School Social Work in Immigrant-Dense Areas of Amadora, Portugal and Gothenburg, Sweden: Challenges of Students from Immigrant Backgrounds and Perspectives of Social Work Practice

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September, 2021

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Abstract

The schools in immigrant-dense areas attended by students from immigrant backgrounds are vulnerable to educational inequality and further social exclusion. This research aims to discover the perspectives of school social workers towards the challenges of students and their social work practice. The research opted for Amadora, Portugal, and Gothenburg, Sweden, as comparative case studies to enrich understanding of school social work in predominated immigrant areas in the European context. The study applied a qualitative-comparative case study methodological approach, semi-structured interview for data collection, thematic and comparative methods for analysis.

The educational challenges of students in schools reported by respondents range from economic, language, family, academic, emotional well-being, and residential mobility aspects. In terms of professional perspectives, most social workers do not stigmatize the immigrant background to determine students' success in school integration. Social work is not practiced differently based on the backgrounds of students from the professional perspective. There are more similarities than differences in many aspects between Amadora and Gothenburg. Still, the differences between the two appeared from a different structure, resource, and operation of the social work profession in each country.

Keywords: school social work, children of immigrants, school segregation, integration, education

Resumo

As escolas em áreas de grande concentração de imigrantes frequentadas por estudantes de origem imigrante são vulneráveis à desigualdade educacional e a uma maior exclusão social. Esta investigação visou conhecer as perspetivas dos assistentes sociais escolares em relação aos desafios apresentados pelos estudantes e à sua prática de trabalho social. A investigação elegeu a Amadora, Portugal, e Gotemburgo, Suécia, como estudos de caso comparativos para enriquecer a compreensão do trabalho social escolar em áreas de residência da população imigrante no contexto europeu. O estudo aplicou uma abordagem metodológica de estudo de caso qualitativo-comparativo, entrevistas semi-estruturadas para a recolha de dados, e análise de conteúdo temática e comparativa.

Os desafios educacionais dos estudantes nas escolas, relatados pelos assistentes sociais entrevistados, incluem aspectos económicos, linguísticos, familiares, académicos, de bem-estar emocional, e de movimento residencial. Em termos de perspectivas profissionais, a maioria dos assistentes sociais não estigmatizam a origem dos imigrantes para determinar o sucesso dos estudantes na integração escolar. O trabalho social não é praticado de forma diferente com base no *background* dos estudantes do ponto de vista profissional. Há mais semelhanças do que diferenças em muitos aspetos entre Amadora e Gothenburg. Ainda assim, as diferenças entre os dois surgem das diferentes estruturas, recursos e funcionamento da profissão de assistente social em cada país.

Palavras chave: Serviço social escolar; descendentes de imigrantes, segregação escolar; integração; educação

Acknowledgement

This dissertation became a reality with the kind support of many individuals which I would like to extend my gratitude to all of them.

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere thanks to my wonderful supervisor, Prof. Sandra Mateus, for encouraging me to pursue my pure interest and intention to do this research topic, professional guidance, assistance, keen advice, kindness, and understanding throughout my thesis journey.

I am highly indebted to all my interviewees for sharing your valuable time and willingness to participate in my research remotely, including your contribution to sharpening my educational interest. I am committed to utilizing this knowledge to benefit people and society whenever possible.

I am very thankful to Mengqi Chen, my beloved friend from the Mfamily program, for sharing very useful important advice regarding information and the data collection process in Gothenburg.

I also would like to thank Prof. Joana Azevedo, Prof. Evelyn Khoo, all professors and coordinators that I have been in contact with for responding to inquiries, comments, and information that took part in my thesis completion.

I am grateful to the European Union - Erasmus Mundus program for funding my education and providing this life-changing opportunity, including ISCTE-IUL, University of Gothenburg, University of Stavanger, and Makerere University, for contribution in this academic journey.

Many thanks to my family that always has been there for me. And my MFamily colleagues for companying in this journey amid the pandemic academic year.

Lastly, thank invisible hands for facilitating possibilities and my learning process until the ending of my thesis journey.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background

Alike general urban, several European cities experience segregation of privileged and disadvantaged living areas influenced by socioeconomic characteristics of the population. The immigrant population tends to encounter socio-economic hardships and otherness perceptions in the society that motivate social marginalization. They tend to have low-paid jobs and be excluded in vulnerable areas with deprived housings and high criminality (Khan et al., 2015). The dense immigrant population in these specific areas formed up the immigrant communities. The communities can impact people's lives for generations and newcomers.

Education is a strong driver of social mobility. However, residential segregation also inevitably leads to school segregation. Schools in predominated immigrant areas have most children from immigrant backgrounds in neighborhoods attended. These marginalized schools contain a high proportion of foreign-born students. The schools are disadvantaged due to minimal resources and a lack of support for teachers. These affect the inequality of education and academic performance of children (The Council of Europe; Commissioner for Human Rights, 2017). These reasons portrayed that schools in immigrant-dense communities appear to be demanding and challenging. In addition to the pre-existing condition of immigrant students, such as the lack of language skills, pre-educational qualifications, and social resources, that cause them educational difficulties in the first place.

Many school professionals are working in different aspects to respond to the benefits of students. Social workers are one of them. They aim to intervene and support to maintain successful education for students. Several reviews from the literature present that the ecological perspective is the equipment of social workers. It allows them to connect with school, family, and community in their interventions. However, social work is contextualized in different areas of practice. Therefore, it drives the interest in how social work practice is in immigrant-dense schools. What are the challenges of students in this context of schools and how social workers respond to those challenges? And if any different perspectives of social workers working in the areas will contribute to social work knowledge in working with students from immigrant backgrounds, especially in the European context.

This research opted for Portugal and Sweden as a comparative study field to represent examples of school social work in the European context, using Amadora and Gothenburg as case studies. These two locations similarly present the socio-economic and population segregation of the cities. Amadora is on the outskirt of Lisbon. It is well-known for "the main region of immigration in Portugal." The majority group of immigrants was from the former Portuguese colonies, namely Cape Verde, Angola, Guinea-Bissau. The immigration trend was intensified after 1974. The recent migration also brings other scattered groups of immigrants, namely Brazilians, Eastern Europeans, and other African immigrants (URBACT, 2019).

On the other side, Gothenburg is the second-largest city in Sweden. Ethnic heterogeneity presents in some immigrant-dense suburban districts of Gothenburg. In 2016, the population with a foreign background in Gothenburg was 33% (Göteborgsbladet, 2016). This population group is dense in specific locations, namely Hjällbo, Gårdsten, Bergsjön, and Biskopsgården. The areas contain most populations with non-European backgrounds and are considered vulnerable communities, facing social stigmatization and exclusion (Uio Department of Sociology and Human Geography, 2010).

The two comparative fields have a similar context. Both territories present existing predominant areas of immigrants, school segregation phenomena, including the existence of the school social work professionals, and the implementation of supportive programs. However, several divergences across these two contexts will enrich the new learning from the study. Both cases are different in the background of immigration, social welfare and policy, educational system, resources, and the operation of the school social work profession. These pre-similarities and differences among the case studies will benefit extensive comparative exploration in school social work perspectives in immigrant-dense areas in the European context.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The research aims to explore and compare school social work perspectives in immigrant-dense areas of Amadora, Portugal and Gothenburg, Sweden.

There are the following specific objectives.

> - Explore the definitions of the immigrant background and characteristics of immigrant-dense schools in both contexts.

- Explore challenges of students from immigrant backgrounds of both contexts based on social workers' perspectives.
- Explore and explain school social work intervention based on the ecological systems theory model (micro, meso, macro).
- Discuss professional perspectives regarding work with students from immigrant backgrounds and the contribution of social work in schools.
- Discuss the similarities and differences of school social work of two contexts regarding all mentioned specific objectives.

1.3 Research Questions

To achieve the purpose of this research, there are the following research questions.

1) What are the educational challenges of pupils from immigrant backgrounds?
2) How does social work play a role in responding to those challenges in the context of immigrant-dense schools of Amadora, Portugal, and Gothenburg, Sweden?
3) What are the similarities and differences between the two contexts?

1.4 Structure of the study

This research comprises five chapters that have been organized to respond to the objective of the study, which is to explore school social work in immigrant-dense areas of Amadora, Portugal, and Gothenburg, Sweden in specific aspects: challenges of students from immigrant backgrounds and perspectives of social work practice.

The report starts with chapter one which presents the introduction of the research, background, purpose of the study, and research questions; chapter two elaborates relevant literature reviews and discussions; chapter three discusses research methodological approach, methods of data collection and analysis, including the methodological limitation; chapter four presents all findings related to the research questions and specific objectives. And the last chapter presents the summary and conclusion reflecting on the outcome of this research.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter will discuss the relevant literature reviews, to find out the existing knowledge and literature gaps to discover in this research. This literature review comprises several discussing topics. The structure of this section begins with migration and social exclusion, pupils from immigrant backgrounds and challenges, school social work role and practice, locations overview between Amadora, Portugal and Gothenburg, Sweden, educational system reviews, and ecological systems theory discussion.

2.1 Social-educational exclusion

This research interest was motivated by the social exclusion problem of the immigrant population living in the cities and how the condition impacts the education of children population in the areas. Therefore, the literature reviews regarding social exclusion, migration, and education are beneficial for the research.

2.1.1 Defining social exclusion

The literature by Khan et al. (2015) summarized comprehensively five elements of social exclusion, forms, and impacts of exclusion. There are key elements of social exclusion to concern. First, social exclusion is a contested term depending on what aspects people are excluded from. Second, social exclusion is multidimensional. Third, social exclusion is associated with inequality between groups of people. Fourth, social exclusion is socially constructed. Last, social exclusion is a process involving the denial of resources, services, right to participate equally in economic, social, cultural, political arenas by actors. Exclusion indicators appear through outputs of exclusion, such as low income, inaccessible services, and inequalities.

These elements may benefit the study in explaining how the challenges of students from immigrant backgrounds lead to social exclusion. According to Khan et al. (2015), there are several forms of exclusion. First, *the political exclusion* is the denial to access citizenship rights and equal opportunities. Second, *economic exclusion* is inaccessibility to the labor market and assets. For example, being unemployed or employed in the informal or underground sectors. This form of exclusion can be an outcome of inequalities in other aspects, such as accessing resources, education, and public services. Third, *social exclusion* is discrimination based on social attributes

(e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, social status and identity, religion, etc.). It can reduce or limit social service accessibility. Last, *Cultural exclusion* relies on the acceptance and respect within the society towards values, beliefs, norms, and ways of living from diverse cultures.

To conclude the review of the concept based on Khan et al. (2015), social exclusion is associated with more than one dimension of exclusion that reinforces each other. For example, economic exclusion may have a linkage with educational exclusion. Social exclusion, therefore, is a complicated problem that cannot be tackled by any single dimension. Social exclusion has a variety of impacts, such as poor health and education, income inequality, poverty, denied access to opportunity, violence, insecurity, and vulnerable subjective wellbeing. This knowledge is advantageous for further findings of this research.

2.1.2 Migration and social exclusion

According to the previous studies, poverty is one of the factors that motivate people to migrate. Likewise, migration can cause social exclusion as it often involves socio-economic hardships from moving to a new place. Khan et al. (2015) stated that immigrants face challenges in feeling insecure, having low-paid jobs, being marginalized in vulnerable areas with deprived housings, and high criminality. The host society and policy can also either intensify the challenges or coping strategies of immigrant populations. The otherness perception based on religion, ethnicity, and cultures from the host society can be a source of conflict, mistrust, and resentment. Immigrant-discriminated policy or failure in assistance and support can lead to the structural exclusion that causes a transition to poor education, unemployment, vulnerability to crime, and community tensions.

Many studies tend to present poverty as the top factor of social exclusion. Therefore, it is reluctant to address that social exclusion is limited to children of migrant parents. In other words, any population with a socio-economically disadvantaged background can also face this social exclusion. For example, the lower education and employment status of parents also influence the social exclusion of their children. However, being children of migrant parents tends to intensify the consequences due to some specific conditions of migrant households. For instance, a language barrier can limit parents' access to well-paid jobs. Deprived accommodation, inadequate family income, low access to healthcare, and early childhood education are visible challenges of children of migrant parents (Smolinski & Morabito, 2014).

Smolinski & Morabito (2014) also found that newly arrived migrant children tend to live temporarily in inadequate housing. Poverty highly represents in refugees and asylum seekers because of unemployment and the lack of a supportive system. Growing up disadvantaged without support leads to the cycle of poverty and social exclusion transmitting to generations.

Many studies dominantly mentioned the social exclusion of newly arrived immigrants. But a variety of migrant categories and challenges they face should be in consideration. For instance, the situation of children of migrant parents or families who grow up in the new country, or the so-called second generation, is controversial. This group has a variation. The varied migrant background characteristics, social class, and culture of their families influence the social exclusion phenomenon differently. Schneider (2016) provided some interesting examples. Young women who grow up in families with traditional patriarchal attitudes may pursue a different pathway because of access to higher education. The impact could be marriage postponing, gaining professional career opportunities, attitudes transformation, etc. The example of Schneider (2016) also reflected that children of non-immigrant working-class families could also face the same challenges in education and job opportunity as immigrant workers. The migrant background is not the only factor to dictate social exclusion. So, intersectional consideration is necessary to comprehend social exclusion.

2.1.3 Educational exclusion and inclusion

One aspect of social exclusion that this research focuses on is educational exclusion. As mentioned earlier, educational exclusion can be a cause and effect to other types of social exclusion. Educational exclusion connects with economic, social, and cultural aspects, for instance, poverty, ethnic background, language, disability, etc. This research is keen on exploring how living in the excluded immigrant areas affects the educational exclusion of students.

UNESCO (2016) presented many forms of educational exclusion as follows.

1. *Exclusion from having the life prospects needed for learning*: living under inadequate conditions that affect health and well-being, in turn, impact the learning capacity. For example, deprived housing, lack of proper food, clothes, and safety.

2. *Exclusion from entry into a school or an educational program*: being incapable of tuition fee payment, being criterial illegible for school entry, and inadmissible way of dressing to school.

3. *Exclusion from regular and continuing participation in school or an educational program:* being unable to continuously pay and attend school due to life conditions, such as far distance to school, illness, injuries, and closed school.

4. *Exclusion from meaningful learning experiences:* teaching and learning process that is not corresponding to the learning needs and styles of the learners, incomprehensible language and learning materials of instruction, negative school experiences (e.g., bullying, discrimination, prejudice, and violence).

5. *Exclusion from recognition of learning acquired*: learning in a non-formal, uncertified, or unrecognized program that is inapplicable for admission to further educational opportunities.

6. *Exclusion from contributing the learning acquired to the development of community and society:* learning in the school or program is considered a low value for society. As a result, the learning limits work opportunities and leads to less value and acceptance perception based on the learning qualification.

Forms of educational exclusion presented above show that the condition of students' life can also impact their education, such as poverty, language skill, attending unrecognized school, health, and mental well-being problems.

Testa (2013) stated that school performance strongly associates with student background. Social-economic-cultural resources, choices, and capacity of the family to mobilize disadvantaged social class indicates whether children will achieve advantaged future life opportunity through family support in schooling. This pattern is the key to unequal social stratification reproduction among students from different family backgrounds.

One of the ways to promote social inclusion is to promote educational inclusion. According to Muijs et al. (2007), social inclusion has a broad definition. It could mean practices, activities, mechanisms that promote socio-economic-cultural integration, access, or participation in the mainstream society, including acceptance and recognition of individuals or groups. Developing education for all children regardless of their backgrounds is one of the keys to social inclusion by reducing barriers and engaging them in mainstream life participation.

School is a crucial setting in which immigrant children learn to develop social interactions and integration into the host society (Oxman-Martinez & Choi, 2014). Improving education for all children to achieve social inclusion occurs on many levels. Testa (2013) mentioned that schools

should recognize the structural inequality which negatively impacts education, social inclusion, and further life chances of pupils. Schools can create supportive environments and promote school engagement and achievement through programs and practices. Therefore, the educational exclusion can move to educational inclusion, starting from the school environment in which social workers are also a part of the study context.

2.2 Pupils with immigrant backgrounds

Reviewing the concept of the immigrant background is important for the basis of this research. This part will discuss the previous study about the challenges of students from immigrant backgrounds and immigrant-dense schools to identify the gap for this study.

2.2.1 Defining the immigrant background

According to the literature, the immigrant background has a wide range of definitions depending on the context of usage. In a rigid term, especially for the empirical study, the measurement of concept is based on the birth countries of individuals or their parents (Schneider, 2016). The "immigrant background" refers to descendants with the migration history of themselves or their parents involved, so-called "first-generation" and "second-generation" immigrants. First-generation immigrants were born outside the country and whose parents were also born abroad. Second-generation immigrants were born inside the country, but both parents were born or moved from another country (Hippe & Jakubowski, 2018).

The "foreign background" is another term that has a similar definition. According to statistics Sweden (2019), the birth origin of parents defines the foreign background. Persons with a foreign background are born abroad or born in the destination country with both foreign-born parents. Persons with a native background are born inside the country with two native-born parents or at least one native-born parent and another foreign-born parent.

