



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

# **SÁMI CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO LEARN THEIR LANGUAGE**

## **Indigenous Experiences and Law in the Russian School Context**

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**Abstract**

This thesis is about the right to language (RtL), particularly about Sámi children's right to learn their language in school in Russia. The thesis consists of overarching research questions, methodology, and six studies.

This is interdisciplinary research within the field of the Sámi studies. The research combines approaches of law, sociology of law, and language sociology. In the thesis, I describe the overall methodology that obliged me to use several data gathering methods, as well as different analytical approaches. In the studies, I employed the legal method, interviews, thematic interview analysis, and document analysis according to themes. The theoretical framework of the thesis is based on two theoretical pillars: Pound's 'Law in Books' and Ehrlich's 'Living Law'.

One of the key findings of the research is five core elements of the RtL that were deduced as a result of the analysis of international law. These elements are: Legal recognition, Non-discrimination, Participation, Appropriate education, and High-quality education. The analysis of the Russian law demonstrates that these five elements are present in the Russian legal provisions. However, the contents of some of these elements in the Russian legislation vary from the contents of the respective elements found in the relevant international and regional legal acts.

Another key finding of this research indicates that the extent, the content, and the organisation of the current Sámi extracurricular language activity refer to a marginalized form of language education of the Sámi learners in Russia. The potential power of the legal framework of the RtL is not utilized for strengthening teaching and learning opportunities of the Sámi language in school.

**Keywords**

right to language, Sámi, school, Russia, Living law, Law in books

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