



FINNISH EDUCATION  
EVALUATION CENTRE

# EQUALITY AND PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION – AN OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL EVALUATIONS



Annette Ukkola | Hanna Väättäinen (eds.)

SUMMARIES 18:2021

# EQUALITY AND PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION – AN OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL EVALUATIONS

Annette Ukkola  
Hanna Väättäinen (eds.)



Finnish Education Evaluation Centre  
Summaries 18:2021

PUBLISHER Finnish Education Evaluation Centre

BOOK DESIGN Juha Juvonen (org.) & Ahoy, Jussi Aho (edit)

COVER PHOTO iStock Photo

LAYOUT PunaMusta Oy

ISBN 978-952-206-719-7 pdf

ISSN 2669-8811 (Online)

© Finnish Education Evaluation Centre

# Contents

|                                                                                                                                       |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Introduction.....                                                                                                                     | 5         |
| <b>1 What is the state of equality and equal opportunities in education in Finland? .....</b>                                         | <b>7</b>  |
| 1.1 Differentiation of competence .....                                                                                               | 9         |
| 1.2 Equality of opportunities.....                                                                                                    | 19        |
| 1.3 Accessibility of education and learners' participation .....                                                                      | 38        |
| <b>2 Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on realisation of equality .....</b>                                                            | <b>45</b> |
| <b>3 Equality is underpinned by a holistic idea of the learner .....</b>                                                              | <b>53</b> |
| Increasing need for support challenges the realisation of equality in education .....                                                 | 54        |
| How can attachment to school, learning and the community be ensured as paths diverge and distance practices become more common? ..... | 56        |
| <b>4 Recommendations for promoting equality in education .....</b>                                                                    | <b>59</b> |
| <b>5 The multiple meanings of equality .....</b>                                                                                      | <b>65</b> |
| Concepts and their meanings change over time .....                                                                                    | 66        |
| Equality .....                                                                                                                        | 67        |
| Equity .....                                                                                                                          | 69        |
| <b>References .....</b>                                                                                                               | <b>70</b> |

# Introduction

Year 2021 marked the 100th anniversary of Finnish education: universal compulsory education was brought in a century ago, obliging all citizens to obtain a basic level of education. While the world today is very different from what it was a hundred years ago, building a civilised nation remains the mission of education. Education aims for the equality and well-being of individuals and promotes democracy in society. Education improves the standard of living and increases satisfaction with life. Education also bolsters cultural heritage, which is important for the continuity of communities. Education builds a shared value system and a common understanding of society and the world, whereas life satisfaction and community spirit translate as a feeling of security. We could say that education builds the population's mental herd immunity.

Equality, flexibility and high-quality teacher education have been regarded as the strengths of the Finnish education system. Each child has a subjective right to participate in early childhood education and care. The purpose of basic education is to guarantee all pupils certain fundamental knowledge and skills and, subsequently, both general upper secondary education and vocational upper secondary qualifications confer eligibility for further studies at a university or university of applied sciences. The purpose of free-of-charge education and various forms of support is to give everyone equal access to education, regardless of their socio-economic background.

Promoting equality is one of the key objectives of education evaluation activities and focus areas of FINEEC's ongoing evaluation plan period (2020–2023). Evaluation information is used to promote the realisation of equality by seeking answers to the following questions:

**What is the state of equality and equal opportunities in education in Finland?**

**Which factors enhance or hinder the implementation of equality in education?**

This publication contains information on equality and participation in education. It also aims to build a picture to underpin discussions on education policy and to identify areas in need of development. The publication mainly draws on evaluation information published by FINEEC in 2019–2021.

Chapter 1 examines the state of play of equality from three viewpoints at different levels of education extending from early childhood education and care to higher education and liberal adult education. Chapter 2 looks at the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on equality. Chapter 3 gives a summary of the previous chapters and takes a look at the future. Chapter 4 contains recommendations based on the evaluations for promoting equality in education. Chapter 5 focuses on the concepts used in this publication.



***What is the state of  
equality and equal  
opportunities in  
education in Finland?***



iStock Photo

In this Chapter, we discuss the state of play of equality and equal opportunities in education in the light of FINEEC's evaluation information from the following perspectives:

**Differentiation of competence**

**Equal opportunities**

**Accessibility of education and learners' participation**



## 1.1 Differentiation of competence



- Basic education successfully ensures equality at the national level. The levels of basic education pupils' skills are similar in different parts of Finland, and the pupil's linguistic background or gender, the educational institution's language of instruction and the municipality group only explain a small proportion of the differences.
- Learning gaps between individuals are large. Basic education is not always able to bridge the learning gaps related to pupils' home backgrounds, and these differences persist as pupils move on to upper secondary education.
- Inequalities related to the economy, demographic structure and welfare between and within regions have increased in the past few years, and they also have an impact on educational institutions. Especially in the largest cities, there are differences between basic education pupils' average skills.
- In the future, the impacts of reforms in early childhood education and care may become visible in basic education pupils' learning and skills.

*It is hoped that high-quality early childhood education and care and flexible education in grades 1 and 2 will balance the impact of children's different starting points*

It is hoped that participation in high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) will balance learning differences arising from children's family backgrounds. The ideal aimed for in Finnish early childhood education and care policies has been freedom of choice. In reality, families' choices are limited by such issues as different types of support provided by municipalities, availability of services, families' starting points and factors related to working life and, consequently, even similar ECEC paths may result from a wide range of different reasons. In addition, there are many different options for ECEC and childcare, and dozens of different paths stem from these choices. In fact, children's ECEC paths do not have a straightforward connection with their knowledge and skills as they start grade 1. It appears, however, that full-time early childhood education and care is particularly beneficial for those children who have several factors predicting a low level of knowledge and skills, for example learning difficulties of close family members. Support measures received in ECEC also seem to benefit children, as the mathematics and mother tongue skills of many pupils who have received intensified support are at or above the average level at the beginning of grade 1. (Ukkola et al. 2020.)

Many types of reforms have been carried out in early childhood education and care in recent years, and others are currently underway. A new Act on Early Childhood Education and Care entered into force in 2015, and the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care was introduced as a normative document in 2016. Efforts to develop the evaluation of ECEC quality and the experiments of free early childhood education and care for 5-year-olds and two-year pre-primary education will provide important information about the early childhood education and care system. The objective of these experiments, in which early childhood education and care is provided free of charge for 5-year-olds and pre-primary education is extended to two years, is to improve equality in education. Their aims also include improving the quality of ECEC and pre-primary education and creating a clearer continuum between ECEC, pre-primary education and grades 1 and 2. Changes have also been made in the personnel structures of early childhood education and care. The aim of developing the coherence and flexibility of pre-primary education and education in grades 1 and 2 to promote the learning of basic skills in the early years is included in the Government Programme (Government 2019). We can also expect to see the impacts of these reforms, experiments and measures in future evaluations of education in grades 1 and 2.

## ***Pupils' skills in basic education are at the same level in different parts of Finland***

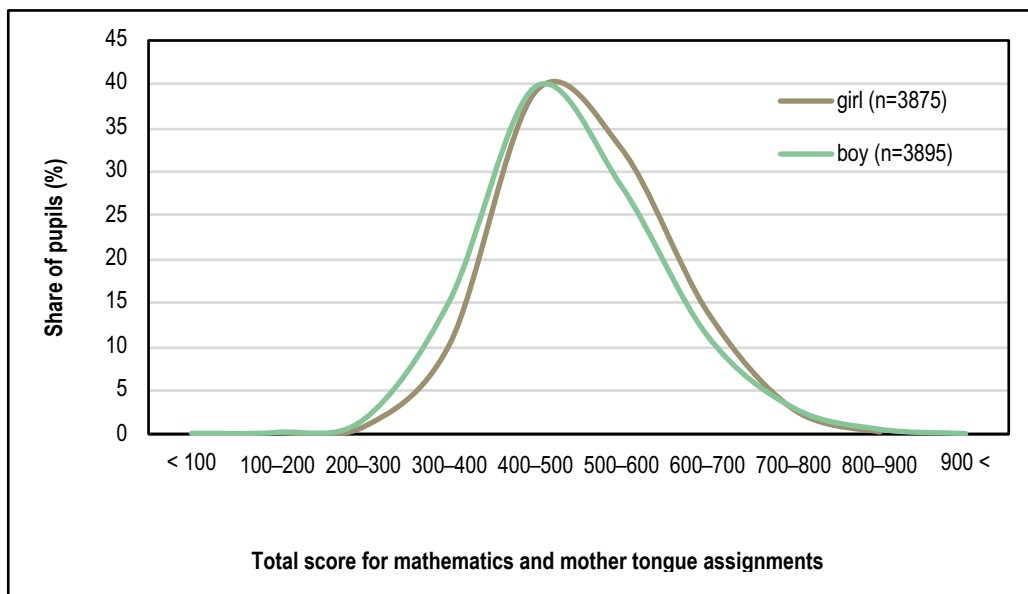
From the national perspective, Finnish basic education has a good track record in ensuring equality. The levels of pupils' skills are similar in schools in different parts of the country, and the pupil's gender, the language of instruction used by the educational institution and the municipality group only explain a small proportion of the differences in skills at the beginning and end of basic education. Individual variations in the pupils' skills at the beginning of comprehensive school are already large, however, and there are also major differences at the beginning of grade 3, at the transition point between grades 6 and 7, and at the end of grade 9. (Härmälä et al. 2019; Kauppinen & Marjanen 2020; Metsämuuronen & Nousiainen 2021; Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2019; 2021; Åkerlund et al. 2019.)

Factors that influence differences in pupils' skills include their attitudes and motivation, their plans for further studies, and their families' different educational, economic and socio-cultural resources. Proficiency in the school's language of instruction also affects skills, or at least the possibilities of demonstrating knowledge in different subjects: the level of mathematics and mother tongue skills of pupils studying Finnish or Swedish as a second language has repeatedly been lower than that of other pupils (Julin & Rautopuro 2015; Metsämuuronen & Nousiainen 2021; Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2019; 2021).

While national differences in pupils' skills between the Regional State Administrative Agency areas are minor, regional variations are greater among Swedish-speaking schools. The differences are evident in the mother tongue syllabus *svenska och litteratur* (Hellgren & Marjanen 2020) and the syllabus in *A-finska* (A syllabus in Finnish) (Åkerlund et al. 2019). These results are influenced by such factors as the proportion of Swedish-speaking population in the municipality.

## ***Girls' and boys' skills only differ in mother tongue***

Learning outcomes should not depend on the pupil's gender. Basic education is well placed to achieve this goal, as the levels of girls' and boys' skills in both mathematics and mother tongue are similar at the beginning of grade 1 (Figure 1) (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2019). By the time the pupils begin grade 3, no differences have emerged in mathematics skills, but girls are slightly ahead of boys in their mother tongue skills. (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2021.)



**FIGURE 1. Distributions of skills between girls and boys at the beginning of grade 1 (N = 7,770). (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2019)**

In mathematics and English, gender differences have been minor in grades 7 to 9 (Härmälä & Marjanen 2019; Julin & Rautopuro 2015; Metsämuuronen & Nousiainen 2021). However, gender differences in skills have repeatedly been observed in mother tongue assessments in grade 9 (Harjunen & Rautopuro 2015; Hellgren & Marjanen 2020; Kauppinen & Marjanen 2020). These differences are also visible at school level: in mother tongue assessments in grade 9, boys only scored higher than girls in two schools (Kauppinen & Marjanen 2020).

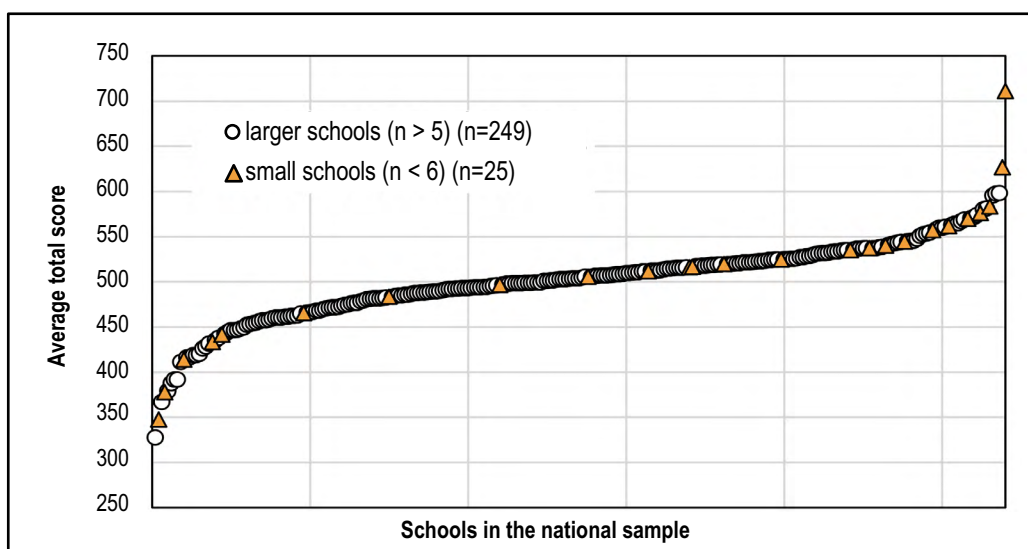
**Gender is not a key factor behind differences in skills.**

At the beginning and end of education in grades 1 and 2, gender only explains half a per cent of the difference in knowledge and skills, and individual variations are large among both girls and boys. (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2019; 2021). There may also be differences between girls' and boys' response techniques and motivation. Rather than from all boys having poor skills, the differences between the averages consequently stem from the fact that there are more boys than girls demonstrating poor skills. We should indeed remember that there are also many girls in Finnish schools whose skills give cause for concern. Education can contribute to reinforcing

development towards gender inequalities, for example through schools' practices, modes of interaction, language use or gender stereotypes created by learning materials, which may result in segregated structures and also affect individuals' possibilities. (Saarinen et al. 2021a.) It is important to encounter and treat pupils as individuals – not as representatives of their gender.

### *Differences in skills between schools grow during basic education*

The foundation of the Finnish welfare society is comprehensive schools offered as a local service, which guarantee equal opportunities for learning for all pupils regardless of their background. However, there are differences in the average skills levels between schools. The school they attend usually explains between 6% and 8% of the pupils' skills (e.g. Harjunen & Rautopuro 2014; Julin & Rautopuro 2015). At the beginning of comprehensive school, pupils' skills are at a similar level in different parts of the country, and there is little or no difference in the average skills levels between schools. Rather than having been selected to schools based on their skills, new pupils' skills vary in each school. (Ukkola et al. 2020). After the first two years of school, pupils' skills are close to the national average of 500 points in most schools (Figure 2), but the difference between the schools with the poorest and best average skills has grown since the beginning of grade 1, and the proportion of this difference that is explained by the school has gone up from 6% to 11% (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2021). In grade 9, there are differences in the average level of mother tongue skills between schools, and a similar proportion of this difference is explained by the school as at the beginning of grade 3 (Kauppinen & Marjanen 2019).

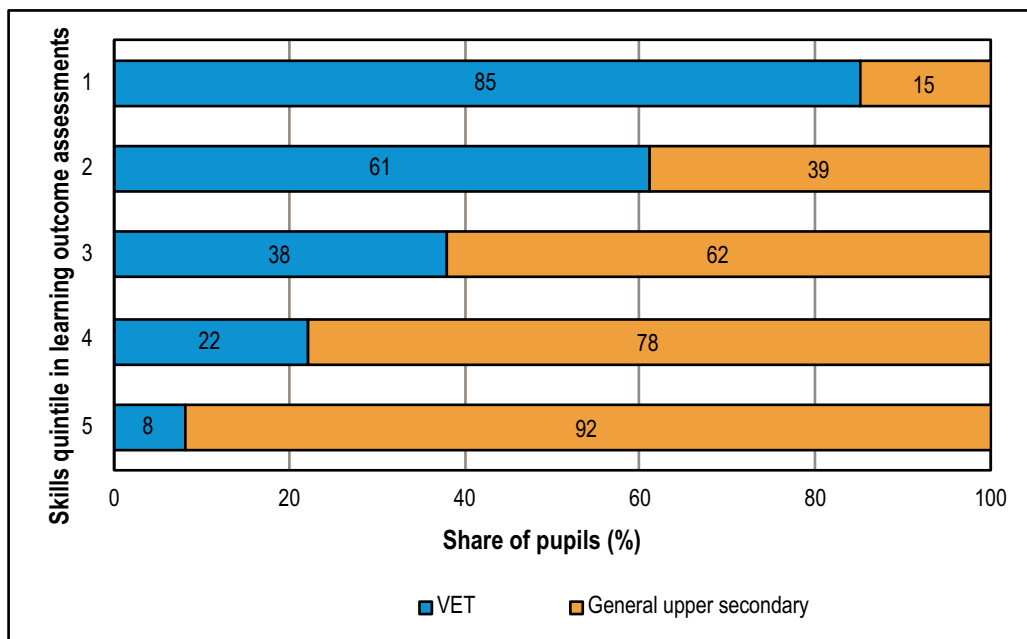


**FIGURE 2.** Average total score for skills by school at the beginning of grade 3 (N=274) (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2021)

The variation in pupils' skill levels between schools is associated with general regional development. Social, educational and economic disadvantage can cumulate in entire residential areas that coincide with school enrollment areas. The residential area and the school enrollment area also affect the hobbies available for the pupils, for example, and the people they meet in their daily lives. The influence of the surroundings and the divergence of education paths are consequently visible in education, both at individual and school level. In small municipalities an entire age cohort may attend the same school and even be in the same class. In large cities families have more choice regarding schools and groups for instruction with a certain emphasis. This is why differences between schools emerge specifically in cities. From an international perspective, however, the differences between schools remain rather moderate in Finland. In order to reduce the differences between schools, a working group appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture proposed in September 2021 that an appropriation for educational equality granted to education providers be made a permanent feature in the state aid system (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021). Equality funding will be targeted at areas where socio-economic factors can have a negative impact on learning outcomes.

