ago (Interviewee C).

Identifying the competence of one's own organisation and understanding its strengths, as well as understanding the export possibilities of Finnish education more broadly, were also highlighted. Localisation is needed when implementing programs in different cultural context.

Finnish actors themselves should identify their own strengths, what can be done and in which context and from which starting points. It's an important thing. When the partner doesn't necessarily know what they want, recognising only they should develop something. And then the Finns bend to any corner even if the resources are small (Interviewee A).

You can't copy our model; you can apply it. So, it always must be implemented through localisation and then it requires a good local partner who can act as a cultural interpreter and translate the Finnish message into the local context. Few of us can do it, even if one always wants to say that I can. It doesn't work that way (Interviewee C).

As stated in the previous speeches of the interviewees, cooperation is needed. In the next section, focus is on especially on these questions.

4.4.3 Networking, trust, partnerships, and visibility are critical

In the interviews, the need for Finns to be more visible in the target country, either themselves or through various networks and local experts, who, for example, have studied in Finland and understand Finnish education, but on the other hand are proficient in the local language and culture, came up strongly in the interviews. It was also strongly emphasised that a successful transaction cannot be made only through an online meeting or e-mails, but to build trust and better open co-operation opportunities, a face-to-face encounter is needed.

It's difficult to make that sale via e-mail or through teams from Finland. It would require being on the spot and deeply creating that kind of trust and finding those customers and continuity (Interviewee B).

Networking is extremely important, whether it's for local actors and stakeholders, and for Vietnam, knowing what is already being done there. What, for example, is GIZ doing or what kind of projects is the EU commission or delegation there tuning in (Interviewee A).

We operational level people know each other much better today. Finns understand that we shouldn't compete in the big markets, but we already cooperate quite actively. Now I'm talking about our organisation and myself, and for example, when a contract has been made, it has also been offered to another organisation to come along. And it has already been noticed that we can't do it alone (Interviewee C).

When working with different actors, potential partners, subcontracting chain, or local actor, it is important to know their backgrounds and missions. The country's goals must also be known more widely so that cooperation can be successful with local partners or staff, too.

Background checks must be conducted, history and context understood, including knowledge of market economy. It is necessary to examine where Vietnam is aiming at the state level (Interviewee E).

A presence in Vietnam and a good partner is a prerequisite for doing business. it depends on the companies' choices how many decide to be there or through a partner. Things are also handled well by the Vietnamese staff (Interviewee B).

Both parties should understand what cooperation means, whether it is a fee-based or whether it is, for example, like university exchange programs. One must be able to open the various possibilities to meet these needs and wishes and find a suitable solution together.

Partnerships for colleges in Finland in some fields including upgrading educational programs or exchange programs and global internship. (Interviewee D)

Students exchange – high quality training for students to contribute Vietnam and work abroad that Vietnam ranking arises. (Interviewee D)

Bilateral relationships between Finland and Vietnam were mentioned important with the opportunities for Finnish vocational education export know how. Partnerships and partnering in bigger projects were seen as one opportunity also for education export know how and continuation and expansion of the fee-based programs.

Vietnam is developing and in what way is our bilateral relationship? We can take advantage of the opportunities that open and, solve the challenges that exist, and we strive to succeed in this competitive situation, which is what is going on here. Vietnam has a lot of partner countries, and everyone is probably striving for the same goal. That is, to this kind of full-scale good mutual co-operation, that serves bilateral relations (Interviewee B).

The funding is the biggest question mark in the Vietnamese market because it should get a continuation and expansion. In general, the customer mainly pays directly for the service. Of course, you can be a partner in bigger projects. As a possibility, project ensembles and thereby larger funding, especially with the higher education sector (Interviewee E).

There is a desire to work together, we are still looking for the bigger success. (Interviewee C)

I repeat that cooperation is greater than the sum of individuals. Own partners in Finland first, local partners must be found as well (Interviewee E).

Trust and honesty are important things when doing international business. These things were also brought up.

I have also come across corruption and seen the actions of some countries. A Finn never enters that gray area. Finnish honesty...And perhaps the most pressing thing is that

what a Finn promises, they keep. Trust is the most important thing to a Finn (Interviewee C).

Finland is a small country, and it is important that the actors does not compete too much against each other but instead co-operate more. Co-operation is needed also with other countries e.g. many times mentioned Germany.

Procurement processes are always quite strict from the outside, but yes, the networking and cooperation with the local field of actors. And even if you join the things that Germany is leading, you don't have to start from zero all by yourself. Finland is quite a small country (Interviewee A).

First, Finns should try to get to know each other and understand the opportunities for cooperation and above all to network with different stakeholders, whether they are international financial institutions or EU delegations, etc. (Interviewee A)

Finnish actors probably compete quite a lot and some of them for the same students, but when they presented their own activities, everyone supported each other very well. All have a distinctive offering and highlighting different cities or provinces. Vietnamese families have a choice (Interviewee B).

For Finnish actors, companies, and education providers there are services and networks available both in Finland and Vietnam.

4.4.4 Education Finland, Team Finland and Embassy of Finland opens the doors

It emerged in the interviews that although a rather small group of educational know-how export experts have already learned things and gained experience and are also able to utilise various sources of information in searching for background information, Education Finland program, Team Finland knowledge experts, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education and Culture, and Finnish Embassy actors in the target country were felt very important. Also, domestic co-operation and support was felt to be very crucial now and, in the future, too. The Embassy of Finland in Vietnam strives to help and open doors, utilising Education Finland program and Team Finland's co-operation and network, as well as future service requests.

After all, they always open the door, or the prestige services are something the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education offer. They are very important (Interviewee C).

A ministerial visit always opens doors. Of course. Already when our ambassador of education visited Vietnam, its positive effects extend for a long time. Maybe a route to Finland tour could be in order (Interviewee B).

According to Education Finland draft program document for the years 2024-2027 (13.5.2024, Jaakko Skantsi. Personal communication. Education Finland draft program.) Education Finland's objective is to enhance the global demand of Finnish education by 2027, and the growth of Finnish education export know how is evidenced by the continued increase in turnover. By that year, education export know how will play a crucial role in overall export promotion. Achieving global sustainable development goals such as digitalisation requires significant knowledge transfer, training, and co-operation. Education Finland's strategy and measures will support Finnish education export know how operators' success on the global stage, strengthen global position of Finland in educational expertise fostering successful commercial co-operation projects.

Together with the different operators, it is possible to implement larger collaborative projects, market our expertise, learn from each other and utilise existing expertise and support.

That kind of long-term cooperation is what we want to build. A win-win situation for both parties. One example of going to promote cooperation is to gather a group here, and thus go to promote together. I know that we already have actors on the professional side who have good connections to Vietnam (Interviewee A).

