



## **Mother tongue tuition for foreign background students – what does it mean for their learning? Results and implications from a Swedish study**

*Eva Wirén*

© 2009 CIDREE/DVO: Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe/Department for Educational Development, Flemish Community of Belgium – Curriculum Division, Brussels, Belgium.

All rights reserved. No part of the publication may be reproduced, stored in an information storage and retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.



**CIDREE**

Consortium of Institutions for Development  
and Research in Education in Europe

# Mother tongue tuition for foreign background students – what does it mean for their learning? Results and implications from a Swedish study

—Eva Wirén

## Abstract

*Over the past decades Sweden has gradually developed to a country characterized by an increasing diversity of people from varying cultural backgrounds. Almost a fifth of students in Swedish compulsory education have today a foreign background; either as born abroad or as born in Sweden of foreign-born parents. These students are entitled to tuition in Swedish as a second language. They are also entitled to tuition in their mother tongues, where mother tongue tuition in the Swedish context refers to tuition for foreign background students in their native languages. Comparing patterns of academic success the difference between students of Swedish background and students of foreign background is significant. The focus in this chapter is on the practice of mother tongue tuition for foreign background students, and on what this tuition means for their learning, in terms of how they succeed in their studies. The question of mother tongue tuition for foreign background students in the Swedish school represents a political issue and debate in Sweden. The results indicate a possible effect of participation in mother tongue tuition, apparent by the generally higher merit ratings for these foreign background students – a result which contrasts the marginalised position that this tuition seems to occupy in Swedish schools. The context for the study is the Swedish compulsory education, i.e., with students up to age of fifteen. The chapter draws heavily on results from a study carried out in 2009 at Skolverket, the National Agency for Education. The study involved three sub-studies: a national survey study, a qualitative interview study and analyses of a statistical longitudinal data-material.*

## An introduction

The focus in this chapter is on mother tongue tuition for students with foreign backgrounds, and what this practice really means for their learning in terms of how they succeed in their studies. Mother tongue tuition in Sweden refers to tuition in the respective native language for foreign background students.<sup>1</sup> The results indicate a possible positive effect of participating in this tuition for foreign background students, a result which is analysed in relation to other factors that might explain these students' comparatively higher merit-ratings.

The context for the study is the Swedish compulsory education, i.e., students up to the age of fifteen. The chapter draws heavily on results from a recently performed study at the National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2009). The study involved a nationally representative survey study directed to the head(s) of schools with a minimum of 10% of students with another mother tongue, a qualitative interview study performed at 13 schools in four districts, and analyses within a statistical longitudinal data material in a follow-up of students in compulsory education year 3 to 9.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This means that the term is not used when referring to tuition in Swedish, which instead is referred to as tuition in Swedish (or in Swedish as a second language, which is an option for foreign background students.)

<sup>2</sup> The majority of children in school's year 3 are 9 years old and 15 years old in school's year 9

## **An increasing number of students with a mother tongue other than Swedish, and a general pattern of lower school results**

In 2008/09 almost a fifth or 18% of students in compulsory education had a different origin, either born abroad or born in Sweden with foreign-born parents. For each year the number has increased by 1% or 2% and according to the population prognoses the proportion of foreign-born people is continuously increasing. As a figure of comparison, about 100 000 people immigrated to Sweden in 2007 (SCB, 2008).

Whereas Swedish is a first language and mother tongue for the majority of students in the Swedish school, it represents a second, or perhaps third, language for an increasing number of students. In practice, for this group of students this means studying the various subjects taught in school in parallel to trying to master Swedish, as a language and as the language of teaching. This may serve as one explanation to the general pattern of lower school results for the group of students with a foreign background, as displayed in table 1. As a group, students with foreign background perform about twenty points less in comparison with Swedish background students, and about twice as many are not eligible for studies at upper secondary school or did not reach the goals in all subjects (Table 1).

**Table 1. Students leaving compulsory education in 2007/08 who had, or should have had, grades from school year 9**

	Average merit rating	Percentage of students (%) who are eligible for studies at upper secondary school	Percentage of students (%) who did not reach the goals in one, several or all subjects
Total (N)	209,3	88,9	23,4
Students with Swedish background	212,0	91,0	20,8
Students with foreign background	192,7	76,6	39,0

However, although the average pattern is convincing, it is important to recognise that the variation within the group of foreign background students is considerable, hidden by the average. The difference between having immigrated as a student, and being born in Sweden with immigrated parents, is one main source of variation. This difference relates in particular to the question of when the foreign-born students have arrived to their new country. Students who arrive before school has started do not perform much worse on average than students with foreign background born in the country. Thus, arriving late to the Swedish school is a major factor in the generally lower school result for the group of immigrated students. Another generally important factor concerns students' social backgrounds. The influence from family background is as considerable for foreign background students as for students with a Swedish background (Skolverket, 2004).