### ***The skills and attitudes of pupils aiming for vocational education and training and upper secondary school diverge***

There appears to be a relatively sharp division in the pupils' skills in grade 9, as pupils with the best skills mainly aim for general upper secondary education, while those with the poorest skills opt for vocational education and training (Figure 3). This trend is visible in both Finnish and Swedish schools. The attitudes of pupils who aim for general upper secondary school and those opting for vocational education and training have also differentiated: the latter group has clearly more negative attitudes towards studying mother tongue than the former. (Harjunen et al. 2018; Hellgren et al. 2021; Kauppinen & Marjanen 2020.) A corresponding divergence of skills and attitudes can also be seen in mathematics (Metsämuuronen & Tuohilampi 2017), and a similar difference can already be seen at the beginning of grade 7 in English (Härmälä et al. 2018).



**FIGURE 3.** Shares of pupils aiming for vocational education and training and general upper secondary education in skills quintiles of a mother tongue assessment in grade 9. (Harjunen et al. 2019)

Constancy has also been observed in the level of skills. The skills level in mother tongue at the end of basic education predicts success in the matriculation examination mother tongue test (Harjunen et al. 2018; Hellgren et al. 2021.) While the skills levels in mathematics already start diverging in the first few years at school (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2019; Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2021), a particularly clear disparity can be observed in grade 9 of basic education and in general upper secondary education (Metsämuuronen & Tuohilampi 2017). Another indication of this constancy is that the diverging academic success of general upper secondary school students in their studies and matriculation examination is explained by the underlying difference in their initial levels rather than by the distribution of lesson hours they have chosen. The general upper secondary school students who had tried the new distribution of lesson hours system had higher final grades at the end of basic education than others, and they also continued to have better academic success than others in general upper secondary school. (Kamppi et al. 2021.) It has also been observed that in vocational education and training, students' skills in mathematics may remain at the level they had achieved in grade 9 or even decline (Metsämuuronen & Salonen 2017).

## *Children of highly educated guardians get a head start on their education path*

In international comparisons, a strong link between pupils' socio-economic background and their skills has not been observed in Finland. Inequality has increased since 2012, however, and the differences in Finnish pupils' skills examined in the light of their socio-economic backgrounds are currently close to the OECD average. The guardians' education indicates several factors affecting children's school attendance, including appreciation of education (e.g. Ukkola et al. 2020).

### **The pupil's home background is already visible in their average skills level at the beginning of grade 1.**

At the beginning of comprehensive school, children whose guardians had a university education were more than a year ahead in mathematics and mother tongue skills of children whose guardians had completed at most vocational education and training (Ukkola et al. 2020.) The correlation between pupils' home backgrounds and skills is still visible in grade 9 (e.g. Hellgren & Marjanen 2020; Julin & Rautopuro 2016; Kauppinen & Marjanen 2020; Metsämuuronen 2017) and in general upper secondary school (Kamppi et al. 2021).

Assessments of learning outcomes indicate that basic education is not always able to bridge the gap in skills stemming from the pupils' home backgrounds. A group of pupils with major gaps in their literacy and numeracy skills and in understanding the school's language of instruction move on from basic education to the upper secondary level (Julin & Rautopuro 2016; Kauppinen & Marjanen 2020; Kuukka & Metsämuuronen 2016). At the level of the Finnish education system, this affects especially vocational education and training and VET students' growing needs for support. Educational background also tends to be passed on to the next generation: the children of highly educated guardians apply for a place in general upper secondary schools (e.g. Julin & Rautopuro 2015; Ristikari 2018) and are admitted to the educational institution of their first choice (Ristikari 2018) more often than the children of guardians with a low level of education. The children of highly educated guardians are also more likely to be admitted to higher education institutions, especially universities, than the children of parents who have a low level of education (Kamppi et al. 2021; Nori et al. 2021).



### ***There are differences in the grades of vocational undergraduate qualifications between education providers***

In the vocational upper secondary qualification in logistics, there is a lot of variation in the grades of both vocational qualification units and common units between the training providers. There are hardly any differences between the regions. There are small gender differences in the grades of the qualification units. For both women and men, the most common grade was good (4). In the parts of the common units, on the other hand, the proportion of women praised was double that of men. There were no major differences in the grades of Finnish- and Swedish-speaking students in the vocational qualification units, but the grades of non-Finnish-speaking students were lower than those of Finnish- and Swedish-speaking students. There are no major differences in the grade distributions of the parts of the common units between students who spoke different mother tongues. (Hakamäki-Stylman 2021.)

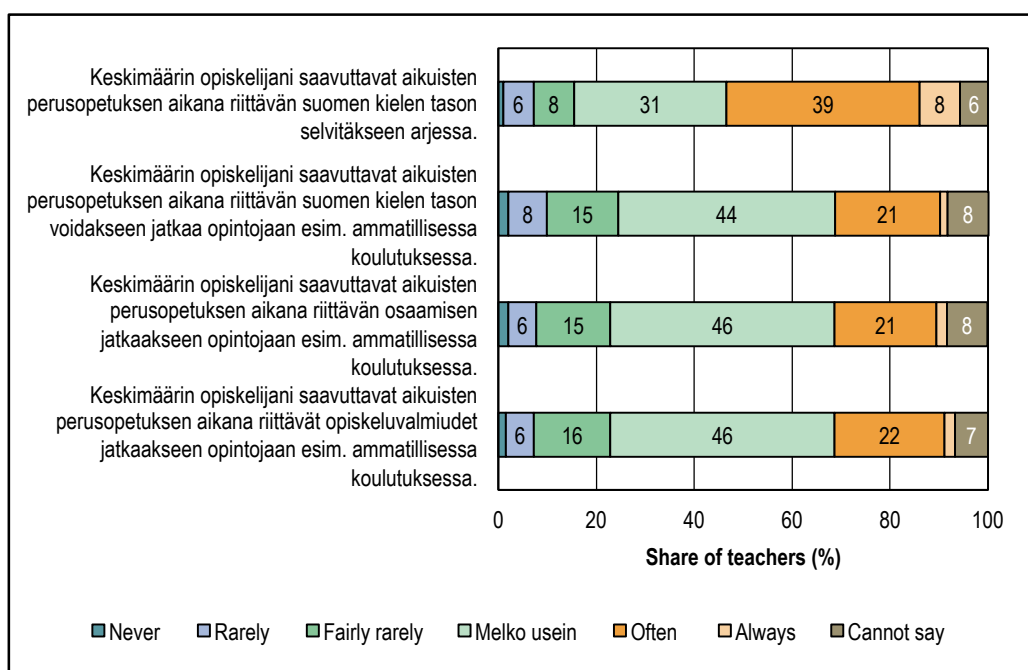
The skills of social and health care students are very good as measured by the grades of the vocational qualification units and common units. The most common grade in the vocational qualification units was excellent (5) and in the common parts of the degree a good (4). There were some differences in the grades according to the age, gender and education providers of the students. The age groups of at least 35 received significantly higher grades in both the vocational and common units than the age groups under 35. The grades of women were slightly higher than those of men in both the vocational and especially the common units. For both women and men, the most common grade in the vocational qualification units was excellent. In contrast, in the common units, the most common grade was good (4) for women and good (3) for men. There were also differences in grades between education providers, but not between regions. According to the students' mother tongue, there were few differences in grades. For all language groups, the most common grade in the vocational qualification units was excellent and good in the common units. (Kilpeläinen 2021.)

### ***Varying level of competence and heterogeneity of groups increase the need for guidance and support services in education for immigrants***

According to education providers and teachers, the majority of students in literacy training for immigrants, basic education for adults and vocational education and training attend programmes that correspond to their skills and objectives (Hievanen et al. 2020). Despite this, teachers find that their teaching groups consist of students with very different levels of skills. In particular, the vaguely specified target group for literacy training is likely to explain part of the heterogeneous nature of teaching groups. It is in many ways challenging to have young students who progress rapidly and older people with emergent literacy skills for whom studying is a completely

new experience in the same teaching group. In everyday life, this creates a need for increasing the number of teaching and guidance staff and developing their competence.

Teachers report that most students in literacy training for immigrants organised as liberal adult education achieve an adequate Finnish language proficiency to cope with everyday life or to continue in integration training, but the capabilities needed for basic education for adults are rarely reached. In basic education for adults, 68% of teachers found that the students achieve a sufficient level of knowledge and skills for moving on to vocational studies fairly often, often or always, whereas 22% felt that this happens fairly rarely, rarely or never (Figure 4).



**FIGURE 4. Teachers' assessment of students' skills development in basic education for adults (N = 192–193). (Hievanen et al. 2020).**

The challenges related to basic skills faced by students with a migrant background persist in vocational education and training. Some students with a migrant background do not have sufficient Finnish or Swedish language proficiency to cope with studies, the world of work and everyday life. Some have poor study skills at the beginning of their studies. Students with a migrant background often need a great deal of support in their studies, especially in common units. (Hievanen et al. 2020.)

## 1.2 Equality of opportunities



iStock Photo

- There are major variations in interpretations of the objectives set down in the National Core Curricula for Early Childhood Education and Care and for Basic Education, and of the way in which they should be implemented. Different interpretations and contents lead to practices that vary from region to region.
- The number of learners requiring different support measures is increasing at all levels of education. There are disparities in identification of support needs, delivery of support measures and continuity of support.
- Some of learners' support needs result from insufficient proficiency in the school's or educational institution's language of instruction and their inadequate study skills. These shortcomings can be seen at all levels of education.
- The situations in municipalities and regions are diverging, which affects the needs to develop teaching and the educational institution network.

## *The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care is implemented in varied ways*

The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care was inaugurated in 2016. Its purpose is to guarantee early childhood education and care of a consistent quality. However, it was introduced more successfully in some parts of Finland than in others. The introduction of the core curriculum was more successful in urban municipalities than in rural and densely populated ones. In rural and densely populated municipalities, problems emerged due to the fact that training related to the core curriculum introduction was often provided far away, and finding substitutes was difficult. (Repo et al. 2018.)

The content-related objectives of the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care are not reached everywhere as set out in the curriculum document. While the content-related objectives set for ECEC are mainly achieved well in a large proportion of day-care centres, they are realised poorly in some. The qualitative content of children's personal early childhood education plans also vary, and they are not always consistent with the spirit of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care. Local early childhood education and care plans do not always adequately describe how the activities are organised to support the child's development and learning. Instead, they focus on describing the children and their goals, which is not their purpose. (Repo et al. 2018; Repo et al. 2019.)

**Uniform evaluation tools will make it possible to develop ECEC quality consistently across Finland.**

To ensure early childhood education and care of a consistent quality, FINEEC is developing an ECEC quality assessment system. As part of this development work, FINEEC has piloted ECEC quality assessment tools to boost information production on the quality of early childhood education and care received by children, including interaction, pedagogy and the contents of the activities. (Harkoma et al. 2021.)

## *Shortage of ECEC professionals affects pedagogy, support and management*

In 2018, a provision was included in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care under which by 2030, two thirds of the staff in a day-care centre must be teachers in early childhood education and care or Bachelors of Social Services with a qualification in early childhood education and care. Until 2030, one third of

the staff must represent these two professional groups. Children's access to early childhood education and care and pre-primary education delivered by qualified teachers varies, however, as many ECEC and pre-primary education groups do not have a qualified teacher. In particular, there is a shortage of qualified teachers in early childhood education and care and staff substitutes in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, growth centres and small municipalities, and thousands of ECEC posts and roles are constantly vacant throughout Finland. The lack of qualified staff affects ECEC management (Siippainen et al. 2021) and, for example, pedagogy, everyday activities, identification of support needs and implementation of support measures and, consequently, ECEC quality and the coping, well-being and commitment of staff (Repo et al. 2018). The fact that the provision on personnel structure refers to the day-care centre as a whole also creates inequality between children (Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 540/2018). Consequently, all child groups even in the same day-care centre may not have the same personnel structure.

### *Support needs are not identified equally in ECEC and pre-primary education*

There are major individual variations in the skills of new pupils when they start school. At the beginning of grade 1, most pupils read words fairly fluently and have a basic understanding of quantities and numbers, or at least very good starting points for developing their literacy and numeracy skills. Many pupils with very inadequate mathematics or mother tongue skills also start grade 1, however. Nevertheless, many of the pupils who demonstrate the poorest skills at the beginning of their education path have not been issued with a decision on intensified or special support. This raises questions of whether children's needs for support are recognised equally in early childhood education and care and pre-primary education, or whether there are shortcomings in the transfer of information and the continuity of support measures between early childhood education and care, pre-primary education and education in grades 1 and 2. (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2019; Ukkola et al. 2020.)

The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018) contains no provisions on the structure of support provided for children or the organisation of support, and the support received by children may have varied. This situation is about to change, however, as the Government proposed in September 2021 that provisions on children's right to three-tiered support, the delivery of support, evaluation of the need for support, forms of support and support services be included in this Act (HE 148/2021 VP).

## *Neighbourhood school or the nearest school?*

Finnish children enjoy the most equal opportunities to participate in instruction in the world. The principle of the neighbourhood school is an important cornerstone of basic education. Under the Basic Education Act (628/1998), the local authority shall assign to a child a neighbourhood school or some other appropriate place where education is given in his or her native language in which the local authority is obliged to provide education. The pupil is subject to compulsory education regardless of the language they speak, however, which is why the municipality can also direct them to some other school rather than the nearest one. The guardians' wishes are taken into account in this situation.

**Up to 93% of pupils start comprehensive school in a neighbourhood school assigned to them by the municipality.**

The number of pupils attending their neighbourhood school decreases somewhat during the first two years of school. Instruction with a certain emphasis often starts in grade 3, and in addition to studying in a special class or a certain language choice, guardians report this as the most common reason for the child not starting grade 3 in their neighbourhood school. Another common reason for making this choice is that the neighbourhood school is not, in fact, geographically the closest one, for example because of municipal boundaries. (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2021.) However, the school choice is partly a hidden phenomenon, as guardians often choose their place of residence before the child starts comprehensive school (Vilkama & Bernelius 2019). This makes it difficult to determine the scale of the phenomenon and the impacts that school choice has on the kind of pupils schools attract.

School choice is also an indication of municipalities' different resources and the school networks maintained by them. For more than 94% of pupils in education in grades 1 and 2, the school commute takes less than half an hour, and for 57% it takes no more than 15 minutes, whereas a small group of pupils take more than an hour to travel to school in each direction. A school commute longer than half an hour is an indication of school choice: as few as slightly over 5% of the pupils who started grade 3 in their neighbourhood school have a school commute of more than half an hour, while 14% of those who started grade 3 in a school other than their neighbourhood school face a commute of this length. The lengths of school commutes also reflect regional differences in school networks: at least one third of grade 3 pupils appear to have at minimum two alternative schools within a 15-minute commute from their home; on the other hand, it takes some grade 3 pupils more than an hour to reach even their nearest school. (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2021).

## *Education and jobs keep the areas populated and vibrant*

The Finnish education system was built on the idea of a nationwide school network, at the centre of which are small local comprehensive schools, general upper secondary schools, vocational institutions and a decentralised network of higher education institutions. A global trend of urbanisation has continued for a long time, however, and centralisation and cutbacks are taking place simultaneously at many regional levels: people move from sparsely populated rural areas to villages and urban agglomerations, from agglomerations to towns, and from small towns to growth centres. At the same time, the municipalities' service networks have been adapted in response to the demographic development. Schools have been closed down and amalgamated due to the decreasing number of children and, for example, repair backlog of school buildings. The number of comprehensive schools has consequently declined by more than one third since 2005, and the number of schools for grades 1 to 6 has been cut back by almost one half in the same period. The greatest decline has been seen in the number of small schools with fewer than 50 pupils. There has also been a clear reduction in the number of schools with less than 100 pupils, whereas the number of schools with more than 500 pupils has increased, and there is an increasing number of schools with more than 1,000 pupils. (Statistics Finland 2021a.) The centralisation of the school network can also be seen in longitudinal evaluations as the amalgamation and closing down of schools included in previous samples (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2019; 2021).

In the light of many indicators, people appear to enjoy the best levels of well-being close to growth centres. For example, the employment rate, income level and voting rate are higher in these areas than elsewhere in Finland (Statistics Finland 2021a). The peri-urban areas around large cities benefit from the city's strong labour market and such services as higher education institutions. Well-being can also be linked to skills: while the pupils' skills levels have been similar around Finland, the average level has been higher in urban and densely populated municipalities than in rural ones. Internal variations within the regions are great, however, and differences can be seen especially within the largest cities. (Härmälä et al. 2019; Kauppinen & Marjanen 2020; Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2019; Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2021.)