5 Conclusion and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to find and understand the challenges and opportunities for Finnish Vocational education and training export know-how in Vietnam considering sustainable development goals and working life needs. Following a qualitative method, six key informants representing extensive expertise from Finland and Vietnam were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Results, introduced in chapter four, were created through qualitative data analysis introduced in chapter three. In this chapter, the answers to the following research questions are provided:

RQ1: What kind of challenges there are for Finnish VET export in Vietnam, also considering SDG goals and the demands of working life?

RQ2: How can Finnish VET providers and companies to overcome these challenges (possibilities)?

Based on the interviews and other qualitative data, it can be concluded that Finnish actors face many challenges related to vocational training export know-how both in Vietnam and in Finland. These challenges consider a wide perspective, including SDGs, the working life environment, and changes both in Vietnam and in Finland; urgent global and local needs for upgrading skills of the teachers and students and employees and stand out with the key components and best practices of Finnish education, especially VET. There are set by different laws and practices and the lack of appreciation of vocational training in Vietnam.

One of the biggest is the lack of common direction and the contradiction between goals and practical actions in Finland. New operators who operate in so-called gray area, making it difficult for training organisers and their companies to implement fee-based activities. Barriers are still needed to be dismantled so that high-quality Finnish vocational education has a chance to succeed alongside competitor countries such as Germany, Australia, and Japan.

The biggest challenge is the availability of funding. Finns do not make sufficient use of various funding sources and cooperation with Finnish international companies in the target country. The more extensive financing solutions of competitor countries also hamper the possibilities of expensive Finnish education. More experts and wider cooperation are needed because international operating environments require versatile skills from cultural sensitivity to productisation.

Implementing Finnish Vocational education export know-how in Vietnam faces multiple challenges for achieving SDGs and better match for the working life. The main challenges are presented wider in chapter four and summarised here:

- Green and digital transition transforms VET, and the world of work, but there is varying readiness for the change

- Sustainable labour market, decent work, and vocational education need reform and there is still lot to do with SDG goals and working life conditions
- Laws, reforms, and strategies in Vietnam are complex and information is not easy to find
- In Finland there are barriers with such legislation for Finnish VET export know-how
- The biggest challenge is the lack of funding
- More co-operation and partnerships are needed
- Finnish way of learning needs tailoring for local needs
- What Finland has to offer instead of Japan, Korea, or Australia?
- Vocational education and training image is not as attractive as higher education
- More experts, intercultural understanding and partnerships are needed

There are lots of possibilities and solutions to overcome the challenges for the Finnish educational providers and companies to collaborate with individual Vietnamese vocational schools and institutes. Training for the vocational teachers, supporting the TVET schools to build partnerships with the companies to enhance working competences and prepare for working life, or even providing opportunities for Vietnamese students to study Finnish qualifications in Vietnam or in Finland would be the ones that are highlighted on many occasions. There are also broader opportunities for cooperation related to the Vocational Education Reform, curriculum work, orientation towards working life and the quality of education.

Finnish Vocational education and training providers and companies can overcome these challenges and find possibilities for the commercial export of Finnish know-how:

- Sustainable labour market and green and digital transition goals can be implemented by deeper co-operation with Finnish international companies located in Vietnam and education export know how providers and companies together (SDGs integrated in Finnish curricula, working life co-operation models, new bigger projects, and co-operation)
- Finding a common ground in the jungle of legislation and different practices in Vietnam and Finland when the laws and reforms are in change
- Finding a mutual direction in Finland by breaking down barriers and deepening co-operation
- Bigger projects and different funding mechanisms are needed to operate in Vietnam and there are possibilities when there is enough expertise and Finnish laws, and a common goal supports this
- Finnish pedagogy, quality of education and competent teachers
- Finnish vocational qualifications and modules of qualification are an opportunity and can be implemented either in Vietnam or in Finland

- Working life needs, SDGs and curriculum implementations have been done hand in hand in Finnish VET qualifications and similar models can be localised
- Entrepreneurial skills and life-long learning models can develop the society and open possibilities for all
- Finnish way and Finland, the happiest country in the world – image, and clearer operating models to ensure commercial operations
- Expanding inter-cultural understanding, business culture knowledge, education export know-how expertise and productisation skills
- More networking, partnerships, and visibility brings more possibilities
- Support of the Education Finland, Team Finland and the Embassy of Finland are important and needed in the future, too

The willingness to cooperate between Vietnam and Finland is strong. The business culture and general atmosphere also encourage cooperation, although the legislative environment and decision-making process are different from Finland. Educational institutions still can, for example, decide on foreign cooperation partners and develop international co-operation. So, there is room for cooperation on both sides in Vietnam and in Finland. In addition, we already have a good Team Finland and Education Finland network to support and utilise for responsible business if necessary.

5.1 Co-delivery of education export know how by finding a mutual direction – stakeholder implications

This thesis contributes to different organisations or stakeholders in different ways. In every case and organisation, it's all about solution-orientation and wanting to collaborate in a new way. Governmental relations between Vietnam and Finland are good, and Finland has previously financed, for example, many water and energy projects. As Vietnam's economy grows rapidly, the relationship between our countries has changed from development co-operation to trade partnership. Vietnam is one of the countries that has suffered the most from climate change. All United Nations member countries are committed to promoting Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The states are responsible for implementing the program. COVID-19, wars and natural disasters have slowed down the achievement of the goals worldwide. One of the key targets is high-quality education, and decent work and economic growth, which can promote equality and continuous learning.

The most important result based on the data is the need for wider cooperation and support for legislation and its interpretation with the possibilities for different kind of funding. Education export know-how is commercial and typically paid by the customer or third part, and it is also necessary to be able to bring into use various financing channels.

In the end, however, everything is about how we can all work together as part of the framework and solution, if we want to operate either in Vietnam or to get experts to Finland in the future. (Interviewee A)

Finnish education providers and education companies could train together in the target country and take advantage of the Finnish rules of the working life and the best training practices by cooperating more widely with Finnish companies that operate in the target country. This would also make use of local efforts for a higher-quality working life and the expansion of the same type of working life models that vocational educational institutions and companies do in Finland. This could contribute to both the country's development, the company's social responsibility, getting skilled workers and the opportunities for Finnish education providers and education export companies in the target country.

Wider co-operation models could also ensure the expertise of the organisations implementing training exports in Vietnam, with the help of local cooperation networks. Networking and working with the local actors are one key for the success, too. Concrete proposals emerged such as joint implementations with a Finnish company and a wider group of actors in Vietnam or finding a joint discussion and direction in Finland or even with German to enable high-quality commercial education export activities. It was considered important that wider cooperation and joint models would reduce the number of those operating in the so-called gray area of the law and good operating practices. This would better enable the export of paid education instead of applicants for free opportunities.