The variation in terms of linguistic competence, and also of cultural and social backgrounds, among students – within school and frequently within the same classroom – represents one of the key challenges for schools, and for individual teachers, to confront.

## **A school for all – and what the Swedish school has to offer students with a foreign background**

In the sixties, Sweden changed from a parallel school system to a comprehensive system – a school for all. The main idea of this reformation was to provide equal opportunities for children to have an education, irrespective of their family background.<sup>3</sup> With today's increasingly higher number of students with a foreign background, and more generally put, with an increasingly varied group of students, the question is what tools schools have to meet this demand in terms of teaching and education.

The Compulsory School Ordinance regulates in principle three specific actions concerning the group of students with a foreign background (see below). One is the teaching of *Swedish as a second language* and the other is to offer *mother tongue tuition*. The practice of *study guidance*, which involves the possibility for students to have the teaching and their studies within various subjects supported by explanations in their mother tongue, is also regulated.

### **Swedish as a second language**

The head of the school decides the need for foreign background students' to participate in the teaching of Swedish as a second language where the Ordinance specifies this as if necessary. As such, the teaching of Swedish as a second language is specified to replace the teaching of Swedish, i.e., the students are supposed to participate only in the one or the other of the two subjects.<sup>4</sup>

### **Mother tongue tuition**

Mother tongue tuition is a question for the municipality, and not decided by the school, which is obliged to offer the tuition to students with a mother tongue other than Swedish. Some conditions regulate this offer. In order to participate, the students are required to have a basic knowledge in their mother tongue and it must constitute a daily spoken language. The regulation does not force municipalities to offer the tuition for mainly two reasons. One is the case of less than five students within the municipality, and the other is a lack of teacher competence.

### **Study guidance**

The Ordinance specifies that a foreign background student in need of study guidance in his or her mother tongue is entitled to such guidance.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Sixten Marklund has described the reformation of the education from a parallel to a comprehensive system in several publications. A summarised report can be found in Marklund, S (1984)

<sup>4</sup> In practice, however, this is not always the situation. Instead various studies reveals a rather more mixed up, and confused, situation in school as relates to the teaching of Swedish for this group of students. See for instance Skolverket (2009)

<sup>5</sup> The Ordinance does not, however, specify very clearly what is actually meant by study guidance, which is displayed as a point of confusion for many schools in the study.

# Mother tongue tuition as a school subject

## Present system and history

An integration policy that declared the right for immigrants to keep and develop their original culture and language laid the ground for the introduction in 1977 of state financed mother tongue tuition in the educational system, i.e., the right for foreign background students to get tuition in their native language. The strategy, formulated in the late sixties, for the state's action about the question of integration of immigrants came largely as a response to the immigration of labour occurring at the time. The agreement reached on an immigrant and minority policy in the mid 70s contrasted the earlier prevailing idea – that society must be built on cultural unity in order to achieve the goals of the Welfare state of social equality. Whereas a perspective of assimilation had dominated much of earlier Swedish politics, which was directed towards national minorities, the individual cultural identity was now regarded as a value. Behind the new political slogan “equality, liberty of choice and collaboration” was the idea that inhabitants with another geographical and/or cultural background should be integrated in the Swedish society maintaining their culture of origin (Borevi, 1998).

By the time of the 1977 reform municipalities were mandated to offer mother tongue tuition to foreign background students entitled to such tuition.<sup>6</sup> The introduction of mother tongue tuition reflected a tolerance towards other cultural values, languages and religions (Skolverket, 2003) and except for introducing a teacher education for mother tongue teachers both bilingual education and active bilingualism in school were supported.

In the early nineties the educational system was decentralised. This change represented a major shift in educational politics, going from a centralised state control to a governing by municipalities. The economic conditions changed, which, among other things, affected the practice of mother tongue tuition. Today it is up to the individual municipality to decide how to spend their total budget, as special funding controlled by the state is no longer the case. Perhaps in response to these changes, a drastic reduction of mother tongue tuition has occurred over time (Skolverket, 2003) The teacher education for mother tongue teaching was discontinued in 1991, but a present proposal for a new teacher education argues in favour of establishing an education for mother tongue teachers (SOU, 2008: 109).

