

Understanding and Dealing with Dyslexia in the EFL Classroom

A Scalar Analysis of Educational Policy Documents



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Abstract

Dyslexia is a problem that can limit someone's life if the person does not receive the appropriate support in order to develop strategies to deal with it, and it is not limited to one's first language. The first limitations appear early in life during the school years as the child struggles with literacy issues. It is in the educational environment where the child will receive the first support and experience obstacles, but it is possible to succeed in school with the right orientations. These orientations depend on how dyslexia is seen within the educational system and the educational policy documents determine how learning difficulties are handled.

Accordingly, this study examines educational policy documents and how they are interpreted by educational stakeholders on multiple scales, with the aim of understanding how issues about dyslexia are negotiated. English learning/teaching has also emphasis in the study due to the language's depth and its importance in the Swedish scenario. A qualitative study was conducted using descriptive coding, discourse analysis and nexus analysis, considering the different discourses involved and how the personal experiences are reflected in such discourses. The results suggest that the stakeholders are aligned with the educational policies and have similar understandings of policy content. The existent variations seem to depend on the participants' life experiences, circulating beliefs or ideologies. Additionally, the study indicates the need for further investigation with a larger number of participants to understand if this represents the reality throughout Sweden.

Keywords: dyslexia, EFL, educational policy, discourses, teacher agency

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1. Introduction

Dyslexia is an issue of importance in teaching and learning as it affects the ability to process words. It is particularly important in language learning, since it prevents the communicative development both in the first language and any other language that a person intends to learn (Daloiso, 2017, p.19).

English, more specifically, seems to be an even more challenging language for those who have dyslexia, and it is estimated that one in every ten people in English-speaking countries has dyslexia, while in other countries this figure is considerably lower (Daloiso, 2017, p.17; Stadler, 1994, p.16). Sweden's relationship with the English language has been very important in the last decades, being present in media, advertising, day-to-day communication and business. It is considered by many as Sweden's second language (Hult, 2012, p.243; Skolverket, 2012b, English, Aim of the subject). The orthographic depth and complexity of English and its importance in Sweden are some of the reasons why this study on dyslexia has focused to some extent on this language.

With that in mind, this study has investigated the support given to learners with dyslexia in Sweden. Previous research shows that the way dyslexia is seen by educators – as a disease, a learning disability or a learning difference for instance – affects the way assistance is given to learners. In addition, educational policies are responsible for creating or reproducing the different perspectives on dyslexia, and the interpretation of such policies also carries value in the work done in the classroom.

To identify what is Sweden's perspective on how learners with dyslexia receive support in their learning, the educational policy documents were examined. Further, to understand if the policies are being followed and how, interviews with people directly involved in the work with dyslexia were conducted. Teachers are the professionals who have

direct contact with students on a daily basis. Yet, their decisions are, at times, related to the decisions made by the school principal, other school staff or educational authorities.

Therefore, it was important to take into consideration how different people in the educational environment apply the content of the educational policies to their work with dyslexia. In order to understand what the policy documents say and how they are used, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How is dyslexia entextualized in the Swedish educational policy documents?
2. How do stakeholders on different scales of the Swedish educational system interpret the content of the educational policy documents in terms of what dyslexia is and how to work with it?

The educational policy documents and data obtained during the interviews were analyzed through the lens of discourse analysis (Gee, 2011) to understand how the language used presents the information, to whom and for what purpose. Nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004) was also used to identify the discourses in place and how the participants' historical bodies or life experiences affect their interpretation or implementation of the policies.

During the next chapters different aspects of relevance in this study will be presented: the main characteristics of dyslexia and its relationship with the English language, previous research on the view of dyslexia and its influence on the educational policies, and the Swedish educational context. The methodology and theoretical framework used in the study are also presented, followed by the analysis of the data, the conclusions, limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Background

In order to understand what the educational policy documents say in terms of dyslexia and how the stakeholders interpret that, it is important to first understand what dyslexia is. This chapter presents an introduction to dyslexia, how it affects English learning and previous research on how the way learning disabilities and dyslexia are seen affect the educational policies.

2.1. Dyslexia

It is possible to find records of studies on dyslexia already in 1877, when it was called ‘word blindness’. Later in the 1930’s, Samuel Orton argued that the term ‘word blindness’ was not the most accurate term to describe the issue, and came up with the term ‘strephosymbolia’, which means ‘confusion of symbols’ (Stadler, 1994, pp.10-11). A clear definition of dyslexia is still not easily obtained despite several years of research on the subject. Even learners with dyslexia provide different definitions of the problem: “a problem transferring my knowledge into written work”, “frustration at not being able to complete tasks on time”, “having a bad memory and being disorganized”, and many others (Daloiso, 2017, p.14).

The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) defines dyslexia as a ‘learning difficulty’ (Daloiso, 2017, p.14). However, different authors define it with different terms, such as ‘learning disability’ that comes from a language disorder (Lightbown & Spada, 2011, p.24), ‘language disorder’ that generally persists through life (Goulandris, 2003, p.3), and ‘learning difference’ to explain the fact that learners with dyslexia simply learn in a different way (Daloiso, 2017, p.14; Pollock & Waller, 1994, p.xiii). In this study, the term ‘learning difficulty’ was used as I believe that the learners with dyslexia experience difficulties in learning compared to other learners, but they are not incapable of learning, that is, they are not disabled.

Dyslexia is characterized by a combination of different symptoms that vary from person to person. These are the most common characteristics described by the British Dyslexia Association (2018, Dyslexia and Co-Occurring Difficulties, Overview):

It is a lifelong, usually genetic, inherited condition and affects around 10% of the population. [...] occurs in people of all races, backgrounds and abilities, [...] is really about information processing: dyslexic people may have difficulty processing and remembering information they see and hear. This can affect learning and the acquisition of literacy skills. [...] It often co-occurs with related conditions, such as dyspraxia, dyscalculia and attention deficit disorder.

On the plus side, dyslexic people often have strong visual, creative and problem-solving skills [...] Many famous and successful people are dyslexic.

Given the characteristics described above, Daloiso (2017) mentions that conventional language teaching methods usually do not work for learners with dyslexia, but with the support of information technology and counselling, they might overcome their difficulties (p.14). Dyslexic people have specific difficulties in three areas: phonological processing, working memory and processing speed. When it comes to phonological processing, dyslexics have difficulties with dividing the words in syllables, recognizing rhyming words and identifying similar or different sounds, for instance, which can lead to a slower reading process and difficulties to follow what someone is saying. They also tend to have a shorter working memory, which affects their ability to hold information temporarily. As for processing speed, dyslexics tend to be slower when engaged in tasks that require fast response (Daloiso, 2017, p.15). Consequently, there is a considerable impact on the development of literacy skills.

Previous research even shows that adults with dyslexia have different levels of lexical diversity in their written and spoken language, using more diverse vocabulary when speaking than writing as they have to limit their ideas to the words they can spell (Sumner, Connelly & Barnett, 2014, p.192).

2.2. Dyslexia in English Learning

Given that dyslexia affects language development and literacy skills, it is natural to assume that the problem also affects the learning of foreign languages. However, there is a degree of variation related to the language learned due to the orthographic depth of each language (Daloiso, 2017, p.18; Goulandris, 2013, p.2). The orthographic depth is related to how much a written language deviates from one-to-one sound-letter correspondence. Languages are classified and ranked as deep/opaque or shallow/transparent, where deep/opaque languages deviate more than shallow/transparent languages (Daloiso, 2017, p.18; Goulandris, 2013, p.2).