Finnish actors, both education providers and educational companies representing and partnering them, face challenges in multiple levels. Some of the challenges are domestic and relate to legislation and its interpretation, lack of unified goals, and the need of broader collaboration. Despite having the Team Finland network and the support from the Finnish embassy, Finland is still relatively unknown country. In contrast, e.g. German actors have a strong presence in Vietnam.

Furthermore, interviews highlighted the visibility and appeal of Japanese, Korean and Australian companies to Vietnamese students and their parents.

On the other hand, Finland has good reputation because of the long long-term support, especially in the water and energy sectors, and a reputation that crosses the news threshold as the happiest country in the world, which consists of a functioning society, quality education, and many other factors. SDGs have also been built into Finnish education, especially Finnish vocational qualifications. It was pointed out by interviews that it is also built into Finnish society and education and can be implemented as methods of operation taken to a global and local context.

SDG4 focus on quality education, aiming to ensure inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for all. When a country commits to this goal and achieves it, it means prioritising access to education, improving the quality of teaching and learning, promoting lifelong learning opportunities, and fostering education systems that prepare individuals for the challenges of the future.

In Finnish society and at all levels of education and especially in the content, implementation, and evaluation of vocational education curricula have already been strongly implemented. In Vietnam, on the other hand, the goals have not yet been so centrally included in the curricula and practical activities, and the projects are often separately funded. Green transition and digitalisation are still topical because the working life is changing, and old jobs are transforming to new ones. At the same time life-long learning and reskilling the employees is crucial when Vietnam aims towards sustainable economic growth and green transition.

Exporting education know how to different countries is demanding but rewarding, especially in a small country like Finland that does not have a long history and not necessarily as much marketing efforts as those countries who have been exporting education for a long time. Vocational education export often also falls at the feet of higher education, even if there is a demand and need for vocational skills and competences in the world.

There are lots of possibilities for the Finnish educational providers to collaborate with individual Vietnamese vocational schools and institutes. Training for the vocational teachers, supporting the TVET schools to build partnerships with the companies to enhance working competences and

prepare for working life was brought up. Providing opportunities for Vietnamese students to study Finnish qualifications or modules of qualifications as entrepreneurs in Vietnam, or studying in Finland, where an increasing demand of workforce is expected to grow, would be the ones that are highlighted on many occasions.

That kind of long-term cooperation is what we want to build. A win-win situation for both parties. One example of going to promote cooperation is to gather a group here, and thus go to promote together. I know that we already have actors on the vocational education side who have good connections to Vietnam (Interviewee A).

An education provider and education export know-how company that exports Finnish vocational qualifications or modules of qualifications localise the education to suit the target country and tailors it to the needs of customers. Understanding customer needs and local culture, purchasing processes, and creating new sustainable business models is long-term work needing enough education export know-how employees with the understanding the target markets and legislation both in Finland and Vietnam.

A clear need among all actors would be to find a common direction and legislation that enable commercial export of high-quality Finnish vocational and professional education. It is important to understand the possibilities and limitations of the legislative environment of both countries also for financing commercial education from different channels and sources. Wishes for clarification and removal of operational obstacles was presented.

There is a desire to work together, we are still looking for the bigger success. (Interviewee C)

The results of the research can also be used in different target countries. Training organisers, companies implementing training exports and actors responsible for legislation and strategies can benefit from the versatile perspectives of the research, as the legislative change in vocational training is now topical again.

At best, the co-operation and solutions of vocational education can meet the development needs of Vietnam's education and working life, the challenges of sustainable growth and the economy.

At the same time, the own expertise of Finnish operators increases, the export of educational expertise generates income, and it can also partly solve the skills shortage of Finland.

In summary, Finnish vocational education export know-how presents both challenges and opportunities both in Finland and in this case in Vietnam. By integrating SDGs, deepening co-operation, and understanding Vietnam's context, there is possibility to overcome the challenges and create impactful educational export of know-how between the two nations. If every stakeholder wants to find a common ground and mutual direction.

5.2 Assessment of the findings

According to Yin (2018) the case study is one of the most challenging methods when the goal is to design a good case research by collecting, presenting, and analysing the data, and finally compose an article, report, book, or oral presentation. This came true in this research in practice by the broad topic and the procedural nature of the research with the decisions at which stage it is necessary to limit the collection of material and how to report the analysis, and the whole research process. However, the framework that emerged from the literature about the challenges of Finnish education export know-how and the solutions sought for them by organising and analysing the data, eventually helped to connect the different theme areas, SDGs, working life needs, Vietnamese and Finnish education system and VET, and legislation environment. That seemed separate in the beginning when finding relevant literature.

The research brought the researcher a broader understanding, which hopefully will be conveyed to the reader as well, in accordance with the methodology of qualitative research. On the one hand, as the topicality and complexity of the topic, but on the other hand, as the interconnection of separate theme areas. There is no single challenge to that has an easy solution. This same generalisation can certainly be made if a similar study were examined in a different environment or at a different time, because there are constant changes in environments and variables.

SDGs, sustainable transition, and green jobs

The country's commitment and achievement of SDGs has a profound effect on learning. It ensures access to quality education, promotes social inclusion, alleviates poverty, empowers women and

girls, improves health and well-being, and promotes environmental sustainability (e.g. Sachs et al. 2023; UNESCO, 2017; UNESCO, 2020). Baum (2020) brought up that achieving the remaining SDGs will be challenging in Vietnam by 2030. And that was confirmed by the results of this study as the goals are separate, although improvements related to working life conditions and decent jobs (SDG8) came up.

As literature brings up, vocational education development strategy of Vietnam for the period 2021-2030 with vision 2045 considers SDGs such as regional and equal opportunities for learning, lifelong learning, and quality of education (Nummela & Holm, 2023). In findings the goals seem to be still more separate projects and do not include practical implementations in Vietnamese VET, as they are already in Finnish curricula and practices at all levels of education. This point of view strengthens the possibilities of exporting Finnish vocational education expertise to Vietnam, which systematically strives towards the SDG goals in both education and working life.

Vietnam as a target market

Several sources emphasise the growth and goals of the economy of Vietnam (e.g. Matters, 2024; Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Finland, 2023), however, many countries still heavily finance projects and educational cooperation in Vietnam, thus creating a challenging operating environment for Finnish actors. Many countries also market opportunities to both students and their parents. This study emphasised funding, and its lack or difficulty. The different operating methods among the operators also attracted attention and a common direction was hoped for so that commercial operations would be possible, so-called after gray operators joined.

As Global Partnership for Education (2024) brings out despite the achievements, Vietnam faces some challenges with access and quality in lower secondary education, quality still being limited in remote areas. Accessing and completing education is a greater challenge for female students and ethnic minorities. In the interviews, the possibilities of Finnish education in relation to SDG goals such as equality were highlighted.

