

Policy for Integration

The contextual influence on the actors' role in integrating newly
arrived children and youth into elementary school

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Abstract

In 2016, a national policy package consisting of six support measures was legislated and clarified in the Swedish school law. The six support measures aim to create clarity and guidance for teachers, principals and other relevant actors to integrate newly arrived children and youth and ensure they achieve the national curriculum requirements. Recent reports state that the gap between native and foreign-born students continues to grow and that segregation increase in Sweden. Foreign-born students fall behind in terms of study results and make up the majority of those who are not eligible for high school.

This research focuses on those relevant actors whose primary responsibility is to enforce the policy package 2016 into practice. The research aims to explore and understand how these relevant actors experience, understand and enforce the policy package 2016 in practice through the lens of critical policy analysis and four contextual dimensions. This research undertakes a qualitative study with interviews as the primary method for data collection.

The findings from the interviews show that context plays an essential role in how the relevant actors experience, understand and enforce the policy package 2016 into practice. The main finding indicates that the policy package 2016 is perceived as vague and open up for individual interpretation. The relevant actors' individual interpretation is affected by their school's geographical location, student intake, competence, experience, routines, resources, and collaboration.

Key words: integration, education, policy, sustainable development, policy enactment, newly arrived, migrants.

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1 Introduction

The world is more interconnected than ever before and is experiencing increased global migration flows. Globalisation, war and conflict, climate changes or the strive for better living conditions are some factors that have spurred international migration in recent decades. Around 281 million people were counted as international migrants in 2020, according to the world migration report 2022 (IOM 2022), and around 36 million were children under eighteen years (UNICEF 2021). Many of these are children of school age. Education is a fundamental human right and goal number 4 of the sustainable development goals (United Nations n.d.*b*). The goal works to ensure sustainable development and fight inequalities. Education is a powerful tool that fosters knowledge and empowerment and it enables children and youth to develop prosperity and skills to cope with life, to enter the labour market, spur human capital, improved healthcare and tolerance (United Nations n.d. *a*). However, education is not a right that is equal for all. Sweden received around 140 000 migrants who got a residence permit in 2022 where 11 000 of these are children below eighteen years (Swedish Migration Agency 2023). Sweden is one of the leading countries concerning integration and equality and stands for equal opportunity and rights for all (Government Offices of Sweden n.d.).

Despite this, recent reports state an increase in differences in school results and growing segregation in Sweden (Sveriges Lärare 2023; Bunar 2022; Grönkvist and Niknami 2020). Sweden has experienced higher pressure and an increase in newly arrived children and youth to elementary school in the last decade (Grönkvist and Niknami 2020). Moreover, the gap between native and foreign-born students continues to grow. Foreign-born students make up a majority of those not eligible for high school (Sveriges Lärare 2023). Due to lack of guidelines and clarity regarding integrating newly arrived children and youth into Swedish elementary schools, the government introduced a policy package legislated in 2016. Many of these guidelines went from voluntary to obligatory (Bunar 2021; Tajic 2022).

The existing literature within the area of school integration of newly arrived students has generally focused on the students (Tajic 2022; Nilsson Folke 2016; Tajic and Bunar 2020; Brännström 2021). However, there is a significant need for further research on actors who actively work and are primarily responsible for enforcing the policy package 2016 into practice. These actors act as a bridge between the Swedish state, academia and society and are an important element in the integration process of newly arrived children and youth into elementary school.

This thesis will shed light and focus on the relevant actors, referring to teachers, principals and municipal workers who work actively with the policy package 2016, to explore and understand their perception of how this policy works in practice, in order to integrate newly arrived children and youth into the Swedish elementary school.

1.1 Research aim and question

The aim of this study is to explore and understand how relevant actors, referring to teachers, principals and municipal workers who actively work with the policy package 2016 experience, understand and how they enforce the policy package legislated in 2016. The focus will be on these relevant actors whose primary responsibility is to enforce the policy package 2016 into practice. The relevant actors are viewed as key actors in this thesis (Braun et al. 2011). Integration, policy and education are broad fields, for this reason, this research is narrowed down to exclusively focus on the relevant actors and the policy package 2016. Specifically, the policy package consists of six support measures and are the following: mapping, preparatory classes, prioritised time plan, individual study plan, adjusted time plan and study guidance in native language (Bunar 2021). The aim of the policy package 2016 is to establish clarity and guidelines to teachers, principals and other relevant actors, integrate newly arrived smoothly and for the newly arrived children and youth to achieve the knowledge requirements. The critical policy analysis framework will be the theoretical lens throughout this research and will give this thesis the frames and tools to analyse this issue. Policy in this thesis refers to an ongoing process that varies due to contextual factors. The thesis will use four contextual factors taken from the theory and are; situated, professional, material and external (Braun et al. 2011). These four contexts will help analyse how the relevant actors experience, understand and enforce the policy package 2016 and how these contexts influence this process. The research question for this thesis is the following:

How do relevant actors experience, understand and enforce the policy package 2016 to integrate newly arrived children and youth into Swedish elementary schools?

To answer the research question, interviews with nine relevant actors were conducted and analysed and put in relation to the four different contexts; situated, professional, material and external (Braun et. al 2011; Tajic 2022).

2 Background

The key concepts of this thesis will be defined in this section. Also, Sweden's fundamental view on integration and the policy reform in 2016. The section aims to clarify Sweden's integration policy, how and why there were changes in educational policy guidelines in 2016 and how these intend to work in practice to integrate newly arrived children and youth into elementary school.

2.1 Definitions of concepts

The core concepts of this thesis are policy, integration and newly arrived. These are generally broad terms that, in this research, are limited and will reflect a particular area and definition. These concepts are necessary to define and clarify due to their complexity.

2.1.1 Policy

Policy has room for interpretation and individual translation. Ball (1994) states that "Policy" can be defined and interpreted in many different ways. In this research "Policy" will refer to the Policy package 2016. More specifically, policy package 2016 will refer to the six support measures legislated in 2016; mapping; preparatory class; prioritised time plan; individual study plan; adjusted time plan and study guidance in native language.