English is considered a deep/opaque language with its 26 letters, 44 sounds and inconsistent orthography. In comparison, Italian only has 25 sounds realized in 33 single letters and letter combinations. Languages as German, Swedish and Japanese are considered shallow/transparent, while French, Danish and Polish are considered deep/opaque (Daloiso, 2017, p.18; Goulandris, 2013, p.2).

Daloiso (2017) argues that “learners with mild dyslexia in a shallow language [such as Swedish] face huge barriers in learning English, because the language itself amplifies their pre-existing difficulties” (p.19). She also adds that foreign languages are usually learned in a formal context, such as the classroom, which means that not only the linguistic difficulties – reading and spelling – should be taken into consideration, but also aspects like the emotional and cognitive impact of classroom activities (p.34). Recurrent failures can cause an emotional confusion in learners with dyslexia. Consequently, anxiety becomes a

constant feeling during the lessons, causing poor motivation, shyness, isolation and even aggression. It is not uncommon that teachers fail to see the signs of dyslexia and just assume that the learners are not interested (Daloiso, 2017, pp.37-40; Stadler, 1994, pp.27-28).

2.2.1. Strategies and techniques in the EFL classroom.

The matter of how to deal with learners with dyslexia in the EFL (English as Foreign Language) classroom is, due to the reasons mentioned above, slightly more complicated than dealing with learners who do not have a language difficulty. There are several strategies and techniques that should be taken into consideration by the EFL teachers, and some examples will be provided here.

The first is considering the emotional factors mentioned previously, such as motivation, frustration and anxiety. This aspect should be considered when working with any learner, but it is particularly important for learners with dyslexia (Daloiso, 2017, p.37). Motivation is important for any student, but discovering what motivates a dyslexic student will help both the teacher and the student. The teacher should try to see it from the learner's perspective and choose, for instance, texts matching areas of interest for them. 'Foreign language anxiety' as presented by Daloiso (2017) is also an emotional factor that affects all foreign language learners, but its consequences to learners with dyslexia are more problematic. Teachers should rethink the way of working with the communicative approach in the classroom and consider the discomfort faced by learners with dyslexia while reading aloud or delivering oral presentations (Daloiso, 2017, p.40).

Other common activities in the EFL classroom that cause frustration in learners with dyslexia are, for instance, taking dictation, copying from the board, taking notes, memorizing a vocabulary list out of context and summarizing what was read (Daloiso, 2017, p.42; Pollock & Waller, 1994, pp.146-147). These activities require real-time foreign

language processing, activation of memory to reach knowledge and activation of several skills simultaneously, which can cause a cognitive overload (Daloiso, 2017, p.42).

The structure of the lesson should also be explicit so the learner with dyslexia knows what will be done, how and why the activity is conducted (Daloiso, 2017, p.78). Additionally, integrated technology in the form of, for instance, video resources, audio recordings, interactive whiteboard that helps with saving notes, spell-check programs, and text-to-speech software that reads texts aloud are also valuable resources to work with in the EFL or any other classroom (Daloiso, 2017, pp.82-83; Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.108).

Stadler (1994) adds that the most important factor for students' success is a competent teacher who knows the students' language difficulties and strategies. Also, the teacher should adapt the teaching to every individual, so the learners can work on their own pace and avoid the constant frustration that might happen otherwise. Learners with dyslexia also need guidance to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses and develop the best strategies to deal with their difficulties (p.55). The list of strategies, resources and tools to work with dyslexia in the EFL classroom is long. The purpose of this study is not to serve as a guide, though, but to focus on the policy documents and on the work done with learners with dyslexia.

2.3. Previous Research on the Perceptions of Dyslexia

To understand how dyslexia is entextualized in the Swedish educational policy documents and how the stakeholders on different scales of the educational system interpret these policies, it is important to review previous research that have similar objectives and compare the evolution of the issue in other parts of the world or through history in Sweden. Therefore, this section will present studies conducted in the United Kingdom, Canada, USA and Sweden,

where focus is on the way dyslexia is classified and seen by educators and policy makers and the consequences of that.

2.3.1. Dyslexia – a learning disability or a learning difference?

Some of Ade-Ojo's (2012) research questions are "How do teachers of literacy respond to the presence of learners with dyslexia in their classes? What are their perceptions of dyslexia and to what extent do these perceptions converge with their perceptions of literacy?" (p.624). To answer these questions, he explored people's different perspectives of dyslexia and how they are integrated into their construct of disabilities.

The first is the modernist perspective that "'places the locus of disability within the individual'" (Ade-Ojo, 2012, p.625). Opposing to that is the post-modernist perspective that views the disability as a social construction based on an incorrect assumption regarding differences in learning (p.625), which agrees with Daloiso's (2017) definition of dyslexia as being a "learning difference" (p.14) and not a learning disability. The same perspectives are also presented with other names: the scientific, medical and psychological, corresponding to the modernist, and the social, political and cultural discourse, that corresponds to the post-modernist (Ade-Ojo, 2012, p.625).

The findings show that most teachers see learners with dyslexia as people with some problem they need to solve or an illness. Teachers showed apprehension when planning to teach learners with dyslexia, and they are not sure how to implement alternative approaches to teaching. Also, their perception is that learners with dyslexia are in the classroom to be helped rather than to learn (Ade-Ojo, 2012, p.629). A minority group showed a different perception, though. They consider these learners "merely different in their preferences [...] and do not want others to impose particular ways of doing things on them" (p.629). Ade-Ojo (2012) concluded that there is a dominance of the medical construct of dyslexia in the

educational discourse of the UK (p.630) and that policy makers' "one-dimensional perceptions of dyslexia" as a disease affect teachers' perceptions and the development of trainee teachers (pp.638-639).

2.3.2. Teachers' negotiation of inclusion policy.

DeRoche's (2013) case study investigated how teachers negotiate inclusion policy in classroom's activities. It took place in one school in Canada and consisted of interviews with educators and observations of their lessons with a group of 25 children, where nine of them had some kind of reading and writing difficulties and dyslexia. The perspectives of a classroom teacher, a special education resource teacher and an educational assistant are considered in the study (p.82).

The study includes information about major differences between the perspectives of educational leaders who develop policies and teachers who implement them, and that teachers practice autonomy in different ways, but this autonomy is limited by resources and other factors (pp.78-79). Lack of adequate training was also mentioned in the study as a factor that affects how teachers implement policy, as well as working experience (p.81).

The findings show that teachers were positive about inclusion, but their ideas differed. Due to their lack of knowledge in how to work with learning difficulties and lack of resources, the teachers accepted the inclusion policy, but "this rhetoric does not penetrate to the core levels of education: the classroom" (p.84). The study also concluded that teachers choose established teaching practices and rely on trial and error strategies, rather than methods promoted in workshops on inclusion (pp.86-87). In summary, the negotiation of policy was dependent on factors such as past experiences, student behavior, established strategies and limited resources.

2.3.3. Dyslexia throughout the states of the USA.

In the US, dyslexia is also an important subject within educational policies. Youman and Mather's study (2013) presents the large variation throughout the states, where federal and state laws are interpreted and used in different ways. Some states, like Alabama for instance, have not even recognized the existence of dyslexia as a learning difficulty (p.151).

Youman and Mather (2013) explain that the differences among the states start already in the lack of consensus regarding a clear definition of dyslexia (p.134). In some cases, the term 'specific learning disability (SLD)' is used instead of 'dyslexia', which puts the learners with dyslexia under a broader umbrella of learning difficulties and disabilities and prevent them from receiving specific support and accommodations for dyslexia (pp.134, 138).

Some states provide dyslexia handbooks to schools and parents, while others have early universal screening for dyslexia and other reading disorders. Some refer educators and parents to federal laws, while others to the specific state regulations (pp.138-139). Not only the identification of dyslexia varies depending on the state, but also the interventions and adaptations provided. Children in some states receive support within the public-school setting, while others may not receive any specific support at all (p.141).

