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## **The Learning of and in Sami in the Norwegian School Education**

### **Abstract:**

In the minority policy of Norway there was a nationalistic period (approx. 1860-1950) when learning and teaching in and of Sami, the use of Sami were strictly prohibited. The measures of this assimilative policy caused that only a small part of the Sami population has proficiency in Sami. After the Second World War the minority (language) policy of Norway changed, and the Sami undertook their ethnic-linguistic identity. In this process the international ideological tendencies played an important role. In 1989 the Sami Law came into force in Norway and it also provided linguistic rights to the North, Lule and South Sami. In addition, the law on the primary and secondary education regulates the Sami education in Norway. On the basis of the research conducted in Tromsø in 2009-2010 and a Norwegian survey (Samisk Språkundersøkelse. NF-rapport nr. 7/2012) the aim is to present the possibilities and goals of learning in and of Sami in the school education in Norway nowadays. It will be possible to observe as well how these support the bilingualism among the Sami children.

### **Introduction**

The Sami live in large numbers in Northern Norway, Northern Sweden, Northern Finland and Russia. According to an UN-Report of 2011 the total number of the Sami can be estimated at between 70,000 and 100,000; between 40,000-60,000 of them reside in Norway, 15,000-20,000 in Sweden, 9,000 in Finland and 2,000 in Russia.

Determining the exact number is very difficult, because census data concerning the ethnic descent is not available, only estimations can be considered, on the basis of residence/living area, proficiency of Sami and/or the Sami electoral register.

It is certain that the greatest proportion of the Sami live in Norway, although they form a relative majority only in a few settlements (Kautokeino 85-90%, Karasjok approx. 80%, Nesseby approx. 72% and Tana approx. 54%).

The Sami were never culturally unified and they did not regard themselves as unified, only the surrounding Scandinavian peoples regarded them unified. They can be classified according to their language, and to the geographical area of their residence.

### **1. The Sami languages and the Sami people in Norway**

Sami exists in many varieties, which compose a continuum and between some of them there are great differences. Therefore the Finno-Ugric literature speaks about Sami languages (E. Helander 1995, I. Seurujärvi-Kari/ S. Pedersen/ V. Hirvonen 1997, P. Sammallahti 1998, H.F. Marten 2004). The Sami languages belong to the Uralic

languages, which form the Baltic-Finnic-Sami main branch of the language family (M. Korhonen 1988: 264).

Today, six Sami varieties have their own written language and orthography: Inari Sami, North Sami, Kildin Sami, Lule Sami, South Sami and Skolt Sami (M. Svonni 1998: 25, J.M. Kuhmunen 2005: 1).

Taking into account the number of speakers, it is North Sami which is spoken mainly (approx. 30,000 speakers) followed by Lule Sami (approx. 2,000 speakers). The other Sami languages have less than 1,000 speakers – e.g. South Sami, which has approx. only 500 speakers. For this reason the UNESCO Red Book on Endangered Languages (and the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger) regards North Sami as definitely endangered, and the Lule and South Sami related to Norway as seriously endangered.

## **2. The nationalistic period of the Norwegian Sami policy**

Until 19<sup>th</sup> century the countries on whose territory the Sami lived, did not develop any specific policies concerning themselves. The Sami were allowed to follow their own way of life and could roam the Northern territories (J. M. Kuhmunen 2005, M. Schönfeldt 2007: 36, J. Robbins 2011: 57).

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, the whole situation took a different turn in the form of dealing with ethnic-linguistic minorities. It was the period of nationalistic romanticism: the period of revival of national feelings and ideas. Norwegian nationalism intensified and it led to a hostile atmosphere towards the Sami and other ethnic minorities in the country. This attitude also manifested itself in the policy concerning minorities.

1848 brought particularly negative changes for the Sami. The Norwegianization started, with as its main aim the assimilation of the Sami into the mainstream community. In the interests of this aim many different measures were taken: such as the foundation of the so-called Finnefondet (Finnish Funds) in 1851 (H. Minde 2005: 11), the establishment of special kindergartens and boarding schools, the withdrawal of bilingual textbooks, and the replacement of Sami teachers by Norwegian teachers in order for the Sami children to learn Norwegian as early and successfully as possible (S. Lund 2003: 16–27).

In addition, a new teaching programme, instructions and law about the public schools were introduced, which stated that the main language of instruction should be Norwegian. Hence, Sami and other minority languages could only be used as a supporting language to help with explanations at school (M. Jávorszky 1991: 36, O.M. Hætta 2002: 58). Indeed, the use of Sami was strictly prohibited, not only during lessons, but during break time, too. Norwegian teachers were made to settle down in the Sami areas, and pupils were motivated to learn Norwegian as fast and effectively as possible.