2.1.2 Integration

Integration is a broad field with many definitions. In this study, integration will be defined in the context of education. Furthermore, referring to learning Swedish, having their individual needs met, receiving grades in all subjects, eligibility for highschool and to feel included in the social contexts of school (Bunar 2022).

2.1.3 Newly arrived children and youth

Newly arrived in this thesis refers to a child and/or youth who has arrived to Sweden and is starting elementary school (ages: 7 to 16 years). Swedish school law 3 chapter 12 a § (SFS 2010:800) defines a newly arrived to be: 1) has lived abroad 2) currently a resident in Sweden 3) have started their education later than the start of the autumn semester in the calendar year in which he or she turns seven. A student is defined as a newly arrived up to four years (SFS 2010:800). The term newly arrived child/youth or student will be used in this research.

2.2 Swedish integration policy

Sweden stands for equal rights and opportunity for all, regardless of a person's background (Government Offices of Sweden n.d.). Integration is a broad term, and the Swedish integration policy and regulation cover multiple areas such as the labour market, health and medical care, housing and education. The integration policy covering these broad areas rests on and is enforced through general measures based on an equal basis for the entire population (Regeringskansliet 2009; Government Offices of Sweden n.d.; European Commission n.d.). In addition to the general measures, there are special programs to facilitate and speed up the integration process for newly arrived immigrants (Regeringskansliet 2009).

Sweden's integration policy aims for equal rights, inclusion, and opportunity for all, reflecting the crucial aspect of access to quality education. Sweden's integration policy and guidelines clearly state that education should be accessible and provide equal opportunity for all children and youth from school age seven until eighteen years of age. Regardless of migration status, all children have the right to education and a place in elementary school in Sweden (OECD 2017; Regeringskansliet 2009). The government of Sweden provides policy measures and guidelines concerning school integration. Newly arrived children and youth starting elementary school have the same educational rights as native students (Skolverket 2023a). Elementary education is compulsory for all children nationally registered in Sweden from age six. Education is accessible and a right for all, regardless of migration status. However, it is not mandatory for those not nationally registered in Sweden (Skolverket 2023b).

2.3 Policy package 2016

In 2016, organisational and structural policy measures concerning integrating newly arrived children and youth into the Swedish elementary school went from voluntary to obligatory.

All six support measures included in the new policy package were legislated and clarified in the Swedish school law and Act (SOU 2017; Bunar 2021; SFS 2010:800). These six support measures are; mapping, preparatory classes, prioritised time plan, individual study plan, adjusted time plan and study guidance in the native language and will be further clarified in the next section of this chapter (Bunar 2021).

The policy package 2016 was legislated due to extensive criticism over a need for organisational and structural measures and guidelines in integrating newly arrived students into the Swedish school system (Bunar 2021, 16; Nilsson and Bunar 2016.). A lack of clarity, guidance and structure made relevant actors' jobs hard and confusing. The general Swedish integration policy concerning schools before 2016 had no clear guidelines and policy, which left much up to the individual interpretation of how to enforce these measures. The general concern was the need for a clear policy package with support measures, guidelines, and structures for integrating newly arrived students into school (SOU 2017; Bunar 2021; Tajic 2022). Some of these support measures, such as preparatory classes and mapping, were actively used by schools before 2016 but needed to be defined. Some schools used preparatory classes as separate teaching without regulation or a clear timeframe. The support measure of mapping a student's educational history and background was voluntary and had no clear guidelines. The mapping process had no clear regulations or framework, and no guiding material was in place for teachers and principals to start and develop from (Bunar 2021; Tajic 2022).

The most significant development and clarification in the 2016 policy package are the support measures in integrating newly arrived students, ensuring that this process goes smoothly and facilitating the newly arrived students' learning, integration and achieving the knowledge goals. The support measures are also essential in creating a clear structure for all the relevant workers to interpret and guide newly arrived students into school. School integration for newly arrived children and youth is essential. All these aspects are necessary for the child and youth learning skills and knowledge development (SOU 2017). Another factor that spurred this policy change was the increase in the number of newly arrived children and youth that Sweden received in 2015/16. The decreasing school results are shown in the PISA survey (Bunar 2021). These support measures reflect Sweden's general integration policy with the fundamental aspect of equal rights and opportunity.

2.3.1 Mapping

The first support measure is the mapping procedure of the newly arrived students' educational history, experiences, language skills and general interests. This procedure is the first step in integrating the newly arrived child/youth into school. Today, the mapping procedure is mandatory in Swedish school law, under Article 3 Chapter 12 c § (SFS 2010:800).

Depending on the municipality, this procedure is conducted either by teachers in the specific school or by an organised group within the municipality. In addition, guidelines and material created by the Swedish National Agency for Education, which the mapping procedure shall follow. The material is in line with and directly structured based on the new guidelines within the Swedish School Law and Act (Bunar 2021, 18; Tajic 2022; SFS 2010:800). The mapping procedure aims to create an overview of the newly arrived students' educational history and knowledge. In addition, the newly arrived student undergoes two tests, one literacy and one numeracy, which aim to create a clear foundation for teachers and principals in the process of meeting the specific needs of each child/youth and make sure what support measures one might need when attending school (Bunar 2021; Tajic 2022).

2.3.2 Preparatory classes

In 2016, preparatory classes were legislated under Article 3 Chapter 12 f § in the Swedish school law. The regulation states that a newly arrived child or youth that attends a preparatory class should do so partly and for a maximum of two years (Tajic 2022). However, the definition of partly is not regulated and is up for interpretation in practice (Tajic 2022). Preparatory classes aim to create a foundation in the Swedish language for newly arrived students and to integrate them into regular classes as soon as the student has sufficient knowledge. Preparatory classes, Article 3 chapter 12 f § in the Swedish school law, is used in particular cases if judged necessary by the principal (Tajic 2022; Bunar 2021). Preparatory classes are not mandatory. The responsibility and decision fall on the principal considering the newly arrived students' individual needs (Bunar 2021; Tajic 2022). There is an ongoing discussion, those in favour and those against preparatory classes. Some argue that "partly" needs clarification. Regardless of the student's knowledge, the student must transfer to regular classes within two years. However, on the contrary, more than two years could increase segregation (Bunar 2021).

