

A SUMMARY OF  
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# With another mother tongue

– students in compulsory school and  
the organisation of teaching and learning



Order details:

Fritzes kundservice

SE-106 47 Stockholm

Telephone: 0046-(0)8-690 95 76

Fax: 0046-(0)8-690 95 50

Email address: [skolverket@fritzes.se](mailto:skolverket@fritzes.se)

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## Foreword

This report focuses on the work of the compulsory school concerning students with another mother tongue. Today, almost a fifth of compulsory school students have a foreign background; either born abroad or born in Sweden of foreign parents. The proportion of students with another mother tongue varies from school to school. In some schools it is quite rare, while in others it is very common. The question of the number of students at a school who have another mother tongue is significant for the work of that school. However, the study also presents other factors that are important for how the school acts and for what the school does for these students; these factors can be differences in knowledge, in experience and, more generally, in approach. Parallel to this, a number of general patterns emerge, such as in relation to the organisation of the teaching of Swedish as a second language and of mother tongue tuition. In addition to the organisation of the teaching, the study has attempted to illustrate the significance of participation in this tuition for the students' knowledge performance – as regards grades and average merit ratings. The study also highlights the issue of adapting the teaching in a more general way for the benefit of this student group.

The study is based partly on the results of a questionnaire directed at compulsory school administrations, partly on a qualitative interview study carried out at thirteen schools in four municipalities, and partly on a statistical follow-up study of a year cohort of students in years 3 to 9 of compulsory school. The report constitutes a summary of the study's most important results and conclusions. Eva Wirén has been the project leader for the study and is responsible for the report's design and content.

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*Staffan Lundh*

Head of Department

*Eva Wirén*

Project leader

[eva.wiren@skolverket.se](mailto:eva.wiren@skolverket.se)

Phone: +46 (0)8 527 332 00



## Part One

In part one the study's purpose and background is introduced. This is followed by a summary of the study's main results which are discussed and evaluated from a perspective on possible consequences – at a regulating, governing level and at a local level for schools and municipalities.

# 1. Introduction

Official statistics show that there is an over-representation of students with a different mother tongue to Swedish among students who do not attain the goals in compulsory school. Various studies have illustrated in different ways why these students in general leave school with comparatively poor results. This study poses the question of what schools can do for these students that will allow them to succeed well in the Swedish school system. The report is based on three different sub-studies presented below: a questionnaire survey directed at the country's compulsory school administrations, a qualitative interview survey of thirteen schools in four municipalities, and a statistical follow-up study of a year cohort of students in years 3 to 9 of compulsory school.

## Purpose of the study

Generally speaking, the study aims to lead to a better understanding of the linguistic and knowledge development of students whose mother tongue is not Swedish. The study only applies to compulsory school organisation and to students in years F (pre-school class) to 9.

Previous studies and surveys have highlighted the subjects “mother tongue” and “Swedish as a second language”<sup>1</sup>. This study focuses on these subjects too, even though the starting point is the school's organisation as a whole.

One question in the study deals with how the teaching is organised. This can relate to the grounds on which students study Swedish as a second language or Swedish, or how the mother tongue tuition is organised at school. Another question the study poses relates to the extent to which students' participation in mother tongue tuition and in Swedish as a second language can be considered significant for their results at school as regards grades and average merit ratings.

## Some starting points

The study has several different starting points. One, mentioned above, is the poorer level of goal achievement for this group of students. The difference in average merit rating between students of Swedish and students of

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1 Skolverket (2002), Myndigheten för skolutveckling (2004).

foreign background amounts to approximately 20 merit points<sup>2</sup>. In the group of students of foreign background, almost every fourth student left compulsory school without basic qualifications, in comparison with every tenth student in compulsory school as a whole. The question is what school can do about this situation.

Regulatory texts and other types of governing documents provide a starting point for school's work. Tuition in compulsory school for students with another mother tongue is regulated in the Compulsory School Ordinance (1994:1194). It covers the rules applying to mother tongue tuition, study guidance and Swedish as a second language. The ordinance is also a starting point for this study, where the interest focuses on how the ordinance is put into practice in the country's compulsory schools and on the factors that influence the forming of this practice.

A third starting point for the survey can be found, at least in part, in research that focuses on the language and knowledge development of these students. Different research perspectives serve as the basis for several different surveys. Research involving different linguistic and sociocultural perspectives deal, for instance, with students' prerequisites on arriving at school, with their linguistic and cultural backgrounds and with the conditions for learning and using a second language<sup>3</sup>. There is also research focusing more on school, dealing with how the teaching is organised and conducted, and research that approaches more intrapedagogic conditions in the classroom<sup>4</sup>.

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- 2 Of students who completed compulsory school's year 9 in the school year 2006/07, the average merit rating was 190.1 points for students of foreign background as compared to an average merit rating of 210.1 points for the group of students of Swedish background. Skolverket (2008), table 1, p. 19.
  - 3 See, for example, C & Håkansson, G (2007), for a historical overview of the research on second languages with a focus on grammar and language use. See also various contributions on the same theme in Hyltenstam, K & Lindberg, I (2004) (Ed.).
  - 4 See, for example, Axelsson, M, Gröning, I, Hagberg-Persson, B (2001), Axelsson, M, Lennartsson-Hokannen, I, Sellgren, M (2002), Johansson, C (2000), Parszyk, I-M (1999), Hagberg-Persson, B (2006).

## 2. Summary and discussion of the results of the study

This assessment study focuses on compulsory school's work relating to students with another mother tongue. Approximately 14 per cent of students who left compulsory school in 2007 had a foreign background. A majority of compulsory schools now have students who are entitled to mother tongue tuition and who perhaps also need tuition in Swedish as a second language. There is an uneven distribution within the category "students with another mother tongue", with regard to both region and school. In the major cities, this is a question of more than every third student on average, but in certain schools there can be nine out of ten students with a mother tongue other than Swedish. In sparsely populated or smaller municipalities, it is usually less than every tenth student but, in some schools, there may be no students at all with another mother tongue, or just the occasional one<sup>5</sup>. Thus far, there is variation in the prerequisites regarding school's work for this student group. The proportion of students with another mother tongue in a school is of significance for several situations highlighted in this study.

In spite of the variation, it is reasonable to suppose that the great majority of teachers at compulsory school do or will come into contact with students with another mother tongue. This places demands on teachers in respect of how well prepared they are for this situation, and also on the school. At schools with students of foreign background there are often several different mother tongues and different cultural backgrounds represented. The challenge for the school is to be able to meet this diversity of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It is ultimately a matter of being able to offer equivalent educational opportunities<sup>6</sup>.

As a general background to the work of the school, there is also the overall picture of poorer goal fulfilment for students with a mother tongue other than Swedish. This difference is most pronounced for students born abroad and, in particular, for the students who were late in entering Swedish school. These general differences for students with different backgrounds are documented in official follow-up statistics and were illustrated in more detail in one of the National Agency for Education's studies a few years ago<sup>7</sup>. There is a corresponding difference in respect of the year cohort of students whose school results have been analysed in this study.

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5 Skolverket (2008b).

6 Hyltenstam, K., Liberg, C., et al (2007).

7 Skolverket (2004).

This study is based on school's overall work for the group of students with another mother tongue. One conclusion of the study is that there are considerable variations in whether and how schools focus on students with a mother tongue other than Swedish. Knowledge, awareness, experience and, more generally, approach, all vary among the schools visited.

This depends partly on what student population there is at the school and perhaps also on whether circumstances at the school have recently changed or shifted, such as to having a higher proportion of newly arrived students.

Even if there are positive examples of schools' work in the study, none of the 13 schools visited have in general developed an optimal solution for the multilingual students. Such a solution is remote even for the schools that have progressed further with this work. This does not prevent the picture of these schools from standing in relatively marked contrast to this study's more general image of schools' work in this area. School's work in this area includes the teaching that is specially directed at this group of students: mother tongue tuition, study guidance in the mother tongue, and tuition in Swedish as a second language.

Teaching is regulated in the Compulsory School Ordinance. According to the ordinance, the municipality is obliged to offer the student mother tongue tuition. This contrasts the case of Swedish as a second language and as well of study guidance in the mother tongue, where responsibility lies with the school, with the school head being the decision maker.

To be entitled to mother tongue tuition, a student must use the mother tongue as his/her daily language of intercourse and also have basic knowledge of that language. The municipality does not need to fulfil the requirement if there 1) is no suitable teacher and/or 2) are not a minimum of five students in the municipality with a certain mother tongue. Exceptions apply for the national minority languages.

As an activity, study guidance in the mother tongue is closely connected to mother tongue tuition but is regulated in the ordinance under the heading "Special support".

Tuition in Swedish as a second language is directed at a broader group of students than that for mother tongue tuition. It applies to 1) students with another mother tongue than Swedish, 2) students with Swedish as their mother tongue who have been admitted from foreign schools and 3) immigrant students whose main language of intercourse with one or both guardians is Swedish. The ordinance declares that Swedish as a second language must be arranged instead of Swedish.

To summarise, it can be said that, under the ordinance, Swedish as a second language is a subject with a status equivalent to that of Swedish, and that the student participates in Swedish as a second language instead of in Swedish.

With regard to mother tongue tuition, this is a subject that is additional to other tuition at school – teaching over and above that which school normally covers.

## **Diverse conditions and unclear provisions**

The work on which the study has focused, which includes the organisation of tuition for students with another mother tongue than Swedish, is not easy to summarise even if the interview study has indeed covered visits to a large number of schools. The variation is considerable as to the what, how and why on the part of the school in respect of this student group, but there are some common themes that emerge in the results. The empirical basis for the study is broad, with the results from the three respective sub-studies largely reinforcing the results. Thus far, the impression from the questionnaire and the more representative one from the statistical material correspond well with the in-depth picture from the 13 schools.

