



Language and the law in Swedish education: Between guarantees and implementation

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This paper studies the language rights of Swedish Sign Language users, official minority languages (Sámi, Finnish, Meänkieli, Romani Chib, and Yiddish), and immigrants in Swedish education. The study draws from a critical analysis of Swedish legislation as well as from empirical research in the education literature and reveals existing gaps between *de jure* guarantees and their *de facto* implementation. In preschool, the Education Act (2010) protects the right to instruction in Swedish and Swedish Sign Language, official minority languages, and immigrant languages. Immigrant languages, however, are often seen by teachers as a barrier to the successful acquisition of Swedish and Swedish mainstream values (Hellman, 2019). Deaf children have the right to attend special schools, or they can attend mainstream schools where teachers are required to adapt instruction to their needs. In special schools they are supported by teachers who are highly qualified or experienced deaf educators. However, many municipal schools lack an in-house specialist teacher for deaf students, and hence one must question whether all deaf students can develop their linguistic abilities (Holmström & Schönström, 2017). Immigrants also have the right to receive mother tongue instruction in compulsory and upper secondary education, but only if there are at least five students who wish it, and if a suitable teacher is available. It is usually offered after school hours and for only about 40-60 min a week (Ganuza & Hedman, 2015). Thus, one must question whether this instruction is effective, even when offered. As for national minority languages, the School Ordinance (2011) allows school principals to be the deciders, and even 15 min weekly instruction can count to fulfill the requirements of the Act.

Keywords: Language rights, Sweden, Education, Guarantees, Implementation

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