The Key to Integration?

*A Study of Language as a Policy Strategy for Social Integration of
Immigrants in Sweden*

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Acknowledgments

Abstract

The objectives of the Swedish integration policy are for everyone in Sweden to enjoy equal rights, obligations, and opportunities. The main focus of the policy is on early and individual efforts in language learning so that people who come to Sweden can get a job and live independently. This thesis addresses this issue by seeking to identify and analyze the challenges of integration in Sweden and specifically understand how language learning as a policy strategy helps in the social integration of immigrants into Swedish society. Four dimensions of social integration theory are acknowledged as the central components of successful integration: structural, cultural, interactive, and identificational. The research draws on qualitative data, namely, interviews, autoethnographic study, and document analysis. The results show that the language policy has not been as effective as anticipated because opportunities to use the language skills in practice and achieve positive interaction between different groups in society are scarce. Moreover, ongoing discrimination, especially in the labor market, restricts immigrants from fully participating in everyday life. Without positive interaction and active participation, language learning and integration in general cannot be successful.

Keywords: *Integration, Sweden, policy, Sfi, language learning, immigration.*

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1. Introduction

Sweden is among the most tolerant of nations when it comes to immigration. For many years, immigration flows have noticeably increased. The task that follows immigration is the challenge of integration. This is not easy considering that people come from many different cultural backgrounds. The objectives of Swedish integration policy are equal rights, obligations, and opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic or cultural background (Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality 2009). Through several initiatives and measures, the policy aims to support newly arrived immigrants in their first years in Sweden. However, many immigrants living in the country face difficulty integrating into Swedish society.

One major issue that immigrants must deal with in Sweden is their lack of knowledge of the Swedish language; this makes it difficult for them to establish themselves in Swedish society, especially in the labor market. An important pillar of Swedish integration policy is, therefore, to ensure that all immigrants are offered language education. This is assumed to be the key to successful social integration and work in the country (European Commission 2014).

Swedish for immigrants (Sfi) is the language education program, a tool offered by municipalities all over Sweden; Sfi aims to give adult immigrants the opportunity to learn how to communicate orally and in writing in Swedish. The goal is to prepare immigrants for everyday social and working life (Regeringskansliet 2013a). However, the language learning program has been criticized for not achieving the expected results. Many immigrants are still excluded from participating fully in the social and economic life of Sweden and thus cannot function as normal citizens in the host society.

1.1 Aim and Research questions

How well integration of immigrants succeeds has great importance for the development of society. The aim of this research was therefore to study the integration challenges that immigrants face when coming to Sweden. Furthermore, the study focused on how language as an integration strategic policy contributes to immigrants' social integration. Thus, the following research questions were formulated:

What are the challenges of immigrant integration in Sweden?

How does language learning help adult immigrants integrate into Swedish society?

This topic is worth investigating as it contributes to greater knowledge and understanding of successful integration. Furthermore, it points out the various factors that influence the process. The results of this research serve two purposes: (1) identify the challenges and obstacles of the integration policy in place and (2) discuss what opportunities can be created to enhance integration of immigrants.

2. Swedish integration policy from a historical perspective

The Swedish integration policy's direction and form have changed over time. Far back in history, Sweden carried a cultural assimilation policy toward its indigenous and ethnic minorities. The goal was to make the ethnic minorities more like the majority population. The great immigration during the post-war period, however, rendered such a policy unsustainable, and in the 1960s both immigrants and domestic minorities demanded increased opportunities to preserve their cultural and linguistic heritage. At this time, the state's efforts were fairly limited as it was assumed that a spontaneous integration of immigrants in Swedish society would occur through the labor market.

In 1965, the government introduced free education in Swedish for immigrants. Initially, the training took place in people's spare time and was directed by various community groups. However, in the 1970s, paid night courses in Swedish for immigrants began to be offered. After 1973, newly employed immigrants were entitled to paid leave of up to 240 hours to participate in Swedish language education.

In the mid-1970s, the Swedish integration policy changed. Assimilation was no longer important; instead, the pluralist idea took root, arguing that a society is enriched by many cultural manifestations. As a result, new reforms were adopted with the intention to make it easier for immigrants and their children to maintain language and cultural traditions from their country of origin (Lundh 2005, p. 51ff).

During this time, the parliament pushed for an integration policy based on the need to deal with the labor immigrants from non-Nordic countries. The policy gave immigrants settling permanently in Sweden the right to enjoy the same privileges as Swedish citizens, including access to the welfare system. Furthermore, they could choose whether they wanted to assimilate or maintain their specific culture of origin. It was nevertheless important for their preferences and actions not to conflict with Swedish values and norms. However, by the time this policy came into effect, the labor immigration from these

countries stopped and most migrants were refugees from developing countries. The integration programs now had to face challenging organizational problems (Westin 2006).

During the 1990s, the government modified its pluralist perspective. While the importance of cultural diversity was stressed, the need for adaptation and integration to Swedish conditions was emphasized as well. The aim of the integration was also to ensure a two-sided adjustment, a result of Sweden becoming more multicultural. At this point, awareness of the difficulties of integration increased and the search for a way to facilitate immigrants' integration into society was initiated. The Public Employment Service started to demand that refugees complete Sfi before they become eligible for job placement. Since the mid-1990s, multiple projects and activities have been undertaken at different levels of society to improve integration (Lundh 2005, p. 55ff).

3. Immigration to Sweden

> *Sweden will continue to be an open and tolerant country – I will never compromise on this. As a liberal, I welcome immigration, regardless of whether people come to Sweden as refugees or to work or study...* – Eric Ullehag, Minister for Integration (Regeringskansliet 2014).

Swedish immigration policy is known as one of the most open and tolerant in the world. For years, Sweden has welcomed people escaping from social and political unrest from all across the globe. In the present day, it is estimated that around one-fifth of Sweden's population has an immigrant background, defined as those who were either born abroad or born in Sweden to two immigrant parents (Fredlund-Blomst 2014).

There are a variety reasons for immigration to Sweden. People from countries with problems and conflicts immigrate usually as refugees or as relatives of a refugee, while people from other countries mainly come to Sweden for work or study. Because of the large immigration from countries with trouble, including Syria and Somalia, immigration to Sweden was the highest ever in 2013, at 115,845 people (Statistics Sweden 2014). Table 1 shows the 10 countries from which immigrants most frequently come (without including the Nordic countries) and the reasons for their settlement for 2013.

Table 1: Immigration by country of origin and reason for settlement (the 10 most common)

Citizenship	Studies/ Work	Relatives	Refugees	Other	Total
Total	**13 448**	**35 946**	**24 581**	**14 028**	**88 003**
Women	4 388	20 774	10 329	6 270	41 761
Men	9 060	15 172	14 252	7 758	46 242
Syria	325	1 499	9 755	170	11 749
Somalia	1	8 674	1 962	329	10 966
Poland	1 118	755	0	2 738	4 611
Stateless	32	635	3 503	130	4 300
Afghanistan	26	1 504	2 582	53	4 165
Eritrea	5	530	2 671	132	3 338
India	1 297	1 028	4	47	2 376
Iraq	228	1 610	401	63	2 302
Germany	836	374	0	986	2 196
China	1 140	864	27	44	2 075

(Source: Befolkningsstatistik 2013, Statistics Sweden)

The Swedish Migration Board (Migrationsverket) is the authority responsible for regulating immigration to Sweden. The Migration Office considers applications from people who want to take up permanent residence in Sweden, come for a visit, seek protection in Sweden, or become Swedish citizens. The vision of the Migration Board is "*Sweden — a nation open for the possibilities of global migration.*" Migration is seen as a positive force, something that enriches the country, in both economic and cultural terms.

The Swedish Migration Board receives its mandate from the parliament and the government, which lay down the Swedish asylum and migration policy. The government's goals for the board are to "*ensure a long-term, sustainable migration policy that safeguards asylum rights and, within the framework of regulated immigration, facilitates mobility across borders and promotes a needs-driven labor immigration, while utilizing and considering the development effects of migration, and furthering European and international cooperation.*"

Once a foreigner has been granted permission to stay in Sweden, it is mainly the job of the Swedish municipalities and county councils, along with the Swedish Public Employment Services, to help the immigrant integrate into Swedish society (Migrationsverket 2014).

4. Theoretical framework

The main theory employed in this research was the theory of social integration. To measure social integration, one must begin by defining key terms associated with the process of settlement as a result of immigration. The first part of this chapter delves into the concepts of integration, assimilation, and multiculturalism and reflects on how these terms are used today. In the second part, I focus on social integration, followed by a discussion of language learning as a key strategy for social integration. The concept of social cohesion is also be explored in this chapter. Finally, the last part explains how the theory is operationalized and applied to the research.

4.1 What do we mean by 'integration'?

"Integration is an interactive process between immigrants and the host society" (Bosswick & Heckman 2006, p. 11).

The immigration phenomenon has always been part of human history, although the reasons for immigration have differed. More and more people in developing and developed countries think about immigrating, either permanently or temporarily, to search for new and better opportunities (Keeley 2009, p. 12). The attitudes toward immigrants and the ideas of their role in society have differed among policy makers in Western countries. While immigrants encounter different barriers in each receiving society, they all have to face the challenge of integration the moment they settle in a new country.

Integrations can be defined in several ways. The major issue in the integration process is the complexity of what is actually meant by integration. Even though many agree that the term means "joining different parts into one entity," its practical interpretation and social connotation can differ significantly (Lacroix 2010, p. 6). Rinus Penninx (2003) claimed that integration is a process by which immigrants become accepted into society. In his opinion, the definition of integration is intentionally left open because the specific requirements for

acceptance by the receiving society vary considerably from country to country (Penninx 2003). Chantal Lacroix (2010) argued that different meanings of integration form the basis of national policies for improving immigrant integration and have consecutive effects on measuring, analyzing, and studying the levels of integration. This in turn determines when integration has been successful (Lacroix 2010, p. 6).

Table 2 is from Lacroix and offers a summary of how the term integration is used in academic and policy discourses to explain the process through which immigrants become part of the host society. The table provides a clear overview of the concept and shows that the term is rather vague. Integration can be either a one-way process where immigrants are expected to integrate fully into the existing culture and society without recognizing their diversity or a two-way process where a reciprocal adaptation between the immigrants and members of the society occurs. Of course, as Lacroix stated, the process depends on the interests, values, and perspectives of the people concerned in each society (2010, p. 11). As people endow integration with different meanings, it becomes more difficult to agree on a universal policy framework for integration, which may in the end lead to failure of integration in many societies.