As the provision of social welfare and health care services is transferred to the counties, providing education and training will remain the most important task shouldered by municipalities. Examples of factors that influence municipalities' operating capacity, vitality and attraction are their population and population density, the age and educational structure of the population, companies and services operating in the municipality, the employment rate, a sufficiently extensive school network and smooth, fast and effective transport connections. If the situation of one of these factors deteriorates and, for example, services are cut, this often also affects other factors. As the impacts of negative factors accumulate, the region



loses attraction. The diminishing trend also extends to schools and is, for example, evident in principals' concerns over the staff's well-being, commitment to work and coping under a threat of school closure (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2021). The uncertainty of the school's status may cause not only the staff but also families to move out. In fact, schools can play an essential role in keeping residents in different regions of Finland and determining their population structure.

**A thriving school and its staff can be the heart of an area.**

The number of children aged under 18 will decrease by 100,000 in the next decade (Statistics Finland 2021a), and municipalities must take this trend seriously. Pupils will face longer school commutes as the school network is cut back. While the length of the school commute has not been linked to pupils' skills (e.g. Härmälä et al. 2019; Kauppinen & Marjanen 2020), the municipalities will have to carefully weigh the impacts that cutting back on the school network may have on the area's attraction. School commutes are a factor in the well-being of children and young people and smooth everyday lives of families. It is important to continue monitoring the development of the school network and its link to pupils' skills as well as well-being and cultural rights also in the future. This is why a FINEEC evaluation in 2021–2022 will produce information on the impacts of comprehensive school closures and issue recommendations aiming to promote the cultural and social rights of children and young people and to strengthen the vitality of the regions.

***Different interpretations of National Core Curriculum contents lead to regional variety in practices***

The purpose of the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education is to ensure the consistent quality of teaching and assessment. All municipalities and schools providing basic education must have a local curriculum, which is the basis of their instruction and education. The latest core curriculum document was introduced in 2016. As a whole, the preparation and introduction of local curricula has been successful at the municipal level. Especially in basic education, however, the scope and complexity of the core curriculum document meant challenges for local staff. Local interpretations and understanding of the objectives set out in the curriculum and the way in which they should be achieved vary. (Venäläinen et al. 2020.)

**Pre-primary and basic education actors estimate that the National Core Curriculum plays an important role in realising equality in education.**



The varying interpretations also affect assessment. Especially in basic education, the assessment principles set down by education providers in local curricula have had clear development needs from the perspective of the equality and fairness of assessment. Indications of assessment practices of knowledge and skills in various subjects that violate the Finnish National Agency for Education's instructions have been found in local curricula (2014). (Atjonen et al. 2019.) The consistency of local interpretations could have promoted by more active and clear guidance and support during the local curriculum process (Venäläinen et al. 2020).

The clarity and systematic nature of national level instructions support uniform interpretations. Basic education providers consequently call for systematic and confident guidance. For example, clear guidelines should already be provided as the core curriculum is being introduced. (Saarinen et al. 2021b). Clear instructions would also support assessment: basic education teachers' wishes concerning the development of assessment criteria focused on clarifying them and safeguarding more uniform grading in different schools. Teachers in general upper secondary schools, on the other hand, obviously disagreed about whether similar criteria as in comprehensive schools should be provided for awarding grade 8, for example. (Atjonen et al. 2019)

A methodical and sustained approach was also considered important: as governments change, so do their key projects, which means that previous development priorities are often forgotten. This short-term nature of the work prevents systematic development, as the reforms cannot be implemented and the objectives achieved during a single government term. Uniform policies are called for at both the national and local level. (Saarinen et al. 2021b). A lack of policies may have an impact on the development of knowledge and skills and, consequently, on pupils' future opportunities.

### ***Inconsistent assessment practices affect opportunities for further studies***

Despite the assessment guidelines and criteria in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, the grades given by different educational institutions are not consistent (e.g. Hellgren & Marjanen 2020; Kauppinen & Marjanen 2020; Metsämuuronen 2017). Dissimilar assessment practices result in inequalities between pupils, as three or even four different final grades can be awarded for a similar level of knowledge and skills (Kauppinen & Marjanen 2020; Metsämuuronen 2017). The assessment criteria in basic education vary by the school's size, subjects, teachers' experience and different year grades. (Atjonen et al. 2019). The grades received by pupils studying Finnish as a second language do not always

correspond to their skills, and even a good grade in Finnish is not necessarily enough to cope with upper secondary level studies (Kuukka & Metsämuuronen 2016). (Atjonen et al. 2019).

In particular, assessment creates challenges at the transitions points of education. Basic education and general upper secondary teachers disagree on whether the pupils' grade 9 grades aptly reflect their knowledge and skills. (Atjonen et al. 2019). Grades and grade averages determine pupils' access to further studies, which is why equal and fair assessment is particularly important at the transition points. Inconsistent assessment may affect the smooth progress of a pupil's studies. Too low a grade can prevent access to the pupil's dream occupation and thus reduce motivation for pursuing education. An excessively high grade gives the pupil an opportunity to continue their studies and the educational institution is able to send them on along their education path. However, too high a grade may also mean that the pupil ends up in a field of study that is too difficult or inappropriate for them and fails to make progress in their studies.

The challenges of identifying and assessing skills are also evident on immigrants' education paths (Hievanen et al. 2020). In literacy training for immigrants, for example, a lack national materials for testing skills, assessment criteria and assessment tools hampers initial level assessment carried out in educational institutions. (Hievanen et al. 2020.) The level of knowledge and skills aimed for in the early stages of basic education for adults remains unclear for educational institutions, and the students' skills levels are not always assessed before they are allowed to progress to the final stage. This makes it impossible to ensure that the student is able to manage the more theoretical curriculum contents after the initial stage. After basic education, the effects of inconsistency in assessment can be seen in vocational education and training. Key needs to develop teachers' competence are related to language aware teaching, multiculturalism, competence related to special needs education and improving assessment competence. There is a shortage of teaching materials, and preparing them takes up the teaching and guidance personnel's working time that should be spent on guiding students. (Hievanen et al. 2020.)

In the wake of these evaluations and the recommendations issued in connection with them, the Finnish National Agency for Education has added detail to the sections dealing with assessment in the National Core Curricula for Basic Education and Basic Education for Adults. This additional detail included criteria for awarding grades 5, 7 and 9 in all subjects, and more specific criteria for grade 8. The revised criteria were introduced in schools on 1 August 2021, and grade 9 pupils' final grades relying on them will be awarded for the first time in spring 2022. Future assessments of learning outcomes will show if the new criteria result in more consistent grades based on the pupils' knowledge and skills.

## ***Common policies and operating models are needed for the transition point between basic and upper secondary education***

Those studying in basic education and transition point education for the upper secondary level<sup>1</sup> face more challenges in their career planning skills, including setting targets for and making decisions on further studies, than students who have started in upper secondary education. (Goman et al. 2020.)

Students come to these education programmes with different backgrounds and capabilities, and their needs related to further studies are diverse. Some need more coaching, guidance and support for their well-being, while others can achieve sufficient capabilities for further studies even before completing the preparatory education. However, a personal study plan or competence development plan is not prepared for all students. It is important to start investigating the students' needs adequately at the beginning of their studies, making it possible to provide appropriate guidance that meets their needs. A more systematic approach is also needed at the education system level. Common education provider level operating models and policies are needed in both basic and upper secondary education for evaluating and developing guidance and other activities at transition points (Goman et al. 2020).

Education programmes at the transition point between basic and upper secondary education will be harmonised with the launch of preparatory education for programmes leading to an upper secondary qualification (TUVA) at the beginning of the 2022–2023 term. These education programmes combine voluntary additional basic education, preparatory education for general upper secondary (LUVA) and preparatory education for vocational education and training (VALMA). The Finnish National Agency for Education will define a common core curriculum for preparatory education for programmes leading to an upper secondary qualification.

## ***Small municipalities and urban areas face different challenges related to upper secondary education***

The school network and the locations of educational institutions also play a role when pupils apply for upper secondary level study places. More than 80% of pupils find that the educational institution's location affects their plans to apply for a place in upper secondary education (Goman et al. 2020.) Guided by their personal objectives and interests, young people can choose any study programme in upper secondary level institutions after completing basic education. In practice, however,

---

<sup>1</sup> In voluntary additional basic education (grade 10), preparatory education for vocational education and training (VALMA), preparatory education for general upper secondary (LUVA) or long study programmes in liberal adult education provided by folk high schools

their possibilities are guided and limited by their place of residence and their basic education certificate. Competition is tough, especially for places in the most popular programmes in the largest cities – and sometimes unfair from an individual's point of view: as applicants compete for the same places in upper secondary education, their grades awarded by different educational institutions are not consistent (e.g. Kauppinen & Marjanen 2020; Metsämuuronen 2017).

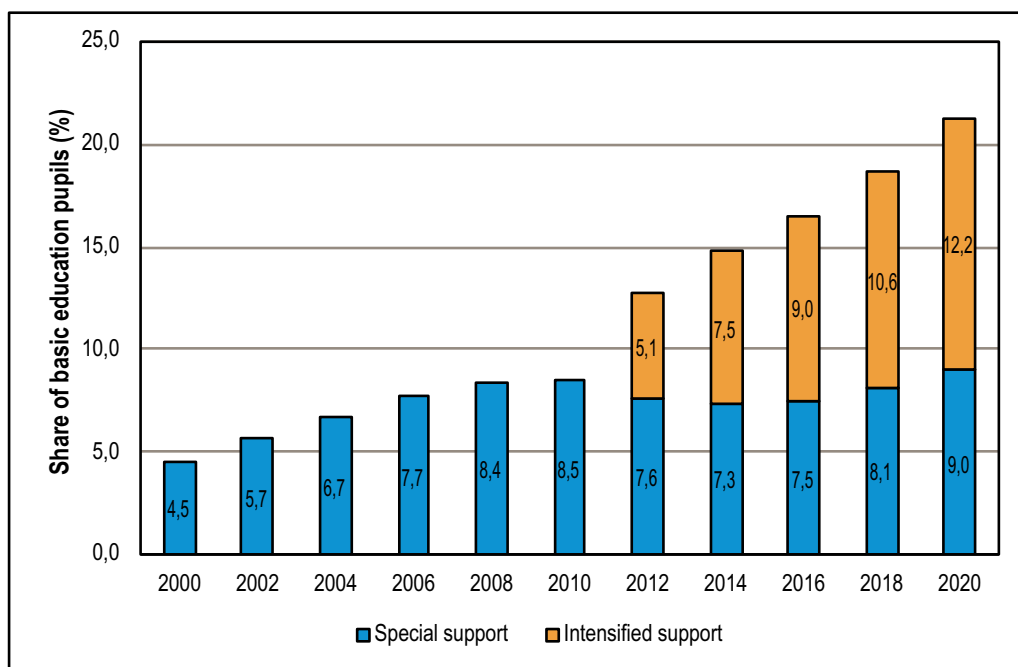
In regional centres and large cities, at least one out of five, or up to almost one half, of upper secondary school students typically come from other municipalities (Vipunen 2021). For small municipalities a modern general upper secondary school building, various development projects (Kamppi et al. 2021) and the benefits offered by the upper secondary school, including learning materials, driving school and a computer, have been pull factors that have attracted new students from outside the municipality. The upper secondary school may fully depend on these students from other localities for its vitality if the municipality itself does not have enough students. Upper secondary education is an important pull factor for the municipality as a whole, which is why investment in attracting students pays off. However, the extension of compulsory education has meant that small municipalities have lost some of this advantage as general upper secondary education has become free for all. They may have to develop new pull factors to continue providing general upper secondary education.

In some cities, centralised general upper secondary education has led to a situation where local applicants can no longer get a place in their neighbourhood school. When a general upper secondary school becomes more popular, it attracts applicants from neighbouring municipalities, which may bring the grade average needed for admission so high that even good skills in academic subjects (grade 8) are not enough to gain admission (Vipunen 2021). A similar situation may be seen regarding the most popular choices in vocational education and training. However, most young people are still offered a place in the educational institution of their first choice (Ristikari et al. 2018).

### *The number of learners in need of support is increasing at all levels of education – more special pedagogy professionals needed*

The number of children and learners in need of different support measures in early childhood education and care is increasing, and according to Statistics Finland (2021), the number of basic education pupils needing support has grown continuously in the 2000s (Figure 5). The impacts of this situation affect the learner’s entire future education path.

Three-tiered support was introduced in basic education in 2011. In that year, intensified support was introduced as a new tier, which initially somewhat reduced the need for special support. Since 2011, the number of pupils receiving intensified support has increased continuously, and the number of those in need of special support has again been growing since 2014. Not enough qualified special needs teachers are available to meet this need, as hundreds of roles for specialist pedagogy professionals are constantly vacant at different levels of education and across Finland. As few as 23% of teachers of grade 3 pupils found that the support they receive from a special needs teacher is sufficient (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2021).



**FIGURE 5.** Shares of pupils receiving intensified and special support in basic education. (Statistics Finland 2021a)

The new Act on Compulsory Education (vn 1214/2020), which entered into force in August 2021, will also increase the number of students needing different support measures at the upper secondary level and in education programmes at the transition point between basic and upper secondary education. Under the Act on Compulsory Education, pupils may continue studying at comprehensive school until they turn 17, after which they must move on to education for programmes leading to an upper secondary qualification or basic education for adults. Students who turn 17 before completing the basic education syllabus are in a vulnerable position in this transition, and it is important to ensure that the support measures continue.

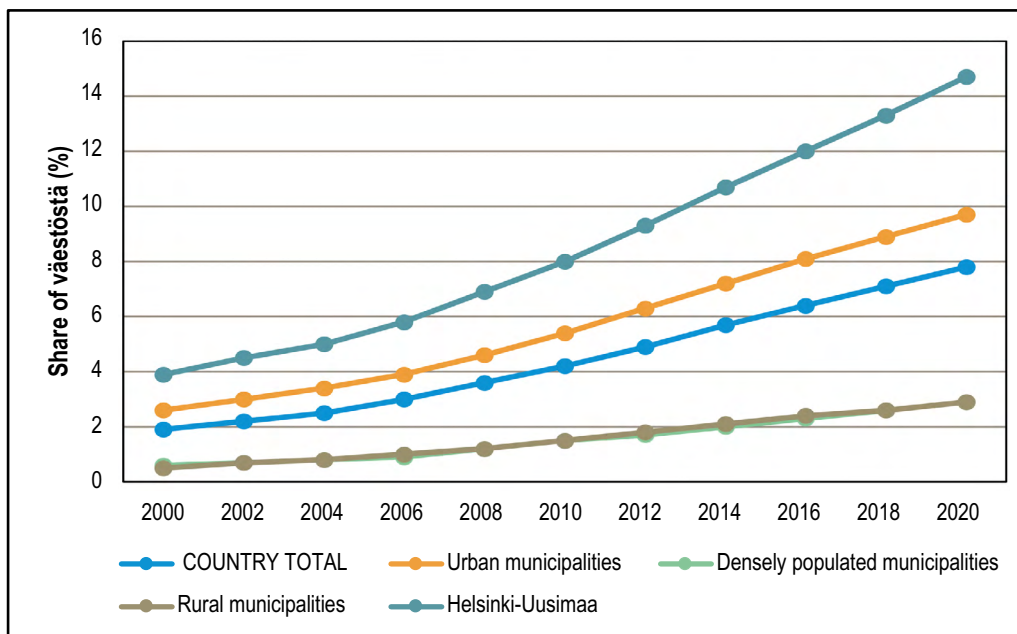
**The number of foreign-language students will increase, especially in basic education and vocational education and training.**

The proportion of foreign-language speakers<sup>2</sup> has increased significantly in the last few decades (Figure 6). The foreign-language population is concentrated to cities, in particular, which also results in differences at the school and regional level. The majority of comprehensive schools still do not have a single pupil who would study Finnish or Swedish as a second language. In some schools, on the other hand, more than one out of two pupils study the syllabus of some other language as their mother tongue. (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2019; 2021.) S2 pupils<sup>3</sup> are a highly heterogeneous group whose skills as a group, however, are clearly poorer than average, both in education in grades 1 and 2 (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2019; 2021) and at the final stage of basic education (Julin & Rautopuro 2015; Metsämuuronen & Nousiainen 2021). Especially the pupils with the poorest skills tend to go on to vocational education and training. In fact, foreign-language students are a clearly visible group in vocational education and training: the number of students who speak a language other than Finnish or Swedish as their mother tongue has tripled in vocational upper secondary education in the 2010s. More support is called for, as students who do not speak Finnish or Swedish as their mother tongue complete their vocational education and training less often than Finnish or Swedish-speaking students. (Vipunen 2021.)

---

2 As foreign-language speakers are regarded those whose mother tongue is not Finnish, Swedish or Sámi (Statistics Finland 2021b).

3 According to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2014), the pupil may study the syllabus in Finnish as a second language and literature (S2) provided that his or her mother tongue is not Finnish, Swedish, or Sámi, or he or she otherwise has a plurilingual background. The S2 syllabus may be considered when there are deficiencies in one or several areas of the pupil's basic Finnish language proficiency, in which case his or her competence does not as yet create preconditions for acting as an equal member of the school community in daily interaction. (Finnish National Agency for Education 2021.)



**FIGURE 6. Trend in the proportion of foreign-language population in Finland (Statistics Finland 2021a)**

The proliferation of students studying the S2 syllabus is also seen in matriculation examinations. The number of students taking the S2 syllabus test in matriculation examinations has doubled in five years, and it continues to grow by hundreds of students annually. While the number of general upper secondary students taking the matriculation examination test in the Swedish as a second language syllabus remains very small, it is also increasing. (Vipunen 2021.)

