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In April 2021, The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (Karvi) evaluated the learning outcomes in the second official language (A-finska) among ninth-grade students who received basic education in Swedish. A total of 2,492 students from 38 schools participated in the study. 1,471 students studied Finnish as a second official language (finska) and 1,021 studied Finnish according to the bilingual syllabus (mofi).

The evaluation assessed how well the ninth graders had achieved the objectives of the core curriculum for basic education framework 2014 at the end of the basic education. The aim is also to provide information on equality within the education system.

The evaluation was conducted on a digital platform in the spring of 2021. The focus was on two subareas: ability to interpret texts (listening and reading comprehension) and ability to produce texts (oral and written production).

Among the evaluation students were asked about their language background, use of Finnish language in spare time and reading habits. The evaluation also examined how the knowledge in the syllabus of A-finska has progressed from 6th grade since the same students participated the evaluation in 2018. The development of knowledge is presented in a separate report.

The results were evaluated from three different perspectives: regions, municipal language distribution and gender. The schools participating in the evaluation were divided into two regions: Southern Finland (Regional State Administrative Agency of Southern Finland) and Western Finland (Regional State Administrative Agency for Western and Inland Finland and the Regional State Administrative Agency for Southwestern Finland). Municipalities were divided into four groups according the number of residents speaking Swedish: 1) Finnish-speaking municipalities with less than 10 % Swedish-speaking residents, 2) Municipalities where 11–50 % of residents are Swedish-speaking (bilingual municipalities where the majority is Finnish), 3) Municipalities where 51–80 % of residents are Swedish-speaking (bilingual municipalities where the majority is Swedish) and 4) Swedish-speaking municipalities where over 80 % of residents are Swedish speaking.

Overall results refer to the average result of all the assessment tasks. Skills exceeding the level of grade eight in any subfield may compensate for weaker knowledge in another subfield (The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014, 328).

The overall result is presented according to a standardized scale, which is used in international PISA evaluations. The national through-cut was set at five hundred (500) points. This means that a student with average knowledge scores 500 points.

Students who study finska come from different linguistic environments and significant differences in results are reflected in municipalities with different language profiles. The result of students living in Finnish and Finnish-Swedish bilingual municipalities is well above average. Other bilingual municipalities have a result that is slightly below average (479 to 498 points). In Swedish-speaking municipalities the result is markedly worse (420 points). The difference between the results in the Finnish-speaking municipalities and Swedish-speaking municipalities is large and statistically significant.

Evaluation in schools is not equal. Students with the same results in the evaluation have different grades. The major differences between results and grades are found in students who have good skills. Students who have achieved 600 points in the assessment have grade 8 in one school and grade 10 in another.

Students studying the mofi curriculum live in Finnish-speaking, Finnish-Swedish bilingual and Swedish-Finnish bilingual municipalities. The result of students in Finnish-speaking municipalities is clearly better than average (523 points). Regional differences in different municipal profiles are small except in Finnish-Swedish bilingual municipalities. The difference is statistically significant, but small (502 vs. 471 points). The results also show differences between students from Finnish-speaking municipalities and Swedish-Finnish bilingual learners (523 resp. 466 points). The difference is statistically significant.

Evaluation in schools is not equal. The major differences are in the evaluation of weaker students. A student with 350 points has an average grade of 6+ in one school and a grade 8 in another.

Finska

Interpretation tasks

There is a clear difference in the results between the schools in the Finnish-speaking municipalities and schools in the Swedish-speaking municipalities. The schools in the Finnish-speaking and Finnish-Swedish bilingual municipalities in Southern Finland have the best results. In the Finnish-Swedish bilingual municipalities, the results are slightly better in Southern Finland than in Western Finland. In the Swedish-Finnish bilingual municipalities, the results are approximately the same regardless of the region. The weakest results are in the Swedish-speaking municipalities, all of which are in Western Finland.

In listening comprehension tasks, 61 percent of students in the more Finnish-speaking municipalities in Southern Finland achieved a good skill level of B1.1 or higher. The corresponding percentage in the Swedish-speaking municipalities was 13. In other schools in the bilingual municipalities, 31- 39 percent of students achieved a good skill level or higher.