The state forcibly infringed into the life of its ethnic minorities, using education as an instrument. Aside education, other instruments were also used in the settling of Norwegians and others. The encroachment of the field of education however, was the most aggressive and efficient.

### **3. Results of this policy – the knowledge of Sami among the Sami population**

One of the results of this unconcealed and aggressive assimilating policy is that the number of Sami able to read and write in their mother tongue is nowadays considerably low. According to a survey conducted in 2000, 42% of the respondents could read in Sami quite well or very well, while only 27% could write well in Sami; 21% can understand and speak Sami, but they cannot read it nor write it (SEG 2000: 19, 22).

### **4. Changes in the Sami policy of Norway**

After the Second World War the Norwegian state changed its minority policy and gave up with Norwegianization (Ø. Stenersen/ I. Libæk 2003: 163). The attitude towards each other, and towards each other's language and culture headed in a positive direction. In the establishment of the welfare state all citizens were regarded as equal, even so, the Sami do realize that in addition to the preservation and development of their mother tongue, the knowledge of Norwegian is indispensable, too (I. Bjørklund 2003: 9). In this process, the international ideological tendencies and the increasingly stronger movement of the indigenous people from the 1960s played an important role. In the 1970s, the Sami undertook the preservation and development of their ethnic and linguistic identity – they began to appreciate their ethnic affiliation, culture and language (G. Minnerup/ P. Solberg 2011: 8–9).

From the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century many more small as well as big, important as well as less meaningful groups and organizations were founded (Ø. Stenersen/ I. Libæk 2003: 163–165). A unified Sami organization however, could only first be formed in 1980s. The culmination of this process was the passing of the Sami Act in 1987 that permitted and supported the establishment of the Sami Parliament in 1989 (Ø. Stenersen/ I. Libæk 2003: 164).

### **5. Effects of the changes for Sami education**

With the change in the nationalistic character of the Norwegian minority (language) policy, the nationalistic language sociology was replaced by vernacularism, which supports the minority languages and motivates the revitalization of the language (I. Lanstyák 2009: 32). This process was typical of the Sami teaching at school as well as of the Sami language courses for adults who could not write and read in Sami. Therefore the writing and publishing of books in Sami became supported by the Norwegian Cultural Board.

At the moment Norway makes efforts to stimulate the use of Sami in ever increasing areas of life, as in the public administration and the use of the internet.

### **6. Laws related to Sami education**

The Sami Act (1987) has as its main aim the creation of a legal framework which will enable the Sami group in Norway to retain and develop its language, culture and communal life. The Act determines that everybody has a right to the learning of Sami – in specific, the Act on primary and secondary schools, which regulates the education of, and in, Sami. Chapter 6 includes the provisions related to Sami education in primary and secondary education. The Act accepts the North, Lule and South Sami languages and

refers to them. Most of its provisions cover only the so-called administrative area for the Sami language<sup>1</sup>. Its main rule states that every child of primary school age has the right to learn Sami and to be educated in Sami, in the administrative area for the Sami language – irrespective of the number of pupils. Outside of the above mentioned area other rules apply, e.g. in one settlement there should be at least ten people who intend to learn Sami, or in Sami for the teaching to be allowed. In the case that less than six people stay in a group, teaching can no longer be provided. In situations when the school cannot provide this education with its own teaching staff, other alternatives can be chosen. Certain settlements have the possibility of finding solutions in the following educational situations: they can decide about the teaching in Sami in one or more schools in the settlement, and they can prescribe that every primary school learner has to participate in the learning of Sami.

The Sami have the right to learn Sami in upper secondary education, too. If the required teachers are not available in the school, the ministry can determine the possibilities and the forms of education. The ministry and the municipality can decide whether certain upper secondary schools should offer the teaching of, or in Sami, and of special Sami subjects.

Prescriptions related to the curriculum about the Sami education, in the primary and secondary schools, in consideration to departmental rules, come from the Sami Parliament.

## **7. The conditions of Sami education**

In 1959, with the modification of the Law for State Schools, education in Sami became possible. First, however, the right conditions for its teaching had to be created, therefore Sami education could be launched until later, in 1964 (S. Lund 2003: 36). The first Sami grammar school class was set up two years later in 1969 in Karasjok (S. Lund 2003: 46).