Table 2: Overview of the term integration

Term	Usage(s)	Shortcoming(s) of the Concept
Integration	• *Usage 1*: Integration is often used in a normative way to imply a one-way process of adaptation by newcomers. This usage does not recognize the diversity of cultural and social patterns in a multicultural society; as a result, integration in this sense may merely be a watered-down form of assimilation. • *Usage 2*: A two-way process of adaptation involving changes in values, norms, and behavior for both newcomers and members of the existing society. This includes recognition of the role of the ethnic community and the idea that broader social patterns and cultural values may change in response to immigration.	• The concept can be amorphous and can mean whatever the person citing it wishes it to mean.

(Lacroix 2010, p. 7)

Although no formal and universal definition of integration exists, Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) introduced the list of "Common Basic Principles of Integration" in 2004, wherein it defined integration as a "dynamic, long-term, and continuous two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States." The JHA definition corresponds to the general definitions used by contemporary authors who write about integration. Likewise, JHA has explained that the integration process involves adaptation by immigrants who have all the rights and responsibilities in relation to their new country of residence. Moreover, the process also involves the receiving country, which is responsible for creating equal opportunities for immigrants' full economic, political, social, and cultural participation. Although immigrants should make their own efforts to attain the necessary skills and knowledge to live comfortably in their new society, it is important to help them remove any obstacles that can stop them from doing so and provide them with tools that enable them to fit in their new society.

The key principles JHA identified as essential for successful integration are employment, knowledge of the host society's language, history, and institutions, education, and equal access to institutions, as well as goods and services (Council of European Union 2004, p. 19ff). Given that integration is a process that mostly takes place at the local level, it is apparent that initiatives from municipalities are crucial for the inclusion and engagement of immigrants.

Participants in contemporary debate, however, sometimes treat immigrants as a problem in need of a solution. They have argued that foreignness is a threat to the stability and identity of the established regimes (Honig 2001, p. 2). Honig's book *Democracy and the Foreigner* aims to shed light on the undervalued role of foreignness in communities and politics. The author shifted the matter from how to solve the problem of foreignness and what we should do about foreigners to "what problems does foreignness solve for us?" (Honig 2001, p. 4). The immigrant is viewed as a resource instead of a burden. The debate does not question whether immigration is good or bad for the nation, but what kind of work the immigrant does. How the receiving country treats immigrants is thus vital for their integration. The

important questions to think about are: What is happening in the host society? What are the policy makers' expectations? How are the policies formed to achieve integration?

4.2 Assimilation and Multiculturalism

People often confuse integration with either assimilation or multiculturalism. The longstanding area of debate among policy makers concerns the possibility of integration without some assimilation and multiculturalism. Concepts such as assimilation and multicultural society are often considered descriptions of a successful integration policy. All kinds of cultural and social behavior, such as giving up one's background and finding a sense of belonging, are frequently associated with the concept of integration (Lacroix 2010, p. 6). However, these terms are not synonymous; they differ in their approaches and the policies they apply.

More assimilation-oriented policies imply that integration of immigrants into society should occur through a one-way, one-sided process of adaptation. This means that immigrants are expected to give up their past linguistic, cultural, and social characteristics and instead adopt the new values and practices typical of the host society and become like the majority of the population. The state is in charge of creating conditions favorable to this process, but the individual immigrant is still in the center and must learn and embrace the new culture and language. Critics of this approach point out that assimilation undervalues and fails to recognize the cultures and languages of the minority groups, and this is in opposition to the democratic principles of diversity and freedom of choice (Lacroix 2010, p. 8).

In contrast to an assimilation policy, multiculturalism values and encourages the acceptance of cultural diversity in a community with equal opportunities and mutual tolerance. The European Commission has defined multiculturalism as the public acceptance of immigrants and minority groups as distinct groups or communities whose languages, social behaviors, associations, and social infrastructures differentiate them from the majority (Meinhof & Triandafyllidou, 2006, p. 8). In recent years, however, multiculturalism has been seen as

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something of a danger to society as it may reinforce separate identities and develop "parallel societies" rather than help to bridge community divides. This in turn can create social exclusion and racist policies in the host society (Spencer 2011, p. 4).

One can say that the policy of integration is more a transitional phase from the policy of assimilation and multiculturalism. Historically, we can see that the one-way integration process, also understood as assimilation, has been present in many nations (Spencer 2011, p. 4). This single process, in which immigrants are expected to adapt completely to the society and give up their culture, is, for instance, still the more accepted process in academic and policy debates in France. Britain, on the other hand, might be classified as multicultural, whereas the Netherlands and Germany might be seen as somewhere between the two (Borooah & Mangan 2009, p. 33). In recent years, research has shown that the integration process, especially in continental Europe, has been influenced by a more two-way approach. Here it is evident that individuals and institutions in the host society have responded and supported immigrants in the labor market and social institutions, social interaction, cultural practices, and civic participation (Spencer 2011, p. 4).

4.3 Social integration

The measures mentioned above and the public policies introduced in regard to integration can facilitate overcoming some of the barriers that are unique to being an immigrant. These policies have a significant impact on the immigrants' ability to integrate in the unfamiliar system that they face when they first arrive. Although it is evident that not everyone is talking about the same thing when speaking of integration, the common understanding is that it is necessary to strengthen social integration to avoid or tackle exclusion in a society. Since integration itself is complex and refers to a widespread field, I have restricted the study by focusing on the idea of social integration.

As an introduction to the concept of social integration, one can say that the phenomenon is concerned with making societies more equitable. In other words, social integration can be explained as "the process of promoting the values, relations and institutions that enable all

people to participate in social, economic and political life on the basis of equality of rights and opportunity, equity and dignity" (Ferguson 2008, p. 3) . A socially integrated society strongly believes that all individuals belong to the society and have the right and power to influence it.

According to Bosswick and Heckman (2006), social integration is the inclusion and acceptance of immigrants into the core institutions, relationships, and positions of a host society. Bosswick and Heckman argued that there are four dimensions of social integration: structural, cultural, interactive, and identificational. Figure 1 illustrates the four-dimensional process. The model shows that the different elements are connected to each other and that together they form the conditions for successful social integration into society.

Figure 1: The four dimensions of social integration
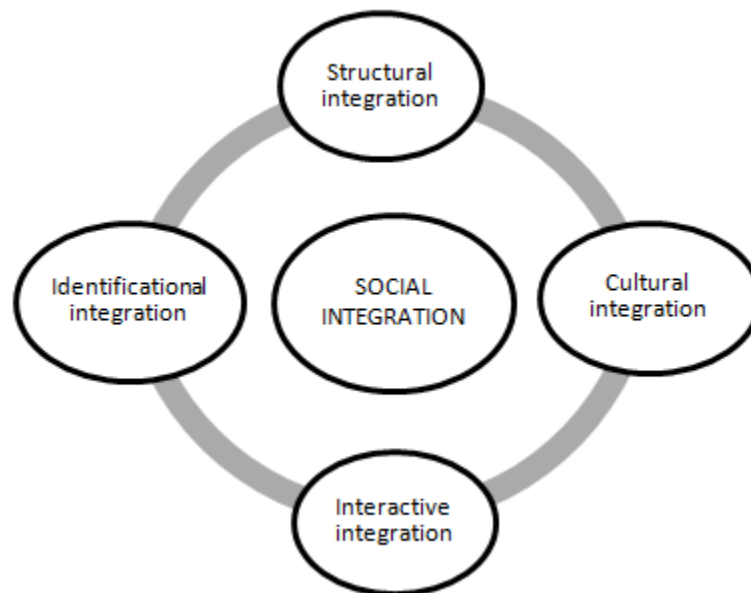
Structural integration means that immigrants have rights and access to position and status in the core institutions of the host society, such as the economy and labor market, the housing system, welfare state institutions, educational system, and full political citizenship. Participation in these so-called core institutions determines a person's socioeconomic status and the resources and opportunities available to him or her. It is, however, not possible to participate in the core institutions without first attaining cultural competencies.

Cultural integration indicates that immigrants can only claim rights and assume position in their host society if they obtain communicative competencies and knowledge about the culture and society. Even though cultural integration mainly concerns immigrants, it is a two-way process of adaptation in which the host society also has a responsibility to learn new ways to relate to immigrants and their needs. Policies that facilitate this kind of cultural integration include language training and support for immigrants' cultural activities, which can also help immigrants feel more at home.

Interactive integration refers to the acceptance and inclusion of immigrants in the relationships and social networks of the society. The preconditions for interactive integration are the core elements of cultural integration, as well as the ability to learn and use the language.

The fourth and last dimension, *identificational integration*, means that an immigrant has a feeling of belonging to, and identification with, groups in the host society. These feelings of belonging may often develop later in the integration process as a consequence of participation and acceptance (Bosswick & Heckman 2006, p. 9ff).

Although all dimensions are of great importance to integration, it is clear that the structural integration largely determines how well the immigrant can really be integrated and achieve social status in society. Having a job and housing, and being able to take advantage of the welfare system in the country, is important to live and be accepted as a normal native. An absolute perquisite though for this dimension is language learning and interaction. To fully

participate in the society, it important to have the opportunity to interact and create relationships, and language learning is a step in that direction.

When it comes to cultural integration, one can discuss the extent to which it must be achieved. How much does one have to learn and adapt to the culture without turning to assimilation? The difference between cultural integration and multiculturalism is not that clear either. The two-way process of cultural integration seems to involve more interaction between the different groups as the groups are expected to have a mutual understanding of each other's culture. Multiculturalism, in contrast, allows different cultures but the interaction and understanding is not necessarily objective. On some points, cultural integration can be compared to the assimilation policy. Although the former approach does not require immigrants to give up their culture, it does require them to make drastic adjustments to avoid clashing with Swedish norms and values.

Identificational integration is an interesting dimension as it is rarely mentioned in other integration approaches. Feeling a sense of belonging is often achieved by greater participation and adaptation, and belonging concerns being included and building a life in the community. However, a question not really considered is: What happens if an immigrant never feels a sense of belonging?

The social integration model clearly demonstrates the vital aspects that are part of the social integration process. These four dimensions interlinked and are mostly brought up, although emphasized differently, in different policy debates. Therefore, this model can be used as a guideline when looking at specific policy strategies used to achieve social integration.

4.4 Language as a key to integration

Language learning plays a particularly vital role in the process of individual and societal integration. It is a key component in everyday communication as well as a resource in the context of education and the labor market which in turn creates a sense of belonging in society. As Esser (2006) stated, "inequalities in terms of access to education, income,

central institutions, societal recognition and social contact are significantly, although not exclusively, determined by linguistic competence in the relevant national language" (Esser 2006, p. i). Krumm and Plutzar (2008) argued further that it is important for immigrants to develop their national language skills so as to integrate and participate in the society; this is critical because at the end of the process they can live under the same legal, social, and financial conditions as the natives of the country. Lack of language skills in, for instance, the labor market without doubt reduces immigrants' chances of finding work and attaining a higher position. In addition, it is associated with significant reductions in income (Esser 2006, p. iv; Krumm & Plutzar 2008, p. 2).

