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In the spring of 2015, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) assessed learning outcomes in the syllabus for Finnish sign language as the mother tongue among pupils in grades 7–9 of basic education. The national assessment was conducted on 14 April 2015, with the intention of evaluating all pupils in grades 7–9 who are studying Finnish sign language as their mother tongue. This was the first time that such an assessment for Finnish sign language as mother tongue has been implemented. The assessment was carried out using an electronic platform. All tasks were signed to the pupils, and they answered constructed-response items in sign language and selected-response items by clicking the correct option. The pupils' performance was evaluated by FINEEC. The purpose of the assessment was to provide reliable information on how well the objectives of the (2004) national core curriculum for basic education have been met, on the skills level in Finnish sign language as mother tongue, and on success in promoting educational equality. The areas assessed were communication, literature, language awareness and cultural awareness.

A total of 19 pupils from three schools participated in the assessment. These included pupils in both mainstream education and special needs education. Pupils were allowed to use an interpreter or assistant during the exam.

Assessment tasks were prepared on the basis of the objectives, core contents and criteria defined for Finnish sign language as the mother tongue in the national core curriculum for basic education. Both in terms of task type and the level of difficulty, the objective was to prepare a wide range of tasks. There were various types of constructed-response and selected-response items, such as multiple choice, matching, true/false and identification. Around 30% of the tasks were easy, 40% were intermediate and 30% were difficult.

In addition to the set of tasks completed by the pupils, information was gathered through background surveys for the pupils, teachers and principals, in order to learn about the attitudes of the pupils and factors that influence learning outcomes, such as teaching arrangements and the amount of teaching time.

School-specific results and feedback were submitted to the schools and teaching providers in the autumn of 2015. The principals and sign language teachers were thus informed about the results for their schools and about their pupils' attitudes towards sign language.

The pupils achieved an average of 59% of the maximum score for the tasks. The level of good proficiency (75% of the maximum score) was achieved by a little more than one in four pupils, while around one in four pupils achieved only poor proficiency (43% or less of the maximum score). Of the core contents for sign language, the results were the best in language awareness tasks (73.0% solved correctly). All of these were multiple-choice questions. The results were the poorest in cultural awareness (38.6% solved correctly). The communication section was also difficult (52.9% solved correctly), whereas in literature, the pupils did a little better (60.1% solved correctly).

Viewed by task type, the average percentage of correct answers for selected-response items (68.1%) was around 19 percentage points higher than the percentage for constructed-response items (48.8%). Boys outperformed girls in the exam as a whole, as well as in all the core contents, except for cultural awareness, in which both girls and boys achieved around 39% of the maximum score. Overall, boys solved 63% and girls 54% of the tasks correctly.

Five of the pupils who participated were in grade 7, twelve in grade 8 and two in grade 9. The percentages of correct answers overall were as follows: 56% for grade 7, 59% for grade 8 and 71% for grade 9. Examined by core contents, the pupils in grade 8 were the most successful in communication, and those in grade 7 in language awareness. The greatest differences between grades were seen in cultural awareness, in which the percentage of correct answers for the pupils in grade 7 (33.3%) was around 30 percentage points lower than the percentage for the pupils in grade 9 (62.5%).

Thirteen of the pupils had Finnish sign language as their home language, and six used Finnish at home. The learning outcomes of those whose home language was sign language were better overall and in all core contents. On average, the users of sign language solved 64% and the users of Finnish 50% of the tasks correctly.

The highest-performing quarter of pupils solved 82% of the tasks correctly, while the figure for the weakest quarter was 36%. The largest difference was observed in cultural awareness, 71 percentage points, and the smallest in language awareness, 27 percentage points.

The attitude section examined how useful pupils find sign language, how pleasant it is to study, and how the pupils see themselves as learners of sign language. The pupils' perceptions were largely positive. In terms of liking the subject, attitudes differed the most between girls and boys: girls liked studying sign language more than boys.

Seven teachers responded to the teacher survey conducted as part of the assessment. Two of them were qualified subject teachers of sign language. Six of the teachers taught sign language and at least one other subject, up to eight subjects in all. Most of the teachers felt that the number of weekly lessons in sign language per year is too small. The most common teaching methods were instructional discussion and functional exercises, while the least used were tests and exams. On the basis of the options given, the most frequently used teaching materials were self-made (non-electronic) materials and materials provided by the Sign Language Library. According to the teachers, the scarcity and quality of teaching materials and the small number of lessons are the main obstacles to achieving good learning outcomes. The teachers were highly motivated to teach sign language, and the principals also said that the teachers are committed to their work.