However, according to Schneider (2016), the terms "migration background" and "second generation" are subject to political and academic criticism. The concept of second-generation immigrants implies that native-born citizens who are offspring of immigrants are unintegrated and undifferentiated from the background of parents regardless of their identity establishment in the society they grew up in. The migration background concept could be problematic in distinguishing into categories. For example, how should we classify the first or second generation of a child who

migrated with their parents at a very young age and grew up in the country of migration? Therefore, the migration background term can be less rigid in qualitative research and upon the perception of migration and definition at the national level (Schneider, 2016). This research will consider earlier criticism by acknowledging the wider concept of the immigrant background and open for exploration from the perception of research participants.

2.2.2 Educational challenges of pupils with immigrant backgrounds

According to the literature reviews, the birth origins of children have no direct cause-and-effect relation to educational challenges. In other words, where they are from is not an indicator of disadvantage in education. As mentioned earlier, "immigrant background" is a broad concept. There are various kinds of immigrant backgrounds, such as newcomers, refugees, and so-called second-generation immigrants. The intersectional backgrounds, such as social status, continents of origin, white or non-white, reasons of migration, religions, cultural and educational backgrounds, network, and so on, cause more complication to specify or generalize the similar encountered hardships. Therefore, mindful conceptualizing the challenges of children with immigrant backgrounds in a holistic approach is to consider many factors, pinpoint how one factor affects another, and how it contributes to their educational challenges.

However, children with immigrant backgrounds are often considered as one of the vulnerable groups to be acknowledged and supported for greater educational integration according to educational policy. Several pieces of literature pointed out various factors associated with migrant backgrounds that cause disadvantages or put them at risk of social-educational exclusion. The factor examples are socio-economic status, legal status, languages, social resources, war, discrimination, family, and cultural background, etc.

Newcomer children often face challenges in school and social adjustment. They are between the differences in education, cultural values, languages of the original and host countries (Oxman-Martinez & Choi, 2014). Newly arrived immigrant children experience several educational disadvantages, such as local language skills and pre-educational qualifications, compared to native-born children. Immigrant children are usually present in marginalized schools with a high proportion of foreign-born children. These schools are disadvantaged due to minimal resources and lack of support for teachers (The Council of Europe; Commissioner for Human Rights, 2017).

Lower quality of education impacts on academic performance of immigrant students. Foreign-born children have higher early leaving and a lower rate of upper secondary education attainment than native-born students. These circumstances later limit their access to university and future job opportunities (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019). However, early school leaving experience is not limited to immigrant status. The situation could apply to any pupils from a low socio-economic background, in which being an immigrant intensifies the drawback condition (Hippe & Jakubowski, 2018).

Social resources also determine the educational success of immigrant children. Knowledge about the educational system, cultural codes, access to networks, a sense of belonging, good relationships with teachers and peers support their school integration and learning performance (Raabe, 2018; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019). The former study about social exclusion among peers shows that students with immigrant backgrounds tend to experience rejection than students of the majority. The first-generation non-European immigrant youth group is the most at risk of isolation. The density or proportion of students with immigrant backgrounds in classrooms also contributes to social exclusion and victimization experiences. The immigrant-sparse classrooms can reinforce more exclusion of pupils with immigrant backgrounds than the immigrant-dense classrooms (Plenty & Jonsson, 2016).

According to OECD (2016), Sweden has 17% of immigrant students in the country, which is higher than Portugal with 7% of immigrant students. Both Portugal and Sweden have a gap in expected non-early school leaving between natives and students with immigrant backgrounds. Second-generation immigrant students of both countries are more likely to maintain in schools than first-generation immigrant students when comparing with native pupils (Hippe & Jakubowski, 2018). This evidence shows that students from different backgrounds of origin (natives, second-generation, and first-generation immigrants) more likely to encounter disparate degrees of challenges. However, the studies related to the educational challenges of descendants of immigrants are still minimal compared to another group called immigrant children.

2.2.3 Immigrant-dense schools

It is essential to review some studies related to immigrant-dense schools as a focal unit of this research. According to the literature, the immigrant-dense schools reflected on school segregation phenomena influenced by residential segregation and parents' school choice.

In the context of Sweden, Bunar (2009) stated that the multicultural urban schools where more ethnic minorities attended have attached "bad" symbolic status and inferior reputation in academic achievement. It affects the trust of parents towards the quality of education and school. Therefore, this stated reason can influence the decision of parents. School segregation leads to a negative outcome, especially for the vulnerable schools. Yang & Gustafsson (2016) mentioned that educational inequality and exclusion are the apparent outcomes of school segregation. There are differences among these schools in school culture, pedagogical practices, numbers of competent teachers, and resource allocation. As a result, children of immigrants tend to be marginalized in low-quality schools (Borgna & Contini, 2014). And the cumulative effect of being in layers of disadvantaged circumstances is that they tend to have poor performance in educational achievement (Pisa, 2001 as cited in Testa, 2013). Therefore, attending low-quality schools affect the academic performance of children with immigrant backgrounds which are majorly present in these schools.

2.3 School social work

School social work for this research interest refers to social work that operates in a school setting. According to the literature reviews, the dominant knowledge found about school social work definition, roles, and skills are from the American and Australian contexts rather than the European context. The discussion regarding social work in schools is as follows.

2.3.1 School social work and definitions

According to Özbesler & Duyan (2009), schools play essential roles in the socialization and bio-psychosocial development of individuals to be qualified in society. Diverse life circumstances and socio-economic backgrounds consequence on students' school performance, development, and social relations. Educational institutions and families own the responsibility to handle challenges, guide and protect students for their well-being to supports their educational achievement. Therefore, the collaboration between schools and families and the roles of multidisciplinary professionals in school settings are necessary.

According to the universal definition of social work by the International Federation of Social Workers, social work is a practice-based profession and discipline that centrally promotes social change and development, social cohesion, empowerment, social justice, human rights, and respect

for diversities. Social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing (ISFW, 2014). Social work responds to a variety of problems and takes place in different settings in society. School is one of the settings in which social work amplifies.

The term "school social work" refers to social work in school settings. Few associations defined the term depending on the national context of usage. School Social Work Association of America (2012) described that

> *"School social work is a specialized area of practice within the broad field of the social work profession. School social workers bring unique knowledge and skills to the school system and the student services team. School social workers…professionals who can assist with mental health concerns, behavioral concerns, positive behavioral support, academic, and classroom support, consultation with teachers, parents, and administrators as well as provide individual and group counseling/therapy."*

Australian Association of Social Workers (2008) defined that

> *"School social work role is unique in its focus on the student in the school environment in order to facilitate successful learning outcomes through the relief of distress and removal of barriers or inequalities…all students are entitled to a quality educational environment which promotes the total development of the child – intellectual, physical, social, creative, emotional…school social workers must have an ability to work with individuals, groups, and communities at the interface between the student, school organization and curriculum, peers, family, neighborhood and wider society."*

The literature of Özbesler & Duyan (2009) and Lakshmi (2014) summarized comprehensively the definition of school social work. It is a social work practice area that operates in schools. The mission is to provide and utilize services to respond to their needs and solve students' problems from bio-psychosocial developmental stages, family, and life conditions, to maintain their educational activities. School social work often involves support to students in vulnerable and risk conditions, such as school dismissal, migrant children, students in transition between schools, domestic violence, special needs, etc. School social workers usually collaborate with multiple professionals in schools to maintain students in school and support families.

Another unique characteristic of school social work is the perspective and connection with the environment of students from peers, family, school, and community. However, the roles of school social workers vary across the national and local contexts, which will be further discussed.

2.3.2 The position and goals of school social workers

The educational policy and local institutions influence how the roles of social workers present in schools. School social work is a specialized field of practice affected by changes in education policy (NASW, 2012). The social work role varies from school to school depending on the institutions that manage social worker employment and the position or department in schools that social workers belong. Some school districts employ social workers to take responsibility for a single school or multiple schools. Some work with a narrow or broad population of students. Some are assigned to work in the special education department that also shapes the scope of their work in the specific area. However, the general expectation from social workers is usually to work in a crisis team and help children with emotional and behavioral problems. School social workers need to understand the unique culture of each school. Therefore, there is a variety in functions and responsibilities of school social workers from diverse contexts (Openshaw, 2008).

According to the National Association of Social Workers (2012), "School social work is the position title that correctly identifies the educational background, profession, and function of a social worker employed by a local education agency." There are other similar titles to school social workers, such as pupil personnel worker, family specialist, home-school coordinator, etc. (NASW, 2012). School social work is more than social work service delivery in schools. Australian Association of Social Workers (2008) identified the school social workers must have a primary goal to promote students' potential and achievement by coordinating and influencing the effort of school, family, and community. Therefore, school social workers are not limited to the title but the goals of their work.

There are several goals of school social workers from literature as follows (Lakshmi, 2014; NASW, 2012; Openshaw, 2008).

1) To be a linkage and coordinate the efforts between school, home, community, and services in improving and helping students.
2) To provide or link students with resources and opportunities to achieve maximum potential and academic development.
3) To promote a better school experience, safe and healthy school environment.
4) To ensure equitable educational opportunities, respect, and dignity for all students.
5) To work collaboratively with other professionals to support the needs of students.

School social worker is not positioning as a single professional in handling challenges of students. The school social worker and multidisciplinary team collaboratively work on behalf of the children (NASW, 2012). Another characteristic of a school social worker is collaborating with other professionals, such as teachers, school counselors, psychologists, school nurses, etc., to mobilize resources responding to the needs of students and families. School social workers cooperate with interdisciplinary professionals and share a contribution to a team, especially carrying the home, school, and community perspectives in a process (Openshaw, 2008). This knowledge will be beneficial to the research to conceptualize and compare with school social work in the European context.

2.3.3 Knowledge and skills of school social workers

Possessing professional knowledge and skills is very important for school social workers to work independently and with an interdisciplinary team. School social workers should have knowledge of intervention at all levels, skills to build trust and relationships, an understanding of values and ethics of the profession to make decisions autonomously for families and children. They also need to elaborate on social work skills and the role differences from other professions to fill in the gap of responsibilities and services in the school (Openshaw, 2008). Essential knowledge and skills that school social workers should obtain are discussed below.

Knowledge of school social work practice

According to Australian Association of Social Workers (2008), knowledge and understanding in social work profession, education, school system, policy and regulations are basic requirements for school social workers.

The general knowledge of school social work practice are as follows.

1) Knowledge of social welfare arrangements and understanding of society.
2) Knowledge of education practice, and policy.
3) Knowledge of psychology (e.g., human behavior, personality development, social environment, social learning theories, special needs of students, individual and group psychology and therapy, family and social networks, physical and mental health, disability, vulnerability, resilience, etc.).
4) Knowledge of methods of social work intervention (e.g., individual and family casework, groupwork, policy development, school and community organization, research).

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The specific skill base knowledge of school social work practice includes

1) Multiple levels of analysis of human life impacts based on ecological systems framework.

2) All methods of generalist social work intervention.

    2.1 Casework: individual counseling with children, parents, family, school professionals, linking to community resources, crisis intervention.

    2.2 Group work: therapeutic group work, social skills education for students, parental education.

    2.3 Community development: provision of professional development for teachers, social action, connection with community, student welfare, social policy analysis and development.

    2.4 Critical incident management: awareness and responses to traumatic incidents and emergencies, counseling and support, recovery monitoring and evaluation.

    2.5 Research: literature-based knowledge for practice, evaluation of research studies, social policy, planning and implementation of research, critical evaluation of school social worker's own practice.

    2.6 Administration: records, management, program development, coordination, organizational service delivery, training, and supervision.

Skills of school social work practice

School social workers should own necessary skills to practice at individual, groups, and community levels. The skills are as follows (Openshaw, 2008).

1) Assessment

Assessment skill is crucial in deciding for intervention plans to provide adequate services for students. School social workers operate assessment through the ecological perspective, which takes the child's family and environment into consideration. Social workers should educate other members in schools and the community to value early assessment and investigation for the treatment of children.

2) Direct practice

School social workers should have direct practice skills to work on many levels. For example, counseling individuals, home visits, and group work. School social workers work on the emotional and behavioral problems of students. They collaborate with health services and assist parents and teachers to cope with the problems of students. School social workers also should be able to do

home visits to assess the situation of children in the case of school absence. The home visit is another role of social workers to connect school and family, to promote parents' involvement in programs or management plans regarding child matters. Group work is a practice to meet the needs of many and diverse students at once. Group work also targets parental education to have resources in accommodating children.

3) Relationship-building skills

Building positive relationships with children is essential for school social workers. Developing trust is a primary step to pursue change. Showing acceptance is an encouragement for children to overcome adversity.

Additionally, the Australian Association of Social Workers (2008) mentioned the following essential skills of school social workers in communication and critical thinking.

4) Communication

Interpersonal and communication skills with children and adults are necessary skills of school social workers. School social workers should have an ability to listen and understand experience from children's perspective to advocate for them among the adult dominant culture in school, family, and other systems. Communication skill also benefit social workers in negotiation, mediation, and consultation with other workers in schools and agencies.

5) Critical thinking

As mentioned earlier, knowledge about social, political, economic, historical, cultural, and ecological systems is crucial for school social workers. School social workers must own skills in critical reflection and analysis. They should utilize knowledge and understanding about the social structure, school, institutions, dimensions of power, the influence of class, gender, age, ethnicity, and cultural differences.

School social workers utilize knowledge and skills in social work practice to handle the following common issues due to the Australian Association of Social Workers (2008).

1) Transitions (e.g., childhood and adolescent development, transfer into a new school, family separation).
2) Personal, social, and emotional development (e.g., mental health, bullying, trauma, social relationship, cultural and ethnic differences, refugee students, personal skill development).
3) Family issues (e.g., poverty, violence, abuse and neglect, housing, alcohol, and drugs).
4) Schooling issues (e.g., disability, attendance, etc.).

This knowledge is useful for conceptualizing the general skills and knowledge of school social workers and what workers contribute them into their roles and practices.

2.3.4 Roles and practices of school social workers

School social work functions vary among school contexts. However, basic tasks usually are consultation, assessment, direct intervention, and assistance with program development (Openshaw, 2008). Australian Association of Social Workers (2008) described that social work activities and service delivery play at any of these levels: prevention, early intervention, and intervention. The example services are as follows.

1) Prevention (e.g., parent information, student welfare policy and education development, strategies, activities, programs, professional development provision, research on student issues, community service planning).

2) Early intervention (e.g., group work with students or professionals regarding specific needs, programs development, consultation with teachers and families, student supports, counseling, or casework).

3) Intervention (e.g., counseling or casework, referral to social services, consultation with professionals, school policy change).

School Social Work Association of America (2012) categorized services that school social workers provide for students, families, and school professionals, including coordination between school and community.

1) Services to students (e.g., crisis intervention, intervention for academic performance, assist emotional management, interaction skills development, etc.).

2) Services to parents or families (e.g., parental support to assist children, mitigating family stress, helping parents in programs and community resources accessibility, etc.).

3) Services to school personnel (e.g., providing information to other workers in school to understand the influence of economic, culture, family, health on student's performance, assessing students, assisting teachers, providing support to staff, etc.).

4) School-community liaison (e.g., mediating community resources and supports for students and families, advocating for services responding to the needs of students and families, etc.).

To conclude, the roles of school social workers involve several units in a student's environment (family, teachers, school, community). The tasks range from casework, group work, incident

response, administration to community development. The goal of school social work services provision aims from prevention to intervention levels. Another reflection regarding Openshaw (2008) is that school social workers can sometimes face difficulty gaining visibility and validity in their roles and skills to school-related personnel. Therefore, another important role is network building with school staff to convince workers and families to understand the social work role. Familiarity in school culture and trust establishment with other professionals can also facilitate school social workers in working and representing a unique benefit of their presence in school.

2.4 Ecological systems theory

According to Bryman (2012), the theory is useful for the research. It provides a rational framework and facilitates findings interpretation. Theory and research are related to each other in mainly two approaches: deductive and inductive. The inductive approach is a process of generalizing a theory as an outcome from observations and findings. However, the inductive strategy in qualitative research is not rigid. Even though it aims to create theory, theory can also be used as a base for research. Inductive reasoning is also a part of grounded theory, which is a back-and-forth step between data collection and analysis to form up theories.

This research aims to conceptualize school social work perspectives from local social workers of two contexts for comparison. Therefore, this research applied an inductive strategy, and the theory outcome was majorly constructed from the grounded theory approach.

As mentioned earlier that an ecological perspective is a tool of school social work. Therefore, it is beneficial to review the ecological systems theory as a background for the analysis. The original ecological systems theory has founded on psychology science developed by Bronfenbrenner in 1979. The presentation of the ecological systems model is usually a set of multiple circles layering from one closed to an individual. The theory explains that human development is a process of interaction and influence between individuals and environmental systems that they belong. Bronfenbrenner's classic ecological systems theory classified the environmental systems into four levels, micro, meso, exo-, and macro-systems. The microsystem is the area of an individual's direct interaction. The mesosystem involves interaction between multiple microsystems that interconnect and influence each other. The exosystem is the scale impacting individuals even though they are not active participants. The macrosystem is outermost. It represents beliefs, values, and norms reflecting through cultural, religious, socio-economic organizations of society. This system affects

the experience of individuals and influences other ecological systems (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). The discussion of ecological systems theory in social work is explaining below.

