A Belonging Paradox
– Exploring the Reception of Ukrainian Refugee Pupils into Swedish Schools

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Abstract

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has forced millions of Ukrainian citizens, especially women and children, to seek refuge in other countries, including Sweden. Given the large number of Ukrainian refugee children, it is of utmost importance that they have the possibility to continue their education abroad. In Sweden, Ukrainian refugees have access to education, a right provided by their status as asylum seekers under the Temporary Protection Directive. This thesis aims to explore the reception of Ukrainian refugee students into Swedish schools, by focusing on the communication and interactions between Swedish schools’ personnel, classes’ collectives, and Ukrainian refugee students and their families. The data used for this study were obtained through conducting five semi-structured interviews with two middle- and high-school teachers and three studiehandledare. The results show that, in general, Swedish schools, teachers, and studiehandledare make substantial efforts to facilitate the reception and integration of Ukrainian refugee pupils; at the same time, the classes’ collectives were described as cordial and helpful. Despite the welcoming nature of Swedish schools and the safety that Sweden provides, the Ukrainian refugee pupils and their families struggle to find a sense of belonging, especially since the majority of Ukrainian refugees wish to return to Ukraine once the war is over. The belonging paradox experienced by Ukrainian refugees is, thus, characterised by their desire to express gratitude towards Sweden and, at the same time, being unable to get accustomed to the Swedish culture and education system while waiting to return home.

Keywords: belonging, inclusion, Ukrainian refugees, migrant students, Swedish schools, studiehandledning, Temporary Protection Directive.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the start of the war in Ukraine on February 2022, more than 54,000 Ukrainian citizens have sought protection in Sweden via the Temporary Protection Directive (Migrationsverket, 2023), many of whom are children. Inevitably, refugee children must continue their education in Sweden, and their parents or guardians have to go through the process of finding a suitable school and building relations with teachers and other school representatives.

However, during the research process for this thesis, I have observed how the integration of Ukrainian refugee families into Swedish schools and the Swedish education system, after the start of the war, was not yet examined. The few studies that currently exist have instead focused on comparisons between the reception of Ukrainian asylum seekers and other third-country nationals who sought asylum within the EU in the past years (Bosse, 2022; De Coninck, 2023; Morrice, 2022) or on mental health and post-war trauma (Anjum et al., 2023; Buchcik et al., 2023; Hodes, 2023; Rizzi et al., 2022). I consider that another significant challenge faced by migrants, particularly migrant students, is the transition from one education system to another. According to Lea (2012: 107), positive interactions between schools and families are highly important for the pupils’ academic outcomes, especially when it comes to migrant students, as they need additional support in accommodating in a new school environment. As far as communication between teachers and migrant parents is concerned, barriers might arise. While the teachers highlight language incompatibilities and cultural differences as the main causes for the communication problems (Bunar, 2017a: 11), migrant parents mention socio-economic situations, feelings of exclusion, or the fear of becoming a burden for the schools (Dahlstedt, 2018: 79-82). In the case of Ukrainian refugee families in Sweden, even though many Ukrainian students are still in contact with their school in Ukraine through a form of distance teaching, most of them still continue their education in Sweden.

The Ukrainian refugees’ status as asylum seekers under the Temporary Protection Directive gives them access to the Swedish education system and paves the way towards a more facile reception. However, criticism regarding the reception of Ukrainian refugees into EU Member States and implicitly Sweden has been brought up, and comparisons between the treatment of Ukrainians and that of other groups of refugees and asylum seekers from the past have been drawn. According to Bottero (2022: 534), the EU immigration laws and policies are
controversial in many aspects, including an intention of immigration selection, or “the purpose of strategically selecting those immigrants who are considered more socio-economically and culturally desirable”, used as an argument for better integration prospects. Following the same pattern, there is a general belief expressed in public discourses that Ukrainian refugees are easier to integrate into any of the EU countries because they are European and have certain values, which makes them “ideal” refugees. For instance, the former Prime Minister of Bulgaria, Kiril Petkov, states: “These are not the refugees we are used to. […] These are Europeans, intelligent, educated people, some of them are programmers. We, like everyone else, are ready to welcome them” (European Commission, 2022). The same discourse is seen throughout the EU Member States, including Sweden. With the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive, the beneficiaries are provided with a list of rights, including the right of free movement in any of the EU countries, access to a residence permit, means of subsistence (if necessary), medical care, education, employment, and the asylum procedure (European Commission, n.d.). In Sweden, while the Temporary Protection Directive permits access to certain social rights, such as those mentioned above, it also prohibits access to certain benefits associated with the refugee status, as the Ukrainian refugees are offered the same entitlements as asylum seekers; thus, the Ukrainians’ status as refugees lies in a state of uncertainty (Näre et al., 2022: 256; Odynets, 2022: 33).

1.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of my thesis is to explore the reception of Ukrainian refugee students into Swedish schools, by taking into consideration the communication and interactions between the schools’ personnel, the classes’ collectives, and the Ukrainian refugee students and their families. At the same time, I am interested in exploring how Ukrainian families position themselves between Sweden and Ukraine, taking into account the dominant narrative of cultural similarities and ease of integration that surrounds refugees from Ukraine. For this, I have pursued interviews with two middle- and high-school teachers and three studiehandledare, all participants being in close contact with Ukrainian refugee students. To explore the reception of Ukrainian refugee students into Swedish schools, the guiding research questions for this thesis are:
I. How do Swedish schools and the schools’ personnel prepare for the reception of Ukrainian refugee students and what role do schools, teachers, and studiehandledare play in the students’ and their families’ integration into the Swedish education system?

II. In what way do classroom dynamics change after the reception of Ukrainian refugee students in Swedish schools?

III. How do Ukrainian refugee students and their families perceive the Swedish education system, and how do they position themselves between Ukraine and Sweden, as translated through the perspective of the teachers and studiehandledare?

1.2 Disposition

The thesis is divided into seven main chapters. After the introductory chapter, which explains the aim of my study and highlights the three guiding research questions, I continue by outlining the contextual background of the thesis. Thus, in the Background chapter, I provide firstly an overview on Swedish schools and on students with immigrant background in Swedish schools; then, I include a section dedicated to studiehandledning, and the chapter ends with a description of the situation of Ukrainian refugees in Sweden. In the third chapter, Theory and Concepts, I discuss the theoretical framework relevant to the analysis of the results, focusing on citizenship and belonging, as well as on migrant respectability and the concept of the ideal student. The next chapter, Previous Research, aims to present the findings from previous studies, with a focus on interactions between teachers and parents and on the situation of Ukrainian families in the Swedish context. The fifth chapter elaborates on the methodological approach, explaining the process of data collection and the method of analysis, also approaching the ethical considerations and researcher’s positionality. In the sixth chapter, the results of the thesis are presented and analysed, considering the theories, concepts, and literature review previously mentioned. The seventh chapter serves as the conclusion of the study and discusses the results in relation to the three research questions, as well as the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research. At the end, a list of references and appendices is provided.
Chapter 2: Background

2.1 Swedish schools

According to *Skolverket*, The Swedish National Agency for Education, education in Sweden is done in regard to democratic values and human rights, and is based on constant collaboration between pupils, families, and schools (Skolverket, 2022a). *Skolverket* refers to schooling as a mirror of society and mentions the importance of promoting the fundamental values of Swedish society, which are “the sanctity of human life, the freedom and integrity of the individual, the equal value of all, irrespective of gender, race, religion or social background, equality between women and men, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable” (n.d.: 19). The Education Act (*Skollagen*) implemented by the Parliament mentions the decisions that all educational institutes and their representatives are obliged to follow, as well as all decisions concerning all educational activities. According to the Education Act and to *Skolverket*, everyone in Sweden has equal access to education, regardless of their geographic, economic, and social situations (SFS 2010:800, 1 kap. 8 §), as well as regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, disability, and life views (Skolverket, 2022a).

The Swedish education system divides schooling into different stages. Between the ages one and five, children have the opportunity to attend pre-school; this step is not obligatory, however attending pre-school has become customary in Sweden (Skolverket, n.d.: 6). Compulsory schooling in Sweden starts from the age of six (in some cases, with the possibility of starting at the ages of five or seven) with the mandatory attendance of a *förskoleklass*, a pre-school preparatory class equivalent to grade zero (Skolverket, 2021).

Then, compulsory education continues from first grade until ninth grade in a compulsory basic school, during which all pupils learn the same obligatory subjects imposed by the curriculum described in The Education Act (Skolverket, n.d.: 6-7). Compulsory education, according to *Skolverket* (2022b), can be completed by attending either a municipal or an independent school (a school with another owner than the Municipality); the teaching in both types of school must be equivalent, and the same curriculum imposed by The Education Act must be followed. The obligation to attend nine years of compulsory education is referred to in the
Skollagen as “skolplikt”, and it applies to all children who reside in Sweden (SFS 2010:800, 7 kap. 2 §).

The upper secondary school (gymnasium) includes the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades, and, even though it is voluntary, the majority of pupils choose to attend it (Skolverket, n.d.: 8). During upper secondary school, pupils can choose between seventeen national programmes, which prepare them for either working life (vocational) or for further studies (academic) (Skolverket, n.d.: 8). Moreover, the Swedish education system has a meaningful approach to providing education for adults. In this case, each municipality is obliged to provide adults with compulsory basic education and upper secondary schooling in a programme known as Komvux, where adults are taught the same subjects imposed by the curriculum, but at a higher study pace (Skolverket, n.d.: 11).

2.2 Pupils with foreign backgrounds in Swedish schools

Swedish schools have a long tradition of receiving large numbers of migrant children, both refugee and non-refugee; thus, many changes have been made regarding the regulations for the education system, which has been reformed many times, in order to facilitate the reception and integration of migrant children (Bunar, 2017b: 1-3). According to the statistics provided by Skolverket for the years 2021 and 2022, out of a total of 810 000 pupils enrolled in a form of compulsory education in Sweden, 290 000 pupils have foreign background (Skolverket, 2022c: 12). The category of pupils with foreign background (utländsk bakgrund) includes pupils who were born abroad or who are born in Sweden, but both parents were born abroad, and pupils with unknown background (Skolverket, 2022c).

While the Education Act mentions the obligation to attend compulsory education for all pupils residing in Sweden, it does mentions instances in which attending compulsory basic school is voluntary. Thus, the following categories have different obligations in terms of compulsory schooling: undocumented migrant children have access to education in preschools, elementary (compulsory) schools, and upper-secondary schools, in regard to the same conditions as children with Swedish citizenship or with legal residency status; however, undocumented migrant children are not obliged to attend compulsory school (Bunar, 2017a: 4). Asylum-seeking pupils are also
entitled to education in Sweden and must be offered a place in an elementary or upper-secondary school within a month of their arrival; like in the case of undocumented migrant children, attending compulsory school is not mandatory for asylum-seeking pupils (Bunar, 2017a: 4). Lastly, refugee students with permanent residency and children of EU and non-EU labour migrant parents, with residence and working permits, share the same rights and obligations as children with Swedish citizenship, including the obligation to attend compulsory school (Bunar, 2017a: 4).

The reforms in schooling mentioned above were important steps towards a better reception of pupils with migrant backgrounds in Swedish schools. The first reform, adopted in 2011, included the implementing of an “Introductory Programme” for foreign students in upper-secondary classes; it allows foreign students who are not yet eligible to follow one of the national programmes to continue their studies by choosing one of the tracks offered by the Introductory Programme (Bunar, 2017b: 3-4). The second reform, adopted in 2013, granted undocumented children the right to attend compulsory school (Bunar, 2017b: 4). The third reform, implemented in 2016, introduces four new important elements for the reception of foreign pupils in Swedish schools. Firstly, the government created a definition to clarify who is considered a newly arrived student: “children who lived abroad and move to Sweden after the autumn semester’s start in the year they turn seven are considered as newly arrived irrespective of the reasons for migration” (Bunar, 2017b: 5). Secondly, compulsory mapping of students (kartläggning) has been implemented; it involves mapping students’ prior school knowledge and creating a portfolio for each student, based on which learning is organized, and which is updated on a regular basis (Bunar, 2017b: 5). Thirdly, preparatory classes were introduced for foreign pupils. Each school’s principal decides whether a student should attend preparatory classes (for a maximum of two years) or be placed directly into ordinary classes, based on individual circumstances and the results from the compulsory mapping; moreover, in order to minimise segregation, foreign students must be provided with activities within an ordinary class (Bunar, 2017b: 5). Finally, the last reform targets the reallocation of supplementary teaching hours to Swedish language, from other subjects, during the introductory period (Bunar, 2017b: 6). Language, as it will be further explored, often represents a barrier between students with immigrant backgrounds and Swedish schools, hence the accent placed on the importance of additional Swedish language classes.
2.3 Studiehandledning

According to Skolverket (2023: 7), one in five elementary school students in Sweden speaks a second language, different from Swedish. This aspect does not only influence the students’ school situation and their ability to meet the Swedish schools’ expectations, but it also influences teachers’ experiences, who must remodel their teaching methods in order to work towards promoting linguistic and cultural diversity, taking into account the students’ backgrounds (Skolverket, 2023: 7-8).

In Sweden, the students who have difficulties attending school, due to linguistic and cultural differences, can benefit from the help of a studiehandledare, in their native language. As Sheikhi explains, the aim of studiehandledning is to provide temporary guidance for students, in regard to meeting the school’s expectations concerning grading criteria, or other general school experiences (2019: 1). The most important asset of a studiehandledare, according to Skolverket (2023), is the ability to combine both the language and the cultural factor while supporting a student, and being aware of where those factors stand in comparison to the Swedish language and culture. Other important qualities that a studiehandledare should possess are: being fluent in the student’s native language and the language of the instruction, while also having good knowledge of the student’s cultural background and former school experience; mastering keywords and concepts discussed during lessons, both in Swedish and in the student’s mother tongue, and knowing when to switch from a language to the other; having good pedagogical background, in order to easily guide the student through the school subjects; being familiar with the Swedish school system and the curricula; being familiar with the schools’ expectations, grade and assessment criteria, and goals that the student must fulfil; and lastly, having knowledge in the school subjects the student needs help with (Skolverket, 2023: 41-42).