Some aspects of school's work for these students that are rather unclear can be attributed to the somewhat vague formulations in the ordinance, such as the expression regarding the organisation "if necessary" of tuition in Swedish as a second language. This invites variation in the way in which school acts and can probably be a factor contributing to the lack of clarity.

## **Swedish as a second language – subject or remedial teaching?**

Swedish as a second language stands out in the interview survey as being, to a great extent, remedial tuition in Swedish rather than an independent subject. The students participate in Swedish but have extra lessons that go under the heading of Swedish as a second language. Students with another mother tongue are thus often included both in tuition in Swedish and in Swedish as a second language. With regard to students in the younger school years, the boundaries between separate subjects are sometimes more fluid and there are variations both in the syllabus on which the teaching is based and in the syllabus in accordance with which the students are assessed (in year 5).

For students in the higher years, it is more common for Swedish as a second language to be organised as a separate subject, but it is often regarded as a temporary measure from which successful students can transfer to the ordinary Swedish tuition.

At many schools it seems that only the poorly performing students are offered Swedish as a second language, while others may study Swedish. The result of the interview study can be interpreted as an ability grouping of stu-

dents in the tuition in Swedish<sup>8</sup>. The questionnaire survey adds that at more than every fifth school, students with *Swedish* as their mother tongue are included in the class of Swedish as a second language. One possible explanation is that the tuition at these schools is regarded as remedial teaching for “weak” students in general, irrespective of whether or not they have a different mother tongue.

Analyses of the statistical material show that, as regards second generation immigrant students, it is often those with poorer conditions at home who participate in Swedish as a second language. Their parents often have little education and a weak position on the labour market. On the other hand, second generation immigrant students who follow the syllabus in Swedish are more often from a higher social background. Of those students who were born abroad, the great majority participate in Swedish as a second language. Of the students who were born abroad but who do not participate, comparatively more come from a Nordic country.

Students who have participated in Swedish as a second language are also those who leave school with the absolutely lowest average merit rating, if a comparison is made of students who have taken part in different types of tuition<sup>9</sup>. The lowest average merit rating for the students in Swedish as a second language can be said to correspond with the image of students with poorer conditions at home and the image of the subject as being remedial teaching mainly for poorly performing students.

It is, however, difficult on this basis to say anything about the effect of participating in the tuition of Swedish as a second language. In many respects the subject is not treated in the schools as a subject in its own right, nor is it always directed at those students for whom the tuition is intended under the Compulsory School Ordinance. Not until Swedish as a second language is organised as a separate subject with its own syllabus is it possible to take into consideration the possible effects of such teaching.

This would also imply suitably qualified teachers and students who participate in the class on the basis of having Swedish as a second language, and *not* on the basis of their being generally poor performers and/or due to having a certain social background.

The study's general image of Swedish as a second language constituting remedial teaching is contrasted in part by one or two schools in the study

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8 Myndigheten för skolutveckling (2004) pointed out unclear areas at schools in the character and function of Swedish as a second language, and indicated that the subject is a subject for “the weak students” that, in practice, involves an ability grouping of the students in the teaching of Swedish.

9 In a comparison of students who had participated in Swedish or in Swedish as a second language and/or in mother tongue tuition.

where Swedish as a second language is a separate subject and has a high(er) status. This has required different initiatives such as the recruitment of suitably qualified teachers, professional development, and information on the subject for everyone involved. The questionnaire survey reports that schools with a higher proportion of students with another mother tongue have a more clear-cut approach to these students. For instance, it is more common to have a general policy that all students with another mother tongue must participate in Swedish as a second language. At these schools it is a question of eight out of ten students participating, in comparison with four of ten students at schools with a low proportion, 15 per cent, of students with another mother tongue.

The ordinance specifies that the school head must determine whether there is a *need* for the tuition. This lack of clarity in the ordinance leaves much scope for different interpretations and it is not always clear which students can be regarded as needing the tuition<sup>10</sup>. Considering the scope of the phrase in the ordinance, it is in many respects up to the individual school and the school head to decide what should apply to fulfil the *need* for tuition in Swedish as a second language.

The study reports that schools mainly use different types of language tests to decide which students will participate in Swedish as a second language. Three out of four schools use an assessment of the students' language skills, oral and written, to decide whether it is needed and, at all 13 of the schools visited, some kind of test was involved. However, a combination of several different factors is often considered when assessing the individual student. It is, for instance, common that schools also take the student's, and the parents', wishes into consideration.

Basing a decision on an assessment of students' language skills can be said to be completely in line with the ordinance. At the same time, teachers say that resources are not available for teaching all the students who need Swedish as a second language. But schools' reasoning about lack of resources can be seen as being closely related to a view of the subject as remedial teaching. The ordinance expresses clearly that the teaching of Swedish as a second language replaces the teaching of Swedish, and this must reasonably mean an allocation of resources to the subjects as required. The reasoning at the schools with a small proportion of students with another mother tongue might be due to the greater difficulty (more resources required) in providing parallel tuition in Swedish as a second language if the group of students is small, but it is more likely that it is a question of approach. If there are fewer students at the school

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10 Hyltenstam, K & Lindberg, I (Ed.) (2004) indicated in the foreword that schools' situation of having more and more students being second generation students contributes to a difficulty in deciding which type of tuition in Swedish is motivated.

with another mother tongue, it is perhaps easier to regard the need for tuition in Swedish as a second language as an addition to the regular teaching in Swedish at school, rather than as an independent choice.

It is thus not only a question of resources and planning but also of perspective and approach. At some schools, it is considered better for the students to study Swedish. This can be because the students are perceived as having reached a certain level in their language development and thus do not need “a comprehensive SSL (*Swedish as a second language*)” as one teacher expressed it. At some schools, the will as far as possible to place students in the Swedish class is mainly out of consideration for students who are negative about being separated from the teaching of Swedish to which most other students belong.

But such consideration, however well meant, reinforces the image of a subject that does not have equal status and that students want to give up. The status of the subject can have a direct critical significance for the students’ and parents’ attitude to participation. The perception of Swedish as a second language as a remedial subject for weak students does not make it easier to get students to want to take part. It is not uncommon for schools to end up in an argumentative situation in which students do not want to participate in the tuition – a view that often also represents the students’ parents’ attitude to the subject.

The subject may also signal a feeling of exclusion for students, in which a foreign background and another mother tongue set them apart from the norm: the group of students of Swedish background<sup>11</sup>. In Parszyk’s thesis, the students express the difference between both the subjects as participation in Swedish as a second language or in “proper Swedish”. Even if the students regard the teaching in itself of Swedish as a second language positively, the subject is not regarded as “proper Swedish”<sup>12</sup>.

The school’s attitude and view of the subject in this complicated situation is naturally important in relation to the signals surrounding the subject and the teaching that the students and their parents pick up. There may not have been sufficient discussion in schools about the purpose of Swedish as a second language nor clarification of how to identify the students who should participate and why. Then there could be a risk that teachers or school administrations would, quite unaware, not always reflect to the students particularly well-established or well thought out values relating to the subject, nor chal-

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11 Gruber, S (2004) has pointed out that the division into Swedish and Swedish as a second language can mean that the school “differentiates”. The school’s principle that all students of foreign background are to participate in Swedish as a second language runs the risk of branding the students with a sense of exclusion. See also Guber, S. (2007).

12 Parszyk, I-M (1999).

lenge notions about exclusion and about tuition for students who do not cope particularly well with school.

As far as Swedish as a second language is concerned, school needs a common approach. This would need to be embraced by the school administration, teachers of other subjects, and by the school staff in general – not just by teachers of Swedish as a second language, who can be expected to be better versed in the matter.

At the school in the study that has worked more successfully on raising the status of the subject, conscious action and perspective are involved. There are no significant problems with the subject's status at this school. The school has a high proportion of students with another mother tongue and at least as many students who study Swedish as a second language as study Swedish, and the subjects are taught in parallel. There was no talk of lack of resources as at many of the other schools and there were also comparatively more teachers qualified in Swedish as a second language. There is at the school a closely knit group of teachers of Swedish as a second language who promote the subject and who have also worked to pass on knowledge of and insight into the subject to teachers of other subjects and to students and parents. To a great extent it is thanks to this strong group of teachers at the school that the status of the subject has been raised.

### **Is Swedish as a second language justified as a subject?**

One overall impression from the study is that, for the most part, Swedish as a second language is conducted as remedial teaching or as a subject for students whose performance is weak. It is neither organised as nor regarded as an equivalent alternative to Swedish. Other studies have pointed out the low status of the subject, and the results of this study reinforce this image. On the basis of the results of the study, the question can be posed as to whether there is any justification for Swedish as a second language constituting a subject, with regard to how the teaching of it is conducted at present. The question also arises as to what is actually necessary if Swedish as a second language is to function as a separate subject in accordance with the Compulsory School Ordinance and the subject's syllabus.

## Mother tongue tuition at the periphery – but significant for students' performance?

In the study, mother tongue tuition appears to a great extent to be an activity that is external in relation to the school, even if it is conducted on the school's premises and for the school's students. This is not surprising since the main responsibility for the activity rests in most cases on the municipality. Nor is it hard to understand that the municipality organises mother tongue tuition if one considers that there can be students from different schools in a tuition group. There are not many schools that have a sufficient student base for conducting the work themselves, in respect of having their own permanently employed mother tongue teachers. Nor is it a question of *one* group of students, even if the group is described, in this study too, under a joint heading – students with another mother tongue. At the majority of schools, *a number of different* linguistic student backgrounds are involved and, thus, a number of different teachers.