The growing flows and numbers of migrants and asylum seekers in Europe have given rise to discussions and debates regarding immigrants' citizenship and their entitlement to social and political rights. Questions often asked address when and how immigrants become citizens of a nation and in what conditions (e.g., concerning language, work, territory, participation) (Lister et al. 2007, p. 48). Integration policies, norms, and discourses indicate the rights and responsibilities of people who immigrate to another country. These policies can have a double effect, both supporting and disciplining citizens, for example, by demanding that they learn the native language and pass a language test. Although learning the language may itself be a valuable resource, it can also be seen as compulsion (Lister et al. 2007, p. 85).

Different regulations in different countries address language provision and requirements for immigrants to learn the host country's language. Many countries now require adult immigrants to show that they have basic knowledge of the host country's language before being granted entry, residence, work permits, or citizenship (Council of European Union 2014). Obligatory language courses are often combined with tests used as tools to oblige immigrants to learn the language of the receiving country. According to the Dutch Nationality Act of 2003, an immigrant must be able to show that he or she is fittingly integrated into Dutch society and capable of speaking, reading, writing, and understanding the Dutch language fairly well. Denmark and Finland have also implemented language

tests, but in Denmark immigrants also must document that they have some knowledge of Danish history, culture, and society. The UK employs a combined language and citizenship test. Sweden, though, does not require language or any kind of citizenship test to apply for naturalization (Lister et al. 2007, pp. 82-83). The obligatory language courses combined with tests are partly because of the idea that immigrants themselves may not be ready or willing to learn the language and understand the culture in the receiving country (Krumm & Plutzar 2008, p. 5). On the other hand, neither empirical data nor experience supports the notion that migrants are not willing to learn the language; on the contrary, migrants are usually very enthusiastic to attain language skills if the courses are adapted to meet their needs (Krumm & Plutzar 2008, p. 5).

In fact, the real concern often discussed is the quality of the policy programs. Almost no empirical evidence or information is available regarding the effectiveness of the state-funded language and integration programs that have been used as models for changes in migration and integration policies in a number of countries. There is also no solid or well-grounded report about the success of the measures taken to accomplish language acquisition and hence achieve social integration (Esser 2006, p. 30). Evaluation of these courses has occasionally been carried out; however, these evaluations largely reported on practical circumstances and problems related to their establishment and implementation. Various evaluations state that serious issues exist in terms of ensuring inclusive and broad participation among the immigrant groups. It is for this reason that problems may arise for immigrants who try to complete the courses at the same time they face the most sensitive problems in terms of integration (Esser 2006, p. 30).

Since acquiring the host country's language is the first step and a key component in an integration process, the lack of language skills likely has an overall negative effect on the four dimensions of integration, that is, immigrants' ability to interact with natives, understand the culture, gain access to position and status in the core institutions, and find a feeling of belonging in the host society. Language learning can thus be seen as a qualification for achieving social integration.

4.5 Social cohesion

Although the concept of social integration is the key concept in this paper, it is essential to briefly discuss social cohesion as well in this context.

There is no universally agreed upon definition of social cohesion; however, most definitions involve notions of solidarity and togetherness (Demireva 2014, p. 3). In a society with cultural diversity, it is important to create a cohesive community where diverse groups live together in peace. A cohesive community is one where:

> *there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities; the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued; those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods* (LGA 2004, p. 7).

As a consequence of immigration, a vast policy concern involves the effects that immigration may have on social cohesion. The challenge is thus to address existing conflicts between immigrants and natives, remove any barriers, and encourage positive interaction between the groups. Just like integration, social cohesion aims to build societies where people feel that they belong and are comfortable mixing and interacting with others, especially people from different cultural or religious backgrounds (LGA 2004, p. 7).

4.6 Theory application

As noted, the concept of integration is multidimensional; therefore, I have clearly defined the term, which enabled me to categorize the integration process taking place in Sweden. The limitations of the concept include that it is a vague conceptualization and that a thin line separates assimilation, multiculturalism, and integration. As a result, the theory of social integration is poorly understood and measured in research.

Bosswick and Heckman's (2006) four dimensions of social integration describe the specific characteristics of social integration that guided my work. They illustrate the elements that are most important to consider and examine when researching this phenomenon. When conducting my research, I assumed that these dimensions include the most critical aspects of social integration, and starting from there I studied how language learning as an integration policy influences those four dimensions.

Based on the theory, I determined what data to collect to understand the behaviors and attitudes of migrants and policy implementers. This in turn explained the process and challenges that are experienced but unexplained. I identified the problems and solutions for the integration strategy and by doing so my research findings may challenge accepted theory. New research data allowed me to modify the theory and provide a more conceptual understanding of and insight into the relationship between language learning and social integration.

5. Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to present the social research methods and the empirical techniques that have been applied during my study. For the data collection, I employed qualitative methods, including interviews, autoethnography, and documentation analysis. These various methods helped me gather, analyze, and interpret data about the performance of the integration policy. This section of the paper also covers a discussion on epistemology and ontology, the issue of ethics and possible limitations of the research design.

5.1 Epistemology and Ontology

The ontological and epistemological views are very important to discuss as a researcher since the orientation to the subject is shaped by the position you hold (Marsh & Furlong 2010, p. 18). From a constructivist ontological position, I assume that there is no absolute knowledge or objective truth and that the world is socially constructed. I therefore chose to utilize qualitative methods to help me recognize how immigrants and actors involved in the integration process understand their world (Marsh & Furlong 2010, p. 27). There are of course essential differences between immigrants that needed to be considered. Immigration and integration is not necessarily perceived the same way by all individuals and there may be different experiences of integration which form the process and opinions of the social phenomenon. From an interpretive epistemological stance, I believe that the only way to fully understand the world is through an examination of the interpretation of the world by its participants (Bryman 2008, p. 366). The qualitative techniques have produced a dialogue between me and the interview respondents, and as a result the study mainly relies on their answers which were put in a larger perspective in my analysis.

5.2 Sampling

The research is mostly based on a purposive sampling technique, which means that the individuals who were interviewed were chosen on the basis of the characteristics they possess (May 2008, p. 95). The goal of this sampling method is to select participants in a strategic way, so that those who are sampled are relevant to the research questions that are posed (Bryman 2008, p. 415). Since the purpose of the research was to study language as a

policy strategy to integrate immigrants in Sweden, I carried out qualitative interviews with various people who are all part of the integration process.

The respondents who were purposely selected were three coordinators working at Sfi and adult education, four integration officers who are actively engaged in implementation of the integration agenda, and one employee from the Swedish Public Employment Service who helps immigrant jobseekers find activities in society during and after their language education. I also conducted focus group interviews with immigrants enrolled in both Sfi and in Komvux (municipal adult education). This was to help me understand the immigrants' experiences of integration and their situation during their language studies at Sfi; I also gained insight into the post-Sfi period at Komvux when the immigrants' language skills are further enhanced. After all, the immigrants are those who are directly affected by the policy, and therefore their input was valuable to the research. The immigrant participants were selected with the help of teachers at Komvux and Sfi who asked their students whether they wanted to participate voluntarily. However, I did require that the immigrants from Sfi who agreed to take part in the interview speak English as well. The reason was that this requirement was more likely to allow those immigrants to fully express themselves and contribute more to the discussion.

This research was conducted in different municipalities in the southern part of Sweden (Eslöv, Lund, and Helsingborg). The scope of the research was based on accessibility and participant availability; including more municipalities would have required significantly more resources and time.

I do not claim that the study does not have limitations in its generalizability since the results obtained in the study may not occur in every situation. However, to guarantee that the sample included a variety of individuals, I made sure that the interviewees differed from each other in terms of key characteristics. At the same time, I suggest that the sample reflects cases of common attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of immigrants' social integration process in Sweden.

5.3 Interviews

Interviews are the most widely employed method and most common source of data in qualitative research studies (Bryman 2008, p. 436). I used two types of semi-structured interviews during my data collection. Although individual interviews were more prevalent in my research, focus group interviews were also conducted.

The individual semi-structured interviews and the group interviews were conducted in a fairly open framework that allowed me to prepare and design questions and topics in advance that had to be covered during the interview. At the same time, this type of interview method encouraged interviewees to answer the questions in their own terms; by doing this, I was able to ask further questions and discuss some issues in detail that were not considered prior to the interview (May 2001, p. 120). Since I interviewed four different groups of people (immigrants, Sfi coordinators, integration officers, and employee of the Swedish Employment Service), I prepared four interview guides that included main questions that each group had to answer and then fairly specific topics that I covered with each group. This made it possible for me to get rich and detailed answers from different points of view.

I usually started my interviews by explaining my intentions with the research and discussing the respondents' background, education, work experience, and similar information. This was to release the tension and make the interviewees feel more comfortable during the interview. As noted, mutual trust was created between me and the participants, which in most cases allowed them to open up more and describe their true thoughts and feelings about the topic. The interviewees were then also asked about the concept of integration and how they understood the term; whether they thought immigrants are integrated in Sweden; what the major issues are that immigrants encounter; and what should be prioritized in the integration process. In addition, I asked questions regarding the language education policy, immigrants' integration in the labor market and other institutions, and the efforts made by these different groups to improve integration, among other items.

The other type of interview method used was focus group interviews. This method requires the researcher to conduct interviews with a small group of people. The reason for carrying out an interview this way is to see how the participants discuss a specific theme as a member of a group (Bryman 2008, p. 473). In my case, the focus group method was used with the immigrants because I thought it would be interesting to watch how they respond to each other's views. I conducted two focus group interviews, one with three immigrant students at Komvux and one with three Sfi students. My role during these interviews was more of a moderator as I tried to encourage them to speak freely about the topic and at the same time guide them throughout the conversation. The questions asked concerned their position in society, how they felt they were perceived by natives, the extent to which they felt a sense of belonging, how much language learning has helped them to integrate, and how much they currently participate in the core institutions.

My questions during these interviews were very much related to the theory of this research. I asked questions that would help me understand the theory better and thereby see how much it corresponds to reality.

5.4 Autoethnography

Another qualitative technique that I adopted in my research was a relatively new research method, referred to as autoethnography. Autoethnography is a good way to gather information about the social setting by analyzing personal experiences (Ellis et al. 2011). As I work occasionally as a substitute teacher at Sfi and the adult education in Eslöv municipality I was able to conduct autoethnographic research at the school. By combining both personal experience and observations, I obtained more insight into the struggles that immigrants face and their route toward integration.

Having personal access to the setting allowed me to come very close to the reality and experience immigrants' conditions and the challenges and obstacles they face in language learning. The autoethongraphic research enabled me to write narratives of my experiences which was then followed by self-reflection helping me to understand the research more.