Moreover, as it is mentioned in the article provided by Skolverket, the Swedish school law does not impose any requirements that specify the education background or previous studies that a studiehandledare should have, each school having the possibility to assess whether a candidate is suitable for the role (Skolverket, 2023: 40); this places studiehandledare in a sub-group of paraprofessionals. According to Åberg (2022: 398), paraprofessionals are sought after in welfare institutions, due to the fact that they have “similar biographical experiences as the clients”, rather than a certain training or education.
Thus, it is contested that people with a migration background are employed for their extensive “cultural competence” which helps in managing the interaction between the service providers to the clients, through translation, interpretation, and explanation, both linguistically and culturally (Åberg, 2022: 398). As explained above, studiehandledare in Swedish schools must show not only good language skills in Swedish and the native language of the student, but should also show good knowledge of Swedish culture and the student’s culture in order to act as a “bridge” between the school and the student. All in all, a studiehandledare is considered an important element that connects the student’s previous school experiences to the Swedish school culture and expectations (Skolverket, 2023: 37).

Having discussed the importance of the cultural factor, together with advanced language knowledge in translating and explaining the Swedish education system and school culture, the studiehandledare represent a major element in this study, alongside teachers. Thus, in the case of Ukrainian refugee students and their families, their interactions with Swedish schools and teachers are mediated through the studiehandledare, and their integration into the Swedish education system is highly dependent on the quality of these interactions.

2.4 Ukrainian refugees in Sweden

In Sweden, Ukrainian citizens are covered by the Temporary Protection Directive; this means that Ukrainian citizens who fled the war in Ukraine are entitled to a temporary residence permit under the period the Directive is active. After receiving a temporary residence permit, Ukrainian refugees are granted the same rights as asylum seekers, including access to Swedish coordination numbers, accommodation help, financial support, and access to work, school, and health care (Migrationsverket, 2023b). The main advantage of the Temporary Protection Directive is the omittance of bureaucratic processes which most probably would have slowed down the asylum system, given the high demand and the high number of displaced persons (European Commission, n.d.).

With Ukrainians being the first beneficiaries of the Temporary Protection Directive, discussions have arisen over the perception that Ukrainian citizens are favoured, because of their cultural and geographical closeness with the EU Member States. In Sweden, it can be
observed how political figures and parties have switched their views on immigration prior to the reception of Ukrainian refugees. For example, Maria Malmer Stenergard, a migration policy spokesperson for The Moderate Party (*Moderaterna*), argues in favour of prioritising the reception of Ukrainian refugees in Sweden through stopping the reception of refugees from other countries; she mentions, among other factors, the importance of prioritising asylum seekers who fled war-torn countries instead of economic migrants (Malmer Stenergard, 2022). Moreover, humanitarian aid was and still is an important factor in the reception of Ukrainian refugees in Sweden, with civilians organising donation gatherings, creating groups on social media platforms, and helping with accommodation, when necessary.

However, as Näre et al. mention, there is no guarantee that the welcoming treatment Ukrainian refugees receive will be permanent (2022: 256). Issues with the Temporary Protection Directive in Sweden have already surfaced, which question the Ukrainians’ status as refugees. Looking back at the rights given and conditions imposed by the Temporary Protection Directive in Sweden, it is mentioned that, while the Directive is active, Ukrainian refugees can not apply for asylum, obtain a permanent residence permit, or apply for a work permit; in addition, they are not entitled to a Swedish personal number and will not be registered as residents in Sweden (Migrationsverket, 2023c). These arrangements make it impossible for Ukrainian citizens in Sweden to actually obtain a real refugee status and, until further notice of policy changes, many Ukrainians will have to live in permanent uncertainty while trying to rebuild their lives in Sweden or while waiting to return home (Odynets, 2022: 33).

As mentioned earlier in this paper, Ukrainian children must continue their education in Sweden, and the uncertainty discussed above influences the interactions between Ukrainian families and school representatives. The interactions of Ukrainian students with the teachers and the studiehandledare shape their reception and integration into Swedish schools, thus it is of utmost importance that these interactions are positive and beneficial.
Chapter 3: Theory and Concepts

In this section, I will explore the concepts that are relevant to my research questions. I have chosen to discuss the concepts of citizenship and belonging, focusing on migrant respectability and the ideal student. The section will end with a summary, which aims to highlight in which way the previously listed concepts are linked to the main theme.

3.1 Citizenship

According to Marshall, citizenship is described by “a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed” (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992: 18). Thus, citizenship is a set of rights available to the members, and, at the same time, is constituted through several duties. There are three broad rights that citizenship offers: civil rights, which came first, targeted individual freedom, or “liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice”; secondly, political rights give citizens the opportunity to engage in political matters, though voting or participating in elections; thirdly, social rights, which allow access to social services necessary for a decent standard of life, and access to education (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992: 8). However, many scholars are critical to the Marhsallian understanding of citizenship, mainly because of its lack of intersectional approach. An example in this sense, Yuval-Davis (2007: 562-563) states that “people’s citizenships are also affected by their locations within each polity, as they are constructed […] by other intersecting social divisions, such as gender, class, stage in the life cycle, etc”. Moreover, Yuval-Davis considers a “multi-layered citizenship”, or the fact that nowadays people might hold a citizenship status in more than one political community; thus, while the rights and obligations given and imposed by citizenship shape the lives of people, Yuval-Davis argues that this diversity of citizenships has probably a greater impact on the lives of migrants, refugees, and persons of ethnic minority origins (2007: 562).

On the other hand, alternative conceptualisations of citizenship have emerged. Bhambra states that citizenship is deeply rooted in the “active exclusion of other groups” (2015: 102). She
argues that citizenship involves the existence of a political domain and a non-political domain, in the sense that it is the people’s transition from non-political to political, (or from exclusion to inclusion) that constitutes citizenship (2015: 105). Moreover, Bhambra turns to Hegel’s theory and explains that modern citizenship is attributed to the subjects who are capable of property, specifically self-ownership (2015: 105). In this case, citizenship is built on the exclusion of the “unfit”, the subjects incapable of property and self-ownership (enslaved persons), and the subjects indifferent to property (indigenous populations living in colonised territories) (Bhambra, 2015: 105). Following the pattern that links the concept of citizenship to exclusion, Bhambra (2015: 106) argues that “assimilation into the conceptual category also requires alignment with the dominant historical narrative”. This means that, as long as certain groups of people have a history of oppression, they will not be granted citizenship unless they consciously choose to disregard said history as subordinated subjects and align with the past of the existing citizens (Bhambra, 2015: 106).

All things considered, while citizenship offers a multitude of social and political rights, it does so through exclusion, as not all subjects are granted the citizen status. Guiding the discussion back to the case of Ukrainian refugees in Sweden, the Temporary Protection Directive gives access to certain social rights, such as education, work, and health care, it also hinders the access to asylum, permanent residency, or Swedish personal numbers. Thus, their status under the Directive both enables and, at the same time, prevents certain rights associated to citizenship.

3.2 Belonging

As Bellamy puts it, “Membership lies at the heart of citizenship. To be a citizen is to belong to a given political community” (2008: 53); this portrayal directly links the concept of belonging to the concept of citizenship. However, these concepts should be discussed and analysed separately since Antonsich (2010: 4) and Yuval-Davis (2006: 197) argue that belonging encompasses more than socio-political factors. Thus, a separate discussion about belonging is necessary.

According to Yuval-Davis, there are two main analytical dimensions of belonging; while the study of belonging discusses “about emotional attachment, about feeling ‘at home’” and the
feeling of safety, the politics of belonging highlight “specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular ways” (2006: 197). Antonsich refers to the study of belonging as “place-belongingness” and also argues that it implies one’s emotional feeling of attachment towards a particular place; at the same time, he emphasizes Yuval-Davis’ links between feeling “at home” and the feeling of safety, comfort, and familiarity (2010: 6). Moreover, Antonsich states that belonging in the sense of a feeling of attachment to a place can be generated through five main factors: autobiographical (one’s personal experiences, relations, and memories and tie the individual to a certain place), relational (one’s personal and social ties), cultural (shared forms of cultural expression, customs, habits, and, most importantly, language), economic (feelings of safety and confidence for the future by creating a stable material condition), and legal (access to, for example, citizenship status and residence permits) (2010: 8-10).

Having discussed the dimension of the study of belonging, or place-belongingness, it is also important to explore the second dimension, or the politics of belonging. Belonging to a certain place is not only an individual matter, but is also a social one; thus, belonging to a place involves being a part of a group of individuals (Antonsich, 2010: 12-13). Yuval-Davis argues that the politics of belonging are rooted into creating imagined boundaries that limit political communities (2006: 204). These imagined political communities are constructed, as Yuval-Davis mentions, depending on “people’s social locations, people’s experiences and definitions of self, but probably even more importantly on their values” (2006: 204). Thus, a distinction between “us” and “them” is made, which conditions the membership within an imagined community (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 204). Belonging is, in this sense, exclusionary. As Antonsich discusses, the notion of belonging is often understood as a need of “sameness” between members, thus, in order to belong, it is thought that one must assimilate the majority’s values, culture, language, and behaviour (2010: 15). However, in order to reach the feeling of belonging, one needs to feel comfortable expressing their own identity through the recognition of differences, not through enforced assimilationism (Antonsich, 2010: 14-15).

In the Swedish context, for example, this debate and shift between multiculturalism and neo-assimilationism is present. In this sense, Dahlstedt and Neergaard explain that Sweden has
been traditionally known as a welcoming, inclusive, and multicultural nation in relation to refugee and asylum politics in the past, as compared to other EU member states (2019: 122). Moreover, during the interwar period, “swedishness”, or “being Swedish” was characterised by a strong desire towards democracy, rather than by a common cultural heritage (Dahlstedt & Eliassi, 2018: 207). Nowadays, and especially after the “refugee crisis” from 2015, Sweden has implemented stricter policies on migration, which are tied to the exclusion of the Migrant Other (Dahlstedt & Neergaard, 2019: 122). A popular argument is that, due to increased migration in Sweden, the Swedish “national core values” are challenged, which is a threat to the well-being of the “People’s Home” (Dahlstedt & Eliassi, 2018: 204). As Dahlstedt and Eliassi highlight, political figures in Sweden have criticised the Swedish multiculturalism and directly linked it to the “fall” of the nation, with the intention of promoting the re-creation of the People’s Home through new values (2018: 219). In this case, the above-mentioned values become symbols to what is considered desirable or who is worthy of belonging and of rights, at the same time as today’s political debates about Swedish multiculturalism, inclusion, and exclusion tend to focus on socio-cultural belonging (Dahlstedt & Eliassi, 2018: 219).

3.3 Migrant respectability

While the previous section discusses the exclusion of the “Other” on behalf of a lack of “sameness” and conditioning one’s right to belong through imposing certain imagined boundaries or values, this sub-chapter explores the process in which migrants strive to become “worthy” of acceptance in the receiving communities, or to become respectable. The concept of respectability was first discussed by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in reference to the movements of Black women in the 20th century who, because of their wish to gain a respectable status in the society, adopted the values and principles promoted by the white society (Dazey, 2021: 581). This strategy involved creating a hierarchical scale between what is considered respectable and unrespectable.

According to Dazey, respectability politics refers to certain power dynamics and hierarchies that appear, on one hand “between marginalized groups and the dominant society” and, on the other hand “within marginalized groups themselves” (2021: 581). It is argued that the
concept of respectability as a strategy for inclusion has its roots in continuous social and institutional exclusion ignited by discrimination in employment and housing, discriminatory assumptions and depictions, and negative stereotypes (Dazey, 2021: 582). Moreover, respectability is also overshadowed by the idea of having “good morals” or a “proper behaviour”. Dazey explores further this idea and claims that marginalised groups teach themselves how to change their own behaviour, gestures, way of speaking, clothing, as well as how to adopt the manners and morals considered desirable by the dominant society (2021: 582).

While it has been mentioned above that the concept of respectability has been observed within the Black community, especially among women in the United States, it can also cover other marginalised groups, such as LGBTIQA+ communities and migrants (Dazey, 2021: 591). Guiding the discussion towards migrant respectability, Banks argues that many groups of migrants have been denied citizenship in the United States on the basis of certain assumptions that their cultural background is incompatible to that of the American culture (2017: 2-3). Moreover, migrants have been seen as the main problem of modern American society and have been criminalised or depicted as impossible or unwilling to integrate (Banks, 2017: 10-11). As a consequence, migrants adopted the respectability strategy in order to prove that they are capable of adopting the American morals and values, thus they are worthy of citizenship (Banks, 2017: 3).

In Sweden’s case, Mulinari and Neergard also associate respectability with embracing a “good” or “proper behaviour” as a means of social inclusion (2019: 225). Moreover, they bring into discussion the term “defensive othering” as a process of dis-identification present at the members of a marginalised or subordinated group and is used as a means of acceptance in a dominant group (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2019: 228). This term is important in order to discuss the different forms of migrant respectability that have been observed in Sweden, among other places.