While responsibility and organisation of the work at municipal level can seem reasonable, this situation often involves difficulties in practice. Mother tongue teachers in the study describe a situation that includes teaching outside school hours, traipsing between different schools and sometimes even having to look for rooms in which to hold the lessons. As far as the school is concerned, the situation with the municipality having responsibility for tuition being arranged can involve a lack of insight into the activity. Yet the school has the ultimate responsibility for the students. Most schools mention guidelines for the work, most of which are issued at municipal level. Commonly occurring guidelines are ones that concern the tuition's placement in relation to the timetable, or that determine the size of the student group. This is normally a relatively small group, with students of differing ages.

Of those who are qualified to participate in the tuition, every second student takes part on average. Participation is, however, greater in schools with a larger proportion of students with another mother tongue. A greater number of these schools also say that, in principle, all the students at the school can be offered tuition. The opposite applies at schools with a smaller or small proportion of students with another mother tongue. In contrast to the students who participate in Swedish as a second language, students who have taken part in mother tongue tuition are more often from homes representing a higher level of education. The reason for students not being offered tuition in their mother tongue is usually, according to the schools, due to too few students having the same mother tongue. Another common reason is a lack of teachers.

The reasons for students/parents not wanting to participate in the tuition are different. It may be due to the time at which the tuition is offered. Tuition after school hours is not popular among the students, and teachers also talk about tired, unmotivated students. The questionnaire study showed that the tuition is normally scheduled outside the timetable, and this was also the case at the majority of schools in the interview study.

Analyses of the statistical material in the study report a higher and comparatively highest average merit rating for students who have participated in mother tongue tuition. This student group's average merit rating (220 p) differs most in relation to students who have participated in Swedish as a second language (181 p) but also in relation to the group of students of Swedish background (208 p). Students who have participated both in Swedish as a second language and mother tongue tuition have an average merit rating (190 p) that is higher than for students who have only taken part in Swedish as a second language.

With regard to the scope of the tuition, this does not amount to much more than one lesson per week. In this perspective, the noticeably higher average merit rating for students who have taken part in mother tongue tuition appears almost remarkable. At the same time, existing analyses report that the number of years of tuition may have a possible effect.

The higher merit rating on average for students taking part in mother tongue tuition cannot be explained by factors involving the students' background such as the level of education in the family or the family's social standing, the student's gender or migration background. Thus far, a higher average merit rating is a general feature for those students who have participated in the tuition, irrespective of family background. It is, however, important to emphasise that other circumstances may exist in the background that we do not know about and that can contribute to the students' high merit rating. This could, for instance, involve parents and students who are particularly motivated to study. Nor can we be completely certain when we make statements about direct effects of the tuition; it is more reasonable here to talk about possible effects.

If comparisons are made between students of different foreign backgrounds, a clear possible effect emerges regarding the tuition of the group of second generation immigrant students. Even for the small group of students who participated among students who have a Swedish mother or father, mother tongue tuition does seem to be able to make a difference.

From a language research perspective, it is likely that the tuition does have the particular effect reported in the results of the study<sup>13</sup>. Other previous, less

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13 Hyltenstam, K in Myndigheten för skolutveckling (2007).

extensive Swedish studies indicate the same situation<sup>14</sup> and reference is often made in this context to a larger American study of the effects of different tuition programmes<sup>15</sup>. The conclusion that mother tongue tuition could possibly be more important for second generation students could also be drawn from that research angle, which has emphasised the significance of a well developed mother tongue for the learning process in general. It is possible that second generation immigrant students' mother tongue is less deeply rooted when compared with the group of foreign-born students, and the mother tongue tuition would thus be able to play a greater role.

Tuition not being obligatory for the students is a situation that may be of possible significance in the context. On the one hand it is almost ironic that participation in non-compulsory tuition emerges as having a possible effect that could be of benefit for the school's teaching in general. On the other hand, one can reflect over students' motivation to participate as being a possible factor in what appears to be a probable effect of the tuition. The fact that the students do not have to participate in the tuition should indicate a more committed situation both on the part of the students themselves and/or that of their parents. The highest merit rating for this group of students could relate, at least in part, to motivation.

More generally, we know from research and from different studies<sup>16</sup> that motivation can be a strong stimulus for learning. The motivation to study a certain subject – the mother tongue in this case – can thus be presumed to be relevant for knowledge development and for the grade in the subject itself, compared with other subjects that are more unmotivated for the student. But it is perhaps less likely that motivation as the sole factor would result in such a considerably higher merit rating, summarising the student's grades in the 16 best subjects, compared with students who have not participated in the tuition. On the other hand, students' and parents' motivation can doubtlessly contribute as a reinforcing factor in the situation that language research has illustrated – the significance of good mother tongue skills for students' possibilities for learning and skills in other languages and other subjects.

To sum up, mother tongue tuition appears in the study on the one hand to have possible importance for the students' general knowledge development and, on the other hand, to be an activity that for the most part takes place

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14 E.g. Hill (1966) whose study of about 40 students who had participated in mother tongue tuition reported a positive difference in the grade average in the core subjects.

15 A study performed by Thomas, W & Collier, V (1997) referred to in Axelsson, M in Hyltenstam, K & Lindberg, I (2004) (Ed.).

16 See e.g. Giota, J. (2001) who has studied students' motivation regarding school and studies in data collected within the scope of the project UGU "Utvärdering Genom Uppföljning" (Evaluation through Follow-up) at the University of Gothenburg.

outside of other school activities and that can almost be described as marginalised. Thus far, the possible effect of participation in mother tongue tuition, apparent in the generally higher merit ratings, appears almost to be a frontal collision with the image of the the tuition's marginalised position in Swedish compulsory school.

## **Study guidance in the mother tongue**

Study guidance in the mother tongue should involve considerably better opportunities for students with another mother tongue, who have not yet reached a sufficiently high level in Swedish, to keep up with the teaching in other subjects. It is problematic that study guidance in the mother tongue appears in the study to be an even more limited possibility than mother tongue tuition. Study guidance is rare in the schools visited in the interview study. Even if two out of three schools in the questionnaire study say that they offer students study guidance, this usually involves just a few students. Guidance is mainly directed at newly arrived students and occurs to a greater extent at schools with a higher proportion of (newly arrived) students with another mother tongue. There are different reasons for more students with another mother tongue not receiving this guidance, of which one can be a lack of resources relating both to time and money. The time issue relates to the same teachers often being responsible for both mother tongue tuition and study guidance.

One of the municipalities visited restricts how much study guidance can be offered. With regard to students who attend schools where the proportion of students with another mother tongue is lower, the chances of receiving study guidance are significantly less.

In the interview study there are teachers who express doubt about the benefit of the guidance but also teachers who feel that more students ought to have this possibility. Experience of the study guidance itself is mainly positive, even if problems are also involved. These relate, for instance, to demands for improved cooperation between other (subject) teachers and those teachers who are responsible for the guidance. Some teachers in the study mention the situation that, since the mother tongue teacher is not usually qualified in the subject, there are few opportunities for being able to offer good study guidance. Good guidance presupposes good skills in the language and knowledge of the subject. More generally, there is a lack of information, both about what the guidance actually is and involves, and about who has the responsibility for taking the initiative for such guidance.

Language research has indicated the time-related conditions that apply in order to be able to use a language as a tool for learning. The time involved is

about five years. For obvious reasons, students with another mother tongue do not have this possibility. On the contrary, they are expected to participate in the tuition and perform at the same rate as the group of students of Swedish background, while learning Swedish at the same time. Different reasons appear in the study for the study guidance not being more widespread. Resources are a factor here, but perhaps also of lack of understanding of what exactly study guidance is (cf above). This doubt can partly reflect on the lack of clarity in the ordinance, with study guidance being regulated in chapter 5, “Special support”, of the Compulsory School Ordinance and not being related to mother tongue tuition.

The fact that study guidance is not more widespread is singularly problematic. An adaptation of the teaching can be just what students with a lack of Swedish need if they are to have a chance of keeping up in school. One conclusion is that the provisions relating to tuition for these students must be clarified.

### **Mother tongue tuition and study guidance need strengthening**

The results of the study indicate a situation that is almost the reverse. On the one hand, mother tongue tuition appears, to a very great extent, to be a marginalised activity in school. On the other hand, the comparatively higher merit ratings for students who have participated indicate a possible effect of mother tongue tuition. Thus, it can be regarded as motivated to, in various ways, strengthen the role of mother tongue tuition. Mother tongue study guidance in different subjects also appears in the study to be an activity that is organised on a very limited scale. Mother tongue tuition can thus have particular significance for second generation students. Study guidance in the mother tongue can, on the other hand, enable a recently arrived foreign-born student to keep up with the school’s teaching, i.e., when the student’s knowledge of Swedish is not at the linguistic level that the teaching requires.

## **Adaptation of the teaching**

Study guidance is an example, in regulated form, of what school can offer in the way of adapted tuition for this group of students who have another mother tongue. Language research has indicated other possibilities within the framework of the classroom by adaptation of teaching and methods of

working. This is fundamentally a question of drawing attention to linguistic conditions in the school's subjects<sup>17</sup>. In the interview study there are examples of schools at which the work in this area has progressed further, and of teachers who, within the scope of their respective subjects and/or in work teams, work with the students in different ways on language development. But there are also examples of the reverse, of schools that pay little attention to the students who have another mother tongue, and of teachers who pay little or no attention to this situation in their classrooms. Some teachers do not want to categorise their students, such as "students with a mother tongue other than Swedish". This can stem from an unwillingness to single out students, but it can also be an indication that the situation is complicated. Some teachers felt negative about having to adapt the teaching. They thought that the tuition could maintain a higher level if there were only students of Swedish background in the class. Finding the time to stimulate the students who had made good progress with their linguistic development was regarded as a problem. There were also examples in the interview study of an adaptation that involved simplification and easier tasks for these students, which cannot be the correct approach. Adaptation of the teaching must not be interpreted to mean simplification of questions, low expectations and lower demands being placed on students.