2.3.3 Prioritised time plan

Prioritised time plan, Article 9 chapter 4 a §, aims to give the newly arrived student guaranteed teaching time on equal bases as native students (SFS 2010:800). This support measure allows the school to reorganise the schedule and to give more teaching time to subjects based on the students' individual needs. The time redistribution must occur without consequences for the student to achieve the knowledge goals (Tajic 2022; Bunar 2021). Therefore, a prioritised time plan is based on the first support measure, the mapping procedure of the newly arrived student's needs and knowledge (Bunar 2021).

2.3.4 Individual time plan

The individual study plan mainly applies to newly arrived students who are integrating school in their senior years in elementary school. This regulation aims to give the student all the support and opportunity to achieve eligibility for high school (Tajic 2022; Bunar 2021). Moreover, a newly arrived student who enters elementary school in later years has less time to achieve knowledge goals and achieve eligibility for high school. Therefore, an individual study plan can be of support and must be given to each student based on their individual needs within two months of school start (Tajic 2022).

2.3.5 Adjusted time plan

The adjusted time plan also applies to newly arrived students who integrate into an elementary school in senior years. This support measure aims to support, create opportunities and prepare the student for future studies. In addition, this support measure allows the school to redistribute subjects to increase the conditions for achieving eligibility to apply for high school. However, the study time must be as extensive as regular students (Tajic 2022).

2.3.6 Study guidance in native language

Study guidance in the native language, regulated under Article 3 Chapter 12 § in the Swedish school law (2010:800), aims to support and guide students with limitations in the Swedish language and enhance knowledge development. Furthermore, making sure and helping the newly arrived to achieve the objectives of the curriculum (Tajic 2022). Study guidance in a native language is there to facilitate the integration process for the newly arrived child/youth and provide the support the student needs. Study guidance in the native language has been a frequently used measure since the 1970s but was legislated, clarified and stated as a right in the Swedish school law in 2016 (Tajic 2022; Skolverket 2015).

3 Theoretical framework

This research aims to understand and explore the relevant actors, referring to teachers, principals and municipal workers understanding, experience and enactment of the policy package 2016. Policy enactment can look different depending on various contexts, which can differ in how the relevant actors translate, interpret and enforce these support measures in elementary school. The contextual dimension will be the foundation for further analysis in this research with the lens of critical policy analysis. Relevant actors are seen as key actors in policy enforcement, which in this research refers to the policy package legislated in 2016 (Braun et al. 2011). The contextual factors of the critical policy analysis will help the research gain insight into what relevant actors need to enforce the policy package 2016 successfully. The theoretical lens of critical policy analysis, inspired by the educational and sociology research tradition of Ball's (2015) "policy sociology," aims to explore how policy is perceived and applied in practice by the relevant actors. This section will further present the theoretical framework chosen for this research.

3.1 Critical policy analysis

Critical policy analysis will be used as the theoretical lens throughout this thesis, and with its contextual dimension, will help answer how the relevant actor's experience, understand and enforce the policy package 2016 into practice to integrate newly arrived children and youth into elementary school. The critical policy analysis is a comprehensive theory that is often used concerning the field of education. The theory looks at political, cultural and social contexts and how policy can reflect on opportunities for social change and reform (Levinson et al. 2009; O'Connor and Rudolph 2023). Policy studies have historically focused on the function, result and problem orientation of policies and their implementation, generally through legislations or other national regulations (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012). Policy implementation reflects on the historical way of policy studies, where policy is viewed as a "problem to be solved" and reflects on the government's attempt to respond to social and economic changes (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012). However, this has developed throughout the years as social and political science have taken place within policy approaches and developed a critical eye. Questions of what policy implies and why it exists have raised awareness of questions within policy analysis theory.

The complication of viewing policy implementation in the traditional way, Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012) argue marginalises those processes which are involved in policy and policy enactments.

Furthermore, critical policy analysis focuses on power relations, politics and values within and concerning local and national actors regarding educational decisions and reforms (Ball 1994; Tajic 2022). In contrast to the traditional policy theory, the critical approach looks beyond the problem orientation. It implies that discourse, language and text create the context for conceptualising policy problems and solutions (O'Connor and Rudolph 2023). The critical policy analysis reflects how schools enforce and interpret policies, making the relevant actors the main actors (Braun et al. 2011). Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012) argue that policy needs to take translation and context into account, and not just "implement". The authors state that policy implementation often is a well used expression in connection with "top down" and "bottom up" approaches to policy. Furthermore, this thesis will refer to policy enactment which aims at viewing policy as an ongoing process and in a non-linear way. Context plays a vital role here, as policy enactments start from different places, in different surroundings with different contexts (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012, 7).

So what is a policy? What does it imply? According to Ball (1994), there is no specific definition of what policy is and what it implies. Moreover, in this thesis, with references to Ball's (1994) view, policy is an evolving process and outcome. A policy, in this thesis, reflected on the support measures legislated in 2016, is complex and leaves room for different understandings, translations and interpretations (Ball 1994). The policy is not a set framework with direct orders but rather seen as a constantly developing process. Therefore, policies can be represented and interpreted differently by actors and schools (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012). The policy creates directions, principles and guidance toward set goals, which creates a circumstance that allows or limits opportunities for school actors to make decisions (Tajic 2022; Braun et al. 2011; Ball 1994). This circumstance creates a creative and complex space for further interpretation, translation and action. Schools and their key actors vary in their capacity and opportunities to cope with policies. The critical policy analysis is based on the theoretical assumption that policy is translated, interpreted and represented differently between actors in different contexts (Tajic 2022; Braun et al. 2011; Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012).

The relevant actors, referring to teachers, principals and municipal workers who work actively with the policy package 2016, are viewed as subjects and agents of policy. They are subjects of national policy guidelines and regulations but also actors who cope with policies and translate, interpret, understand and enforce policies into practice, making them agents of policy as well (Tajic 2022; Braun et al. 2011; Ball et al. 2011). For teachers, principals and municipal actors to be agents and subject to policy, these relevant actors are legitimate policy actors who have the power to translate, interpret and enact policy into practice (Tajic 2022).