Mulinari and Neergard differentiate between five types of migrant respectability, based on the positioning of the subject. “Coping migrant respectability” refers to groups of migrants who struggle to produce “good migrants”; this type of respectability involves, for example, being overly polite, learning and speaking the majority language, suppressing different negative emotions (anger, for instance) and working more than the majority population (Mulinari &
Neergaard, 2019: 228). “Anti-discrimination respectability” involves migrants considered well integrated and educated, and sharing similar values with those of the majority population; however, it is acknowledged that their migrant position is overshadowed by ethnic discrimination (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2019: 228). “Successful migrant respectability” is the result of public discourses promoting the idea that migrants represent a big and threatening national problem and it highlights the migrants who detach themselves from their cultural background and from other migrants (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2019: 228-229). “Racist migrant respectability” is tied to the concept of defensive othering and is describing groups of deracialised migrants who pass as “white” (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2019: 229). Finally, “antiracism as non-respectability” involves an oppositional identity, different from those discussed above, and is representative for the migrants who are against any form of migrant respectability as a way of obtaining the right to belong (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2019: 229).

3.4 The “ideal” student

Taking into account the former discussion about belonging, respectability, and the “good character” of migrants seeking membership or citizenship, it is also necessary to consider the concept of the “ideal” student. Additionally, it is important to link the concept of the ideal student to the process of identity formation of migrant students and what is the schools’ role in this process.

In a study that targets the assessment system of young children in England, Bradbury concludes that the characteristics of the ideal learner promoted by the education policies are deeply rooted in neoliberal values; they depict the ideal learner as a person who must “become a rational, self-knowing subject, able to access ‘learning’ in all its forms, process it, and reproduce it for the purposes of assessment” (2013: 15). These, as she argues, are the qualities promoted by the British assessment system that can transform the ideal learner into the ideal student. On the same note, Wong et al. highlight that the research focused on pre-university students and teacher expectations depicted the ideal pupil as being “attentive, disciplined, independent, motivated, punctual, respectful and responsible” (2023: 154).
Considering the identity formation of students, it is highly connected to the concept of the ideal student. As Grecu et al. argue, the values that form the image of the ideal student differ depending on the school’s culture and the way it is presented by the teachers, and they shape the development of the students in different ways (2019: 88-92). In their study on the alienation of pupils transitioning from primary to secondary school in Luxembourg, Grecu et al. have shown how the students enrolled in a school with low academic demands tend to have lower academic achievements, deviant behaviour, and present difficulties in acquiring basic academic skills as compared to the students enrolled in a high achieving school with a more demanding image of the ideal student (2019: 100-102).

In Sweden, schools have continuously made efforts to accommodate newly arrived pupils by promoting an inclusive and diverse environment. Nonetheless, migrant pupils still should fit into what is considered ideal by Swedish standards. In this regard, Dahlstedt (2018: 77) claims that the identity of newly-arrived students in Sweden is moulded based on that of the Swedish pupils; being “Swedish”, or adopting Swedish attributes is now considered a value which promotes the image of the ideal student. As a result, newly arrived pupils are regarded by teachers through the prism of Swedish pupils, and they are perceived as culturally “others” until they assimilate the Swedish values (Dahlstedt, 2018: 77).

Nevertheless, it is impossible to map a set of standard values that reflect the ideal student and that are globally valid. As far as teachers’ expectations are concerned, the image of the ideal student will always vary, depending on each teacher’s experience, socio-cultural background, and personal values, combined with different institutional influences and expectations (Maslovatay et al., 2008: 165; Wong et al., 2023: 155). In final, it is important to acknowledge that the concept of the ideal student is also unavoidably excluding and depreciating certain groups. As stated by Bradbury (2013: 6), the “ideal” and the “not-ideal” classifications are interconnected. The latter is attributed to the pupils who do not (yet) possess the values imposed by the former and it places them in a position of inferiority, being regarded as the “other”.
3.5 Summary

In this section, I have explored the concepts of citizenship, belonging, migrant respectability and the ideal student. It has been discussed how citizenship implies a continuous relation between the individual and the state, consolidated through a series of rights and duties that are, however, available only for the individuals who are allowed to belong in a certain state. As Glenn (2011: 3) claims, “Citizenship is not just a matter of formal legal status; it is a matter of belonging, which requires recognition by other members of the community”; a person’s right to citizenship and belonging into an (imagined) political community is highly conditioned by how the other members perceive citizenship as they are the ones to draw the boundaries. I argue that public discourses around the situation of the Ukrainian refugees places them into a paradoxical position between belonging and not belonging: on one hand, their cultural values are depicted as being close to the European norms, thus facilitating the process of integration and making them “ideal refugees”. On the other hand, their refugee status tends to be minimised, in the sense that Ukrainians do not fully benefit from the rights that are normally allocated, as the Temporary Protection Directive does not allow them to receive a “real” refugee status. Additionally, I have discussed how the concept of belonging is connected to certain values. If citizenship and membership are conditioned by acquiring a number of desired characteristics, then it can be argued that an imagined picture of the ideal subject emerges, and all candidate subjects are moulded based on it. Taking a closer look at the discussions about the situation in Ukraine, which have been broadly present in the political sphere in Sweden, certain political figures have given arguments in favour of a more permissive reception for the Ukrainian refugees, mentioning the factor of the “desired characteristics” and values discussed above. For example, Jimmie Åkesson, the leader of the Sverigedemokraterna, a party known for its anti-immigration views, compared the Ukrainian refugees, who are primarily children, women, and elderly, to “economic migrants” who, as he states, freely target Sweden as a country of destination (Carlén, 2022). Åkesson justifies this shift in his opinion regarding immigrants and refugees by stating that Ukraine is in Sweden’s immediate vicinity, thus, in an emergency situation, a neighbouring country should receive aid, and should be entitled to temporary protection (Carlén, 2022). Following the same pattern, Christopher Larsson, also a member of Sverigedemokraterna and the representative of the party’s group in Karlskrona, justifies the changes between the reception of refugees from previous years and the reception of Ukrainian refugees. Among others, he states that Ukrainians
are Orthodox Christians and their culture is more “western”, which makes them “riktiga flyktingar” (real refugees), more similar to Swedish citizens (Björn af Kleen et al., 2022). The same expectations of “good” or “proper” character and behaviour, values and desired characteristics also revolve around the concepts of migrant respectability and ideal student. In this sense, Bunar (2017a: 7) acknowledges that the image of the ideal student is also present in Swedish schools; moreover, migrant students perceive the ideal student depiction as the “normality”, or the proper way towards belonging and inclusion. Solely considering the general assumption that Ukrainian refugees are “proper” refugees that already possess “ideal” European values, the relation and communication between schools and Ukrainian families should be unproblematic.
Chapter 4: Previous Research

This section contains a review of the literature which is relevant to the aim of my paper, and which introduces the results of my study. The section is divided into four subchapters. Firstly, I will introduce findings from previous studies made on the interaction between teachers and parents, in a general sense. Secondly, I will describe the interaction between teachers and migrant parents, focusing on the causes of the recurrent communication problems between the two sides. Thirdly, the situation of Ukrainian refugee families in Sweden will be explored. Finally, the last sub-chapter is dedicated to the summary, highlighting at the same time the knowledge gap that I want to address with my research question.

4.1 Interactions between teachers and parents

According to Adams and Christenson, the relation between schools and families has changed over the recent history; if in the past schools and families worked separately towards the children’s development, each having specific defined roles, nowadays the focus is more on the equal partnership between the two sides (2000: 477-478). Parental involvement has been shown to constitute the foundation of both satisfactory education achievements of students and a good school-family relation (Halsey, 2005: 59). According to Schneider and Arnot (2018: 11), parental involvement consists of a number of “scripted school activities” that parents are expected to perform (for example, organising fundraising activities or attending parent-teacher associations), together with activities done at home with the students (such as homework help). It is argued that, while parental involvement is beneficial, it emphasizes that parents must adopt the values that are dictated by schools as being universally acceptable; it also draws a line between what is imagined to be “good parenting” and “bad parenting” (Epstein, 2010: 3-4; Schneider & Arnot, 2018: 11). Epstein suggests that the term “partnership” is more suitable for referring to school-family relations, and it means that “educators, families, and community members work together to share information, guide students, solve problems, and celebrate successes” (2010: 4). In order for the partnership to be satisfactory, the communication and interaction between all sides should be continuous and unproblematic; for example, students will benefit in their development if both
parents and schools are aware of each other’s responsibilities and establish complementary goals through proper communication (Epstein, 2010: 44).

Thus, communication is essential in teachers-parents relationship. In an ideal scenario, the existing strategies for teachers-parents interaction should be enough to provide teachers with flawless means of communication. Graham-Clay (2005: 118-121) mentions two strategies of communication which should be combined by teachers in order to facilitate the interaction with the parents: the one-way communication (written communication in the form of newsletters, notebooks, or report cards) and the two-way communication (an effective dialogue through phone calls and conferences).

Communication between schools and families, however, is not always satisfactory. According to Graham-Clay (2005: 123-124), one of the causes for miscommunication is the feeling of an unnatural relation between parents and schools, or the lack of trust between the two sides, which might influence parents in being less cooperative and involved. Trust, as Adams and Christenson claim, is a “vital element in building and maintaining the family–school relationship”, and it also influences school performance (2000: 477). A second cause, cultural differences, also impacts communication between teachers and parents; in this sense, teachers’ capacity to adapt to new situations is vital for transforming cultural diversity into an opportunity, not an issue (Graham-Clay, 2005: 124). The idea of cultural differences as a threat to communication between teachers and parents will be explored further in this paper. Other causes such as parents’ previous negative experiences with school, economic and time constraints and incompatibilities, as well as lack of access to technology are also mentioned by Graham-Clay (2005: 125-126) and should be taken into consideration while discussing effective teachers-parents interactions. The causes listed above are also highlighted by the results of different case studies on schools, teachers, and parents. For example, Ozmen, Akuzum, Zincirli, and Selcuk pursued a study on the communication problems between teachers and parents in primary schools. Their findings show that teachers have mapped the same socio-economic and cultural challenges mentioned above (Ozmen et al., 2016: 39). In order to counter these issues, a series of recommendations was discussed. In principle, the accent falls on enhancing the feeling of trust between schools. Schools and teachers should be aware and take into consideration parent’s socio-economic and cultural situations and time constraints while building a plan for teachers-
parents communication; at the same time, schools should consider an “open-house” approach, where the school becomes a middle ground for effective and engaging interaction, where parents can be easily included in certain activities and meetings (Graham-Clay, 2005: 123-126).

### 4.2 Interactions between teachers and migrant parents

As discussed above, an active communication and partnership between teachers and parents is important, especially for the students’ education achievements. In the case of migrant families, a secure relation between the school and the family is even more crucial, as children might face difficulties in getting accustomed to the new educational practices, which can cause discontinuity in their education (Lea, 2012: 107). Going back to Graham-Clay’s recommendations against the barriers to communication between schools and culturally diverse parents, teachers, as she mentions, should not only know how to incorporate the cultural and linguistic differences into the curriculum, but should also understand in which ways these differences in perspectives might influence the communication with the parents (2005: 124).

A popular belief among teachers working with students with a migrant background is that their families are “hard to reach” and are not involved enough in the children’s school situation (Hamilton, 2013: 300). Different studies that explore the interaction between teachers and migrant parents highlight similar beliefs. For example, the study conducted by Arnot and Schneider (2018: 16) on two secondary schools in England shows how teachers made a link between migrant parents’ engagement in their children’s school and their attendance at meetings and parents’ evenings. Moreover, teachers tended to compare EAL (English as an Additional Language) parents to non-EAL parents, drawing the conclusion that the first group is less interested in their children’s school experience. In this particular study, the difference between the perceptions of the teachers and parents is highlighted. Contrary to the teachers’ observations, migrant parents in this case claimed a high level of parental engagement; the discrepancy lies within the fact that the parents’ principles were different than those appreciated by the schools, and they chose to show their interest in other ways (Schneider & Arnot, 2018: 16). These differences between perceptions are not a singular case; they are actually a recurrent situation in the results of similar studies. For instance, Poza, Brooks and Valdés’ (2014: 144-145) interviews
with Latino immigrant parents in the United States conclude that, while teachers point out the parents’ indifference towards the students’ education, the parents, on the contrary, showed great interest in their children’s schooling. The cause, as explained by the parents interviewed, is that their alternative ways of engaging with the schools are mostly invisible, since they do not resonate with what is imagined by the schools and the teachers as standard practices (Poza et al., 2014: 145).

In Sweden, Bunar (2017a: 11) also acknowledges the poor communication between schools and migrant families as a major issue. Taking into account the opinions expressed by teachers regarding communication issues, they mentioned cultural differences as barriers to communication (Bunar, 2017a: 11). As far as migrant parents are concerned, they highlighted lack of knowledge in certain subjects, lack of prior information about the school system, and language problems (Lundahl & Lindblad, 2018: 9-10), together with socio-economic situations such as exclusion in the labour market (Dahlstedt, 2018: 81-82). Moreover, migrant parents tend to be regarded by school personnel as a problem, not as a resource towards the students’ integration and achievements (Dahlstedt, 2018: 75; Lundahl & Lindblad, 2018: 9). According to Dahlstedt, a number of stereotypical characteristics revolve around migrant parents in Sweden, as observed from teachers’ perceptions; in this case, the migrant parent is seen as absent and disinterested and this, according to the interviewed teachers, is the cause for both the children’s school situation and the poor interactions between schools and families (2018: 76-77). When the migrant parents do get involved and try to interact with schools, Dahlstedt explains that the teachers interviewed saw the parents’ involvement as “bothersome”, due to the parents’ demands or different views on education, discipline, and order (2018: 78-79). In this way, the migrant parents are expected to interact with the schools only in a certain way that is considered “normal” by Swedish schools’ standards and adopt the core values that the Swedish educational system is built on. (Dahlstedt, 2018: 83).