2.4.1 Ecological systems theory in social work

Ecological systems theory and social work share a similar fundamental principle. The ecological systems theory has a focal point on the interaction between individuals and the environment. Likewise, the social work principle also acknowledges individuals as a part of families, groups, communities that they interact with, in which these surrounding environments also shape individuals. This perspective influences social work practice to pay attention to physical, social, and cultural environments, such as physical well-being, family, community, political, legal, economic structures, beliefs, norms, languages, etc. The connection between these several parts influences each other and on individuals. The relationship is also fluid and changing over time regarding historical and cultural influences (Teater, 2014).

The ecological perspective influences an integrative approach in social work practice. It helps social workers to conceptualize, assess, and treat problems in a new different way to achieve effective social work intervention (Pardeck, 1998). For instance, the ecological perspective eliminates a cause-and-effect linear thinking. Instead of considering that A affects B, it emphasizes the interaction and relationship between them or other influential environmental factors on the relationship. Therefore, it widens more channels for interventions that might target possible physical or social environments rather than attempting on actual A or B (Teater, 2014).

The ecological perspective allows social workers to work in different systems from micro to macro-level approaches, such as engaging with individuals, family, community, and other social systems. In other words, the intervention of social workers can shift from psychotherapy to policy planning activities (Pardeck, 1998).

In the aspect of school social work, Jiang, Peng, & Wang (2016) explained that school social workers focus on bio-psychosocial development and utilize ecological perspectives in working with students, understanding students as individuals connected to different units (families, schools, communities) in the social system. Therefore, the school social work area engages in different levels (micro, middle-level, macro) from individual-family intervention to school-community programs and welfare policy advocacy. Therefore, this study will benefit from applying the

ecological systems theory to understand the levels of school social work interventions. And how school social workers utilize this perspective in their practice.

2.4.2 Ecological systems theory and criticism

According to Siporin (1980), regardless of being a widespread model used in social work, ecological systems theory has some limitations. Ecological systems theory can serve either social stability or social change. The model has the most criticism on remaining the status quo if there is no utilization for the system transformation. Siporin (1980) explained the limitations of ecological systems theory as follows.

First, the theory assumes the similarity in all systems. Each system is different and needs different ways of handling. The model also tends to assume subsystem integration and ignore decentralization, conflict, variety, and participation.

Second, the system-oriented thinking and interdependency between systemic components perspective of the theory assume that particular intervention will automatically impact other elements. But the defined entry, controls, consequences, and prediction of interventions into systems are still lacking. Pardeck (1998) also added that the theory is problematic in social work practice, especially how to implement the ecological approach in the assessment and treatment of the problems of service users. Therefore, one critic is that this perspective may impact unsuccessful social programs. And justification on social workers as equally as other experts like social planners, psychotherapists, and community organizers.

Third, the systems theory tends to exclude subjective experience, meanings, and values. It limits the explanation of social problems resulting from the dominant system.

To conclude, the theory might be helpful to conceptualize and categorize the levels of social work interventions. However, it can cause few limitations to this research. Firstly, the theory might not facilitate effective comparison between the two systems, as it tends to assume the similarity in all systems. Secondly, the theory might respond to what questions but not "how" questions. The researcher should not rely on one theory but be receptive to subjective experience and meanings of social workers to find how they practice and respond. Thirdly, the ecological theory tends to unrealistically overestimate social workers to be capable of solving at all levels. Therefore, this criticism should be of concern for the data collection and analysis process of the research.

2.5 Literature gaps

In summary, the reviewed literature contextualized many relevant aspects and knowledge base about school social work with students from immigrant backgrounds. The reviews helped to understand the influence of migration on social exclusion, prior knowledge about challenges of students from immigrant backgrounds, school social work, and the application of ecological system theory to social work. However, there are knowledge gaps to explore further by this research. For instance, the knowledge about challenges of students in immigrant-dense schools, how social workers function in this context, and work with students from immigrant backgrounds, including a comparison of these mentioned aspects in two territories: Amadora, Portugal, and Gothenburg, Sweden.

Chapter Three

Research settings

As this research operated in two settings, to acknowledge the background of both research territories is essential. Amadora, Portugal and Gothenburg, Sweden are divergent in geographical and social characteristics, including education systems. This chapter will provide and discuss the information of the two contexts as follows.

3.1 Locations overview: Amadora and Gothenburg

Amadora, Portugal, and Gothenburg, Sweden similarly have presented the socio-economic and population segregation of the cities. This section presents general overviews about the locations of the study to provide the background knowledge for the research: Amadora, Portugal and Gothenburg, Sweden, in terms of geographical areas, population, migration background, and school segregation.

The geographical and social characteristics of Amadora and Gothenburg are summarized below.

	Amadora	Gothenburg
Country	Portugal	Sweden
The location status	A municipality, and a part of Lisbon metropolitan area	A municipality, and a part of Västra Götalands län county
Area size	23.8 km^2	447 km^2
Resident population	182,915	617,781
Foreign population	21,456	162,071 15,862 (children 0-19 years)
Percentage of foreign-born population	11.7%	26%
Common countries of birth in the non-Nordic and non-EU immigrant groups	Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique	Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Yugoslavia, Iran, Syria (in four immigrant-dense areas)

Table 1: Summary of general overviews: Amadora, Portugal and Gothenburg, Sweden

(Sources: World Population Review, 2021; Statistics Sweden, 2020c; Pordata, 2019; Statistics Sweden, 2015; Amadora Cidade, 2014; Council of Europe, 2011).

3.1.1 Amadora, Portugal

Amadora is located on the outskirt of Lisbon and belongs to the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (AML). It is well-known for "the main region of immigration in Portugal". The majority group of immigrants was from the former Portuguese colonies. In 2001, the largest immigrants were from Portuguese-speaking African countries. Immigrants from Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe represented 76% of total immigrants in Amadora (Council of Europe, 2011). As immigration to Amadora has been intensified after 1974, the second generation of immigrant children and youth group became large. Other scattered groups of immigrants, namely Brazilians, Eastern Europeans, and other African immigrants, are from recent migration (URBACT, 2019).

Figure 1: Amadora, a part of Lisbon Metropolitan Area, Portugal[1]

In 2019, the population in Amadora increased to 182,915. There was 15.7% of young people aged under 15. There was 21,456 foreign population which was 11.7% of the total resident population. This percentage was higher compared to the overall foreign population within the country (5.7%) (Pordata, 2019). In 2012, the retention and dropout rate in primary education in Amadora was 16.2%. The rate was higher than the Lisbon region at 11.3% (Amadora Cidade, 2014).

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[1] The Municipality of Amadora, 2018, accessed on https://www.compact-project.eu/en/Project-results/News/The-Municipality-of-Amadora---LPA-representation-in-COMPACT

3.1.2 Gothenburg, Sweden

Gothenburg is the second-largest city in Sweden. Ethnic heterogeneity presents in some immigrant-dense suburban districts of the Gothenburg metropolitan area. According to Göteborgsbladet (2016), the population with a foreign background in Gothenburg was 33%. In Angered and Östra Göteborg districts, 73% and 57% of the population have a foreign background (OECD, 2018). In specific locations, namely Hjällbo, Gårdsten, and Bergsjön are vulnerable communities that faced higher unemployment and social assistance support for families, including social stigmatization and social exclusion (Uio Department of Sociology and Human Geography, 2010).
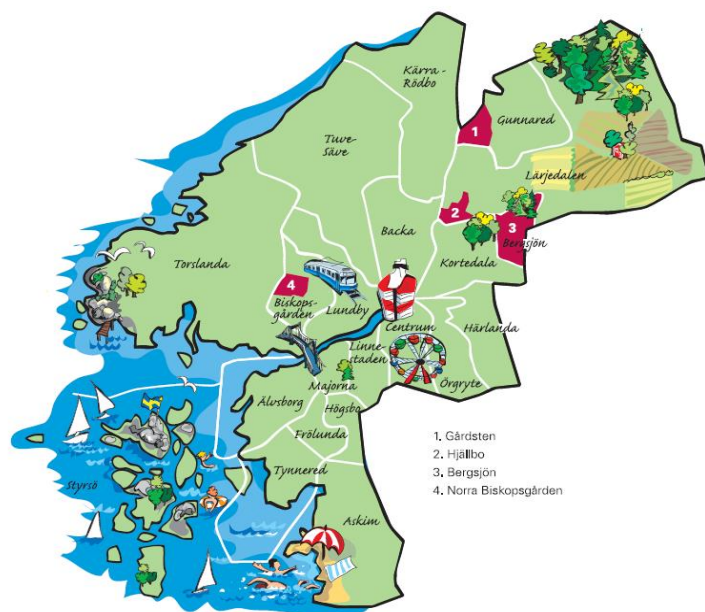
Figure 2: Four primary areas of Gothenburg: Hjällbo, Gårdsten, Bergsjön, and Biskopsgården[2]

In 2019, there were 47, 396 children and young persons (0-19 years) with a foreign background in Gothenburg (Statistics Sweden, 2020b). Bergsjön, Gårdsten, Hjällbo, and Biskopsgården are four of fifteen selected districts in Sweden in urban development work (URB). They are working areas to promote socio-economic development and reduce segregation for local and national integration (Statistics Sweden, 2015). Among these four primary areas of Gothenburg within the two years (2011-2013), the majority of the foreign population in four areas were born outside of

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[2] E. Gustafsson Information AB, 2005, accessed on
http://www4.goteborg.se/prod/storstad/dalis2.nsf/vyFilArkiv/Storstad_eng.pdf/$file/Storstad_eng.pdf

Scandinavian and EU countries. Bergsjön Gårdsten, Hjällbo, and Biskopsgården had more than half of foreign-born than Swedish born population. The most foreign-born population outside Nordic and EU countries in all four areas had birth backgrounds in Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Yugoslavia, Iran, Turkey, and Syria (Statistics Sweden, 2015).

3.1.3 School segregation: Portugal and Sweden

The school segregation phenomena in Portugal and Sweden are similar, in which the socio-economic factor of children's families drives residential segregation and school choice of parents (Liebowitz et al., 2018; Hansen & Gustafsson, 2016; Andersson et al., 2010). In Portugal, the distribution of immigrant students is uneven among schools. The school segregation densely occurs in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (AML), in which some schools fill up enrollment by 90% of immigrant students, and the difference in school social assistance enrollment is high between 78% and 8% within the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (Liebowitz et al., 2018) in which Amadora city is located.

Likewise, Sweden experiences school segregation between immigrant and native students. According to the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs (2008), 112 schools out of 4,826 elementary schools in Sweden contained more than 50% of children of a migration origin. In about a half of these schools, the number could be up to around 90% to 100% (Bunar, 2009). School segregation showed a significant increase, especially in cities and larger towns (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2010). The metropolitan of Gothenburg, one of the locations, reported high school segregation and a dense population of visible-minority schoolchildren (VMS) (Andersson et al., 2010). This knowledge from the literature complements the research in that the immigrant-dense segregated schools exist in both territories in which the research can explore further.

3.2 Education system: Portugal and Sweden

Understanding the education system is essential in studying social work in the school settings of both contexts. The research required background knowledge in these aspects: the educational system, educational policy and measures regarding students with immigrant backgrounds, education staff who are involved in social support work, and where school social workers belong

to in the educational system of each country. Eurydice (Accessed on 07/03/2021) provided a comprehensive source of information which is described below.

3.2.1 Education system in Portugal

Key features of the education system

The government defines central goals and education framework for all levels. National policy regarding the education system and school network management in pre-school, basic, upper secondary levels of education is a direct responsibility of the Ministry of Education (Ministério da Educação – ME). School clusters are organized as the school network. Each school cluster has autonomous administration and management structure. Management in pedagogy, teaching schedules, and non-teaching staff are also upon the independency of school clusters.

Compulsory education starts from the age of 6 to 18 or basic education to upper secondary education. The state supports free and universal public education from the age of 4. The education system in Portugal is divided into five sequential stages: pre-school education (ISCED 0), basic education (ISCED 1-2), upper secondary education (ISCED 3), post-secondary non-higher education (ISCED 4), and higher education (ISCED 5 – 8).

- Pre-school education (3-6 years old) is optional and upon families' role in supporting. However, it is universal for all children from 4 years old. The education system does not include another special focus on childcare (creche) for children under three years old, which belongs to the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity, and Social Security (MTSSS).
- Basic education (6-15 years old) is compulsory and free and classified into three cycles.
  - First cycle (ISCED 1) of 4 years or grades 1-4
  - Second cycle (ISCED 1) of 2 years or grades 5-6
  - Third cycle (ISCED 2) of 3 years or grades 7-9
- Upper secondary education (15-18 years old) lasts three years or grades 10-12. The education contains different types of courses for options, either academic or vocational.
- Post-secondary non-higher education is usually one year in the technological specialization courses for over 18-year-old who completed compulsory education.
- Higher education includes university and polytechnic education systems.
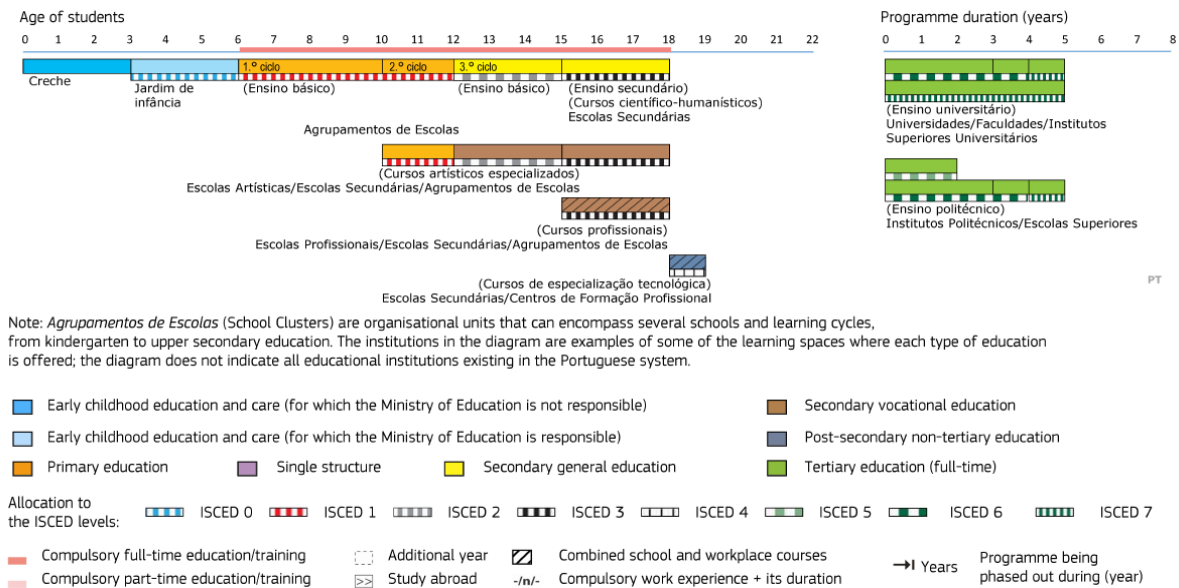
Figure 3: Structure of the National Education System Portugal

Educational policy and measures relating to students with immigrant backgrounds

Inclusive education for all children in different socio-economic backgrounds is well-represented through the Portuguese national education policy perspectives. In 2017, the National Strategy for Citizenship Education (ENEC) acknowledged the right to education for social inclusion and participation of citizens. School clusters must recognize and implement cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity to all children, including professionals and staff in the school environment through school projects. Schools and multidisciplinary teams should strengthen the roles in promoting inclusive education (Law no.116/2019 [26], of 13th September). The national reform in education also aims to reduce socio-educational inequalities by focusing on reinforcing relationships between schools, families, students, and the community.

There are support measures for students at risk of social exclusion from school integration problems, different mother languages, and learning difficulties. These supports include Portuguese as a non-native language, mediators, tutorial support, and intercultural projects. Support measures related to inclusive education for students from immigrant or disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are as follows.

- Programme for Priority Intervention Educational Areas (TEIP 3)

The program started in 2012 and exclusively targeting schools in underprivileged areas with high early school leaving. There is 16% of Portuguese schools participating in the project. The program aims to implement positive discrimination measures for improving the quality of the education system that benefits students' educational achievement.

TEIP 3 program emphasizes three intervention areas: school culture and pedagogical leadership, curriculum management, partnerships and community. The objectives are to improve students' learning, reduce school absence and dropout, provide guidance learning, support school to working life transition, strengthen cooperation between schools and partners. School clusters with TEIP3 project work autonomously to implement the measures and improvement plans based on the local context understanding.

- Educational measures for the integration of unaccompanied foreign minors (MENA) in the educational system

There are Portuguese language learning, school social assistance, and more special educational measures to integrate these children into the educational system.

- Learning communities project INCLUD-ED

This project aims to promote community participation to mitigate social inequality by applying successful education activities (Ações Educativas de Sucesso - AES). The activities, for example, having interactive discussion groups among students on different topics to discover learning capacity to facilitate mutual help learning. The program is successful in educational improvement and school dropout reduction. In 2019/2020, the program expanded to students in socio-economically disadvantaged groups, including non-Portuguese speaking immigrant students in priority intervention educational areas clusters. The result approved the academic ability of students.

Other education staff in social support work for students

The Decree-Law no. 54/2018, 6th July identified a multidisciplinary team as a resource to promote inclusive education. Psychologists are dominant-represented in providing psycho-social support among other types of specialized professionals in inclusive education measures. Psychology and guidance services (Serviços de Psicologia e Orientação - SPO) operate in school clusters from pre-school to upper secondary education.

