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In the spring of 2015, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) assessed the learning outcomes on grades 7–9 for the ‘Romany language as a mother tongue’ syllabus in basic education. The national assessment was carried out on 14 April 2015 as an overall study in which the objective was to include all pupils who study Romany language as their mother tongue in grades 7–9. The purpose of the assessment was to produce reliable information on how well the objectives of the 2004 national core curriculum for basic education have been met, on the level of the ‘Romany language as a mother tongue’ syllabus, and on success in promoting educational equality. The report also presents the status of Romany language and teaching Romany language as part of basic education. The areas of the assessment were linguistic knowledge, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, writing and speaking.

The assessment of the learning outcomes of Romany language was now carried out for the first time. The assessment included 12 pupils from seven schools. The pupils’ performances were assessed by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre.

Assessment assignments were prepared on the basis of the goals, content areas and criteria defined for the ‘Romany language as a mother tongue’ syllabus based on the national core curriculum for basic education. When preparing the assignments, account was taken of the variability of the assignments both in terms of assignment type and level of difficulty, and the pupils’ variable levels of competence in Romany language. The assessment included various kinds of production and selection assignments, such as multiple choice and combination assignments.

In addition to pupil assignments, additional data was collected by using background surveys for pupils, teachers and principals. Information was gathered, for example, on attitudes and factors affecting learning results, such as teaching arrangements and the amount of education. The background survey for teachers was carried out in a cooperation seminar for Romany language teachers organised in collaboration with the Finnish National Board of Education in which the majority of Romany language teachers participated both in basic education and other education levels.

In the autumn of 2015, school-specific results and feedback were delivered to the schools and education providers that participated in the assessment. In this way, principals and Romany language teachers obtained information on the results of their school's pupils and their attitudes towards Romany language.

The pupils' level of competence varied to a great extent. Some of the pupils were studying Romany language for the first year, and at the most, pupils had studied it for eight years. The number of weekly lessons in Romany language also varied. Studying may have been continuous, or there may have been a break included at some point.

The best pupils completed more than 60% of the assignments correctly in all content areas, whereas the weakest pupils did not receive any points in some areas. On average, the best results were achieved in listening comprehension exercises. More than 60% of the pupils completed two listening comprehension assignments correctly; however, the last listening comprehension assignment was challenging, as only 14% of the pupils were able to solve it correctly, and the completion percentage was 41% in the whole listening comprehension section.

Only five pupils completed the speaking assignments. The assessment indicated that there were rarely or never any pair discussions during Romany language lessons, oral presentations were held rarely, and spoken exercises were hardly ever recorded. There were also few oral homework assignments, so pupils were not accustomed to completing speaking assignments.

Practically none of the pupils completed the writing assignment. Two pupils wrote a couple of words so it was not possible to assess writing competence, and this skill was therefore left out of the assessment in terms of individual areas and the whole assessment. When teachers evaluated the competence of items mentioned in the national core curriculum, they considered the performance of pupils to be the weakest in writing understandable and grammatically correct texts. Similar to oral homework assignments, there were also few written homework assignments.

Pupils who speak Romany language daily at home did better in all areas than those pupils who speak Romany language only occasionally. The competence level between girls and boys varied; girls performed better on assignments related to reading and listening comprehension, whereas boys were competent in linguistic knowledge and speaking. If pupils had their own Romany language textbook or a teacher used a Romany language textbook as part of teaching, pupils were more competent in all areas compared to others.

The attitude sections investigated how useful pupils considered Romany language, how content they were studying it, and how the pupils rated themselves as learners of Romany language. Pupils did not feel that they were very competent in Romany language, and on average, they had neutral attitudes towards the usefulness of Romany language, but they did like Romany language as a subject. 80% of pupils considered it important to be competent in Romany language, and they were happy to study it.

The education of teachers in Romany language varied from those who had completed comprehensive school to those with a higher academic degree. 87% of teachers felt that they needed further education. Therefore, the availability of Romany language teacher education and related further educational opportunities should be increased so that there would be more competent teachers.

More than 90% of teachers thought that the scarcity of available teaching material makes it more difficult to achieve good learning results in Romany language. It became clear through the assessment that more versatile teaching materials suitable for various grades are needed.

Romany language is currently under threat. Education is important in reviving Romany language. The teaching of Romany language to children and young people should be developed in such a way that more and more Romany children in comprehensive school could receive education in Romany language.