3.2 The role of context in policy enactment

The role of context will be a tool in answering how and what the relevant actors need to successfully enforce the policy package 2016. The relevant actors, referring to teachers, principals and municipal workers who work actively with the policy package 2016, have an essential role in how this policy package is enforced in practice. Relevant actors are the key actors and have the ultimate responsibility. Relevant actors are those who, in practice, face and work with the national guidelines and regulations. The four contextual dimension will be used as a tool to analyse the data, and answer the reseach question of this thesis of how the relevat actors experience, understand and enfore the policy package 2016 into practice.

The critical policy analysis provides a critical and contextualised description of educational policy. Context is an essential aspect and definition within critical policy theory and are essential in the aspect of policy enactment (Braun et al. 2011; Singh, Heimans and Glasswell 2014). Contexts can shape how policies are interpreted, translated, understood and enacted by the relevant actors. The interpretation stage aims at relevant actors' understanding of the policy, through policy as text while the translation stage directs its focus on "enacting" the policy through meetings, discussions and school plans (Singh, Heimans and Glasswell 2014). Moreover, schools have different conditions and settings, reflecting various capacities to transform policy into practice (Braun et al. 2011; Ball 2015; Singh, Heimans and Glasswell 2014).

The theory of critical policy analysis and its view on the policy as a process, outcome and result is essential when asking how the policy package 2016 is understood, experienced and enforced by the relevant actors. Critical policy analysis and its aspect of context give this research the space and tools to analyse and see beyond policy as a "problem to be solved" (Tajic 2022; Braun et al. 2011; Ball 1993). It considers human and contextual factors that influence and contribute to the policy discourse. Critical policy analysis takes on political, cultural and social aspects, giving the space to analyse how policy enactment can differ in contextual aspects (Tajic 2022). Furthermore, Braun et al. (2011) refer to four contextual dimensions, which this thesis will use as a tool for further analysis. All four contextual aspects are interconnected, and some reflect more than others, all four contexts refer to and can help this research to understand how policy enactment works in practice (Braun et al. 2011). All contextual factors are constantly changing and developing, both inside and outside schools which reflect on the transition from policy to practice (Singh, Heimans and Glasswell 2014).

Ball (1993) points to the importance of seeing policy on both the macro and micro levels and how structural levels of analysis account for individuals' perceptions and experiences. It is essential to see both parts and how they connect. Policy on the structural level aims at a "problem" to be solved.

The policy subjects in this thesis, referring to the relevant actors, are the agents who have to solve the “problem” in context (Ball 1993).

Furthermore, context decides how action can either be limited or create opportunities. These understandings and interpretations of a policy and its enactment can vary depending on the context and circumstances (Braun et al. 2011; Tajic 2022). This research will embrace a framework, focusing on four contexts, namely situated, professional, material and external, that can help explain how policy enactment might differ between schools and how relevant actors translate, interpret and enact policies differently. Also, how the experience, understanding and enactment can reflect on the issue of context and how circumstances can either allow or limit strategies (Tajic 2022; Braun et al. 2011; Ball 1994). These four contexts are highly interlinked and will form the research’s basis for further analysis and will use these to help reflect and understand how the relevant actors enforce the policy package 2016. These aspects of context create space for the relevant actors to translate, interpret and enact policy in different ways depending on the circumstances and surroundings. These contexts vary and reflect on the issue of limit or opportunity for policy enactment (Braun et al. 2011; Tajic 2022). The four contextual aspects are shown in figure 1 below:

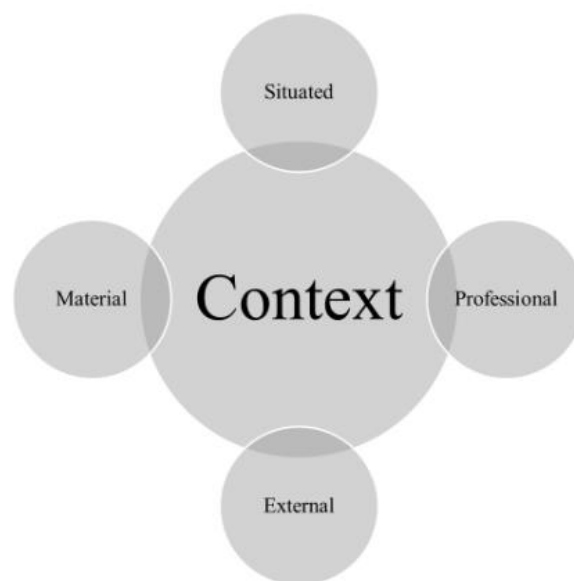


Figure 1: Theoretical framework

3.2.1 Situated contexts

Situated contexts can reflect on a school's history, location and intake. History can reflect on how a school has historically had organisational structures and strategies. Location can reflect on the school's geographic location, if the school is located in the city or a specific neighbourhood. All these aspects can reflect on each other. For example, a school's location can reflect on students' intake, further defining a school's culture and how it defines itself (Braun et al. 2011). Situated context is an important aspect to include due to its interference in how policy can either be limited or allow opportunities for the relevant actors to enact the policy package 2016 (Tajic 2022).

3.2.2 Professional contexts

The professional context focuses on human aspects such as values, experiences, policy enforcement, and management among the relevant actors. This contextual insight gives the research the tool to see and understand how these aspects of the relevant actors influence and reflect on how they experience, understand and enforce the policy package 2016 into school practice today. The professional context focuses on human factors and how these aspects of values, experiences and strategies either limit or allow opportunities for policy enactment. These aspects can vary in outcomes even if schools are similar (Braun et al. 2011).

3.2.3 Material contexts

The aspect of material context is linked to schools' overall infrastructure, budget, staffing, technologies and other resources (Tajic 2022). The authors bring up an example of location setting, where a school operates from different buildings and can reflect on different capacities, resources and outcomes (Braun et al. 2011). This dimension is relating to all aspects that can be is connected to the "physical" aspect (Braun et al. 2011).