For a long time after the legitimization of Sami education, many difficulties were encountered – there were no prepared curriculums, adequate textbooks, and above all qualified teachers.

Although the attitude of the Norwegian state towards the Sami had changed, during the first decades after the introduction of Sami education, the curriculums had either a complete lack, or only a limited presence of Sami contents.

The first curriculum in which the Sami language and content appeared was Mønsterplanen from 1974 (M74). In spite the fact that the teaching in Sami was legitimate, Norwegian remained the main language in the Sami education. New to the curriculum was the plan to feature Norwegian as a foreign language.

The curriculum for primary schools in 1987 (M87) contained the subject of Sami as a first language, Sami as a second language and Norwegian as a second language for Sami children. It was the first curriculum which differentiated between pupils who have Sami, or another minority language as a first language. Bilingualisation of children appeared to be the aim in the document.

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<sup>1</sup> At the moment 9 municipalities: Karasjok, Kautokeino, Nesseby, Porsanger, Tana, Kåfjord, Lavangen (all North Sami), Snåsa (South Sami), Tysfjord (Lule Sami). It can be enlarged.

With the reform of 1997 two parallel curriculums were produced: L97 and L97 Samisk for Sami education. The latter applied to every pupil inside the Sami administrative area. According to this curriculum, pupils have the possibility to choose between Sami as a first language, Sami as a second language, Sami language and culture, Norwegian as a first language (and Finnish as a second language) and Norwegian as a first language.<sup>2</sup>

With the reform in 2006, a new national core curriculum was introduced instead of L97: the Kunnskapsløftet (meaning: *increase of knowledge*). It contains a special, parallel document for Sami education (Kunnskapsløftet Samisk) that includes education inside the Sami administrative area as well as Sami education in Norway, outside this area.

The Sami curriculum has been worked out for several subjects and for the subjects not included in Sami the national core curriculum is valid. The Sami curriculum can be found in the following subjects: christianity, religion and life style, food and health, music, nature, society, duodji (Sami handicraft), Sami as a first language, Sami as a second language, religion and ethics, geography, history, reindeerkeeping and Norwegian for students who have Sami as a first language.

In general, under the curriculum, every pupil/student has to get to know the Sami history, culture, and way of life. Naturally, in other settlements and regions, these Sami contents are included in many different ways in the everyday life and education of the community. In settlements which are part of the Sami administrative area, all pupils follow the Sami curriculum and they may choose Sami as the language of education, or alternatively Norwegian with the learning of Sami. Outside this area, children may be educated in Sami individually. Linguistically, the curricula for Sami as a first or as a second language are particularly important because these subjects, together with the subject of Norwegian, can contribute to the development of bilingualism, or functional bilingualism in the children.

In 1988, the Sami College (Samisk høgskole) was established in Kautokeino. A year later it began to offer the course of Sami Teacher Training. Since it is situated in the North Sami area, the language of instruction is North Sami. The college has a Centre for Sami Education (Senter for Samisk i opplæringa), its aim is the development of the proficiency in Sami among the Sami population with the use of teaching and research. The institution offers, among others, kindergarten teacher and school teacher training, general Sami teacher training, special courses in Norwegian for educators teaching minorities, courses on bilingual children and courses in language practice and culture in different Sami languages.

The University of Nordland in Bodø offers teacher training for Lule Sami. It has courses in pre-school teacher education, primary school teacher education, lower secondary teacher education and senior teacher education as well as a module in cultural knowledge with the focus on the Lule Sami area.

Within the area of teachertraining in Norway, it is the University College in Nord-Trøndelag that is responsible for the South Sami language and culture. It offers training for future kindergarten teachers, primary and lower secondary school teachers and

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<sup>2</sup> see [skuvla.info/skolehist/magga-n.htm](http://skuvla.info/skolehist/magga-n.htm)

courses in the South Sami language and culture which can also be followed as online courses.

The lack of coursebooks in Sami or with the Sami content has recently started to diminish and several such coursebooks are today in circulation.<sup>3</sup> All three Sami languages are present on the palette however, as North Sami possesses the biggest number of speakers and educational institutions it also has the biggest number of materials on offer. The printed materials are supplemented with an increasing number of digital resources.<sup>4</sup> These make the work of teachers and pupils/students easier as well as present several options in cases when a Sami teacher cannot be provided to teach their specialisation in the required location.