Business culture is business-related values, beliefs, attitudes, meanings, and practices shared by a business community (Guirdham, 2009). In this research intercultural knowledge was also brought

out like Beveridge highlights cultural knowledge and awareness of culturally ingrained human behaviour being vital for success in international markets (2021). Both the differences in culture and business culture came to the fore, but on the other hand, compared to many Asian countries, the immediate interaction and ease of communication, language challenges aside. Cultural sensitivity, knowledge of practices and history is important for successful cooperation.

Education export, Finnish vocational education, Exporting Finnish VET know-how, Finnish way

When comparing the results with previous literature and studies about Finnish education export and the resulting key challenges and possible solutions, several natural points of convergence between different sub-areas were found.

Finnish education export know how is currently being debated concerning mostly labour based immigration in Finland. There may be a danger that if the export of vocational training is viewed from only one perspective, the good practices already learned and the Finns' chances for success also in the commercial sale of education may be left at the feet of some other perspective. At the same time, VET and good working life practices as well as sustainable transit would be in great demand and need in the world.

In his research, Alen identified as strengths of Finland as an equal educational society, where vocational education plays a significant role in working life co-operation. Lack of sales competence for which the strengths of Finnish education and the image of the Finnish society are not taken full advantage of were the weaknesses. In this study, the Finnish society, quality of education in all levels, and the strengths especially on Finnish VET were highlighted. Also, the lack of experts in Finnish VET export know-how was mentioned and the needs for wider knowledge and skills, with new kind of co-operation and funding (2021).

Haapanen and Harjula highlighted the strong hope that the decision-makers will dismantle the obstacles and bureaucracy which still occurs and prevent Finnish education export to flourish (2021). This study emphasised finding a common direction and solutions first in Finland so that now the new actors who have appeared and act in so-called legislation gray area will be disciplined and

commercial high-quality training export would be possible. Customer is easily looking for the cheapest implementation.

Most studies dealing with Finnish education exports are related to educational levels other than vocational education with some exceptions from different target countries or focus more other things than exporting VET or has done before the new law came into force. It is good to state that the proposal of the law of the vocational education and training regarding the export of education is currently in the opinion round.

It should also be noted that there is no up-to-date statistical information on Finnish fee-based education leading to Finnish VET qualification due to the reporting system and the fact that those carried out in Finland using the Finnish curriculum framework instead of global ones, cannot yet be distinguished at the time of this research. The new Education Finland program for the years 2024-2027 was published soon after the publication of this study, but the researcher got access to the draft just before it was completed and used it as other material.

5.3 Research reliability, ethics and limitations

This section focuses on reliability, ethics, and limitations of this case study research. According to Alvesson and Sandberg (2012) single case study may be sufficient and could be used to confirm, challenge, or extend the theory, when a well-formulated theory is to be tested specifying a clear set of propositions will be true.

This research process has been guided by Jamk University of Applied Sciences valid ethical guidelines and the general guidelines for conducting good research. The interviewees who participated in the study were informed in advance and at the beginning of the interview about the research, and their personal information has been encrypted when reporting the results (e.g. Interviewee A). The use of other material is limited to the observations presented in the study and other material obtained.

Qualitative research is typically evaluated through the actions and decisions taken by the researcher throughout the study. There is no clear formula for case study, but the choices and

decisions made were the nature of the topic and the qualitative research trying to explain larger entities and their connections to each other.

In this case, the author and the studied phenomenon is supported by over two decades of working with Vocational education and training, in manager and expert roles, and living and observing daily vocational education export know-how. The relevance of the chosen topic is justified by the current challenges in the Finnish legislation, the importance of SDGs, and the strategies and reform of vocational education and training in Vietnam. Objectivity in educational qualitative research is sometimes problematic as Atkins and Wallace states (2012) because the researcher is often inside the subject, runs the interviews and adds personal reflections.

Conducting interviews as a method in qualitative research raises criticism for potential interview bias, which is a possible outcome of human interaction. It is possible that interviewer could influence the answers, or signal approval or disapproval of some answers. Bryman and Bell (2015, p. 508) encourage proper preparation and warn novice researchers of inefficient questions that might lead to simple yes or no answers.

Strengths of observation as Hennink et al. (2020) highlights provide familiarity with cultural milieu and context of behaviour, documents unspoken rules of social conduct and provides insights of people's behaviour and is complementary to other methods such as interviews. Simultaneous observing and field notes may be subjective and time consuming, and there is need for skilled interactions of the observer.

Since the aim is to avoid errors in research activities, the reliability of the conducted research must be evaluated in individual research, and within the scope of qualitative research, there are different concepts for this. The research is evaluated as a whole, as there are no clear instructions on the reliability of qualitative research. However, the main thing is the object and the purpose of the research, own commitments to the subject as a researcher, and why the research is important, how the data collection is done and how the informants were selected, what the duration of the research is and how the data was analysed and reported (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p.158).

Reliability and trustworthiness have been the leading principles in this study including credibility, transformability, dependability and confirmability (see Figure 26).

Verification of findings in qualitative research. Reliability and trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness	Question	Action	
Credibility	How congruent are the findings with original data?	The researcher must be honest and explain the process and results well	Honesty has been one of the most central principles in the whole process. The research process have been tried to describe understandable way
Transferability	How well can the results be applied to other contexts? Can the findings be relevant in other situations or environments?	The researcher must explain can the results be applicable to other cases	The results have been explained and presented and the limitations of this case study has been brought up
Dependability	How reliable is the research process?	It is important to document the steps and decisions to help to assess the reliability of the process	The research process has been documented also using figures
Confirmability	How objective is the research outcome?	The researchers must be aware of their own role and influences in the research process	Researcher has been aware her own role from the beginning of the study to its chosen methods and implementation

Figure 26. Verification of findings, reliability, and trustworthiness in this study. Source: Bryman & Bell, 2015; Stahl & King, 2020. Enhanced by author, 2024.

Qualitative research views the social setting or case in terms of process. According to Bryman and Bell one of the main ways to reveal this tendency is often a concern to show how events and patterns unfold over time. As a result of that, there is often a strong sense of change and flux in qualitative evidence. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how the history and the present reality of the organisations and context occurs over time (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 407).

Working life experience inevitably influenced the author's worldview on the research topic also helping to maintain a genuine interest in the topic. Concentration was required to maintain the spectator role during the interviews, when familiar-sounding experiences were shared.

Approximately one year that was spent working on the thesis from the ideating to reporting phases allowed time for reflection and processing the topic and the approach of the thesis. The

intense practical work and interviews were scheduled to be executed in the winter and spring of 2024. The process followed the case study research method with changes of direction, re-ideating, and re-planning and critical thinking being present throughout the learning journey.