4.3 Ukrainian families in Sweden

At the time of writing this thesis, there exists, to the best of my knowledge, no studies on interactions between Swedish schools and Ukrainian families, or on the Ukrainian families’ and
students’ experiences with the Swedish education system. In fact, as stated in the introduction, only a few studies have been done on Ukrainian families after the war in 2022 in general, less so in the Swedish context. Thus, this sub-chapter contains limited background information which is not directly related to the reception of Ukrainian refugees into Swedish schools, but which I believe is useful for understanding the main context and for analysing the results of this study.

As Khrenova and Burrell (2021: 253-254) state, the number of Ukrainian citizens in Sweden started to rise after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the war in Donbas; the economic crisis and the war outcomes have forced Ukrainian to apply for asylum and work permits in Sweden, among other countries. Back then, the demographics were different, and Ukrainian migrants in Sweden represented a diverse group regarding age, occupation, and reasons for migration (Khrenova & Burrell, 2021: 254). Nowadays, due to the activation of the martial law in Ukraine, which hinders a high percentage of men from leaving the country, the majority of Ukrainian refugees in Sweden are women, children, and the elderly.

An interesting aspect in relation to Ukrainian families living abroad is the ways used to keep in contact with the members who remained at home as a way of coping with homesickness. In this instance, Khrenova and Burrell looked at Ukrainian families living in Sweden through the prism of transnational families; according to them, “Members of transnational families have to search for strategies to transmit love and support that do not involve physical proximity and yet still give a sense of familial bond” (Khrenova & Burrell, 2021: 251). It is, thus, clear that a continuous contact between the Ukrainian family members in Sweden, in this case, and the family members who remained at home is important and has a bridging function between the “old” life and the “new” life. In the case illustrated by Khrenova and Burrell, the accent falls on material goods sent between Sweden and Ukraine. As the authors argue, this exchange of material goods mimics the physical connection between family members from abroad and from home, and are a solution for experiencing more intimate bonds (Khrenova & Burrell, 2021: 251). As it will be discussed in this paper, some of the feelings experienced by Ukrainian refugee families in Sweden are homesickness and uncertainty. Thus, I found the correlation between the practice of exchanging goods from Sweden to Ukraine and vice-versa and the belonging dilemma of Ukrainian families in Sweden interesting.
4.4 Summary

In this section, I have discussed the findings from previous research done on interactions between teachers and families in a general way, interactions between teachers and migrant parents, and on Ukrainian families in Sweden. Firstly, I have discussed the importance of a continuous and satisfactory relationship between teachers and parents. As studies have shown, a well-maintained communication based on mutual trust between teachers and parents is necessary for the positive academic outcomes of the students. As far as migrant parents are concerned, it was shown how a strong relationship between teachers and parents is even more crucial for the students, as they experience more difficulties in adjusting to a new education system than “native” students. Moreover, obstacles that hinder the development of a bond between teachers and parents have been discussed, such as language incompatibilities, cultural differences, or the negative stereotyping of migrant parents. Similar obstacles for communication and interactions also appear in the Swedish context. Regarding the situation of Ukrainian refugee families in Sweden, it was discussed how Ukrainian citizens living in Sweden are continuously trying to find ways of maintaining a connection with the family members still living in Ukraine. Feelings of homesickness are present, and Ukrainian migrants long for a more palpable correspondence with their families. However, at the time of writing this thesis, there are no studies available on Ukrainian families’ reception into Swedish schools made since the war started in February 2022. Additionally, there are no studies exploring the interactions between Swedish schools, teachers, and Ukrainian migrant students and families. Thus, this thesis aims to address this knowledge gap and provide insights, although limited, in regard to the reception of Ukrainian families into the Swedish education system.
Chapter 5: Methodology

In this section, I will explain the methodology chosen for my thesis. I will discuss the process and method of data collection, as well as the method of data analysis. Additionally, I will reflect on the ethical matters of data collection, also focusing on the researcher’s positionality.

According to Creswell and Poth, qualitative research involves a complex investigation of a question, issue or phenomenon, that combines the stories and experiences of the participants with the reflexivity of the researcher, the data being collected from natural settings and contexts which are familiar to the participants, and being analysed through an “inductive-deductive logic” (2018: 81-84). Moreover, qualitative research implies choosing among the five dominant qualitative research approaches: narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Since my thesis involves studying the interaction and communication between Swedish schools and Ukrainian refugee students and families, focusing on the experiences of teachers and studiehandledare, my qualitative approaches of choice are narrative and phenomenological research. Narrative research is based on collecting stories about the participants’ lives, or certain aspects or experiences from the participants’ lives (Creswell & Poth, 2018: 112). Phenomenological research emphasizes the study of a certain phenomenon experienced by all members of a defined group of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018: 124). Thus, I will analyse the personal experiences and stories of teachers and studiehandledare about their interactions with Ukrainian students and families to explore the reception of Ukrainians into the Swedish education system.

5.1 Data collection

To collect data, I conducted semi-structured interviews. I chose the semi-structured interview format because, while it allows the participants to discuss freely about their experiences through open-ended, general, and spontaneous questions, the researcher can also return to the structure in order to bring back the discussion towards the research question, when needed (Zhang et al., 2021: 4). Thus, I have written two interview guides, one used for interviewing teachers, and the other used for interviewing studiehandledare. Both guides start with three general questions about the participants’ background and continue with a series of open-ended
questions revolving around the participants’ personal interactions and experiences with Ukrainian refugee students and families. At the end, the participants were encouraged to share other aspects which they considered important, and which were not covered by the questions in the interview guide. The interview guides are reproduced in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

As far as participant sampling is concerned, I have used the “snowball sampling” method. This method involves finding potential interview participants through recommendations from previous interviewees, a process which is repeated until the desired number of participants is reached (Noy, 2008: 330). In my case, the sampling process was rather difficult, due to the fact that the reception of Ukrainian refugee students in Swedish schools is a new and still on-going process. My only criteria of selection were that the participants must work in relation to the Swedish education system and must have contact with Ukrainian refugee students and their families. Firstly, I contacted the coordinators of the VFU (verksamhetsförlagd utbildning) team for the teacher-training programme at Linköping University via e-mail, in an attempt to find information about schools in the Norrköping Municipality that enrolled Ukrainian refugee students. My e-mail was then forwarded to the Municipality, which provided me with a list of seven schools and five studiehandledare and their contact information. The individuals who were interested in participating in my study answered by e-mailing me back. At first, I conducted interviews with the teachers; after that, I started to consider reaching out to the studiehandledare, taking into account the teachers’ recommendations.

In total, five interviews were conducted. Two of my informants are middle- and high-school teachers, and the other three participants are studiehandledare working with Ukrainian refugee students. The scheduling and the details of the interviews were discussed via e-mail, the participants having the freedom to choose the date and place that suits them best. In addition, four out of five of my informants preferred to meet in person rather than scheduling on-line meetings; the interview with the fifth participant was pursued on Zoom. Four participants agreed to having English as the language of the interview, with occasional interventions in Swedish; however, one informant requested the help of an interpreter, as they claimed they were not very confident in their English language skills. The fifth participant requested Swedish as the interview language. Considering the fact that my Swedish language skills are at a conversational level, I have once again requested the help of an interpreter for more complex questions. In addition, even though
English is not mine and neither of my interviewees’ first language, and I have limited knowledge
in the Swedish language, I did not experience any difficulties in understanding the participants’
stories or transcribing the interviews.

Firstly, I have received feedback from my supervisor for my interview guides, and I held
a mock-interview with a friend, also in order to receive feedback. Out of five participants, two
requested the interview guide to be sent to them in advance. A consent form was also sent to the
participants via e-mail. At the beginning of each interview, I have repeated relevant information
about me and my study to my informants, and asked if they have further questions. Then, I have
discussed with them the consent form; the ethical considerations will be approached later in this
section. After asking for consent to record the interview, I have asked my informants general
questions about themselves and their work, then the interview proceeded with the questions
written in the interview guide. During the interviews, I wrote notes, depending on the
participants’ answers, which allowed me to ask follow-up questions easier. Since I chose to
conduct semi-structured interviews, I took the freedom of changing the order of the questions, or
not asking certain questions at all. At the end, the participants were asked to share some
important aspects about their experiences, which were not covered by the interview guide. As an
approximation, the interviews lasted between 45 and 70 minutes, the interviews where the
interpreters were present being the longest. The transcriptions of the interviews were done in the
same days the interviews were conducted, and the process of transcribing each interview lasted
for approximatively three hours; moreover, I chose to keep the participants’ discourses in their
pure and unaltered form while transcribing, not changing any grammatical aspects or the order of
words in sentences. At the end, the recordings were deleted immediately after the transcribing
process.

5.2 Method of analysis

The transcriptions resulted from the interviews were using for the analysis and coding
process. I chose to adopt the thematic analysis approach which is, as described by Virginia Braun
and Victoria Clarke, a widely used method of data analysis in qualitative studies and it involves
“analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79). Braun and
Clarke developed a list of six phases of thematic analysis, which I have considered and used as a guide throughout the analysis process of my data. The six phases are the following: familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 87).

While I have chosen to transcribe my interviews digitally, I decided to print the transcriptions for the coding process, in order to facilitate the search for codes and patterns. Then, following the six-phase guide mentioned above, I began by repeatedly reading the data carefully, at the same time highlighting certain phrases and taking notes of potential codes and themes, a process defined by Braun and Clarke as “reading the data in an active way” (2006: 87). I continued by underlining the most interesting aspects that appear in the transcriptions, starting to write codes, superficial in the beginning, for these ideas. After obtaining a long list of codes, I started to develop a selection, deleting certain codes, and grouping the remaining codes into broader themes or more precise sub-themes. Following a reviewing process of the themes and sub-themes, I have worked towards defining the themes and sub-themes. As Braun and Clarke state, this part is important for the analysis, because it involves attributing each theme to certain important parts of the data, making sure that the themes are not too broad or too general (2006: 92). Finally, the themes were used to shape the final analysis of the data, and to write the results which are relevant to the aim of the paper. An overview to the themes, and what sub-themes and codes they consist of, is found in Appendix 4.

5.3 Ethical considerations

Taking into consideration the ethical matters, I have followed the guidelines described by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). Thus, a consent form, which can be found in Appendix 1, was sent via e-mail to all the participants, prior to the interviews. The form highlights the participants’ rights; all the participants were informed about my research and the aim of this thesis, as well as the fact that their participation is entirely voluntary, and that they can withdraw at any time. Moreover, the form assures the participants that their anonymity will be respected; they were explained that, as long as they consent to being audio-recorded during the interview, their names and other personal information will be omitted during the transcribing
process. They were also informed that the audio recordings and all the data gathered from the interviews will be deleted. The information written in the consent form was repeated and discussed at the beginning of each meeting with the participants. Consent was given through signing the consent form in two copies – one being in my possession and the other copy remaining in their possession – and at the beginning of each recording. In order to protect the identity of the participants, I will refer to them as “Teacher/ Studiehandledare 1-5”. Moreover, I will not provide the name of the schools or institutions my informants are employed at, since I am working with a very small number of participants.

5.4 Researcher’s positionality

According to Manohar, Liamputtong, Bhole, and Arora (2017: 3), researcher positionality refers to “the position the researcher has taken within a given research study”. Positionality and the researcher’s views are shaped by certain fixed or subjective aspects, such as ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, social class, personal experiences, opinions, and beliefs, among others (Manohar et al., 2017: 3). Throughout the research process, researchers are highly influenced by the aspects mentioned before, in relation to the study or the potential interview participants. Thus, it is important that the researcher acknowledges, through self-reflection, that their own background will influence the entire research process, including the interpretation of the research findings (Manohar et al., 2017: 3).

Having been born and raised in Romania and having moved to Sweden in 2021 in order to attend a master’s programme at Linköping University, I am somewhat familiar with the Swedish education system and the expectations that the system has for the students in Sweden. However, I have no experience in working in education in Sweden, nor do I have acquaintances working in education, so it was difficult for me to picture an image of the opinions and experiences my informants might share. Thus, the information gathered from the interviews with teachers and studiehandledare was practically new. In addition, I do not have knowledge of the Ukrainian education system and school culture, so I avoided making presumptions about, for example, the difficulties that Swedish schools’ personnel might have in interacting with Ukrainian refugee students and their families.
Taking everything into account, my position in this research is that of an “outsider”. It is argued by Merriam et.al. (2001: 411) that the strengths of an outsider researcher lie in their ability to gather more in-depth information about the study’s topic; this happens due to the researcher’s curiosity and unfamiliarity to the topic and through, for example, asking “taboo” questions. During the interviews, I have often found myself in the position of asking my participants more follow-up questions, in order to clarify certain aspects that they were mentioning. By doing this, I have collected valuable information which might not have been taken into consideration had I been familiar with the topic. Moreover, as Sánchez-Ayala states, having an outsider position can be beneficial in regard to the ethical considerations, especially to the participant’s anonymity; thus, the interviewees can perceive the researcher as more trustworthy, which can facilitate the development of the interview into a broader and more relaxed discussion (Sánchez-Ayala, 2012: 119).