***There are major differences in ECEC, instruction and education providers' resources for offering instruction and support***

Savings in central government finances have affected local government resources: municipalities have been forced to fill in gaps out of their own budgets, and some of the providers of basic education, general upper secondary education, basic education in the arts and liberal adult education have consequently cut back on their staff and the amount of instruction they offer (Pitkänen et al. 2017). The provision of basic education is also guided by the distribution of lesson hours laid down in a Government Decree (793/2018). However, the amount of instruction pupils receive varies from municipality to municipality, and the lesson hours may have

been allocated differently to different grades. Pupils in one school may have several lessons less every week than those in another school (e.g. Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2021). In some municipalities, pupils receive instruction that exceeds the minimum amount by several hours each week. Differences in the amount of instruction that the pupils receive in basic education may cumulate if a pupil changes schools or moves to another municipality in the course of their education path. A pupil who changes schools may not receive the national minimum amount of instruction if instruction in the two schools they attend has been allocated to the grades differently.

**The cumulative difference in the amount of instruction pupils receive during their time in basic education may be up to one year.**

In addition to the curriculum reform, drivers of change affecting municipalities include demographic change, the changing school network and limited resources. During the period when the new curricula have been introduced, local government budgets have been tight, and pre-primary education units and schools are forced to operate with very different resources. (Venäläinen et al. 2020.) The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on local government finances will be seen with a delay.

### *Home background, attitudes and gendered practices also influence skills and education paths indirectly*

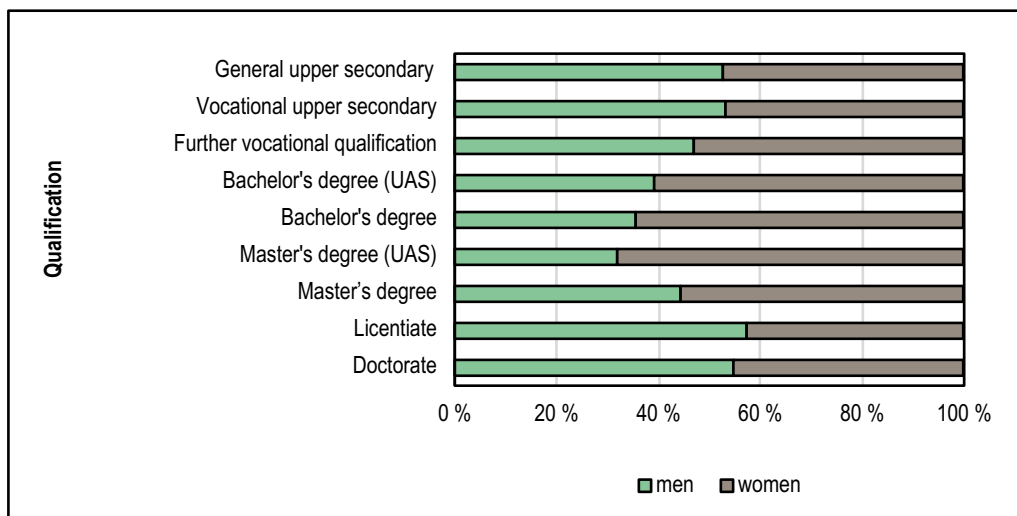
Reading as a pastime has repeatedly been shown to correlate to pupils' skills both at the beginning of comprehensive school grade 1 (Ukkola et al. 2020), at the end of grade 9 (Harjunen & Rautopuro 2014; Hellgren & Marjanen 2020; Kauppinen & Marjanen 2020) and in the mother tongue test in the matriculation examination alike (Hellgren et al. 2021). At the beginning of grade 1, however, reading appears to be a hobby pursued by children whose guardians have a high level of education. Regardless of the guardians' level of education, participating in instructor-led hobbies also improves children's initial level in mathematics and mother tongue at the beginning of comprehensive school, but participation in hobbies varies greatly depending on the child's home background: 56% of the children whose mothers have no education beyond comprehensive school participate in no instructor-led hobbies, whereas this figure is only 9% for children whose mothers have university level education. (Ukkola et al. 2020.)

Pupils are usually guided by their personal interests when choosing a place of study after basic education. Other significant factors are their academic success, plans for further studies, career goals and the location of the educational institution. The choices made by friends, the guidance counsellor's recommendations and the



parents' opinions have less of an impact on the choice of study place. (Goman et al. 2020.) The career choices of pupils with a migrant background<sup>4</sup> are affected by attitudes and perceptions of different professions' appreciation in the culture of their countries of origin. Guidance counsellors' attitudes and challenges in identifying prior learning may also enhance stereotypical education paths. (Airas et al. 2019.)

Differentiation in pupils' attitudes can already be seen at the beginning of grade 3: girls were more positive about school attendance and school subjects than boys. Attitudes can have a major impact on what subjects pupils choose at school and where they end up continuing their studies. (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2021.) Attitudes are not only individual attributes, as cultural norms and expectations as well as structures may be at work in their background (Saarinen et al. 2021a). Despite Finland's reputation as a model country of equality, the education and labour markets in this country are strongly segregated into fields dominated by women and men. This segregation also applies to levels of education: the greatest number of higher education degrees are completed by women (Figure 7). In 2019, women completed as many as two thirds of Master's degrees at universities of applied sciences (Statistics Finland 2021a). Nevertheless, the gender segregation of occupations is visible in that men receive higher wages than women on average.



**FIGURE 7. Qualifications completed by men and women aged 20 in 2019 (Statistics Finland 2021a)**

<sup>4</sup> The concept of a person with a migrant background is used for comparisons with those with a Finnish background. Persons with a Finnish background include all those who have at least one parent born in Finland. Persons with a foreign background comprise all those whose both parents, or the only known parent, were born abroad. (Statistics Finland 2021c.)

Efforts have been made to reduce gender segregation through various projects. The problems have included the short-term nature of such activities, their one-sided nature, and not going beyond the scope of the project itself. The teaching staff's work plays an important role in promoting equality, which is why special attention should be paid to teacher education. It is important to translate the school's gender equality plans into concrete actions. Intervening in stereotyping speech and actions can dispel prejudices and influence discrimination. (Saarinen et al. 2021a.)

### *Immigrants' education paths are not always based on their competencies and needs*

Some learners only arrive in Finland and start school as adults. Immigrants' varying backgrounds and different starting points become obvious in such contexts as literacy training for immigrants and basic education for adults, in which the heterogeneity of groups and individual differences in the development of learners' competencies and in their further paths are emphasised (Hievanen et al. 2020). Their transitions and progress on education paths are not always optimal from the students' perspective. The transition to the next education programme may be too rapid from the perspective of the student's language proficiency development, which means that their proficiency does not necessarily meet the requirements of the next stage of education. (Hievanen et al. 2020.)

Liberal adult education programmes are delivered as courses of varying lengths and using different forms of instruction, which supports the reform's objectives of serving different target groups on the one hand, while on the other, it challenges the system's ability to guarantee students' equal opportunities to receive education that is consistent with their needs and goals everywhere in Finland, regardless of the size of the educational institution and local factors. Teachers are concerned over whether the duration of such programmes, the manner of their delivery and guidance to further studies are best suited to the needs of those students, in particular, who progress more slowly. The fact that funding for education focuses on those immigrants who have an integration plan is another concern. This excludes persons who have been in Finland for a longer time and who would benefit from literacy training.

Fast-track education paths are appropriate for many immigrant students, but especially for those who have started their studies in Finland with a poor basic level of knowledge and skills, the attempt to speed up the completion of education and move on to working life may jeopardise their social and economic equality. Students who do not achieve strong basic knowledge and skills in the programme will be left in a vulnerable position in the face of working life transformations.

For many people who have stayed at home for a long time, the possibility of studying may be important in itself. In a student's life, reaching the goals may be about much more than a measurable improvement in literacy skills, such as expanding their life circle and strengthening their agency. (Hievanen et al.2020.)

### *Practices for delivering special support vary in vocational education and training*

In terms of educational equality, it is essential that support and guidance services are targeted appropriately and delivered at the right time. The number of students receiving special needs support has increased in vocational education and training in recent years. The purpose of special support is to make studying for a vocational qualification possible for students who face more challenges in studying and learning than usual. Special support consists of systematic pedagogical support based on the student's individual needs, objectives and capabilities as well as special teaching and study arrangements.

**Not all students receive timely support they need for their studies.**

Both the recognition of support needs and the delivery of support measures vary. In the planning of special support, the recording of planned support measures in students' personal competence development plans (HOKS) and students' participation in agreeing on support measures are implemented well. However, the effectiveness of the support is not evaluated systematically. Evaluation results indicate that the staff are not sufficiently aware of the agreed support measures and methods. There is room for improvement in information flows and cooperation between staff members. (Goman et al. 2021a.)

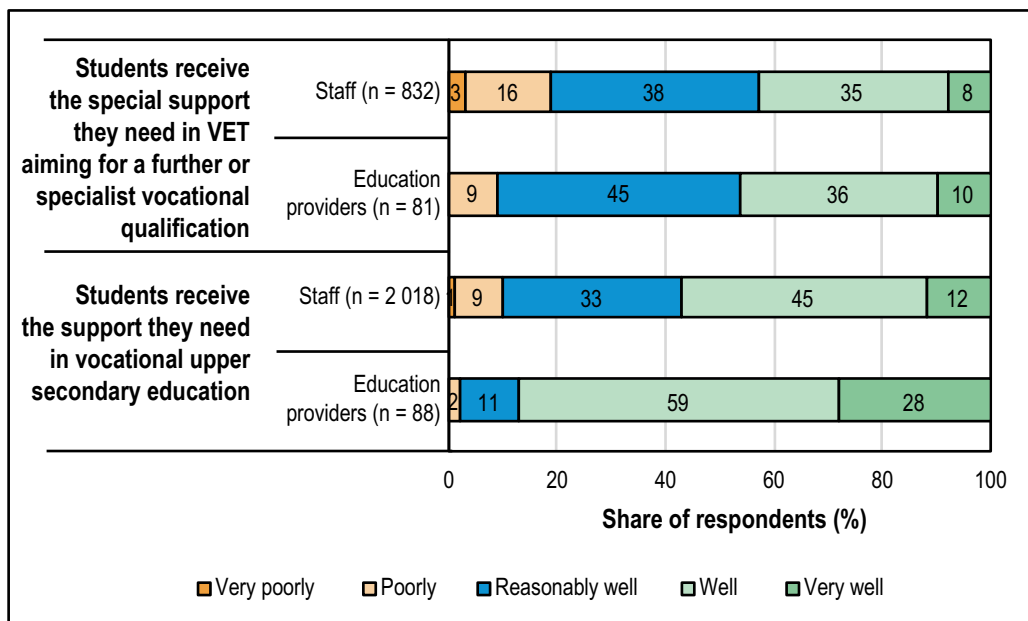
Education providers hold more positive views of the special support received by students than staff (Figure 8). All education providers estimate that the students' possibilities of receiving the special support they need in the common units are at least fairly good, and as many as 85% find that these possibilities are good or very good. One out of ten staff members find the students' possibilities of receiving the special support they need poor or very poor. Access to support in vocational units was considered even poorer. (Goman et al. 2021a.)

### *The development of academic language skills is a key prerequisite for higher education studies*

According to predictions, more than half of the new employees will need higher education in the future (OPH 2019). Students with a foreign background are a growing but still under-represented group in Finnish higher education, especially universities (Airas et al. 2019). The finding applies to both immigrant and Finnish-born immigrant children who have completed a Finnish comprehensive school. The low proportions of students with an immigrant background admitted to higher education suggest that the Finnish education system is not able to provide them with sufficient capacity for higher education.

In the application phase of higher education, the importance of language skills is especially emphasized. Concerns have been raised about, among other things, the wide variation in the way S2 (Finnish as a second language) teaching is organized and the quality of pre-tertiary education. Teaching in S2, R2 (Swedish as a second language) or Finnish as a mother tongue should provide an opportunity to develop academic language skills at all levels of education.

Students consistently needed advanced language studies and linguistic support also during their higher education studies. The fact that people with a foreign background are not recognized as their own group in higher education institutions makes it difficult to target support, guidance and communication. Thus, despite plans for equality, it is difficult for higher education institutions to identify the need for positive special treatment for special groups (Airas et al. 2019).



**FIGURE 8. Education providers' and staff members' views of special support received by students in common and vocational units. (Goman et al. 2021a)**

Special support is the most readily available in the fields of science as well as health and well-being, and accessing it is the most difficult in the fields of technology and services. The staff of education providers with small student numbers rated the availability of support higher than the staff of large providers. In the continuous application process, which means that students can apply at any time, new students' support needs are not identified as systematically as when other application methods are used. The identification of needs is also less effective in the context of further and specialist qualifications than upper secondary vocational qualifications. In training aiming for an upper secondary vocational qualification, support is delivered less effectively in vocational units than in common units. The practices related to adapted competence assessment and exemptions from qualification requirements or learning outcomes are not clear. (Goman et al. 2021a.)

### 1.3 Accessibility of education and learners' participation



- There are major regional variations in ECEC participation rates.
- Guidance at the transition points of education is not always delivered at the right time and based on needs.
- The resources for guidance vary in upper secondary studies. Support is needed particularly by those who have been bullied.
- Learners' equality can be influenced through teacher education.
- Principles shaped by different interpretations of equality influence international accessibility of higher education.

## *Major regional variations in ECEC participation rates*

The purpose of early childhood education and care is to support the child's holistic development, promote children's equality, prevent social exclusion and lay a foundation for the child's later learning. Every child has a right to participate in early childhood education and care, and the ECEC participation rate of children aged 1 to 6 in Finland has in fact increased steadily in recent years. However, the situation of early childhood education and care differs in many ways from that of basic education: for example, there are major regional variations in the ECEC participation rate, and not all children are within the scope of ECEC. Depending on their situations, families may or may not feel that participating in early childhood education and care pays off for them. In addition to the client fees paid by the families, factors that influence children's participation in ECEC include a home care allowance system that is not uniform across Finland: some municipalities choose to pay families a municipal supplement in addition to home care allowance. In some municipalities, the criteria for receiving the municipal supplement to home care allowance are inconsistent with both the education policy and labour market policy tasks set for early childhood education and care. (Siippainen et al. 2020.)

## *Children's participation is taking its first steps in ECEC*

The idea of participation is underpinned by such documents as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which emphasises the child's right to be heard in matters concerning him or her. The objective of a culture that supports participation is to guide children towards democracy. In ECEC, participation means that children are active agents and members of their group. However, ECEC providers estimate that children's participation in early childhood education and care is realised less well than many other areas. Among other things, children's participation in the planning and evaluation of activities and the selection of working methods were assessed to be low. Especially those working with the youngest child groups found that children's participation is realised poorly. In their open-ended responses, however, early childhood education and care staff described diversely and at length practices that can be seen as emphasising children's participation. The concept of participation is still quite recent, and its meanings in daily life need to be discussed. (Juutinen et al. 2021.)

*Accessibility of literacy training for immigrants is considered good but education paths could be smoother*

Providers of literacy training for immigrants find that while enough student places are available in proportion to demand and the target groups have mainly been reached well (Table 2), challenges in access to the training remain for those who are employed and those who have stayed at home for a long time. Organising childcare is a challenge to the participation of parents who are caring for children at home.

**TABLE 2. Perceptions of education providers and teachers in literacy training organised as liberal adult education of whether they have succeeded well in reaching the different target groups. (Hievanen et al. 2020).**

| Scale             | Education providers |           | Teachers     |           |
|-------------------|---------------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|
|                   | %                   | n         | %            | n         |
| Strongly disagree | 1.5                 | 1         | 1.6          | 1         |
| Somewhat disagree | 16.4                | 11        | 8.2          | 5         |
| Somewhat agree    | 53.7                | 36        | 54.1         | 33        |
| Strongly agree    | 26.9                | 18        | 31.1         | 19        |
| Cannot say        | 1.5                 | 1         | 4.9          | 3         |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>100.0</b>        | <b>67</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>61</b> |

Most teachers report that they guide the student to the next education programme either after he or she has completed the training or during it if the student has the necessary capabilities. Some students do not meet the requirements for a place in further studies, for example because their basic level of education is inadequate. Regional availability also affects their possibilities of finding a place in further studies. Finding the next steps on the education path has proven challenging, especially for those with emergent literacy or learning difficulties. (Hievanen et al. 2020.)

The challenge to cooperation between the authorities and effective education paths is that the target groups for integration training, literacy training and basic education for adults as well as the objectives of the education are partly open to interpretation and overlapping, which is reflected in TE Offices' and other supervising parties' principles of steering education. The legislation or funding do not officially restrict the target group or content of literacy training, for example, which enables varied interpretations in different regions and by education providers of who is directed to the training. (Hievanen et al. 2020.)



While cooperation between different actors in literacy training, basic education for adults and vocational education and training is effective, the amount and scope of the cooperation vary, and the work partly depends on the activity of individual actors and teachers. The current data protection legislation poses challenges to exchange of information and smooth communication with a view to sharing essential information related to the student's education path. Nevertheless, educational institutions find that cooperation with other education and training programmes and projects creates added value for the students both during their studies, for example in the form of working life cooperation, and at the transition points of education. (Hievanen et al. 2020.)