The boundary of psychologists mostly involves counseling, academic and vocational guidance for students. The work focuses on psycho-pedagogical-behavioral support areas for both students and teachers, including preventive work related to risky behaviors and learning development. The educational psychologists' work in the Portuguese education system also partly participates in the education community and collaboration with families, teachers, and other members of the system. Non-teaching staff is another category of school human resource involving administrative and educational support, such as technical and operational assistants, health workers, and psychologists. *Social workers* are categorized as non-teaching staff and a part of psychology and guidance services, together with sociocultural staff, speech therapists, and mediators. The non-teaching staff is upon the management of school clusters or non-clustered schools. They are a part of public service employment under the Ministry of Education (ME) or the local municipal councils.

3.2.2 Education system in Sweden

Key features of the education system

The education system in Sweden is decentralized and free of charge from preschool to higher education. The government defines central goals and education framework for all levels. Municipalities are responsible for education management from preschool to upper secondary levels. These local authorities have their education departments for administration in planning, resource allocation, staff, child welfare, special educational needs, and professional development. The major school funding is also from municipal tax revenues. Primary and secondary schools have autonomy in management by principals. Higher education is the responsibility of the state universities and state university colleges.

Swedish education is compulsory for nine years, from preschool class (from 6 years old) to middle secondary education (16 years old). However, the government subsidizes and supports preschool education from the age of one. The stages of Swedish education show below.

Preschool (förskola) from 1 year old

Preschool class (förskoleklass) from 6 years old

Compulsory school (grundskola) from 7 to 16 years old

Upper secondary school (gymnasieskola) from 16 to 19 years old

Higher education: students can apply for universities (universitet), university colleges (högskola), and/or higher vocational education (yrkeshögskola) after completing upper secondary education.
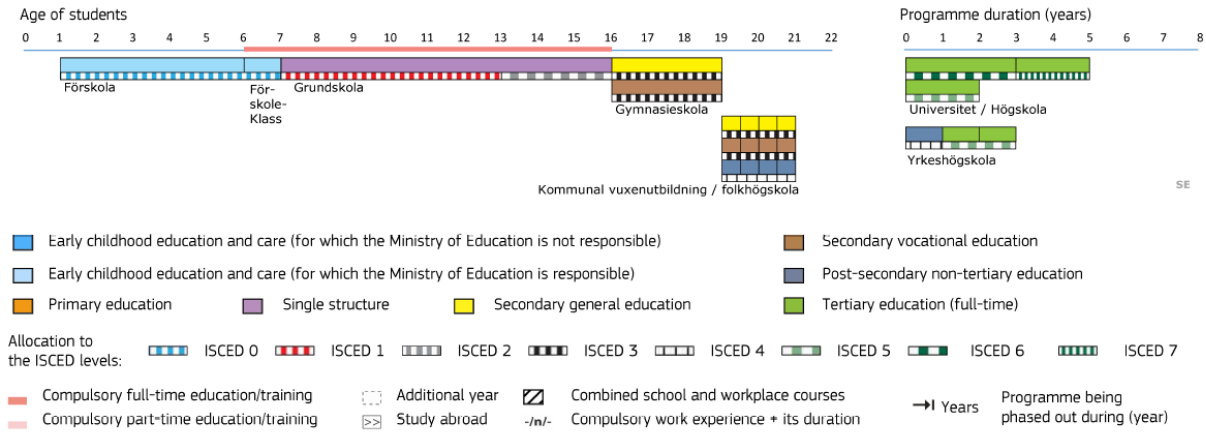
Figure 4: Structure of the National Education System of Sweden

Educational policy and measures relating to students with immigrant backgrounds

Pupils in the Swedish education system have the right to achieve educational goals based on their ability. Students need support for many reasons, such as their social conditions, illness, and disabilities. There are specific support measures for students with immigration backgrounds, especially newly arrived pupils, and those with non-Swedish mother language. Newly arrived pupil in the Swedish education system refers to "someone who has been living abroad, is now residing in the country, and started their education here later than the autumn term of the calendar year he or she turns seven." The newly arrived status terminates after four years of education in Sweden. It is the responsibility of principals and headteachers to investigate or notify the special needs of pupils. Students are entitled to receive special assistance to minimize the obstacles and risks affecting their educational achievement. The support measures are divided into preschool and school education measures.

- Support measures in preschool

The support measures in the preschool level are the responsibility of the preschool head (förskolechef). In 2019, the government intended to increase preschool participation and Swedish language development for children of 3-5 years of age, especially ones who considered as newly arrived and do not speak Swedish at home.

Municipalities also provide open preschools (öppen förskola) for children and families to participate for few hours a day. The school helps to provide education for children who do not attend preschool. It also functions as a socializing space for families with a foreign background to be equipped for integration into Swedish society. Special language preschool groups' (språkförskolor) is another school run by the municipalities targeting Swedish language learning. Both types of activities are free and accessible.

- Support measures in school education

The support measures in school education are the responsibility of the headteacher. There are two targets for measures: newly arrived pupils and students whose mother tongue is any other than Swedish.

Newly arrived pupils

Most municipalities provide a reception class for newly arrived pupils regardless of their status. The tuition in a reception class includes the Swedish language, knowledge about Swedish society, and school subjects based on the previous education level. The pupils move to a regular class and study the same national subjects as other students when they are well-equipped from the reception class to follow lessons in general schools. Newly arrived pupils are entitled to ask for "study guidance" which is additional support by teachers after classes. This assistance can be either in Swedish or in their mother language.

Swedish and mother tongue tuition

Swedish as a second language subject is available in compulsory and upper secondary school for pupils whose mother tongue is not Swedish. Some subjects are offered in their mother language (modersmålundervisning), especially in schools with a high proportion of pupils from immigrant backgrounds. Mother tongue tuition also be offered in reception classes. However, municipalities have limitations in providing mother tongue tuition depending on teachers and the demands of students. Sami and Tornedal Finnish, Finnish, Romany, and Yiddish are exceptional and available, as they are official minority languages.

Other education staff in social support work for students

Each municipality regulates the employment of other educational staff. Other education staff within schools are, for example, mother tongue tutor assistants, pupil assistants, guidance, school health service, and school welfare officers.

A social worker is called a school counselor (kurator) in the Swedish education system. The social worker is one of the other education staff. The social work staff usually belongs to the health service department of the school. All students are entitled to access free school healthcare and psychological counseling that professionals (medical officer, school nurse, psychologist, and school counselor (social worker)) in the school health service are involved. These staffs contribute to the promotion and prevention work in the health, learning, and development of students. The school organizer decides about other education staff resources based on local demands and situations.

3.2.3 Education system discussion: Portugal and Sweden

According to the literature reviews, there are several differences between Portugal and Sweden in the educational system, educational policy, and staff operation in the educational setting structure. Features in the educational system of both countries are different. Both implement educational policies regarding students from immigrant backgrounds. The newly arrived immigrant students are the most dominant group addressed in the educational policies. They are similar in policies regarding language skill improvement and educational inclusion. However, Sweden has more concrete programs in the preparation and integration of immigrant students in education, considering the same source of information. Portuguese educational policy predominantly promotes educational inclusion, which also includes broader groups of students. Such as the TEIP program that applies in vulnerable school areas.

In terms of staff structure and operation, the information of school social workers in both educational systems is minimally presented. Both refer to social workers as a part of other psycho-social-health supportive staff. In Portugal, psychologists are mandatory in school, but not social workers. Social workers are non-teaching staff and a part of psychology and guidance services, together with sociocultural staff, speech therapists, and mediators. Social workers sometimes are among the professionals in a team project, especially in the school clusters in the vulnerable areas

that implement the Priority Intervention Educational Areas Program (TEIP) to mitigate school failure risk and drop-out (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019).

On the other hand, social workers in Sweden are school counselors in the Swedish education system. They are counselors with a social work knowledge background. They belong to the health service department of the school along with other health support staff. The difference from Portugal is that access to social workers or school counselors are mandatory school services identified as health interventions for every student. The awareness of these differences in the education system of both countries is advantageous for analyzing research outcomes based on two local contexts.

Chapter Four

Methodology

This chapter will describe the methodology for this research. Methodological approach, methods of data collection, sampling, methods of analysis, and limitation are as follows.

4.1 Methodological approach: comparative case study approach

Questioning about ontology and epistemology is crucial in deciding on a research methodological approach. Ontological and epistemological assumptions of this research perceive reality as plural and subjective. Interaction with social actors in the contexts is necessary for approaching reality (Al-Ababneh, 2020). The study aims to discover the school social work intervention in which the knowledge is contextual. Therefore, interaction with social workers in the contexts is required to answer the research questions, especially how professionals implement practices and create meanings in the school system. These assumptions are parts of the interpretivism paradigm that apply qualitative as a research methodology. The *qualitative methodological approach* aims for context analysis, categorizing patterns, and developing inductive concepts or theories for understanding the phenomena (Al-Ababneh, 2020).

This research involves conceptualizing the school social work intervention patterns in two case studies and comparing the schemes across two cases to discover similarities and contrasts with the awareness of contextual influences. Therefore, a comparative case study is an appropriate qualitative methodological approach for this research.

The comparative study in education is the study of two or more countries in a holistic approach. A set of social and cultural attributes of contexts are a part of the analysis. Similarities and differences are outcomes of the study, with insights about the social reality across different areas (Khakpour, 2012). Bartlett & Vavrus (2017) described that the *comparative case study approach (CCS)* involves micro, meso, macro dimensions of case-based research. There are two logics of comparison: 1) compare and contrast the particular units of analysis, and 2) trace across scales (individuals, groups, sites, and time). "Tracing" or process-oriented approach is the key of comparative case studies because direct comparison dismisses a deeper understanding of the cases and intensifies dichotomies, static groupings, and pre-determined concepts. Therefore, context considerations (institutions, social and policy actors, language, period of time) are inseparable for

CCS research to explain how one condition influences another circumstance and how the phenomenon has developed to the present.

CCS approach is applicable for the research. Amadora, Portugal and Gothenburg, Sweden are case studies to compare similarities and differences in the school social work perspectives with pupils from immigrant backgrounds. Although the surrounding contexts, such as social actors, institutions, the education system, and policy are parts of considerations to develop an explanation of how similar or different social work in schools have been practiced and appropriated by social workers in two case studies.

4.2 Sampling

4.2.1 Selection of case studies

Location A: Amadora, Portugal

A part of Europe (European Union, European territory, and European welfare state)

High density of population with immigrant backgrounds

Residential and school segregation

Southern European welfare state

(Portugal) history of migration, educational and political systems

School social work

Location B: Gothenburg, Sweden

A part of Europe (European Union, European territory, and European welfare state)

High density of population with immigrant backgrounds

Residential and school segregation

Nordic welfare state

(Sweden) history of migration, educational and political systems

School social work

Figure 5: Comparative research design for comparison between Amadora and Gothenburg

(adapted from Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) by Lor (2011))

One concern for comparative studies is to answer in which attributes or characteristics are comparable between entities. To pursue sensible comparison, the entities must reflect on similar and dissimilar attributes (Sartori, 1991). There are similar characteristics between the two case

studies (Amadora and Gothenburg). First, both locations are a part of Europe (European Union, European territory, and European welfare state). Second, both cases represent predominated immigrant areas, residential and school segregation. However, both locations are incomparable in aspects of the history of migration, welfare regimes, educational and political systems.

In comparative research design, few-country comparison purposefully selects cases for the study rather than sampling. Few countries in comparison should have some shared and non-shared attributes at the same time. According to the Most Different Systems Design strategy (MDSD), the selected countries for comparison should have some different characteristics but share the same phenomenon of the research interest (Lor, 2019). In Figure 5, Amadora and Gothenburg consist of shared and non-shared attributes, but both territories share the same interest in implementing school social work. Therefore, the comparison will gain insights into how dissimilar characteristics of both locations affect school social work perspectives of practice.

4.2.2 Selection of participants

The research sampling process requires a decision about the sampling method and the sample size. According to Bryman (2016), *purposive sampling* is the strategic selection of contexts or participants to have relevant samples for answering the research questions. Purposive sampling is non-probability. So, the criteria for selection must be purposeful.

- Criteria of selection for participants: social workers who work in schools with students from immigrant backgrounds in the locations of the study. The selected schools have locations in Amadora, Portugal and Gothenburg, Sweden (specific zones: Hjällbo, Gårdsten, Bergsjön, and Biskopsgården).
- Numbers of participants: Four social workers from schools in Amadora and Gothenburg. Eight school social workers in total for research participants.

According to the process of searching participants, the researcher contacted 27 school counselors in Gothenburg and 7 social workers in Amadora. Each has four professionals who responded to participate in the study. The school counselors in Gothenburg were reached by emails found from the city of Gothenburg, the webpage which contains information of schools and locations. Social workers in Amadora were reached by the personal contact and network of the research supervisor.

4.3 Methods of data collection

This research collected data by online interview. As mentioned earlier, the researcher reached the participants from Gothenburg by contacting individually via email and accessed participants from Amadora by network and connection. The methods of data collection, the process of interviews, including the challenges are following.

4.3.1 Semi-structured interview

According to the earlier qualitative methodological approach, this research opted for a semi-structured interview method to collect information. The *semi-structured interview* is a prepared interview with a flexible list of specific questions or topics to ask participants. The list has a purpose for guiding interviewees to reply in the scope of research, while also allowing space for interviewees and researchers to explore or follow up other related topics flexibly (Bryman, 2016). The interview guide for this research contains five themes of exploration (see appendix I).

4.3.2 Video conference interview

The research project took place amid the COVID-19 pandemic circumstance that impacted face-to-face interaction arrangement with participants. Therefore, an online video interview was an option. The pandemic challenges in-person interview, which is important in qualitative research. Challenges in video conferencing are rapport building, issues related to technology, and privacy (Reñosa et al., 2021). Nevertheless, online data collection has some benefits, such as accessibility, cost-effectiveness, data management features, and opportunities in expanding data collection (Reñosa et al., 2021; Archibald et al., 2019). For this research, the online interview had an advantage in collecting information remotely from both locations when the ongoing pandemic limits face-to-face meeting opportunities.

4.3.3 The process of data collection and challenges

The interview took an average of 1.5 hours and was conducted in the English language. The researcher introduced the participants to the purpose of the study, the duration of the interview, and audio recording permission. The interviews were on zoom meetings, and one interview was in person. All respondents were very cooperative during the interview process. However, some challenges occurred during interviews.

Firstly, English is not a native language for all social workers from both contexts. Some social workers were worried about their language ability or struggling to communicate some ideas. The researcher interviewed in English directly to all participants and relied on the translators to communicate with three participants from Amadora. Having a translator from each of the participants was a very supportive opportunity. However, the translation process could unintentionally distort the content, and prevent the researcher to perceive the true intentions and emotions of the participants. Moreover, the researcher automatically spoke more with the translators than the participants, which can also minimize the rapport building with the respondents.

Another challenge was the discomfort of touching the subject of identifying immigrant backgrounds of students, or some problems that occurred from having an immigrant background. The immigrant background is a complicated concept. Talking about who has and who does not cause a discomfort feeling for the researcher and the participants. Therefore, the researcher accessed as much as the participants were willing to convey, and irritated the aim was to explore and not to generalize.

There was also a challenge of appropriating the scope of questions from the beginning of interviews, as the researcher primarily had many questions to explore. For example, talking about the challenges of students was a broad topic. Discovering what social workers respond to all of those challenges was not doable in a limited time. Therefore, the researcher had to follow the main theme that arose from each interview.

4.4 Methods of analysis

This research applies different analysis methods. First, a thematic analysis to conceptualize and categorize the challenges of students from immigrant backgrounds and school social work practice of each context. Second, the comparative analysis to discover and explain similarities and differences in school social work practice of both case studies.

4.4.1 Thematic analysis

The thematic approach is suitable for many kinds of narratives, such as interviews, conversations, and texts. The thematic analysis focuses on the content and develops main themes and subthemes as a product from data (Bryman, 2016). The thematic analysis formed collective ideas to

understand the pattern of school social work practice of each case study. The process started from transcribing interviews from four school social workers in Amadora and Gothenburg, followed by coding main themes and subthemes of data from each case to continue further comparative analysis.

4.4.2 Comparative analysis

Comparative research does not practically consist of direct comparison but explaining and interpreting. Learning from other experiences enriches better understandings of one single context. The comparative study widens the comparativist's horizon by learning from multiple contexts (Sartori, 1991). Comparative research aims to achieve the conclusion beyond single cases, to explain similarities and differences between units of analysis influenced by their contextual conditions (Esser & Vliegenthart, 2017). The purpose of this research comparison aims to seek and explain similarities and differences of social work interventions practiced by school social workers in immigrant-dense areas of Amadora and Gothenburg, with the awareness of contextual influences. The levels of comparison, steps of comparative analysis, theoretical framework application, and cross-national comparison are clarified to achieve this goal.

Levels and steps of comparative analysis

In analytical process, the research will adopt the earlier couple logics of comparison for the comparative case study approach (CCS) offered by Bartlett & Vavrus (2017). Firstly, comparing units of analysis to find direct similarities and differences. Secondly, considering contexts in explaining the process of similarities and differences of analysis units. This step pursues three axes of comparison: horizontal, vertical, and transversal. The horizontal axis compares how similar or contradictory phenomena display in distinct locations by tracing the complexity and connection with social actors, documents, and other influences. The vertical axis focuses across various scales (international, national, regional, local) for comparison. And the transversal axis pays attention to historical tracing and comparison over time.