Youman and Mather (2013) conclude that state laws may include more protections than the federal laws, but not less. Also, a proper diagnosis of dyslexia is crucial for the student to receive the appropriate support and getting the term 'dyslexia' to be recognized by the public-school system would also be a major milestone (p.151).

2.3.4. Improving diagnosis.

Continuing in the American context, Adelman, Reyna, Collins, Onghai and Taylor (1999) discuss problems that arise from not carefully differentiating among students who present learning difficulties. They also discuss the need for policy and practice to address the full

range of learning difficulties, so students have opportunities to succeed (p.328). They argue that good policy depends on improving differential diagnosis and explain that most students who present reading and writing difficulties may be diagnosed as having learning disabilities. However, there might be many cases where this diagnosis is incorrect (around 85%) due to a failure to differentiate learning disabilities (caused by Central Nervous System dysfunction) from other problems that are not caused by internal barriers (p.328).

The incorrect diagnoses may be a consequence of classifying problems in human functioning that “convey the impression that all behavioral, emotional or learning problems are instigated by internal pathology” (p.329). That means attributing the cause of the problem only to the individual instead of trying to identify the cause in the social environment as well (p.331-332).

Adelman et al. (1999) suggest that to accomplish success in dealing with learning difficulties, “policies must be realigned so that the diverse practices [...] are unified. This involves moving from fragmented to cohesive policy and from narrowly focused, problem specific, and specialist-oriented services to comprehensive general programmatic approaches” (p.340-341).

2.3.5. A historical perspective in Sweden.

One of the most relevant studies for this investigation was done by Nelson and Sandin (2005). It introduces the complexity surrounding dyslexia, how it was perceived in the Swedish educational system in the 1900's and the effects on the educational policies.

It describes three relevant periods for dyslexia in Sweden. The first (1910-50) has a medical framework with focus on neurology and ‘word blindness’ as dyslexia was first labeled. This period is characterized by a change in society where child labor had to be fought and school attendance increased with school reforms based on normalization and a school for

all backgrounds. The normalization resulted, though, in a separation of children since those who did not fit in what was considered normal were sorted and removed (p.193). Early intervention to achieve success was considered important, but specific instructions on how to teach children with learning difficulties were never proposed (pp.195-196).

The second period (1950-70) has the psychologist Eve Malmquist as the main influential researcher and sees dyslexia as a condition caused by different factors – social, biological and pedagogical. There was a large focus on the pedagogical implications of how to train children with dyslexia, instead of focus on the medical reasons behind the difficulties (pp.191-192). Malmquist's work resulted in a PhD thesis that was used as textbook in teacher training (p.197). It was also associated with the creation of an educational system for all social classes and an integrative approach (pp.192,199). This approach became evident in the 1962 and 1969 curricula, but it failed in terms of integration because children put in special classes tended to remain there no matter their efforts to leave (pp.200, 202). Reading classes were closed, students integrated back into regular schools and a new curriculum started being created at the end of the 1970s.

The third period (1979-90) emphasizes an inclusive special education and dismisses categorization of children's problems on an individual medical basis (p.192). The curriculum from 1980 does not mention reading and writing difficulties of any kind, while the curricula from 1962 and 1969 had specific sections about it where the measures to be taken were described in detail. The focus in the 1980 curriculum was on school as a pedagogical environment and not on the performance of the child as an individual (p.202).

This lack of attention to dyslexia as a specific problem resulted in a campaign to raise awareness conducted by The Swedish Dyslexia Foundation and the Swedish Dyslexia Association in 1996-97. It also aimed to change the educational policies on how to work with

children's reading and writing problems and claimed that the teacher training programs had neglected the problem of dyslexia in the 1970s and 1980s. Also, dyslexia was to be defined in terms of pedagogical problems, not in terms of the individual child's biological problems (p.189). According to Nelson and Sandin (2005), "the educational policy-makers of today continue to be influenced heavily by an inclusive ideology" (p.204).

The previous research showed then how the perceptions of what dyslexia is affect the development of educational policies, as well as how these policies interfere or not in the classroom activities. As shown in the study by DeRoche (2013), not everything established in the educational policies is implemented due to multiple factors that depend directly or indirectly on the teacher's negotiation of the policy. Having a national policy fully implemented is already difficult, but the problem increases when there are multiple local policies that sometimes do not agree with the national policy as presented by Youman and Mather (2013) or when the diagnoses are not accurate (Adelman et al., 1999). A historical perspective of how dyslexia was seen in Sweden and its connections to educational policy were also presented by Nelson and Sandin (2005). However, the actual educational policy documents need to be placed in the correct context, and therefore a presentation of the Swedish school system is needed and will follow next.

3. The Swedish Educational Context

In order to investigate how dyslexia is handled in the Swedish schools nowadays, it is important to understand how the Swedish educational system works and its multiple players. This section will provide a brief description of the most important educational institutions:

➤ *Riksdag* (Swedish parliament): the national legislature and the supreme decision-making organization of Sweden. It is the *Riksdag* that makes and changes the

educational laws or Education Act¹, which is the base for all the work done in the educational system (Sveriges Riksdag, 2018).

➤ *Skolverket* (Swedish National Agency for Education): “the central administrative authority for the public-school system, publicly organised preschooling, school-age childcare and for adult education” (Skolverket, 2017). The agency is responsible for ensuring that all children and students have access to the same standard of education in safe environments. It is also responsible for preparing educational policy documents and for official statistics and evaluations in education. Most Swedish schools are public and run by the municipalities (Specialpedagogiska Skolmyndigheten, 2012, p.2), but the Education Act and the educational policy documents have a national reach and rule all the decisions made in the school units.

➤ *Specialpedagogiska Skolmyndigheten, SPSM* (National Agency for Special Needs and Schools): works to ensure that people, “regardless of functional ability – have adequate conditions to fulfil their educational goals” (Specialpedagogiska Skolmyndigheten, 2012, p.2). It provides special needs support, education in special needs and accessible teaching materials, as a complement of the resources provided by the municipalities and schools (p.3).

➤ *Skolinspektionen* (Swedish Schools Inspectorate): a government authority that “scrutinizes schools and assesses applications to run an independent school” (Skolinspektionen, 2016a). They also investigate requests submitted by students or teachers who believe that a school has done something wrong. One of their reports (*Skolans arbete med extra anpassningar – Kvalitetsgranskningsrapport*, 2016) was very useful in this study, as it investigated how the educational policies regarding special needs and support were being

¹ In Swedish: Skollag

implemented in the Swedish schools. It showed that many schools still struggle to provide the appropriate support to students with learning difficulties (Skolinspektionen, 2016b).

The educational institutions presented above organize and support many school forms. However, this study focused only on the work with dyslexia within compulsory and upper secondary schools.

4. Methods

Throughout the background section, the characteristics of dyslexia were described, and previous research showed that different people have different understandings and interpretations of educational policies and of how dyslexia should be handled. For this reason, a qualitative analysis of the policy documents as well as interviews with those working with such documents felt necessary. The way they were conducted will be presented in this chapter.

4.1. Data Collection

The process of collecting data comprises two steps: the identification of the relevant educational policy documents and interviews with stakeholders on different scales of the educational system.

4.1.1. The educational policy documents.

With the help of a document written by the Swedish Dyslexia Association² (Svenska Dyslexiföreningen, 2015), it was possible to identify which educational policy documents had a direct or indirect connection to dyslexia. They are: the Education Act, the national curricula for compulsory and upper secondary schools, and the ‘General recommendations for the work

² *Lagar och förordningar vad gäller elever med svårigheter i skolan – särskilt läs- och skrivsvårigheter/dyslexi*

with individually adapted education, special support and plan of actions'. Due to the relevance of this study to English teaching, the syllabi for the English subject were also considered in the analysis. All the policy documents were obtained online on Skolverket's webpage. The combination of facts and data gathered in these texts served as the base for the next step, which consisted of interviewing people who deal with dyslexia within the educational system.