Limitations

This thesis has several limitations. The subject area turned out to be very broad and at the same time really inspiring when the challenge was to be consistent. Along the way, interesting studies, articles, news, and current reviews related to the subject area in some way or another came forward, when the researcher was strongly involved in the topic itself, forcing the researcher to delimit and leave them out of the study. In these situations, decision-making was made easier when returned to the research questions. As Alvesson and Sandberg (2012) states the most critical aspect and fundamental step of all research is the formulation of research questions and constructing them into research questions.

The chosen method, qualitative case study research itself was very time-consuming, but very educational process. Understanding the method and the choices made related to it were partly challenging, but enough time spent on it, browsing through numerous books and studies, brought in very important insights. The emergence of additional questions, summarising and doing conclusions, on the other hand, the limited time and place-bound work in the agreed university of applied sciences reporting framework for chosen kind of case study all presented their own challenges. On the other hand, the solutions, limitations, and insights made along the way helped to bring a certain kind of overall picture of a complex subject and case, in which, however, similarities and points of comparison with other Finnish education export know-how cases or target countries can be found. Verifying that there is not much up-to-date research information or enough reliable data and statistics available on the Vietnamese and Finnish vocational education and training in English language, not to mention its' connection to SDGs and working life needs and education export know-how is one result itself.

Conducting interviews, as a method in qualitative research, is a possibility that interviewer could, for instance influence the answers, or signal approval or disapproval of some answers. It is important to recognise that translations from Finnish to English and English to Vietnamese and can

take away the richness of the expression or in some cases, if the subject area is not sufficiently familiar, and cause a wrong interpretation.

The conducted interviews represent the experiences of six key informants having practical knowledge first about Vietnam, and secondly either Finnish education export know how or know how about Vietnamese vocational education or broader experience about co-operation between Vietnam and Finland. Despite being neutrally selected, voluntary participation in a thesis interview may indicate that the interviewees, had a positive attitude towards education and co-operation with Finnish and Vietnamese actors. However, the interviewees were not afraid to bring out critical perspectives, either. The participants were selected using purposive sampling because of the desired criteria; finding individuals with maturity in working life and deep understanding with the complex topic. If the research had focused only on studying the export of vocational training in the target country, without considering, for example, the SDG perspective, or the legislation and the experience base, the results could look somewhat different. Here, the interviewees were given a voice, and the results were analysed by re-combining key subject areas from previous literature and the framework. This was also possible because the researcher is involved in the subject herself having practical experience related to all aspects of research to some extent.

The work-life situation of interviewees and the background including the cultural context at the time of the interview may have accentuated their comments, in positive and negative. The long careers of the interviewees can be considered a richness giving deep and versatile information. As the interviews were conducted both in Finnish and one in English with Vietnamese interpreter, the data analysis was done in Finnish before translating the results. Despite efforts and best intentions, the possibility of misunderstandings or nuances may be lost in translations.

This study revealed the lack of statistical data on the implementation of Finnish vocational education in non-EU countries or for groups coming from them in the home country. Also, the statistical data and evaluations that can be found in Vietnam are incomplete, and it is challenging for a Westerner to find reliable up-to-date data.

5.4 Recommendations for future research

In this case study on Finnish vocational training export know-how focused on Vietnam the voice was given to key experts and observing was made. If a similar study was conducted among teachers or students, different country, one separate education provider or vocational school, concentrating only one qualification or vocational curriculum or working life connections, interesting comparable findings for that specific question could be received.

The realisation of SDGs, in Finnish vocational education and training export know-how could also be a separate area of research. Whether it is another country or case study outside the EU that has been able to find similar discoveries with Finnish vocational education export know-how. Although a case study like this is always linked to time, place and the operating environment at that time.

Qualitative research can provide both in-depth information and gap-spotting information about the subject or case being studied. However, both qualitative and quantitative research is needed in future. Quantitative research and statistics on Finnish vocational education and training, especially fee-based training leading to VET qualification for groups from non-EU country and its implementation in different target countries or in the home country is needed, also, in the form of an apprenticeship contract. This would benefit the sector by expanding legislation and common good practices, as well as Finland's visibility and possibility in Vietnam and other countries in terms of commercial training and funding from different destinations.

Other interesting ideas as research topics that came up during the research process are the funding possibilities of Finnish vocational education in future, the effects of reforming legislation on the implementation of commercial education exports and competitiveness with other countries, various broader cooperation projects with different education levels and actors, and the good practices that can be obtained from it. Also, an in-depth study of the operating methods of the highlighted competitor countries could bring valuable additional information. Comparing successful implementations, challenges, and opportunities of Finnish vocational education between two different target countries can also bring more information that could be generalised.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Sustainable development goals. Vietnam and Finland performance in 2023. Sustainable development report 2023. Sachs et.al (2023)