This research pursued a two-leveled comparison with minor modification due to the research interest, time, and resource condition. The comparison plan is following.

1. Compare to address similarities and differences of school social work practice in Amadora and Gothenburg.

2. Compare the similarities and differences of school social work practice across two locations. The comparison in this step consists of two axes: horizontal and vertical. To explore the contextual influences on school social workers to implement similar or different interventions across two case studies.

   o Horizontal: considering the influence of social actors, such as students, families, teachers, professional team, principal, and others in school social workers' surroundings.

   o Vertical: considering the influence from three scales: national (policy, education system, social welfare), regional (municipality, city, other institutions), local (school system and management).

The comparative analysis framework presents below for conceptualization.

Levels of Comparison	Process of analysis		
First Level	Unit of analysis 1 School social work practice **Amadora**	**Similarities** **Differences**	Unit of analysis 2 School social work practice **Gothenburg**
Second Level	Units of analysis	Two axes of comparison	
	Similarities	Horizontal	Social actors
		Vertical	Three scales (national, regional, local)
	Differences	Horizontal	Social actors
		Vertical	Three scales: (national, regional, local)

Table 2: Two levels of comparative analysis of school social work practice in Amadora and Gothenburg

This research followed four practical steps of comparative analysis according to Esser & Vliegenthart (2017) to achieve these two levels of comparison. The steps start from describing similarities and differences, providing contextual descriptions (such as systems and cultures) to enrich understandings, establishing classifications, and explaining.

Theoretical framework application

The comparative analysis must operate by using the basis of a common theoretical framework for conceptualization, rather than analyzing objects separately (Esser & Vliegenthart, 2017). This research analyzed school social work practice in Amadora and Gothenburg by applying the same theoretical framework. This study used ecological systems theory from Bronfenbrenner (1979) that Dupper (2003) adopt to conceptualize school social work interventions. School social workers use the ecological perspective in working with children as inseparable individuals from the social systems. School social workers attempt to perceive broader students' problems and deliver services at different levels. They work with children and families in the micro-level, such as focusing on students' behavioral problem and parenting skill enhancement. Improving the school environment and utilizing community resources are also a part of work at the middle level. Interventions at the macro level are still rare for school social workers, even though they could ideally advocate beneficial child welfare policies (Jiang, Peng &Wang, 2016).

School social work intervention

Micro
(e.g. Individual pupils and families)

Meso
(e.g. school environment and communities)

Macro
(e.g. advocacy in policy and child welfare)
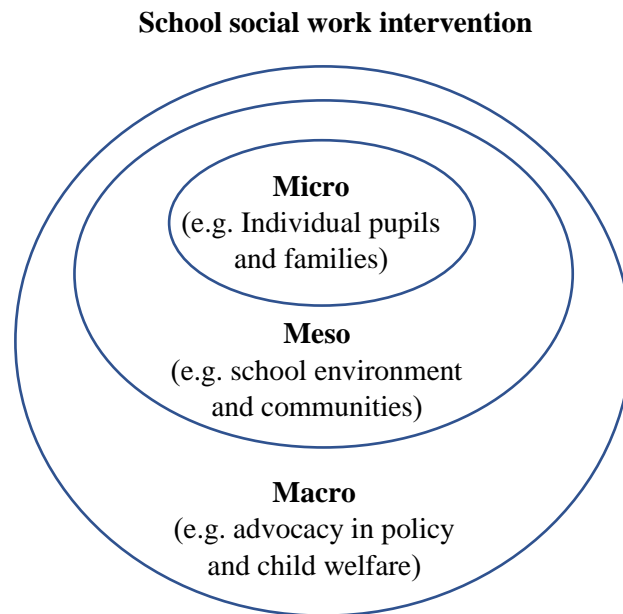
**Figure 6**: The central ecological systems theoretical framework in comparative analysis of school social work interventions in Amadora and Gothenburg

Therefore, applying the ecological system model for this research aims to conceptualize the themes of school social work practice. The model will help classifying interventions or activities practiced by social workers of both contexts in three levels (micro, meso, macro) to represent the gist of school social work practice. The ecological systems theoretical framework as a central model for the comparative analysis of school social work interventions in Amadora and Gothenburg is formed in Figure 6.

Cross-national comparison

According to Gómez & Kuronen (2011), case-oriented and cross-cultural comparison are similar approaches in qualitative cross-national research. Case-oriented or case studies use more systematic comparative analysis techniques to understand phenomena in their institutional, cultural, and historical contexts. The cross-cultural or cross-national approach adopts a more qualitative ethnographic method to study the phenomena in different cultural settings, highlighting experiences and local practices to understand from inside of the context.

This research is more aligned with the case-oriented approach. However, putting a cross-national approach into consideration would enrich cultural sensitivity for the study and fill in the gap of irrelevant units of comparison across the two contexts. Both locations (Amadora and Gothenburg) have different systems and institutions that could bring difficulty in direct comparison regardless of studying the same phenomena. Therefore, focusing on local processes and practices is a part of cross-national comparison that is beneficial for the study.

4.5 Limitations

There are several challenges of conducting qualitative cross-national comparative research. The difficulty is often related to cultural differences, language, differences of conceptualization of similar phenomena, semantic similarities, and the possibilities to understand actors' conceptual frameworks in different contexts (Gómez & Kuronen, 2011). The cultural difference is a major concern and limitation of this cross-national comparative study. It requires a lot of social and cultural knowledge from a researcher to conduct a well-defined and comprehensive research. However, language plays a vital part as there is a linkage between words and conceptualization. There is a way to closely reach the local actors' conceptual framework by analyzing the language usage in meanings and interpretations. Understanding the cultural meanings beyond knowing how

to speak and understand language is an advantage that will unfold the local practices (Gómez & Kuronen, 2011). This issue is complicated as the researcher of this study is not an insider of any studying contexts. Furthermore, English was the language for conducting interviews which is not the local language of participants. Therefore, issues with speaking an unfamiliar language and diverted meanings from the translation process should be taken into account. Also, reminding awareness of social and cultural differences can be done as much as possible. For example, attempt to understand how the population from immigrant backgrounds is defined and perceived in the social and cultural contexts of Amadora and Gothenburg. Including pay attention to the usage of words, phrases, and meanings of participants.

The methodological review and final discovery of a researcher show that another major limitation for the study would be that the comparison cannot be done but can be only explained. The reasons are the small amount of information collected from each context (four cases each) and the nature of the qualitative method without empirical evidence. Both reasons cause difficulty in the generalization of the characteristics of school social work in both cases. Also, many incomparable units within both contexts consist of their own identities and systems.

However, there is an advantage to the study. The study provided a bird-eye view comprehension. Studying more than one context added richness and variety of understandings about the focal interest: school social work of schools in immigrant-dense areas, especially in different cases and dimensions. The study finally explored the uniqueness of school social work in general and in specific contexts which all contribute to social work knowledge in school settings.

Chapter Five

Findings and Discussions

This chapter will present findings and discussions regarding the prescribed research questions, which aim to explore two topics of interest in the context of schools in immigrant-dense areas of Amadora, Portugal, and Gothenburg, Sweden. The first topic is to describe the educational challenges of pupils from immigrant backgrounds from the school social workers' perspectives. The following matter is to discover the role of school social work in responding to the challenges in the context of schools in immigrant-dense areas. These two topics are illustrated across two contexts: Amadora, Portugal, and Gothenburg, Sweden. The main goal is to explain similarities and differences and gain a more varied understanding of how the school social work perspective and practice unfold in different contextual settings.

As the research presents as a qualitative cross-national comparative study, restrictively generalizing similarities and differences are not doable due to the methodological limitations from few representative cases and some incomparable units of comparative analysis. Therefore, the findings and discussions are upon collected information and an explanation of similarities and differences constructed from their contexts. There are four contextual settings in focus for this research. 1) social actor (e.g., children and families, teachers, and other professionals in schools), 3) institutions (e.g., schools, municipalities, governmental institutions), 3) systems (e.g., educational and social policy), and 4) social, cultural, and professional context (e.g., perception of immigration and immigrants, perception and reflection regarding social work profession and practice). The last contextual setting is complicated and as much possible reached by the researcher's observation of language and the capacity to understand the cultural meanings.

The information collected for these findings is from eight research participants in total. Each four of the participants are based in Amadora, Portugal, and Gothenburg, Sweden. All interviewees are females aged between 29-51 years old. Almost all respondents experience working in the current schools for more than three years. Most interviewees have educational backgrounds in social work. The background of interviewees is presented below.

Respondent	Location	Age	Position	Educational Background	Work duration in the current school
1	Amadora	40	Mediator	Psychology and special needs in education	6 years
2	Amadora	40	Social worker	(Missing information)	3 years
3	Amadora	45	Social worker	Social education and social work	13 years
4	Amadora	51	Social worker	Social work and family therapy	10 years
5	Gothenburg	29	School counselor	Social work, human rights	5 years
6	Gothenburg	45	School counselor	Social anthropology and social pedagogy	5 years
7	Gothenburg	46	School counselor	Social work	3 years
8	Gothenburg	36	School counselor	Social work	2 months

Table 3: Summary of research participants' background

Terms and structure of findings

The information for this chapter was from eight social work professionals from eight schools in both locations (four schools each). The professional titles are different between the two contexts. In Gothenburg, all social work professionals in schools are named "Kurator" which has a direct translation to "school counselor". In Amadora, most school social work professionals have the title of "social worker" and "mediator" which is another position that has a similar task to school social workers. However, the finding presentation will use the word "social worker" as a mutual term to represent all social work professionals of both contexts.

The four parts of findings in this chapter are the center of analysis and discussion between social work of immigrant-dense schools in Amadora, Portugal, and Gothenburg, Sweden. The first topic of this chapter will provide the backgrounds and characteristics of students and schools in immigrant-dense areas. The following part will describe the challenges that impacted the education of students from immigrant backgrounds from the social workers' perspectives. The third part will present conceptualization and discussion of the school social work intervention and practice based on the ecological system theory. The further discussion about the role and contribution of school

social work in responding to challenges of students from immigrant backgrounds will present in the last part enriching through reflection from the perspectives of social workers.

5.1 Backgrounds and characteristics: pupils in immigrant-dense schools

Before discussing the gist of the study, it is necessary to explore the definitions of students from immigrant backgrounds and the characteristics of schools in immigrant-dense areas of Amadora and Gothenburg. Achieving this research objective will provide a context base for readers to construct further understandings in later discussion about educational challenges of students from immigrant backgrounds and school social work intervention. The content structure in this section begins with local definitions of the immigrant background and characteristics of immigrant-dense schools.

5.1.1 Identifying immigrant backgrounds

Identifying immigrant background is subject to criticism and could be a problematic concept. It is complicated to distinguish people into categories. The immigrant background has a wide range of definitions depending on the context of usage. It is also upon the perception of migration and national-leveled definitions (Schneider, 2016). Strictly defining an immigrant background is complicated in qualitative research. Yet, we must discover and be sensitive to the local meanings. This study explored the concept of immigrant background from explanations and perspectives of social workers.

The focal point of the study is the schools in immigrant-dense areas of the cities: Amadora and Gothenburg. According to social workers from eight schools, the term immigrant background frequently engages with these couple concepts: "newly arrived" and "descendants of immigrants". The immigrant background concept from the study refers to all varieties of migration-related to children or their families.

> *"It depends how you define immigrants, but there's some kind of immigration history… some have lived for most of the lives in Sweden, and some just newly arrived, it's kind of all varieties. All variations of immigration"*– (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).
>
> *"There are different kinds of situations in this school, it is not one type of immigrant"* – (Respondent 1, Amadora).

Newly arrived immigrants

The most basic understanding of social workers in both contexts considered the newly arrived group as children from an immigrant background. The newly arrived immigrants or so-called first-generation immigrants are the ones who were born abroad from foreign parents (Hippe & Jakubowski, 2018). The concept of immigrant background from this understanding is straightforward as they just moved in from another country with both parents who were born abroad. Another general used term is "immigrant children". This group also includes children who came with refugee status or for humanitarian reasons.

Both contexts have many children from various countries of origin. In Amadora, there is a big number of newly arrived students from Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Brazil, and some African Portuguese-speaking countries like Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde, Angola, and Mozambique. Very few amounts came with the refugee status.

> *"Two or three years ago, we'll see a lot of students from Bangladesh and Brazil and from those countries. And we always have a lot of students that came from the African countries, these African countries that speak Portuguese like Cape Verde, Guinea, Mozambique"*
> – (Respondent 3, Amadora).
> *"We have from Iraq this year and Syria (They were in the status of refugees) last year...Some of them are in a family reunion"* – (Respondent 1, Amadora).

In Gothenburg, there is a mixture of immigrants from various countries and several continents. There is a significant number of parents from Somalia, Turkey, the middle east, Southeast Asia, and some parts of Africa. Considering the history of migration in Sweden in 2015, there was also a higher influx of immigrants for humanitarian reasons from Syria.

> *"We are the school to take the most newly arrived whether there's a lot coming in or not. Sweden has closed the borders, pretty much so we don't get very many new now. But during 2015-2016 we had a big influx of students that were newly arrived"*– (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

The newly arrived immigrants seem to be a smaller group as most of them are children of immigrants who migrated to Sweden generations ago. One social worker also mentioned that the school receives newly arrived students about a couple per year, and many of those new students have been living in Europe before. They migrated for a family reunion or humanitarian reasons.

"Many students that even if they're new, they have been living in Europe before. They have migrated from a European country, but then we also have families that have been migrated because of war or other situations, such as family connections" – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg).

Newly arrived immigrants are a part of students from immigrant backgrounds. Amadora and Gothenburg contain different proportions and groups of immigrants. However, newly arrived children are not the majority in all schools of respondents, but another group called descendants of immigrants in the following section.

Descendants of immigrants

Students who are descendants of immigrants in second or third generations are the majority in almost all schools of respondents. The descendants of immigrants or so-called second generations are those who were born inside the country, but parents were born or migrated from another country (Hippe & Jakubowski, 2018). However, identifying descendants of immigrants as persons with an immigrant background is not straightforward. Some parents were born in the country, and their children are so-called third generations as well. As one social worker in schools with descendants of immigrants as a majority stated that *"Most of the students in my school have parents that are born in another country"* – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

According to Schneider (2016), it is problematic to define whether children are first or second generations, especially those who were born in another country but have lived most of their life in the destination country. This group of children also present in schools, as stated that *"Maybe they were born there as well, but they were very little when they came to Sweden, like a year or so"* – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

Therefore, immigrant background in this definition is difficult to draw the line. Defining immigrant backgrounds in Amadora and Gothenburg contexts are slightly different, observing from the way social workers described it.

According to the migration history in Amadora, most immigrants were from former Portuguese colonies or Portuguese-speaking African countries, namely Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe. Immigration was intensified after 1974, and therefore the second generation of immigrants became large (Council of Europe, 2011; URBACT, 2019). The reality of nowadays is not different. Descendants of former immigrants

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densely participate in these school neighborhoods, and they are a group that social work professionals work with the most.

> *"We have a large percentage of immigrant students. But the majority are already second or third generation in Portugal"* – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

The defined separation of who is considered to have an immigrant background was controversial in the Amadora context. Many social workers were hesitant in identifying descendants of immigrants as students from immigrant backgrounds. From the statements of respondents, children of immigrants who were born here are considered locals due to the specific long history of migration in the country.

> *"The majority are born in Portugal and they are Portuguese. So, they are second or third generation. They're ethnically black, but they're already born in Portugal with a Portuguese nationality"* – (Respondent 4, Amadora).

Some respondents tended to associate or define students from immigrant backgrounds with other characteristics such as language ability, cultural differences, and challenges in life circumstances.

> *"At home, they speak their own language, and they don't speak Portuguese. So those are the people that I focus on to know Portuguese, and that will be called immigrants"* – (Respondent 4, Amadora).

> *"It's difficult to separate the children, but also the immigrant children. Usually, they have learning difficulties. And they have less support from their families at home because they don't have the capacities or the knowledge to accompany them properly"* – (Respondent 2, Amadora).

However, exploring how social workers define students from immigrant backgrounds was a complicated task. The limitation of a researcher to understand the cultural meaning and the translation involved in most interviews of the Amadora case might affect the term understanding. As noticed, many respondents often mixed the term immigrant children with children from an immigrant background. We can conclude that the immigrant background from the initial perspectives of social workers in Amadora generally implies to the newly arrived immigrants. While it might not be legitimate to define as such with the descendants of Portuguese-speaking immigrants who were born in the country for generations.

Same as Amadora, descendants of immigrants are the most population in schools situated in immigrant-dense areas of Gothenburg. Many of these schools often have very few students with ethnic Swedish parents.

> *"I would say that if I just look at the names on the lists, there are huge Swedish names. So, (if) most of our pupils have a name from another country, it doesn't mean that you come from another country, because you can be born in Sweden. But your parents are from another country. But I could say that there are very few that have parents from Sweden that are born in Sweden and their parents are Swedish"* – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

On the other hand, social workers in Gothenburg tended to reflect the immigrant background based on the perception in Swedish society. The quotes from a dialogue with social workers were not representative of their personal opinions but rather a reflection of the local understanding towards the concept. The immigrant background in a general understanding of professionals in Gothenburg included descendants of immigrants, considering the migration background of parents, their names, and ethnicity.