To conclude, I believe that the outsider position was beneficial to me in this study. As expressed above, having had prior in-depth knowledge about the topic, I would have been most likely influenced to make biased assumptions about the experiences of the teachers and the studyhandledare. As expressed by Merriam et.al, the main advantage of the outsider position is the chance to “render a more objective portrayal of the reality under study” (2001: 414).
Chapter 6: Results and Analysis

In this chapter, I discuss the findings gathered from the interviews that I have conducted for this study. For this, I have grouped the findings into six themes, taking into consideration the insights, opinions, and lived experiences of the teachers and studiehandledare. Before continuing with the following explanations about the sub-chapters, I would like to repeat and clarify again the nature of my data. All information used in this paper is gathered from discussions with only teachers and studiehandledare. Thus, when the Ukrainian refugee students’ and parents’ opinions are mentioned, they are recalled through the voices of the teachers and the studiehandledare. Firstly, I highlight the changes and the preparations that the schools made in order to facilitate the reception of Ukrainian refugees into the Swedish education system. Secondly, I focus on the teachers and their interactions with the students and their families. Thirdly, I discuss the importance of studiehandledning, as well as the studiehandledare’s role in accommodating Ukrainian students into Swedish schools. Fourthly, I reflect on the way the classroom dynamics changed after welcoming the new students, focusing on the differences between the Ukrainian and the Swedish education system and the interactions within the classrooms. Lastly, I analyse the feelings and emotions of homesickness and gratitude expressed by Ukrainian refugee students and parents, as recalled by my participants.

6.1 Swedish schools: preparing for the reception of Ukrainian refugee students

The first theme discusses the preparations that Swedish schools made prior to enrolling Ukrainian refugee students. This section also mentions the resources (or lack of resources) that teachers received before the placement of the Ukrainian students in their class, as well as whether the teachers’ expectations prior to the reception were met during their interaction with the students. The results show that there are differences in the ways schools manage the reception of Ukrainian refugee students, with each approach having different outcomes. Although, in general, schools make efforts into accommodating Ukrainian refugee students. On the other side, teachers claim that there is a lack of information that they receive from schools prior to the reception about the students’ backgrounds and their experiences. Moreover, the information that they do receive (the results from the mapping process) does not always reflect reality.
6.1.1 Help received by Ukrainian students from Swedish schools

An opinion expressed by all participants is that schools prepared for the reception of Ukrainian students in different ways, depending on their previous encounters with migrant students. When asked about such preparations, one informant responded:

The schools that have a good level of experience, you can see it right away, in how they prepare for the arrival for the students. One of the first things they do is actually hiring or asking for studiehandledare. [...] Schools that have less experience, it is evident because they often ask for advice. First of all, they ask advice from the bosses. They order a few [hours with a studiehandledare] in the beginning, and then analyse how it goes. (Studiehandledare 1)

Schools are, thus, classified through their previous experience in accommodating migrant students. As Studiehandledare 1 claims, the more experienced schools immediately take into account the possible cultural and linguistic barriers to interacting with the new students and solve this problem by hiring professionals as a means of diminishing these barriers. The less experienced schools are also aware of these matters, but prefer a slower pace; they follow advice and suggestions at a smaller scale in the beginning, in order to analyse the outcomes. Studiehandledare 3 claims that economy also plays an important role in schools’ preparations. They claim that, while some schools order many hours of studiehandledning per week from the beginning, other schools prefer to rely on free online tools and services, such as Google Translate, or expect Russian-speaking teachers to act as interpreters for the Ukrainian students. These solutions are undoubtedly problematic, as they might temporarily solve language barriers, but they completely ignore the aspect of cultural and behavioural differences. This issue will be further discussed within the fourth theme, dedicated to the role of studiehandledning.

On the same note, another participant described their view on how schools prepare for the reception of Ukrainian students by giving another example:

They do this skolbesök. That’s when students come before they start the school, so they go there and the school shows them like - this is your school, this is the teacher, this is where we eat, this is the class and everything. So, when they come the first day, they already know better. (Studiehandledare 2)
While Studiehandledare 1 mentions the support schools give in terms of the language and cultural aspects, Studiehandledare 2 refers to the familiarisation of Ukrainian students with the school in general. It is claimed that, through guiding them inside the school area and introducing them in advance, not only to the teachers, but also to different rooms, the schools allow for a more welcoming first impression, and pave the way for an easier accommodation and integration of Ukrainian students.

As far as teachers are concerned, when asked about the special adjustments that schools made to facilitate the reception of Ukrainian students, they took the role of representatives for their schools and referred to the actions that they pursued. From their recalled experiences, it can be noticed that the special help from the teachers is very close to what is described above by Studiehandledare 2. For example, Teacher 2 explains:

In the beginning, the mother was a bit worried, because it was hard for him [the student]. When we should be somewhere else in the city, he didn't know where to go. He couldn't find the way there. But then, we had to take care of him and walk with him. Now, I think he is okay with the whole city. (Teacher 2)

In this instance, the pronoun “we” does not refer only to this particular teacher, but to the school as an entity. It is clear that the personnel are interested in supporting and helping the students also outside the school’s area. According to the voices of all interviewees, the majority of the schools make efforts to provide help and to support their new Ukrainian students.

However, I also found an instance in which schools show less interest in implementing solutions towards an easier reception of the students. Regarding what was said by Studiehandledare 2 about the “skolbesök”, the same person admitted that not all schools take their time to guide the new students around the institution, showing them their teachers and their classrooms. Moreover, as recalled by Studiehandledare 2, students might see this type of lack of involvement from schools as rather hostile:

But I also know one student who stopped going to school, because she didn't feel welcomed in the school. She came several times, but there was no one to meet her, to explain where her class was and she just didn't know where to go or how to ask. She was crying really hard and asked her mom to take her out. So now she's not going to school. (Studiehandledare 2)
The student’s decision to stop going to school is highly concerning, especially since Sweden adopted an Education Act, which clearly states the importance of nine years of compulsory schooling. Going back to the conditions for compulsory schooling mentioned in the Swedish law, asylum seekers without a permanent residency card and a Swedish personal number have access to schooling but are not obliged to attend school. As we have seen from Studiehandledare 2’s claims, refugee students can be easily discouraged while trying to accommodate in a new school and can be influenced into refusing to continue their education while living in Sweden. Studiehandledare 3 shares the same opinion, and argues that, since attending school is voluntary, Ukrainian pupils must be motivated and convinced to continue going to school in Sweden. Thus, it is of great importance that schools work towards creating a welcoming image and supporting the students in this situation.

6.1.2 Do teachers receive support?

As explained earlier, the schools and school personnel are, in general, involved in welcoming and supporting the new Ukrainian refugee students. At the same time, I was interested in finding out whether teachers received support from their schools, prior to the enrolment of Ukrainian students. After being asked this question, one teacher responded:

When I read this question, if we had any support, if I get support, to know how to work with the refugees. It was nothing. Norrköpings kommun is a very big arbetsplats. And nothing. So, I was left a little bit on my own. Or our own, because in the school we work together. But taking care of this, no support, and what they've been through, we don't know. (Teacher 1)

In this case, Teacher 1 argues that they did not receive any resources or support in order to help them prepare for the reception of Ukrainian refugees. At the end, Teacher 1 mentions that the school personnel do not know any details in advance about the students’ situation and “what they’ve been through”, referring to the potential trauma the students may suffer from. Linking this fact to previous studies done on migrant students, Bunar (2017b: 8-9) explains how migrant children who suffer from trauma as a result of their experiences while leaving their countries are at a higher risk of achieving lower academic results and having a more unsatisfying experience in Swedish schools than other students. Having this in mind, it can be argued that teachers should receive additional information about the students’ background and support in dealing with the
students’ traumatic experiences in order to be able to create a welcoming and safe environment in the classroom.

At the same question regarding resources for the school personnel, Teacher 2 shared the same opinion as Teacher 1, and claimed that they did not receive much information from the school, apart from the documents with the results after the mapping of the student’s previous academic knowledge. According to the interviewees, the mapping documents from the preparatory school served as a model of the expectations that teachers should have prior to working with the Ukrainian students. However, in Teacher 2’s case, the mapping results did not reflect reality:

But, for example, those papers said that he [the student] read English for several years, but he can't speak English […]. But in the papers, it says that he's been reading English for 5 years. So, the papers that we got, they weren't right. So, I don't know what to say about the expectations...
(Teacher 2)

The discrepancy between the mapping documents and the reality in this case has been problematic for establishing a proper communication channel between Teacher 2 and the student. Studiehandledare 1 offers an explanation regarding this issue, and states that “If it says for example that they studied something for a few years, it can literally mean that the student was present in the class. If they studied it for real, you never know”. Moreover, as Studiehandledare 1 further explains, “there are confusions because the Swedish teachers expect the same level that their own students have here, and it's not the case”. In short, in the absence of information regarding the students’ backgrounds and the lack of proper examination and mapping of the students’ previous school experiences and knowledge, teachers can be lured into automatically expecting the refugee students to fit into the “Swedish pupil” model, as referred to by Dahlstedt (2018: 77). The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that teachers need to be provided with more and accurate information about the students’ background in order to successfully interact with the students and help them integrate into a new school environment.
6.2 The role of teachers in facilitating Ukrainian refugees’ reception in Swedish schools

The second theme explores the teachers’ insights into their experiences of interacting with Ukrainian refugee students and their families. The interviews highlight a close relationship between teachers and students. On the one hand, the teachers express their wish to be able to offer more help also outside of the schools’ walls. On the other hand, teachers become important figures for the children, as they represent an image of stability and security, and students show high levels of trust while interacting with their teachers. In terms of the interaction between teachers and parents, all teachers mentioned that they have a rather close relationship with the mothers.

6.2.1 Interactions between teachers and students

Throughout the discussions, the teachers continuously expressed their interest in helping the refugee students and their families by taking account of their needs. One informant states:

I think it's important that you do a little bit more for them, because they need it. If they come here, they are glad that they are still alive, but they have to have the basics. If they need clothes, ok, we teachers, can we fix some clothes that we can give them? A bit like that. (Teacher 2)

As recalled by Teacher 2, the school personnel take initiative for accommodating the refugee students. In this case, help is offered outside the school, and is focusing on providing the students with “the basics”, for example, clothes. In another discussion, Teacher 2 mentions other instances in which teachers take initiative to help refugee students, such as temporarily covering the cost of bus tickets for the students who must rely on public transportation to go to school. Following the same pattern, Teacher 1 also mentions the help that teachers are providing for their refugee students. Though, they make an interesting claim:

So how can I support the girl [a student], in what way is the best way? How can I support the mother? There is nothing like that… But I am a teacher, I teach my subjects and that's about it. And there we could do a lot more… (Teacher 1)

In this instance, Teacher 1’s statement can be linked to what was discussed earlier about the lack of resources and information from the school for the teachers. Moreover, as it can be
understood from the statement above, teachers should only “teach their subjects”, and handle other school-related issues; being involved in a student’s personal matters is, thus, not demanded, as it is not considered the teachers’ main responsibility. Teacher 1’s statement, “[…] but I am a teacher, I teach my subjects and that’s about it. And there we could do a lot more” is also interesting in terms of its translation through the prism of respectability. Respectability refers to one’s strategy of adopting certain attributes in order to align with a more privileged or dominant group, with the scope of distancing oneself from a less privileged or minority group (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2019: 228). In this instance, the teachers’ desire to do more for refugee students, outside school matters, exceeds the general expectation and responsibility attributed to teachers, thus, positioning themselves on a higher moral stance.

Another interesting insight regarding teachers being more or less implicated in the students’ matters outside school-related issues was shared by Studiehandledare 3:

It also happens that they [the school personnel] exaggerate, because of the war. They start to feel bad too much for the children because of the war, and they allow them to do anything they want to do at school. They don’t dare to say something against the children. […] And we all know how children all over the world are, they learn very fast how they can take advantage of adults. […] The most important is that one shouldn’t exaggerate. They should act with them as they act with normal students. They shouldn’t exaggerate and feel bad too much for them because of the war or talk about the war if the children don’t want to. It doesn’t help with the integration, and it doesn’t help with the lessons anyway. Teachers shouldn’t accentuate that much that they come from war. (Studiehandledare 3)

Thus, Studiehandledare 3 claims that teachers should find a balance when taking into account children’s situations. Teachers perceiving war as an excuse for the students’ behaviour or absence from school, as Studiehandledare 3 argues, does not help children achieve more in school or “integrate” better. Taking into consideration the previous statements made by Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and Studiehandledare 3, it can be observed how the behaviour towards Ukrainian students tends to be inclusionary and permissive. Going back to the distinction of “us” and “them” highlighted by Yuval-Davis (2006: 204), and to the “migrant Other” in the Swedish context, as described by Dahlstedt and Neergaard (2019: 122), “them” and the “migrant Other” were previously excluded by the majority on the prospect of a lack of “sameness”. In the case
portrayed by the interview participant, an opposite situation emerges, and the relation between “us” (the Swedish school personnel) and “them” (the Ukrainian students) is not exclusionary.

Nevertheless, the unanimous opinion of all participants is that teachers become important figures for refugee students. Teacher 2 makes a clear statement in this sense: “I think many teachers become very important people to them [the students]. Because, for those who came alone, we were the only grownups they had, and the only safe place”. The term “safe space” appears numerous times under the interviews and refers to both Sweden as a country and school in general. The existence of a safe space is important in terms of belonging, especially in terms of place-belongingness, as the feeling of being “at home” is generated, among others, through the feeling of being safe (Antonsich, 2010: 6). In this instance, the teachers represent the safety and the stability that refugee students need. Considering the concept of belonging, the students’ feelings of familiarity and belongingness to a place (in this case, Swedish schools and the Swedish education system) are encouraged and generated by the safety that teachers represent. Moreover, teachers acknowledge a significant amount of trust that the students show towards them; in some instances, it is recalled that some students prefer to spend their time with the teachers rather than with their classmates. Studiehandledare 1 explains this occurrence through stating that “in Ukraine, they are a little afraid of the teachers, which is both a good and a bad thing. And here, they can feel that they have a more friendly relationship with the teachers”. This particular view on the Swedish school system and Swedish teachers is not uncommon in the interviews: Ukrainian students, being accustomed to a stricter education system, perceive the informal style, characteristic to the Swedish system, as openness and friendliness.