4.1.2. Selection of participants.

Six participants were chosen through two different ways. The school participants were chosen based on criterion-based selection, which means that they met specific criteria (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2015, pp.54-56). The criteria for the teachers were: they should be certified EFL teachers, currently teaching the subject of English and with some experience in teaching learners with dyslexia. The school chosen was an upper secondary school in the south of Sweden, in which I was aware of the existence of a significant number of learners with dyslexia.

The other participants were chosen through the snowball method, that is, one participant recommends the other based on his/her relevance for the study (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2015, pp.55). The starting point was identifying an expert to be interviewed at the Swedish Dyslexia Association, who later provided a contact at SPSM³ and so on. A brief presentation of the participants and their background/experience is provided below.

Pseudonyms were chosen to protect their identities.

³ National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools

<i>Name / Organization</i>	<i>Background and experience</i>
Sofia <i>Skolverket</i>	Over ten years of experience in teaching languages and learners with learning difficulties. As advisor, she works with other school authorities, universities and school units.
Anette <i>SPSM</i>	Special needs advisor with over fifteen years of experience in reading and writing difficulties/dyslexia and in finding alternative tools and methods to work with learning difficulties.
Linda <i>School</i>	School principal with over fifteen years of experience as upper secondary teacher and principal. She is also part of the Pupil Welfare team, that support teachers with pedagogical concerns and students with difficulties of all kinds.
Susanne & Josefine <i>School</i>	EFL teachers with about twenty years of experience in teaching languages - Swedish and English - and working with students who have multiple learning difficulties.
Lena <i>Dyslexia Association</i>	Experienced university teacher who has a degree in Linguistics and large experience in teaching teacher students to work with learning difficulties.

4.1.3. Interviews.

The choice of conducting interviews comes from the need to understand how policies are interpreted across multiple scales of the educational system. Seidman (2006) says that we interview to “find out what *their* [the participants] experience is and the meaning *they* make of it, and then to make connections among the experiences of people who share the same structure” (p.128).

The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions (see Appendix), giving the participants the possibility to talk freely about a pre-determined subject (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2015, p.85). The interviews were conducted in Swedish, since it is the participants' first language, during the spring of 2018 and took place in their workplaces or via video-conference. They were audio-recorded, transcribed, and the transcriptions were printed and analyzed.

4.2. Methods for Analysis

After identifying the relevant policy documents, deductive coding was done based on a list of codes determined beforehand to identify the parts of the documents that were related to learning difficulties (Saldaña, 2013, p.65). This list included terms as dyslexia, reading and writing difficulties, learning difficulties and disabilities, special education, as well as others that emerged during the reading of the texts, as part of inductive coding (Saldaña, 2013, p.65).

The transcriptions of the interviews were also coded before the analysis. Since the interview questions were based on the data obtained from the policy documents, deductive coding was done first, as some codes or categories were already meant to be discussed. Later, inductive coding was done, allowing important aspects to emerge instead of seeking pre-developed theories (Seidman, 2006, p.117). Then, descriptive coding was done, and the passages of the transcriptions were summarized in a word or short phrase (Saldaña, 2013, p.88). These codes or categories were marked with different colors for an easier visualization and the main points within each category were listed. Some of these codes were: educational policy documents, teacher education, special education, dyslexia and responsibilities.

4.2.1. Discourse analysis.

After coding the data, discourse analysis was used to identify the meanings of the language. Gee (2011) defines discourse analysis as the study of language-in-use. It can focus on the

language structure (grammar) or deal with meaning in social, cultural and political terms (p.ix), which is the case in this study. Gee (2011) also presents multiple tools to perform discourse analysis and the following were chosen and used in this study:

- Tool #15: The Activities Building Tool – what activities is the communication (policy documents and interviews) presenting? What social groups, institutions or groups support and set norms for these activities? (p.98).
- Tool #13: The context is Reflexive Tool – it is required to think about the context and not just about what was said. How is what was said/written helping to create, shape or even manipulate what listeners will consider relevant? Is this reproducing or changing contexts? (p.85).
- Tool #18: The Politics Building Tool – how words are being used to build what counts as social goods and how they should be distributed? (p.121).

4.2.2. Nexus analysis.

Besides coding and performing discourse analysis, the research questions and data were also examined through the lens of ‘nexus analysis’. According to Scollon and Scollon (2004), nexus analysis is “the mapping of semiotic cycles of people, discourses, places, and mediational means involved in the social actions we are studying” (p.viii). Hult (2015) states that nexus analysis is especially useful regarding language policy planning because it facilitates mapping connections across scales (p.217). ‘Discourse’ is also a key concept here as it entails the use of language to accomplish some action in the social world (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p.2) and “all places in the world are complex aggregates (or nexus) of many discourses which circulate through them (p.14).

There are three kinds of discourse that may intersect in a social action: the historical body - individuals’ life experiences, discourses in place - circulating beliefs or

ideologies, and interaction order - norms for how individuals relate to each other during the social action (Hult, 2015, p.218; Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p.13-14). This study focused on 'historical body' and 'discourses in places', since there was no direct interaction among the participants.

Scollon and Scollon (2004) also mention that nexus analysis contains three main phases. During the 'engaging phase', the relevant scales and stakeholders in the Swedish educational system were identified (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp.153-154). They are: the educational policies, that serve as the base for any work performed in the schools and comprise their own discourse; the school authorities and their representatives, as "different people play the same role differently depending on their history of personal experience" (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p.13); the school unit and its representatives who deal with learners with dyslexia. They also have their own discourse, which is based on their own interpretation of the policy documents and on their 'historical body'; the dyslexia association, a scale not officially connected to the educational system, represents all those who have dyslexia and provides, perhaps, a different perspective of those directly engaged in the educational system.

The 'navigating phase' consisted of data collection and the analysis of how the different scales interpret the policies and their discourses. The last phase, 'changing phase', summed up results of the analysis of the multiple trajectories of historical bodies and discourses in place (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p.178).

This section has presented the methodology through which this study was performed. The next section will present the analysis of the data collected.

5. Analysis

The data collected consists of the educational policy documents and the responses obtained in interviews with the participants. They were first asked an open question about their role in the organization they work in and their relationship with dyslexia, if any. The purpose was for the participants to place themselves in a context, as the context and perspective are of great importance in this multilayered process. This chapter will present the analysis of each policy document, the participants' interpretation of such documents and additional subjects related to dyslexia that emerged during the interviews.

5.1. Learning Difficulties in the Swedish Educational Policy Documents

According to the Swedish Dyslexia Association (Svenska Dyslexiförening, 2015, p.3) and Stadler (1994, p.113), the term dyslexia is not directly mentioned in any of the educational policy documents. Nelson and Sandin (2005) also mentioned in their historical perspective on dyslexia in Sweden that the curriculum of 1980 removed any reference to specific learning difficulties in an effort to reach inclusion (pp.202, 204). New curricula were created after that, but they still do not have any reference to specific learning difficulties, which might be interpreted as a way to reinforce the discourse of inclusive education previously established. Gee (2011) explains that we use language "to build and destroy social goods" (p.118), which means that the words we use, or in this case do not use, serve as a way to make a statement. Although the term dyslexia is not explicitly mentioned in the policy documents, the issue is present through indirect terminology or under major subjects, and this was analyzed and will be presented here.