## A political issue and debate

The question on the necessity of offering mother tongue tuition for foreign background students in Swedish school is political, and is debated from time to time. One principal concern expressed is the idea that the teaching is of no use, or even negative, for students' learning, and that it would be more effective, from a societal point of view, to support the learning of Swedish. The proponents in favour of mother tongue tuition for foreign background students lean largely on the arguments from bilingual research, namely that proficient knowledge in the first language is positive for the learning of a second language and, in general positive for the learning process.

---

<sup>6</sup> To offer tuition was already in practice, but occurred on a voluntary basis before the reformation

Modern language steering documents include, in addition to a perspective on the language itself, a perspective on the culture surrounding the language in question. Regarding steering documents for mother tongue tuition for foreign background students, they also include perspectives on language and culture, but in addition include aspects of cultural identity, for the individual. Many mother tongue teachers in the study describe the two components of the subject, language and cultural identity, as equally important in their tuition and for their students. In this sense the mother tongue subject can be seen to have a wider purpose when compared to other modern languages.

In the current policy of meriting studies in modern language for entrance to university studies, proficiency in the mother tongue has not been included.<sup>7</sup> Whereas current educational policies otherwise value knowledge of languages, the possession of a mother tongue other than Swedish is not regarded as an asset. This reflects what seems to be an ambivalent attitude towards the position of language, as it could be regarded obvious for language, including proficiency in mother tongue(s), to hold a generally strong position within school and the educational system (Nihlfors, 2008).

The lower status for other mother tongues than Swedish is also reflected when considering mother tongue tuition for foreign background students at school.

## **Mother tongue tuition at school – status and position**

### **A marginalised and peripheral activity in many schools**

The Ordinance obligates the municipality to be responsible for mother tongue tuition for foreign background students, but the tuition normally occurs within the school. The municipality most often employs the mother tongue teachers, and the teachers are not, in this sense, a part of the teacher collective at the school in which the tuition occurs. That the municipality is responsible for mother tongue tuition might partly explain that schools frequently demonstrate a lack of insight into this business, even if the tuition occurs on the schools' grounds and for their students. That mother tongue tuition is a responsibility of the municipality – and not for the school – also makes sense. There can be substantial practical problems involved for the single school with few students, to, for instance, locate a teacher. At a majority of schools there is not one but a number of different linguistic student backgrounds represented, which would require equally many teachers for tuition in the various mother tongues that these students represent.

Mother tongue tuition appears largely to be an external activity in relation to other school-based activities in the study. Many teachers describe a work situation that underlines such an interpretation. Their stories include teaching outside school hours, traipsing between different schools, and sometimes even having to look for a room in which to hold the lesson.

The results from the survey study corroborate the teachers' statements with a pattern of mother tongue tuition as scheduled mainly outside the school's timetable. But, nine out of ten schools offer the tuition, and for each of the primary school years, although a little less

---

<sup>7</sup> With the exception for a specific module in a later course which is rewarded with half a merit point.

frequent for the later years. Normally the tuition is limited to between 40 and 60 minutes per week. Six out of ten schools are in principle offering all entitled foreign background students tuition. To offer all students is a more common response from schools where every other student has another mother tongue. The schools offering tuition to just some of the entitled students have by contrast more often a low number of foreign background students (less than 15%). When asked about the reason why only some students and not all are offered tuition, they frequently mention a lack of teacher competence, remembering that the Ordinance leaves room for the possibility of this excuse.

Summing up, mother tongue tuition for foreign background students appears to a high degree to be a marginalised and peripheral activity in school. This does not take away the fact that many other subject teachers in the study expressed that they would like to see a more developed cooperation between mother tongue teachers and themselves. These teachers regard it a waste not to make use of the mother tongue teachers' specific insights and competence, for the benefit of their teaching other subjects to the same group of foreign background students.

## **Possible effects of participation in mother tongue tuition**

### **Patterns of participation**

Not all foreign background students participate in mother tongue tuition. As opposed to other subjects taught in school, mother tongue tuition is optional for the students to attend. There are various organisational reasons for students not to participate in the tuition. A first prerequisite for their attendance is of course that the school/municipality in fact offers the tuition to their students. That this is not always the case was noted above; where in particular schools with fewer foreign background students not always offer all entitled students tuition. Reasons for not participating in this tuition given by the mother tongue teachers and students reflect large difficulties inherent within the organisation of the tuition, pointing for instance to the extra hours of work outside the school timetable.