The varying attitudes between teachers, but perhaps also between schools, regarding what place the multilingual students' needs should take up in the teaching situation, and what type of adaptation should or should not be made for their benefit, and in what way, indicate a lack of clarity and suggest that schools have not discussed the situation enough. The research has pointed out the importance of adapting the teaching for the benefit of these students<sup>18</sup>. This involves not only the teaching of the Swedish language but also, more generally, the teaching of other subjects. Adapted teaching can be said to be a general pedagogical task for teachers to deal with in any classroom. But multilingual competence is required too, to be able to teach more effectively with a method that promotes language and knowledge development. It was exactly this broader expertise in these areas that allowed the more active schools to be distinguished in the interview study.

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17 Skolverket (2008c).

18 See e.g. Gibbons, P (2006).

### **Need for adapted teaching – but not for lower standards**

The result of the study indicates that there are considerable variations in whether schools adapt the teaching for students with another mother tongue and, if so, how. There are also variations in how the need for such adaptation is regarded. Research has shown the importance of adapting teaching for the benefit of multilingual students. This adaptation, however, should not involve a simplification of tasks nor a lowering of standards. Teaching that is better adapted to this group of students does place demands on the school to take advantage of and/or build up expertise within the area of language development – multilingualism.

### **Does which school matter – a question of equivalence**

Both the questionnaire and the interview study report significant differences in compulsory schools' work that has to do with schools' different proportions of students with a foreign background. The interview study also showed that the immigrant status that students with another mother tongue have, whether they themselves have immigrated, whether they have just arrived or whether only the parents have immigrated are all important questions for a school. In general, schools with a higher proportion of students with another mother tongue appear to take more conscious action in these issues and their work in the area is also more pronounced.

This is perhaps not so remarkable since the situation involving students with another mother tongue is more dominant at those schools, and thus fits more naturally into the work<sup>19</sup>. All in all, a varied student population can provide a better incentive for a school to have a more conscious attitude towards tuition etc. for the students with another mother tongue.

The interview study also illustrates the importance of the school administration and other staff being aware of the multilingual students' situation at the school. This is significant for a school's ability to build up an activity in which these students can do themselves better justice. As well as a conscious approach to these students, there must also be different organisational and resource-related prerequisites. The analysis of the 13 schools indicates, how-

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19 It can nonetheless be noted that the schools visited have, at the most, 50-60% students with another mother tongue; it is in other words not a question of schools where nearly all the students have another mother tongue.

ever, that this consciousness of what is significant for the language development of students with another tongue does have a positive effect on the activity<sup>20</sup>. It can, for instance, involve the view of Swedish as a second language as a subject and not as remedial teaching, or how work can be done to integrate mother tongue teachers into other teaching, or increasing study guidance. A conscious view of the multilingual students also seems to contribute to the testing of new solutions/projects and, sometimes, to new ways of the schools using resources. The schools that have come furthest in developing their work for students with another mother tongue can be said to have “reversed the perspective” in relation to other schools as regards the starting points for the work. What the schools do have in common is that they to a greater extent take a starting point in a multilingual student group in the planning of the work, and that there was a conscious approach to what was done at the school. They get closer to a view of multilingualism being regarded as a resource rather than a problem<sup>21</sup>.

Schools with a low proportion of students with another mother tongue, however, do not always see a need for having a special perspective on these students. This sometimes originates in a view that there are in fact no problems as far as these students are concerned. That no news is good news<sup>22</sup>. But sometimes the basis is instead the school’s ignorance of what a proportion of the school’s students having another mother tongue actually means. For some schools, it also involves a relatively new alteration in the student mix at the school, with the school being taken by surprise.

It cannot be acceptable that, as a student, there is less chance of benefiting from, for instance, mother tongue tuition and study guidance, and less chance of receiving better tuition in Swedish as a second language if the student comes to a school with a low proportion of students with another mother tongue. It is also paradoxical that schools with a high proportion of students with another mother tongue are generally better equipped to meet students with another mother tongue, while it is quite common for the student and the student’s parents to regard it as more attractive to attend a school with a small proportion of students with another mother tongue. Other studies have

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20 See e.g. Cummins in Naclér, K (Ed.) (2000) who takes up the need for a language policy in school. He points out the necessity of involving not only specialised language teachers but all the teachers at the school, and of working on incorporating relevant research into the specific situation that applies at the individual school in order to achieve a more effective organisation and tuition for students with another mother tongue.

21 See also Myndigheten för skolutveckling (2004), which reasons along similar lines regarding school’s attitude to multilingual students as a problem or a resource.

22 This can naturally also be a valid perspective. We know from other studies that it is not only a question of students of foreign background, but also of the students’ social background, in the study of students’ school results. See e.g. Skolverket (2004).

pointed out this status situation, which also corresponds well with the higher status awarded to participation in Swedish as a subject than in Swedish as a second language<sup>23</sup>. It can be noted in this context that there is a significant lack of studies that illustrate more generally the effect of school's more long-term work and efforts<sup>24</sup>, even if we in this study have described the possible effect of students' participation in different types of teaching.

### **Lack of equivalence**

There is considerable variation in how schools conduct their work for the students with another mother tongue. The result of the study indicates a difference between whether the school has a higher or a lower proportion of students with another mother tongue. It is fairly obvious that schools with a high proportion of students of foreign background plan and design the work to a greater extent on this basis. From a student and parent perspective, however, schools' differing possibilities and varying ways of receiving students with another mother tongue do appear problematic. From the equivalence angle, it cannot be fair that there is such variation between schools in the way in which the teaching is organised, in what is offered and, more generally, in the perspective and approach used in relation to this group of students.

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23 Kallstenius in Axelsson, M & Bunar, N. (Ed.) (2006).

24 Skolverket (2007).

### 3. Consequences and proposals for action

On the basis of the results of the study and on the conclusions of the results noted in the section above, a natural next step is to deal with possible consequences. What needs to be done to improve the situation in compulsory school for students with another mother tongue? Using the results of the study to improve these students' chances of succeeding in school involves partly different types of measures or changes at different levels. Some of these are possible to distinguish at the governing, regulating level, and others at the local level (schools, municipalities).

#### Measures at a regulating, governing level

The study describes an activity that is extremely varied, as mentioned above. It cannot be fair that the prerequisites of students with another mother tongue are so different at different schools in respect of access to mother tongue tuition, study guidance and tuition in Swedish as a second language. It can be stated at this point that texts in ordinances and other types of governing documents serve as a basis for how the work is to be conducted in the schools. In that respect, regulation is fundamental.

Vague, unclear formulations in the ordinance leave excessive room for interpreting how the work should be conducted in the schools, and also in connection with deciding to which students the activity refers<sup>25</sup>. Taking into consideration the lack of clarity in the ordinance regarding the activity it is not difficult to understand that schools' work actually varies to the extent described in the study. For instance, it is not obvious what the definition of "if necessary" is in relation to the organisation of the teaching of Swedish as a second language. The fact that the study reports such a minimal prevalence of mother tongue study guidance for these students could originate from this being regulated in the ordinance under the heading Special Support. Study guidance is also surrounded by a vagueness, with the use of the expression 'if students need it'.

The situation of schools not regarding mother tongue tuition as an activity for which they are responsible relates of course also to the fact that the ordinance is directed at the municipality. Coordination at the more comprehensive, municipal level, however, can also be regarded as reasonable, taking into consideration schools' varying proportion of students with another mother

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25 Hyltenstam, K & Lindberg, I (Ed.) (2004). Foreword

tongue. Schools and teachers in the study would like to see greater cooperation between mother tongue teachers and the school but, from the organisational aspect, this seems to be difficult to achieve.

Taking into account the possible effect, reported in the study, that participation can have on these students' grades and merit ratings, a careful analysis of what could be done at a regulatory, governing level is well motivated. This involves strengthening students' participation in the teaching as well as strengthening the teaching as part of the school's activity.

All in all, and against the background of the study's results, clearer regulation of the teaching of these subjects can be considered well motivated, including study guidance in other subjects in the mother tongue.

## **What is important for schools and municipalities at a local level?**

In the interview study it emerges that considerable variations exist in whether and how the schools focus on students with another mother tongue. This variation is also reported in the questionnaire study. One fundamental condition seems to relate to the proportion of students with another mother tongue at the school. There are examples in the interview study of schools with a more conscious perspective – usually schools that have a high proportion of students with another mother tongue.

But even then, research indicates that the majority of schools in the study have a long way to go to achieve an optimal situation for these students.

For schools to be more effective in their work on these students' language and knowledge development, they must employ a long term, conscious and considered approach<sup>26</sup>. The research indicates the necessity of coordination at all levels as far as the multilingual students are concerned, such as an integration of language and subject tuition<sup>27</sup>.

This study is however able to convey some more positive aspects. For instance, using these students as a starting point in the planning and organisation of the work. In addition, regarding multilingualism as a resource rather than as a problem. There are positive examples in some schools' work such as exercising an overall view, having a diversity of different solutions, projects,

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26 Cummins in Naclér, K (Ed.) (2000) emphasises the importance of drawing up a policy at the school that includes the entire school staff and not only language teachers. He indicates the necessity of regarding the work on such a policy as a process rather than a product expressed in a fixed document. The role that school plays has also been illustrated in different sociological studies. See, e.g. Axelsson, M and Bunar, N (Ed.) (2006).

27 Axelsson, M and Bunar, N (Ed.) (2006), Hyltenstam, K & Lindberg (Ed.) (2004) Foreword.

efforts to utilise existing resources and the like, rather than occasional major efforts. It is not least important that the school is well prepared, such as by equipping itself with and utilising competence in questions of diversity and second language perspectives. The study emphasises the importance of the school administration having that kind of competence. The study also reports examples of competence not being utilised in spite of it actually being available.