5.1.1. The Education Act.

Starting with the Education Act (*Skollag*) that applies from July 1st, 2011 (Skolverket, 2015), there is no direct reference to dyslexia in the text. Yet, there are some chapters that cover

students' need for extra support. These chapters apply to all school forms and aim to ensure that all students' needs are taken into consideration, which should also cover the needs of the learners with dyslexia.

Statements such as “[t]he education must consider the different needs of children and pupils. [...] An effort should be done to compensate for differences in children's and pupils' conditions” (Skolverket, 2015, Ch.1 §4) show that students should receive all the support needed despite their conditions or abilities. An important chapter that refers to learning disabilities says:

Ch.3 §3 – All children and pupils should be given the guidance and incentive they need in their learning and personal development for them to develop as much as possible, based on their own conditions and according to the educational goals. Pupils who, due to disabilities, have difficulties to meet the educational goals and knowledge requirements should be given aid to, as far as possible, prevent the disability's consequences. Students who reach the minimum knowledge requirements should be given guidance and stimulus to reach further into their knowledge development. (Skolverket, 2015, my translation, my emphasis).

According to the Swedish Dyslexia Association (Svenska Dyslexiförening, 2015, p.3), the underlined text in Ch.3 §3 refers specifically to students with learning disabilities or difficulties. It was added in the last revision of the Education Act, which indicates an effort to give specific assistance to these learners. Two other chapters also refer clearly to the assistance given to learners with difficulties:

Ch.3 §5A – If there are indications, [...] that a pupil will not achieve the minimum knowledge requirements, the pupil should be given immediate aid in the form of individually adapted education as part of the mainstream education, [...].

Ch.3 §8 – If there are indications, [...] even though the aid has been given in the form of individually adapted education [...] this must be reported to the principal. [...] The principal shall ensure that the pupil's special needs are urgently investigated. The need for special assistance should also be investigated if the student presents other difficulties in their school situation. (Skolverket, 2015, my translation)

The above-mentioned chapters are some of those that refer to the assistance to learners with learning difficulties, which includes dyslexia. Through these few chapters, it becomes clear that the discourse in place is the inclusion of students who have learning difficulties into mainstream education. Terms such as ‘different needs’, ‘compensate for differences’ and ‘all children and pupils’ are examples of this inclusive discourse. What should be done, to whom (see 4.2.1 Tool#15) and how (see 4.2.1 Tool#18) are part of the discourse.

Other chapters of importance for this study deal with the right to appeal after a decision made by the principal (Ch.28), with the allocation of resources as being the local authorities’ responsibility (Ch.2 §8A), as well as the principal’s responsibility in allocating resources within the school units (Ch.2 §10). Some chapters also deal with a specific educational waiver⁴ that states that a teacher may disregard some parts of the minimum knowledge requirements for the grade if there are special reasons for this. That applies when the student has a disability or other similar personal circumstances that are not temporary, and

⁴ In Swedish: Undantagsbestämmelse

for this reason, he/she is not able to reach some of the knowledge requirements (Skolverket, 2016).

One of the most important questions in the interview was specifically about which educational policy documents a teacher should have knowledge of to work with learners with dyslexia. The answers among the participants were very similar when it comes to which documents, but they varied slightly in terms of how they should be used. All the participants named the Education Act as the base for any work done in schools and its connections to democratic values, equivalent education and right to education and support according to every student's conditions.

Linda (principal) was very clear when she said that the most important thing to know is that "we have to help the students" (Interview, Mars 20, 2018) and that the student should be the focus of any work done in schools. The discourse in place (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p.161-163) here is clear – Linda is the principal of a school well-known for attending students with learning difficulties, and for this reason, she argues that no matter the policies or regulations, their role is to give the students all the support they need.

5.1.2. National curricula.

The second most important educational policy document is the National Curriculum (*Läroplan*), which is divided in compulsory and upper secondary schools. Since 2011, the new curricula in place are Lgr11, compulsory school (Skolverket, 2018a) and Lgy11, upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2018b).

Much of the content of the curriculum for the compulsory school is based on the Education Act. It focuses on the school's democratic values and its mission to educate all students in an equivalent manner. Like the Education Act, an explicit reference to dyslexia or other learning difficulty is not present in the curricula either, but they do refer to the

obligation of giving assistance to pupils in risk of not meeting the goals, which might be the case for learners with dyslexia if not given assistance. Here, the lack of specific terms or definition of specific groups is part of the discourse of inclusion present in the Education Act (see 5.1.1).

Both curricula have been recently revised to add chapters related to digitalization (Skolverket, 2018a; Skolverket, 2018b). This change is particularly important for learners who have some kind of learning difficulty, and specially for learners with dyslexia, as many of the tools and resources used nowadays to aid learners with difficulties require the use of technology.

Moreover, the curricula divide the support to students with learning difficulties in two categories, ‘individually adapted education’ (*extra anpassningar*) and ‘special support’ (*särskilt stöd*). This is a significative change since only ‘special support’ existed before. Later in section 5.1.4, there will be a detailed description of these key concepts, but it is through the application of these two kinds of assistance that learners with difficulties have a chance to reach the educational goals.

5.1.3. Syllabi for the English subject.

Neither the syllabus for the English subject within the compulsory (Skolverket, 2012a) nor the one for upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2012c) specify learning difficulties of any kind. However, they do state that one of the goals of the course is to develop the learner’s capacity to use the English language both orally and in writing. Considering the difficulties these learners have to express themselves in writing and English’s orthographic depth (Daloiso, 2017, p.18; Goulandris, 2013, p.2), it may be challenging to be forced to develop written skills to achieve the minimum knowledge requirements. The effect of that may be that,

without the appropriate tools and support, the learner with dyslexia will automatically be doomed to fail.

This suggests that the main purpose of the subject syllabi is to serve as a reference for the subject and not as a guide for how teachers should teach it. The text aims to reproduce in the educational environment the status of the English language in Sweden and the context where it is inserted, that is, a language used almost as a second language (Hult, 2012, p.243; Skolverket, 2012b, “English, Aim of the subject”). This context is also shaping how teachers should teach and assess the language - through written and oral communication despite specific difficulties (see 4.2.1, Tool#13).

Being a reference and not a guide may also be interpreted as freedom for teachers to decide how to work. However, it gives them the responsibility to know how to deal with possible learning difficulties, which not all of them are prepared for, according to Skolinspektionen (2016b). More about teachers’ abilities to deal with learning difficulties will be presented in section 5.2.1.

The participants mentioned that the multiple policy documents are interconnected. Sofia (Skolverket) provides her point of view about how they should be used: the National Curricula, the subject syllabi and the minimum knowledge requirements (a part of the subject syllabus) should be read and discussed in group by the teachers once a year, but most important is to have regular discussions about the subject syllabus, since it controls teacher’s daily activities (Interview, April 27, 2018). The discourse in place here seems to be a mix of the teacher she was and the advisor she is now, that is, her historical body. She knows what works for a teacher – to discuss the subject syllabus with colleagues for instance – and adds to that the school authority’s discourse of using and discussing all the educational policy documents. That gives her a uniqueness and contributes to the transformation of the

discourse in place from the teacher's to the advisor's perspective (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p.160-161).

5.1.4. General recommendations for the work with individually adapted education, special support and plan of actions.

Skolverket is also responsible for producing and publishing support material used by school staff, such as the “General recommendations for the work with individually adapted education, special support and plan of actions⁵” (Skolverket, 2014), from here on called ‘General recommendations’. This is a very important document for schools and students with learning disabilities and difficulties since it includes recommendations for how schools should implement the support to them.

