

SUMMARY

Approximately half of the pupils learning Swedish as their long syllabus in grades 1–6 of basic education) attending grade 9 in spring 2013, participated in an assessment of learning outcomes. The sample account for 1,679 pupils from 73 Finnish-language schools.

Learning outcomes

Pupils demonstrated **excellent** achievement of the **listening comprehension** objectives. The majority of pupils exceeded the goals set out for good learning in the curriculum by at least one level.

Pupils demonstrated **good** achievement of the **reading comprehension** objectives, the majority of them meeting the goals of a good level of performance. Their speaking skills in Swedish were **excellent** and writing skills **good**. In practice, the level good refers to the ability to meet basic needs for immediate social interaction.

In all skill sets, girls achieved better results than boys. Pupils' learning improved in accordance with their **parents' education**. Pupils applying to the general upper secondary school achieved better results in all skill sets compared to those aiming at vocational education and training. Pupils following the **A1 syllabus** in Swedish language produced better results in all skill sets than those following the A2 syllabus. Pupils who had received **grade 7** or 8, depending on the skill set, attained good results. Those who spent **no more than half an hour** doing their homework achieved better learning outcomes than those who did not spend any time on home study. **Regionally**, pupils in **South-Western Finland** attained the best results, with excellent achievement in all skill sets apart from writing. As for the other regions, pupils' ranking varied by skill set. By **type of municipality**, pupils with the best Swedish language skills were found in **densely populated** municipalities.

The **most popular teaching practices** included listening to students speaking in pairs, giving feedback and discussing their progress with individual pupils. Teachers obtained teaching material from the Internet, but rarely participated in online discussions on topics touching on their profession. Clubs, international teacher or pupil exchange schemes and peer feedback among teachers were also rare. With regard to the assessment methods reported by teachers, many focused on written exams.

The use of authentic working methods in teaching improved the pupils' success in reading comprehension. Modern methods also had a positive impact on reading and listening comprehension, and teacher-guided spoken exercises during lessons enhanced all language skill sets. Teachers' continuing education also contributed towards improved performance levels. The more the teachers applied authentic working methods, the more their pupils enjoyed Swedish language and found it useful. A link was also observed between spoken exercises during lessons and positive impressions of Swedish language and studies.

While most pupils regularly completed their Swedish language assignments, teachers spoke a lot of Swedish in class and paired oral exercises were commonplace, the objectives set out for the range of exercises and self-regulated learning in particular were poorly realised. Swedish was rarely used outside school, and assessment methods largely relied on teacher-led written exercises and vocabulary tests.

Girls had adopted a wider range of learning practices than boys, and girls also completed their assignments more regularly. Pupils whose parents had passed the matriculation examination or pupils who intended to apply to the general upper secondary school most regularly completed their homework assignments. In order to receive grade 8, pupils were expected to complete their homework at least sometimes, and in order to receive an excellent grade they had to do their homework often or nearly always.

Little regional variation was found among learning practices. Across the country, Swedish assignments were usually completed to a good level, but most regularly in South-Western Finland and least regularly in Northern Finland. Pupils living in rural municipalities were the most regular in doing their assignments, while those living in urban municipalities were the least regular.

Pupils expressed neutral opinions on their own competences and on how much they liked Swedish language, and voiced positive opinions on the usefulness of Swedish language as a subject. Pupils were most divided on how much they enjoyed Swedish as a subject and how interesting they found the lessons and exercises. Overall, pupils were positive or very positive about their school as a studying and learning environment. Those who felt negative about their school demonstrated poorer achievements in language tasks. Groups expressing more positive opinions on Swedish language and studies included girls, pupils whose parents had taken the matriculation examination, pupils who intended to apply to the general upper secondary school and pupils who followed the advanced syllabus in Swedish.

A strong link was observed between the skill sets in Swedish, the strongest relation being between listening and reading comprehension, and the weakest between speaking and comprehension skills. Pupils who regularly completed their assignments were the most likely to perform best in language tasks. With regard to the opinions given, the one most strongly linked to language skills was the pupil's opinion on his or her own language proficiency. Enjoyment of Swedish language and studies was related to the number of opportunities teachers offered during lessons for spoken and written communication and planning and assessing learning: the more opportunities offered, the better the pupils liked Swedish language.

The percentage of schools whose achievement remained below or above average varied between 10 and 15 per cent by skill set. Compared to the 2001 assessment of the A language syllabus in Swedish, the gap in pupils' grades between schools was also found to have increased.

Explanation models

Parents' of education explained success in all skill sets apart from speaking: the higher the parents' level of education, the better the results in assessment tasks.

Plans for further study constituted an important statistical link to achievement in all skill sets. Pupils intending to apply to the general upper secondary school achieved better results in all language tasks, particularly in reading comprehension than those applying to vocational education and training. **Advanced syllabus 1** improved pupil performance in all language skill sets in comparison to Advanced syllabus 2.

The key explanatory factor in all skill sets was the pupil's opinion of their own proficiency. With regard to reading comprehension, this was followed by plans for further study and regularly completing assignments. Listening comprehension was also explained by gender (girls having the advantage) and use of Swedish language outside school. Writing skills were explained, in addition to gender, by plans for further study (those intending to apply to the general upper secondary school having the advantage). Success in speaking tasks was further explained by plans for further study and use of Swedish language outside school.

Development suggestions

Resources that should be used more in rectifying the problems identified include school satisfaction, the perceived usefulness of the Swedish language, regular home study and established use of spoken language practice at school.

The range of problems included little practice in learning skills, limited use of ICT in teaching, a small range of assessment methods and variation in learning outcomes by gender, parents' education and geographical area. The quality of school instruction and assignments can be improved by integrating into the assignments the use of ICT and planning of one's own work at school and outside. Information on the need for Swedish language skills and support for Swedish studies should be particularly targeted at boys and pupils whose parents have not been educated to the level of matriculation examination. Assessment should be based both on spoken and written skills and work, with each accounting for a clearly defined share of the grade. The European Language Portfolio provides help in implementing all of these measures.