3.2.4 External contexts

The external context refers to external actors, expectations and pressure. This context can reflect on exam results, responsibilities, cooperation and organisational structures (Braun et al. 2011). External contexts can have an impact in how the relevant actors experience, understand and enforce policy in practice (Braun et al. 2011; Tajic 2022). Also, the relevant actors' experiences, understandings and how they choose to work with policy can reflect on the external contexts.

4 Methodology

This chapter explains this research's overall design and chosen methods. The following section presents the measures taken to answer the research question of how the relevant actors, referring to teachers, principals and municipal workers experience, understand and enforce the policy package 2016 in practice to integrate newly arrived children and youth into elementary school.

4.1 Research design

The research undertakes a qualitative approach as the study aims to shed light, explore and understand (Scheyvens 2014, 60) how the policy package legislated in 2016 is experienced, understood and enforced by the relevant actors in elementary school. The research seeks to provide insight and understanding of relevant actors' understanding, interpretations and experiences of translating the policy package 2016 into practice. Thus, the research does not aim to generalise as every relevant actor has individual experiences and understandings. The research is performed through the lens of critical policy analysis and its contextual dimensions (Ball 1994; Braun et al. 2011). The theoretical lens and its contextual tools will help create insight into how the relevant actors experience, understand and enforce the policy package 2016 into practice.

4.2 Research method

As this research aims to explore and understand how the relevant actor's experience, understand and enforce policy into practice, the most suitable method for collecting data is to perform interviews (Robson and McCartan 2016). Moreover, this research is interested in human values, feelings and experiences to understand how the policy package legislated in 2016 is enacted and understood among these relevant actors. Therefore, the primary method for data collection will be semi-structured interviews conducted with teachers, principals and municipal workers who work actively with the policy package 2016 in or with elementary schools in Sweden. Interviews are the most suitable method for this research since teachers, principals and these specific municipality workers are the legitimate key actors in this study and its research question, aims and theory. Semi-structured interviews help collect valuable and detailed information (Robson and McCartan 2016, 290).

It is helpful in the sense of collecting experiences, opinions, thoughts, and understandings concerning the policy package legislated in 2016, to facilitate the integration process for newly arrived children and youth starting elementary school. The semi-structured interviews were performed via an interview guide (appendix 1) with specific topics cover. The interview questions were primarily open-ended but adaptable and not necessarily in a specific order (Robson and McCartan 2016, 291). One example of an interview question is: *How do you, at the school, work with the policy package 2016 and integration of newly arrived students?*

Interview Participant	Date	Time
Teacher 1	3/5-2023	22 minutes
Teacher 2	5/5-2023	23 minutes
Teacher 3	5/5-2023	19 minutes
Teacher 4	5/5-2023	21 minutes
Teacher 5	7/5-2023	25 minutes
Municipal actor 1	4/5-2023	20 minutes
Municipal actor 2	4/5-2023	21 minutes
Principal 1	5/5-2023	22 minutes
Principal 2	4/5-2023	20 minutes

Figure 2: Interview information

4.3 Data collection

The research conducted a purposeful sampling concerning the specific area and group that this thesis aims to shed light on and explore (Robson and McCartan 2016, 281). The data was collected via interviews, specifically semi-structured conducted one on one. The primary focus of this research is to explore and understand the relevant actors' experiences and understandings of the policy package 2016. Therefore, the primary step of collecting data was to decide who to interview and why. In searching for participants, I emailed all elementary schools in a municipality working with the policy package 2016 containing the six support measures and having received newly arrived students. Moreover, I also searched for participants via acquaintances, which created a snowballing effect (Robson and McCartan 2016, 281).

In some cases, the interviews were carried out digitally, either via Zoom or telephone, while other interviews took place at the school. All interviews were performed one on one and lasted for about 20 minutes. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. I interviewed nine relevant actors, two principals, two municipality actors working directly with the policy package 2016 and five teachers. All actors participating in the interview have experience and are working with newly arrived students.

Before starting the interview, I presented the purpose of the interview and the research project. After this, I asked for consent to record the conversation and assured complete anonymity. In addition, I followed all the steps within the LUMID ethical guidelines to assure reflexivity (LUMID 2013).

4.3.1 Translation

The interviews were held in Swedish to gain complete information and be transparent. However, this could imply a risk of limitation and translation biases when translating. Nonetheless, the collected information and the depth the interviews reached in Swedish outweigh the risks of translation biases. In addition, my knowledge of English allows me to translate simpler sentences using tools such as dictionaries.

4.4 Data analysis

The research undertook a thematic coding analysis to thoroughly define the data and how it relates to the chosen theoretical lens, the critical policy analysis and its contexts (Robson and McCartan 2016). This stage was an iterative process, meaning the processes went back and forth between analysis and data collection (Scheyvens 2014, 75). The data analysis was guided through five steps of thematic coding (Robson and McCartan 2016, 469). Firstly, in this stage, I started with transcribing the conducted interviews, thoroughly reading through transcripts and writing down primary ideas and links to the chosen theory. When a clear overview of the data was created, I re-read the transcripts and started developing initial codes. When developing codes had reached a stage with similar extracts and links to the critical policy analysis, I started identifying themes. All the similar codes were created under a specific theme linked to the theoretical framework. In the last data analysis stage, I developed thematic networks (Robson and McCartan 2016). I linked my findings to the chosen theoretical framework and clarified how the collected data is connected and can be linked to the contextual aspects of the critical policy analysis (Robson and McCartan 2016, 469). During these stages, I also re-read, noted thoughts, and went back and forth through the codes and themes.

4.5 Ethical considerations

As this research aims to explore and understand individuals' experiences, understandings and perceptions, it is essential to be aware and self-reflective as a researcher during the entire study.

Therefore, this research has applied and followed the LUMID ethical guidelines, provided to outline ethical principles and guidelines when conducting research (LUMID 2013). LUMID ethical guidelines (2013) state four requirements. Firstly, the researcher must provide information about the study and its aims. This information was provided in the first stage of the interviews, followed by the clarification that the interview is voluntary and that the interviewee can withdraw at any time. Second, the interviewee has the right to decide on their participation. In this stage, the researcher obtained consent to participate and allowance to record. The third requirement is that all collected data and details of the interviewee will be protected and anonymous through all stages of the research. Lastly, the collected interview data will only be utilised for this thesis (LUMID 2013).