Both the longitudinal statistical study and the questionnaire study serve to shed light over the students' participation. Official statistics report an average of every second student participating (of those foreign background students who are entitled) in the tuition. The present study can add that participation is more common in schools with a high percentage (> 50%) of students with a foreign background – where two out of three students participate. A majority, about seven out of ten, both of first and second-generation immigrant students have participated in the tuition at some point between their school year 3 and 9.<sup>8</sup> Noteworthy is that almost a fifth of students, who in official statistics represent a Swedish background but who have one foreign-born parent, are also participating in the tuition. On average, the students participate in the tuition for about three years, but a longer period is more common for foreign-born students, i.e. first generation immigrant students.

Comparatively more students participate in the lower school years and participation decreases continually thereafter up until school years 6, or 7 (age 12 -13), then increases

<sup>8</sup> Where this time-span refers to the design of the study used for these analyses. The first data collected refer to school year 3. The students who are registered to have participated in year 3 can quite likely have participated in the tuition already for year 1.

again in the later school years 7-9. This pattern of participation fits well with the reports from the mother tongue teachers. Reaching their teens, more students take an interest in their identity and cultural belonging, where for foreign background students the tuition in their mother tongue offers a closer contact with their cultural origin.

## Merit ratings

Longitudinal statistical material offers the possibility of studying the relation between participation in different tuition and merit-ratings. Considering the general pattern of merit ratings<sup>9</sup> for students with different backgrounds, the greatest difference is visible, as might be expected, between foreign-born students and the students with Swedish background (Table 2) Students from a mixed family background, i.e. with one Swedish parent and one parent born abroad, have an almost identical merit rating when compared with students from a Swedish background, i.e., born in Sweden of Swedish-born parents.

**Table 2 Average merit rating for students of different background**

Students with Swedish background	Students born abroad	Students born in Sweden of foreign-born parents	Students born in Sweden of one Swedish and one foreign-born parent
207,92	195,05	199,18	205,82
(n=6896)	(n=548) <sup>9</sup>	(n=634)	(n=875)

School sources often point out inadequate knowledge of Swedish as an important factor in the general lower average results for students with a foreign background. Part of the difference is however possible to relate to a difference in family background, where foreign-born students more often come from homes with low level of education and a weaker connection to the labour market.<sup>10</sup> In addition, parents could be disadvantaged more generally in terms of their possibilities to support their children with their schoolwork. Aside from language issues it can also be a question of parents being less familiar with school, and the educational system, irrespective of their ambitions and desires for their children's education.

The crucial question then is what schools can do to even out these types of initial value differences for students. This is a question not least of what tuition students are offered, and the significance it has for their learning.

## A positive effect of mother tongue tuition ...

With the marked exception of a large-scale American study on the effects of participation in different types of study programs for foreign background students (Wayne and Collier, 1997) it is difficult to find any example of studies that get close to this line of investigation – what mother tongue tuition actually means for foreign background students' learning

<sup>9</sup> The merit rating is based on the 16 best grades in the students' final grade (a criteria-related grading in four levels; Fail (0), Pass (10), Pass with distinction (15) and Pass with special distinction (20)) with a maximum of 320 points.

<sup>10</sup> For the relative importance of these type of background factors, see Skolverket (2004)

(Bakken, 2007) Considering the debate about mother tongue tuition there are good reasons to try to shed some light on the question of whether the tuition has any positive, negative, or for that matter, no effect at all on the students' learning.

For the purpose of this chapter, we will specifically look at the merit-ratings for the students participating in mother tongue tuition, using the group of Swedish background students as a main group of reference.<sup>11</sup>

According to the Compulsory School Ordinance, there are four possible career patterns when considering the total group of students with a mother tongue other than Swedish in the Swedish compulsory education, all of which appear in the analysis of the statistical material at hand. The most common career is the group of foreign background students that participated to various degrees in both mother tongue tuition and in Swedish as a second language.<sup>12</sup> Another group of foreign background students did not participate in any other tuition than for Swedish background students, i.e., not in mother tongue tuition or in Swedish as a second language.<sup>13</sup> That leaves two respective groups of foreign background students who participated in one of the two subjects, either in Swedish as a second language<sup>14</sup> or in mother tongue tuition.<sup>15</sup>

Comparing students' merit ratings in table 2 above to the merit-ratings displayed for foreign background students participating in mother tongue tuition in table 3 below, the pattern is consistent and obvious. Students who have participated in mother tongue tuition leave school with comparatively better grades, as expressed in their comparatively higher on average merit ratings (Table 2 and Table 3).