> *"Some of our students are born in Sweden, or even generational immigrant parents, like in a sense, they are Swedish, but would not be defined as such. Because of the skin color or ethnic background"* – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

Some social work professionals also addressed some disadvantages associated with the immigrant background regardless of being born in Sweden, for example,

> *"Most often is we have issues in Sweden with like many other countries that you have. It's harder for you if you have a name that doesn't sound Swedish or if you don't look Swedish when you're seeking work or an apartment. So often you could say that it's the child is the second generation, just because of the way they look or what their name is. It shows for them in their life. I would wish that it wasn't so, but it is in this society, unfortunately"* – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

In conclusion, professionals of both contexts perceive the immigrant background slightly differently. However, either newly arrived children or descendants of immigrants present in all schools of respondents. The purpose of clarifying immigrant background is not to categorize children to achieve the conclusion of definition. But exploring the contextual influence of each context will be an advantage in further exploration.

Regarding the researcher's reflection, all children regardless of their backgrounds in this school context, are not separated from the view of social work professionals. The general educational challenges of children are inseparable in which problem happens to whom. Understanding the immigrant background concept has a purpose to acknowledge the variations among different types of migration. Because different situations of children can affect challenges they face as well. It is important to reiterate the focal point on the schools in immigrant-dense areas. Therefore, further discussion in educational challenges of students from immigrant backgrounds will focus on all children with all types of migration history in this school context as a center of interest.

5.1.2 Immigrant-dense schools

Many schools in immigrant-dense areas present these characteristics from the perspectives and descriptions of school social workers. Most of characteristics apply to both immigrant-dense schools in Amadora and Gothenburg.

Schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas

Most social work professionals described their schools as schools located in poor areas with a density of immigrant population. The areas face social-economic disadvantage, high criminality, social exclusion in the suburban areas of the cities, and stigmatization. One social worker from Amadora mentioned that

> *"The city Amadora, just the name of the city is already stigmatized because of its criminality. Because it has lots of cultures and immigrants and a lot of social neighborhoods"* – (Respondent 2, Amadora).

Likewise, a professional from one of the predominated immigrant areas in Gothenburg stated that

> *"The part of the city is more stigmatized...when I tell people that I work in Biskopsgården, they're like, oh my god, they're shooting there every day. Which is not true. But it's more Biskopsgården and not the school"* – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

According to Khan et al. (2015), social exclusion is a process associated with inequality. It is a phenomenon in which groups are disadvantaged because of their social characteristics. The description of social workers in immigrant-dense areas reflects some dimension of social exclusion, especially from the influence of their migration background and the areas they live in. The immigrant areas of both locations reflect on the vulnerability of the population and the community as one participant reflected that

"It is in a poor area where the inhabitant has kind of changed over time, you can see a kind of which group by the most exposed or most vulnerable in the Swedish society because they live in these kinds of outer suburbs. So today, it's a very much predominantly immigrant area" – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

The social exclusion impact also shows through few resources in schools and neighborhoods, especially in the case of Amadora.

"All these are the schools, they are situated in two neighborhoods that are literally one of the worst areas or the poorest with a lot of criminality, where housing is really bad, there are very few wellness resources in the school, or not in the school, but in the neighborhood" – (Respondent 4, Amadora).

To conclude, the socio-economically disadvantaged characteristic is very much related to schools in immigrant-dense areas. The findings also show that social exclusion in this school context is mainly influenced by the community area of the schools in which the immigrant backgrounds of the major population are involved.

Multicultural schools

Another prominent characteristic in schools of participants is that many schools contain students from different national backgrounds. Many social workers in Amadora described their schools as *"multicultural vibe"* and *"a mixture of cultures and different social backgrounds"*. In Gothenburg, one social worker addressed that her school has *"children from many parts of the world or with parents from many parts of the world"*. Several schools of both contexts have diverse nationalities of children or parents.

"Students came from different cultural backgrounds, and in this school, we have a total of 28 different nationalities" – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

"There's a variety. I think there are at least 55 languages spoken in school" – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

The multicultural characteristic is considered to be a benefit for students. Many social workers reflected absence or minimal conflicts or issues among students toward different backgrounds of origin. On the opposite, the advantage is the cultural diversity. It tends to facilitate children more in learning and accepting people from different cultures.

"They grew up an in a really international area with a lot of people they used to accommodate this"– (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

"It is very positive for students to know and to learn about other people's culture. Here in this school, they can live with people from very diverse places. Yeah, there are classes that have six different nationalities. So that's positive for them" – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

Proactive schools

Social work professionals acknowledge the disadvantages of the community in schools' surroundings. However, all schools of participants represent a proactive quality from the perspectives of workers. They are active schools in handling challenges of students, implementing programs, being resourceful with qualified professionals, and supports. One social worker from Gothenburg was one of the others who acknowledged the flaws yet described it as a good school regardless of the community's bad reputation.

"I don't think the motivation to choose our school is because it's the best school...I think they could choose because they know that this teacher is good. The reputation in the city is not that (good). But this is a very good school" – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

In Gothenburg, having qualified professionals is a primary positive reason for the strength of the schools. One described that it is *"a well-organized school with competent teachers and a school health team"* – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg). Another social worker also stated similarly that

"It is very segregated in Gothenburg, extremely segregated, I would say. And I hope that it doesn't affect the children too much. In this school, in some ways, it affects them. But many of the staff here, the teachers, and the principal, and others are very professional. So, I think it's a good school for the students here" – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

Efficient professionals are not the only key in this school context. One social worker explained that there is a staff allocation system based on student characteristics. The schools with a higher proportion of students in vulnerable situations are more likely to have a higher rate of professionals to support smaller classes.

"We have a really high rate of educated teachers. And also, the highest teacher density, like there are fewer students and each teacher, so we have small classes, which is really good" – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

One of the workers in Amadora also stated similarly regarding the proactive quality and the understanding of professionals in school regarding children from immigrant backgrounds. They tend to be responsive to the needs of students, and that creates an accepting environment in the school for this group of children and families.

> *"It's the school that doesn't cry about the problems but tried to solve them…It is not that we are like that, we must stay like that and there's nothing to do. We don't think about that. That's why we're trying to find ways to make the difference"*
>
> *"We are very familiar with this kind of reality. So, when they arrived, we are already asking questions about what they have and don't have"*
>
> – (Respondent 1, Amadora).

Unlike a general practice in Sweden, it is not mandatory to have a social worker for every school in Portugal. However, three out of four schools of participants implement the Priority Intervention Educational Areas program (TEIP) which a social worker participates in a multidisciplinary team in schools.

> *"In Portugal, it's a standard for social workers to not be at school, with exception of these schools that are under this program, so in Portugal, the standard that schools must have is a psychologist, not a social worker, but only these areas that have priority intervention areas, are the ones that require a social worker"* – (Respondent 4, Amadora).

The TEIP program targets schools in underprivileged areas with high early school leaving and aims to promote educational equality and inclusion (Eurydice, 2021). The schools have more supports from multidisciplinary professionals if the TEIP program is implemented. The program is location-oriented, so it applies to specific schools. However, the immigrant background is not an exact criterion for schools to implement this program. Social workers described the TEIP program as follows.

> *"It doesn't matter if they're an immigrant or second-generation or with any sex or whatever…the criteria only just need to be a student who lives in that area. Doesn't matter who you are"* – (Respondent 4, Amadora).
>
> *"We are like a kind of school. So, the work is mainly trying to change the way kids see school and diminish the numbers of (absence) and disciplinary cases, help families looking for some help in the external partners, and looking for help to respond and also mental health responses"* – (Respondent 1, Amadora).

Schools in immigrant-dense areas most of the time represent the disadvantage and downside. However, it shows from the study that these schools also present proactive management in improving the education quality for students. The competent school professionals and a high proportion of teachers are prominent in the school context of Gothenburg. And schools in Amadora are active in implementing the extra program that provides more professional support in schools in which a social worker takes part.

5.2 Challenges of pupils from immigrant backgrounds

One of the main objectives for this research is to explore challenges of students from immigrant backgrounds based on social workers' perspectives and find the similarities and differences between the two contexts. Social workers reflected several challenges of students reported in schools and from their perspectives. Challenges, in this case, refer to psycho-social-cultural hindrances that have a negative impact on students' educational achievement or success. According to the findings, some issues have a similar trend in both Amadora and Gothenburg. And some problems tend to be more frequently mentioned or with different degrees or patterns compared to another case. The challenges of students from immigrant backgrounds presenting in this section are upon the thematic analysis of information collected and cannot represent as a generalized rule that applies to all schools in the same condition of Amadora and Gothenburg. Even though most schools have the same population from immigrant backgrounds and school conditions, every school still has its unique characteristic and typical challenges.

Moreover, it is essential to remind that children are not automatically disadvantaged merely because they have an immigrant background. It is more likely that the life circumstances associated with the immigrant background affect children. And we cannot assume that these life conditions happen to every child. There are divergent situations among children from different types of migration and family backgrounds. As one social worker from Gothenburg said that

> *"Since all the kids are immigrants, and some of them just being really normal, regular students, with no problems whatsoever, and the rest is kind of a range of problems. It's good in a sense because you can't pin it down as immigrant problems because most of them actually do function perfectly in our system...*
>
> *But if the life condition is rough, and people are stressed, their priorities will be different from someone in a more functional situation"* – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

Therefore, this finding presentation will reflect some part of the challenging conditions of students from immigrant backgrounds from the perspectives of social workers in schools. The common challenges found in both locations are discussed below.

5.2.1 Economic challenges

Migration and poverty can be a cause and an effect of migration. Immigrants face challenges in feeling insecure, having low-paid jobs, being marginalized in vulnerable areas with deprived housings and high criminality. Structural exclusion leads to poor education, unemployment, vulnerability to crime, and community tensions (Khan et al., 2015). Economic challenges or poverty of students is one of the most common issues that social workers from Amadora and Gothenburg often handle.

As mentioned earlier, the schools of respondents from Amadora are in a low socio-economic deprived area. Children are easily exposed to drugs and criminality. The financial shortage and insufficient financial support from the state put families to settle down in Amadora because of its cheaper accommodation to afford. As said,

> *"If they don't have money to buy a house or to have a quality lifestyle. They put them in these social neighborhoods for a short amount of money. Most of these children live in those kinds of neighborhoods…there are a lot of problems related to dealers, problems with the police and criminality"* – (Respondent 2, Amadora).

Many families need food and clothes, and it is intensifying during the covid-19 pandemic situation. Many parents lost their jobs. The lack of financial support enforces the families to work hard. This situation directly affects children as their parents do not have time for their children's educational support.

> *"There's also a lack of economic support to these families that makes the families work more than they should. They work for lots of hours, longer hours, and they are exploited. This usually has drastic consequences for their families and children"* – (Respondent 2, Amadora).

Economic problem has a crucial impact on students' education, because to function in studying, children need to survive and have an appropriate of basic needs. One social worker criticized that the education policy in Portugal overlooks this problem sometimes as she said that

"This public policy tends to evaluate the schools by the grades and the success of how many students conclude to the school and they don't give importance to the food and if the students are well feeding, if they are well-dressed if they have the conditions to study" – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

The pattern of economic challenges in Gothenburg is similar in that there are some problems reported with lacking food and clothes. Some students do not have the internet to study online from home during the covid-19 pandemic, so they must travel to school during that circumstance. The same issue was also reported in Amadora.

However, the financial support from the state in Sweden is known for sufficiency to survive but might not be enough for the well-being of the families or developmental opportunities for children. Challenges in Gothenburg reflect both absolute poverty and relative poverty. Some social workers mentioned that the financial support from the government may not be sufficient for children to experience activities or afford other opportunities like other children do.

"They can't do maybe an activity they want to do, or they don't have enough food all the time" – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg).

"Because social services don't give you money to do anything except survive. So many of those families don't have any money to do anything ever. Like they can't even buy pizza or go swimming" – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

However, some part of reflection from a social worker shows the existence of absolute poverty in Sweden.

"School in Sweden is free. So, there should not be anything that costs but in one way…I would say that I have been working in other schools with parents from totally different backgrounds and there could be a problem with not having the right clothes with not the right brands, but I think in my school, almost all of them are having parents with not so much money. So that will not be the same problem" – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

Another example of an economic problem in Gothenburg is a proper housing problem. As said, *"Sometimes the migration office they offer a place to stay. But sometimes those places are not so convenient for families to stay at"* – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg). The housing problem in Gothenburg is a common issue for the city. However, the housing problem is not limited to people from immigrant backgrounds. One social worker explained it as a structural problem in society as they are the most vulnerable for social exclusion in many aspects, such as losing jobs or houses.

"We have a lack of housing. This is too few apartments for too many people and that's a general problem that doesn't only connect to the immigrant population but as with everything the population in our areas are the first people to lose their jobs, to lose their apartments, and it's harder for them to get new contracts or to get hired…it's like they're the outskirts of society in everything no matter of their own, it doesn't like the education or the integration or the actions are not very active defining in this. And looking back this has been a structure in a society" – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

In conclusion, most economic problems reported by social workers are accordance with several pieces of literature review. The main economic difficulties are inadequate family income, unemployment, deprived housing, and inaccessible education during the pandemic due to the lack of technological devices and the internet. Economic support from the state is available in both contexts, even though it is considered insufficient at times for the child's development and well-being.

5.2.2 Language challenge

Language is one of the primary challenges related to migration. The study found that newly arrived students specifically encounter the most difficulty in the new language. The language challenge is not limited to children but their parents. The hardship in communicating the local language leads to other challenges, such as learning problems and lower access to resources. There are similar outcomes from a language challenge between Amadora and Gothenburg.

Not knowing Portuguese or Swedish, the main language of instruction in classrooms undoubtedly leads to academic learning challenges for students.

"Because you're coming from another country, it doesn't mean that you're not good at mathematics or physics, they could be really good at that. So of course, that will affect a class with the Swedish language" – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

Language challenge in class affects the understanding in the classroom which directly impact on learning performance. They do not want to participate in education, which leads to the school absence or early leaving. As said,

"In class, they have difficulty understanding everything. So, they don't participate. That can lead to these motivations to drop out, skip school" – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

The language barrier is present with both children and their parents. Not knowing the language brings difficulty to access services, or to claim their rights with the school service regarding things that matter for their children. A social worker in Amadora mentioned her role to help the students communicating with the administration office in school.

> *"A lot of students from South Asia, that just coming in and don't speak Portuguese. So, I help in communication with the office sometimes even I speak a little bit of English because there are not a lot of English speakers in the administration office"* – (Respondent 4, Amadora).

In Gothenburg, one professional stated a difference between parents in this school context and schools in other parts of Gothenburg in expressing their rights or requests with the school. The language barrier is a part of this challenge, in her opinion.

> *"A lot of the students and or parents don't have the knowledge or language to express what they need…many parents, maybe in other parts of Gothenburg, where they have more money would say you need to help us with this, you need to sort this out for our child and us. And in this school, a lot of parents don't know that they can say that, or they don't know where to turn or how to express that"* – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

However, not every student from immigrant backgrounds is struggling with the language issue, especially ones who are descendants of immigrants who can speak Portuguese or Swedish.

> *"Some of them are Portuguese fluent, they don't have problems with the language. Because we have a lot of population that come from Angola. Cape Verde, Sao tome, Guinea, they speak Portuguese, and most parts of them are already born here"* – (Respondent 1, Amadora).

The condition in Amadora is different because the new immigrants sometimes are coming from Portuguese-speaking countries. Not every school of participants is implementing Portuguese intensive classes. There is a school where newly arrived immigrants are the minority, most students can speak at least Portuguese, and therefore they do not have much need to form an extra Portuguese class. However, speaking Portuguese from different countries outside Portugal might reduce but not stop the challenge. Portuguese language variants are very different. These variants are not valued by teachers and still represent a challenge and a vulnerability. One school in Gothenburg also does not consider language a big problem, unless they are newly arrived children or there are some other conditions of children involved.

"A few of them can't speak Swedish because they recently came to Sweden or because they have been facing trauma coming to Sweden, they haven't learned Swedish, even if they have lived here for several years" – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

Language is more than knowing the language but a deeper understanding of the language. One social work professional from Gothenburg explained her knowledge and experience that students of immigrants could have a problem with levels of language usage. A part of it is associated with the class of families and a higher expectation of language requirements in school.

"Lots of students, even students born in Sweden, can have a rather superficial use of language…it's partly due to immigration and the language spoken in the area and at home. But it's also partly a class question…there's a language that we use and expect others to use…like the right language. Even in Swedish" – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

Language plays a crucial part in the education and social integration of families from immigrant backgrounds. Language is a door to education and resources from social services. Language challenge is likely to be an issue for newly arrived immigrants rather than descendants of immigrants. However, the language of families and other conditions of immigrant parents may affect children in one way or another, as is discussing further.

5.2.3 Family challenges

Social workers from Amadora and Gothenburg acknowledged the effect of family circumstances on students. Economic challenges appeared as a primary source of stress for families in both cases. In Amadora, social workers reported that there are a lot of single families. Most of the time, families overwork alone to earn more, and therefore, they do not have time to take care of their children. For example,

"We have a lot of families that only have one parent, and the mother most of the time with a lot of kids that work from six in the morning to 10, and from 5 am to 10 pm. So mostly do the cleaning. They never at home to put kids to bed or take them out or supervise them. And mostly they are not at home to provide them dinner" – (Respondent 4, Amadora).