### *Shortcomings in guidance and support in upper secondary studies*

Education providers' varying resources have an impact on student guidance in upper secondary level studies. General upper secondary education providers gave a better rating for the adequacy of the guidance resources in the initial stage of studies in proportion to student numbers than vocational education and training providers. Of general upper secondary education providers, 76% rated the adequacy of resources as good or very good, whereas this opinion was only held by 57% of vocational education and training providers. (Goman et al. 2020.) Staff members' views of the resources available for delivering special support varied by field of education. Best ratings for the adequacy of personnel resources and the effectiveness of the staff's division of labour were given by staff representatives who worked in the fields of natural sciences or health and well-being. The staff in technological and service fields gave the lowest rating for the adequacy of resources. The effectiveness of division of labour was also rated the poorest in technological fields. (Goman et al. 2021a.)

**Most pupils receive sufficient guidance for planning their future studies and making choices in basic education.**

However, pupils who had experienced learning difficulties during their time in comprehensive school or who had repeatedly been bullied felt that they were not encouraged sufficiently to consider their options for further studies and that the guidance counsellors did not have enough time to talk to them. They also found that their self-knowledge and information acquisition and decision-making skills had developed poorly. These pupils also experienced more difficulties than others in starting their studies after basic education and attaching to studies than others. (Goman et al. 2020.)

### *Equality of learners can be promoted through teacher education*

Teacher education has an impact on equality at all levels of education. While the obligations and interpretations related to equality in the National Core Curriculum guide schools, the schools decide independently on their practices. Teachers enjoy strong autonomy, and they build participation and create equality or inequality through their work.

In upbringing and education, tolerance and diversity mostly refer to multiculturalism while staying silent about such subjects as differences related to gender and sexuality. Themes related to gender and various differences are not addressed systematically as a single, coherent entity in teacher education, and a teacher trainer can only reflect on and encounter them as individual cases. In teacher education, there appears to be an implicit presumption of equality prevailing in Finland. (Saarinen et al. 2021a.) In addition to teachers' equality training, there are shortcomings in schools' gender equality plans. The plans are often based on ready-made templates, which is why they are not relevant to school work, and the school does not engage with them. (Saarinen et al. 2021a.)

The contents of a teacher's pedagogical studies vary considerably depending on the individual emphases of universities and universities of applied sciences (Jyrhämä 2021). The teacher's assessment competence directly affects the pupil's possibilities of being admitted to their first choice in further education. Teachers typically use written tests that pupils complete individually in assessment. The ability of a single assessment method to cover all objectives set for learning is often limited, and diversifying the assessment methods would enable pupils to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in different ways and motivate them to study. It could also make assessment more transparent. As few as 42% of basic education and general upper secondary education teachers feel that pupil and student assessment at schools or educational institutions is fair. Providers of initial education and staff training as well as the management of schools and educational institutions should pay attention to improving and diversifying teachers' assessment competence over the long term (Atjonen et al. 2019).

### *Operating principles shaped by different interpretations of equality affect the accessibility of higher education*

While internationality is a built-in feature in the strategies of an increasing number of higher education institutions, the strategic goals associated with internationalisation are not always clearly visible in their activities and quality management (Nordblad et al. 2019; Pyykkö et al. 2020). The concept of equality is also widely used in strategy documents that describe the operation of higher education institutions

and frequently referred to by the management and staff (Airas et al. 2019). However, this term is often perceived to refer to treating all applicant groups or students the same. Equality as a *starting point* includes the implicit presumption that everyone is on the same starting line. Evaluation information indicates that this is not the case, however, and that the students' backgrounds matter. This is why talking about equality as a *goal* rather than a starting point would be more meaningful. Students with a foreign background<sup>5</sup> are not currently identified as a separate group in higher education institutions, which is why targeting communication, services, support or advice at them is difficult. Regardless of their equality and non-discrimination plans, it is challenging for higher education institutions to identify special groups' need for positive special treatment (Airas et al. 2019).

Higher education institutions are making efforts to take different applicant and student groups into consideration by creating more flexible application paths and study structures (Moitus et al. 2020, Konkola et al. 2021). Flexible study path models offer diverse study models for students in different life situations and with varying educational backgrounds (Moitus et al. 2020).

**Digitalisation has opened up possibilities for reaching out to new target groups and developing the offer of continuous learning, both nationally and internationally.**

Competition for higher education places in Finland is tough, and knowledge of the application practices and language proficiency may be crucial in the application phase. Application processes and practices built on the traditions of a uniform Finnish culture and relying on Finnish language proficiency consequently give rise to a situation in which those admitted are a relatively homogeneous group. Higher education institutions are well aware of the needs to improve staff competence related to multiculturalism, and many of them have included internationalisation goals in their strategies. Universities of applied sciences have recognised a need for working life competence and the challenges of guiding and supporting students with a foreign background during work practice (e.g. Konkola et al. 2021). Responses to these issues have included providing training in student guidance delivered in easy language.

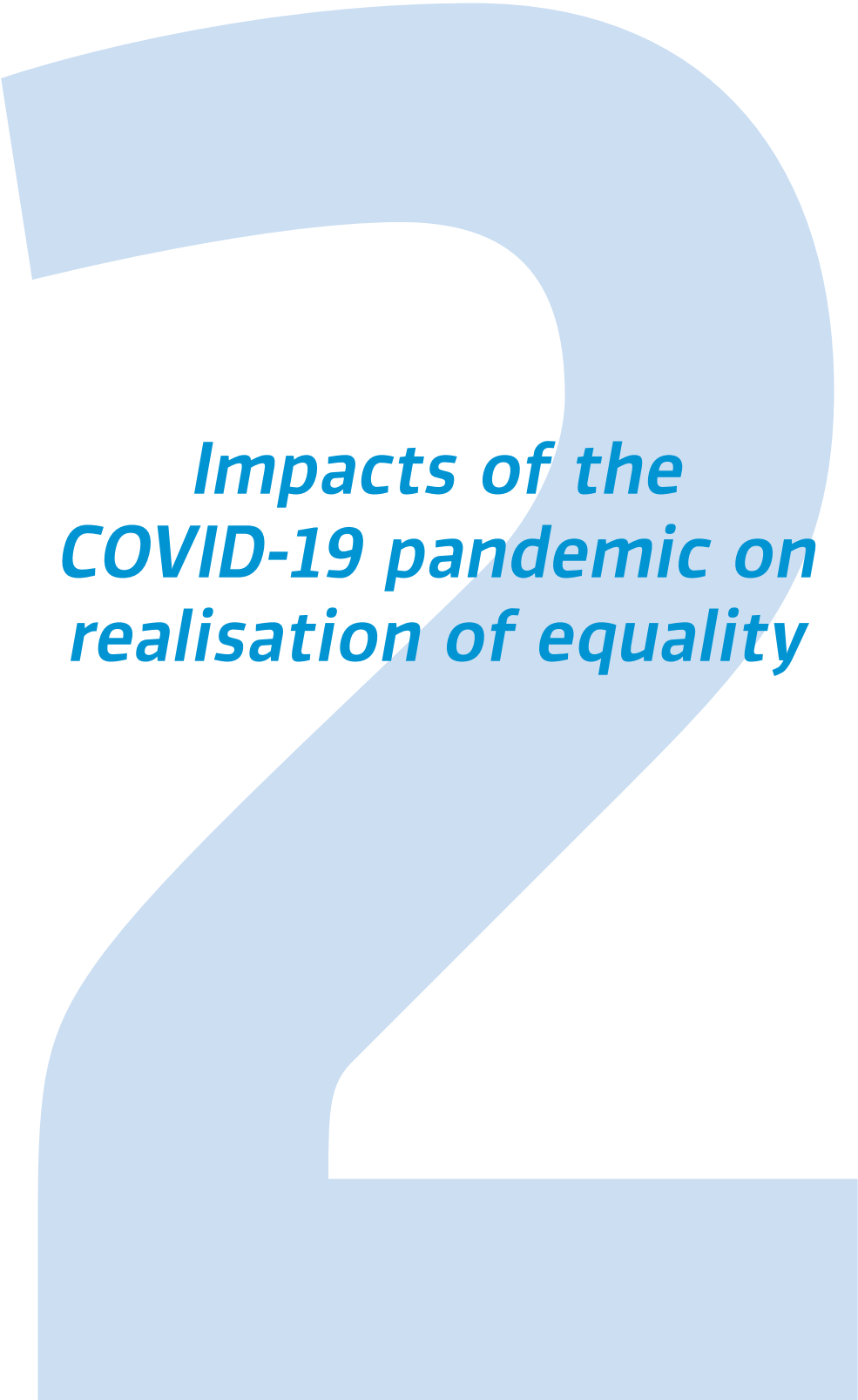
---

<sup>5</sup> Persons with a foreign background comprise all those whose both parents, or the only known parent, were born abroad. This group also includes persons born abroad when neither of their parents is registered in the Population Information System. (Airas et al. 2019, Statistics Finland 2021b.)

### *Belonging to a group is important for higher education students – regardless of their background*

While students with a foreign background appear to benefit from targeted support and positive special treatment, they do not wish to be labelled as different from others. While students also named a number of support and guidance forms that had benefited them in the application phase or while studying (including preparatory education, a dedicated instructor, linguistic support provided by tutor teachers, additional time in examinations, separate application paths to higher education), they preferred to try and manage alone or with the help of friends rather than feel that they were treated differently, or considered different from others.

The expectation was that a certain degree of uniformity with students with a Finnish background was required to belong to the group. The students themselves equated being similar and being treated the same, as they did not wish to feel different from others. In other words, diversity was also seen as a deviation from the principle of equity (cf. traditional gender equality discourse). Similar views were not expressed when talking about internationality and international exchange students, as higher education institutions took it for granted that tailored services should be provided for them, and that diversity is something positive and a richness.



***Impacts of the  
COVID-19 pandemic on  
realisation of equality***



iStock Photo

- While the changes that took place during the pandemic made daily life in early childhood education and care more peaceful, keeping in touch with children's homes became more difficult.
- Distance learning increased pupils' inequality in basic education.
- Delivering support measures was challenging in emergency conditions.
- Learners' and teachers' capabilities for using IT devices varied, as did their access to devices.
- While the emergency conditions resulted in well-being and skills gaps, some pupils benefited.
- Those VET students who needed the most support felt that they had received the least of it.
- Higher education students' different capabilities for independent study are emphasised during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Distance learning has also improved the accessibility of education.

Years 2020 and 2021 will be remembered for the COVID-19 pandemic which, in addition to undermining people's sense of health and safety, had an impact on everyday activities and familiar practices both in the lives of individuals and in

society. Distance learning was introduced almost nation-wide on a fast schedule in March 2020. Universal distance learning ended in May 2020, but since that time, many schools, educational institutions and higher education institutions have alternated between periods of distance learning and contact teaching. The pandemic has had a long-lasting impact on everyday life and well-being both in homes as well as in early childhood education and care, schools, educational institutions and higher education institutions, and many of these impacts will emerge with a delay.

The pandemic has highlighted pupils' and students' personal experiences and learning challenges in a new way, while the link between them and learners' wellbeing and coping has been understood more extensively. The digital practices introduced for distance learning and teaching during the pandemic have also given rise to new questions and information needs.

This exceptional period has shown how strong the links between education and society are. Learning and competence development provide a significant space for living and communal existence for children, young people and adults. In addition, education also keeps individuals attached to society and operating as part of it. Education shapes young people's ways of speaking and acting and their attitudes towards other people, society and the world. This is why it is important to both observe and ask how education reproduces inequalities and privileges and how these practices, ways of speaking and attitudes can be changed.

***While the changes that took place during the pandemic made daily life in early childhood education and care more peaceful, keeping in touch with children's homes became more difficult***

The pandemic brought about various restrictions to the daily activities of early childhood education and care. However, the emergency conditions also gave rise to new practices, including increased use of small groups and reduced interaction between groups. Activities in small groups made everyday life more peaceful, which was particularly beneficial for children in need of support measures. The staff also felt that working in small groups was meaningful and improved the team spirit. Outdoor activities in nearby natural environments, physical activity, and hygiene education increased, but many units had to give up all excursions and cooperation with cultural actors and similar. The pandemic did not treat all parts of the country in the same way, as in some areas excursions could be continued, whereas in others almost all possible destinations were closed. In other words, this put early childhood education and care units in different position depending on their location. If the unit was located within a walking distance from suitable destinations that remained open, the children were still able to go on excursions. Groups that depended on public transport opted for virtual and imaginary excursions. (Juutinen et al. 2021; Poroila 2021.)

Following national and local guidelines, a variety of hygiene measures were introduced to combat the spread of the coronavirus in early childhood education and care units. Hygiene measures changed everyday activities and their schedules. In some units, however, this was also used to promote the children's participation and equality: as each child was taught individually about hand hygiene and always washed their hands together with an adult, everyone was given an equal amount of one-to-one time with an adult. (Juutinen et al. 2021; Poroila 2021.)

Staff liaised with guardians through remote means, either partly or fully. Meetings with guardians were limited to outdoor settings or remote meetings, which hampered telling them about the activities and passing on daily information. On the other hand, the staff felt that organising discussions on children's personal early childhood education plans through remote connections was easier and more accessible. (Juutinen et al. 2021; Poroila 2021.)

### *Distance learning increased pupils' inequality in basic education*

Problems that had already been identified earlier took a turn for the worse while basic education pupils engaged in distance learning. For example, there were shortcomings in the availability of pupil and student welfare services. In order to mitigate the impact of the emergency conditions, additional resources are needed for general learning support, remedial teaching, intensified support and special support. During the distance learning period, support provided by the homes was particularly important for basic education pupils. This placed the pupils in different positions depending on such factors as the support the guardians were able to give them as well as the devices, network connections, space and peaceful working atmosphere available in their homes. (Goman et al. 2021b; Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2021.)

**Providing special and intensified support during the distance learning period was challenging.**

Teachers felt unable to support all of their pupils sufficiently. The lack of contact teaching undermined the realisation of equality, especially for pupils who need special or intensified support and those who belong to a linguistic minority. Teachers and principals also found that learners' equality was affected by their motivation and capacity for self-regulation. (Goman et al. 2021b; Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2021.)



### *While shortcomings were observed in access to IT devices and skills in using them, digital skills developed dramatically during the distance learning period*

Problems in accessing IT devices and the absence of a network connections undermined learner's equality during the distance learning period. This was emphasised particularly in basic education. The rapid transition to distance learning resulted in inequality between schools, as not all schools had the same capabilities and tools required for this transition. There was a shortage of IT devices and learners' digital skills varied, which affected the smooth running of online teaching. Not all teachers had the same digital skills and capabilities for delivering instruction online. There were also major differences between the available devices and the staff's capabilities for using them. However, teachers and principals felt that both the pupils' and their own skills had developed considerably during the distance learning period. (Goman et al. 2021b; Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2021.)

### *While the emergency conditions resulted in well-being and skills gaps, some pupils benefited*

Many schools, teachers and principals were struggling to cope during the emergency conditions, and many types of differences between schools and pupils emerged. Basic education teachers found that gaps in knowledge and skills increased as some pupils made progress in their studies while the skills of others could even decline. Teachers reported challenges in delivering support measures and student welfare. On the other hand, some principals pointed out that differences between pupils and schools exist anyway, pandemic or no pandemic, and some pupils always need more support for their school attendance than others. Some principals reported that everything went well and said that the emergency conditions had little impact on learning. Some grade 3 teachers also felt that the emergency conditions had their advantages and noted that studying independently suited some pupils very well. Teachers emphasised the importance of cooperation in their efforts to guarantee that the pupils in different grades were treated as equally as possible. (Goman et al. 2021b; Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2021.)

**In distance learning, pupils were able to demonstrate their diverse skills more diversely than in contact teaching.**

Guardians of grade 3 pupils had varying experiences of the emergency conditions during the spring term of grade 2. The hardships of the emergency conditions were evident in the responses of many guardians. Young pupils needed a great

deal of support for their studies. The resources of both guardians and teachers were stretched, and guardians said that the school was not able to provide the support they would have needed. However, everything went well according to some guardians, and the emergency conditions had little or no impact on their child's studies. Many guardians had also noticed positive things. Some pupils found it easier to concentrate on the instruction at home than in a large class, while others were happy because they did not have to get up early or wait for slower pupils to catch up. (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen 2021.)

### ***VET students who needed the most support felt they had received the least of it***

More than one half of VET students found studying in the emergency conditions more mentally stressful than in normal times. On the other hand, most students felt that they had received sufficient support for their studies. Slightly more than one out of four experienced major problems with their studies due to the emergency conditions. Those students who experienced cumulating problems related to motivation, stress and studying in the emergency conditions found the progress of their studies and the support received from their educational institution poorer than other students. These students also felt that their study skills were insufficient and that the availability of guidance counselling and student welfare was poor. (Goman et al. 2021b.)

According to the management of VET providers, studies in the workplace were hampered the most in service, health and wellbeing fields and the least in agriculture and forestry as well as data processing and telecommunications. The greatest disruption to work-based learning was caused by the pandemic in the Regional State Administrative Agency areas of Southern and Eastern Finland. While organising demonstrations was fraught with challenges, this was also an opportunity to update the ways in which they were implemented. In the emergency conditions, more diverse methods were developed for organising demonstrations, also outside workplaces. On the other hand, respondents felt they had slightly fewer problems in assessing competence. The greatest challenges in work-based learning, demonstrations and competence assessment were experienced in the Regional State Administrative Agency area of Southern Finland, and the smallest in the area of Northern Finland. (Goman et al. 2021b.) This finding can also be seen as reflecting the epidemic situation and the restrictions related to it in these areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed the greatest challenges to the provision and availability of special support, whereas recognising special support needs and planning the support were less challenging. Reaching the students was difficult during the pandemic. The challenges of delivering support could not necessary be

solved even by offering contact teaching, as some students did not participate in it for one reason or another. Differences in support needs and learning difficulties were emphasised during the pandemic, and the need for individual guidance increased. Students' varying circumstances at home also affected their possibilities of studying. Not all students had access to their own computers or a quiet space to work in. Students' inadequate study skills, life management skills and study motivation were also considered challenges during the pandemic. (Goman et al. 2021a.)