6.2.2 Interactions between teachers and parents

Throughout the interviews, both teachers talked about their interactions with the students’ parents, in this case, exclusively mothers. The teachers acknowledged the importance of keeping a close contact with the mothers, through recurrent face-to-face meetings, in private or during parents’ evenings, and also through phone calls and messages. When asked about the nature of their interactions with the mothers, both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 expressed positive thoughts. For example, Teacher 1 claims: “I would say we have a rather close communication. So, she [the mother] knows that she can phone me every day if she has questions or if there is anything that worries her”. Additionally, Teacher 2 talks about their interaction with another mother and
One thing to consider in the relation between teachers and mothers is the language of communication. As explained by teachers, in the best case, communication is done through the English language. In contrast, there are instances in which teachers and mothers do not share a common language, and their interaction becomes significantly difficult. Moreover, Studiehandledare 3 explains that the lack of a common communication channel, a common language, might actually influence the parents into hesitating to contact the school and the school personnel:

I can say from my experience with the teachers and parents: the majority of them feel unsure when they have to contact the school themselves. For most of them, the communication is done through me. They don’t dare to, even though maybe they can speak a bit of English or Swedish. They are afraid of being misunderstood. So, they think that is better to communicate through us, studiehandledare. (Studiehandledare 3)

According to Studiehandledare 3, many parents “don’t dare” to speak with the school personnel because they fear they could potentially be misunderstood. This instance resembles the description of “coping migrant respectability” (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2019: 228), in the sense that the parents who hesitate to contact the schools themselves seek to be respectable by avoiding being considered as acting “out of place”.

All in all, the participants’ claims on the interactions between teachers and Ukrainian parents coincide with the findings from the previous research done on this topic. Teacher 1 and Teacher 2’s experiences and descriptions about communicating with Ukrainian parents can be understood as related to what Epstein describes as “partnership” between schools and families: parents and teachers understanding each other’s roles and establishing a relation based on mutual help on behalf of the students (2010: 44). At the same time, Studiehandledare 3’s statement
reminds of Bunar’s (2017a: 11) and Lundahl & Lindblad’s (2018: 9-10) conclusions that language and cultural differences, among others, influence the quality of the interactions and communication between schools and migrant families.

6.3 Studiehandledning as a bridge between Swedish schools and Ukrainian students

The third theme describes the role of studiehandledning in facilitating the integration of Ukrainian students into the Swedish school system, as seen by teachers and studiehandledare. A common statement appears in each interview: the studiehandledning is highly beneficial for all sides: the teachers, the students, and the parents. Moreover, the interview participants claimed that the studiehandledning does not only help the students to acquire and train their Swedish language skills but, most importantly, it helps the students adopt a certain behaviour, understand the Swedish education system and school culture, and learn to communicate better with their peers.

Both interviewed teachers mentioned working with a studiehandledare and spoke about the positive outcomes of studiehandledning. Teacher 1 makes a strong claim that the presence of a studiehandledare is “why she [a student] can survive Swedish school”, Teacher 2 having a similar opinion about studiehandledning. Language help is the most important aspect mentioned by teachers when talking about studiehandledning, as language barriers are, at the moment, the most common reason for miscommunication between teachers and students. For example, Teacher 1 states:

Without him [the studiehandledare] she [the student] would have had it very difficult. But now he can always try to explain or make the week understandable for her. Then, when she comes to class, she knows what we are going to talk about from that studiehandledare in her language. And when I am telling her about it in Swedish, she says “ahaaa, this makes sense!” and she understands some of it. (Teacher 1)

In this case, it can be observed how the Ukrainian student has prior knowledge about the topic of the lesson but is not aware of this fact because of language barriers. After the studiehandledare explains the topic using the student’s native language, Ukrainian, she understands the topic and
can actively participate in the lecture. In the absence of a studiehandledare, a similar situation would go as explained below:

Very often, when I came to schools and there was no studiehandledning for the students, the first 2 or 3 months, and when I started to help with the learning and language and the subjects, the students themselves were like "Oh, ok, now we start to learn something". Because, before that, it was just a bunch of unknown words and noises, and they just couldn't understand anything. (Studiehandledare 1)

In addition, Teacher 1 talks about how switching between Ukrainian, Swedish and sometimes English is tiresome for the students. They acknowledge that it takes a great amount of focus and energy to be able to study the basic school subjects in Swedish without actually speaking or understanding Swedish. At the same time, the language help does not only resume to translating the content of the lectures and subjects, but also to interactions between Ukrainian students and their classmates and teachers:

My thing is not only to do subjects, but also to help children to adapt in the school. So, a part of my studiehandledning time, I teach them school language. Like, I can/I cannot, I need/I don't need, I want/I don't want. [...] So, I'm also helping them to understand that, to understand what the other students mean by doing something. If you want to show something, what is the best way for you to show. (Studiehandledare 2)

“School language” in this case refers to basic means of communication and interactions, giving the students the possibility to express themselves in relation to others. It is, thus, obvious that receiving support in their native language is important for the students and their integration into the Swedish school system, both for understanding the subjects and actively participating in class discussions, and also for building relationships with classmates and teachers.

Throughout the discussions with the three studiehandledare, all of them emphasised on the fact that language help in the form of translating from Swedish to Ukrainian and vice-versa is only a small part of the studiehandledning. Studiehandledare 1 further explains: “Not only language, but it's more about behaviour, or mentality. Culture as well, they are different. Education in itself, because it's different as well. Educational system too, because the grading for example, it's different.” From this statement, it can be understood that the studiehandledare must also be familiar with the Swedish school system in general and is expected to take into
consideration the possible difficulties that might arise on the basis of the differences between the Ukrainian and Swedish systems. In addition, Studiehandledare 2 states:

I help with the behaviour and culture too. I do, because I'm coming from the same country they come from, I've been studying in Ukrainian schools, so I know their culture, and I've been living here in Sweden for years, so I know this culture too. (Studiehandledare 2)

In this instance, Studiehandledare 2 refers to the behavioural and cultural differences between Ukrainian students and Swedish students, or what is expected by the Swedish system. This interview extract also shows possibly the most important attribute of a studiehandledare; that is, having experienced both the Ukrainian and Swedish systems and cultures. As Studiehandledare 3 also states: “One can write a whole master thesis only about the cultural differences between Sweden and Ukraine”, thus, these differences should be also taken into consideration in the process of integrating Ukrainian students into Swedish schools. Day-to-day activities and occurrences which might seem normal in the Swedish context, can be perceived as culture-shocks by Ukrainian students, as argued by the three studiehandledare.

When asked to reflect on their occupation as studiehandledare, all three interviewees mentioned that it is important to keep a close contact with the teachers and the parents for the best results. According to Studiehandledare 1 and Studiehandledare 2, very often they find themselves in the position of translating documents or explaining the schedule to parents, not only because of the language incompatibility, but also because they appear as more trustworthy. Even though they are assigned to the students only, the studiehandledare also agree to act as a communication mediator between teachers and parents:

There is no way around it, you have to speak to both. Because as I mentioned before, very often parents as well don't speak English or Swedish. They ask questions through me, they often ask how their child is doing at school, what's the homework, how the child is doing in general. And in that way, they feel a lot calmer about it, since everything is fine. Like a normal parent would. (Studiehandledare 1)

Regarding the contact with the teachers, the main arguments of the interviewed studiehandledare, on behalf of the importance of co-working with the teachers revolve around the students. On one hand, students feel more comfortable knowing that they can communicate with their teachers...
through a studiehandledare, without the risk of being misunderstood. On the other hand, the teachers can understand better to what extent their students acquire the information discussed in class, and whether improvements are visible. About the co-working relationship with the teachers, Studiehandledare 2 recalls:

When I’m working with a student, I’m kind of co-working with the teacher as well. So, of course, I explain to the teacher what I’m gonna do, what we have done, ask what the teacher thinks is more important to do. But then, we also ask teachers how the student is doing when I'm not here. And sometimes, the teachers are kind of laughing, sometimes they come to me like: “[Name], he did that and that, is that how you do in Ukraine? What should I do?” So, for me, I feel pleased that they're asking how we can help him, how do I think. It's not like “Ah ok, the studiehandledare is here, I'll go”. But there is a communication with the teachers all about how they can help the student to understand the subject, or how can we understand what he does, if it's the normal thing in Ukraine, or it's just breaking the rules or something. (Studiehandledare 2)

In other words, the teachers and the studiehandledare are communicating and working together on behalf of the students. The studiehandledare are in a position from which they can explain the behaviour of the Ukrainian students, so that the teachers can use this information in order to “personalise” their teaching approach towards the students. The situation above is an example of successful interaction between the studiehandledare and the teachers, each being aware of the other’s role and attributions.

To conclude using Studiehandledare 1’s words, “studiehandledning is like a bridge between their experience in Ukraine and this new society in Sweden and the more help they get, the faster they adapt”. Studiehandledning is therefore an important tool for an easier reception and integration of Ukrainian students into Swedish schools and is seen as beneficial by all sides. Upon a closer look, a studiehandledare is not just a bridge between the two cultures or between the two education systems but is also a symbol of the intersection between the politics of belonging and place-belongingness. The differences between languages, values, cultures, and behaviours, explained and translated through studiehandledning, represent on the one hand, the boundaries between the two communities of belonging, or between “us” and “them” (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 204) and on the other hand, the cultural factors which connects an individual to a certain place and which contribute to feelings of belongingness (Antonsich, 2010: 9).
6.4 Classroom dynamics

The fourth theme explores to what extent classroom dynamics changed after the reception of Ukrainian refugee students in Swedish schools. This sub-chapter also emphasises the ways in which the differences between the Ukrainian school system and the Swedish school system influence the students’ performance in class. The results from the interviews show that language is, again, an obstacle for the integration of Ukrainian students in class. An interesting factor to consider is that, despite of the welcoming atmosphere in classrooms, Ukrainian students are less interested in bonding with their Swedish peers, and they prefer to focus more on their friendship with other Ukrainian pupils.

6.4.1 Two different education systems

In the previous themes, it was mentioned how Ukrainian students have former knowledge about the school subjects taught in Sweden, but they can not express themselves or understand the discussions because of the language. It was also discussed how the casual atmosphere characteristic to Swedish schools is in contrast to the Ukrainian school system, which is stricter. On the same note, it is important to mention the differences between Ukrainian schools and Swedish schools in terms of priorities and expectations. In this sense, Studiehandledare 1 explains:

The level of education I guess might differ a lot, particularly in languages. But I've heard also stories that it was vice-versa. Some students were thinking that they already know this, they are learning the same things they already did. It can be both ways. [...] Ukraine, as most of post-soviet countries, suffer from this thing, not a lot of people learn English, it's not so mainstream as it is in Sweden. Or take Math for example, the level of education in Ukraine is actually higher than here in Sweden, so some parents are worried about that as well. (Studiehandledare 1)

Thus, as Studiehandledare 1 argues, while the Swedish education system values, for example, foreign languages, the Ukrainian system emphasises the importance of exact sciences. This difference between the values promoted by the two education systems stand in accordance with Grecu et al.’s claims that the image of the “ideal” student varies depending on each school’s culture and approach (2019: 88-92), and that there is no depiction of an “ideal” student that is globally accepted. Taking into account the teachers’ opinions, they agree to the statement
presented by Studiehandledare 1 up to a point. The teachers note that Ukrainian students have difficulties with the subject that involve reading and speaking, such as History. However, Teacher 2 states:

He [the student] has good grades in Crafts, Music, and in Art. The other subjects… So, Math for example, it's difficult to understand, we talk a lot of Math, and he can't do that. He can, but when it's only numbers, he can work, but not when it's sentences, so he has to read that, it's very difficult, even if we translate it. In Swedish, it's very hard. (Teacher 2)

In this case, Teacher 2 mentions Math as a problematic subject for the student, but in terms of language, when the task involves text in Swedish. Crafts, Music, and Art, on the other hand, do not require actively speaking, and difficulties are not mentioned in this regard.

Apart from the language factor, some participants have pointed out that the content of the lessons in general or the values promoted by Swedish schools might be sometimes regarded as problematic by Ukrainian parents. For instance, in the previous quote taken from the interview with Studiehandledare 1, they mention how parents are “worried” about the fact that subjects such as Math are not taught in Swedish school at the same level as they are in Ukrainian schools. Studiehandledare 3 also talks about worries in this sense, and states that:

About the parents and the legal guardians, sadly, for example, in the beginning they call me and say “this is not normal, why is this allowed, why do they do this?”. Many are, for example, shocked or against when the schools talk about the rainbow, LGBTQ, you understand… same-sex marriage, when they did rainbow flags in schools…it is a big shock for our Ukrainian parents and students. Or also about religion, in Ukraine religion is taught just a little bit in the 7th grade and only in specific schools. So, in the beginning I got questions from the students “will we have to pray during religion class?” or from parents “why do they have to study about religion? Why do they have to know what other religions mean? We are Orthodox, we don’t need this”. So, I am trying to explain, but many don’t want to understand in the beginning. But after some time, they become calmer. (Studiehandledare 3)

Thus, as Studiehandledare 3 explains, there are many instances in which the Ukrainian students’ and parents’ expectations about Swedish schools are different from what they actually experience, and this can be regarded as a culture shock. The two education systems differ, and accommodation is more difficult in the beginning. Again, the studiehandledare takes the role of a
“cultural interpreter” and use the advantage of having a similar background as the Ukrainian families in order to explain why Swedish schools put more emphasis on other values and priorities than Ukrainian schools.