Teachers at several schools say that their competence in Swedish as a second language is not always taken advantage of. For a school to develop a consciousness and a considered approach in the work with these students it must start with the long term build-up of knowledge and, not least, of staff who are qualified in the area of second language development for students. Advantage should then be taken of this competence by organising the work to allow as effective use as possible of the knowledge and experience held by the school. Increased cooperation between different categories of teachers at the school, not least as regards mother tongue teachers and subject teachers, and also cooperation between the school administration and the staff, are necessary if the work for and with these students is to be effective.

For schools with a lower proportion of students with another mother tongue, where the majority may be second generation immigrant students, it can seem far fetched to focus on the students who have another mother tongue. Against the background of an increasing proportion of second generation immigrant students, it can also be difficult to recognise and identify these students' actual need, for instance, of tuition in Swedish or Swedish as a second language. In the school environment, students with different backgrounds in Swedish as a second language can appear, to differing degrees, to be extremely competent in Swedish. Research into the field of second language has however indicated that good skills in everyday language are not sufficient for successful participation in the school's different subjects in the higher school years<sup>28</sup>. Students' ability to talk fluently between lessons does not necessarily mean that they do not have difficulties in keeping up in class. There is a fundamental difference between "everyday knowledge" and "school knowledge", with the latter assuming different kinds of linguistic ability<sup>29</sup>. Where Swedish can more obviously appear to be a second language for students born abroad, it can be less clear in the case of second generation immigrant students.

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28 Hyltenstam, K and Lindberg, I (2004) Foreword.

29 A clear difference remains in that school knowledge is more text-based and thus more context-dependent. In everyday knowledge, language is often accompanied by action and by references to joint experiences etc. In school knowledge, the language is expected in another way to be self supporting. Skolverket (2008c).

## Part Two

In part two the methods used in the study is introduced and the study's main results are presented. A first chapter focus on the organisation of schools' work for these students and a second on the eventual effects of participation in mother tongue tuition and/or in Swedish as a second language on students' grades.

## 4. Method

### Questionnaire study

The aim of the questionnaire study was to acquire a broad view of schools' work relating to students with another mother tongue<sup>30</sup>. The questionnaire was put to the school administrations of all the compulsory schools in the country at which ten per cent of the students were entitled to mother tongue tuition<sup>31</sup>. It was sent out to 1,201 compulsory schools<sup>32</sup>. Responses were received from a total of 900 schools, corresponding to 75 per cent of the schools in the survey. The results can be seen as being representative of the work in the country's compulsory schools<sup>33</sup> in relation to students with another mother tongue than Swedish<sup>34</sup>.

Questions were mainly asked about the organisation at the school of mother tongue tuition and Swedish as a second language, but some questions referred to the existence of study guidance and bilingual teaching. Other questions related to the school's documentation and follow up of the students' language and knowledge development, and questions were also asked about the school's other resources for these students and for any projects. The school heads were asked to express their opinion about different possible obstacles to the work and to evaluate what is most important in the work relating to improved goal achievement for this student group.

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30 The questionnaire study is presented in "Grundskolors verksamhet för elever med annat moders mål än svenska – resultat från en enkätstudie" ([www.skolverket.se/publikationer](http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer))

31 In addition to the criterion of a minimum of ten per cent of entitled students, there was also a requirement of a minimum number of 20 students. Certain independent schools with language/ethnic/denominational specialisation were not included in the study if the school's specialisation did not correspond with the purpose of the study.

32 The selection originally included 1,300 schools. As the questionnaire was administered via the internet, almost one hundred schools dropped out, which was mainly due to the updating of register information. Examples of this were that school units had been discontinued or amalgamated with other units, changed name/address etc. A small number of schools had special reasons for not responding to the questionnaire.

33 In accordance with the study's limitation, i.e. schools with a minimum of 10 per cent of entitled students etc.

34 A certain dropout analysis was conducted in a comparison between the schools that had responded or had not responded to the questionnaire, with regard to different background conditions such as the number of students entitled to mother tongue tuition. This comparison did not report any notable differences between the different groups of schools.

## Interview study

The study covered a total of 13 school units divided between four municipalities<sup>35</sup>. A basis for the selection of schools was to represent schools that, to some extent, had different prerequisites for the work. Those involved were, for instance, schools with different proportions of students with another mother tongue<sup>36</sup>, schools in different environments<sup>37</sup> and schools with work in this field for students in different years<sup>38</sup>. Some schools organised activities for newly arrived students.

The school administration was interviewed at all of the schools. Different categories of teachers were interviewed: pre-school class teachers, class teachers for students in years 1–3, class teachers for students in years 4–6, subject teachers in Swedish and Swedish as a second language, subject teachers in social science, natural science and mathematics in years 6–9. Groups of students were interviewed at schools with students in the higher years 6–9. Mother tongue teachers were also interviewed at all of the schools with the exception of one<sup>39</sup>.

The interviews focused on the schools' activity for students with another mother tongue<sup>40</sup>. They dealt with the organisation of the teaching - mother tongue tuition, Swedish as a second language, any adaptation of the teaching, study guidance for students - and with what and how the schools thought and reasoned around the work. This could relate to motives and background, matters of principle, new insights, well-grounded experience etc. School resources, such as teacher competence and the school's student population, were also involved.

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35 The interview study is presented in "Grundskolors verksamhet för elever med annat moders mål än svenska – resultat av en intervjustudie" ([www.skolverket.se/publikationer](http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer))

36 One category of schools has between 15 and 25% of students entitled to mother tongue tuition, while other schools have over 50% of entitled students and one school has about 30–35% entitled students.

37 Schools in large towns/suburban municipalities, rural municipalities, medium-sized towns in different parts of the country.

38 Whole F (preschool class)–9 schools, schools only with students in lower years (F–5) and schools only with students in the higher years (6, 7–9).

39 At one school, the mother tongue teachers were doubtful about the interview and chose not to participate in the study.

40 All in all, about sixty interviews were conducted, with most of them done in groups. Each interview lasted about one and a half hours. The interviews were recorded and printed.

## Statistical material (ETF)

This sub-study aimed to illustrate possible effects of participation in mother tongue tuition and in Swedish as a second language. The material that the study has used is the “ETF” material<sup>41</sup>.

The material is unique insofar as it tracks a year cohort of students in compulsory school from year 3 until the end of year 9<sup>42</sup>. The students were in year 3 in the spring term of 1997 and left school in the spring term of 2003. In addition to annual administrative data, covering details of participation in the teaching, the material also includes questionnaire responses from the students when they were in year 9, and details of their performance at school, such as grades and merit ratings in year 9. Certain register details regarding, for instance, migration and the parents’ level of education and employment, are linked to the students.

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41 The material is longitudinal and originates in a research project, UGU (ETF – Evaluation Through Follow-up) at the Department of Education of the University of Gothenburg. The analysis of the material is presented in ”En uppföljande studie av en kohort elever i grund skolans årskurs 3 till årskurs 9 (UGU-87)” ([www.skolverket.se/publikationer](http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer)).

42 The material is one collection of several that follow a year cohort of students through compulsory school. The material that has been used applies for students who were in year 3 in the spring term of 1997. A majority of the students were born in 1987.

# 5. Compulsory school’s work for students with another mother tongue

## Mother tongue tuition

Mother tongue tuition is regulated in the Compulsory School Ordinance. According to the ordinance, the municipality is obliged to offer the student mother tongue tuition. As far as the students are concerned, there are conditions attached to the tuition. The mother tongue must be a daily language of intercourse for the student and the students must have basic knowledge of the mother tongue. The fact of the student having one or both parents with another mother tongue than Swedish is thus not sufficient. The mother tongue tuition may not include more than one language for the same student.

Some circumstances allow municipalities not to offer mother tongue tuition. This is the case if there is not a suitable teacher or if there are less than five students in the municipality who request tuition in a certain mother tongue. If the tuition is arranged outside timetabled time, students are entitled to tuition for a maximum of seven school years unless there are special needs that motivate an extension.

## Students’ opportunity for mother tongue tuition

The extent to which the need for mother tongue tuition is required varies, but a majority of the schools nevertheless say that most students are offered tuition. (Table 1)

Table 1 Which students are offered mother tongue tuition? (Questionnaire study)

	No. of schools (n)	Proportion of schools %
Can all students have mother tongue tuition?		
In principle, all students	495	59.6
Not all students, but most	264	31.8
Only certain students	68	8.2
Do not know/doubtful	4	0.5
Total	831	100.0

Schools where more than every other student has another mother tongue offer to a slightly greater extent tuition to all entitled students. In schools with a lower proportion of students with another mother tongue (up to 15%) it is more common, by contrast, that only some of the entitled students are offered tuition.

### Students’ participation in tuition

The proportion of students at school with another mother tongue seems also to be of significance for participation. As with the schools’ reporting above of which students are offered tuition, a higher proportion of students participate at schools where every other student has another mother tongue. (Table 2)

Table 2      *Average number of students in mother tongue tuition for schools with different proportions of students with another mother tongue (Questionnaire study)*

<i>Schools with different proportions of students with another mother tongue</i>	<i>No. of schools (n)</i>	<i>Proportion of students with another mother tongue who have participated in the tuition during the school year %</i>
-15 %	228	51.9
15 - 25%	264	49.6
25 - 50 %	221	59.4
50 % >	162	67.4
Total number of schools	875	56.8

### Which students participate – and for how many years?

A majority both of foreign-born students and second generation immigrant students have participated in mother tongue tuition for at least one school year in compulsory school<sup>43</sup>. It is worth noting that a fifth of the students with one Swedish and one foreign-born parent<sup>44</sup> have also participated in the tuition. (Table 3)

Table 3      *Proportion of students with different foreign background who participate in mother tongue tuition at some point during years 3-9 of compulsory school (ETF material)*

	<i>Born abroad (%)</i>	<i>Born in Sweden of foreign-born parents (%)</i>	<i>Born in Sweden of one Swedish-born and one foreign-born parent (%)</i>
Taught in mother tongue	73.8	68.3	18.8
Total	(n=617)	(n=681)	(n=929)

According to the mother tongue teachers, motivation to participate in the tuition is clearly related to the students’ age. When younger, more students are motivated to participate. Just before the teenage years, other activities hold an attraction and the students have a greater wish to stop the tuition, which they

<sup>43</sup> ETF material.