**Not all students could be reached during the distance learning period, and attempts to contact students used up a great deal of personnel resources.**

On the other hand, education providers felt that the pandemic had also brought about positive changes in vocational education and training. Education providers were forced to come up with new practices, and the staff had to produce new learning materials. Distance learning suited some students better than contact learning at the educational institution, and others benefited from completing demonstrations at the educational institution rather than in the workplace. (Goman et al. 2021a.)

### *Higher education students' different capabilities for independent study were emphasised during the pandemic*

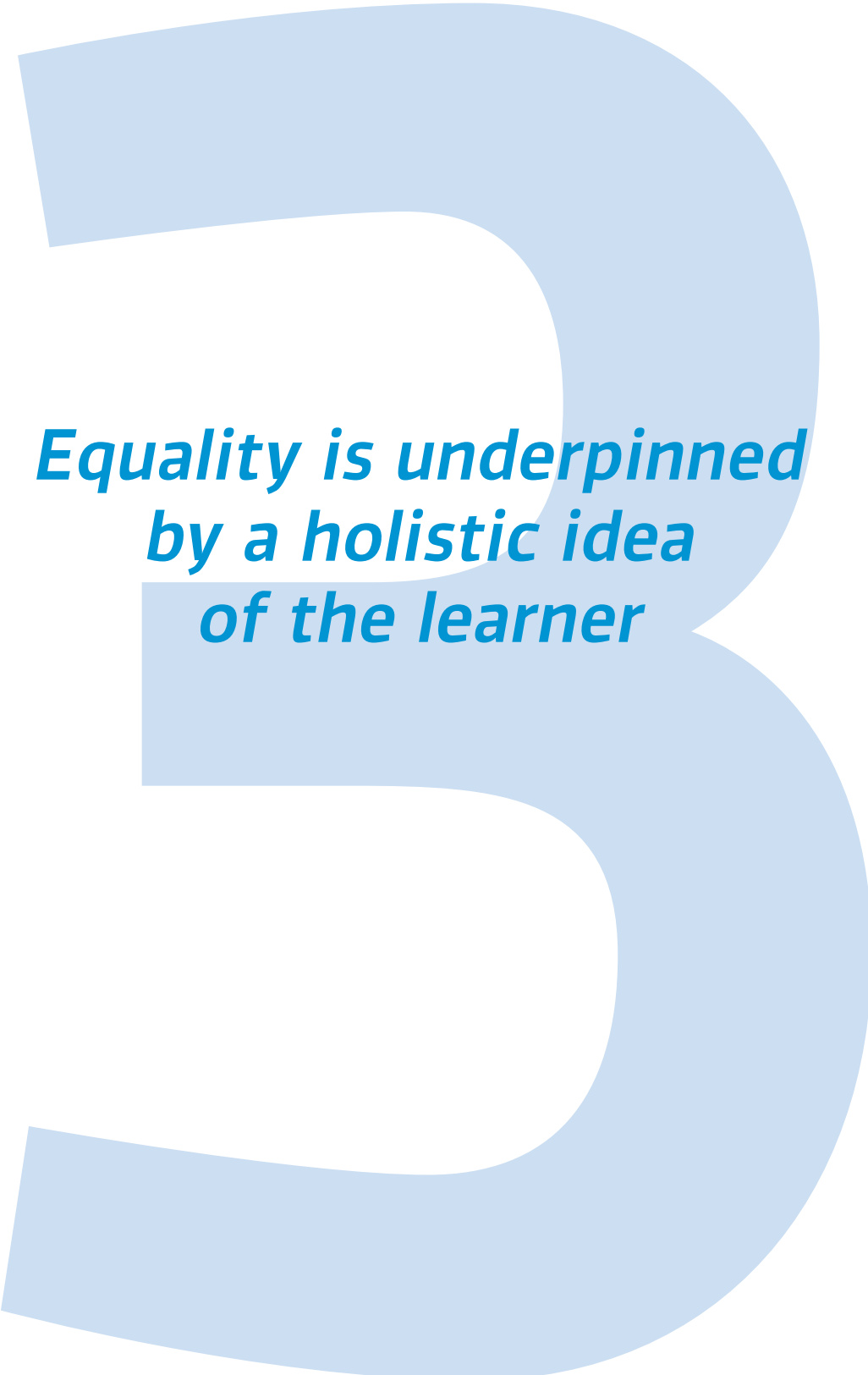
Higher education institutions estimated that in the emergency conditions, students were divided into those for whom the distance and hybrid models were highly suitable forms of study, and those who were challenged by distance learning and the varying practices. Almost seven out of ten higher education institution representatives said that the students' varying capabilities for independent study were a key factor. The challenges were related to such issues as learning difficulties, lack of independent study skills, erosion of social relationships, lack of life management skills or not having a suitable space for studying at home. (Goman et al. 2021b.)

One out of five higher education institutions believed that the emergency conditions had no observable impacts on the equality of learning or that the impacts were impossible to assess. Of all higher education institution, universities of applied sciences found the impacts of cancelling compulsory internships on equality in learning the greatest. Problems with organising internships may have affected the progress of studies in universities of applied sciences more than in universities. (Goman et al. 2021b.)

One out of ten higher education institutions mentioned that the possibilities of organising online teaching vary by field, which affects the students' equal opportunities to receive instruction. One out of four higher education institutions said that the varying quality of devices and software available for students was a challenge to the realisation of equality in the emergency conditions. On the other hand, the responses also showed that some higher education institutions addressed the need for devices and software in distance learning, for example by offering devices that students could borrow. Almost one out of five higher education institutions found that online teaching has improved the availability of instruction at the regional level and for working students. Higher education institutions estimate that students with learning difficulties experienced the greatest increase in their need for support in the emergency conditions. (Goman et al. 2021b.)

### *Distance learning also improved the accessibility of education*

With the introduction of digital teaching and learning practices, more people than before have had the opportunity to participate in studies offered by such providers as universities of applied sciences and universities without leaving their homes. More opportunities for distance learning have also become available in upper secondary education and liberal adult education. In addition, some higher education institutions have offered their studies free of charge to the unemployed or workers who have been laid off. Building a digital learning strategy that covers all levels of education and training and promotes accessibility as well as a digital service ecosystem are good examples of intensifying cooperation between the levels of education and efforts to develop the education system as a whole.



***Equality is underpinned  
by a holistic idea  
of the learner***



This publication examines the national state of play of equality and equal opportunities in education, discusses factors that hamper the realisation of equality in education, and gives recommendations aiming to improve the current situation. This Chapter sums up the core contents of the publication.

### **Increasing need for support challenges the realisation of equality in education**

From the perspective of equality, the strengths of the Finnish education system are the familiar mainstays: free basic education, an education system structure that enables flexible education paths, and competent and committed education, teaching and guidance staff. Many teachers participating in evaluations have said that especially in challenging times, the possibility of sharing problems with highly skilled colleagues and resolving issues in multiprofessional cooperation has been a great resource in their work.

Major investments have recently been made in Finland in developing **early childhood education and care**, for example by striving to increase the ECEC participating rate and by developing quality management in ECEC. These measures are also investments in the realisation of equality among children. Early childhood education and care of a high quality supports children's equal opportunities and lays the foundation

for their early education path. Currently, as a particular challenge can be seen the shortage of ECEC professionals, which has extensive impacts on the well-being and coping of both the staff and children. The varying regional and local resources also result in inconsistent realisation of equality.

In **basic education**, the pupils' skills levels are similar in different parts of Finland, and there are little or no differences in the average knowledge and skills in different subjects between girls and boys. This indicates a good status of equality at the national level. However, socio-economic factors have an impact on pupils' academic success, and our education system is not alone able to level out the differences between their dissimilar starting points. Differences in skills between schools also increase during basic education. Varying skills levels within teaching groups and increasing support needs create a need for resources and special needs teaching. In addition, attention should be paid to providing support and guidance that respond to pupils' needs, which in turn requires effective identification of prior learning – especially at the transition points of education. Common policies and operating models are consequently called for at the transition point between basic and upper secondary education. Inconsistent assessment practices and different interpretations of curriculum contents also affect the pupils' opportunities for further studies.

Efforts made to improve equality **at the upper secondary level** have included providing more possibilities for individualisation of studies and removing linguistic and other barriers to participation in vocational education and training. Various reforms have been completed in both vocational education and training and general upper secondary school in recent years. The challenges related to upper secondary education, including student welfare, teaching arrangements and reforms relevant to the transition points of studies have been discussed a great deal in recent years. While identifying these challenges has been essential from the viewpoint of student welfare and smooth education paths, information on and understanding of their impacts are obtained with a delay. Currently, a group of pupils who experience challenges related to their literacy and numeracy skills and understanding the school's language of instruction move on from comprehensive school to the upper secondary level. In vocational education and training, a lack of contact teaching has undermined the realisation of equality, especially among students who need special needs or intensified support and those who belong to a linguistic minority. However, the challenges of upper secondary education are not the same in small municipalities and urban areas, and there are also regional differences in the average grades awarded for vocational studies.

**Higher education institutions** aim for providing more flexible and diverse study opportunities for new student groups. They are making efforts to offer harmonised contents to as large a group as possible and, on the other hand, to tailor studies

individually. Digitalisation has also provided an increasing number of students with the possibility to participate in studies offered by universities of applied sciences and universities without leaving their homes, which supports the realisation of equal opportunities and promotes the accessibility of higher education institutions. Especially at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalisation has opened up new possibilities for developing education and continuous learning both nationally and internationally. Higher education students' different capabilities for independent study have been highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the student cohort diversifies, higher education institutions should also pay attention to reinforcing guidance, support and measures that promote togetherness and integration.

### **How can attachment to school, learning and the community be ensured as paths diverge and distance practices become more common?**

Through national evaluation of education and relying on conventional indicators, an idea can be formed of the distribution of competence by region or gender. In addition, it is important to create an understanding of how equally pupils and students feel they are encountered in their everyday studies and how they reflect on what they have experienced. Learning and growth at all levels of education are also associated with meanings that cannot be easily measured. Examining the levels of education exclusively from the viewpoint of effectiveness may conceal the fact that schools, pre-primary schools and day-care centres are places that, at best, produce joy, pleasure, togetherness and well-being for learners in ways that cannot be measured. Setting objectives and indicators or criteria that add detail to them does not in itself guarantee that early childhood education and care and education are delivered to a high standard or equally. In principle, the precondition for many activities carried out within the educational institution related to promoting equality in schools and educational institutions is that learners are present and that the measures can reach them. Consequently, one of the key questions related to equality is how attachment to the school, learning and the community can be created when remote practices become more widespread.


The analogy of the school as a mirror of society raises the question of how the different initial situations and needs of the members of a diversifying society are addressed in education. The message conveyed by students with a foreign background indicates not only a need for support but also concerns over being treated as someone who is different from and not equal to others. Education policy issues and provider level solutions revert to the question of to what extent the individual is required to adapt to existing operating methods underpinned by certain traditions and, on the other hand, to rapidly changing learning environments, and to what extent such adaptation is required of the Finnish education system and



the ways of organising education. These decisions have a bearing on a learner's entire education path and status both in the labour market and as an active agent in society.

#### **Key viewpoints of future equality work:**

- dismantling discriminatory structures and equality in guidance as a precondition for smooth education paths, especially at the transition points of education
- awareness of educational equality perspectives in regional policy decisions, both nationally and regionally
- perceiving the comprehensive and systemic nature of education: the school is not an island separate from the rest of society, an individual is not a learner separate from the rest of the community, and learning is not a separate part of life
- holistic understanding of the learner: wellbeing and experiences of togetherness affect learning outcomes and skills development, and experiences of meaningfulness and attachment are built through shared everyday practices
- recognising the historical continuum of equality: the contents of equality change along with a changing society

A large, light blue number '4' is centered on the page. The number is stylized with a thick stroke and a slight shadow effect. The text is overlaid on the upper part of the number.

***Recommendations for  
promoting equality  
in education***



In this publication, we have described the state of play of equality in education and obstacles to its realisation in the Finnish education system from different perspectives. Collectively, these perspectives build a picture of how skills improve and can be developed throughout life and, on the other hand, how we can observe the very real impacts of many factors identified in early childhood on later stages of the individual's education path and career.

Based on FINEEC's evaluations, the state of play of equality in Finnish education is good by international comparison. However, learners do not have equal opportunities in every ECEC unit, educational institution or higher education institution. Inequalities related to the economy, population and welfare between and within regions have increased in the past few years, and they are reflected on ECEC units, schools, educational institutions and higher education institutions.

To promote equality in education and training, FINEEC makes the following recommendations:

**Learners should be offered smooth, flexible and individual learning paths.**

**Sufficient time and resources should be reserved to support learners' knowledge and skills.**

**Learners' well-being, participation and togetherness should be supported and fostered.**

**Structures and practices that produce inequality in education should be identified and dismantled.**

*Learners should be offered smooth, flexible and individual learning paths.*

**A more systematic approach should be taken to ensuring smooth education paths and transitions.** To build smooth, flexible and individual education paths, flexibility is required of structures, funding and resources, ways of organising education, education planning, and teaching, guidance and education staff. It is important to ensure that the objectives of different levels of education are in line with each other, enabling smooth transitions from one level to the next.

**Transition point cooperation between the levels of education relating to student guidance and information flows should be developed further.** Effective practices for identification of prior learning are needed at the transition points of education, and information should be passed on smoothly. Effective daily cooperation should be supported by creating a systematic approach and structures. The timeliness, adequacy and expertise of guidance are also essential.

**All population groups should have access to continuous learning, career advancement and social inclusion regardless of their socio-economic background.** When developing flexible study paths and application practices, under-represented groups' possibilities of accessing education should be addressed. Schools, educational institutions and higher education institutions should also identify special groups

in all transitions, for example when students apply for a place in instruction with a special emphasis or upper secondary education. The structures and funding mechanisms should enable learners to make individual choices that are fit for purpose. Education paths that progress at a slower pace and directing students to other activities should also be seen as options.

**Studies in Finland's official languages should support the development of academic language skills throughout the learning path.** The availability of language instruction that meets their needs should be guaranteed for learners, and coherent study paths should be built for developing their proficiency in both national languages. The mother tongue syllabus chosen by the student should not become a barrier to progressing on the education path. The advantages and disadvantages of exempting them from studying the second national language should be carefully considered for each student.

*Sufficient time and resources should be reserved to support learners' knowledge and skills.*

**Resources should be allocated to providing learners with the support to which they are entitled.** Support measures should be offered as soon as the need for support arises at all levels of education. Support forms should be developed as required by the needs, and sufficient time and resources should be guaranteed for identifying prior learning and recognising individual needs. Continuity of support measures should be ensured at transition points of education.

**At all levels of education, it should be ensured that the students achieve sufficient capabilities.** Earlier stages of the education path lay the foundation for later studies. To ensure that transitions do not exacerbate the growing skills gaps and put off tackling a learner's challenges, education and training providers should ensure that learners have sufficient capabilities for the next step on their education path. However, it should be acknowledged that developing their skills and participating in society in other ways may be more appropriate for some students than continuing on the education path.

**Sufficient instruction and support for improving their Finnish or Swedish proficiency should be ensured for learners at all levels of education.** The majority of foreign-language speaking learners need support with learning Finnish and Swedish and advancing their language proficiency. Language studies must be adequate and appropriate. Society must offer opportunities for continuous language learning, also at all stages of working life.

*Learners' well-being, participation and togetherness should be supported and fostered.*

**Learners' attachment to their communities, participation and active agency should be supported and strengthened through multiprofessional cooperation.**

Operating models should be developed for supporting learners' wellbeing and reducing their mental stress. To bolster teaching, guidance and education work, sufficient school health care and social welfare services and smooth cooperation between different professional groups are needed. Exchanges of information and interaction with other actors should also be increased.

**The learning environment should be safe and promote school enjoyment.** Each learner should be offered a safe and healthy space in which to grow, learn and study, as well as equal opportunities for action and self-realisation. ECEC units, schools, educational institutions and higher education institutions should consciously strive to create facilities for learners' encounters with each other and staff members, also those not revolving around learning contents.

**Learners' active personal agency in education and civic society should be strengthened.** Learners should be guided to notice different options and encouraged to make choices that are right for them. Educational institutions' practices should enable many types of participation and support the development of learners' independent agency. It is important to address learners' general life situations and the changing skills needs of working life.

**Learners' participation and agency should be supported by ensuring that quality management systems are effective.** Learners' participation in developing education and hearing them as part of feedback systems play a key role in effective quality management in education and are a means of ensuring that equality between learners is realised.