### **8. A description of survey conducted in Norway (2009-2010) and of the Norwegian research on Sami (2012)**

The core of conducted research consists of a survey with a questionnaire. The main aim of it was to study the attitude of the North Sami group in Norway towards the present-day minority language policy and to see to what degree they use, or can use, the linguistic rights provided by the state. In addition to the questionnaire other data acquisition methods were used, such as observation during visits to educational institutions, interviews and informal conversations.

I carried out my research in Tromsø and its surroundings in Northern Norway, in 2009 and 2010. Tromsø is the County Town of Troms County. It lies adjacent to Finnmark County, which composes the central Sami area (North Sami).

The North Sami group was the focus of my research. During the sampling for the questionnaire people between 18 and 65 years of age and from the active-age groups were chosen, but I did not preclude elderly Sami. Altogether, 126 people participated in the survey.

The selection of the first respondents was done through contacts from two kindergartens, from the school and from the university. With the snowball method more and more people were added to the research sample. The participating institutions were two kindergartens, the Gimle barnehage and the Prestvannet barnehage, a primary school, the Prestvannet skole and the University of Tromsø with its Centre for Sami Studies.

In the last 10-15 years much research has been conducted in Norway with as the central issue the knowledge and the use of Sami. One of these, and the most recent one is the *Samisk språkundersøkelse 2012*, a Norwegian survey about the Sami language situation. It deals with the proportion of Sami people who know Sami with the degree of their knowledge, the use of Sami and their participation in the Sami education. The three main Sami groups in Norway took part in the survey: the North Sami, Lule Sami and South Sami. Among other methods a quantitative survey with a questionnaire was used, which was answered by 2,000 respondents.

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<sup>3</sup> their list can be viewed on <http://www.statped.no>

<sup>4</sup> <http://e-skuvla.no>

## 9. Research results

Since the study in my survey looked at the complex linguistic situation of the Sami in Tromsø and its surroundings such as language skills, use of language, identity, attitude towards the Sami language and this paper is aimed at the learning in, and of, Sami in the school education in Norway, only the relevant issues will be dealt with.

On the basis of my research in Tromsø in 2009-2010 and the Norwegian surveys from 2000 and 2012 the importance of learning in and of, Sami during school education; the assessment for Sami as well as the utilization of these possibilities were highlighted.

### 9.1. Competences in Sami –the place and method of learning Sami by the respondents

More than 62% of the respondents learnt Sami in the family context. The appropriate family background makes this possible for them since roughly, in an equal proportion of the respondents, both parents are of Sami descent. Additionally, nearly 15% of the respondents stated they had learnt the language with their family and at kindergarten and/or at school. In addition to learning Sami within the family context, 15% followed a course to develop a higher degree of fluency. There were no respondents who had acquired their knowledge of Sami exclusively in educational institutions.

If we look at the competences of the respondents we can easily notice that the most striking deficiencies appear in the writing skills in Sami. These outcomes are the obvious consequences of the method of language acquisition, or language learning. This means that the language competences of most of the respondents previously obtained in the family context, from the parents, are above all based on oral communication. Accordingly, the oral language competences are dominant. Learning of, and proficiency in writing in Sami seems more typical among those who have participated in the teaching of or in, Sami, in addition to learning within the family context, on courses and in educational institutions. In the case of elderly people, the use and learning of writing in Sami, is not a characteristic feature. This is most probably because before 1970s common North Sami orthography did not exist.

The Sami knowledge that the informants do have also constitutes an essential issue in the Sami language research of 2012. The respondents were asked about their language skills, their use of Sami and the education they and their children completed. As regards the knowledge of Sami almost 45% of the respondents can speak it fluently, very well or well, but only 32% can write in Sami very well or well.

The respondents between 18 and 59 years of age provided the following information about the form in which they learned Sami in educational institutions:

Age	language education	kindergarten	primary school	lower secondary school	upper secondary school
18-29	1. language	32%	28%	28%	23%
	2. language	9%	33%	29%	30%
30-39	1. language	15%	15%	17%	11%
	2. language	4%	31%	26%	28%

40-49	1. language	3%	7%	7%	3%
	2. language	5%	19%	20%	19%
50-59	1. language	0	2%	3%	5%
	2. language	2%	7%	13%	15%

*Table 1. Participating in Sami education by age (Språkundørsøkelse 2012: 173)*

In all the three educational levels, less than a third of the respondents had Sami as a first language. In the last two age groups, the number of people who learned Sami as a first language at all educational levels, is very low (0-7%).

In the higher educational levels this proportion decreased in the age groups of 18-29, and 30-39. In the case of older generations, the number of participants in the learning of Sami as a first language increased, from kindergarten to upper secondary school.

