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Learning outcomes in Sámi languages in basic education grades 7 to 9 in 2015

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In the spring of 2015, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) assessed the learning outcomes in Sámi languages of pupils in basic education grades 7 to 9. The assessment covered Sámi as a mother tongue syllabus and syllabus A in Sámi (Northern Sámi, Inari Sámi and Skolt Sámi). The nationwide assessment was carried out on 14 April 2015 in the form of a full assessment with the aim of including all pupils studying Sámi as a mother tongue or syllabus A in Sámi, whose teaching is implemented in accordance with the national core curriculum for basic education.

The assessment of learning outcomes in Sámi languages was now carried out for the first time. 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 proficiency levels attained by pupils studying the syllabus for Sámi as a mother tongue and syllabus A in Sámi, and on success in promoting educational equality. The areas of assessment in mother tongue were linguistic knowledge, reading comprehension, writing and speaking, while the areas of assessment in syllabus A were language knowledge, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, writing and speaking. The assessment report also discusses how Sámi languages are taught and what their position is in basic education.

The assessment included 77 pupils from eight schools. The assessment of the syllabus for Sámi as a mother tongue included four pupils who study Inari Sámi and 33 pupils who study Northern Sámi. None of the pupils in basic education grades 7 to 9 studied Skolt Sámi as a mother tongue. Seven pupils studied Inari Sámi, four pupils studied Skolt Sámi and 29 pupils studied Northern Sámi under syllabus A in Sámi. 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 syllabus for Sámi as a mother tongue and the syllabus A in Sámi based on the national core curriculum for basic education. Both in terms of assignment type and level of difficulty, account was taken of the variability of the assignments when preparing them for the assessment. The assessment included various kinds of production and selection assignments, such as multiple choice and right/wrong questions. In the assessment of learning outcomes in the syllabus for

Sámi as a mother tongue, the assignments for Inari Sámi and Northern Sámi were the same, and the same assignments for assessing the learning outcomes in syllabus A in Sámi were used for all three Sámi languages.

In addition to the sets of assignments for pupils, additional data was collected by using background surveys for pupils, teachers and principals. Information was gathered, for example, on the attitudes of pupils and the factors affecting learning results, such as teaching arrangements and the amount of education. In addition, more detailed information was gathered from principals and teachers through interviews.

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, the principals and Sámi language teachers obtained information on the results of their school's pupils and their attitudes towards Sámi language.

In the assessment of the learning outcomes in the Sámi as a mother tongue syllabus, the pupils scored an average of 60 per cent of the maximum points. In Inari Sámi, the average percentage of correctly completed questions was 44 per cent, while in Northern Sámi, the corresponding figure was 66 per cent. In both languages, the pupils attained the highest percentage of correctly completed questions in the speaking assignments: 83 per cent in Inari Sámi and 81 per cent in Northern Sámi. For the pupils studying Inari Sámi, the most difficult section was reading comprehension. The average percentage of correctly completed questions was low in that section, only 22 per cent. For the pupils studying Northern Sámi, the weakest section was the writing assignments, in which they scored an average of 47 per cent of the maximum points.

In the assessment of learning outcomes in syllabus A in Sámi, the average percentage of correctly completed questions was 46 per cent. Broken down by language, Northern Sámi pupils succeeded best in the assessment. As a whole, their average percentage of correctly completed questions was 48 per cent, while the corresponding figure was 45 per cent for Inari Sámi pupils and 31 per cent for Skolt Sámi pupils. In all the languages, the pupils had the highest percentage of correctly completed questions in the listening comprehension assignments (Inari Sámi 65%, Skolt Sámi 58% and Northern Sámi 68%). In all the languages, the section in which the pupils had the lowest percentage of correctly completed questions was linguistic knowledge (Inari Sámi 32%, Skolt Sámi 20% and Northern Sámi 38%).

Broken down by assignment, the average percentage of correctly completed questions in the selection assignments (65.6%) in the syllabus for Sámi as a mother tongue was approximately nine percentage points higher than the corresponding figure for production assignments (57%). In the examination on syllabus A in Sámi, the average percentage of correctly completed questions in the selection assignments (70.1%) was significantly higher than the corresponding figure for production assignments (39.0%).

In the assessment of learning outcomes in the syllabus for Sámi as a mother tongue and syllabus A in Sámi, apart from mother tongue speaking assignments, girls attained better language proficiency compared to boys in the examination as a whole and broken down by content area. In Sámi as a mother tongue, the average percentage of correctly completed questions was 65 per cent by the girls and 57 per cent by the boys. For the A syllabus in Sámi, the corresponding figures were 52 per cent (girls) and 39 per cent (boys). In the speaking assignments in Sámi as a mother tongue, there was not much difference between girls and boys; boys completed more questions correctly than girls (boys 82% and girls 81%). The greatest difference was in the reading comprehension assignments, in which the percentage of questions completed correctly by girls was 18 percentage points higher than the corresponding figure for boys. In the syllabus A in Sámi, the learning outcomes of girls were better in all content areas. The greatest difference was in the writing assignments, in which the percentage of questions completed correctly by girls was 24 percentage points higher than the corresponding figure for boys.

In the syllabus for Sámi as a mother tongue, the percentage of correctly completed questions by pupils in the best quartile was 78 per cent, while the corresponding figure in the worst quartile was 38 per cent. The greatest difference was in writing, 47 percentage points, and the smallest difference in speaking, 21 percentage points. In the syllabus A in Sámi, the percentage of correctly completed questions by pupils in the best quartile was 69 per cent, while the corresponding figure in the worst quartile was 24 per cent. Broken down by percentage points, the greatest difference was in writing, 66 percentage points, and the smallest difference in listening comprehension, 30 percentage points.

The attitude sections examined how useful pupils considered Sámi language, how content they were to study it, and how the pupils rated themselves as learners of Sámi language. The same scale for measuring attitudes was applied to pupils on the syllabus for Sámi as a mother tongue and the A syllabus in Sámi. In both syllabuses, the pupils' attitudes were on average fairly neutral. The most positive comments were given in response to statements concerning the usefulness of Sámi language. On a scale of 1 to 5, the average score for the usefulness of Sámi language given by pupils on the syllabus for Sámi as a mother tongue was 3.5, while the corresponding score given by pupils on the A syllabus in Sámi was 3.2.

16 teachers responded to the survey for teachers. Of the respondents, slightly over half (56%) had language teacher qualifications. 75 per cent of the teachers also taught other language subjects; the highest number of other subjects taught by a single teacher in addition to Sámi language was six. Sámi language was taught in small groups; most of the groups comprised 3–5 pupils, while roughly one in five were groups of 1–2 pupils. In the opinion of the teachers, the attainment of good learning outcomes was hindered most by the scarcity (100% of the respondents) and quality (93% of the respondents) of learning materials. Notwithstanding this, the teachers were highly motivated to teach Sámi language; the principals also felt that teachers were committed to their work.