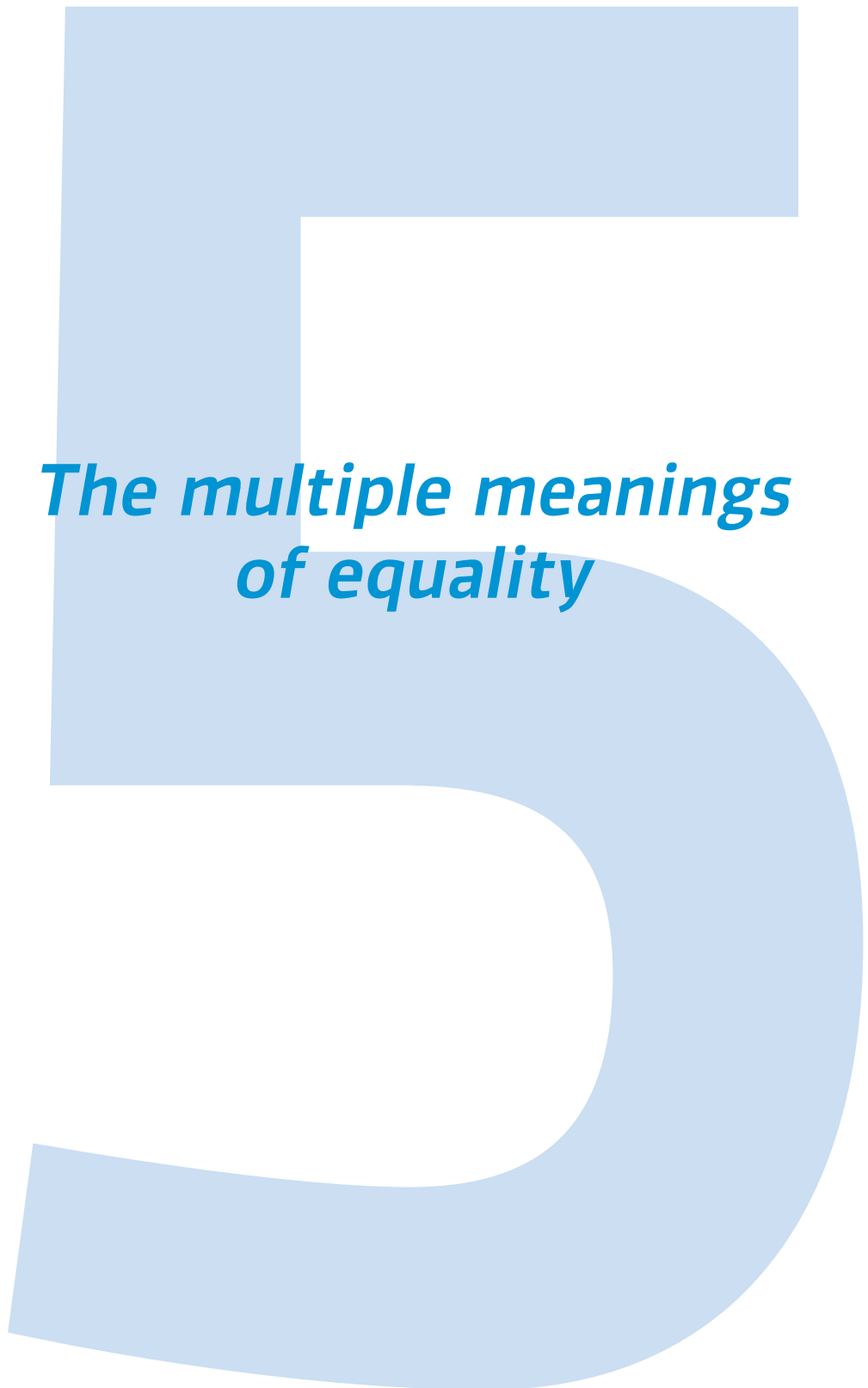
*Structures and practices that produce inequality in education should be identified and dismantled.*

**Teaching, education and guidance professionals' well-being and adequate training should be ensured throughout Finland.** The structure, numbers and competence of staff should meet the needs of the activities. Working conditions and resources have a direct impact on not only the quality of and opportunities for pedagogical work but also the well-being, motivation and coping of the staff.

**Every learner should be offered access to high-quality instruction, regardless of where they live and what their socio-economic background is.** The social, regional and demographic segregation of society poses challenges to the education system, both nationally and locally. Differences between pupils and schools are linked to the diverging educational, economic and socio-cultural resources of families and regions. Municipalities should ensure that basic education is provided as a local service to all pupils. Upper secondary education and higher education institutions should be seen as regional pull factors.

**The competence of teaching, guidance and education staff should be developed systematically.** The foundation for competence, and an understanding of the need for continuous competence development, are laid in teacher education. The staff should be offered opportunities to actively maintain and develop their vocational skills. Teaching and guidance staff should be supported in developing their assessment skills. In addition to competence related to pedagogy and school subjects, the perspective of equality should also be incorporated in teacher education and competence development.

**The effectiveness and delivery of teaching, guidance and education should be monitored, evaluated and developed systematically.** Especially in connection with major transformations, systematic and long-term planning and monitoring are needed. Recurring calls for proposals and short-term projects burden ECEC, education and VET providers and higher education institutions and fail to support systematic development work. Project activities that offer an apt response to the needs should be put on a permanent footing in order to develop the systematic approach and effectiveness of the activities, also at the national level.



*The multiple meanings  
of equality*





iStock Photo

## Concepts and their meanings change over time

The Finnish education system was built on equality. However, the content-related meanings of equality have varied as the historical environment and the setting of educational policy discourse change. At the time when comprehensive school was inaugurated, emphasis was placed on social equality and guaranteeing adequate skills for everyone. From this approach, there has been a shift towards discourse on equality that emphasises individual choices and the individual's rights (Kalalahti & Varjo 2012; Simola et al. 2017). The new views also emphasised reducing regulation on education and liberalisation of school choices (Kalalahti & Varjo 2012). The backdrop to this was an idea of equity that emphasises the individual's rights.

Examinations of equality are associated with drawing conceptual and ethical lines concerning diversity, inequality and equity. While equality is currently at the heart of efforts to develop our education system, interpretations of its content vary. The different meanings are not always stated clearly in public discussion. Their underlying values become visible, however, at the latest in negotiations on concrete measures for achieving the goals of equality. It has been suggested that "when the aim of equality is increasingly taken for granted as the direction of development

and a key goal of social progress, the concept itself will have become vague and even contradictory” (Puohiniemi 2002).

Using the concepts of *equity* and *equality* in parallel is not without problems. These concepts are often perceived as stemming from the same basis and pursuing the same objectives. However, matters considered as the individual's rights, including individual freedom of choice in education, do not always consistently support the objectives of social equality, such as the objective of dismantling segregation in education and levelling out differences between schools. (see Simola et al. 2017.)

Human encounters in the course of data collections for evaluations have shown how experiences and meanings of equality and wishes concerning it vary among education providers, staff and learners, depending on their personal interpretations. They have been shaped by social situations and communities, and on the basis of certain information – perhaps at school. This is why particular attention should be paid to the importance of the school as an agent that strengthens and maintains attitudes. A shared understanding of the content of these concepts lays the foundation for effective dialogue. The following section provides an overview of the official definitions formulated for the key concepts related to equality.

## **Equality**

**Equality** refers to the equal value of all people as individuals and members of society. In the Act on Equality between Women and Men, it refers to gender equality. The Act on Equality between Women and Men prohibits discrimination on such grounds as gender, gender identity and gender expression, pregnancy, childbirth, parenthood and the obligation to provide family care (VN 609/1986). While equality is also mostly used to refer to gender equality in general discussions (Brunila 2009), the term is also used in parallel with the concept of non-discrimination. In literature, both are referred to as 'equality', or more specifically as 'gender equality'.

In today's discussions, equality in education often refers to equal opportunities: society must ensure that all of its members, in other words all children, are guaranteed equal opportunities to grow to their full potential (Metsämuuronen 2019).

Pursuant to the Constitution of Finland, **equality** means that no one shall, without an acceptable reason, be treated differently from other persons on the ground of sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or other reason that concerns his or her person (VN 731/1999). Further provisions on equality are contained in the Non-discrimination Act. More specifically, non-discrimination is associated with considering the impacts of background on each' persons *opportunities*: "In a fair society, reasons related to the person, such as birth or skin colour, must not affect people's *opportunities* to access education, work and different services – the fundamental rights belong to everyone." (ibid.) In some contexts, equality is referred to as equal opportunities, distinguishing between it and equality thinking experienced as conventional, in which equality was thought to mean equal treatment for all. In the field of education equal opportunities can, among other things, mean an equal opportunity to complete the basic education syllabus on the same principles, regardless of the pupil's place of residence, gender and parents' wealth or social status (Jakku-Sihvonen 2009). (Kalalahti & Varjo 2012.)

In the context of equality, we often also talk about **de facto equality** and **positive special treatment**. The concept of de facto equality acknowledges and makes visible the fact that people's starting points and opportunities in society are different and that equal treatment is not always sufficient to guarantee the realisation of equality (Non-Discrimination Ombudsman 2021). A precondition for the realisation of de facto equality is active efforts to eliminate inequality based on discrimination, for example through various promotion measures, including positive special treatment.

In legislation, **positive special treatment** refers to situations where different treatment is appropriate in order to promote equality or to prevent or eliminate harm caused by discrimination (Section 9 of the Non-discrimination Act). All education providers have an obligation to promote equality and, when assessing the realisation of equality, they must pay attention to such aspects as the student admission criteria, learning materials used, measures to prevent harassment and bullying at school, equality of teaching situations, assessment of study attainments and teachers' equality competence.

The current legislative basis of the Finnish education system relies on the idea that not everyone can be considered to be on the same starting line (cf. equality as a starting point), and that treating everyone the same is not enough to promote the realisation of the principles of equality. Instead, education measures aim to achieve de facto equality from different individuals' perspectives (cf. equality as a goal).

## Equity

**Equity** is seen as a value and a principle associated with the right of every person to be treated equally (UN 1948). The content of this concept has been analysed in many different ways in education research. Especially in English education literature, the term *equality* has been interpreted as referring to similar treatment for everyone (or a certain group of people) regardless of their background (Paananen et al. 2018), whereas the term *equity* takes into account the effects of background. The latter aims for an equitable outcome for everyone by taking into account their different starting points (cf. equal opportunities/de facto equality). This means that people are treated individually, enabling them to pursue different goals. (Espinoza 2007, see Paananen et al. 2018)

Equity can also be seen as referring to an individual's right to a certain type of education, in particular, which in some contexts even conflicts with the concept of equality that aims for the common, shared and 'equal' good (see Simola et al. 2017).

# References

- Airas, M., Delahunty, D., Laitinen, M., Shemsedini, G., Stenberg, H., Saarilammi, M., Sarparanta, T., Vuori, H. & Väättäinen H. 2019. Taustalla on väliä. Ulkomaalaistaustaiset opiskelijat korkeakoulupolulla. Julkaisut 22:2019. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/KARVI\\_2219.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/KARVI_2219.pdf)
- Atjonen, P., Laivamaa, H., Levonen, A., Orell, S., Saari, M., Sulonen, K., Tamm, M., Kamppi, P., Rumpu, N., Hietala, R. & Immonen, J. 2019, "ETTÄ TIETÄÄ MISSÄ ON MENOSSA" Oppimisen ja osaamisen arviointi perusopetuksessa ja lukiokoulutuksessa. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 7:2019. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/KARVI\\_0719.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/KARVI_0719.pdf)
- Brunila Kristiina 2009. Parasta ennen. Tasa-arvotyön projektitapaistuminen. Kasvatustieteen laitoksen tutkimuksia 222, Helsingin yliopisto. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-10-4393-2>
- Espinoza, O. 2007. Solving the equity–Equality conceptual dilemma: A new model for analysis of the educational process. *Educational Research*, 49(4), 343–363.
- Goman, J., Hievanen, R., Kiesi, J., Huhtanen, M., Vuojus, T., Eskola, S., Karvonen, S., Kullas-Norrgård, K., Lahtinen, T., Majanen, A., & Ristolainen, J. 2021a. Erityinen tuki voimavaraksi – Arviointi ammatillisen koulutuksen erityisestä tuesta. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 17:2021. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/KARVI\\_1721.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/KARVI_1721.pdf)
- Goman, J., Rumpu, N., Kiesi, J., Hietala, R., Hilpinen, M., Kankkonen, H., Kjaldman, I.-O., Niinistö-Sivuranta, S., Nykänen, S., Pantsar, T., Piilonen, H., Raudasoja, A., Siippainen, M., Toni, A. & Vuorinen, R. 2020. Vaihtoehtoja, valintoja ja uusia alkuja – Arviointi nuorten opintopoluista ja ohjauksesta perusopetuksen ja toisen asteen nivelvaiheessa. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 6:2020. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/KARVI\\_0620.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/KARVI_0620.pdf)
- Goman, J., Huusko, J., Isoaho, K., Lehikko, A., Metsämuuronen, J., Rumpu, N., Seppälä, H., Venäläinen, S. & Åkerlund, C. 2021b. Poikkeuksellisten opetusjärjestelyjen vaikutukset tasa-arvon ja yhdenvertaisuuden toteutumiseen eri koulutusasteilla. Arviointihankkeen osa III: Kansallisen arvioinnin yhteenvedo ja suositukset. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 8:2021. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2021/04/KARVI\\_0821.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2021/04/KARVI_0821.pdf)
- Hakamäki-Stylman, V. 2021. Ammatillinen osaaminen ja pedagoginen toiminta logistiikan perustutkinnossa. Julkaisut 7:2021. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2021/03/KARVI\\_0621.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2021/03/KARVI_0621.pdf)
- Harjunen, E., & Rautopuro, J. 2015. Kielenkäytön ajattelua ja ajattelun kielentämistä. Äidin kielen ja kirjallisuuden oppimistulokset perusopetuksen päättövaiheessa 2014: keskiössä kielentuntemus ja kirjoittaminen. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 8:2015. [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2015/04/KARVI\\_08151.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2015/04/KARVI_08151.pdf)
- Harkoma, S., Vlasov, J. & Marjanen, J. 2021 Varhaiskasvatuksen kansallisten arviointityökalujen pilotointi. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 13:2021. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/KARVI\\_1321.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/KARVI_1321.pdf)

- HE 148/2021 vp. Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle laiksi varhaiskasvatustilain muuttamisesta. <https://okm.fi/delegate/file/95523>
- Hellgren, J. & Marjanen, J. 2020. Svenska och litteratur i slutet av årskurs 9. Resultat av en utvärdering av lärresultat varen 2019. NCU. Publikationer 18:2020. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/KARVI\\_1820.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/KARVI_1820.pdf).
- Hellgren, J., Marjanen, J. & Karlsson, J. 2021. Modersmålets lilla longitudinella utvärdering – Från slutet av grundskolan till studentprovet 2014–2017. Sammanfattningar 22:2020. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/NCU\\_T2220.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/NCU_T2220.pdf)
- Hievanen, R., Frisk, T., Väättäin, H., Mustonen, K., Kaivola, J., Koli, A., Liski, S., Muotka, V. & Wikman-Immonen, A. 2020. Maahanmuuttajien koulutuspolut – Arviointi vapaan sivistystyön lukutaitokoulutuksesta, aikuisten perusopetuksesta ja ammatillisen koulutuksen kielitaitovaatimusten joustavoittamisesta. Julkaisut 11:2020. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/KARVI\\_1120.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/KARVI_1120.pdf)
- Härmälä, M., Huhtanen, M., Puukko, M. & Marjanen, J. 2019. A-englannin oppimistulokset 7. vuosiluokan alussa 2018. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 13:2019. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2019/05/KARVI\\_1319.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2019/05/KARVI_1319.pdf)
- Jakku-Sihvonen, R. 2009. Tasa-arvo ja laatu koulutusjärjestelmän kehittämisperusteina. Teoksessa Nyssölä, Kari, Jakku-Sihvonen, Ritva (toim.), Alueellinen vaihtelu koulutuksessa – Temaattinen tarkastelu alueellisen tasa-arvon näkökulmasta. Helsinki: Opetushallitus, 25–37.
- Julin, S. & Rautopuro, J. (2016). *Läksyt tekijäänsä neuvovat. Perusopetuksen matematiikan oppimistulosten arviointi 9. vuosiluokalla 2015*. Karvi. Julkaisut 20:2016. Kiinteä osoite: [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2016/04/KARVI\\_2016.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2016/04/KARVI_2016.pdf)
- Julin, S. & Rumpu, N. 2018. Työrauhan ja turvallisen oppimisympäristön arviointi perusopetuksessa ja lukiokoulutuksessa. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 6: 2018. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2018/05/KARVI\\_0618.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2018/05/KARVI_0618.pdf)
- Juutinen, J., Siippainen, A. Marjanen, J., Sarkkinen, T., Lundkvist, M., Mykkänen, A., Raitala, M., Rissanen, M-J. & Ruokonen, I. 2021. Pedagogisia jatkumoa ja ilmaisun iloa! Viisivuotiaiden pedagogiikka ja taito- ja taidekasvatuksen nykytila varhaiskasvatuksessa. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 9:2021. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2021/05/KARVI\\_9\\_2021.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2021/05/KARVI_9_2021.pdf)
- Jyrhämä, R. 2021. Opettajan pedagogiset opinnot 60 op. Laaja-alainen opettajakelpoisuus – tilannekuvaus 2021. Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö. Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön julkaisuja 2021:41. Helsinki. [https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/163554/OKM\\_2021\\_41.pdf](https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/163554/OKM_2021_41.pdf)
- Kalalahti, M. & Varjo, J. 2012. Tasa-arvo ja oikeudenmukaisuus perusopetukseen sijoittumisessa ja valikoitumisessa. Kasvatus ja Aika 1012:1, 39–55. [http://www.kasvatus-ja-aika.fi/dokumentit/kalalahti\\_ ja\\_varjo\\_0103122343.pdf](http://www.kasvatus-ja-aika.fi/dokumentit/kalalahti_ ja_varjo_0103122343.pdf)
- Kamppi, P., Lepola, L., Marjanen, J., Filpus, N.-S., Välijärvi, J., Ahva, T., Kasurinen, H., Koski, K., Salminen, J. & Värri, K. 2021. Lukion tuntijakokeilun arviointi. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 25:2021. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/KARVI\\_2521..pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/KARVI_2521..pdf)
- Kauppinen, M. & Marjanen, J. 2020. Millaista on yhdeksäsluokkalaisten kielellinen osaaminen? Suomen kielen ja kirjallisuuden oppimistulokset perusopetuksen päättövaiheessa 2019. Karvi. Julkaisut 13:2020. [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2020/08/KARVI\\_1320.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2020/08/KARVI_1320.pdf).