5.5 Document analysis

Since the research focused on integration policies and processes that are largely stated in state regulations and laws, it was important to use documents as a vital source of data as well. Not only do these kinds of data provide statistical information, but the data also contain textual material that can be useful. In a way, one can assume that documents reveal something about an underlying social reality (Bryman 2008, p. 521ff).

The document sources used in my study were first and foremost public records such as official and annual reports, mission statements, and press releases. These sources were valuable because they constituted a record of the performance and development of the policy in place. In addition, I used mass media outputs as a source. The issue of integration is to a great extent discussed and debated in many newspapers in the country, both national and local, and for that reason I included newspapers that cover this topic. By analyzing the content, I was able to find common and recurring themes and compare them with my empirical evidence.

5.6 Data analysis

All the interviews I conducted were audio-recorded and transcribed, which has made it easier for me to conduct a thorough examination of the answers. Interview analysis was done by first coding the interviews (i.e., segments of the data have been organized, reviewed, and broken into component parts). I then used thematic analysis, which means that the researcher tries to find central themes and subthemes from the data. These themes are formed by carefully reading and rereading the transcripts and other notes that make up the data (Bryman 2008, pp. 542, 554f). I compared the themes from the interviews to the themes extracted from the other data to see whether similarities or differences exist between the findings. Examples of themes often brought up and later used as a basis for my analysis are integration as a two-way process, cultural conflict and differences, discrimination, and language learning failure; in addition, active participation in society is weak.

5.7 Ethics

An issue that often arises in social research is the issue of ethics (Bryman 2008, p. 113). During the research process, I constantly asked myself how I should treat the people on whom I conduct research and how their views should be presented so that they do not feel misquoted or misrepresented. Therefore, I made sure that all the interview participants understood the purpose of the research and how the answers from the interviews would be used.

To avoid causing any kind of harm to participants, I was extremely careful not to provide too much information about them. One of the main ethical concerns that Bryman (2008) talked about is invasion of privacy. To avoid invading their privacy, I did not use the names of the immigrants, and instead I only included information about their nationality, age, and gender. During my interviews, I made sure to notify participants that their privacy would be protected, which made them feel more confident answering certain questions without any restrictions. All the participants were also notified that the interview would be recorded and that nobody but the researcher would listen to the interviews.

The participants' preferences were not overlooked, however; I informed them that they were free to refuse to answer any of the questions and that they could withdraw from the interview at any time. With this information, some of my research subjects asked me to send them the parts of the paper where their names were included so that they could give me permission to use the name. I have, of course, respected their wishes with regard to the reproduction and publication of their statements and views.

5.8 Limitations

I believe that qualitative research was the most suitable method for my study as I wanted to understand what was underneath all the numbers and figures. However, there are of course limitations to the methods used. Sometimes these methods are criticized for being impressionistic and subjective, meaning that the findings rely too much on the researcher's views about what is significant and important and also on the close relationships that the researcher creates with the people being studied (Bryman 2008, p. 391). Certainly,

relationships developed between me and the research participants, but this I believe helped me understand the issue through the participants' eyes. What they saw as significant became the point of orientation in my study.

One of the major concerns with the data collection was the sampling. Unfortunately, I was not able to interview everyone I intended to. Due to limited time and resources, and lack of accessibility, numerous actors in the sphere could not be included. I was only able to ask a small portion of individuals involved in this issue to participate in the research. As a result, I sought out and used alternative sources. There is also the possibility that crucial sources have been missed, but I would strongly argue that the breadth and depth of my interviews, autoethnographic study, and document analysis serve to contest this limitation.

Another limitation of my study was that the immigrants from Sfi who were selected for the group interviews were chosen based on their language skills. Since I specifically required these immigrants to be able to speak English, I only included individuals with a better education. The reason was to stimulate longer discussions and receive as much information as possible from the participants.

I am also aware that autoethnography is based on my interpretations and thus to some degree can be argued to be subjective. Nevertheless, I believe it is an important method for use as it provides first-hand information and helps the researcher understand issues and settings in a way that books, papers, and reports cannot.

Finally, as mentioned earlier in the text, there is an issue concerning the generalizability of the findings. When semi-structured interviews are conducted with a small number of individuals in a certain locality, it is often impossible to generalize the findings to other settings (Bryman 2008, p. 391). For example, how can one or two municipalities or a few research participants in the South of Sweden (Skåne) be representative of all cases? Again, I want to stress that the research subjects or participants are not meant to be representative of a population; instead, the findings of qualitative research can be seen as "instances of a broader set of recognizable features" (Bryman 2008, p. 392).

6. Findings

This section of the paper includes the results of the research divided into five subchapters. The first subchapter discusses current Swedish integration policy and its objectives. The subchapter after that addresses the role of language learning in integration and how Swedish for immigrants (Sfi) works as a policy strategy. The third subchapter explains the extent to which immigrants actively participate in the core institutions and what the restrictions are for doing so fully. Then a discussion of how important culture and identity are in the process of integration is presented, and finally the last subchapter discusses immigrants finding a sense a belonging through positive interaction.

6.1 The Swedish integration policy

The current Swedish government's overarching objective in its integration policy is equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic or cultural background. The policy goals are to be achieved through measures and initiatives within many policy areas and by several actors at the national, regional, and local levels (European Commission 2014). The overall focus is on giving newcomers the best possible position to come into work and learn the Swedish language. Sweden's current integration minister, Erik Ullenhag, describes the task as follows:

> *Our focus is early, individualized interventions for quick contact with the labour market and the Swedish language. Some have high education, others have barely any education at all. But everyone has done something in the past and everyone can contribute. We must become better at taking advantage of the expertise and resources that the new arrivals bring to our country. That is how we can manage the competition in an increasingly globalised world, and that is how we ensure continued Swedish prosperity in the future –* Erik Ullenhag, Minister for Integration (Regeringskansliet 2013b).

In 2008, the government introduced an overall strategy for integration entitled "Empowerment against exclusion – the Government's strategy for integration." Seven areas were identified as important to work on to achieve integration:

- Faster introduction for new arrivals
- More employment, more entrepreneurs
- Better results and greater equality in school
- Better language skills and more adult education opportunities
- Effective anti-discrimination measures
- Development of urban districts with extensive social exclusion
- Common basic values in a society characterized by increasing diversity

(Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality 2009)

Each minister, ministry, and government agency in Sweden is responsible for integration issues within its respective area. The Ministry of Employment, for instance, has coordinating responsibility for issues concerning integration in the labor market. Many different reforms have been put into effect to increase immigrant participation in the labor market; one is step-in jobs. Step-in jobs aim at faster entry into the labor market and better language learning. They are offered to unemployed, newly arrived immigrants in combination with language training and provide an allowance that amounts to 75% of employers' wage costs (Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality 2009). Other measures have also been taken to provide professional development for Sfi teachers, to improve the assessment and validation of foreign qualifications, and to provide supplementary higher education (Regeringskansliet 2011).

The Swedish Public Employment Service is responsible for coordinating initiatives to support unemployed people and help newly arrived refugees and their family members become established (Ministry of Labour, Sweden 2013, p. 14). The Swedish Public Employment Service is required to create an individual plan together with the new arrival which is based on the person's previous work experience and education. The plan should

also contain Swedish language courses, civic orientation, and employment preparation activities (Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality 2009).

One of the biggest challenges in Swedish society today is combating the exclusion in which many immigrants and foreign-born individuals are trapped. The reduction of exclusion is therefore a priority, which can be achieved through initiatives in the areas of the labor market and education (Ministry of Labour, Sweden 2013, p. 14). When conducting my research, I learned that the integration process is reciprocal and two-sided in the sense that everyone is involved and must contribute. The integration officer in Lund, Helena Jacobson, explained in our interview that integration is an ongoing process, not a temporary condition or where one can say that "now you are integrated." It is a process that leads to people from different groups living and working in contact with each other in different parts of society without the need to give up their group identity (Interview with Helena Jacobson 2014). I also learned that the municipalities have great responsibility, especially when it comes to assisting newly arrived refugees with their introduction to society. Several municipalities offer various activities and programs to enhance the social integration and inclusion of immigrants. The various efforts, for instance, language courses, meeting groups, housing planning, and information support for immigrants, aim to help immigrants obtain employment quickly in which they can support themselves independently and take part in the life of society.

Since the purpose of the research was largely to determine how language learning as a main focus in the integration policy helps immigrants integrate, in the following part, I look into the language program offered by immigrants in Sweden.

6.2 Language and integration

Language is a crucial element for foreigners' integration and establishment in the host society. As stated in the theory section, access to education, income, and central institutions, as well as societal acceptance and social contact, depend on the immigrants' linguistic skills in the national language (Esser 2006, p. i). These linguistic skills are important to develop to integrate and participate in society. Although Sweden has no

language requirements or any compulsory citizenship test before applying for naturalization (Lister et al. 2007, pp. 82-83), it becomes almost impossible to live under the same social and financial conditions as the natives of the host country when the language part is missing.

6.2.1 Swedish for immigrants

The elementary Swedish language program for adult immigrants (Sfi) is supported by an official language policy and is part of an integration policy that guarantees all new arrivals the right to free language education (Lindberg & Sandwall 2007, p. 79). The language courses that are offered at Sfi aim to give adult immigrants basic knowledge of the Swedish language. The idea is that basic speaking, reading, and writing skills will enable a person's ability to influence and actively participate in everyday social and working life. The assessment and rating of the participants' language skills are based on listening comprehension, reading comprehension, conversation, and oral interaction (Kennerberg och Åslund 2010, p. 4).

The municipality is responsible for offering Sfi courses to adult immigrants who lack basic knowledge of the Swedish language and meet the criteria (i.e., over the age of 16 years, a resident in a municipality, a permanent personal number). Normally, the language courses should be available within three months of the individual's registration as a resident of a municipality. In most municipalities, there is also a possibility of attending the courses on flexible hours for students who cannot attend a regular course, considering that the immigrant should also be able to combine Sfi with other activities, such as work, internship, or other studies.

Three study programs at Sfi offer varying degrees of intensity and ambition; the divided programs are made up of A-D courses, each building on the previous course, with D being the highest level. This means that students are moved up to a more intense course after completing each course. During the registration at Sfi, students are assigned to different paths depending on previous knowledge and educational background (Regeringskansliet

2006). The structure and arrangement of the Swedish language programs is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Sfi study paths

Study path 1, courses A + B
For those with brief or no education (0-5 years) from their country, not able to read or write, and/or are not familiar with the Latin alphabet
Study path 2, courses B + C
For those with primary and secondary school education (6-9 years) from their country
Study path 3, courses C + D
For those with education equivalent to high school or higher education (10 years or more) from their country

(Source: Eductus 2014)

Since 2000, there has been a steady increase in the number of Sfi participants. In 2012, approximately 108,000 foreigners attended Sfi education, which means that the number of Sfi students has increased by 5% since 2011 and more than doubled since 2000, at 66%. The available data from the Swedish National Agency for Education also show that most of those studying at Sfi are women (Skolverket 2012a).