VIETNAM

Performance by Indicator

Indicator	Value	Year	Rating	Trend
SDG1 – No Poverty				
Poverty headcount ratio at \$2.15/day (2017 PPP, %)	0.4	2023	●	↑
Poverty headcount ratio at \$3.65/day (2017 PPP, %)	2.8	2023	●	↑
SDG2 – Zero Hunger				
Prevalence of undernourishment (%)	5.7	2020	●	↑
Prevalence of stunting in children under 5 years of age (%)	19.3	2022	●	↔
Prevalence of wasting in children under 5 years of age (%)	4.7	2020	●	↑
Prevalence of obesity, BMI ≥ 30 (% of adult population)	2.1	2016	●	↑
Human Trophic Level (best 2–3 worst)	2.2	2017	●	↑
Cereal yield (tonnes per hectare of harvested land)	5.9	2021	●	↑
Sustainable Nitrogen Management Index (best 0–1.41 worst)	0.7	2018	●	↔
Exports of hazardous pesticides (tonnes per million population)	48.7	2020	●	●
SDG3 – Good Health and Well-Being				
Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births)	124.3	2020	●	↔
Neonatal mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	10.5	2021	●	↑
Mortality rate, under-5 (per 1,000 live births)	20.6	2021	●	↑
Incidence of tuberculosis (per 100,000 population)	173.0	2021	●	↔
New HIV infections (per 1,000 uninfected population)	0.1	2021	●	↑
Age-standardized death rate due to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, or chronic respiratory disease in adults aged 30–70 years (%)	21.2	2019	●	↔
Age-standardized death rate attributable to household air pollution and ambient air pollution (per 100,000 population)	102.8	2019	●	●
Traffic deaths (per 100,000 population)	30.6	2019	●	↓
Life expectancy at birth (years)	73.7	2019	●	↔
Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 females aged 15 to 19)	29.0	2020	●	↔
Births attended by skilled health personnel (%)	96.1	2021	●	↑
Surviving infants who received 2 WHO recommended vaccines (%)	83	2021	●	↓
Universal health coverage (UHC) index of service coverage (worst 0–100 best)	70	2019	●	↑
Subjective well-being (average ladder score, worst 0–10 best)	6.3	2022	●	↑
SDG4 – Quality Education				
Participation rate in pre-primary organized learning (% of children aged 4 to 6)	99.9	2018	●	●
Net primary enrollment rate (%)	97.7	2021	●	↔
Lower secondary completion rate (%)	97.7	2018	●	●
Literacy rate (% of population aged 15 to 24)	98.6	2019	●	●
SDG5 – Gender Equality				
Demand for family planning satisfied by modern methods (% of females aged 15 to 49)	72.1	2020	●	↔
Ratio of female-to-male mean years of education received (%)	92.1	2021	●	↔
Ratio of female-to-male labor force participation rate (%)	88.6	2022	●	↑
Seats held by women in national parliament (%)	30.3	2021	●	↔
SDG6 – Clean Water and Sanitation				
Population using at least basic drinking water services (%)	96.9	2020	●	↑
Population using at least basic sanitation services (%)	89.2	2020	●	↑
Freshwater withdrawal (% of available freshwater resources)	18.1	2019	●	●
Anthropogenic wastewater that receives treatment (%)	0.3	2020	●	●
Scarce water consumption embodied in imports (m ³ H ₂ O eq/capita)	665.2	2018	●	●
SDG7 – Affordable and Clean Energy				
Population with access to electricity (%)	100.0	2020	●	↑
Population with access to clean fuels and technology for cooking (%)	65.3	2020	●	↔
CO ₂ emissions from fuel combustion per total electricity output (MtCO ₂ /TWh)	1.0	2019	●	↔
Renewable energy share in total final energy consumption (%)	18.0	2019	●	↓
SDG8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth				
Adjusted GDP growth (%)	0.6	2021	●	●
Victims of modern slavery (per 1,000 population)	4.5	2018	●	●
Adults with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider (% of population aged 15 or over)	30.8	2017	●	●
Unemployment rate (% of total labor force, ages 15+)	1.7	2023	●	↑
Fundamental labor rights are effectively guaranteed (worst 0–1 best)	0.6	2021	●	↔
Fatal work-related accidents embodied in imports (per 100,000 population)	0.0	2018	●	↔
Victims of modern slavery embodied in imports (per 100,000 population)	14.0	2018	●	●
SDG9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure				
Rural population with access to all-season roads (%)	85.9	2022	●	●
Population using the internet (%)	74.2	2021	●	↑
Mobile broadband subscriptions (per 100 population)	87.8	2021	●	↑
Logistics Performance Index: Quality of trade and transport-related infrastructure (worst 1–5 best)	3.0	2018	●	↔
The Times Higher Education Universities Ranking: Average score of top 3 universities (worst 0–100 best)	36.6	2022	●	●
Articles published in academic journals (per 1,000 population)	0.2	2021	●	↔
Expenditure on research and development (% of GDP)	0.5	2019	●	↔
SDG10 – Reduced Inequalities				
Gini coefficient	35.7	2018	●	↓
Palma ratio	1.5	2018	●	●
SDG11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities				
Proportion of urban population living in slums (%)	5.8	2020	●	↔
Annual mean concentration of particulate matter of less than 2.5 microns in diameter (PM _{2.5}) (µg/m ³)	27.9	2019	●	↔
Access to improved water source, piped (% of urban population)	85.4	2020	●	↑
Satisfaction with public transport (%)	83.0	2022	●	↑
SDG12 – Responsible Consumption and Production				
Municipal solid waste (kg/capita/day)	0.3	2010	●	●
Electronic waste (kg/capita)	2.7	2019	●	●
Production-based SO ₂ emissions (kg/capita)	10.4	2018	●	●
SO ₂ emissions embodied in imports (kg/capita)	0.8	2018	●	●
Production-based nitrogen emissions (kg/capita)	27.8	2018	●	↔
Nitrogen emissions embodied in imports (kg/capita)	7.6	2018	●	↔
Exports of plastic waste (kg/capita)	1.3	2021	●	↑
SDG13 – Climate Action				
CO ₂ emissions from fossil fuel combustion and cement production (tCO ₂ /capita)	3.4	2021	●	↔
CO ₂ emissions embodied in imports (tCO ₂ /capita)	0.3	2018	●	↔
CO ₂ emissions embodied in fossil fuel exports (kg/capita)	185.7	2021	●	●
SDG14 – Life Below Water				
Mean area that is protected in marine sites important to biodiversity (%)	24.6	2022	●	↔
Ocean Health Index: Clean Waters score (worst 0–100 best)	46.9	2022	●	↔
Fish caught from overexploited or collapsed stocks (% of total catch)	5.5	2018	●	↔
Fish caught by trawling or dredging (%)	66.3	2019	●	↓
Fish caught that are then discarded (%)	16.9	2019	●	↓
Marine biodiversity threats embodied in imports (per million population)	0.0	2018	●	●
SDG15 – Life on Land				
Mean area that is protected in terrestrial sites important to biodiversity (%)	40.1	2022	●	↔
Mean area that is protected in freshwater sites important to biodiversity (%)	39.5	2022	●	↔
Red List Index of species survival (worst 0–1 best)	0.71	2023	●	↓
Permanent deforestation (% of forest area, 3-year average)	1.2	2021	●	↓
Terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity threats embodied in imports (per million population)	0.1	2018	●	●
SDG16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions				
Homicides (per 100,000 population)	1.5	2011	●	●
Unsentenced detainees (% of prison population)	12.8	2019	●	↑
Population who feel safe walking alone at night in the city/area where they live (%)	85	2022	●	↑
Birth registrations with civil authority (% of children under age 5)	96.1	2014	●	●
Corruption Perceptions Index (worst 0–100 best)	42	2022	●	↔
Children involved in child labor (% of population aged 5 to 14)	6.9	2021	●	↔
Exports of major conventional weapons (TIV constant million USD per 100,000 population)	0.0	2018	●	●
Press Freedom Index (worst 0–100 best)	24.6	2023	●	↓
Access to and affordability of justice (worst 0–1 best)	0.5	2021	●	↔
Timeliness of administrative proceedings (worst 0–1 best)	0.5	2021	●	↔
Expropriations are lawful and adequately compensated (worst 0–1 best)	0.4	2021	●	↔
SDG17 – Partnerships for the Goals				
Government spending on health and education (% of GDP)	6.2	2020	●	↓
For high-income and all OECD DAC countries: International concessional public finance, including official development assistance (% of GNI)	NA	NA	●	●
Other countries: Government revenue excluding grants (% of GDP)	19.6	2019	●	↔
Corporate Tax Haven Score (best 0–100 worst)	0	2021	●	●
Statistical Performance Index (worst 0–100 best)	73.2	2022	●	↑