**Table 3. Average merit ratings for students of different foreign background who participated in mother tongue tuition<sup>16</sup>**

Students born abroad	Students born in Sweden of foreign-born parents	Students born in Sweden of one Swedish and one foreign-born parent	Total group of students
216,27	228,57	213,99	220,22
(55)	(n=129)	(n=138)	(n=322)

**...or are there other possible explanations?**

Is it then possible to understand the high merit ratings for foreign background students who have participated in mother tongue tuition? It is possible to state with certainty that participation in mother tongue tuition co-varies with merit rating for foreign background

<sup>11</sup> The full description is available in Skolverket (2009)  
<sup>12</sup> Representing 50% of the students born in Sweden of foreign-born parents, and 68% of students born abroad  
<sup>13</sup> Representing 18% of the students born in Sweden of foreign-born parents, and 9% of students born abroad. Concerning this group of students born abroad it represents mainly students from other Nordic countries.  
<sup>14</sup> Representing 11% of the students born in Sweden of foreign-born parents, and 13% of students born abroad  
<sup>15</sup> Representing 21% of the students born in Sweden of foreign-born parents, and 10% of students born abroad  
<sup>16</sup> The table includes only students who has studied mother tongue but not in combination with Swedish as a second language. The group that participates in mother tongue tuition is larger, if including also the students who participate in Swedish as a second language. This group is not included here (but in the report 321 for the interested reader), since it would require quite another discussion not in focus for the purpose of this chapter.

students, but not with certainty that the high merit-ratings in fact are caused by the tuition, and the tuition alone. When, for instance, remembering that the tuition normally does not encompass more than one lesson (40-60 min) per week, it is fully legitimate to ask if there could be other possible and perhaps even more plausible explanations to the observed higher merit-ratings for these students.

The longitudinal statistical material used in the study gives a possibility to get closer to the question of effect, by studying the merit ratings for different “career patterns” for foreign-background students in compulsory education. It should however directly be noted that it is not a question of causal relationships, which would require an altogether different type of study. The material used for the analysis is however unique insofar as it tracks (a representative sample of) a year cohort of students in compulsory education from year 3 until the end of year 9. The time-period concerned is between the spring terms of 1997 to the spring term of 2003, when the students left school from year 9. Of relevance for these analyses are the annual administrative data (covering details of participation) and certain register detail information regarding, for instance, migration and the parents’ level of education and employment that are linked to the students.

As it is obviously hard to control all other possible circumstances that can come into this relation, it makes sense to comment on the results more in terms of *possible* than *actual* effects.

Having said this, several of the interviewed mother tongue teachers emphasised that the foreign background students who do well in the mother tongue subject usually also do well in other subjects. The teachers saw this as an effect of their tuition and said that the mother tongue tuition for these students strengthens them in the rest of their schoolwork. This is not only attributed to the learning of the language in question, but the teachers also stress the importance of the tuition for the students’ identity building and general self-confidence.

It can be stated that the *number of years* in tuition seems to have certain significance. A comparison among students in this regard indicates a somewhat higher merit rating for students who have participated for a comparatively longer time.

The statistical study also admits to checks for certain background information, such as the students’ gender and cultural and social backgrounds.

Considering *gender*, there could be an effect of girls being over-represented in the tuition, recognising that girls generally have better results in school. But considering the gender distribution in mother tongue tuition, it proved to be relatively even and a co-variation between the participation and the higher merit rating is visible for both boys and girls.

Nor is it the case that students with a background in *certain countries* participate to a greater extent in mother tongue tuition, so the factor of specific linguistic backgrounds cannot be attributed to the high merit ratings.

The students’ *social backgrounds* are of relevance for their participation in mother tongue tuition. Almost half the group of foreign background students who participated in the

tuition has parents who have a post-secondary education. This background seems to be of relevance for the recruitment of students to the tuition. This does not, however, mean that it is this profile of higher social background that serves to explain the higher merit ratings.