The Swedish government has allocated funds regularly to improve teachers' skills and to enhance educational outcomes. In 2009, compulsory national testing in all three programs was introduced (Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality 2009). These national final exams are mandatory and support teachers in assessing and grading the student learning Swedish. They also contribute to the assessment criteria, being as uniform as possible across the country (Skolverket 2014). In addition, a pilot project was begun in 13 municipalities with a performance-based bonus for newly arrived immigrants who complete their studies in Sfi with a passing grade within 12 months. The purpose of this project is to test whether financial incentives (in this case, 12,000 Swedish kronor) may stimulate

immigrants to learn Swedish faster, and thereby improve their chances of obtaining a job (Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality 2009). Unfortunately, the Sfi bonus has not adequately contributed to immigrants' learning Swedish more quickly. Therefore, the performance-based incentive compensation in Swedish for immigrants will be abolished in July 2014 (Arbetsmarknadsdepartamentet 2013). The participants I interviewed responded positively to the abolishment of the Sfi bonus when I asked them whether they thought it was good or bad to use the payment of a bonus as a strategy. Because the evaluation of the project has also been confirmed, they argued that it not effective. Following statement is from an Sfi coordinator at Eslövs municipality:

> *I believe it's good that the government has decided that there will be no more bonuses granted. I have only experienced it as a stress-producing method; there is nothing about it that is positive for language learning. Nor do I think that it's fair. People come here in various conditions and with different prerequisites; therefore, I don't think that some immigrants should be given special treatment and have more opportunities than others* (Interview with Eva Jönsson 2014).

Sfi is an education with many involved: the Swedish Migration Board, different parts of the municipality (such as social services, refugee reception/integration, educational administration), and the Swedish Public Employment Service. Sfi offers an education with many goals that at times are incompatible. The education system also depends on interaction between different actors. Previous evaluations of the Sfi have indicated that the interaction between different actors is flawed in several respects. Assessment of the Sfi participant's language skills is such a point; Sfi and the employment services make different assessments of an individual's employability, associated with language skills. Shortcomings in coordination between various parties are highlighted as problematic for the Sfi participant's ability to combine Sfi studies with, for example, internship, work, or other studies (Skolinspektionen 2010, p. 8).

The coordinators at Sfi and adult education that I spoke with brought up the problem of assessment and lack of coordination between the parties involved. Sfi coordinator Eva Jönsson explained that students say they have been offered a job, but only if they will have completed the D course. She further stressed the issue of employees believing that by passing Sfi one is fluent in Swedish. In reality, however, this is not the case; she believes that many shortcomings exist even after finishing all the courses and the desired linguistic level is far from being reached (Interview with Eva Jönsson 2014). Anna Nordqvist, coordinator of adult education in Eslöv municipality, claimed that the reason for this misunderstanding is the lack of cooperation and communication between them and the Public Employment Service:

> *The cooperation could have been so much better. There is something very strange about the legislation regarding this. We at adult education are ordered to cooperate with the Public Employment Service, but they are not ordered to cooperate with us...which means that we are failing in the two-way communication. It needs to work on both sides to be successful* (Interview with Anna Nordqvist 2014).

The uncertainty and lack of knowledge about what Sfi is and its objectives have in a way, as many of my interview participants pointed out, resulted in the actors involved not being able to meet in the middle and then together work toward immigrants' development in society. Sfi is simply basic education in the Swedish language that everyone needs. It provides four basic skills – reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The four skills are the key elements of language, and basic knowledge of them will help immigrants handle their everyday communication by themselves. Further developing their linguistic skills would, however, require further language studies or practice through internship, work, or other kind of activity. During my group interviews with the immigrants, I sensed their concern regarding the lack of communication and interaction between them and natives. They all wished that the municipality could do more to create opportunities for internships and supported the idea that internships should be included in language education.

Khalid El-Haj, an employee at the Swedish Public Employment Service, confirmed the importance of language practice during the studies at Sfi by suggesting that he has seen a positive development when immigrants are sent to a Swedish workplace and thus forced to stay in a Swedish-speaking environment (Interview with Khalid El-Haj 2014).

Smiljana Jörliden, who is head of the unit at the learning center in Helsingborg, expressed her thoughts like this:

> *I think there is too much focus on first being able to speak the Swedish language fluently, and then you can get a job…and, then you are integrated. Of course, you should learn the language, but to do that you need to practice the words and the phrases you learn. It goes hand in hand* (Interwiew with Smiljana Jörliden 2014).

Conditioning the ability to work on language competency and not allowing immigrants to enter the labor market due to limitations in language have become contentious issues. Although the requirements do not formally exist in the Swedish policy, as they do in other countries mentioned in the theory part, one can see that there are still informal demands when it comes to immigrants' language learning. Learning a new language, however, takes time, and if immigrants are excluded from the labor market for the lack of linguistic skills it will take even more time. This creates a vicious circle which has negative effects on immigrants' ability to integrate. Furthermore, various factors influence immigrants' capacity to learn a new language. This issue is discussed in the next section.

6.2.2 Critical factors affecting language learning

There is constant criticism of Sfi that it takes too long for people to learn Swedish and complete the courses, and that there is low participation and many dropouts. I can to some extent understand where the criticism is coming from. Data from 2012, for instance, show that 38% of those who started an Sfi course before July 1, 2012, completed it during the year, while 23% decided to drop out and the remaining 39% still continued their Sfi studies (Skolverket 2012b). These data show that few people actually complete a course within one

year, and the rest either interrupt their studies or continue for a longer period of time. As a substitute teacher at Sfi, I have also observed many immigrants who have lived in Sweden for several years but not finished the courses. Then again, I have learned that many of these immigrants do not engage in activities other than language training at Sfi that would enable them to practice their language skills.

At the same time, several other factors might affect immigrants' ability to learn the language faster. First, short hours are offered to immigrant students. According to the regulation on adult education (SFS 2011:1108), the benchmark for the time in education in Swedish for immigrants is 525 hours. The benchmark rate may be exceeded or fall below depending on the amount of teaching the students need to meet the knowledge requirements outlined in the syllabus. These hours are usually divided into four hours a day, and this is not sufficient if you are going to learn a language effectively. It is easy to forget, especially if you do not have everyday contact with Swedes. Moreover, the majority of Sfi participants are of child-bearing age, meaning that during the studies many are responsible for small children and sometimes this means that participants have to drop out due to pregnancy, parental leave, or child care (Skolinspektionen 2010, p. 7).

Another factor is health condition of immigrants and the prerequisites they have. For example, Smiljana Jörliden explained that some have had to go through a rehabilitation phase before they can learn the language. Normally, when individuals move to another country they go through a grief process, regardless of the reason for migrating. The immigrants are in various stages of grief and, depending on the stage, it can take longer to learn the language and adapt to the society (Interview with Smiljana Jörliden 2014). With these conditions, it can be hard to go back to school and learn a language from the beginning; some are even concerned that they will never be able to fully learn it to get a job. This is what a 58-year-old immigrant man from Iraq said during the interview:

I'm afraid that I will never learn the Swedish language well enough to get a job. For me, it's more difficult to learn the language because of my age. I also have difficulties in concentrating during the lessons. This is not working for me at all /.../ I think that a job would help me learn faster, I need to use the language more and have more contact with Swedish people (Interview with immigrant A 2014).

Age, background, and medical condition are just a few things that play a significant role in immigrants' ability to learn a language. In terms of educational background, figures show that in 2012 34% of the students had at least 13 years' experience from previous studies, 27% had 10-12 years of educational background, 14% had 7-9 years, and 22% had 6 years or less (Skolverket 2012c). These numbers demonstrate a very mixed group; a very small percentage of immigrants has a higher education. Sfi coordinator Eva Jönsson argued that educational background can play a vital role in language learning, which means that different groups have different advantages. Immigrants who have a higher education or English language skills tend to learn Swedish faster. She also explained that teachers of Sfi try to map the students and adjust the training after meeting the participants they receive, but there is often a limited number of places for illiterates and the low educated because they are so many students (Inteview with Eva Jönsson 2014).

Many municipalities fall short in evaluating, analyzing, and developing Sfi. The Swedish School Inspectorate's evaluation shows that the individual mapping of immigrant students and the opportunity for the participants to influence their studies are poor and must be developed and further improved. The evaluation also indicates that the teaching needs to be based more on the individual's work and educational experiences, interests, and goals. Hence, it is important that the collaboration among Sfi, other municipal initiatives, and the Public Employment Service improves (Skolinspektionen 2010, p. 7). Many municipalities make an effort to adapt the teaching for immigrants with special needs, but it is often the methods and tools used that are insufficient. Both the coordinators who were interviewed in Eslöv adult education and the head of unit at the learning center in Helsingborg said that

they have ongoing talks with students about their previous experience and current objectives. What emerges from these talks, however, is not always documented and an interpreter is rarely used during the talks. Therefore, it is common that a detailed mapping is not issued, which in turns leads to late development of knowledge for many immigrants.

There is no doubt that Sfi is part of an integration process in which the immigrants improve their language skills and reach social independence. However, it is obvious that Sfi does not meet the stringent requirements, and the road into the labor market is still far away. Greater involvement, better cooperation between the state and the municipality, and more opportunities for immigrants are just examples of things that can be improved in the integration process (see chapter 7).

6.3 Active participation of immigrants

The current political rhetoric in Sweden's integration and minority politics often contains the words "same rights and responsibilities" and "same possibilities" (Roth & Hertzberg 2010, p. 21). This means that every citizen of Sweden has rights and access to the core institutions of society, such as the economy and labor market, the housing system, welfare state institutions, and full political citizenship. These rights are essential parts of social integration theory and must therefore be analyzed when considering the process of achieving full integration.

Sweden has relatively small restrictions on immigrants' opportunities and rights when it comes to political participation and access to welfare institutions. Different kinds of immigrants are given different residence statuses that activate different sets of rights and expenditures. Political participation, for instance, is permitted for those who are Swedish citizens and are or have been registered in Sweden. This means that foreign nationals who have lived in Sweden for three years and been granted citizenship have the right to stand for election and vote in local and national elections (Valmyndigheten 2014). The same goes for the welfare institutions; universality and solidarity have for a long time been the pillars of the Swedish welfare state. Provided a person has a Swedish personal identity number, that

person will be eligible for the same rights as all other residents of Sweden. The Swedish public welfare institutions such as child care, health care, elder care, and education are therefore available to all residents of Sweden, regardless of ethnic or national origin (Work in Sweden 2014).