<sup>44</sup> In official statistics, students with one Swedish and one foreign-born parent are usually defined as students of Swedish background. The separation and inclusion of the students in this study is because the mother tongue tuition also covers these students (cf above).

do to a greater extent or, alternatively, they are absent more often. When the students reach their teenage years, their interest in studying their mother tongue often returns. Some students see the benefit of possibly gaining a high grade in the subject, but this can also be a question of teenagers seeking an identity. Around this time, the mother tongue becomes important again.

Comparatively more students in the lower school years – just over half<sup>45</sup> – participate in mother tongue tuition. Participation decreases continually thereafter up until year 6 or 7, then increasing again in the later years 7–9<sup>46</sup>. (Not presented in table.) On average, the students participate in the tuition for about three years but, for foreign-born students, a longer period is more common. (Table 4)

*Table 4 Different number of years in mother tongue tuition for students with different foreign background. Proportion (%) of students who have participated in mother tongue tuition. (ETF material)*

No. of years <sup>47</sup> in tuition (from year 3–9)	Born abroad (%)	Born in Sweden of foreign-born parents (%)	Born in Sweden of one Swedish-born and one foreign-born parent (%)	Total % (n)
1–2 years	36.6	40.1	67.6	43.1 (466)
3–4 years	31.9	33.6	27.7	32.0 (346)
5–7 years	31.5	26.2	4.6	25.0 (270)
Total	100.0 (n=448)	100.0 (n=461)	100.0 (n=173)	100.0 (n=1082)

<sup>45</sup> This applies for both foreign-born and second generation students in the ETF-study.

<sup>46</sup> The ETF-study shows that 38,1 % of foreign-born students and 28,9 % of second generation students participate in mother tongue tuition in year 9.

<sup>47</sup> The number of years displayed in the table departs from year 3. An additional two years of tuition is not unlikely, since the study does not include information for year 1 or 2.

## Organisation of the tuition – school years, time and timetabling

At most schools, mother tongue tuition is arranged for students in the respective school years that the school covers<sup>48</sup>. An average of nine out of ten schools arrange tuition, with a somewhat higher proportion for the lower school years and a slightly lower proportion for years 7–9. Mother tongue tuition occurs to a less extent in the preschool class, but it is nevertheless the case in seven of ten of the schools in the questionnaire study.

It is apparent from the questionnaires that the tuition is normally limited to between 40 and 60 minutes per week, even if these times vary both upwards and downwards. For the most part, the tuition is held at the students' own school.

The teaching is mainly scheduled outside of the timetable, which is apparent both from the results of the interview study and the questionnaire study.

Some of the mother tongue teachers who were interviewed expressed dissatisfaction at the tuition time being so restricted. They think it is difficult to achieve the goals in the subject with the limited time at their disposal.

Mother tongue teachers indicated other problems with premises, with some schools not having a fixed room for the tuition. The teachers having first to find a vacant room can be put in relation to a work situation which for most of these teachers involves constant movement between different schools and tuition that is usually scheduled after regular school hours.

In most cases in the study, it is the municipality that has the overall responsibility for the mother tongue tuition. This means that schools sometimes can have a less committed relation to the tuition and are sometimes badly informed both about which students are included and about how the tuition is organised. Just less than a fifth of the schools say that there are no guidelines for this activity.

## Study guidance

Study guidance as an activity is closely linked with mother tongue tuition but is regulated under the heading Special Support in chapter 5, sections 2 and 3 of the Compulsory School Ordinance. It states there that a student is entitled to study guidance in their mother tongue if the student so requires. Study

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<sup>48</sup> The questionnaire included a question if the school arranged, for the current year, mother tongue tuition for the respective years F (pre-school year) -9. If the school did not include specific years, the response "Not valid" was an option. The estimate of the proportion of schools that arrange the tuition for the respective years is based on the valid number of schools.

guidance can, in special cases, also include a language other than the mother tongue with regard to immigrant students<sup>49</sup>. The ordinance does not, however, clarify what is meant by “study guidance”. Lack of clarity as to what study guidance actually means is also something that emerges in the interview study.

At most of the schools visited, study guidance is exercised rather sparingly. It takes place to the greatest extent at the schools that have a higher proportion of newly arrived students and it is also mainly to this student group that study guidance is offered.

Statements from the schools also indicate that study guidance is reserved for the weakest students and is not given to students who are said to have made more progress with their language development. Some teachers think that more students need study guidance than those who at present have access to it.

Almost two thirds of the schools in the questionnaire study offer study guidance. At two of three schools that offer study guidance, approximately every tenth student with another mother tongue is involved<sup>50</sup>. We do not know whether this low figure depends on lack of resources or on little need for the guidance.

The visits to the schools show that there are problems, both regarding cooperation as well as the knowledge base for the study guidance. At some schools there is a hint of doubt about the benefits and quality involved. In general, the study guidance teacher helps with translating subject words or with explaining the subject in more detail for the sake of better understanding.

## Swedish as a second language

The Compulsory School Ordinance lays down that tuition in Swedish as a second language shall, *if necessary*, be arranged for students with another mother tongue than Swedish. This group of students also includes immigrant students whose main language of daily intercourse with one or both guardians is Swedish, and students whose mother tongue is Swedish and who have been admitted from schools abroad. It is the school head who decides whether tuition will be arranged for students. The ordinance also states that the tuition should be arranged *instead of* tuition in Swedish. In addition to this tuition in the subject, Swedish as a second language can constitute the subject Language option, Student option and/or School option.

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49 Concerning students that before arrival to Sweden have had tuition in another language than their mother tongue.

50 The questionnaire study.

## Which students participate and on what grounds?

### Grounds for the school's decisions...

It is the school head who decides for which of the school's students Swedish as a second language will be arranged. An assessment of the students' oral and written work is used as a basis for the decision. But the decision regarding participation often involves parents and students. At the schools visited, it was generally difficult to decide that students should study Swedish as a second language if this decision was not supported by the student/parents.

It can be noted here that, according to the ordinance, a school head can, in theory, decide in accordance with which syllabus the student is to study Swedish, irrespective of what the student/parents think. At the same time, the school and school head have a far-reaching responsibility to explain and motivate for students and parents which form of tuition will provide the best educational solution for the student.

### ...and the students' background

Which students do participate in Swedish as a second language? As far as students who left compulsory school at the end of the spring term of 2003 are concerned, there are relatively clear patterns both as regards their migration background and their social family background<sup>51</sup>.

A majority of students born abroad – eight out of ten – participate in Swedish as a second language, and the proportion is greater the later the student arrived in the country<sup>52</sup>. Approximately six of ten students born in Sweden of foreign-born parents participate in the tuition.

With reference mainly to the foreign-born students, but also to second generation immigrant students, of those who do not participate in the tuition, a comparatively greater number come from another Nordic country or a European country.

For the second generation students, there is another factor involved: the educational level and occupation of the parents. There are comparatively more students from home environments with a low level of education and homes where the parents have a low job status who study Swedish as a second language. A higher social background among second generation immigrant students indicates instead that the student follows the syllabus for Swedish.

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51 Analysis in the ETF material.

52 It must be remembered here that the material only includes students who had arrived by the end of school year 3 at the latest.

## **How is tuition in Swedish as a second language organised?**

The interview study showed that schools often organise Swedish as a second language in the form of remedial lessons connected to Swedish, and that the students participate both in Swedish and in Swedish as a second language.

In these cases, the number of lessons that the students have in Swedish as a second language varies. This way of organising things dominates in years 1–5 and is generally more common in schools with a low proportion of students with another mother tongue. For students in years 6–9, Swedish as a second language is organised as a separate subject in the majority of the schools visited. There are nevertheless differences in how the tuition is arranged.

At most of the schools, it was pointed out that there was a lack of teacher time for tuition in Swedish as a second language. This can be related to the fact that the tuition in Swedish as a second language is organised as remedial lessons connected to Swedish and not as a separate subject with as many lessons and equivalent to the subject Swedish.

## **View of Swedish as a second language – separate subject or remedial teaching?**

With the odd exception, at all of the schools visited for the study there is a view of Swedish as a second language as being a remedial subject rather than a subject with a status equal to that of Swedish. This is of course most noticeable at schools where the subject is organised as remedial teaching. At these schools, the students usually participate wholly or partially in the regular Swedish class but go and study Swedish as a second language during other lessons. But even at schools where the students are taught Swedish as a second language as a separate subject, the subject is usually looked upon as a temporary measure.

## **What does and can the school do – a picture of the work at 13 schools**

### **Varied activities under varying conditions**

Knowledge, awareness and the approach in relation to the group of students with another mother tongue all vary at the schools visited. About half of the group of schools can be said to have a comparatively more conscious perspective as regards language and knowledge development for students with another mother tongue. This perspective, to a certain extent, is also apparent with regard to the area of work involved. It is not possible to say, however, that any of the schools have gone the whole way in creating a structure or activity that, according to the relevant research, is of the greatest benefit for multilin-

gual students<sup>53</sup>. Such a school environment is distinguished more by cooperation at every level in relation to the multilingual students and by an integration of language and subject tuition. Most of the schools in the study have a long way left to go.

Thus far, the schools whose work in this area has progressed further have a different set of strengths and weakness as regards the activity for students with another mother tongue. In the group of schools whose work is less well developed, there are examples of those that, to some extent, have good prerequisites, such as having teachers qualified in Swedish as a second language, but where this does not make much impression on the activity.