4.6 Limitations

This study has deliberately only focused on those relevant actors, referring to teachers, principals and municipal workers who work actively with the policy package 2016 and how they experience, understand and enforce the policy package 2016. However, this decision has raised awareness of the possible limitations of not having interviewed and extended the research to include the newly arrived children and youth that are directly affected by the policy package 2016. Nonetheless, it is a conscious choice to exclude the newly arrived children and youth in this research due to limited time frame, ethical sensitivities and scope. As this research is based on a qualitative approach to explore, understand and shed light, the research cannot provide a statistical generalisability of the results (Scheyvens 2014, 77). All the actors participating in this research have their perceptions of things, and as the school world is constantly changing and developing, so do their experiences and understandings. This research is aware that human factors play a part, and as stated earlier in this thesis, the aim is not to generalise results but to shed light and understand their role in policy enactment (Scheyvens 2014, 77). Moreover, as the method for data collection is interviews, a limitation could be that the interviewees perceive the area as sensitive and that this could reflect and influence their transparency and openness. I can not expect that everyone is fully open and honest.

5 Analysis

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews with relevant actors referring to teachers, principals and municipal workers who work actively with the policy package 2016. The findings are analysed in connection with the theory of critical policy analysis. The chapter will analyse and discuss how the data fit together with the theory and the situated, professional, material and external contexts (Braun et al. 2011; Tajic 2022). These contexts assist in answering the research question of how relevant actors experience, understand and enforce policy package 2016 into practice to integrate newly arrived children and youth into Swedish elementary school.

5.1 Geographical location and intake

The interview data show that the relevant actors' experiences, understandings and how they enforce the policy package 2016 can vary depending on the school's geographical location and intake. The geographical location and the intake of newly arrived students relate to the *situated context* (Braun et al. 2011; Tajic 2022).

Findings show that relevant actors working in schools in the countryside have experienced and received a small intake of newly arrived students. As a result, schools in the countryside have not enforced the support measures of the policy package 2016 to the same extent as schools in a city. Teacher 5 expressed that their identification of being a smaller school in the countryside reflects on the intake of newly arrived students and policy enactment. Further, teacher 4 states they have not received “that many” due to being a smaller municipality.

"At the school I work in, we haven't had that many newly arrived. How many we have in the whole school.. The school has 142 students. We only just have five newly arrived" (Teacher 5).

"It's mainly the mapping. We don't have any preparatory classes. Because we're a small school" (Teacher 5).

"We haven't received that many newly arrived. We are a very small municipality after all" (Teacher 4).

In contrast, teachers 3 and 1 working in schools in cities express a perception of a higher intake and experience of newly arrived students. Findings imply that the schools located in cities work more actively with several of the support measures of the policy package 2016. Teacher 3 indicates a relationship between a higher intake of newly arrived students and a sense of experience. Further, teacher 1 clarifies that they have received a high intake of newly arrived students.

*“Yes, we have been warmed up now. Because we received a lot of newly arrived. Two years ago, I think.. We received so many, almost every week”
(Teacher 3).*

*“We receive many students with great needs. That's how it turned out”
(Teacher 1).*

Findings also indicate that schools in the countryside need more resources and staffing to enforce more significant parts of the policy package 2016. This finding shows an intertwined perception connected to the *situated* and the *material* context (Braun et al. 2011). The data indicate different understandings and experiences depending on where the relevant actor works, in the countryside or a city. Teacher 5 has experiences from a school in a city and a school in the countryside and states that there are significant differences. The teacher now works at a school in the countryside and experiences that the school's location affects access to resources and the students right to equal education. Teacher 5 states that these differences affect the newly arrived students' right to an equivalent education due to geographical position and intake.

“We talked about qualified teachers. Does it concern a city. Then yes, there they make sure that there are teachers who teach Swedish as a second language. The nearest town.. Which is about four miles from this school.. They have arranged both preparatory classes and Swedish as a second language. And study guidance in native language. I worked in that municipality for 23 years. They have arranged this. Because it is much easier to do that in bigger cities. And I started working in the countryside two and a half years ago. Here you see big differences. To reflect on that question. Here, it is the resources that decides. In the countryside, it's the resources. What reception the student gets. Mostly, there's not enough resources available. To teach the student in Swedish as a second language, it results in regular Swedish as the rest of the students” (Teacher 5).

“My own opinion is that.. It's a bit sad.. That it is not equivalent. We all live in Sweden. I have worked in both the city and the countryside. And I see that preconditions.. Preconditions change depending on where the student lives. Because it's not equal for all students, they don't receive equal schooling. They don't receive equivalent education. They don't have equal conditions” (teacher 5).

5.2 Room for individual interpretation

The findings from the interviews show that experience, competence and the creation of strategies to cope is an important factor in how the policy package 2016 is experienced, understood and enforced in practice by these relevant actors. The policy package 2016 opens up for individual interpretation which relate to the *professional context* (Braun et al. 2011). The data show a general positive attitude among the relevant actors towards the policy package 2016, there are guidelines to relate to compared to before.

Despite the general positive attitude, relevant actors have expressed that they perceive the policy package 2016 as vague and that it opens up for individual translation and interpretation. Relevant actors express that the policy package 2016 needs further clarification because it lacks clear routines. However, it leaves room for the school and the relevant actors to interpret and create their own experiences and strategies based on the interpretations from the policy package 2016. Municipal actor 1 expresses how it is ultimately up to the individual actor to interpret the policy package 2016. Principal 2 states that the policy package 2016 lacks clarity and is up for individual interpretation.

“I feel that you read at the Swedish National Agency for Education, and I have asked several questions to the Swedish National Agency for Education as well to clarify. And yet, in the end, it is still up to you to interpret it. So I don't always think it's completely easy.” (Municipal actor 1).