In Gothenburg, financial stress is one of the other challenges that families encounter. The insecure housing, family movement, contact with authorities, and learning the new language caused parents to feel stressed. And it is difficult to expect families to take full responsibility for their children. As said,

"Living under extreme, economical stress, or having really smaller apartments, living with insecure contracts and apartments and have to move all the time with families, maybe five kids, which makes it really hard to expect them what to do. It's quite hard work to have kids in school for the parents if they are living up to expectations as the Swedish school system kind of thing" – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

However, social work professionals from each context presented the impact of family stress on students differently. Social workers in Amadora mentioned the main consequence of lacking supervision for children. As said, *"lack of family involvement and it is just the responsibility of the students themselves"* Many times, students live on their own and cannot concentrate on studying or have proper routines.

"They also lack the study in their homes, they just go to school, because they are alone, most of the time, so instead of studying, they play games, or they are taking care of the siblings. They have a lot of distractions, and they don't spend much time studying because of the lack of adult supervision" – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

On the other hand, professionals in Gothenburg highlighted more consequences on children in that they take many adult responsibilities to help their families. For instance, taking care of siblings and themselves, and helping parents to be in contact with the authorities. As said,

"A lot of our kids are carrying this kind of responsibility that we expect adults to carry. Such as, as a daily schedule. If no one is available and everyone in the family is at work or if the adults are not in a good mental kind of state, quite young kids will have to make sure that they get up in the morning, get dressed and have clean clothes and get to school and maybe make sure that their youngest siblings also get to school, before they can go to school" – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

"They may learn Swedish, faster than their parents. They sometimes have to help their *parents in different kinds of contact with authorities. So, they don't come to school"*
– (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

Family support can also be in a form of educational support from home. Only some professionals in Gothenburg referred to this challenge. The low educational background of parents can affect the education of their children because parents do not know how to support them.

"If the parent can read or write then, the child is at a bigger risk to have issues in school. And we don't see that a lot with native parents because most of them can read or write even

if it's not good…they have parents who maybe don't have an education at all, for example. Many of the mothers from Somalia, they can barely read. So, they don't know how to help their child" – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

The economic situation, status, and educational background of immigrant parents lead to family challenges. From the perspectives of social workers, families take part in the school life of children. The family situation can affect students' presence in the school, concentration, well-being, and educational performance.

5.2.4 Academic challenges

The findings show that some students from immigrant backgrounds, especially newly arrived immigrant children encounter academic difficulties. The challenges are related to the former school background, lower education attainment or academic performance, and less understanding of the education and school system.

Newly arrived children often face challenges in school and social adjustment. They are between the differences in education, cultural values, languages of the original and host countries (Oxman-Martinez & Choi, 2014). Language is a crucial part of educational learning for students, as already mentioned earlier. Cultural values and pre-educational qualifications also stimulate a learning challenge of students apart from the language issue.

Cultural values can influence education. One social worker from Amadora. For example, the challenge of Roma students. As said,

"They have their own culture. And usually, they don't value school. The families also don't value the school and they have different legislation. The kids marry really early. And they dropped school because of that" – (Respondent 2, Amadora).

None or lower pre-educational qualifications before migration also cause more challenges in educational adaptation for students. In Gothenburg, one professional mentioned some students that have been in a non-mainstream school. Some of them have not been in education continuously because of multiple migrations or being in refugee status.

"You are born in a country and you have been living there. And for some reason, you have not been in school or maybe you have been in some kind of religious school…some students that they need have also been refugees, so they may not have been able to go to school for

some years because they are moving from country to country" – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

Different educational demands from homelands and the country of destination can be different. In this case, many students struggle to achieve higher educational demands in the new country. As one social worker from Amadora said,

> *"The educational discrepancies because a lot of students report that in the homelands the level of (educational) demands was lower. Like over there, it was easier for them to integrate into the school and to have good grades. They feel that it is more complicated for them here. Because here they say it's more difficult"* – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

Lower academic performance and expectations from schools are a concern for some schools. For example, Gothenburg social work professional stated that many students do not have grades, while the reality is different in schools from another context. In Amadora, many students opt to study in a vocational program to finish the mandatory education in Portugal (until grade 12). And not so many of them have the motivation to pursue higher education after.

> *"When I'm looking at the grades that the student has in the school, a lot of the students have at least one subject without a grade on it"* – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).
>
> *"They choose this kind of program because they think it's easy for them to finish school. And the percentage of students that go to college is very low"* – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

Social resources of immigrant children and families, such as knowledge about the educational system, cultural codes, and access to networks, are a part of school integration that support their learning performance (Raabe, 2018; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019). Not understanding the school expectation and system are valid problems in both contexts. In Amadora, a social worker mentioned that some families did not know if they can ask for support from the school. Similar to the Gothenburg case, in terms of the understanding or expectation between schools and families.

> *"Some of them are surprised when they understand that you can ask for help at school to have some things and get help with some things"* – (Respondent 1, Amadora).
>
> *"There are some people that are new in Sweden, they have a different view and sense of what the school is and what you can expect from a school and what the school will expect from you"* – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

Academic and learning challenges have a similar pattern in the schools of Amadora and Gothenburg. The migrant conditions like language, former education background from another country, and the lack of social resources, partly intensify the learning challenges of immigrant students.

5.2.5 Emotional well-being challenge

According to all schools of participants, students with a status of refugee, asylum seekers, or those who came for a humanitarian reason are a small group compared to other groups of students with immigrant backgrounds. There is a similarity of the challenge from the perspectives of social work professionals in both Amadora and Gothenburg. However, social workers from Gothenburg more frequently addressed the issue than workers in Amadora. The higher numbers of children and families who migrated for humanitarian reasons in Sweden could be a reason for this. The most common challenge of this group of students is emotional well-being hardship. Many social workers acknowledged a different experience of students from this group and causing them trauma and fear. This condition affects them in a different way which other students who never had the same experience would be. As said,

> *"I feel that immigrants sometimes have other experiences, like the students that came from Syria. They have war experience and much harder backgrounds. They have a lot more difficulty adapting because sometimes they express fear"* – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

> *"I can see that the children who have fled from example from Syria, who has witnessed war and experienced starvation and things like that, are traumatized, of course, so they have different issues than a child who has never experienced that kind of trauma"* – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

Besides experiencing wars and starvation, social work professionals in Gothenburg also mentioned the consequence of family pressure on children. There is a sense of insecurity involved in life as mentioned earlier. The anxiety with the permanent stay and burdens of parents are heavy responsibilities on them. The children of immigrant parents can feel and be affected by that as well.

> *"When a child doesn't have a permanent state that brings a sense of insecurity in the family as a pressure that the child feels. So that affects the child's well-being as well, it's a stress for the family and the child"* – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg).

"Maybe you're worried for yourself and your family if you will be able to stay in Sweden. So, I think they manage to have to deal with a lot of problems" – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

Traumatized experiences and family pressure from the insecurity in life harm children's emotional well-being and discourages them from focusing on education. Almost every social worker in Gothenburg acknowledged that. As said,

"Kids have a lot of stress and like circumstances that make it really hard for them to focus on school" – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

"*Students also come to Sweden with maybe some trauma or mental health problems that could cause trouble in learning, or problems with concentration*" – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

Students especially those who experienced traumatic life events, or life pressure from the family, are vulnerable to the emotional well-being challenge. In turn, it directly impacts their educational experience. One professional from Gothenburg well-summarized this conclusion that "*In those situations, impact the emotional well-being of students. But these factors sometimes can impact their education as well*" – (Respondent 1, Gothenburg).

5.2.6 Mobility of students

Children and families from immigrant backgrounds of some schools frequently move to different locations to stay. One of the schools in Amadora has a regular moving trend. As said, *"There is always someone new arriving and someone departing. The school is also always welcoming people"* – (Respondent 1, Amadora). There are domestic and international mobility in both contexts of some schools. The international mobility exists in the two contexts in different patterns. In Gothenburg, one social worker said that students have often lived in several countries in Europe before moving to Sweden.

"Most of our students are so many students that even if they're new, but they're still they have been living in Europe before…They often have been lived in several countries for a different amount of time, or different places. It can also be only here in Gothenburg that they have to move" – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg).

However, the international mobility of children and families from one school in Amadora has a direction to other countries in Europe.

"Sometimes they move to other countries that are not from the ones they came from. They came to Portugal. The parents stayed for a while one to two years then they tried to go to find someplace better. Sometimes they move to England, sometimes they move to Germany. But the main movement I see of someone leaving from Portugal is not for the birthplace. Usually for another place they think is better" – (Respondent 1, Amadora).

These statements reflect a moving trend of immigrant children and families in Portugal and Sweden. Some immigrants stay in Portugal temporarily before moving to other countries in Europe for "better" reasons. While Sweden is one of those "next" destination countries of immigrants.

For a domestic movement, there is a similarity between Amadora and Gothenburg. The economic reason is the main influence of movement within the country. Searching for a cheaper and decent place to stay is the most stated reason from social work professionals.

"We also have some movement from African descendants trying to find cheap places. So, they move a lot from on the border to the other side of the river. They tried to find cheaper homes there" – (Respondent 1, Amadora).

"They move a lot because they can't stay in one place too long. Or they don't find a job in that particular place, or they move to maybe another house to find a better situation…you stay with the landlord a couple of months, and then maybe the landlord doesn't rent the house or the apartment anymore, or maybe it's too expensive for you. So, you have to move" – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg).

Moving several times to different places is also a disadvantage in education. Professionals mentioned the far distance traveling from home to schools. The moving condition also impacts family stress and so their children. For instance,

"If they have to move a lot, and they would be shuffled through the largest city, they sometimes have a long journey to school every day…If it's a single mother with five kids, and they live in different unsuitable conditions and are moving around a lot, obviously she is that mother won't be able to support their kids in the same way as someone living in a different situation" – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

Moving several times to different locations to stay, either within the country or between the countries, is not a fixed characteristic for all children from immigrant backgrounds. However, if they do move, the motivation is from the economic reason, such as finding cheaper and suitable

accommodation or finding jobs. The outcomes are a far distance from schools. The stress of moving from the families can also obstruct the maximum capacity to support their children.

5.2.7 School segregation and educational exclusion

> *"There's no kind of ethnic Swedish pupils at all, actually. So, it's an immigrant school"* – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

One characteristic of all schools of participants is that they have a high proportion of pupils with immigrant backgrounds. The findings from the research are following many previous studies regarding the educational exclusion of students from immigrant backgrounds existing in Portugal and Sweden. The pattern of school segregation in these two contexts is similar, as in other European countries. According to The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights (2017), the recent increase of refugees arriving in Europe intensified school segregation. Children with a migrant background usually experience studying in marginalized schools with a high proportion of foreign-born children. The statement is proven to be valid from the study.

There are many reasons behinds for this school segregation. The main influences found from the study are residential influence, school choice of parents, and local school practice.

The school enrollment system in Portugal and Sweden are similar in that schools will receive students living in the surrounding areas or the community. A professional from Amadora explained the Portuguese school system that,

> *"When you arrived must you go to the school of your residency, trying to find that vacancy, but you can fulfill the paper with five or six schools. If you don't have a place in the first one, the process will go to the second one, and the third one, until the final place. And if you don't have a place even the last one, the process was up to the ministry, they will find a place nearby, but probably far from the schools"* – (Respondent 1, Amadora).

In the Swedish system, schools are obliged to receive students in the neighborhoods. However, there is also a free school choice system that parents can opt for schools outside of their areas based on their preference. As said,

> *"The Swedish system works that way. You should go to school. You will be in a school that will have children from around. So, most of the schools have like that. But if you don't want to go that you can choose another school"* – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

It is a logical sense that children from the same community areas go to the same schools. Children living in immigrant areas are more likely to be in immigrant-dense schools. One aspect of social exclusion has a linkage to another dimension of exclusion (Khan et al., 2015). It shows that residential segregation leads to school segregation. All schools of respondents are filled up with children with immigrant backgrounds and perceived as schools for immigrants.

> *"They are put in the school that is near their address. So usually, immigrants that live in the neighborhoods go to the same school"* – (Respondent 2, Amadora).

Nevertheless, residential segregation is not the only reason why schools of participants from both contexts have a high proportion of children from immigrant backgrounds. In Gothenburg, the free school choice system also exacerbates this segregation sometimes. Because parents prefer the best schools for their children. One school always lose students to other schools as said,

> *"Sweden has this kind of free school choice where it's free to attend, like private schools, and that has actually created the kind of drainage of students…it's the slow progress of losing students every year"* – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

Another professional criticized that the free school choice system also negatively impacts students' education. As said,

> *"You have a system where you are free to choose the school, that I think also it's a problem because then we have students that are in our school and think this is not a good school, I don't learn much. So, they go to another school… when they come back some years later, we can see that was not good for their education"* – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

Opting for good schools also happens in the Amadora schools. As said,

> *"I notice that the families usually don't want to put their children in schools that they know that they have children from (this kind of) social neighborhoods"* – (Respondent 2, Amadora).

Several studies explained that parental choice influences school segregation. Multicultural schools or schools attended by socially disadvantaged students are well-known for their reputation in lower expectations of educational attainment or lower quality of education (The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 2017; Bunar, 2009). Besides choosing better schools, selecting schools based on the characteristics of the student population in schools is also another explanation. Fear of exclusion could happen to children from immigrant backgrounds if they opt to be in the so-called Swedish middle-class schools (Yang & Gustafsson, 2016). We cannot clearly

define the motivation of parents in sending their children to these schools. However, some professionals mentioned that a sense of belonging could be advantageous for the families to be in where they feel welcomed and comfortable. For instance,

> *"Coming to a school for hours can be easier than going to schools in other places, but they are not so familiar with the receiving of immigrant people"* – (Respondent 1, Amadora).

> *"It has some advantages, of course, the sense of belonging and the family's possibilities to meet other families who are similar to them"* – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

We discussed the residential factor and school choice of parents. However, local actors in local school institutions are also involved in the process of exclusion. One social worker from Amadora shared one of the reasons for the school segregation. Some other schools do not prefer children with disadvantaged backgrounds to maintain the good academic performance of the schools. Therefore, students who faced rejection in the schools nearby ended up going to these schools in Amadora, far away from their homes.

> *"Generally, all the schools in Amadora, all have immigration. We have 12 clusters of schools, and generally, all of them are immigrant students. But sometimes the schools do a selection of students if they see that the students have a lot of health issues or they have an irregular condition, like the repetition of classes like failing classes. They need to repeat that level. If students have a lot of failure in their education record, they tend to say that they don't have a place for them in that school, that the school is full, so they need to apply to other schools. So, they can do those kinds to students with a lot of issues, or the students that the other schools don't want them, they tend to come to here in this school. Sometimes, they do that because they don't want the school to be classified in a lower-ranking"* – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

Another professional has another explanation that sometimes the schools do not have available places because some immigrant children enter schools in the middle of the year.

> *"When there are a lot of children coming, probably the ones that will arrive later won't have a place nearby"* – (Respondent 1, Amadora).

"School segregation is a first step in a life of segregation" (The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 2017). Many social work professionals addressed the outcomes of school segregation. Being in an immigrant-dense school disrupts their integration into the whole society.

The mixed environment of students from different backgrounds would facilitate their language learning and understanding of each other differences.

> *"The positive side is that they integrate well with other students, but they will not integrate as well in the receiving society…they are not well prepared for society compared if they were in the school with the less percentage of immigrant students"* – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

> *"The segregation is devastating for the country and the city... I think all children need to meet people from all parts of society. And segregation only makes people afraid of each other"* – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

In conclusion, the reality of schools and reflections from participants show that school segregation leads to educational exclusion. The main factors of school segregation in Amadora and Gothenburg are residential segregation and parental preferences. We also learned from the Amadora context that actors, school institutions, systems, and local practices could be a part of the exclusion process. Educational inequality and social exclusion are the outcomes of school segregation among children from immigrant backgrounds.

5.3 School social work and ecological systems theory

Another research question is to find how social work plays a role in responding to those challenges of children from immigrant backgrounds and how they are similar or different between Amadora, Portugal, and Gothenburg, Sweden. The specific objective to achieve in this section is to explore school social work interventions and explain them based on the ecological systems model (micro, meso, macro) as the central framework for comparison.

Ecological systems theory has a relation to school social work. From the literature reviews, social workers are different from other professionals in schools in that they perceive broader students' problems and consider individual students inseparable from the surrounding environments. Most of the time, school social workers work at different levels with different people in the student's social systems. Their goal is to facilitate pupils' education life by preventing and intervening in problems and providing supports. So, students can achieve their educational goals.

There are many forms of ecological systems theory models adopted in different fields of study. This research applied the ecological systems model in school social work presented by Jiang, Peng &Wang (2016) as a primary framework before the information collection. Dupper (2003) adopted

the ecological systems theory to explain school social work services at different levels. The categorization consists of three levels (micro, meso/the middle level, macro). The summarized primary ecological systems model for this research was already presented in Figure 6.

This findings section will present the pattern of school social work activities in schools in immigrant-dense areas of Amadora and Gothenburg by using the ecological systems model of three levels (micro, meso, macro) for conceptualization. However, categorizing school social work activities across different countries or schools is a challenging task. Therefore, the outcome for this research is not limited to the mentioned strict model from the prior assumption and generated from the contextual flexibility.