In regards to the children of the respondents, 47% do not receive Sami education in any form, 66% of them are educated at the kindergarten. The three most frequent arguments for it are: the lack of offer, the lack of qualified teachers and the opinion that there is no help with the homework.

Most children have Sami (as a second language or as the language of instruction or as a first language) in primary and lower secondary schools (65% and 62% respectively). The proportion of those who have it as a first language and of those who have it as a second language is approximately the same (about 30%). Also, in upper secondary school, the number of students that have Sami as a first language and of those learning the language as second language is nearly equal.

A very important piece of information was that only 20% of the involved parents said that their child/children has/have education in Sami. This means that very few Sami children receive education in Sami and can use the language in different topics, situations and areas – all these factors do not help the children to become functionally bilingual.

## **9.2 Information regarding the children of the respondents**

With the questions regarding the children of the respondents information about their knowledge in Sami and the way and place of language learning, as well as the language-use customs of the families was successfully collected.

The age group at primary school is dominant (more than 41%), 25% are younger than 5, 8% are older than 50, 6% are students in upper secondary school and only 4 % are between 40 and 50, and 2% between 26 and 30.

There were efforts to map the oral knowledge in Sami of the children. The results are as follows: a vast majority of the children (nearly 67%) in the opinion of their parents speaks Sami well, about 20% speak it to a certain degree and under 14% do not speak it at all. These results are absolutely in accordance with the results concerning the language competences of their parents.

Since almost all of the participants of the said survey speak Sami, it is by all means necessary to take into consideration a comprehensive Norwegian survey in order to form a more complete notion of the language skills of the younger generation and thereby of more real present and future prospects of retention of the Sami language.



Regarding the children of the respondents 47% of them have not received Sami instruction at all. Only 25% of the children take part in the learning of Sami as a second language and 28% of Sami as a first language or receive education in Sami.

	no Sami education	little Sami education/ Sami as a second language	education in Sami/ Sami as a first language
kindergarten	66%	10%	24%
primary school	35%	35%	30%
lower secondary school	38%	30%	32%
upper secondary school	43%	30%	27%
altogether	47%	25%	28%

*Table 2. Participation in Sami education of the children of the respondents  
(Språkundervisning 2012: 174)*

An essential stipulation for the survival of the language is its appropriate acquisition and developing complex language competence by the younger generations. In this – because a considerable part of the Sami population has no or few competences in Sami, an overriding important role falls on the educational institutions – first of all on the kindergartens, the primary and the lower secondary schools.

### **9.3 Willingness for Sami education and motivation for it**

All of my interviewees and conversation partners – teachers, parents, and students, named kindergarten and school as the most important present-day factors in the retention of the Sami language. This is due to the fact that these institutions are able to provide the right environment for the acquisition of the language to children of numerous families, which have no knowledge of Sami with the exception of the Sami administrative area where people have competences in Sami in greater numbers and therefore families play the most important role in the language learning and acquisition.

According to the results of research and observation the tendency for an increasing number of people – in the case when parents or grandparents do not speak the language anymore and are beginning to learn Sami – is not only apparent in Tromsø but also in the wider region.

## **10. Conclusion**

Most respondents hold the view that kindergarten and school education in Sami is very important. In addition, however, the use of Sami outside these institutions is seen as very crucial, too.

The resources for the use of Sami in varied locations (kindergartens, schools with education in Sami, offices, shops with Sami speaking staff) are significantly different as it is mainly in the settlements inside the Sami administrative area that more opportunities exist for Sami education (learning in Sami, Sami as a first language, Sami as a second language) as well as for the use of language in everyday situations. The available

opportunities outside this area are limited and Tromsø can be seen as an example of this phenomenon. Only one Sami kindergarten functions in town and no Sami school. Besides there is only one Sami class in a school and Sami teaching solely in certain schools. The children typically do not have the possibility to continue with education in Sami after kindergarten and even more so after primary school.

As a consequence of these deficiencies many children with the Sami background do not or cannot choose education in Sami. A noticeable tendency is that the children at school prefer to learn Sami as a second language rather than as a first language, which strengthens the position of Norwegian and hinders the development of bilingualism of the younger generations rendering the revitalization of the Sami languages more difficult. All these factors affect mostly the Lule and South Sami.

Within the span of a few decades the attitude to and the practice of Sami education has changed considerably. However, as we can see there are many measures to be taken in the near future both on the part of the state and on the part of the Sami communities in order to reach the aims drawn up in the interests of the Sami languages.

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