“They are not obvious, which one to use. I also don't feel that you get that much support from the Swedish National Agency for Education. It is just individual assessments. You are sitting with a student's future in your hands when you make these decisions. That.. you shouldn't read that subject because its more strategic for you in your development. After all, there are 15-16 subjects in elementary school. Is it reasonable for them to complete all of them in one year? No, its not. So what should you choose? What I miss is probably a closer contact with the high school and language introduction. And gain more knowledge. That's how I feel I would have liked. If I do this, what does it lead to for this student?” (Principal 2).

Relevant actors clarified the importance of competence and experience needed to enforce the support measures. The general findings indicate that experience and competence either limit or create opportunities to enforce the policy package into practice. Principal 1 expresses the need for experienced and competent staff. Teacher 1 expressed that there needs to be more competence and experience to further enforce the policy package 2016.

“The key is that there needs to be staff who has expertise in how second language development works. There needs to be someone who knows this. Because, they become an asset to “bounce ideas off of”. And can face any anxiety that may come. I have also had newly arrived in my classroom, and it takes time” (Principal 1).

“Yes, I would say that sometimes many students come at the same time. I see that there may not be the competence needed, or the opportunity for competence development for the teaching staff” (Teacher 1).

“I can imagine that there are quite big differences between schools. How it might look. I think that sometimes there is a lack of human resources. But also perhaps competence development. How to direct it.” (Teacher 1).

The findings also show a recurring theme of the importance of self-developed routines. Relevant actors express the importance of routines they have created from interpreting and understanding the policy package 2016. The general findings show that clear routines create confidence and structures to enforce and work with those support measures of the policy package 2016.

“We have taken our own routines and written them down. How we want to welcome newly arrived students. And then, of course, we also follow the Swedish National Agency for Education’s recommendations” (Teacher 3).

“And then there needs to be structures at the school for follow-ups. It also needs to be in the organisation. I think that is important” (Principal 1).

“I have worked a lot with routines and governing documents concerning this in the past. And that has meant that I havent had to spend time understanding them. But rather making it work in reality. So, I feel safe in them” (Principal 2).

5.3 Resources spur creativity

The data show that individual interpretation opens up creativity and ties to resources. Resources either limit or creates opportunity. Data findings show that many relevant actors experience that policy enactment requires resources, which relates to the *material context* (Braun et al. 2011). Relevant actors who have access to resources, such as digital tools and teachers with the right skills, turn their individual interpretations into creativity.

Relevant actors who have expressed that they have enough resources to apply and work with the policy package 2016 express that they have been involved in translating, interpreting, and creating their own strategies based on their schools' needs from the policy guidelines. They have translated the policy guidelines and adapted and created a strategy suitable for their specific school and newly arrived students. Principal 1 and Municipal Actor 1 both indicate that they have created their own strategies or hybrids to enforce the policy package 2016 into practice.

“We don't have a preparatory class. We have something called IT and language support. Where our newly arrived can go and learn assisting technology and all the programs available” (Principal 1).

“We have our language strengthening groups. It's not exactly like a preparatory class, but a hybrid, our own concept that we've come up with.” (Municipal Actor 1).

Data also shows that relevant actors need more resources and are limited to applying and working with the policy package 2016 and its guidelines. For example, teacher 1 expressed that there is a lack of resources due to financial cuts and a tighter school budget. Also, teacher 1 experienced and understood that due to financial and staff cuts, sometimes teachers need to take other roles, which have consequences for specific support measures of the policy package 2016.

“There have been a lot of budget restrictions now and there will be in the future. So they removed, for example, study guidance in some parts, for example the senior classes in elementary school” (Teacher 1).

Additionally, the relevant actors express that the limitation comes from teacher shortages. These findings also show an interrelation with the *professional context* (Braun et al. 2011) where relevant experience and competence are needed for these relevant actors to enforce the policy package 2016 into practice. Teacher 5 states that newly arrived children and youth have the right to the support measures of the policy package 2016 but that schools are restricted concerning qualified teachers with the right experience and competence.

“Of course, the student has the right to the mapping procedure. The student has the right to preparatory class. The student has the right to Swedish as a second language thereafter. We can't.. All schools cant strictly follow the law. Not all schools are equipped with qualified teachers. It very much depends on which teachers you have hired. And which ones are available.. Because there is a shortage of teachers.. Competent teachers in school” (Teacher 5).

5.4 Collaboration for knowledge sharing and routines

The data show that many relevant actors express that external collaborations open up for knowledge sharing and facilitate their process of understanding and enforcing the policy package 2016 into practice. These external collaborations and follow-ups are put in relation to the *external context* (Braun et al. 2011). Teacher 1 and Municipal Actor 1 express that external collaboration and network are working well and have developed better knowledge and routines.

“We have networks here in the municipality. Where all “Swedish as a second language” teachers meet once a month. They go through tools and try to develop them and compare assessments with each other. It is a great network that works really well. We have a great collaboration” (Teacher 1).

“Those who work with this have been on training and collaboration with another municipality. Through that, we gained more knowledge concerning study guidance” (Municipal actor 1).

Relevant actors working in schools, where the municipality is responsible for performing the “mapping procedure”, express that whilst this removes some of the workloads, it also creates pressure. Relevant actors 3 and 2 express that when the “mapping document” of the newly arrived student does not arrive on time, it creates pressure, and they must place the student on individual assessment.

“We have good communication with the teachers and the principals. But sometimes, we wish that the “mappings” arrived sooner, before the student starts. Sometimes a student starts and then we just place them by the year of birth. We place the student in the right grade. But when the “mapping” comes after two months, you may realise that oh that student should go down a grade. So, then it becomes another change” (Teacher 3).

“In this municipality, the mapping is done centrally. We don’t do it at the school, instead it is done via the municipality and then they send us the mapping. And now you get it quite quickly. But it is still the case that mostly it is not used as a foundation for class placement as the idea with the mapping is. Because we have to place the student in a class as soon as we get information that a student is going to start” (Principal 2).

Despite this, the relevant actors, both those working for the municipality and in the schools, express an enthusiasm to collaborate and strengthen the communication between the school and the municipality (where the mapping procedure is performed centrally by the municipality actors).

Principal 1 highlights and perceives that external actors are curious about their work and want to do follow-ups.