### Schools whose starting point is in a multilingual student group

The schools in the study whose work in this area has progressed further take for granted, more than the others, that the student group is multilingual, rather than regarding multilingualism as an irregularity. A more conscious perspective and a greater overall view of these students emerged in interviews with school management and different teacher categories, but also in what was done at the school<sup>54</sup>.

At these schools, there was a greater diversity of solutions for the students with another mother tongue. This could be a question of different projects that had the purpose of supporting the students' development, but also of different, more minor solutions and efforts to utilise existing resources for the prevailing needs.

Most school administrations had undergone professional development in questions of diversity and, in many cases, teachers had been given training in this area. For instance, many of the teachers had been trained in Swedish as a second language since that competence was to be used in the work, even in other subjects than Swedish as a second language. Swedish as a second language had a relatively high status and there was also an awareness of the significance of the mother tongue tuition, even if that tuition, for different reasons, was often marginalised at these schools too.

The tuition in Swedish as a second language worked relatively well at the schools at which the activity was better developed, particularly at some of them. At those schools, there was considerable confidence in the tuition, not only among the school staff but also among students and parents.

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53 See e.g. Bunar and Axelssons introduction in Axelsson, M and Bunar, N. (Ed.) (2006) and Foreword, and Axelsson, M in Hyltenstam K, & Lindberg, I, (Ed.) (2004).

54 Compare the reasoning in Myndigheten för skolutveckling, (2004) about regarding multilingual students either as a resource or as a burden. At the schools with a better developed activity, the students were seen more as a resource than as a burden.

At one school in particular, intensive work had been done on providing information about the function and advantages of the subject. The teaching of the subject was seen to be equal to the teaching of Swedish, in contrast to the situation at most of the other schools in the study<sup>55</sup>. In the interviews with the school's subject teachers, an awareness of the importance of language in the subjects was apparent, and the subject teachers said that, in their respective subjects, they had noticed positive effects of the tuition in Swedish as a second language

At some schools in the study, work has been started on incorporating mother tongue tuition and the mother tongue teachers into the rest of the work at the school. At a few schools, there were mother tongue teachers who were employed by the school and who also taught other subjects there. At one of the schools, the mother tongue teachers had good prerequisites for influencing the work, such as through regular meetings with the school administration and by being included in the work team.

Some of the schools had several other activities and ventures that originated with the multilingual students. Examples of activities that were considered particularly beneficial for students of foreign background were the organisation of "language baths"<sup>56</sup> in Swedish and English, tuition during school holidays, "homeworkshops", or participation in different local projects. Another example was the acquisition of books in different languages for the school library.

In the schools covered by the study, there are also instances of teachers and teacher groups having made more conscious efforts to adapt the teaching for multilingual students. One teacher's strategy was to try to get the students to talk to each other and discuss what they were doing in mathematics. According to this teacher, this benefited the students whose language was weak more than if they had been working on their own the whole time. Teachers in a certain team worked together on a joint structure, planning lessons in their subjects. A lesson structure that the students learned to recognise was considered to make it easier for students with another mother tongue to be able to keep up and concentrate on the lesson itself. Prior to each lesson, an agenda was presented that referred back to previous lessons and included a summary at the end. The teachers in the team also aimed at starting to work around the subject areas more thematically with the purpose of giving the students the possibility for greater prior understanding<sup>57</sup>.

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55 See also Myndigheten för skolutveckling, (2004), Hyltenstam, K in Skolverket (2000) and Bergman, P in Skolverket (2000).

56 "Language bath" means intensive work on the relevant languages for a certain period.

57 See e.g. Holmegaard, M, Wikström, I in Hyltenstam K, & Lindberg, I. (Ed.) (2004) who describes beneficial prerequisites for students with another mother tongue to be able to learn, and Gibbons, P (2002) who describes a (subject) teacher's role as language developer.

At schools that had come far with their work on language development, it was often the case that teachers in several different subjects, and the school administration too, had been trained in language development and Swedish as a second language. At one school, all staff, including office staff and staff with other functions, had received training in multilingualism in order to be able to deal better with the students with another mother tongue<sup>58</sup>.

### **What is important for schools' attitudes?**

The proportion of students with another mother tongue at a school is significant for the extent to which the school can be said to organise more deliberately strategic work for this group of students – a result at which the questionnaire study also points.

The students' immigrant background is another factor that is important in the schools' approach. There were different extents to which schools with a high proportion of students with another mother tongue received newly arrived students. At some schools, this was within the scope of preparatory classes. It was quite obvious that these students required different, specific efforts.

One conclusion of the interview study is that schools with a more diverse student group seem to have more incentive for adapting the work for the benefit of the multilingual students. Another factor that seemed to be significant in the differences observed between the 13 schools visited was the school administrations' knowledge and awareness in relation to working with the multilingual students.

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58 Possibilities for development are described in e.g. Axelsson M, Lennartsson-Hokkanen, I, Sellgren, M, (2002).

## 6. Possible effects of participation in different tuition

### Average merit rating for students with different backgrounds

Regarding differences in school results between students with different backgrounds, the greatest one is between the foreign-born students and the students with Swedish background. The difference amounts to about 13 merit points<sup>59</sup>. (Table 5)

Table 5      Average merit rating for students of different foreign background, spring term 2003. (EFT material)

Students in year 9, spring term 2003	Born in Sweden of Swedish- born parents	Born abroad	Born in Sweden of foreign-born parents	Born in Sweden of one Swedish-born and one foreign-born parent	Total
Average merit rating	207.92 (n=6896)	195.05 (n=548)	199.18 (n=634)	205.82 (n=875)	206.31 (n=8953)

A majority of these students, both those who themselves have immigrated and those whose parents have immigrated, have participated in the tuition in one or both subjects. Participation is greatest for foreign-born students where two of three students have been taught in Swedish as a second language and also in the mother tongue<sup>60</sup>.

59 The merit rating is based on the 16 best grades in the student's final grade (Ännu ej godkänd (Fail)=0, G (Pass)=10, VG (Pass with distinction)=15, MVG (Pass with special distinction)=20). The table includes students with grades in at least one subject. The reason for the difference between second and first generation immigrant students not being greater is because the survey does not include students who arrived later than in school year 3. About 60 per cent of these foreign-born students arrived in Sweden a year or so before school started. The merit rating for the foreign-born students in this material is closest to the merit rating in official statistics for students who arrived before the school start.

60 In respect of registered participation for at least one term/school year. Participation in both subjects does not necessarily mean that it has been during the same school year. The criterion is that the students have been registered to participate in the tuition at some point during the course of years 3–9 of compulsory school.

## Is students' participation in tuition significant for their academic success?

The difference in average merit rating between students of Swedish and foreign background is well documented and presents no particular surprises. Swedish is the mother tongue for students of Swedish background, but is a second or perhaps third language for students of foreign background. The language is a means and a prerequisite for students being able to fully assimilate knowledge in different school subjects. This makes particularly high demands on students who do not have the language of tuition “built-in” as a first language. The research in the field of second languages has pointed out the time-related situation that applies for students with another mother tongue, for them to achieve a sufficiently good linguistic level for the school’s teaching in different subjects. About two years is reasonable for having a command of the language at a more everyday level, but five years in order to be able to use the language as a tool in, for instance, the learning process at school<sup>61</sup>.

School sources often point out that inadequate knowledge of the Swedish language is an important factor in the generally poorer result that this group of students demonstrates<sup>62</sup>. But even linguistically, the variation within the group of students with another mother tongue can be considerable, both at the school in general and within an individual class. There can be a mix of students born inside and outside the country, from multilingual or monolingual home environments, with different situations as regards Swedish as their second language, and with varying levels of knowledge of their mother tongue to fall back on. This, of course, places rigorous demands on the individual teacher to model the teaching appropriately and on the school to know about the needs involved, for instance, in the teaching of Swedish/Swedish as a second language. Official statistics show that it is significant for students’ school results whether the student has immigrated to Sweden or is a second generation student, i.e. born in the country of foreign-born parents. Entering Swedish school late is one of the circumstances that is of great significance for these students’ chances of achieving the educational goals<sup>63</sup>.

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61 Cummins, J (2006) referred to in Axelsson, M, Lennartson-Hokkanen, I, Sellgren, M (2002).

62 This emerges in the National Agency for Education’s inspections (reported in Skolverkets lägesbedömning 2006). It was also brought up in interviews with teachers within the scope of a government commission on students of foreign background, see Skolverket (2005).

63 Students of Swedish background – 210.1 p, students born in Sweden of foreign-born parents – 199.4 p, students who had immigrated prior to school start – 196.2, students who had immigrated after school start – 165.0 p Skolverket (2008a).

There are many circumstances outside the school that can be conceived as playing a part in the goal achievement for students of foreign background<sup>64</sup>. The students have different prerequisites from home in support of their knowledge development. Their social background has a general effect and is evident for students regardless of foreign or Swedish background. Part of the difference in school results existing between students of Swedish and foreign background can be explained by a comparatively high proportion of students of foreign background coming from homes with a low level of education and with a weaker connection with the labour market<sup>65</sup>. More specifically, for students of foreign background there can be a home environment where it is more difficult for parents, irrespective of ambitions and desires for their children, to support them in their school work. Language differences may be involved, as well as parents with a background in other countries and cultures not having the same familiarity with or possibility of understanding the Swedish school system.

The question arises here of what school can do, and does, to even out these differences in “initial values” for students. Among others, it is a question of what tuition the students are offered. When considering the ambitions for the subjects Swedish as a second language and mother tongue tuition that the syllabuses describe, the subjects’ role as tools for learning and as a key to other subject knowledge is explained. A focus on linguistic competence is, of course, specified in both subjects, but the mother tongue syllabus also includes a number of other aims.

The individual’s identity as being multilingual and multicultural is involved here, but the subject also aims to improve the individual’s self-esteem. An overall goal for both of these subjects, directed particularly at the students with another mother tongue, can perhaps be described as an ambition to improve these students’ chances of performing at school on a level equal to that of the students of Swedish background.