Although access to housing and the labor market is a right as well, several studies have shown that rather extensive informal discrimination exists despite the anti-discrimination law (SFS 2008:567) put into place to protect immigrants and promote equal rights and opportunities (Rydgren 2004, p. 697). Due to discrimination, participation in these core institutions is often limited. Consequently, this determines the immigrants' socioeconomic status and the resources and opportunities available to them.

6.3.1 Access to the labor market

Various policy programs are set to improve immigrants' inclusion in the labor market, but still conditions for migrants and native Swedes are not equal (Rydgren 2004, p. 698). A person with a foreign name commonly has a smaller chance of being called for an interview and/or being offered a job than someone with a Swedish name (Migrationinfo.se 2013). Furthermore, strong arguments suggest that discrimination is directed mostly toward non-European immigrants (Rydgren 2004, p. 698). This means that immigrants that do not look Swedish or European are less accepted in the workplace than those who do.

As we can see in chapter 3, many people have immigrated from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Eritrea. For a socially cohesive Sweden, it is crucial that these people find work. However, only 26% of the new arrivals have a job. Another integration policy challenge is that the immigration has shifted in character. A new trend is that more and more immigrants lack higher education, and integrating people with such a low educational level is difficult in a knowledge-based economy such as Sweden (Jansson 2013). There are fewer jobs today with lower education requirements; many such jobs have disappeared.

Nevertheless, immigrants also have arrived who did not receive an education in their home countries. To make it easier for these newly arrived immigrants to get a job, the

employment service and local government can assess the individual's competence. The Swedish Agency for Public Management (Statskontoret) though states that the extent to which new arrivals' skills are assessed and documented is very limited (Statskontoret 2013). Taking advantage of the experiences and expertise available from immigrants has not been very successful:

> *I had other expectations before coming to Sweden. It's not as I thought it would be. There are always setbacks. I have been at the employment office two or three times, and the only job I can get is a cleaning job. It is a bit frustrating because despite my high education, that's the only thing I can do* (Interview with Immigrant D 2014).

Two of three immigrants from the adult education (Komvux) that I interviewed were planning to get a higher education in Sweden, despite their already having an education from abroad that had been validated. The three respondents from Sfi were also highly educated, and likewise they were aware of the existing struggles to meet employers' criteria.

Following is what an immigrant with a bachelor's degree in political science said during the interview:

> *Even though I can speak Swedish, I can't get the same job as the Swedish people can. It's still hard for us anyway because Swedish people also have qualifications and high education, and as we are foreigners we will always be in second place. The Swedish people will always come first* (Interview with immigrant B 2014).

After hearing about the immigrants' concerns regarding this, I asked Khalid El-Haj about discrimination in the labor market and why even those with higher education have difficulty finding employment. He answered as follows:

There is definitely discrimination in the labor market…even immigrants who are highly educated are discriminated against. Employers often question the immigrants' skills and experiences, despite the fact their grades and degrees are validated by the Swedish Council for Higher Education, which is equivalent to Swedish education. You can get it on paper, but in practice, it is a different issue (Interview with Khalid El-Haj 2014).

Not being able to work as an immigrant and thereby actively participate in society poses serious problems for immigrants' social integration. For immigrants to exercise and use the language, they must be active because if they do not have the language they cannot get a job, and if they do not work they will not be able to learn the language. It becomes a vicious circle that is difficult to escape. A lot of the social integration issues not only arise because of the discrimination but also because of an insufficient job policy. An example is the Public Employment Service, which has often been criticized for low confidence and lack of service (Jansson 2013). All the immigrants I interviewed felt that they were not given enough support and help from the employment service:

I can see that it's difficult for me because of my age. But I just want a normal life and to be able to work. I want to be accepted and be part of the social life in Sweden. When people see that I don't speak the language they don't want me /…/ it's hard for me to find a job by myself, so I would have appreciated if the Public Employment Service tried a little bit more to help me (Interview with Immigrant A 2014).

Achieving a better functioning job policy in a knowledge-based society like Sweden is a challenge. Getting low-educated or illiterate immigrants to actively participate in society is something that policy makers must emphasize. These people come from entirely different cultures; many have never had a job or paid work and may not even know what employment means. The fewer jobs and more unemployed immigrants, the more you see

immigration and integration as a problem. We must therefore get better at taking advantage of the skills of highly skilled immigrants. Instead of merely seeing immigrants as a problem in need of a solution, we need to shift the focus, as Honig (2001) stated, and think of how immigrants can contribute and solve our problems.

6.3.2 Access to the housing market

The housing market is sometimes also a challenge. Some natives are not willing to let any immigrants in, which makes it hard for them to get housing where they want. People often look at the last name /.../ As I understand it, it is really tough. There may be an attitude like, "immigrants are welcome, but as long as they do not live next door to me" (Interview with Smiljana Jörliden 2014).

The same problems that exist in the labor market also exist in the housing market; discrimination against immigrants occurs all the time. A study by the Equality Ombudsman (DO) conducted on behalf of the Swedish government proved that discrimination in the housing market is a problem throughout Sweden. This primarily affects persons of foreign origin and the discrimination occurs to a greater extent in the rental market than in the housing market (DO 2013, p. 7).

Housing is a basic need and a human right. It is also a prerequisite for participating in society on equal terms. An inclusive society is scarcely possible unless everyone has access to basic services and everyone has equal rights and opportunities in the housing market (DO 2008, p. 5). The housing situation greatly influences the individual's living conditions and opportunities to develop and participate in society. The findings from the Equality Ombudsman indicate that immigrants in Sweden are forced to live in certain neighborhoods, which makes it nearly impossible for them to enter Swedish society. The apparent housing segregation creates a social distance between people and different groups in society that affects the entire social formation (DO 2008, p. 5ff). Moreover, they become isolated in areas where generally only immigrants live, which leads to immigrants being unable to communicate and use the Swedish language or to build social networks and relationships with natives of the host society. This also leads to different community groups

not understanding or even being willing to understand each other's culture and background. This is discussed more in the subchapter that follows.

6.4 The importance of culture and identity

Due to the increasing immigration flows in many European countries, the concepts of cultural diversity and cultural identity have become controversial. An ongoing debate questions the perceived costs and benefits of cultural diversity; some favor explicit public policies that promote or even demand the cultural assimilation of immigrants, and some argue that welfare state institutions should be designed to accommodate cultural diversity. The policies that support cultural diversity aim to facilitate contacts across communities, promote tolerance, trust, and respect toward other groups, and, in the end, help develop new national identities (Algan et al. 2012, p. 1). Based on the integration policies in place, Sweden is a strong advocate of cultural diversity and acceptance. The integration policy works against discrimination and ensures that all people in the society can be who they are (Länsstyrelsen 2014). Aspects that characterize diversity are external cultural influences, national minorities, and increased migration flows from different parts of the world. The important notion of the integration process is that existing cultures and members of those cultural communities should be accepted for who and what they are (Regeringskansliet 2013c).

Even though Swedish society can be portrayed as culturally diverse, the diversity and the cultural encounters between native inhabitants and so-called newcomers have frequently been discussed to generate political and ethical challenges to society and the state (Roth & Hertzberg 2010, p. 6f). Instances of xenophobia, intolerance, and discrimination occur every day in Sweden. For example, it is common for false claims, half-truths, and myths to be propagated, especially on the internet, about the costs and problems associated with immigration. These claims contribute to prejudice, xenophobia, and sometimes even downright hatred (Regeringskansliet 2013c). Consequently, this has affected the attitudes toward immigration in Swedish society, which in turn makes it more difficult for immigrants to feel accepted.

When interviewing the immigrants at Sfi, I asked them how they felt they are perceived by natives of Sweden. Four of the six respondents said that they occasionally feel discriminated against by the natives and that appearance is one reason why they cannot be fully accepted by natives. A 25-year-old immigrant from Thailand that I interviewed expressed herself this way:

> *Sometimes I feel discriminated against when people here treat me differently. I often think to myself: do they only see me as a foreigner? /.../ Swedish people feel safe with Swedish people. A foreigner is a foreigner. So, it's hard for me sometimes. When I talk to Swedes I sometimes see they are worried or scared of me. That affects my confidence* (Interview with immigrant B 2014).

A 31-year-old woman from Iran explained that people often react because she does not look like a Swede:

> *As long as you look a different way, there will always be people who treat you differently. The appearance is the first thing to reveal that you are not like a normal Swede. Looking like a Swede would surely facilitate a lot of other things. But if you don't, it strengthens your segregation* (Interview with immigrant C 2014).

The interviewee from Iran wore a headscarf, and she also explained that this religious factor made it more difficult for her to be accepted by others who do share her culture. Furthermore, she stressed that she is eager to learn about Sweden and to integrate, but because the native people around her seem to question her competence, she does not have a chance to grow and live up to her full potential in Swedish society.

Another immigrant woman, a 25-year-old from Macedonia, said the same:

> *I don't feel Swedish because I don't look like a Swede. Even with a Swedish passport and citizenship, I can't feel Swedish. People will continue asking me where I'm from /.../ I will always be a foreigner in the eyes of others* (Interview with immigrant F 2014).

When the difference between 'us' and 'them' increases, it is important to work with an inclusive policy. One vital challenge in cultural diversity is the gap between theory and practice in multicultural policies (Roth & Hertzberg 2010, p. 6f). Some critics in political and academic circles have even argued that the traditional assimilation model, which characterized Swedish policy for several decades in the post-war period, has not completely vanished and that the cultural diversity which has been formally approved and accepted has been rather limited in reality (Roth & Hertzberg 2010, p. 7). There are still people who, no matter how much immigrants try to adapt, do not accept the efforts, but only accept full assimilation.

6.4.1. Adapting to a new society

Adapting to a new society might sometimes be confused with immigrants giving up their culture. This "cultural discrimination" puts pressure on immigrants who are in some way expected to act Swedish to fit in. The employee at the Public Employment Service in Eslöv municipality said the following:

> *It's not a question of will /.../ in one way or another, immigrants are forced to adapt to the new society. It's the majority that decides, and immigrants are the minority. It's a development shock, I usually say, you integrate whether you like it or not. Immigrants will take in new expressions and change their way of living. Maybe not the first generation of immigrants, but imagine the fourth or fifth. What will remain of that immigrant?* (Interview with Khalid El-Haj 2014).

Although Khalid believes that adaptation is forced and that integration occurs automatically, he also assumes that it is something that develops step by step, generation after generation. Chirin Ibrabim, an integration officer in Helsingborg, argued that immigration affects people in different ways:

> *There are those who, when they immigrate to another country, cling to their culture, their religion, even more than they have done in the past because it's something they recognize in themselves, it's their identity. While others may be more open to releasing it. This is very individual* (Interview with Chirin Ibrahim 2014).