6.4.2 Welcoming and difficult interactions

When asked about the integration of Ukrainian students in the class collective, the interview participants mentioned language barriers as a principal issue. For instance, Teacher 1 explains:

She [the student] is getting frustrated playing with the other children and stuff, because when she wants to say something to the Swedish children, she can't find the right words and she gets frustrated because it takes too long. And even if she tries to speak Swedish, it doesn't come out the way she wants. So that's something that makes the girl frustrated and she doesn’t integrate so much. (Teacher 1)

The frustration that comes from the fact that this particular student can not speak the other children’s language has a significant impact on the way she places herself among her peers. Here, cultural differences do not seem to affect the relationship between the Ukrainian students and their classmates, but it seems that language plays the most important role. As explained by the two teachers, speaking English is a big advantage for foreign students. This finding resonates with Antonsich’s description of the five factors that influence the feeling of belonging, especially with the cultural factor; a shared language, as argued by Antonsich, confers a strong sense of belonging, as it represents the primary way of building relations with others (2010: 9). Thus, in the absence of a common language, it is more difficult for Ukrainian students to acquire a sense of belonging within the class collective. However, despite the language barrier, the students find alternative ways of communication, either by using online tools (Google Translate) or through a studiehandledare. Additionally, the attitude of the Ukrainian students’ classmates is, in any case, positive and welcoming:

The other students are very careful, and they take care of him and ask him if he wants help and stuff. We also had a talk with the class, our students, so the boys in the class helped him the first weeks to find his way. So, they took him with them so he didn't get lost. And they have been fantastic to take care of him and try to talk to him and see that he is not lost. (Teacher 2)
The other students, according to both teachers, are attentive to the Ukrainian students’ needs, and are actively trying to include them into the class community, creating a welcoming environment which is crucial for refugee students. Similar to the instances in which teachers showed themselves more compassionate and permissive towards Ukrainian refugee students (presented in the subchapter 6.2.1), “native” students show the same compassion. Thus, also in this case, an opposite instance of the exclusion of the “migrant Other” is observed.

A common occurrence expressed by all participants is that Ukrainian students are rather unmotivated to build friendships with their classmates, or to interact with them outside school. For instance, Studiehandledare 2 speaks about one particular student, and explains how they “can speak Swedish, the others are great, I mean her classmates, the teachers are great, and they’re all trying”, but they still choose to adopt a somewhat reserved position and interact as little as possible. Both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 have similar experiences and explain that the Ukrainian students whom they work with prefer other activities, such as reading, rather than interacting with their classmates. As a result, the class collective starts to mirror this reserved position:

He [the student] doesn't have those high expectations about social interactions. He likes to be alone and take it easy, and he's not so talkable. The others try to be inclusive, but it was mostly in the beginning. When they got to know him, they said “ok, he is like this”, then they could start to relax a bit, they didn't have to ask him if he needs help all the time, because they saw he doesn't have big interest in that. (Teacher 2)

Teacher 2 further explains that neither the Ukrainian student’s nor the class’s reaction was hostile; they interpreted it as another instance in which the classmates were receptive towards the Ukrainian student’s wishes.

The two teachers tried to find an explanation for the Ukrainian students’ disinterest in interacting with the class. Reaching a conclusion, Teacher 2 states “I know that he [the student] has many Ukrainian friends in the area that he lives. And he sees them in his spare time. He's not so interested to get Swedish friends actually”. Comparing Teacher 2’s statement with those of other participants, this situation is very common. Many Ukrainian students prefer to keep in touch with their Ukrainian friends from home or meet other Ukrainian children in a similar situation in Sweden. Both Studiehandledare 1 and Studiehandledare 2 use the example of the preparatory school in which Ukrainian children are placed prior to being enrolled in ordinary
schools. They explain that, if all students in a preparatory class are from the same country, Ukraine in this instance, the students perceive this as an opportunity to speak Ukrainian and make Ukrainian friends, and they are less receptive to start learning Swedish and getting accustomed to the Swedish culture. Thus, it can be observed how Ukrainian students prefer to build relationships with people they share similar values and background with. Here, the accent falls on language, ethnicity, cultural attributes and, possibly, similar experiences. This can be interpreted as Ukrainian students building a socially constructed “imagined community”, as named by Anderson (2006: 6); additionally, the shared values (Ukrainian language, culture, etc) represent the boundaries that Yuval-Davis describes as limiting the community (2006: 204). Distinctions between “us” and “them” are still drawn, but the main community of belonging is represented by the Ukrainian nationals, not by the dominant community (the Swedish school, the class collective). This occurrence is regarded as normal or natural by teachers, which argue that it obviously is more comfortable for the students to interact with people whom they share a similar culture with.

6.5 A belonging paradox

The last theme brings attention to the students’ and parents’ feelings regarding Sweden and Swedish schools, as observed by teachers and studiehandledare. On one hand, the students and their families express gratitude towards Swedish schools and claim that they feel safe in this environment. On the other hand, the interviewees point out the feelings of uncertainty of Ukrainian students and their families in regarding their future: while Sweden is seen as a safe place, almost all Ukrainian refugees express their wish to return to their country once the war is over. Their return, however, is affected by factors that they can not control.

6.5.1 Do Ukrainian students have higher desire to study in Sweden?

Throughout the interviews, parallels have been constantly drawn between the Ukrainian and Swedish education systems and schools. Thus, the participants spoke about what Ukrainian students and their families actually think of Swedish schools, and whether the students have more desire to study in Sweden than in Ukraine. Obviously, there is no general answer to these
questions, as families have different experiences in terms of reception and integration in Swedish schools. Taking into account the parents’ opinions, Teacher 1 states:

Education is very, very important for her [the mother], and she is very thankful for everything, every message, she is so thankful for everything we do for her daughter. She wants to make everything right, so she is trying her best to understand and make everything as correct as she can. (Teacher 1)

In this instance, the parent is perceived by Teacher 1 as being thankful towards the school. Moreover, it is stated that the mother is “trying her best to understand and make everything as correct as she can”; this fact can be interpreted as the mother’s effort to keep a close interaction with the school, Teacher 1 further explaining that they exchange phone calls and messages on a weekly basis with the mother, who asks about her child’s situation at school, homework, and grades. In the case of Teacher 2, they speak about the parent’s view on school as follows:

But the mother, I can talk to her. And she's very social and she's very happy about what we are doing here and grateful, I think. […] She trusts us. And I have talked to her many times about his [the student’s] education. And she just says to us “it's okay, he likes to be here, you don't have to teach him this or that, because he's not going to learn that”. So, she's fine that he has a safe place to go every day. (Teacher 2)

Teacher 1’s and Teacher 2’s claims are similar in essence: both mothers express trust and feelings of gratitude towards the school and school personnel. However, upon a closer look, the mothers’ reactions can be interpreted differently. Teacher 1 accentuates that the mother “wants to make everything right” and “is trying her best to understand and make everything as correct as she can” as a form of gratitude for the education that the school provides to her daughter. This amplified gratitude and the tendency to avoid any mistakes and to “make everything right” resonates with Mulinari’s and Neergaard’s (2019: 228) depiction of migrant respectability, or seeking to be seen as respectable by a dominant group. In contrast, the mother mentioned by Teacher 2 chooses to show her gratitude towards the school for providing a safe space for the student; she directly states that her main priority, in this instance, is not knowing that her son receives the finest education, but knowing that the student is safe, and has a safe place to go every day. Again, considering the theory that links the existence of a “safe place” to feelings of belonging, I interpret the second mother’s priority choice as a desire towards belonging.
As far as Ukrainian students are concerned, the participants expressed different points of view in terms of their desire to study more or continue their education in Sweden. For example, Studiehandledare 1 argues: “But still, I can notice that their desire to study is a lot bigger here than it was in Ukraine. Because here in Sweden, the lessons are more practical, it's less theory”. They further explain that Ukrainian children who start studying in Sweden perceive the change from an education system to another as an opportunity for a new beginning. The students with unsatisfactory grades in Ukraine, as Studiehandledare 1 adds, seem to strive to reach better results as school in Sweden. The positive image of Swedish schools is due to the change of atmosphere, from a stricter system to a more permissive one. However, this atmosphere can also be deceiving, as Studiehandledare 3 argues:

Some Ukrainian students are even a bit disappointed in Swedish schools. It is a culture shock for our Ukrainian students, they come here and they see that you can sit on the desks, you can chew gum, you can have your hat on, scream and shout, we don’t have this in Ukraine. In our country, teachers have more authority. So, here, some of our students, maybe they want to study more, and they try, but they can’t, because everybody plays, screams, and so on. Then, some of our students become quiet in the classroom. Because of language, first of all, but also because of the atmosphere. So that’s a negative side. (Studiehandledare 3)

In the case pictured by Studiehandledare 3, the class atmosphere is demotivating for the Ukrainian students who, at some point, refuse to participate, or are overshadowed by their peers. Being accustomed to a stricter system, Ukrainian students understand the permissiveness of Swedish schools as demotivating and overly stimulating. Thus, taking into account both statements, one can not determine whether Ukrainian students are more eager to study in Sweden. At the same time, according to Studiehandledare 3, the majority of Ukrainian students living in Sweden are still in contact with their schools and teachers from Ukraine, and they are enrolled in a form of “distance learning”. Often, students claim that continuing their studies in Sweden is unnecessary, since they will go back to their country once the war is over. This uncertainty will be explored further in the next sub-theme.

6.5.2 Homesickness and uncertainty towards the future

The Ukrainian refugee students’ and their families’ integration into the Swedish education system and society in general is highly altered by the uncertainty that they are facing. In this
particular case, the Ukrainian citizens who moved to Sweden because of the war are almost exclusively women and children. A common opinion expressed in the interviews is that the majority of Ukrainian refugees wish to go back to Ukraine at some point, after the war is over. Studiehandledare 2 makes a statement in this sense:

A lot of them just want to go back, their fathers are there, their husbands are there. 95%, if not more, is going back. I mean, they're not planning to stay here. […] They want to work and be a part of society, and that's the way to say thank you for Sweden that you took us, because we can pay taxes and be a part of your society as long as we have a war, and then we're going back. (Studiehandledare 2)

While the informant mentions the Ukrainian families’ desire to show their gratitude through paying taxes and becoming part of the Swedish society, the families are aware that this situation is temporary. Nevertheless, children feel this uncertainty in a different way than adults do, and this fact can be seen through their attitude towards school. In addition to what has been discussed before regarding Ukrainian students’ higher or lower desire to continue their studies in Sweden and get accustomed to the Swedish school system, Studiehandledare 3 further argues:

Our Ukrainian students, they are not like other asylum seekers, and I don’t mean those who come from war-affected countries, but who plan for many years, they know where they want to go, like “I come here because I want to stay here”. Our Ukrainians, no. From our Ukrainian students, maybe only 10%-15% will continue to stay in Sweden, but all others will want to go back. Because they had their lives in their country and suddenly they lost everything in a night and they had to come here and hide. (Studiehandledare 3)

Thus, many Ukrainian students do not feel the need to get accustomed to the Swedish culture, schools, and education system, because they rely on the possibility that they will be able to return home when the war is over. This fact can be interpreted as a belonging paradox: Ukrainian refugee families are, at this moment, unable to return home and must seek refuge in Sweden, among other countries. While the families do want to “be part of the society” and show their gratitude, their integration is hindered by the thought that, hopefully, they will return home soon. The belonging-paradox has its roots in issues rather concerning place-belongingness. Both places, Ukraine and Sweden, represent dimensions of place-belonging: Ukraine represents familiarity, memories, relatives, and the household, and Sweden represents safety and stability,
all of these factors being vital for generating the feeling of place-belongingness (Antonsich, 2010: 8-9). Studiehandledare 1 speaks about this issue and argues that “the hardest thing for the students and families in order to get to the school system is not knowing if they will stay in Sweden or come back to Ukraine. It's like trying to sit on two chairs at the same time”. The metaphor of “sitting on two chairs at the same time” is representative for this belonging issue that Ukrainian students and their families experience at the moment, being situated between Ukraine and Sweden.
Chapter 7: Concluding Discussion

The aim of my thesis was to explore the reception on Ukrainian refugee students in Swedish schools since 2022, when the Russian invasion of Ukraine started. For this, I have pursued interviews with two middle- and high-school teachers and three studiehandledare which provided me with meaningful insights and perspectives on the reception of Ukrainian students. The interpretations and analysis of the discussions with the interview participants were done in regard to the three research questions of this thesis as follows:

The first research question is dedicated to discussing the preparations done by Swedish schools for the reception of Ukrainian refugee students. The findings show substantial differences between the actions taken by Swedish schools, depending on their previous experience with migrant students and on their priorities in terms of economic matters. The schools’ preparations vary from guidings, aiming to familiarise the new students with their teachers and their classrooms, to immediately providing language support in the form of studiehandledning. As far as teachers and studiehandledare are concerned, the results show high levels of interaction between them and the Ukrainian students and their families, as well as a strong desire to offer help. Teachers, for instance, become important figures for Ukrainian refugee students. They claim to have reached strong relationships with both the Ukrainian students and their families while also involving in more personal issues, outside of the school matters. Additionally, the studiehandledare are seen as a bridge between the Ukrainian and the Swedish culture, and their contribution is considered very important for the reception and integration of Ukrainian students in the Swedish school system. Language barriers, together with cultural differences hinder the integration of Ukrainian students and, according to the participants, the studiehandledning is the most beneficial tool in this regard.