In fact, it is important to note that the observed differences in recruitment profile do not seem to have a direct effect on the observed high merit rating for these students. Comparing groups of foreign background students deriving from different social backgrounds, the merit rating is consistently higher within each of these different social background groups for the students who have in common participation in mother tongue tuition.

*In summary*, the pattern of higher merit ratings for foreign background students who have participated in mother tongue tuition is consistent, and cannot be explained by any gender, cultural or social background differences for these students. As we have managed to rule out some of the possible other influences on the observed relationship we still cannot conclude with certainty and speak in terms of cause and effect. An interpretation is called for to make sense of the observed co-variation between participation and merit-ratings.

### **Possible interpretations of an observed relationship**

One possible interpretation is in line with bilingual research, saying that proficiency in the mother tongue is positive for students' second language learning, here Swedish. This works positively for their general academic performance, Swedish being the school language – which in turn is likely to produce high merit ratings.

An alternative interpretation would be that right from the start it is a question of the “best” students with the most motivated parents, irrespective of social backgrounds, who can “afford” extra studies in the mother tongue tuition – students who perhaps, even without this tuition, would have left school with the high merit ratings. Motivation and ambition are examples of factors that we cannot control for in this data material.

Looking at the contrasting interpretations outlined above, accepting that we cannot state the relationship with absolute certainty, the results indicate strongly that there might be an effect of participating in mother tongue tuition for foreign background students' learning. Considering the debate arguing that the tuition might be negative or at least insignificant for these students in terms of their learning in school, the study gives evidence against such presuppositions.

### **Consequences and proposals for action – a step forward**

Because of the results of the study concerning the practice of mother tongue tuition for foreign background students in Swedish schools and the eventual effect on such tuition for students learning, a natural next step is to deal with possible consequences. What can be done to improve the situation in compulsory education for students with another mother tongue?

#### **At the regulating, governing level**

All in all, the study describes an activity for students with foreign background in Swedish

compulsory education that varies to a large extent depending on the specific school. Besides varying access to mother tongue tuition the variation between schools is highly visible when considering more generally what schools have to offer students with a foreign background. This includes also study guidance and tuition in Swedish as a second language. From the Swedish perspective that emphasises equality as an important aspect of the educational system, it cannot be regarded as fair that the prerequisites of students with foreign background are so different at different schools.

Looking at the responsibility for the governing level, the regulation is fundamental. Schools' often confused attitude over mother tongue tuition indicates a possible need for revision for the purpose of clarification. The fact that the ordinance is directed at a municipality level plays a part in the schools' confusion concerning mother tongue tuition. Although there are good reasons to coordinate activities at a municipal level, as outlined above, there is a need to highlight schools' responsibility in this regard. The practice of mother tongue tuition can, and should be, regarded as part of the schools' general responsibility and lookout for their students.

Taking into account the possible positive effect of participation in mother tongue tuition for foreign background students' merit ratings, a careful analysis of what can be done at a regulatory, governing level is well motivated. This involves both activities strengthening the students' participation in the tuition and a strengthening of the position of mother tongue tuition in Swedish compulsory education. The need for improved integration between mother tongue teaching activities and other teaching activities at the schools were emphasised in the study by teachers and heads of schools. In this context it is worth mentioning that the present proposal for a new Educational Act (Ds, 2009:25) suggests the Act to regulate both mother tongue tuition and mother tongue support (at pre-school) and in addition suggests that mother tongue support should also be regulated for the pre-school class<sup>17</sup>. In summary this can be said to represent a strengthening of mother tongue tuition in Swedish compulsory education.

As a more immediate response to the study's results the Agency organises a series of conferences under the theme Education and Integration during 2009. The purpose is to create a platform for knowledge-based conjoint activities for different parties with connection to the question, including other educational authorities and representatives from the political level. With the same aim a network of professionals has been established within the Agency focusing on the area of education and integration.

