

Publisher

Finnish Education Evaluation Centre 2020

Title of publication

Immigrants' educational pathways – Evaluation of the literacy training in liberal adult education, the new structure of basic education for adults and the more flexible language skills requirements in vocational education and training

Authors

Raisa Hievanen, Tarja Frisk, Hanna Väätäinen, Kirsi Mustonen, Juha Kaivola, Arja Koli, Sari Liski, Virva Muotka, Anu Wikman-Immonen

Between 2019 and 2020, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) implemented an evaluation examining the effects of reforms aimed at accelerating the educational pathways of immigrants in literacy training at liberal adult education institutions, in basic education for adults and in vocational education and training (VET). The evaluation questions were:

- How well do the educational pathways of immigrants function?
- Do literacy training at liberal adult education institutions, basic education for adults and VET meet the objectives set for the reform?
- What factors promote and hinder the viability of the educational pathways of immigrants?

The results of the evaluation consist of four different sets of material: surveys directed at education and training providers, surveys directed at teachers, the material of the events organised for the focus groups and the material of the webinars. In the target group of the survey of providers, 67 providers of liberal adult education (38 % of all providers), all 47 providers of basic education for adults and 73 VET providers (73 % of all providers) responded to the survey. In the survey targeted at teachers, responses were received from 62 literacy teachers in liberal adult education, 197 teachers in basic education for adults and 711 teachers in VET. A total of 116 people participated in the events organised for the focus groups and 106 in the webinars.

According to the evaluation results, liberal adult education institutions have succeeded in taking on their new educational task. In basic education for adults, the reformed structure has harmonised and clarified the teaching at the national level. In VET, it is possible for applicants with weaker language skills to receive a study place in VET as a result of the more flexible language skills requirements.

According to the providers' assessment, relevant legislation and the core curricula for the examined education and training support the realisation of immigrants' educational pathways. Students' educational pathways are individual and the initial level of the student's skills is as a rule taken into account in them.

According to the evaluation results, the government transfer systems for liberal adult education and basic education for adults function well, while the system of funding for VET does not support the realisation of immigrants' educational pathways. The actors in all three forms of education would like to have more resources to be able to respond to the needs of immigrant students. On the other hand, the providers of literacy training in liberal adult education and VET providers do not take advantage of all of the possibilities offered by the systems of funding to finance the education and training they provide.

The heterogenous nature of immigrant students' competence and abilities to study is a challenge in all of the education and training examined. Providers should therefore pay attention to ensuring that it is realistically possible for the persons selected as students to achieve their personal goals in the studies. Uniform assessment of students' competence and skills also produces challenges both within the education and training programmes and when the student moves from one education or training to another. In liberal adult education, assessing the learning outcomes of literacy training and the level of students' competence at the final stage of the training is difficult because no criteria has been determined for the objectives of the training. The providers of basic education for adults in turn interpret in different ways the objectives of the initial stage of the education and the literacy stage included in it, the assessment of competence and the abilities required for moving to the final stage. Consequently, the students beginning the studies at the final stage of basic education for adults do not all have sufficient abilities to complete them. It can be assumed that these assessment challenges are also reflected in the educational pathway when students progress to VET, where teachers face challenges because of the deficiencies in students' language skills and ability to study.

The collaboration the providers of the education and training subject to this evaluation conduct with TE Offices, municipalities, centres of excellence for immigrants, integration training for immigrants and with each other mainly works well when such collaboration exists. On the other hand, several teachers do not participate in the collaboration. The reinforcement of the collaboration networks and the establishment of the operating models also require additional investments in all three forms of education.

To conclude the results of the entire evaluation, the evaluation team notes that strengthening the basic competence and skills of students with an immigrant background and clarifying the division of tasks between the different forms of education in relation to this play a key role in making the educational pathways of immigrants smoother.

The following conclusions and recommendations are proposed as a basis for the development work.

1. The flexibility of the educational pathway requires clarification of the responsibilities of the different forms of education and ensuring that students acquire basic knowledge and skills

In the light of the evaluation results, it seems that there are differences in how the education and training providers understand the objectives of the education and training and the skills required of students at their beginning and completion of their studies. This makes flexible and appropriate progress on the educational pathway more difficult for immigrant students.

Recommendations

- The evaluation team recommends that the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment continue the dialogue with the education and training actors to create a shared understanding of the roles that the different forms of education have in educating immigrants.
- As part of the dialogue, it should also be considered whether the studies in the early stage of basic education for adults would also benefit those in integration training for immigrants, even though their aim is not to complete the entire basic education syllabus. For example, learning the basics of mathematics would support students in their everyday activities. For example, learning the basics of mathematics would support students in their everyday activities.
- The evaluation team proposes that, when flexible educational pathways are supported, it should also be ensured that the actors retain an understanding of the responsibilities involved in providing education and training that produces general basic knowledge and ability.
- The Finnish National Agency for Education should ensure that the objectives of the different levels of education and training are aligned so that moving from one education or training programme to another goes smoothly and students have the required level of knowledge and skills at the transition points of the educational pathway.

2. Building appropriate educational pathways requires clarification of the student profiles in the different kinds of literacy education

The objectives and the target group of literacy training in liberal adult education and of basic education for adults seem ambiguous and partly overlapping. There are different views of the target groups of the two types of education, which is reflected in what kind of educational pathway the student is directed to by the TE Office or other parties providing guidance and in regional solutions regarding who will organise literacy training. The student's integration status and the regional availability of study places determine what education or training the student is eventually directed to.

Recommendations

- The evaluation team recommends that the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education clarify the profiles of students in literacy training in liberal adult education and students in basic education for adults. The evaluation team

considers it important that the clarification work be carried out in close cooperation with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment so that the primary target group of the education and training will be understood and interpreted consistently by the parties directing people to education and training.

- As one option for the clarification of the student profiles, the evaluation team proposes considering the possibility that immigrants who are illiterate or have emerging or developing literacy skills would primarily be directed to the literacy stage in basic education for adults when it is available in the locality and this is justified considering the student's overall situation and goals.
- and the person has the abilities to study in basic education for adults. The majority of these people also lack the general knowledge and ability that basic education for adults could offer them.
- Immigrant students who do not have the abilities required for participating in full-time studies, who are not within the scope of the labour force or who need flexible teaching solutions for other reasons would in turn benefit most from the ways education is typically provided in liberal adult education.

3. Flexible study paths are required for different learners

Fast educational pathways are appropriate for many immigrant students. However, especially for those immigrants who have started their studies in Finland with weak basic knowledge and skills, the aim of completing the education and transferring to the world of work faster may risk their social and financial equality in the long term.

Students who do not achieve strong basic knowledge and skills during the training will be in a vulnerable position in the transformations of the world of work. Immigrants must also have the opportunity to engage in continuous learning and to progress in their career.

Recommendations

- The evaluation team recommends that the Ministry of Education and Culture develop funding systems for different forms of education so that slow educational pathways will be possible for those students who need them to enhance their basic knowledge and skills.
- Supporting a flexible transition to the world of work for immigrants with stronger knowledge and skills must be continued.
- The evaluation team recommends that the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment enhance the opportunities for employed immigrants to improve their basic skills and their proficiency in Finnish or Swedish, for example, in training organised in liberal adult education or in labour market training.

Keywords: immigrants, vocational education and training (VET), liberal adult education, basic education for adults, evaluation, education and training, educational pathways, employment