My second research question aims towards exploring the impact the reception of Ukrainian refugee students had on the classroom dynamics. As the findings highlight, many factors are responsible for the difficulties experienced by Ukrainian students, language barriers being the most mentioned one. The refugee students’ performance during classes is affected by the language factor, even though the content of the lectures might not be unfamiliar to them. The inability to express themselves pressures the Ukrainian students into adopting a defensive or hesitant attitude towards participating in the lectures and interacting with their peers. The
differences between the Swedish and the Ukrainian education system are also perceived in
different ways by the students. While the casual atmosphere characteristic to the Swedish
education system might be regarded as positive by some interview participants, others argue that
it might contribute to the lack of motivation some Ukrainian students express. As far as
interactions with the classes’ collectives are concerned, the refugee students were, in the majority
of cases, welcomed by their peers. As it has been stated, the “native” students showed great
interest in interacting with the Ukrainian students and in making the reception as welcoming as
possible. An interesting outcome is that the Ukrainian student do not seem very engaged with
their schoolmates, instead they focus on getting to know other Ukrainians in a similar situation as
them. This fact is an example of how an imagined community is created based on shared
characteristics, such as ethnicity, language, and culture.

Finally, the third research question explores the feelings of Ukrainian refugee students
and their families regarding the Swedish education system and their emotions of uncertainty in
terms of choosing between returning home or continue living in Sweden. As it was previously
stated in this paper, this last research question was answered through the prism of the opinions
and experiences of teachers and studiehandledare, and not by directly discussing with Ukrainian
refugee parents and students. The results show that the ways Ukrainian families experience
reception into Swedish schools differ significantly. While some Ukrainian students are thought to
have a higher desire to study in Sweden, many others experience lack of motivation while
waiting to return to their school in Ukraine. However, as mentioned in the interviews, the
temporary safety that Sweden and Swedish schools offer to Ukrainian students is acclaimed by
parents, who find themselves in a position of trying to show their gratitude. At the same time,
according to the participants, the majority of Ukrainian refugee families wish to return home once
the war is over, but, while they live in Sweden, they must get accustomed to the Swedish system
and society. Thus, as stated above, a belonging paradox is formed, and their lives and identities
are continuously pushed between Ukraine and Sweden.
7.1 Limitations and suggestions for further research

In the following paragraphs, I intend to mention and explain the limitation of my study. Additionally, I present certain aspects that might be taken into consideration for further research on the topic.

The first limiting aspect that I have experienced is the lack of previous studies and information strictly about the reception of Ukrainian refugee students into the Swedish education system. The Russian invasion and the war taking place alongside the Ukrainian borders is an actual, new phenomenon that started over one year ago. Moreover, this instance was the first time in which the Temporary Protection Directive was used. Thus, I was expecting a very limited amount of information about my topic. However, I also took into consideration the potential studies which might have been done about the situation of Ukrainian migrant families, as there were other instances in the past in which Ukrainian citizens were forced to leave their country (for example, the invasion and annexation of Crimea). Indeed, studies have been done, but with different topic and aims, focusing on, for instance, mental health, and not the integration in certain education systems. One of my solutions was focusing on studies about interactions between migrant families and schools in general, and then comparing the previous research findings to the results from the interviews which I have pursued. Another solution was constantly changing my aim and research questions in concordance with the results and the findings from the interviews and previous studies.

Another limiting aspect of this thesis is the small number of interview participants. The period of thesis writing coincided with the national examination period for many schools in Sweden, thus, many teachers were not available for interviews. Even though my initial aim was to focus on interviewing teachers, I began to consider interviewing studiehandledare, since their role in the reception of Ukrainian students is of high importance. Additionally, no Ukrainian refugee families and students were interviewed; thus, the information regarding the Ukrainian refugees’ opinions and perceptions of Swedish schools were gathered through interviewing teachers and studiehandledare. In this sense, I acknowledge that the results of this study would be much different and more complex if the data had been gathered directly from interviews with Ukrainian refugees. Considering having a very limited number of participants, I made sure that my interview guides were satisfactory, in order to get as much useful information as possible.
from my informants. Choosing a semi-structured interview approach and using open-ended questions was also useful for collecting data, since I was able to spontaneously change, remove, or replace my questions depending on the direction of the discussion. Another limiting aspect in terms of interviews and participants is the language barrier. Two of my informants did not feel comfortable speaking English and preferred the interviews to be conducted in Russian or Swedish. In this case, requesting the help of a third person to take the role of the interpreter was necessary. Additionally, I made sure to allocate more time for the interviews in which an interpreter was present.

Thus, I acknowledge that the limitations mentioned above influence the results of my thesis. However, these limitations are also an invitation for further research. The reception of Ukrainian refugee students in Swedish schools is a new and on-going process, and many informants were hesitant to criticise or suggest potential ways in which the reception process could be improved. Hence, it would be interesting to pursue a similar study in the future, when the reception takes a more defined shape. Additionally, since the number of my interview participants is small, the findings and results from my interviews are, of course, not representative for all schools and teachers in Sweden. Therefore, it would be interesting to pursue a similar study, but considering a wider selection of schools, from different regions in Sweden, and a higher number of interviews with school personnel. It is also of very high importance that the voices of Ukrainian refugee families and students are heard; thus, a potential future study on the reception of Ukrainian refugees into Swedish schools would benefit highly from directly interviewing the refugees. The activation of the Temporary Protection Directive represents another aspect that should be taken into consideration, as it alters the experiences of Ukrainian families in Sweden and the overall reception of Ukrainian refugees; thus, an idea for further research might also be pursuing a similar study after the deactivation of the Temporary Protection Directive. Having this in mind, future research can be pursued in different directions in order to expand the scope of this study.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Consent form

Consent for participation in research interview

Dear participant,

This document contains information about what your participation in this research involves, as well as your rights as interview participant. This interview is conducted as part of a Master’s thesis for the Ethnic and Migration Studies Master’s Programme at Linköping University. The paper focuses on the reception of Ukrainian refugee families in Swedish schools and on the interactions and communication between teachers and Ukrainian families.

The information obtained from this interview will be used as a resource only in this paper. This interview will be audio recorded. The recording will not be made public and will only be heard by the interviewer. The interview will be transcribed in written form, which might be shared with the interviewer’s supervisor (Olav Nygård) for feedback. Regarding confidentiality matters, the participant’s name will never be mentioned in the transcription or in the final paper, and the participant’s identity will always remain anonymous. After the paper is finished, all the material (audio and written) gathered from the interview will be deleted. In the end, the paper will be uploaded online, to Linköping University’s database.

During the interview, the interviewer will ask you a series of questions and will take notes while you answer. Your participation is always voluntary, and you can always refuse to answer one or more questions or stop the interview at any time. Additionally, feel free to ask questions about the interview, the interviewer, and the research at any time.

Thank you for your participation!

Date

Signature of the participant

Date

Signature of the interviewer
Appendix 2: Interview guide (teachers)

~ Introduction:

- **Presenting myself:** My name is Miruna Ardeleanu and I am a student at Linköping University, in the Ethnic and Migration Studies Master’s Programme. I am conducting this interview as part of my research for my master’s thesis.

- **Brief description of the study (key information):** I am interested in the reception of Ukrainian refugee families in Swedish schools, especially in the interactions and communication between teachers and the families. Therefore, your contribution as a [teacher/studiehandledare] is very important to my study.

- **Describe the participant’s rights (confidentiality, right to withdraw, consent):** Firstly, I would like to ask if you agree to this interview being recorded. The recording will not be heard by anyone else and will be deleted after I transcribe the interview. The transcription will be used in my paper and might be shared with my supervisor for feedback. In order to protect your confidentiality, your name will not be mentioned anywhere, and nobody will be able to identify you by the transcription or the final paper. At the end, the paper will be uploaded online, to Linköping University’s database. During the interview, I will ask you a series of questions related to your work, and I also take some notes while you answer. If you do not feel comfortable, you can choose not to answer one or more questions, or we can stop the interview at any point. Also, you can always ask me more questions about the interview, or about me and my research. If you do not have any questions right now, I will start the recording. You must give your consent on tape too, so I will ask you again: Do you give your consent to participate in this interview?

~ Opening questions:

1. You are a [studievägledare/teacher/other]. Can you tell me a bit about what you do?
2. How long have you been doing this?
3. What are the most important aspects of your work?
~ Teacher-parent questions:

1. As a teacher, how much interaction do you have with the families of your Ukrainian students?
   a. Could you elaborate on what these interactions are like for you?

2. What did the school do for the reception of Ukrainian families?
   a. Did you receive any resources / training about the Ukrainian refugee families’ situation?

3. Based on your experiences, how do Ukrainian parents approach their children's education?

4. How do you / the school make sure that Ukrainian parents are kept informed about their children’s progress in school, and other administrative matters?

5. How do you address any concerns or questions that Ukrainian parents may have about the Swedish school system or education system in general?

6. How do you communicate with Ukrainian parents? What are some of your strategies?

7. Have there been any challenges when communicating with Ukrainian parents? If so which?

8. What do you think the school could do better to support communication with Ukrainian parents and ensure that they feel included in their child’s education?

~ Teacher-student questions:

9. What were your expectations when you started working with Ukrainian students/pupils? (Do you know what the school’s expectations were?)

10. What is your experience working and interacting with Ukrainian students so far?

11. From your experience, what does the integration of Ukrainian students in your school look like so far? Think of, for example, the performance in class, achievements, grades, etc)

12. In your opinion, has the classroom dynamics changed by the reception of Ukrainian students? If so, in what ways? (connections between students)

13. Is there anything that you think the school could do better to support Ukrainian refugee students?
~ Closing questions:

14. We talked a bit about [summary of some key points]. Is that a fair summary? Is there anything you would like to add?
15. Thank you so much for your time!
Appendix 3: Interview guide (studiehandledare)

~ Introduction:

- **Presenting myself**: My name is Miruna Ardeleanu and I am a student at Linköping University, in the Ethnic and Migration Studies Master’s Programme. I am conducting this interview as part of my research for my master’s thesis.

- **Brief description of the study** (key information): I am interested in the reception of Ukrainian refugee families in Swedish schools, especially in the interactions and communication between teachers and the families. Therefore, your contribution as a [teacher/studiehandledare] is very important to my study.

- **Describe the participant’s rights** (confidentiality, right to withdraw, consent): Firstly, I would like to ask if you agree to this interview being recorded. The recording will not be heard by anyone else and will be deleted after I transcribe the interview. The transcription will be used in my paper and might be shared with my supervisor for feedback. In order to protect your confidentiality, your name will not be mentioned anywhere, and nobody will be able to identify you by the transcription or the final paper. At the end, the paper will be uploaded online, to Linköping University’s database. During the interview, I will ask you a series of questions related to your work, and I also take some notes while you answer. If you do not feel comfortable, you can choose not to answer one or more questions, or we can stop the interview at any point. Also, you can always ask me more questions about the interview, or about me and my research. If you do not have any questions right now, I will start the recording. You must give your consent on tape too, so I will ask you again: Do you give your consent to participate in this interview?

~ Opening questions:

4. You are a [studievägledare/teacher/other]. Can you tell me a bit about what you do?

5. How long have you been doing this?

6. What are the most important aspects of your work?
~ Main Questions:

1. As a studiehandledare, how much interaction do you have with Ukrainian students at the moment?
   a. Could you elaborate on what these interactions are like for you?
2. In your opinion, what does the reception of Ukrainian students in Swedish schools look like so far?
3. From your observations, what were the schools’/teachers’ general expectations at the moment Ukrainian students were enrolled?
4. Could you explain in what instances your services are requested?
   a. Do your services revolve strictly around the student, or do they extend towards managing the relation between the school/teachers and parents?
5. In your opinion, what does the communication between teachers and Ukrainian students / teachers and Ukrainian families look like right now?
6. What are your strategies for managing communication between teachers and students/teachers and families?
7. Have you ever noticed any hesitation from Ukrainian students to engage with the school, classroom, or teachers? If so, how did you manage this situation?
8. From your experience, what does the integration of Ukrainian students in Swedish schools look like so far? Think of, for example, the performance in class, achievements, grades, and classroom dynamics.
9. Is there anything that you think schools could do better to support Ukrainian students, or to interact better with them and their families?

~ Closing questions:

10. We talked a bit about [summary of some key points]. Is that a fair summary? Is there anything you would like to add?
11. Thank you so much for your time!
# Appendix 4: Coding scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swedish schools: preparing for the reception of Ukrainian refugee students</td>
<td>a) Help received by Ukrainian students from Swedish schools</td>
<td>a) - different schools and different levels of experiences - special accommodation measures taken by schools - no help from schools and unwelcomed students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Do teachers receive support?</td>
<td>b) – teachers’ expectations - kartläggnings - little support from schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of teachers in facilitating Ukrainian refugees’ reception in Swedish schools</td>
<td>a) Interactions between teachers and students</td>
<td>a) – teachers have the desire to help refugee families more - teachers are important people for refugee students - teachers put in effort to accommodate Ukrainian students - trust and close relationship between students and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Interactions between teachers and parents</td>
<td>b) - contact between teachers and mothers - close relationship between teachers and mothers - language of communication - miscommunication instances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studiehandledning as a bridge between Swedish schools and Ukrainian students</td>
<td></td>
<td>- the importance of studiehandledning - high interaction between studiehandledare and students - help provided apart from language - co-working with teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom dynamics</td>
<td>a) Two different education systems</td>
<td>a) – differences in education levels: Ukraine and Sweden - difficulties with the subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Welcoming and difficult interactions</td>
<td>b) – language barriers - welcoming classmates - Ukrainian students not interested in interacting with the class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


| A belonging paradox | a) Do Ukrainian students have higher desire to study in Sweden? | a) – trustful and thankful parents
- a safe place
- higher desire to study
- lack of motivation

b) Homesickness and uncertainty towards the future | b) – showing gratitude to Sweden
- homesickness
- uncertainty |