* Imputed data point

FINLAND

Performance by Indicator

Indicator	Value	Year	Rating	Trend	Indicator	Value	Year	Rating	Trend
SDG1 – No Poverty					SDG9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure				
Poverty headcount ratio at \$2.15/day (2017 PPP, %)	0.2	2023	●	↑	Rural population with access to all-season roads (%)	99.6	2022	●	●
Poverty headcount ratio at \$3.65/day (2017 PPP, %)	0.3	2023	●	↑	Population using the Internet (%)	92.8	2021	●	↑
Poverty rate after taxes and transfers (%)	5.7	2020	●	↑	Mobile broadband subscriptions (per 100 population)	157.2	2021	●	↑
SDG2 – Zero Hunger					Logistics Performance Index: Quality of trade and transport related infrastructure (worst 1–5 best)	4.0	2018	●	↑
Prevalence of undernourishment (%)	2.5	2020	●	↑	The Times Higher Education Universities Ranking: Average score of top 3 universities (worst 0–100 best)	54.5	2022	●	●
Prevalence of stunting in children under 5 years of age (%)	2.6	2022	●	●	Articles published in academic journals (per 1,000 population)	4.2	2021	●	↑
Prevalence of wasting in children under 5 years of age (%)	0.7	2021	●	●	Expenditure on research and development (% of GDP)	2.9	2020	●	↑
Prevalence of obesity, BMI ≥ 30 (% of adult population)	22.2	2016	●	↓	Researchers (per 1,000 employed population)	15.9	2020	●	↑
Human Trophic Level (best 2–3 worst)	2.6	2017	●	↓	Triadic patent families filed (per million population)	53.3	2020	●	↑
Cereal yield (tonnes per hectare of harvested land)	2.8	2021	●	↑	Gap in internet access by income (percentage points)	9.2	2020	●	↑
Sustainable Nitrogen Management Index (best 0–1.41 worst)	1.0	2018	●	↓	Female share of graduates from STEM fields at the tertiary level (%)	27.4	2017	●	↑
Yield gap closure (% of potential yield)	51.5	2021	●	●	SDG10 – Reduced Inequalities				
Exports of hazardous pesticides (tonnes per million population)	1.0	2020	●	●	Gini coefficient	27.7	2019	●	↑
SDG3 – Good Health and Well-Being					Palma ratio	0.9	2020	●	↑
Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births)	8.3	2020	●	↑	Elderly poverty rate (% of population aged 66 or over)	6.9	2020	●	↓
Neonatal mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	1.3	2021	●	↑	SDG11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities				
Mortality rate, under-5 (per 1,000 live births)	2.2	2021	●	↑	Proportion of urban population living in slums (%)	0.0	2020	●	↑
Incidence of tuberculosis (per 100,000 population)	3.5	2021	●	↑	Annual mean concentration of particulate matter of less than 2.5 microns in diameter (PM2.5) (µg/m³)	5.5	2019	●	↑
New HIV infections (per 1,000 uninfected population)	NA	NA	●	●	Access to improved water source, piped (% of urban population)	100.0	2020	●	↑
Age-standardized death rate due to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, or chronic respiratory disease in adults aged 30–70 years (%)	9.6	2019	●	↑	Satisfaction with public transport (%)	61.0	2022	●	↑
Age-standardized death rate attributable to household air pollution and ambient air pollution (per 100,000 population)	7.4	2019	●	●	Population with rent overburden (%)	8.8	2019	●	↑
Traffic deaths (per 100,000 population)	3.9	2019	●	↑	Proportion of population with access to points of interest within a 15min walk (%)	96.6	2022	●	●
Life expectancy at birth (years)	81.6	2019	●	↑	SDG12 – Responsible Consumption and Production				
Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 females aged 15 to 19)	4.1	2019	●	↑	Electronic waste (kg/capita)	19.8	2019	●	●
Births attended by skilled health personnel (%)	99.6	2020	●	↑	Production-based SO ₂ emissions (kg/capita)	26.6	2018	●	●
Surviving infants who received 2 WHO-recommended vaccines (%)	89	2021	●	↓	SO ₂ emissions embodied in imports (kg/capita)	7.3	2018	●	●
Universal health coverage (UHC) index of service coverage (worst 0–100 best)	83	2019	●	↑	Production-based nitrogen emissions (kg/capita)	51.8	2018	●	↑
Subjective well-being (average ladder score, worst 0–10 best)	7.7	2022	●	↑	Nitrogen emissions embodied in imports (kg/capita)	30.7	2018	●	↓
Gap in life expectancy at birth among regions (years)	3.8	2020	●	↓	Exports of plastic waste (kg/capita)	3.7	2021	●	↑
Gap in self-reported health status by income (percentage points)	25.3	2020	●	↑	Non-recycled municipal solid waste (kg/capita/day)	1.1	2021	●	●
Daily smokers (% of population aged 15 and over)	12.0	2020	●	↑	SDG13 – Climate Action				
SDG4 – Quality Education					CO ₂ emissions from fossil fuel combustion and cement production (tCO ₂ /capita)	6.8	2021	●	↑
Participation rate in pre-primary organized learning (% of children aged 4 to 6)	96.9	2020	●	↑	CO ₂ emissions embodied in imports (tCO ₂ /capita)	2.7	2018	●	↓
Net primary enrollment rate (%)	98.3	2020	●	↑	CO ₂ emissions embodied in fossil fuel exports (kg/capita)	0.1	2021	●	●
Lower secondary completion rate (%)	102.1	2020	●	↑	Carbon Pricing Score at EUEM/CO ₂ (% worst 0–100 best)	33.5	2018	●	↓
Literacy rate (% of population aged 15 to 24)	NA	NA	●	●	SDG14 – Life Below Water				
Tertiary educational attainment (% of population aged 25 to 34)	40.1	2021	●	↑	Mean area that is protected in marine sites important to biodiversity (%)	60.9	2022	●	↑
PSA score (worst 0–600 best)	516.3	2018	●	↑	Ocean Health Index: Clean Waters score (worst 0–100 best)	81.9	2022	●	↑
Variation in science performance explained by socio-economic status (%)	10.5	2018	●	↑	Fish caught from overexploited or collapsed stocks (% of total catch)	3.1	2018	●	↑
Underachievers in science (% of 15 year olds)	12.9	2018	●	↑	Fish caught by trawling or dredging (%)	0.0	2019	●	●
SDG5 – Gender Equality					Fish caught that are then discarded (%)	0.2	2019	●	↑
Demand for family planning satisfied by modern methods (% of females aged 15 to 49)	90.4	2023	●	↑	Marine biodiversity threats embodied in imports (per million population)	0.1	2018	●	●
Ratio of female-to-male mean years of education received (%)	102.8	2021	●	↑	SDG15 – Life on Land				
Ratio of female-to-male labor force participation rate (%)	90.8	2022	●	↑	Mean area that is protected in terrestrial sites important to biodiversity (%)	71.8	2022	●	↑
Seats held by women in national parliament (%)	46.0	2021	●	↑	Mean area that is protected in freshwater sites important to biodiversity (%)	75.8	2022	●	↑
Gender wage gap (% of male median wage)	16.0	2020	●	↑	Red List Index of species survival (worst 0–1 best)	0.99	2021	●	↑
SDG6 – Clean Water and Sanitation					Permanent deforestation (% of forest area, 3-year average)	0.0	2021	●	↑
Population using at least basic drinking water services (%)	100.0	2020	●	↑	Terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity threats embodied in imports (per million population)	2.0	2018	●	●
Population using at least basic sanitation services (%)	99.4	2020	●	↑	SDG16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions				
Freshwater withdrawal (% of available freshwater resources)	7.1	2019	●	●	Homicides (per 100,000 population)	1.6	2020	●	↓
Anthropogenic wastewater that receives treatment (%)	100.0	2020	●	●	Unsentenced detainees (% of prison population)	23.5	2020	●	↑
Scarce water consumption embodied in imports (m ³ H ₂ O eq/capita)	3,124.9	2018	●	●	Population who feel safe walking alone at night in the city/area where they live (%)	88	2022	●	↑
Population using safely managed water services (%)	99.6	2020	●	↑	Birth registrations with civil authority (% of children under age 5)	100.0	2022	●	●
Population using safely managed sanitation services (%)	84.1	2020	●	↑	Corruption Perceptions Index (worst 0–100 best)	87	2022	●	●
SDG7 – Affordable and Clean Energy					Children involved in child labor (% of population aged 5 to 14)	0.0	2021	●	●
Population with access to electricity (%)	100.0	2020	●	↑	Exports of major conventional weapons (TIV constant million USD per 100,000 population)	0.5	2021	●	●
Population with access to clean fuels and technology for cooking (%)	100.0	2020	●	↑	Press Freedom Index (worst 0–100 best)	87.9	2023	●	↑
CO ₂ emissions from fuel combustion per total electricity output (tCO ₂ /TWh)	0.6	2019	●	↑	Access to and affordability of justice (worst 0–1 best)	0.7	2021	●	↑
Renewable energy share in total final energy consumption (%)	45.8	2019	●	↑	Timeliness of administrative proceedings (worst 0–1 best)	0.8	2021	●	↑
SDG8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth					Expropriations are lawful and adequately compensated (worst 0–1 best)	0.8	2021	●	↑
Adjusted GDP growth (%)	0.9	2021	●	●	Persons held in prison (per 100,000 population)	49.7	2020	●	↑
Victims of modern slavery (per 1,000 population)	1.7	2018	●	●	SDG17 – Partnerships for the Goals				
Adults with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider (% of population aged 15 or over)	99.5	2021	●	↑	Government spending on health and education (% of GDP)	13.7	2020	●	↑
Fundamental labor rights are effectively guaranteed (worst 0–1 best)	0.8	2021	●	↑	For high income and all OECD DAC countries: international concessional public finance, including official development assistance (% of GNI)	0.6	2022	●	↑
Fatal work-related accidents embodied in imports (per 100,000 population)	0.3	2018	●	↑	Other countries: Government revenue excluding grants (% of GDP)	NA	NA	●	●
Victims of modern slavery embodied in imports (per 100,000 population)	95.8	2018	●	●	Corporate Tax Haven Score (best 0–100 worst)	60	2021	●	●
Employment-to-population ratio (%)	72.7	2021	●	↑	Financial Secrecy Score (best 0–100 worst)	51.8	2022	●	↑
Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) (% of population aged 15 to 29)	11.9	2021	●	↑	Shifted profits of multinationals (US\$ billion)	4.8	2019	●	↑
					Statistical Performance Index (worst 0–100 best)	93.6	2022	●	↑