“They are curious about how we work with their mappings here at the school today. So, they will come here in a week or so and meet our teachers. Their purpose is to see how the school works with the mapping material” (Principal 1).

Relevant actors also mention that they need more clarity regarding the understanding and enforcement of the policy package 2016 and would like to collaborate with other external actors to receive a follow-up. However, they feel that there needs to be more resources and time. Principal 2 states that understanding the policy package 2016 needs to be more specific and the lack of follow-ups from external actors.

“My interpretation is that it's not entirely clear how the guidelines should be interpreted and used. And, I don't experience that there is any control in our administration that it really happens. There is no control over it. We don't get any support” (Principal 2).

Principal 1 refers to scientific research as a big reason for changing how they work with the existing policy package, from being strictly policy oriented to being academic oriented. Findings from academia have influenced their work process with integrating newly arrived children and youth with a more student oriented approach. The school's new approach has resulted in structural changes and changes in the routines with how they work with the policy package 2016.

“I have read a lot of research by Bunar and Folke. Their research left such an impression on me. To get it from a student's perspective, how they felt in the preparatory class. I have a lot to thank Bunar and Folke for. It has rather been thanks to them than the policy being legislated” (Principal 1).

6 Discussion

A key finding from the analysis is that the four contexts, situated, professional, material and external, have an essential role in translating the policy package 2016 into practice to integrate newly arrived children and youth into elementary school. The relevant actors' experiences, understandings and how they enforce the policy vary in relation to these four contexts. The findings show that all four contexts intertwine and influence each other.

To begin with, the main finding from the analysis is that the relevant actors perceive the policy package 2016 as vague and that it opens up for individual interpretation. This finding verifies Ball's (1994) statement that policies are complex and leaves room for translation and interpretation. A key finding is that the individual interpretation is dependent and influenced by the relevant actors' competence, the school's geographical location, newly arrived intake, internal and external collaboration, routines, resources and strategies. All these findings relate to one of the four contextual dimensions (Braun et al. 2011). These findings, derived from the interviews, influence how the relevant actor's experience, understand and enforce the policy package 2016 comprising six guidelines to integrate newly arrived students.

In addition, another interesting finding from the analysis was the implication of differences between the countryside and the city, which shapes other parts of the context. As presented in the analysis (5.1), Teacher 5 understands and experiences a significant difference in the contexts depending on whether the school is located in the countryside or a city. The findings indicate that schools in the countryside do not have the same resources or competence as the schools in the cities, and therefore the newly arrived do not have equal opportunities. It is an interesting finding that requires further research in order to draw conclusions and further statements. Furthermore, a key finding is that the policy package 2016 demands resources which require the right competencies and materials that provide the conditions for creativity. The findings show that the policy enactment and specific support measures fall away due to a lack of resources. This key finding implies the importance of resources and that this can either limit or create opportunities to enact the policy package 2016. One specific finding that stood out was the example in (5.3), where relevant actors have developed specific parts of the policy package 2016 using digital tools. It is an example where the relevant actors expressed that they have enough resources to use their creativity and interpretation and develop their own hybrid of one of the support measures.

In conclusion, the last key finding is collaboration's significance in sharing knowledge and supporting and developing routines. The general findings indicate that the relevant actors would like more collaborations and follow-ups from external actors. However, one unexpected and interesting finding from the analysis that stood out was one participant who influenced a change in strategy concerning integrating newly arrived students at the school due to scientific research concerning preparatory classes. As explained in (5.4), the relevant actor became aware of certain aspects of preparatory classes, which influenced a structural change and opened up creativity and awareness. This finding stands out, and a reflection that arose from this is how policy enforcement has different starting points that can be reflected back on the theory of critical policy analysis (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012). In this specific case, policy enactment started from the academic readings. This finding further implies a missing link between academia and national policy guidelines.

As stated above, this research has confirmed that the four contexts play an essential role in policy enforcement and how relevant actors understand and experience the policy package 2016. Despite this, other contexts beyond these could have an impact, and that should be emphasised. All contexts constantly develop and change (Singh, Heimans and Glasswell 2014). Because context is a dynamic process depending on its environment (Singh, Heimans and Glasswell 2014), it would be interesting to reproduce this research in other contexts to find similarities or differences that can provide better understanding and generalise results.

7 Conclusion

This research aimed to shed light, explore and understand how the relevant actors, referring to teachers, principals and municipal workers, experience, understand and enforce the policy package legislated in 2016 to integrate newly arrived children and youth into Swedish elementary school. The research undertook a qualitative approach with interviews as the primary method for data collection. A total of nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with relevant actors in the field. The interview data were later analysed in relation to the chosen theoretical framework; Critical policy analysis, and Braun et al. 's (2011) four contextual dimensions; situated, professional, material and external. The following research question was asked to achieve the study's aim: *How do relevant actors experience, understand and enforce the policy package 2016 to integrate newly arrived children and youth into Swedish elementary schools?*

It can be concluded that the key finding of this research was that relevant actors' understandings, experiences, and enforcement varies when put in relation to the four contexts (Braun et al. 2011; Tajic 2022). More specifically, the main finding is that relevant actors' general understanding of the policy package 2016 is perceived as vague and that it opens up for individual interpretation. Moreover, the chosen theoretical framework, the critical policy analysis (Ball 1994), confirms that policy opens up for individual interpretation. The key findings show that individual interpretation of the policy package 2016 depends on the four contextual dimensions. In addition, the individual interpretation of the relevant actors is dependent and influenced by further interview findings, such as experience, the intake of newly arrived students, the school's geographical location, resources, collaboration, experiences, competence, resources and routines. This results in how the relevant actors understand and enforce the policy package 2016 and that all actors enforce the policy package 2016, including its guidelines, differently due to their interpretation.

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9 Appendix

9.1 Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

Theme 1 - The general understanding and perception of the Policy package 2016.

Theme 2 - How the relevant actors work with the policy package, what support measures and why. Their experiences.

Theme 3 - The relevant actors perception of how the policy package works in practice. How and if the policy package 2016 facilitate the integration process for newly arrived children and youth. The relevant actors perception of how and if it reflects on the newly arrived children and youth to achieve the national knowledge goals.