On July 1st, 2014, there was a change in the regulations related to students' right to special support that meant to reduce the administrative burden for teachers. Before the change, all types of extra support in comparison to the regular teaching had to be documented, which meant a substantial amount of administrative work for the teachers. After the change, an intermediate stage was introduced – ‘individually adapted education’ – and thought to be a way for teachers to make decisions about extra support and implement them directly in the classroom (Lärarnas Riksförbund, 2017, p.6). The document is valid for all school forms and it divides the support given to learners with difficulties in two categories: ‘individually adapted education’ and ‘special support’. These are key concepts in this study as the interpretation of these definitions affects the way schools and teachers provide support to students with learning difficulties. Hence, it is important to provide here the official definition according to Skolverket before presenting how the different stakeholders in the educational system interpret that. It says:

⁵ In Swedish: Allmänna råd för arbete med extra anpassningar, särskilt stöd och åtgärdsprogram

- ‘Individually adapted education’ – minor interventions that are normally possible for teachers and other school staff to do in the regular teaching in the classroom. No formal decision is needed, and they apply to students in all school forms.
- ‘Special support’ - in contrast, this kind of support deals with actions that require a major intervention that is usually not possible for teachers [...] to do in the regular teaching in the classroom. It is the extent or duration of the efforts, or both, that distinguish this support from ‘individually adapted education’. [...] The decisions surrounding this kind of support are made by the school principal and documented in a document called ‘plan of actions’⁶. (Skolverket, 2014, p.11, my translation).

Some examples of ‘individually adapted education’ are provided in the document, such as helping a student plan and structure a school schedule, provide clearer instructions, support in understanding texts, explanations of a subject area in different ways and training in specific abilities such as reading. Special teaching materials or equipment, such as aids for time-management as well as digital technology with custom software can also be included in the framework of ‘individually adapted education’ (Skolverket, 2014, p.22).

Teachers and other school staff assess the student’s need for ‘individually adapted education’ or ‘special support’ based on his/her development towards the learning objectives of the curriculum. If a student shows signs that he/she might not achieve the objectives, ‘individually adapted education’ should be applied to aid the student in achieving the minimum knowledge requirements. If it still does not work, the teacher should notify the principal about the student’s possible need for special support. An investigation will then be

⁶ In Swedish: Åtgärdsprogram

conducted by the school principal and school staff to identify the student's special needs and what measures are applicable (Skolverket, 2014, pp.11, 13).

All the determinations and processes described in this document are based on the Education Act and national curricula. 'Recommendation' means 'a suggestion or proposal as to the best course of action, especially one put forward by an authoritative body'⁷. The name chosen - 'general recommendations' – says much about its purpose and the discourse is clear – the document seeks to have people follow a specific process and describes who should do what (see 4.2.1, Tool#15). All the chapters contain explicit indications to the municipality's and the principal's responsibilities, which may also be interpreted as a way to show that teachers do not need to work alone. It reinforces the important role the school principal has in making sure that there are resources and defined processes to be followed and in supporting the school staff (p.18).

All the participants agree that the principal's participation in the work with learning difficulties is essential. Sofia (Skolverket) mentions that the different school regulations in terms of special education might be difficult to understand and, in case of doubts, teachers should refer to the principal and the special needs educator for further support. Most participants agree completely with the document when it comes to the principal's responsibilities. Josefine (teacher) says:

You test and document different strategies, then you submit it to the Pupil Welfare team and to the principal for analysis and discussion. Sometimes the conclusion is that there is nothing else to be done in the classroom and special support is needed. Also, what the support will be, how the group will work to give the student assistance and to document the process (Interview, Mars 20, 2018, my translation).

⁷ Recommendation (n.d.). In Oxford Dictionaries

The document functions as a guide to the different players involved in the process. When it comes to the teacher's responsibilities, the participants agree that the teacher is the main responsible for providing knowledge and educational support to the student. The teacher also has to motivate the student, and in case of learning difficulties, develop strategies to make the lessons attractive. The participants also mentioned that a teacher has to communicate with the principal as soon as he/she notices that extra support is needed, or that the work done in the classroom is not enough. The teachers also pointed out that a teacher should be responsible for his/her own professional development, look for information and knowledge on his/her own to provide the best support to the students.

As for the student's responsibility, the participants agreed that it is essential for the work to be successful, and Josefine (teacher) even mentioned that a student with learning difficulties should not "hide behind a diagnosis or difficulty and use it as an excuse not to work hard" (Interview, Mars 20, 2018). On the other hand, Lena (dyslexia association) mentioned that a student with learning difficulties usually has low self-confidence, which makes it difficult for him/her to be active in the process and sometimes this should be respected. Two important and different 'discourses in place' are exposed here. On the one hand, the teacher wants the students to be aware of his/her limitations, but not hide behind them, and on the other hand, the dyslexia association's representative focuses on how the dyslexic person feels when demanded to perform. Both want the same, the student to learn and overcome the learning difficulties, but their discourses reflect their historical bodies and perspectives (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p.161).

In terms of responsibilities of the guardians, the participants believe that the cooperation between school and guardians is essential, and that they should support the school's work towards the student's educational development. Lena (dyslexia association) made a problematic observation: "It is not unusual that certain well-educated parents refuse to

admit that their child has such problems. They do not want the child to be stigmatized as problematic” (Interview, Mars 8, 2018).

In summary, the participants share a similar opinion about the different responsibilities. The only difference is, surprisingly, between the teachers. Susanne did not mention the principal’s responsibility at all, while Josefine did not put any focus on the guardians’ responsibilities, putting instead a lot of responsibility on herself and the strategies she developed along the years. It is difficult to say why they responded so, but perhaps Susanne has been in a work environment where the processes work well, and the principal’s role is not noticed as evidently, while Josefine’s work with the students’ learning difficulties is good enough and she does not need to engage the guardians as often. Their personal experiences or ‘historical bodies’ transform their discourses. As mentioned previously, both have extensive experience with learning difficulties.

Skolverket is also an important source for the teachers, according to Sofia (Skolverket), as it stipulates how certain parts of their work should be done. The ‘General recommendations’ document remains abstract as it only suggests general strategies and not specific instructions. Considering how complex dyslexia is, with its multiple characteristics, it would be impossible to create a document that provides specific instructions on how to deal with every difficulty and their different levels. The purpose of the ‘General recommendations’ is then, not to provide detailed teaching strategies, but to guide the teachers in two different processes, where the first depends on the teacher’s knowledge and strategies, and the second requires a team intervention.

5.1.5. Individually adapted education versus special support.

Given that the purpose of the ‘General recommendations’ document (Skolverket, 2014) is to provide guidance about the process and not to explain what strategies should be followed for

each learning difficulty, an important question had to be answered: do teachers know the differences and boundaries between ‘individually adapted education’ and ‘special support’?

The question, according to the Schools Inspectorate’s report (Skolinspektionen, 2016b) is not so simple and the implementation of the new rules has not been the same in all schools as many of them have not managed to identify the students’ needs yet. That means that many students do not receive the support they need to reach as far as possible in their development. Also, those who did implement the new rules rarely follow-up on the work done to make sure it is being helpful (p.5-6).

Surprisingly, when asked about the differences between the two categories, Sofia’s answer was “Wow, that is not easy!” (Interview, April 27, 2018), but she managed to provide a clear explanation after all, which is expected from a representative from Skolverket. According to her, ‘individually adapted education’ is not really an extra support, but a different way of teaching that includes reformulating ideas, choosing different material and changes at both individual and group levels. They are not necessarily major changes for the teachers, but they do lead to major changes for the students, which agrees with how the other participants described it. They also provided examples of what these changes in the way of teaching could be. Anette (SPSM), for instance, mentions the use of computers, tablets, extra time for learners with dyslexia, spell-check programs, text-to-speech software, and adds that the more these tools are available and used, the less they will be considered an adaptation, which is also the discourse of the principal and teachers.