### **Average merit rating for participation in different tuition...**

The average merit rating for the students of a different foreign background was presented in table 5. Table 6 presents the average merit rating for the whole group of students divided up per participation, or not, in Swedish as a second language and/or in mother tongue tuition<sup>66</sup>.

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64 For a detailed study of different circumstances in students’ backgrounds that are significant for their results at school, see e.g. Skolverket (2004).

65 Ibid.

66 The table is based on details of the students’ participation in the different subjects’ tuition throughout at least one school year.

Table 6      *Average merit rating for students with foreign background<sup>67</sup> who have participated or not in mother tongue tuition (Mtt) and/or in Swedish as a second language (Ssl) (ETF material)*

<i>Participation in tuition (students with registered participation for at least one school year)</i>	<i>Have not participated in the tuition (Ssl and Mtt)</i>	<i>Participated in Mtt</i>	<i>Participated in Ssl</i>	<i>Participated in Ssl and Mtt</i>	<i>Total</i>
Average merit rating	206.83 (n=845)	220.22 (n=322)	181.14 (n=162)	190.30 (n=710)	201.15 (n=2039)

Two clear situations emerge from table 6. Students who have only participated in mother tongue tuition as an addition to the ordinary tuition have a significantly higher average merit rating, even compared with students of Swedish background (cf table 5). The group of students who have only participated in Swedish as a second language have on average the lowest rating, much lower than the lowest merit group in the comparison above (table 6 in comparison with table 5).

### **...for students of different foreign background**

In table 7 below, the corresponding situation is presented for students of different foreign background, such as students who were born abroad. The same pattern of results emerges, with a few variations. By way of introduction it should be noted that the number of students is not large in some of the student groups, involving more uncertainty in estimating the merit rating. This applies, for instance, to the smaller number of about 50 foreign-born students in the respective groups who have not participated in the tuition at all or who have participated in mother tongue tuition (but not in Swedish as a second language). It also applies to the very small groups of 20-30 students who have one parent who is foreign-born and who have participated in Swedish as a second language.

A higher average merit rating is evident for all of these groups of students who have participated in mother tongue tuition. It is interesting to note that the merit rating is highest in the group of second generation immigrant students, that is to say students born in Sweden of foreign-born parents. Regarding, instead, the students who have participated in Swedish as a second language (but not in mother tongue tuition), they represent the lowest average merit rating in all of the groups of students of different foreign background. (Table 7)

<sup>67</sup> The group includes foreign-born students, second generation students and students with one foreign-born parent and one Swedish parent.

*Table 7*      *Average merit rating for students with foreign background who have or have not participated in mother tongue tuition (Mtt) and/or in Swedish as a second language (Ssl) (ETF material)*

<i>Participation in tuition (students with registered participation for at least one school year)</i>	<i>Born abroad Average merit rating (n)</i>	<i>Born in Sweden of foreign-born parents Average merit rating (n)</i>	<i>Born in Sweden of one Swedish and one foreign-born parent Average merit rating (n)</i>
Have not participated in the tuition (Ssl and Mtt)	216.57 (51)	208.07 (114)	205.90 (680)
Participated in Mtt	216.27 (55)	228.57 (129)	213.99 (138)
Participated in Ssl	183.31 (71)	184.49 (69)	163.64 (22)
Participated in Ssl and Mtt	191.19 (371)	188.76 (314)	196.40 (25)
Total	195.05 (548)	200.01 (626)	205.84 (865)

## **A possible positive effect of participation in mother tongue tuition**

Is it possible to understand the high merit rating for students who have participated in mother tongue tuition? Is it a possible effect of participation in the tuition, or are there other possible explanations? It is clear that the merit rating co-varies with the participation in the tuition. But it is difficult with this study to find support for this actually relating to an effect of participation in the tuition and not to something else. That would require a larger data-material and another type of study<sup>68</sup>. It is also important to remember that the study has not focused on the tuition itself in these subjects; we do not know what takes place in the classroom and we are therefore not able, against such a background, to comment on possible effects of the teaching. We must therefore be more careful when commenting on possible effects of participation rather than maintaining that participation in the tuition has a real effect on students' success at school.

Several of the mother tongue teachers interviewed in the study emphasised that students who do well in the mother tongue usually also do well in other subjects. The teachers saw this as an effect of the mother tongue tuition and said that the tuition strengthens the student in the rest of his or her schoolwork. Many mother tongue teachers also stress the significance

<sup>68</sup> E.g. Thomas & Collier's (1997) large-scale American study of the effect of participation in different teaching programmes, referred to in Axelsson, M in Hyltenstam, K & Lindberg, I (Ed.) (2004).

of the mother tongue tuition for the students' identity building and self-confidence<sup>69</sup>.

In connection with this feeling among mother tongue teachers it can be stated that the *number of years in tuition* seems to have a 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 differences, however, are not particularly great, but only involve a few points between students who have participated in tuition for a longer or shorter time<sup>70</sup>.

It is also the case that the students who have participated in the tuition, with a few exceptions<sup>71</sup>, have higher grades in all of the school's subjects, even in the comparison with students of Swedish background.

### **Or are there other possible explanations?**

The high merit rating that was observed for students who had participated in mother tongue tuition can be seen against the study's impression of the tuition's limited scope, tuition that normally involves one or two lessons per week. With this background in mind, a question can naturally arise about the high merit rating observed for the students who had participated in the tuition<sup>72</sup>.

Apart from details from the school, the material also includes information about different circumstances in the students' backgrounds that could possibly constitute reasons for a high merit rating. There are, for instance, details about gender and social background.

*The gender of the students*, and a case with mainly girls in tuition, could be an underlying explanation for the high merit rating. But the gender distribution is relatively even in mother tongue tuition<sup>73</sup> and a co-variation between participation in the tuition and a highest merit rating is evident for both girls and boys.

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69 The mother tongue syllabus also takes up this type of goal as a purpose of the tuition.

70 The average merit rating for all students who have participated in mother tongue tuition varies between 197 and 202 merit points for students who have participated for 1–2 years, 3–4 years and 5–7 years, respectively.

71 The exceptions, significantly, relate to the school's more practical subjects, such as technology, crafts, physical education and art. The differences here are extremely small between students who have or have not participated in the mother tongue tuition. The pattern can be regarded as logical, since good knowledge of the mother tongue ought to make the most difference to learning the theoretical subjects at school.

72 The material refers to students who finished school in 2003. Thus there are a few years until school year 2006/2007 to which the questionnaire study's results refer. One assumption is that the organisation of the mother tongue tuition has not changed dramatically.

73 With the exception of a somewhat higher proportion of girls among students who have participated in Swedish as a second language and mother tongue tuition (girls: 52.8%, boys: 47.2 %).

Nor is it the case that students with a background in *certain countries* participate to a greater extent in mother tongue tuition.

With regard to the question of which students participate in which type of tuition, students' *social background* plays a part. If the profile for the students in mother tongue tuition is compared with the profile for students who have participated in Swedish as a second language, there is a marked difference. As regards foreign-born and second generation immigrant students who only have participated in mother tongue tuition (but not in Swedish as a second language), just less than half the group (46.0%) have parents with some kind of post-secondary education. Of the corresponding group of students who instead have participated in Swedish as a second language, just over a quarter (28.3%) of them have that family background

But the observed differences in recruitment as displayed above, do not seem to have a direct effect on the high merit rating observed for students in mother tongue tuition. As regards the merit rating for students in groups with different social backgrounds<sup>74</sup>, in each such group it is students who have participated in mother tongue tuition who on average have the highest merit rating.

Given the above comparisons, it is important to remember, as emphasised in the introduction to this section, that we cannot comment with any certainty on the effects of participation in the tuition. We do not have information about other possible circumstances existing in the background that perhaps could influence these students' participation as well as merit rating in the same way. Thus, on the basis of the statistical documentation only, we cannot make any comment on causal or directional relationships – cause and effect. An interpretation is needed.

One possible explanation, in line with language research, is that participation in mother tongue tuition generates good knowledge of the mother tongue, which is positive for the students' general academic performance, which in turn results in high merit ratings. An alternative explanation is that, right from the start, it is a question of the "best" students with the most motivated parents, irrespective of social background, who are the ones who can "afford" extra studies in the mother tongue – students who perhaps, even without this tuition, would have left school with the highest merit ratings.

As regards the low merit rating for students who have participated in Swedish as a second language, there are several possible circumstances involved. The students who participate in the tuition come, to a greater extent, from families with a lower level of education and a weaker position on the labour market.

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74 Taking into consideration social background, classified very roughly on the basis of occupation, and level of education, representing the family's most advanced education in a five-grade division from pre-secondary to longer post-secondary, including post-graduate studies.

Swedish as a second language is widely regarded as remedial teaching and conducted as such for poorly performing students. Both of these situations may possibly contribute to the low merit rating for this group of students.

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In the course of their teaching, the majority of compulsory school teachers come or will come into contact with students with another mother tongue. The relationship with a student group that is increasingly being characterised by a diversity of linguistic and cultural backgrounds represents a challenge for the school. It is ultimately a question of being able to offer equivalent educational opportunities.

How does compulsory school meet this challenge, to what degree is the teaching adapted, what kind of teaching is offered to students with another mother tongue, and in what form is it offered? What does participation in Swedish as a second language and mother tongue tuition actually mean for the students, and what conditions are significant to how the school organises the teaching or, more generally, what the school offers these students?

This report is a summary of the main results of the study. The above-mentioned questions are examples of what the report covers. The survey is based on the results of a questionnaire directed at the country's compulsory school administrations, on interviews with school heads, teachers and students at a total of 13 schools in four municipalities, and on a follow-up of students in years 3 to 9 of compulsory school.