As a human being, I would assume that you are part of the culture in which you grew up, and in the integration process it is important to understand and accept differences between cultures and not point to other cultures as inferior or less worthy than your own. People cannot expect just one side to adapt. Integration requires that all people increase their understanding and strive to be open to each other's culture; only then can the gap between immigrants and natives be reduced. Integration is a two-way process.

In one of my group interviews, the immigrant respondents discussed how important it is to adapt to Swedish society to blend in. It was interesting to hear their thoughts in this conversation as it gave an idea of how the immigrants suppose they should behave. This is what one of the immigrants said:

> *As an immigrant, you will never be completely Swedish, but if you want you can adapt to the society and culture. It's easier to blend in if you respect the Swedish culture, learn to speak the language, and even change the way you dress. If you refuse to, it will be difficult to live in Sweden. We must understand that we are the ones who moved here, and if we want Sweden to accept us, we must adapt and learn the rules* (Interview with immigrant 2014 E).

All the immigrants I interviewed shared the view that they will never be or feel entirely Swedish, but they said that they were more than willing to adapt to the culture and hence become part of Swedish society.

6.4.2 Cultural integration

As the theory used in this paper points out, finding a position in the community and participating fully in the core institutions requires immigrants to know about the culture and society. The policies in Sweden aim to facilitate this kind of cultural integration by providing language training and support for immigrants' cultural activities. For example, information about Swedish society, working life, and culture is incorporated into the teaching at Sfi.

Eva Jönsson and Anna Nordqvist, who both work as coordinators at Sfi and adult education in Eslöv municipality, informed me that many different projects and activities are offered to newcomers and even individuals who have lived in Sweden for a while but have stopped in their linguistic development or integration. The so-called "language café" is an activity arranged by many municipalities where immigrants meet Swedish natives and have the opportunity to practice their language skills and learn about Swedish society and culture (Interview with Eva Jönsson & Anna Nordqvist 2014). This two-way communication between immigrants and natives not only contributes to improving immigrants' language skills, but also fosters mutual understanding. Perhaps there is a stranger's caution, which many of the immigrants pointed out, but this does not necessarily mean that the caution is racist or prejudiced. Some people are a bit careful as they might not feel comfortable with people they do not know or with cultures with which they are not familiar. Through these meeting groups, prejudice can be broken down.

Although cultural integration mainly concerns immigrants, it is important for society to learn new ways to relate to immigrants and adapt to their needs. The existing Swedish laws and regulations that mainly relate to immigrants and refugees have facilitated this process. These laws and regulations passed by the Swedish parliament are the basis for the establishment and integration of newcomers. There is, for instance, a regulation (SFS

1986:856) about the state authorities' responsibility for the implementation of integration policies. The authorities must continuously take into account society's ethnic and cultural diversity, both when they are designing their activities and when they engage in them. Within the framework of available resources, the authorities should also provide equal services to all regardless of their ethnic or cultural background and endeavor to ensure that all relevant information about the activities reaches all persons concerned. These kinds of regulations, such as the regulation on state authorities' responsibility, are important weapons in the fight for a more inclusive society. Nevertheless, the central weapon is the creation of more opportunities for immigrants to meet the natives and have positive interactions. This is argued more in the last section of this chapter before a discussion on what opportunities can be created to enhance integration of immigrants is presented.

6.5 Finding a sense of belonging through interaction

Cultural integration and language acquisition are important preconditions for another significant component of social integration, namely, interaction. Interaction refers to the process by which immigrants engage with each other and the receiving community.

There are two types of interaction, negative and positive, and what form the interaction takes affects the outcome. According to Andrew Orton's (2012) guide for policy makers and practitioners, positive interaction can build immigrants' belonging in the society. Positive interactions are explained as those processes that help people effectively build networks and mutually supportive relationships with each other in ways that contribute to a more cohesive society. Negative interaction, on the other hand, can contribute to the opposite; immigrants may encounter hostile attitudes, discrimination, and various forms of oppression and exploitation that can lead to social conflict and immigrants' isolation and alienation (Orton 2012, p. 9ff).

The processes of positive interactions can succeed in promoting integration, as positive interactions can be used to build a common sense of belonging and shared identity (Orton 2012, p. 10). This identificational integration achieved through interaction means that an

immigrant has a sense of belonging to and identification with groups in the host society. As the theory sections describes, these feelings of belonging may often develop later in the integration process as a consequence of participation and acceptance. All of my immigrant respondents claimed that they do not yet feel Swedish; some of them stated that learning the Swedish language might be the solution. This is what one of the immigrants answered:

> *At the moment, I don't feel that I'm part of Sweden because I can't speak Swedish. My problem is the language. When I learn to speak the Swedish language, I will feel that I can be part of the society. It will be easier for me to communicate with the natives, get a job, and function like a normal citizen* (Interview with immigrant B 2014).

So that immigrants can feel Swedish and find the sense of belonging for which many long, it is important to create opportunities for positive interactions, and language skills are indeed needed during these activities. The arrangement of meeting groups and places discussed in the previous chapter is specifically contributing to the physical environment where and occasions when interpersonal and inter-group interaction can actually take place (Orton 2012, p. 14). The problem though is that Sweden does not have enough natural meeting places. Three of the five integration officials I interviewed explained that there seems to always be a need to arrange and force meeting places as the contact spaces are very small. To have contact with Swedes, one must be in an association, be part of a network, or have a job.

Integration officer Kerstin Stöckl informed me that officers work actively to ensure that places are available for people to meet. However, policy makers and policy implementers can frequently do much more to arrange for these interactions:

> *The problem is that people don't meet to the extent that we wish. We would like to see more meetings taking place. Meetings are absolutely the most*

important tool to eliminate prejudices...to get another picture of a person and a different culture (Interview with Kerstin Stöckl 2014).

Without interaction, prejudice and inaccurate stereotypes are more likely to shape attitudes about immigrants. The way immigrants are accepted by the host society plays a significant role in how thoroughly immigrants become integrated and feel a sense of belonging. Almost all my interview participants brought up the importance of being included and accepted by the natives of the host country. According to Khalid El-Haj, the public perception is central to the overall acceptance of immigrants:

> *The public perception of immigrants matters...it plays an important role in integration. We tend to create a social value in the environment we live in, which in turn makes other people respect you more. If the natives know who the immigrants are, they know that they work hard like everyone else, etc.; it creates more acceptance in that society* (Interview with Khalid El-Haj 2014).

I also asked my participants whether they believed that immigrants can ever feel Swedish and hence feel that they belong. Kassem Echehade, an integration officer in Helsingborg, said that it is up to each person to feel Swedish or not. He argued that no one but the immigrant can decide whether he or she is Swedish. No one can control that feeling (Interview with Kassem Echehade 2014). Kassem's opinion was opposed by his colleague, who insisted that it is not up to each person alone to feel Swedish. Like Khalid, she argued that it is important for the people who surround you to consider you a Swede to feel Swedish. "*It does not matter how Swedish you feel if the natives do not see you as a Swede,*" she said (Interview with Chirin Ibrahimi 2014).

The negative public perception that many of the respondents mentioned can affect immigrants' confidence. This in turn makes them isolated and marginalized and, hence, excluded from interaction. This may then lead to fragmented communities with limited social cohesion. Although efforts are made in many municipalities in Sweden to enhance

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interaction, the lack of natural meeting places and negative perceptions of immigrants are still obstacles that policy makers must counteract.

7. Discussion of opportunities for improvement

An integration policy that reduces conflicts between humans and mitigates inequality in society is the basis for good integration. As one can see from the findings of this thesis, several initiatives and measures in Swedish policy aim to support immigrants' establishment. However, multiple challenges affect the integration process negatively. This chapter presents a final discussion of opportunities for improvements in the integration process.

Opportunity 1: Be aware of the successful and unsuccessful factors

Social integration is a continual work in progress; however, I think that one must recognize the various factors of a successful or unsuccessful integration. What is it that makes people fail to integrate? Why do immigrants not learn the Swedish language? Why are they not so motivated? One must be aware of not only of these problems, but also why they occur. If the reasons for why they occur are known, one can begin to counter the problems so that they do not arise again. Guessing and trying different solutions is not efficient as the unresolved issues become a vicious circle that does not lead anywhere.

Opportunity 2: Country training

To improve the integration work I would suggest that officials working with these matters and questions be trained. People who work with immigrants should understand the different countries involved, as not all countries are the same. For example, if you have a group from Somalia, you should know where Somalia is and the story behind this country. Often people bundle together all immigrants in one homogeneous group, even though they come from hundreds of different cultures that speak hundreds of different languages. Once you have better knowledge of a specific immigrant group, you can develop a strategy based on that information.

Opportunity 3: Develop better tools in the language learning

Language is a prerequisite for integration. Without speaking the Swedish language in Sweden, it is very difficult to integrate. If you do not speak the language, how can you fully participate in the society and understand everything that your community has to offer? When people who immigrate to Sweden do not learn Swedish, it is a critical obstacle for both society and the individual immigrant. Immigrants are usually forced to ask their children for help to interpret in contacts with, for example, authorities. More measures, therefore, must be taken to improve the quality of language training. One recommendation would be to employ more teachers or teaching assistants to provide mother-tongue support for those who have difficulty with the language. This facilitates students' learning and understanding. To adjust the education even more, one can give immigrants the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of Swedish in an area in which they work or are interested in working. For this to operate more efficiently, improved individual adjustment and a better link to the labor market are needed. I therefore strongly suggest that language learning be combined with an obligatory internship that is automatically provided by the municipality when an immigrant registers for the Sfi course.

Opportunity 4: Heightened readiness

I believe there must be heightened readiness in the municipalities to receive immigrants, especially persons with very low or no educational background. One cannot expect an immigrant who is illiterate or has low education to learn the language in an equal time as a highly educated immigrant. It will take such immigrants a much longer time. There are also very limited opportunities and very few activities for illiterate immigrants. We must think more about how to help these people integrate into society. Illiterates must have options other than attending these courses but not understanding a thing. Sitting in one place for two years and trying to learn a new language, and not coming more than half way, is not success. These people need ways to learn the language other than by sitting in school when they have never before attended school. Everything they have learned in life is through practice; therefore, these groups need more activities to practice their language skills. Although language learning is central to integration, it is clear that the actual key to

integration is active interaction and participation in society, which in turn also leads to enhanced language skills.

Opportunity 5: Create opportunities for internships and work

Often, there is too great a focus on immigrants having to speak perfect Swedish to work or get an internship. However, I am convinced that immigrants can learn Swedish much faster by practicing and working in addition to studying the language. The strategy of integration policies must therefore be to create more opportunities for Sfi students to combine their studies with work or an internship. Everyone should have the right to practice their language skills outside the classroom. For this to happen, the job policy must be improved.