* Imputed data point

Appendix 2. Theme interview themes and questions

1 Introduction, topic of the interview, purpose, and method of recording - Johdanto, haastattelun aihe, tarkoitus sekä tallennustapa

The interviewer briefly explains the topic, about the qualitative thematic interview, and the method of recording and using the interview in the thesis.

2 The interviewee's background and perspective on the subject- Haastateltavan tausta ja näkökulma aiheeseen

Introduce yourself and your background. Tell about your job description/area of responsibility, especially in relation to the topic being discussed.

3 Culture/business culture - differences and similarities- Kulttuuri/businesskulttuuri – eroja ja samankaltaisuuksia

What differences and similarities do you recognise in the operational culture/business culture of Finland and Vietnam today? How are these aspects reflected in practical cooperation between companies/individuals? What should be recognised and considered when aiming for the Vietnamese market and operating there?

4 Strategies, legislation, financing mechanisms and their impact on cooperation opportunities between Finland and Vietnam, especially from a commercial point of view -Strategiat, lainsäädäntö, rahoitusmekanismit ja niiden vaikutus Suomen ja Vietnamin yhteistyömahdollisuuksiin erityisesti kaupallisesta näkökulmasta

Why is cooperation between Finland and Vietnam relevant now? Priorities of cooperation between Finland and Vietnam before and now? What current aspects of legislation/strategies should be identified and made aware of? Changes/guidelines? What kind of financial instruments/opportunities do you identify for starting cooperation between Finland and Vietnam and continuing commercial cooperation?

5 SDG goals (Sustainable development goals 2030) and their impact, especially on the development of skills and education

How are the SDG goals reflected in country-specific strategies and implementation? Practical examples? What are the most important measures that Finland and Vietnam should take to achieve the SDG goals? In the field of education/vocational training? Can we learn something from each other?

6 Current state of education, especially vocational education, strengths and weaknesses-Koulutuksen, erityisesti ammatillisen koulutuksen nykytila, vahvuudet ja heikkoudet

How would you describe the current state of vocational education in Finland and Vietnam? Differences and similarities? What kind of image does vocational education have? What are the strengths of Finnish vocational education? What about possible development targets? What are the strengths of Vietnamese vocational education? What about possible development targets? Does vocational training meet the current and future needs of the labour market?

7 Opportunities for Finnish companies and educational institutions in Vietnam-Suomalaisten yritysten ja oppilaitosten mahdollisuudet Vietnämässä

What kind of cooperation opportunities do you see in the development of education in Finland and Vietnam now and in the future? What about the export of education (export of know-how, commercial cooperation) and vocational training? What kind of expertise is there in particular demand and need?

8 Possible challenges for Finnish companies and educational institutions in Vietnam -Suomalaisten yritysten ja oppilaitosten mahdolliset haasteet Vietnämässä

What are the biggest challenges in the development of vocational education in Finland and Vietnam? What possible obstacles to cooperation do you see between Finland and Vietnam? What kind of challenges are related to commercial cooperation, especially education export? How could these challenges be solved?

9 Free speech, supplementary questions, and thoughts -Vapaa sana, täydentävät ajatukset ja kysymykset

Is there anything else that would be good to discuss for comprehensive coverage of the topic?