In reading comprehension tasks 68 percent of students in the more Finnish-speaking municipalities in Southern Finland achieved a good skill level (B1.1) or higher. 49 percent of the students in the Finnish-speaking bilingual municipalities of Southern Finland reached the skill level B1.1 whilst in the Swedish-speaking bilingual municipalities the percentage was 27. In the bilingual municipalities of Western Finland, 16–18 percent of the students reached the skill level B1.1. In Swedish-speaking municipalities only five percent of students reached this level.

Production tasks

The differences in the results of oral production are quite significant. All municipalities have both weak and good results. The results in the more Finnish-speaking municipalities are good as over half of students reached a good skill level of A2.2 in both tasks. In the other bilingual municipalities, the result varies. In the first task, the result was clearly better than in the second. The result was weak in the Swedish-speaking municipalities as an average only just over 10 percent of students achieved a good skill level and on average just over half of the students have poor results (A1.2 or lower) in the oral tasks.

There are also large differences in the results of written production depending on the region and on the main language of the municipality. The best results were achieved in Finnish-speaking municipalities although the number of students with good results is small. On average, 19 percent of the students achieved a good skill level A2.2 in the first task and 14 percent in the second. In both written tasks there are many students who only reached the skill level A1.2 or lower (39 resp. 36 %).

Connection between background variables and the results

Students intending to apply to upper secondary school performed better in the evaluation than students intending to apply to vocational school. The difference in the results is statistically significant.

There is a connection between the results and Students' attitudes towards the subject and schooling. The biggest differences are in the know-how. A quarter of pupils who feel they know Finnish have received an average of 78.2 points more than those who feel their skills are weak. The differences are statistically significant.

The use of Finnish in free time had a positive connection to students' results in the evaluation. There is a significant difference in the results between students who speak Swedish with family and friends and students who speak Finnish with family and friends. Students who use Finnish at home and in their free time had better results than those who use only Swedish. Students who speak Finnish with their families received an average of 73.4 points more than those who only spoke Swedish. On average, students who speak Finnish with friends received 48.5 points more than students who only speak Swedish with friends.

Mofi

Interpretation tasks

Students performed well in the interpretation tasks. The variations in the results are small and there are no differences between the municipalities. On average, boys have a slightly poorer outcome than girls. An average of 76 percent of pupils reached a good skills level (B1.2 or higher) in both listening and reading comprehensions. In listening comprehension, a quarter of pupils reached an even higher skill level of B2.1 whilst in reading comprehension 16 percent reached the same level.

Production tasks

There is an explicit difference in the results of Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking municipalities in oral production. The best results were achieved by Finnish-speaking municipalities of Western Finland, where on average 58 resp. 75 percent of the students achieved a good level of competence. In the Finnish-speaking municipalities of Southern Finland 49 resp. 62 percent of students reached the same skill level. In Finnish-Swedish bilingual municipalities in Southern and Western Finland, the results are in the same range as in Southern and Western Finland. In Swedish-Finnish bilingual municipalities, 24 resp. 35 % of the students achieved a good level of competence.

The results are poorer in written production. On average, a quarter of the total sample achieved a good level of competence (B1.2). There are both excellent results, where students reached the skill level B2.1, and poor results, where students reached only the skill level A2.1 or lower. On average, girls received better results in written production than boys (734 and 694 points). As in oral production, the Finnish-speaking municipalities of Western Finland achieved the best results in written production. On average one third of the students in the Finnish-speaking municipalities of Western Finland reached the level of good competence.

Connection between background variables and the results

Students intending to apply to upper secondary school performed better in the evaluation than students intending to apply to vocational school. The difference in the results is statistically significant, medium for girls (535 and 457 points) and large for boys (504 and 396 points).

On average, the students' attitude towards mofi is the same regardless of the municipality but there is variation between the students. A quarter of students with the least positive attitude towards schooling received on average 38.9 points less than a quarter of students with the most positive attitude.

Keywords: Basic education, national evaluation, learning outcome, Finnish as a second official language, native Finnish, skills to interpret texts, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, skills to produce texts, oral production, written production, regional differences, municipal language distribution