Validating immigrants' experiences and knowledge should not just work on paper but in practice as well. The labor market policies need innovative solutions that deal with the largest problem of integration – discrimination. The key to breaking through exclusion in society is an integration policy simultaneously focusing on language learning, interaction between groups, and work. To fight discrimination, policy makers must promote and support the activity of interaction. More measures must be taken to remove the obstacles and push for greater inclusion. As a result of positive interaction, the public will start to accept and value the potential of immigrants and be aware of the positive ways in which immigrants can contribute to the host society.

Opportunity 6: Broaden the work through improved communication

One problem with integration is that integration officials and other actors involved do not seem to be very good at communicating their work to each other and the wider public. This restricts the possibilities to get more people to participate in the integration policy. The work of the integration process will most likely become more accepted if every municipality produces an action plan. These action plans should include guidelines for what the municipality will address over the next three years. Having an action plan based on goals, and later evaluating the results of the work, will improve many aspects of integration efforts. In addition, an action plan will lead to better cooperation between the various actors

involved, as well as greater transparency and accountability. Moreover, the public will be able to follow the work and may choose to participate in the process.

8. Conclusion

This thesis has contributed to a greater understanding of the challenges that Swedish integration policy faces as well as more insight into how the policy strategy of language learning facilitates the integration of immigrants. After combining theory of social integration with results from my qualitative research, I can conclude that the Swedish integration process is lacking in several respects. Although immigrants may to some extent go through all four dimensions of social integration, such integration requires more effort from the host society.

The analysis has provided some clear evidence for these claims. Data from the interviews revealed that there are limited opportunities for immigrants to interact with other groups in society and use the language that they learn at Sfi. This, in turn, restricts them from further developing the language skills and acting independently in society. Furthermore, the results of the research also showed that informal discrimination exists, particularly in the labor market, which does not allow immigrants to fully participate in the social and economic life. Again, this is often due to lack of positive interaction between immigrants and natives.

With regard to the results, the thesis primarily discusses that the various factors of successful and unsuccessful integration must be recognized, and officials working with these matters and questions should be trained and have more knowledge about the immigrants and the countries they come from. Moreover, there must be heightened readiness in the municipality to receive immigrants, especially persons with very low or no educational background. More opportunities should be created for internship and work that enable the interaction to take place on a daily basis. This would indeed be possible if better tools were established in the language programs to combine work or internship with language training. As a consequence of positive interaction, the public will start to accept and value the potential of immigrants. Although the Swedish integration policy strongly advocates language learning as a key to integration, the research shows that language

learning and integration in general cannot succeed without active interaction and participation in society.

Executive Summary

Immigration flows to Sweden have evidently increased over the years, turning Sweden into an immigration country. This strongly indicates that Sweden is among the most tolerant of nations when it comes to immigration. Different initiatives are taken to integrate these newly arrived immigrants into their new living environment. The objectives of Swedish integration policy are equal rights, obligations, and opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic or cultural background. The policy strategy in place identifies the following seven areas of special importance:

- Faster introduction for new arrivals
- More employment and entrepreneurs
- Better results and greater equality in school
- Better language skills and more adult education opportunities
- Effective anti-discrimination measures
- Development of urban districts with extensive social exclusion
- Common basic values in a society characterized by increasing diversity.

(Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality 2009).

One problem that is significantly important to manage is immigrants' lack of knowledge of the Swedish language; this makes it difficult for them to establish themselves in Swedish society. Language learning is therefore often seen as a key integration. The main policy focus is early, individualized interventions for quick contact with the labor market and the Swedish language (European Commission 2014). Swedish for immigrants (Sfi) is the language education program that is supported by the policy, a tool offered by municipalities all over Sweden; Sfi aims to give adult immigrants the opportunity to learn how to communicate orally and in writing in Swedish. The goal is to prepare immigrants for everyday social and working life (Regeringskansliet 2013).

This thesis provides an analysis and study of the current integration policy, with a purpose to understand the integration challenges that immigrants face when moving to Sweden, and how language learning as an integration strategic policy helps to contribute to immigrants' social integration. Following questions are asked:

What are the challenges of immigrant integration in Sweden?

How does language learning help adult immigrants integrate into Swedish society?

Four dimensions of social integration theory were used to recognize the central components of successful integration: structural, cultural, interactive, and identificational (Figure 1). *Structural integration* means that immigrants coming to Sweden have rights and access to position and status in the core institutions of the host society, such as the economy and labor market, the housing system, welfare state institutions, educational system, and full political citizenship. *Cultural integration* suggest that immigrants can only claim rights and assume position in their host society if they obtain communicative competencies and knowledge about the culture and society. *Interactive integration* refers to the acceptance and inclusion of immigrants in the relationships and social networks of the society. *Identificational integration* implies that an immigrant reaches feeling of belonging to, and identification with, groups in the host society (Bosswick & Heckman 2006, p. 9ff).

Figure 1: The four dimensions of social integration

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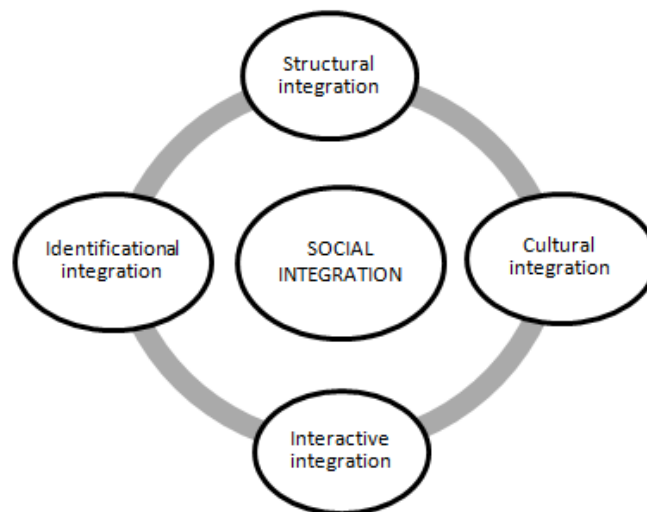
The model of social integration demonstrates the very important aspects that are part of the integration process. These four dimensions are interlinked and are mostly brought up, although emphasized differently, in policy debates. Since acquiring the host country's language is the first step and a crucial component in an integration process, it can be seen as a qualification for achieving complete social integration. Limited language skills will most likely have an overall negative effect on the four dimensions of integration, that is, their ability to interact with natives, understand the culture, gain access to position and status in the core institutions, and find a feeling of belonging in the host society.

Qualitative techniques such as semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, autoethnographic study and document analysis were applied to the study. The analysis of the study mainly rely on the answers from the interview participants which is then put in a larger perspective in combination with the theory, document analysis, and autoethnographic study. The respondents who were purposely selected for the research were coordinators working at Sfi and adult education, integration officers who are actively engaged in implementation of the integration agenda, and an employee from the Swedish Public Employment Service who helps immigrant jobseekers find activities in society during and after their language education. The respondents were also immigrants enrolled in both Sfi and in Komvux (municipal adult education). The immigrants' views helped me understand their experiences of integration and their current situation.

Different factors and challenges have been identified that affect the language learning and influence the integration process. The results of the data analyzed show that many immigrants living in the country face difficulty integrating into Swedish society, especially in the labor market. Although, the Swedish government has allocated funds regularly to improve educational outcomes of Sfi, the language learning program does not seem to achieve the expected results. Many immigrants are still excluded from the social and economic life of Sweden. One main reason is that there is too much focus on having to speak the Swedish language fluently to actively participate in society. Conditioning, for instance, the ability to work on language competency and not allowing immigrants to enter

the labor market due to limitations in language have become contentious issues. Learning a new language takes time, and different immigrant groups have different prerequisites that have an effect on immigrants' capacity to learn a new language. Factors such as previous educational background, age, and health condition are few examples that play a crucial role to language learning. In addition, there are other restrictions that, no matter how much immigrants try to learn, still does not allow them to use the language skills in practice.

Even though Sweden is portrayed as culturally diverse, the diversity and the cultural encounters between native inhabitants and so-called newcomers have frequently been discussed to generate political and ethical challenges to society and the state (Roth & Hertzberg 2010, p. 6f). Despite the formal anti-discrimination law in place, it is also shown that rather extensive informal discrimination exists, which restricts immigrants' access in particularly the labor and housing market (Rydgren 2004, p. 697). This, in turn, determines the immigrants' socioeconomic status and the resources and opportunities available to them. One of the main reasons for these conflicts is the poor positive interaction between immigrants and natives. This contributes to the negative public perception of immigrants which makes them isolated and marginalized. Positive interaction is crucial in order for immigrants to create relationships and social networks in society and thus feel a sense of belonging. Furthermore, interaction helps immigrants to practice and further develop the language skills attained at Sfi.

The thesis concludes that the immigrants may to some extent go through all four dimensions of social integration; nevertheless, it is stressed that more efforts from the host society are required. It is hence discussed that the various factors of successful and unsuccessful integration must be recognized, and officials working with these matters and questions should be trained and have more knowledge about the immigrants and the countries they come from. Besides this, there must be more readiness in the municipalities to receive immigrants, especially persons with special needs or very low or no educational background. Opportunities should be created which enables positive interaction to take place in society. To create these opportunities, better tools need to be established in the

language programs that combine work or/and internship with language training. Swedish integration policy strongly advocates language learning as a key to integration, this thesis, however, argues that language learning and integration in general cannot be successful without active interaction and participation in society.

Appendix A: Interview List

Anna Nordqvist, Coordinator at the adult education (Komvux), Eslöv, 1 April, 2014.

Chirin Ibrahim, Integration officer, Helsingborg, 16 April, 2014.

Eva Jönsson, Coordinator at Swedish for Immigrants (Sfi), Eslöv, 1 April, 2014.

Helena Jacobson, Integration officer, Lund, 1 April, 2014.

Kassem Echehade, Integration officer, Helsingborg, 16 April, 2014.

Kerstin Stöckl, Integration officer, Helsingborg, 16 April, 2014.

Khalid El-Haj, Employee at the Swedish Public Employment Service, Eslöv, 15 April 2014.

Smiljana Jörliden, Head of unit at the learning centre, Helsingborg, 16 April, 2014.

Focus groups

Immigrants, Swedish for immigrants (Sfi), 7 April, 2014, Eslöv:

Immigrant A, 58 year old man, from Iraq. University education. Lived in Sweden for 3 years.

Immigrant B, 30 year old woman, from Thailand. University education. Lived in Sweden for 8 months.

Immigrant C, 31 year old woman, from Iran. University education. Lived in Sweden for 1.5 year.

Immigrants, adult education (Komvux), 7 April, 2014, Eslöv:

Immigrant D, 27 year old woman, from Poland. University education. Lived in Sweden for 5 years.

Immigrant E, 36 year old woman, from Macedonia. High school education. Lived in Sweden for 2.5 years.

Immigrant F, 25 year old woman, from Macedonia. University education. Lived in Sweden for 3 years.

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