- Kilpeläinen, P. 2021. Ammatillinen osaaminen ja pedagoginen toiminta sosiaali- ja terveysalan perustutkinnossa. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 6:2021. [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2021/03/KARVI\\_0621.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2021/03/KARVI_0621.pdf)
- Konkola, R., Hauta-aho, H., Hiilamo, H., Karttunen, M., Niemi, J., Tuominen, M., Huusko, M. & Väättäinen, H. 2021. Sosiaali- ja terveysalan korkeakoulutuksen arviointi. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 14:2021. [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2021/06/KARVI\\_1421.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2021/06/KARVI_1421.pdf)
- Kuukka, K. & Metsämuuronen, J. 2016. Perusopetuksen päättövaiheen suomi toisena kielenä (S2) -oppimäärän oppimistulosten arviointi 2015. Julkaisut 13:2016. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/KARVI\\_1316.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/KARVI_1316.pdf)
- Metsämuuronen, J. 2019. Educational Assessment and Some Related Indicators of Educational Equality and Equity. In: Education Quarterly Reviews, Vol.2, No.4, 770–788.
- Metsämuuronen, J., & Nousiainen, S. 2021. Matematiikkaa Covid-19-pandemian varjossa. Matematiikan osaaminen 9. luokan lopussa keväällä 2021. Julkaisut 27:2021. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/KARVI\\_2721.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/KARVI_2721.pdf)
- Metsämuuronen, J., & Salonen, L. 2017. Matemaattisen osaamisen piirteitä ammatillisen koulutuksen lopussa 2015 ja pitkän ajan muutoksia. Julkaisut 2:2017. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/KARVI\\_0217.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/KARVI_0217.pdf)
- Metsämuuronen, J., & Tuohilampi, L. 2017. Matemaattisen osaaminen piirteitä lukiokoulutuksen lopussa 2015. Julkaisut 3:2017. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2017/03/KARVI\\_0317.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2017/03/KARVI_0317.pdf)
- Moitus, S., Weimer, L. & Välimaa, J. 2020. Flexible learning pathways in higher education. Julkaisut 12:2020. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/KARVI\\_1220.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/KARVI_1220.pdf)
- Nordblad, M., Apajalahti, T., Huusko, M. & Seppälä, H. 2019. Laatu hallussa. Yhteenveto korkeakoulujen auditoinneista 2012–2018. Tiivistelmät 8:2018. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/KARVI\\_T0819.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/KARVI_T0819.pdf)
- Nori, H., Juusola, H., Kohtamäki, V., Lyytinen, A. & Kivistö, J. 2021. Korkeakoulutuksen saavutettavuus ja tasa-arvo Suomessa ja verrokkimaissa: GATE-hankkeen loppuraportti. Valtioneuvoston selvitys- ja tutkimustoiminnan julkaisusarja 2021:12. Valtioneuvoston kanslia. Helsinki. [https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/162889/VNTEAS\\_2021\\_12.pdf](https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/162889/VNTEAS_2021_12.pdf)
- OKM 2021. Oikeus Oppia. Koulutuksellisen tasa-arvon ja positiivisen erityiskohtelun edistämistoimia varhaiskasvatuksessa sekä esi- ja perusopetuksessa valmistuvan työryhmän väliraportti. Ehdotus koulutuksellisen tasa-arvon määrärahan vakiinnuttamiseksi sekä lainvalmistelussa huomioitaviksi näkökulmiksi Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön julkaisu- ja 2021:43. Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö. Helsinki. [https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/163522/OKM\\_2021\\_43.pdf](https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/163522/OKM_2021_43.pdf)
- Opetushallitus 2021. Suomi toisena kielenä. <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/suomi-toisena-kielena-opetus> (luettu 7.11.2021)
- Opetushallitus 2019. Osaaminen 2035. Raportit ja selvitykset 2019:3. [https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/osaaminen\\_2035.pdf](https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/osaaminen_2035.pdf)
- Paananen, M., Repo, K., Eerola, P. & Alasuutari, M. 2018. Unravelling conceptualizations of (in) equality in early childhood education and care system, Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, DOI: 10.1080/20020317.2018.1485423

- Pitkänen, K., Hievanen, R., Kirjavainen, T., Suortamo M. & ja Lepola, L. 2017. Valtiontalouden säästöjen vaikutukset sivistyksellisiin oikeuksiin. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 27:2017. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/KARVI\\_2717.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/KARVI_2717.pdf)
- Poroila, A. (toim.) 2021. Korona varhaiskasvatuksen arjessa – Rajoituksia ja hyviä käytänteitä vuonna 2020. Tiivistelmät 4:2021. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/KARVI\\_T0421.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/KARVI_T0421.pdf)
- Puohiniemi, M. 2002. Arvot, asenteet ja ajankuva. Opaskirja suomalaisen arkielämän tulkintaan. Vantaa: Limor kustannus.
- Pyykkö, R., Tolonen, M., Levä, K., Mahlamäki-Kultanen, S., Pantermöller, M., Pettersson, T., Saarinen, S. & Huusko, M. 2020. Humanistisen alan korkeakoulutuksen arviointi. Julkaisut 1:2020. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/KARVI\\_0120.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/KARVI_0120.pdf)
- Repo, L., Paananen, M., Eskelinen, M., Mattila, V., Lerkkanen, M.-K., Gammelgård, L., Ulvinen, J., Marjanen, J., Kivistö, A. & Hjelt, H. (2019). Varhaiskasvatuksen laatu arjessa. Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelmien toteutuminen päiväkodeissa ja perhepäivähoidossa. Julkaisut 15:2019. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2019/09/KARVI\\_1519.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2019/09/KARVI_1519.pdf)
- Repo, L., Paananen, M., Mattila, V., Lerkkanen, M.-L., Eskelinen, M., Gammelgård, L., Ulvinen, J., Hjelt, H. & Marjanen, J. 2018. Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteiden 2016 toimeenpanon arviointi – Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelmien käyttöönotto ja sisällöt. Julkaisut 16:2018. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2018/08/Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman-toimeenpanon-arviointi\\_2018.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2018/08/Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman-toimeenpanon-arviointi_2018.pdf)
- Ristikari, T., Keski-Säntti, M., Sutela, E., Haapakorva, P., Kiilakoski, T., Pekkarinen, E., Kääriälä, A., Aaltonen, M., Huotari, T., Merikukka, M., Salo, J., Juutinen, A., Pesonen-Smith, A., & Gissler, M. (2018). *Suomi lasten kasvuympäristönä: Kahdeksantoista vuoden seuranta vuonna 1997 syntyneistä*. Helsinki: Terveystieteiden tutkimuskeskus. Kiinteä osoite: [http://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/137104/URN\\_ISBN\\_978-952-343-152-2.pdf](http://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/137104/URN_ISBN_978-952-343-152-2.pdf)
- Räsänen, A., Frisk, T., Hietala, R., Huttunen, M., Korpi, A., & Koski, L. 2015. Ammatillisen koulutuksen järjestäjien laadunhallintajärjestelmien tila. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 20:2015. Helsinki. <https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/raportti-ammatillisen-koulutuksen-jarjestajien-laadunhallintajarjestelmien-tila-vuonna-2015.pdf>
- Saarinen, J., Siekkinen, K., Laimi, T., Ahonen, A., Bernelius, V., Brunila, K., Gustavsson, M., Kauppinen, M. & Norrena, J., 2021a. Tasa-arvo teoiksi ja todeksi. Sukupuolten sisäisten ja välisten oppimistuloseröjen syitä ja taustoja perusopetuksessa. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 19:2021 Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/KARVI\\_1921.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/KARVI_1921.pdf)
- Saarinen, J., Venäläinen, S., Johnson P., Cantell, H., Jakobsson, G., Koivisto P., Routti M., Väänänen J., Huhtanen M. & Viitala M. 2021b. OPS kehittämistyön kompassina. Esi- ja perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelmien perusteiden 2014 toimeenpanon arviointi. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 1:2021. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2021/02/KARVI\\_0121.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2021/02/KARVI_0121.pdf)
- Siippainen, A., Paananen, M., Metsämuuronen, J., Repo, L., Sarkkinen, S., Alasuutari, M., Koivisto, P., Saarikallio-Torp, M. & Kirjavainen, T. 2020. Viisivuotiaiden maksuttoman varhaiskasvatuskokeilun arvioinnin toinen vaihe: Varhaiskasvatukseen osallistuminen, kokeilun kustannukset ja järjestäminen. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 14:2020. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/KARVI\\_1420.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/KARVI_1420.pdf)



- Siippainen, A., Repo, L., Metsämuuronen, J., Kivistö, A., Alasuutari, M., Koivisto, P. & Saarikallio-Torp, M. 2019. Viisivuotiaiden maksuttoman varhaiskasvatuksen kokeilun ensimmäisen vaiheen arviointi. Varhaiskasvatukseen osallistuminen ja kokeilun järjestäminen. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 16:2019. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2019/09/KARVI\\_1619.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2019/09/KARVI_1619.pdf)
- Siippainen, A., Sarkkinen, T., Vlasov, J., Marjanen, J., Fonsén, E., Heikkinen, S., Hjelt, H., Lahtinen, J., Lohi, N. & Mäkelä, M. 2021. Yhdessä yritetään tehdä parasta mahdollista varhaiskasvatusta ja laatua jokaisen lapsen päivään” Varhaiskasvatuksen moninaiset johtamisrakenteet ja johtaminen. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 23:2021. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/KARVI\\_2321.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/KARVI_2321.pdf)
- Simola H., Kauko J., Varjo J., Kalalahti M. & Sahlström F. 2017. Dynamics in Education Politics. Understanding and explaining the Finnish case. Routledge. New York. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203068793>
- Suomen virallinen tilasto 2021a. Erityisopetus [verkkajulkaisu]. ISSN=1799-1595. 2020. Helsinki: Tilastokeskus. Kiinteä osoite: [http://www.stat.fi/til/erop/2020/erop\\_2020\\_2021-06-08\\_tie\\_001\\_fi.html](http://www.stat.fi/til/erop/2020/erop_2020_2021-06-08_tie_001_fi.html).
- Suomen virallinen tilasto 2021b. Väestörakenne [verkkajulkaisu]. ISSN=1797-5379. vuosikat-saus 2020. Helsinki: Tilastokeskus. Kiinteä osoite: [http://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/2020/02/vaerak\\_2020\\_02\\_2021-05-28\\_tie\\_001\\_fi.html](http://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/2020/02/vaerak_2020_02_2021-05-28_tie_001_fi.html)
- Tilastokeskus 2021a. Maahanmuuttajat väestössä. <https://www.stat.fi/tup/maahanmuutto/maahanmuuttajat-vaestossa.html> (luettu 3.11.2021)
- Tilastokeskus 2021b. Tilastot aiheittain. Kiinteä osoite: [www.stat.fi/til/aiheet.html](http://www.stat.fi/til/aiheet.html)
- Tilastokeskus 2021c. Käsitteet ja määritelmät. <https://www.stat.fi/tup/maahanmuutto/kasitteet-ja-maaritelmat.html> (luettu 20.10.2021)
- Ukkola, A. & Metsämuuronen, J. 2019. Alkumittaus – matematiikan ja äidinkielen ja kirjallisuuden osaaminen ensimmäisen luokan alussa. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 17:2019. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/KARVI\\_1719.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/KARVI_1719.pdf)
- Ukkola, A. & Metsämuuronen, J. 2021. Matematiikan ja äidinkielen ja kirjallisuuden osaaminen kolmannen luokan alussa. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 20:2021. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/KARVI\\_2021.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/KARVI_2021.pdf)
- Ukkola, A., Metsämuuronen, J. & Paananen, M. 2020. Alkumittauksen syventäviä kysymyksiä. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 10:2020. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/KARVI\\_Alkumittaus.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/KARVI_Alkumittaus.pdf)
- UN 1948, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. United Nations. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/> (luettu 4.8.2021).
- Venäläinen, S., Saarinen, J., Johnson, P., Cantell, H., Jakobsson, G., Koivisto, P., Routti, M., Väänänen, J., Huhtanen, M., Kauppinen, L. & Viitala, M. 2020. Näkymiä OPS-matkan varrelta – Esi- ja perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelmien perusteiden 2014 toimeenpanon arviointi. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Julkaisut 5:2020. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2020/01/KARVI\\_0520.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2020/01/KARVI_0520.pdf)
- Vilkama, K. & Bernelius, V. 2019. Pikkulapsiperheiden muuttoliike muovaa koulujen oppilasohjaa Helsingissä. Kaupunkitiedon verkkolehti Kvartti, 3/2019. Kiinteä osoite: <https://www.kvartti.fi/fi/artikkelit/pikkulapsiperheiden-muuttoliike-muovaa-koulujen-oppilasohjaa-helsingissa>.
- Vipunen 2021. Opetushallinnon tilastopalvelu. [www.vipunen.fi](http://www.vipunen.fi) (luettu 24.10.2021)

- VN 2019. Pääministeri Sanna Marinin hallituksen ohjelma 10.12.2019: Osallistava ja osaava Suomi – sosiaalisesti, taloudellisesti ja ekologisesti kestävä yhteiskunta Valtioneuvoston julkaisuja 2019:31. Valtioneuvosto. Helsinki. [https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161931/VN\\_2019\\_31.pdf](https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161931/VN_2019_31.pdf)
- VN 1214/2020. Oppivelvollisuuslaki. Annettu Helsingissä 30.12.2020. <https://finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2020/20201214>
- VN 1325/2014. Yhdenvertaisuuslaki. Annettu Helsingissä 30.12.2014. <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2014/20141325#Pidp446776720>
- VN 793/2018. Valtioneuvoston asetus perusopetuslaissa tarkoitettujen opetuksen valtakunnallisista tavoitteista ja perusopetuksen tuntijaosta annetun valtioneuvoston asetuksen 6 §:n muuttamisesta. Kiinteä osoite: <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2018/20180793>
- VN 540/2018. Varhaiskasvatuslaki 540/2018. Annettu Helsingissä 13.7.2018. <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2018/20180540>
- VN 731/1999. Suomen perustuslaki. Annettu Helsingissä 11.6.1999. <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1999/19990731#a731-1999>
- VN 628/1998. Perusopetuslaki 628/1998. Annettu Helsingissä 21.8.1998. <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1998/19980628>
- VN 609/1986. Laki naisten ja miesten tasa-arvosta. Annettu Helsingissä 8.8.1986. <https://finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1986/19860609#P7>
- Yhdenvertaisuusvaltuutettu 2021. Mitä on yhdenvertaisuus? <https://yhdenvertaisuus.fi/mita-on-yhdenvertaisuus>. (luettu 5.8.2021)
- Åkerlund, C., Marjanen, J. & Lepola, L. 2019. Lärresultat i finska i åk 6 (suomen kielen oppimistulokset 6. vuosiluokalla) – Kevään 2018 arviointitulokset. Julkaisut 6:2019. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus. Helsinki. [https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/KARVI\\_0619.pdf](https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/KARVI_0619.pdf)



- ▲ EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE
- ▲ PRE-PRIMARY AND BASIC EDUCATION
- ▲ GENERAL UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION
- ▲ VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
- ▲ HIGHER EDUCATION

**P**romoting equality is one of the key objectives of education evaluation activities and focus areas of FINEEC's ongoing evaluation plan period (2020–2023). Evaluation information is used to promote the realisation of equality by seeking answers to the following questions:

- What is the state of equality and equal opportunities in education in Finland?
- Which factors enhance or hinder the implementation of equality in education?

This publication contains information on equality and participation in education. It also aims to build a picture to underpin discussions on education policy and to identify areas in need of development. identify areas in need of development.

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) is an independent agency responsible for the evaluation of education. It operates as a separate unit within the Finnish National Agency for Education. It implements system and thematic evaluations, learning outcome evaluations and field-specific evaluations. Moreover, FINEEC supports providers of education and training and higher education institutions in matters related to evaluation and quality assurance, as well as advances the evaluation of education.

ISBN 978-952-206-719-7 pdf  
ISSN 2342-4184 (pdf)

Finnish Education Evaluation  
Centre P.O. Box 380  
(Hakaniemenranta 6)  
FI-00531 HELSINKI  
Telephone: +358 29 533 5500  
Fax: +358 29 533 5501  
karvi.fi