



UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES



SVENSKA  
LITTERATURSÄLLSKAPET  
I FINLAND

# Inclusion of migrant background pupils arriving in a Swedish minority context in Finland

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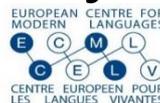
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# Who am I ?

- Multilingual, teacher, researcher and semi-pro opera singer.
- Born in India and came to Europe to Vienna, Austria in 2005 as an au pair to an Austrian family.
- Master's studies in applied linguistics and French as a foreign language in Nantes, France (2007-2009) and voice (singing) at the Regional conservatory (2009-2012).
- PhD in teacher multilingualism and German didactics in Geneva, Switzerland (2015-2024).
- Post-doctoral research currently (2024-2028) in Swedish as a second language at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki, Finland.



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# Background

- Parliamentary discussions on enrolling more pupils in Swedish-speaking schools in Finland [Integration på svenska i Finland – en lägesrapport 2025 – Magma](#)
- Integration of Swedish is not given as an option to most non-white migrant background families [Svenska Yle.](#)
- Ageing population of Swedish-speaking Finns and decline of the language.
- Potential for “new speakers” of Swedish through commonalities with French, German and English.
- My own successful belonging in Swedish in Finland.



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# Context

- Swedish is recognized as second national language in the Constitution of Finland and was the administrative language under Russian occupation.
- Swedish speakers constitute 5.2% of the population of Finland (roughly 290000 speakers ([Om oss - Folktinget](#))).
- Target capital region municipalities of Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa and Porvoo for my research (10-15 Swedish schools shortlisted for my project).
- Data collected in five schools (two secondary and three primary contexts so far using school ethnography as a research method (Bethune & Gilbert, 2019)).



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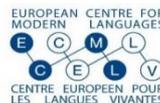
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# Theoretical lens

- Some Swedish-speaking teachers are successful second language (L2) users (Cook, 2004; Halder, 2024) of English and/or French and/or German.
- Tensions between linguistic diversity of non-white pupils as an asset in early multilingualism (Otwinowska, Bergroth, & Zyzik, 2023) and perceived threat to vitality of Swedish as a minority language (Zilliacus, Holm, & Wallinheimo, 2022).
- Future multilingual and multicultural “new speakers” of Swedish like Irish Gaelic (O'Rourke & Walsh, 2020) and Scots Gaelic (Cox, 2021) possibility in Finland with new discussions in Parliament.



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# Research questions

- What policy frameworks are involved in the arrival and inclusion of non-white migrant pupils/students in a Swedish minority context of the capital region of Finland?
- What are the regional and minority languages present in some of the schools in the Swedish minority context of the capital region of Finland?
- How do principals, guidance counsellors and teachers perceive inclusion of regional and minority languages when non-white migrant pupils/students arrive in these schools?

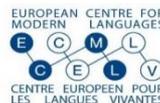


# Policy frameworks : arrival of non-white migrant pupils/students into secondary education

- Non-white migrant pupils arrive mostly from Sweden, but also from some Swedish-speaking regions in Finland.
- Variable proficiency of Swedish, particularly in reading, writing, but also oral and listening skills.
- Some pupils, according to principals and Swedish teachers, have learning difficulties related to special needs and conflict-related traumas, requiring support.
- Principals meet with parents and teachers to decide on goals and some teachers have informal meetings with parents, such as bi-annual "cultural get togethers".



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# Policy frameworks: inclusion of migrant pupils in secondary education in capital region of Finland

- Extra support in Swedish as a second language is considered temporary and provided in small groups and later integrated into Swedish as a first language or mother tongue Swedish classes.
- Swedish S2 teachers present as support or resource teachers in classes where content from Geography, History or science subjects is entirely in Swedish.
- Various coursebooks and materials developed by teachers are used to cater to pupils' needs.
- Study counsellors support students in understanding school culture and developing good study habits.



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# Role of regional and minority languages in secondary education

- Lessons are almost entirely in Swedish with content selected from both materials and language varieties in Sweden and Finland.
- Teachers allow some students to use English, but interaction takes place almost always in Swedish.
- Minority languages (eg, Somali, Dari, Arabic, Russian, Ukrainian, Chinese) are not explicitly focused on in the lessons in secondary education except in rare circumstances.
- Content used from Sweden focuses on Swedish speakers with minoritised backgrounds and their cultural practices.



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# Innovative teaching methods: Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) in secondary education

- Teaching Swedish as a second language integrated with content from the sciences (Biology) and social studies (History, Geography).
- As resource teachers in Swedish as a second language, support is provided either in small groups before or after the big group sessions or during these sessions one-to-one in a corner.
- Sometimes intercultural themes from other languages (Japanese media) are borrowed in Swedish.



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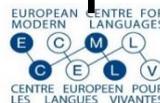
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# Innovative teaching methods: Language awareness in secondary education

- Use of AI tools to translate texts from Swedish into Chinese to develop language awareness about punctuation, and some English-Swedish language mixing is occasionally allowed.
- Difficulties in understanding synonyms like “*doft*” and “*parfym*” are explained in simple terms in Swedish (metalinguistic explanations).
- Students encouraged to choose themes around their personal lives and cultural experiences to write texts in Swedish and sometimes English.
- Differentiation and intercultural group work organised according to the needs of pupils and affinities.



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# Discussion

- Unexamined whiteness (Helakorpi et al., 2023) stemming from perceptions of "deficit ideologies" in proficiency of non-white pupils in Swedish as a second language.
- Monolingual norms in perceptions of reading and writing Swedish (Halder, forthcoming) do not allow pupils to be considered "successful L2 users" (Cook 2005).
- Bilingual upbringing of some teachers does not guarantee taking into account multilingualism (Halder, 2024) if their teacher training has taken place in a monolingual Swedish context in Finland.



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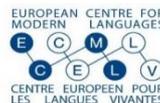
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# Opportunities and challenges

- “Minority meets minority”- commonalities between teachers of Swedish, the second official and minority language, compared to Finnish, enabling negotiation of “otherness” and critical understanding (Halder, forthcoming) of challenges faced by non-white pupils.
- Small class sizes and positive interpersonal rapport between pupils and teachers, and pedagogical creativity are assets to promote the belonging of these pupils in a Swedish school setting.
- Lack of tools is related to the promotion of language awareness in a bilingual setting of the capital region; lack of knowledge about trauma and intercultural family dynamics calls for further in-service training.



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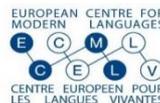
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