Linda (principal) explains that they work in a preventive way in their school, which means that all teachers are prepared to work with students with learning difficulties, and all the tools are available for all students. As part of their employees’ welcome pack, they have a ‘personnel manual’ that includes details on how to work this way, besides recurrent

meetings and courses for the staff. The teachers, Susanne and Josefine, are aligned in their work strategies and attitudes. Since they have large experience with students with learning difficulties, neither of them considers their teaching strategies as ‘individually adapted education’, but a way of working and giving support to all students. Susanne said:

I work as if all students had dyslexia or ADHD, I try to be extra clear. Most students, or all of them, have access to different tools and strategies. I read out loud all the texts [...] there is no student who has access to something that the others do not have. I think that everyone can be given additional time, but those who do not need it, will not sit longer. (Interview, Mars 20, 2018, my translation).

It is also important to give the students a varied range of activities – written, oral, individual, in group. The teachers pointed out that no learner with dyslexia (or any other learning difficulty) is like each other, and therefore, they need to establish a relationship with the student to better understand his/her needs. Josefine provided several examples of tools and strategies that she uses with students and added that teachers have to dare trying different things, and “sometimes you will fail, but even when you fail, you can learn something with it” (Interview, Mars 20, 2018).

Working this way may sound obvious, but the experience of the participants and their knowledge have given them a repertoire of strategies that is not easy to achieve, and the Schools Inspectorate’s report (Skolinspektionen, 2016b) is an example of that, showing how schools still struggle to implement the support to learners with difficulties. It is interesting how the work done in this specific school disagrees with the report. Obviously, a school well known for the work with learners with learning difficulties and disabilities has its discourse aligned with the educational policies and regulations. Additionally, the teachers’ ‘historical

bodies' also matter here because all they know is this way of working. They have always worked with this kind of students and had to learn how to identify needs and create strategies on their own, which makes them the owner of their own knowledge, that is, they do not necessarily need new regulations and rules to work in a way that helps the students. Scollon and Scollon (2004) summarizes this situation when explaining 'historical body': "[a] lifetime of personal habits come to feel so natural that one's body carries out actions seemingly without being told" (p.13).

On the other hand, Lena (dyslexia association) provided contrasting ideas to what was said by the school participants. She agrees with the Schools Inspectorate's report (Skolinspektionen, 2016b) and added that nothing related to 'individually adapted education' and 'special support' works properly in the schools nowadays. She said:

There is no one who knows for sure what 'individually adapted education' is. This has never been discussed and it is up to the teacher and school to define it. [...] the problem is within Skolverket that provides very abstract information in their documents and regulations, leaving it open for teachers' interpretations." (Interview, Mars 8, 2018, my translation).

In terms of 'special support', the participants described it as support and adaptations that affect the organization financially, that is, that require the purchase of extra equipment, tools or hiring additional school staff. Other examples are reduced educational programs and distance or homeschooling. Also, it requires a larger investigation of the student's needs, comprehensive documentation, multiple players involved, and the principal's approval along the process.

Another important point mentioned by some of the participants is the educational waiver, which, as mentioned before (see 5.1.1), gives the teacher the possibility to disregard some parts of the minimum knowledge requirements when giving a grade due to student's disability. Anette (SPSM) and Lena (dyslexia association) added that this possibility should be clear for all involved and that teachers should know how to use it. The teachers also mentioned that most students do not even know of the existence of such regulation.

Lena and Josefine (teacher) named the difficulty in interpreting the educational policy documents and that this interpretation can become personal at times. Lena even called them "extremely fuzzy" (Interview, Mars 8, 2018). Josefine stated that she must follow them, but also interpret them according to values determined at higher levels. She also stated at several moments that teaching and interpreting the policy documents should be about focus on the students, no matter what the regulations for working with learning difficulties are.

When talking to the participants, it became clear that their discourse in place is aligned with the discourse in place in the policy documents, that is, inclusion is part of their daily work and they follow the processes established accordingly. Particularly for the school participants, they even go the extra mile when they make the 'individually adapted education' a routine to all the students and not only those with learning difficulties, as proposed in the policy documents. That suggests an internalization and even a transformation of the discourse present in the policy documents. The reason for this transformation might be that their historical bodies are so rich in experience with learning difficulties that they developed their own strategies and even processes (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p.160-161).

5.2. Additional Considerations for the Work With Learning Difficulties

The following sections will present some topics on which there was focus during the interviews. As mentioned previously, the interview questions were open-ended to allow the

participants to talk freely about whatever they felt relevant for the work with learning difficulties. One theme that emerged in all the interviews was the teacher's knowledge about learning difficulties. Additionally, the last interview question was about their view of dyslexia, which is related to some of the previous research presented in 2.3 and it also reflects their way of working.

5.2.1. Teachers' knowledge and Teacher Education.

When it comes to teachers' ability to deal with learning difficulties, the participants agreed that there is a lack of knowledge and that the problem starts already in the teacher education as the subject of special education is not part of the curriculum. One of the reasons for that, according to Lena (dyslexia association), is that some people within Skolverket and Teacher Education programs still do not see dyslexia as a real learning difficulty due to the impossibility of describing all its characteristics and applying them to all learners with the problem.

Anette (SPSM) highlighted that most teachers have "so superficial knowledge of the basic pillars of language" (Interview, Mars 8, 2018) and lack knowledge in language decoding, which is essential to help learners with dyslexia develop reading strategies. Susanne and Josefine (teachers) and Sofia (Skolverket) justify that becoming a teacher requires so much knowledge that no teacher education program will ever cover everything and added that it is also up to every teacher to look for more information. As a suggestion, they named Skolverket's webpage as a huge source of information, as well as the SPSM's.

It is interesting to note that both teachers and Sofia, who had been working as a teacher until recently, encouraged teachers to look for more knowledge and even mentioned that a teacher is never done with his/her own education. On the other hand, Lena and Anette reinforced that basic knowledge in language decoding is essential for all teachers and should

be provided in the Teacher Education. They are both experienced in training teachers in special education, which probably allows them to say that teachers lack this specific knowledge, while Susanne and Josefine had to acquire this knowledge already as teachers in practice.

It becomes clear how Sofia's and the teachers' 'historical bodies' dominate their discourse. Although they did not receive the appropriate training in special education in the teacher education, they managed to learn on their own and became experienced teachers ready to assist their students. The teachers do believe it is possible to acquire this knowledge later, and although the other participants also believe that, they still argue that no teacher should start working without knowing how to deal with language decoding, dyslexia and other learning difficulties. It is the same discourse in place to start with – teachers need specific knowledge about learning difficulties – but they become two different discourses that were transformed because of the participants' personal experiences or 'historical bodies' (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p.160-161). Josefine is so aware of this that she mentioned several times during the interview that this is her way of working and seeing things, based on the fact that she has been working at the same school for twenty years and had to learn things on her own, but she cannot affirm that things work the same way in other schools.

5.2.2. Dyslexia – a medical, social or educational matter?

Previous studies related to the way dyslexia has been seen in the educational environment were presented in 2.3. They explain how the different viewpoints affected the way learners with dyslexia were received in schools, the support they were given and the educational policies. As mentioned previously, specific learning difficulties as dyslexia are not explicitly mentioned in the educational policies, which gives those who will implement them the opportunity for interpretation. Therefore, the participants in this study were also asked about

their view, whether dyslexia is a medical, a social or an educational matter and these are the results.