### **At the local level – schools and municipalities**

Overall, for schools to be more effective in their work with foreign background students a long term, conscientious and considered approach is required. Cummins, (2002) emphasises the importance of drawing up a policy at the school that includes the entire school staff and not only language teachers. He also indicates the necessity of regarding the work on such a policy as a process, rather than a product expressed in a fixed document. As regards the practice of mother tongue tuition, it is essential that schools understand the potential

---

<sup>17</sup> Which signifies the specific class for six-year olds, the year in-between pre-school and school

of this tuition for the education of their foreign background students. It is also important for schools to organise conjoint activities also involving mother tongue teachers, and in general to strive for a higher degree of cooperation and collaboration between the various actors in the organisation. The question of education for foreign background students should involve all teachers, and not only the mother tongue teacher or the teachers in Swedish as a second language. Research has indicated the necessity of coordination at all levels as far as the multilingual students are concerned, such as integration of language and subject tuition (Axelsson and Bunar, 2006, Hyltenstam and Lindberg, 2004).

This is, of course, a question of competence, where the study has highlighted the importance for the school to be well prepared, by equipping itself with and utilising competence in questions of diversity and second language perspectives, not least important knowledge for the head(s) of the school.

In the study, there are positive examples of schools that demonstrate a more wholeheartedly developed perspective on the question of education for foreign background students. In common for these (few) schools are that they use these students as a starting point in their planning and organisation of work in general, rather than as regarding them a separate problem to be dealt with. The argument is that a developed perspective on language issues is for the benefit of all students, not only for the students with a foreign background.

This changed perspective – to regard multilingualism as a resource and mainstream politics rather than as an isolated problem – might in the end be the more important point of conclusion for schools as well as for the policy level to reflect on.

## References

- AXELSSON, M and BUNAR, N [Eds.]. (2006). Skola, språk och storstad: en antologi om språkutveckling och skolans villkor i det mångkulturella urbana rummet (*School, language and big cities: an anthology on language development and the conditions of school in the multicultural urban space*) Stockholm, Pocky.
- BAKKEN, A. (2007). Virkninger av tilpasset språkopplæring for minoritetsspråklige elever. En kunnskapsöversikt. (*Effects of adapted language education for minority language students Research Summary*) Oslo, NOVA Rapport 10/2007.
- BOREVI, KARIN. (1998). Svensk invandrapolitik under (om)formulering. *Politica*, bind 30 (1998) 2 (*Swedish immigration politics under (re)formulation*).
- CUMMINS, J. (2000). Andraspråksundervisning för skolframgång – en modell för utveckling av skolans språkpolicy (*Second language learning for school success – a model for development of school language policy*) in Naclér, K (Ed.) (2000) Symposium 2000 – ett andraspråksperspektiv på lärande. (*Symposium 2000 – a second language perspective on learning*) Nationellt centrum för sfi och svenska som andraspråk. Stockholm, Sigma förlag.
- Ds 2009: 25 Den nya skollagen – för kunskap, valfrihet och trygghet (*Ministry Publications Series, The New Educational Act – for knowledge, freedom of choice and security*) Stockholm, Sveriges Riksdag
- HYLTENSTAM, K & LINDBERG, I (Ed.). (2004). Svenska som andraspråk: i forskning, undervisning och samhälle (*Swedish as a second language: in research, education and society*). Lund, Studentlitteratur.
- SFS Grundskoleförordning (1994:1194). (*Swedish Code of Statutes, Compulsory School Ordinance*) Stockholm, Utbildningsdepartementet (*Ministry of Education*)
- MARKLUND, S. (1984). Skolan förr och nu. 50 år av utveckling (*The school system now and then. 50 years of development.*) Stockholm, Liber.
- NILFORS, ELISABET. (2008). Kunskap vidgar världen – Globaliseringens inverkan på skola och lärande (*Knowledge widens the world - the effect of globalisation on education and learning*) Stockholm, Globaliseringsrådet (*Globalisation Council*).
- SCB. (2008). Integration – en beskrivning av läget i Sverige (*Statistics Sweden, Integration – a description of the situation in Sweden*), SCB, Prognosinstitutet.
- SKOLVERKET. (2009). Report 321, With another mother tongue – students in compulsory education and the organisation of teaching and learning. Stockholm, Fritzes.
- SKOLVERKET. (2004). Elever med utländsk bakgrund (*Students with foreign background*) Stockholm, Skolverket (*National Agency for Education*).

SKOLVERKET. (2003). rapport 228 Flera språk – fler möjligheter (*More languages – More possibilities*) Stockholm, Skolverket (*National Agency for Education*).

SOU. 2008:109. En hållbar lärarutbildning (*Swedish Government Official Reports, A sustainable teacher education*) Stockholm, Utbildningsdepartementet (*Ministry of Education*).

WAYNE, T.P and COLLIER, V.P. (1997). School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students. Washington, National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.