Sofia (Skolverket) and Linda (principal) see dyslexia as an educational matter. Linda emphasized that “schools must be good at taking care of students with learning difficulties” (Interview, Mars 20, 2018), and did not show a specific need to define dyslexia, but to focus on the school’s role as an educational service provider, a discourse that fits her position as principal. Sofia argued that the term dyslexia is only a medical term, and not the most suitable in the educational environment. She defends the use of ‘reading and writing difficulties’ instead, as it includes dyslexia and other difficulties, and her discourse about terminology fits her position as an educational authority advisor who has to provide information to the multiple players of the school system. Here, again, the discourses in place are directly related to the participants’ historical bodies.

The other participants place dyslexia in the category of medical matter to start with, then connect it with the educational and social environments. Josefine (teacher) did not understand the question about dyslexia being a medical matter at first, but added later that there is indeed a biological difference. However, it should not be treated as something to be cured, which agrees with her attitude towards dyslexia as a learning difference that schools and society should deal with and support. Her discourse is not only based on her experience as a teacher, but also on her own life experience or historical body, as she compares dyslexia with wearing glasses. She argues that without glasses she cannot see well, but it does not mean that she cannot learn the same things that someone without glasses do, and the same happens with a learner with dyslexia who needs special strategies to read and comprehend the text, just like wearing glasses.

Anette (SPSM) mentioned that dyslexia would not necessarily be an issue if teachers were prepared to work with it and returned to the matter of Teacher Education and its limitations. Lena (dyslexia association) argued that seeing dyslexia as a medical issue only is to reduce the problem, and that dyslexia is indeed a medical and genetic matter, but “it can be aggravated or reduced depending on educational, organizational and environmental factors” (Interview, Mars 8, 2018). Both Josefine and Lena like to remind the learners with dyslexia that there are many prominent people in the world who overcame their difficulties and add that the school and society have an important participation in pushing learners with difficulties towards the success.

It seems that no matter the scale in the educational system, all the participants have embraced dyslexia and other learning difficulties as an educational matter and work to provide all the support they can in an inclusive way, in accordance with the policy documents. They have internalized the discourse in place of the policy documents, transformed it according to their life experiences, and are also reproducing it through the way they work with the students and colleagues (Gee, 2011, p.85; Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p.160-161).

This chapter presented an analysis of the educational policy documents, of the data obtained during the interviews and how the participants’ opinions and interpretations vary according to the position they have towards dyslexia and their life experiences. The next chapter will present the conclusions and implications for the teaching of English.

6. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was first to identify how dyslexia is described in the Swedish educational policy documents, and then identify how the stakeholders of different scales of the school system interpret the content of the documents in terms of what dyslexia is

and how to work with it. Through the analysis of such documents, it became evident that neither dyslexia nor any other learning difficulty or disability is explicitly described in the texts. What is present instead is the obligation that the educational service providers have to give support and stimulation to all students, including those who have special needs, and this is clearly stated in the Education Act, as well as in all the other policy documents. This is part of an inclusive discourse connected to democratic values and equivalent education.

Although the term dyslexia is not mentioned in the policy documents, it is indirect present through the regulations and processes determined by the Education Act and school authorities as provided in several examples. This lack of precision in the terminology used leaves room for interpretation about how learning difficulties should be handled by the multiple players in the educational system. The interpretation by the stakeholders in different scales of the educational system is exactly what this study has investigated.

One of the most mentioned aspects is that many teachers have limited knowledge to work with learners with dyslexia and all participants agree that it is due to the absence of a subject like ‘special needs support’ in the Teacher Education. This is a problem that the Swedish Dyslexia Foundation and Association tried to resolve already in the 1990s, as mentioned by Nelson and Sandin (2005, p.189). While the participants agree that this is a problem, some of them choose to focus on the possibility that the teachers have to develop their own abilities and teaching strategies.

The policy documents were evidently also closely discussed, and which of them should be known by the teachers was a point of agreement among the participants. The Education Act figures as a solid base for all the work done in schools, but also working periodically with documents such as the curriculum and the subject syllabus. Some participants consider them abstract and open for interpretations, which agrees, for instance,

with the results of the Schools Inspectorate's report (Skolinspektionen, 2016) regarding 'individually adapted education' and 'special support'. As mentioned previously, the report provides information about many schools still struggling to understand the difference between the two concepts and how to implement the appropriate support to the students. This does not seem to be a problem for the school participants interviewed though.

The way dyslexia is seen by the participants is not a problem either and contrasts for example with how it was seen in Sweden decades ago or how it is still seen in the UK, that is, as a disease (Ade-Ojo, 2012, p.639). What the participants revealed in the interviews is a multidimensional perception of dyslexia as a biological difference, that can be aggravated or reduced depending on the educational resources available, and the result of the educational efforts are of great importance in the development of the individual in society. Whether there is a diagnosis or not is not relevant for the participants, which agrees with the discourse of the educational policies of equivalent inclusive education. What is important is to have the right tools and resources to provide the learners with dyslexia the appropriate resources as early as possible, so they can develop strategies not only for the school work, but for life.

6.1. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although this study has dealt with stakeholders of different scales of the educational system, it was limited to a small number of representatives in each scale. That might mean that some of these scales, the school for instance, would need a larger representation to provide a better picture of the real situation. A possible future research could be extending the study to a larger number of schools in different regions and school forms, following-up the Schools Inspectorate's report (Skolinspektionen, 2016b) to see whether the scenario is still the same or not. Another possibility could be to focus on the teacher education

and try to understand why learning difficulties are not part of the regular curriculum, or if they are, how they are presented.

As mentioned in the initial chapters, dyslexia is particularly more difficult when learning English due to the language's characteristics, and given the importance of the language in Sweden, a study of this nature felt necessary. Hopefully it will be of help and serve as an inspiration for further research.

Word count: 13000

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Appendix - Interview questions

The interviews were performed in Swedish, so this is a translation of the original questions.

1. Can you tell me about your relationship with dyslexia and about your assignment at the association/at the school/at the school authority?
2. What educational policy documents must a teacher know to teach learners with dyslexia?
3. How should teachers use them?
4. In 2014, Skolverket changed some of the rules regarding individually adapted education and special support. These changes aimed to reduce teachers' documentation burden and clarifying the boundaries between support and special support. Have you noticed any difference?
5. How can we interpret what individually adapted education mean?
 - 5a. What teaching adjustment do you think, or do you know that teachers use in their teaching here? Which are especially used for dyslexia? Do you know how they learned about them?
(additional question to the principal)
 - 5b. What adjustments do you use in your teaching? Which are especially used for learners with dyslexia? Which are especially used in English teaching? (additional question to the teachers)
 - 5c. How did you choose these adjustments and how did you learn them? (additional question to the teachers)
6. Regarding diagnosis, what are the advantages and disadvantages of giving the student a diagnosis of dyslexia?
7. How can a teacher know if a student, who fails in achieving the goals, needs individually adapted education / special support or if he/she is simply uninterested or lazy, for example?
8. What is the role of the Pupil Welfare staff in the investigation of the student's learning difficulties?

9. Not all schools have special needs educators or special needs teachers - how do they get help then?
10. Who is responsible for clarifying 'individually adapted education' to the schools and how they relate to students' different needs?
11. How are the students' individual development plans (IUP) written? Can you describe the process to me?
12. What is the student's role in the work with 'individually adapted education' and 'special support'? What should you do if the student does not want to receive additional support?
13. Some of the principal's decisions regarding support for students may be appealed. How do you see that guardians are given this opportunity? How often does this happen?
14. Does dyslexia always require 'individually adapted education'? Could it also require special support?
15. In the case of foreign language teaching, English for instance, which problems are particularly relevant to the language teacher?
16. Do you think that school staff in Sweden are prepared to handle learners with dyslexia?
17. If you were able to change something in how dyslexia is seen and how to work with it, what would this be?
18. Is dyslexia a medical, an educational or a social issue?