5.3.1 Micro level

The microsystem is the area of an individual's direct interaction (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). Family is the closest unit that a child interacts with within the microsystem. The earlier classification of school social work services applied from ecological systems theory by Dupper (2003) defined that the micro-level refers to the work scale involved with children and families, such as working with children's behavioral problems and parenting skills enhancement. This study defines the individual level work in which social workers directly interact with individual children and families. There are many forms of micro-leveled work with children and families found in the two contexts. The commonality is intervention in the crisis, individual support, assessment, or investigation, and the one distinct task between the two cases is counseling work.

Intervening problems and responding to the needs of students and families so children can function well in schools are the common ground of school social workers in Amadora and Gothenburg. The problems they handle are mostly school absence, economic difficulties, and family issues. Social work professionals in Gothenburg more likely described their scope of responsibility in psychosocial health issues. For example, emotional and social problems in schools. On the other hand, social workers in Amadora described their primary roles in providing economic supports and facilities for children and families, such as food, clothes, and school supplies. There is the basis among two cases to support individual students and families in any matters that obstruct their school life. Professionals from both contexts have assessment and investigation roles. However, this area was not clearly explored. In Gothenburg, most of the investigation involves school

absence, child protection, and special needs. In Amadora, the assessment and screening for economic supports could be involved.

The most distinct task is a counseling role. The Swedish professional title as "kurator" which means "school counselor", shapes the main counseling role of school social workers in Gothenburg. The responsibility is to provide counseling, speak the voice of students, and sometimes communicate with adults on their behalf. As said,

> *"A big part of my work is to speak to the child. My responsibility is to catch up, which students need to speak to an adult. And I also get that, from teachers or the principal"* – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

School counselors deal with various kinds of issues, from behavioral and emotional problems, family and social problems, and school life matters related. One professional explained that common problems addressed by students are, for example,

> *"I don't feel well in different ways. anxiety, I feel stressed, I can't sleep, I'm sad, I don't feel well, in some way. Or I don't know how to get a grade in school. I don't know how to do it in school. Those are the two most common issues that they seek me for"* – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

On the other hand, there is no fixed pattern of how much school social workers in Amadora should engage in counseling responsibility. A social worker is not a mandatory position in every school as in Gothenburg. Therefore, the social worker in Amadora is the extra demand from schools. Several workers are present to serve the specific program in school, along with other members of a multidisciplinary team. As the social worker is in a flexible position in school, their scope of responsibility is upon the program they work for, the overlapping work with other available school professionals, and school needs. Social workers in some schools in Amadora barely involve with counseling for students. Working with individual students varies from school to school. Social workers in Amadora are more likely to describe themselves as working with families rather than speaking individually with students in the same way as in Gothenburg. The individual counseling task tends to be the main scope of a psychologist, which is mandatory in every school in Portugal. As one social worker stated that she does counseling sometimes but it is more of a psychologist role.

"I have done it sometimes, but it's more of a psychologist role. So, I go away, I really articulate those kinds of cases with the psychologists. And mostly works with groups of children or with families" – (Respondent 2, Amadora).

A family focus is prominent in Amadora. One social worker stated that she works mostly with families rather than individual students. There is a reason for this clear separation, as the school has three similar professionals with overlapping responsibilities and minor different focuses. There are an educator and a mediator besides a social worker. They focus differently yet coordinate together.

"Those twos work more with students and I work more with families. I know who they (students) are, but I don't really interact with the students, I interact more with the family" – (Respondent 4, Amadora).

However, another school of one respondent has a division of counseling tasks among members within a multidisciplinary team. Each of them is responsible for students at different education levels, while some issues are still delivered among members according to their expertise. The psychologist deals with psycho health issues and the social worker is known for any family and social-economic matters.

"All health and psychological issues are always with the psychologists. We have other five members in the team, and they are divided by classes and levels of education" – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

The social worker stated that she provides guidance to individual students and families. The areas of her guidance provision are family associated problems, unemployment, economic difficulties, immigration challenges, documentation, violence, abuse addiction, pregnancy, and so on. The pattern of seeking and providing guidance support is similar in the Gothenburg context. As said,

"Some of them, ask for counseling, they search for me to talk. And some of them, I am the one who came to them. Sometimes the counseling guidance request comes from the families, other times, from the professors, in other times it comes directly from the students" – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

Social workers in both cases similarly delivered services at a micro-level through intervention in the crisis, providing individual supports, including guidance or counseling. However, school social workers in Gothenburg has a more prominent role of counseling task because they also hold a school counselor role. Social workers in Amadora have their roles identified by the context of each

local school. They rarely engage with counseling as it is overlapping with a mandatory psychologist role. Nevertheless, they are experts within a team in terms of social-economic and family-related matters with individual students.

5.3.2 Meso level

The mesosystem involves interaction between multiple microsystems that interconnect and influence each other (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). Improving the school environment and utilizing community resources are also a part of work at the middle level (Jiang, Peng &Wang, 2016). For this study, the meso level refers to the activities of school social workers that involve any group leveled work, including involvement with other actors or institutions within students' school environment and community.

Social work professionals utilize resources in the school environment to benefit individual students in various ways. Group work is a practice to meet the needs of many and diverse students at once (Openshaw, 2008). Group work is also a method to utilize peers as a resource to help individual students. For example,

> *"By promoting these kinds of sessions and workshops, they can see that maybe their classmates are debating with them as well. And that is normal"* – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

> *"You have behavior problems, but maybe you have a friend acting better so you can discuss. So, your friend knows how to deal with when he's getting mad. How can you do the same? or how can you learn from other children in school"* – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

Social workers from every school have different group work management. Most of them are involved in working with a group of students or in a classroom setting. For instance, *"I also do observations in the classroom, like I observed how they work. And sometimes I also help some children in the classroom"* – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg). Some professionals lead group activities by themselves. Sometimes, they collaborate with a professional team and be a coordinator for other speakers to lead sessions. In Gothenburg, most professionals educate students on various topics like violence, relations, love, and sex.

"I give education about preventing violence. I do preventive workshops about violence with the children, how to prevent violence, and how to get help if you experience violence" – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg).

"We speak to the different classes about sexual abuse or violence at home, and then we speak about how to be a good friend" – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

"We're meeting all the students in the eighth grade and talk about relations, love and sex under puberty" – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

In Amadora, social workers work mostly with a team in group work design. The responsibility is sometimes divided among members based on their expertise. The group work topics to promote in the classroom aim to respond to the needs of students in each classroom. The main topics in the responsibility of social workers are usually communication skills, gender equality, non-violence atmosphere, including the well-being of students during the pandemic situation.

"I work with group pressure. It's more like the communication styles, how they communicate with each other, to resolve conflicts, to learn how to say no. Gender equality is also a topic. Emotional management, and communication skills" – (Respondent 2, Amadora).

"Currently, we are doing the sessions promoting well-being during the pandemic situation. We go to the classes, we talk with students, how are they feeling? How did they feel when they were outside the school? When they are having classes at their homes, and we talk to them to promote communication with us about how they were feeling and to share that with the classmates" – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

Other professionals in the school environment are also a key to drive an impact on individual students. Collaboration with other professionals in school is a necessary part of school social workers. In Amadora, most social workers belong to a multidisciplinary team under the TEIP program. Non-teaching staff includes, for example, psychologists, mediators, social educators. In Gothenburg, school counselors are a part of a health team, along with school nurses, psychologists, social pedagogues, etc. However, all school social workers contact everyone in schools from individual students, teachers, to principals. Teachers are the closest professionals to students. As said,

"Teachers are our allies. They constantly articulate with professionals, because they have a privileged position, they are constantly with the students. So sometimes they are the first ones to see a problem and to see a specific issue, and they are the ones who will tell the social worker about those problems and the situation that are occurring with certain students" – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

Therefore, sharing information and articulation between teachers and social work professionals are frequent. Social workers often receive feedback from teachers and support them in a form of discussion, advice, or counseling. As said, *"Our role is much also to guide and to give counseling to the teachers"* – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg). In the first scenario, social workers are called when there are some issues reported by teachers. For instance,

"Sometimes if the teacher has a meeting with the parents and they feel that this will not be a good meeting or that parents may be really angry, I can be with them just to support them" – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

"Sometimes it's a class problem, and we are called to do an intervention with that class. From the other way, I contact the teacher, to have feedback about the classroom, or for the teacher to have an awareness in specific situations" – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

Knowledge support is a prominent role of social work professionals in both contexts, for example, advising teachers how to work with children and how to detect signs of domestic violence.

"I work a lot with the teaching the teachers how to meet children without getting in a conflict with them or with a group of children. How should I to think as a teacher? To get the group to listen to me?" – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

"I also give education to those teachers and people that work at schools so that they are alert to certain symptoms and know how to act once they have noticed that this or that student might be a victim of physical abuse" – (Respondent 4, Amadora).

Some professionals also provide emotional support for teachers. As said,

"I try to help them to find ways to deal with the students in the classroom more just telling them that you are doing a really good job, continue doing that, you are a good teacher, this will work out really well" – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

However, the relationship between social workers and teachers is not always harmonious. It sometimes requires working in a relationship. The hardship can happen when teachers and social workers are on different perspectives, including when teachers may have high expectations towards social workers and other non-teaching professionals to solve the problems magically.

School social workers also possess a connection with the community beyond working within the school environment. One social worker from Amadora visited neighborhoods for introduction and relation-building between school and community.

> *"We both go to the neighborhood and present ourselves and the school. We try to speak about the importance of the school and try to establish the relation between children, families, and the school"* – (Respondent 2, Amadora).

However, most social workers barely associate with the community in this form but rather collaborate with social services in the community to facilitate support for students and families. They usually mediate between schools and other institutions in the community, such as medical centers, immigration offices, employment agencies, police, child protection services, governmental and non-governmental organizations. The mediator role is a must role for respondents from all schools.

> *"It is an articulation work. Just work for the school and for the students that are in the school, but this work requires that I constantly speak with other people from the outside of the school"* – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

In conclusion, social work professionals from Amadora and Gothenburg perform similar roles of school social work at the meso level. They work with other actors within the school environment and coordinate with the community outside the school. In the school environment, social workers utilize human resources within the school to improve the impact on individual students. Most of them deliver group work activities for students and support other school professionals by providing information and advice. Teachers are social worker's allies. They help to target students in need and to improve the better environment in the classroom. Social workers also utilize resources from the community. They link services to children and families and perform as a mediator to bridge between school and community.

5.3.3 Macro level

The macrosystem represents beliefs, values, and norms reflecting through cultural, religious, socio-economic organizations of society. This system affects the experience of individuals and influences other ecological systems (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). School social workers work at the macro level by advocating child welfare policies (Jiang, Peng &Wang, 2016). However, participation in policy advocacy is idealistic for all school social work professionals from both contexts. Most of their work is in between micro and meso levels. They drive small changes from the everyday work that they do. As said, *"Everything you do, will make a small difference, you cannot change the whole work"* – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

Regardless of unobvious participation at the macro level, all social work professionals are critical towards the gaps in policy and management. They reflect on how the educational and welfare policies to support students from immigrant backgrounds should be. Yet reaching change in policies from their current position is still questioned.

"I feel that immigrant children are the ones that need the most support and most of the work that social workers do" – (Respondent 2, Amadora). All social workers mutually agreed on improving policies and practices for the educational integration of students from immigrant backgrounds. Equality in education and integration are highlighted. For instance,

> *"If you could make school more equal, like now we have in my school, a lot of immigrant students and in other parts of Gothenburg. You have schools with only Swedish children. I think that you need to mix…It's good to meet people from other parts, but also I think that would help some of my students with their education they need if it's more mixed"* – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

Many social workers think that school desegregation benefits all students. It is advantageous to know people from different backgrounds in society, and immigrant students can learn the local language faster. These reasons lead the overall social integration. A social worker from Amadora also added that *"Integrating meaning that also respecting their values from home…It's not like they need to live this in the way we live"* – (Respondent 4, Amadora). Therefore, remaining cultural identities is also a part of the integration.

Some professionals reflected on improving some policy gaps towards working with students from immigrant backgrounds. Usually, most policy suggestions from social workers are more related to

newly arrived students than another group. One social worker from Amadora pointed out the inaccessible resources problem due to the legal status of immigrant students. As stated,

> *"Because children are at school, it shouldn't depend on you have citizenship or residency card. Because if you are sending your children to the school, you're showing interest in them having a better condition. So, the government should give them help to have better conditions. And that means lunch, new books, computers, and transportations"* – (Respondent 1, Amadora).

There are still some gaps for improvement within the well-performed welfare system from the perspectives of social work professionals in Gothenburg. One respondent mentioned the room to improve in terms of bureaucracy and confidentiality that burdens work efficiency. Moving immigrant students can be missing in between because of the inconsistency of information transferring between services.

> *"We're doing a lot of things right in Sweden. We have the child health service…we catch a lot of issues early. But there are a lot of loopholes. Children falling in between. So, I would love to see a change in the laws regarding, we are supposed to tell other social services for example, when people move"* – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

Another professional would like to see a concrete policy of how to work with immigrant students more consistently. As said,

> *"We work with them in the sense of, we have this language group, and we have the filling in the application form in the beginning with where they also tell us a bit about their background. But I feel sometimes that maybe we can do more consistently"* – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg).

Reflection towards educational and welfare policies from school social workers is valuable for policy transformation at the macro level. Educational equality and integration and matter regarding social work practice in school are the main considerations. Although they are not directly engaged in policies advocacy, their perspectives as field workers are valuable for policymakers.

5.3.4 Summary of school social work and ecological systems theory

School social workers from Amadora and Gothenburg utilize ecological systems theory in their perspectives and practices. Their roles majorly engage in the micro and meso levels. Social workers from both contexts work on the micro scale by intervening in crisis and providing supports

to individual students and families. The main difference is that social workers in Gothenburg perform more counseling roles and handle broader issues related to students' school life, including some degrees of psycho-social health. The roles of social workers in Amadora vary among schools and are not committed to individual counseling. They tend to handle more family, economic and social issues, considering their expertise, same as social workers in Gothenburg.

Social workers in Amadora and Gothenburg perform similar roles in the meso levels. They collaborate with other professionals in school environments to expand knowledge and understanding of how to work with students. Other professionals sometimes facilitate them in targeting the needs of students. Some of them involve leading group work activities to promote social skills for students. Another prominent meso role of all social workers is to connect children and families from schools with services in the community. There is no presence of the social worker's advocacy work at the macro level as it is considered ideal. However, social workers expressed valuable reflections from the perspectives of field workers and hoping for welfare and policy transformation in their contexts.

5.4 School social work with pupils from immigrant backgrounds

One of the research objectives is to discuss the professional perspectives regarding work with students from immigrant backgrounds and the contribution of social work in schools.

It is important to reiterate that the challenges of students from immigrant backgrounds cannot be generalized. There are many types of immigrant backgrounds and intersectional conditions to be considered, namely parental education, reasons for migration, countries of origin, languages, legal status, class, gender, family background, cultures, etc. These factors contribute to different challenges that students encounter. Likewise, there is no specific social work intervention for students from immigrant backgrounds. As presented earlier, social workers in any school can adopt the ecological system theory into their practices. Social work practice is for any students in vulnerable situations regardless of background.

However, it is undeniable that the context of schools in immigrant-dense areas appeared to be challenging from the worker's perspectives. The areas are associated with immigration history, economic and social disadvantage, and stigmatization. The matters of economic challenge, family challenge, school segregation, and educational inequality are issues reported in schools of both contexts as presented earlier. This study does not aim to generalize and not to ignore the differences

either. Working at an individual level remains the same among different schools. Nevertheless, social characteristics of families and children in this context of schools may contribute to more specific problems for social workers to handle. As one social worker who experienced working in different schools before said,

> *"Some problems will be more specific in my school. The family background will affect them. So, in one way. I talk about other things. Sometimes I need to learn and talk about their background, and how it is to live in Sweden, coming from another country without a job, having another religion. I mean, those kinds of topics will not appear in the school with Swedish children"* – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

Another social worker reflected on the difference between working in this kind of school. It is known for working in a challenging environment. As said,

> *"I know that I have colleagues who don't like to work in areas like this. Some of them have explained that they're scared, working in areas like this. I don't really know what they're scared of. But maybe the toughness because it is tough"* – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

As the difference exists, this part will discuss the social work perspectives and practices in immigrant-dense schools in which how it is different compared to schools in another context. The finding structure starts from work challenges that social workers encountered, social workers' perspectives towards children, and working life in this school environment. This section will end with a discussion of how school social work contributes to better understanding and support for students from immigrant backgrounds.

5.4.1 Working in immigrant-dense schools: handling with challenges

Social workers handle problems like curing the symptoms. If the family has economic difficulty, they will provide economic support or link them with other services. If students have had a school absence, they will investigate, visit the family to seek the reasons, and work on it with the parents. Those are not limited problems from having an immigrant background. It could happen to any child, and the process of social work practice would not be different in another way around. However, there are some specific challenges associated with immigrant backgrounds that require school social workers to handle extra. Newly arrived immigrant children are the most challenging group due to the lack of legal documents and adaptation to the new culture. As said,

"The first-generation kids display the most difficult because the other ones are already legal. (For the second generation) when it comes to that paperwork, that's not a problem. And they tend to also be more contextualized with our culture with the way things are and therefore don't need as much as aid or help" – (Respondent 4, Amadora).

For this group of children, social workers usually advise them on legal and rights issues for the family. As said, *"I give support or advice or talk with the parents a lot with questions about their rights, the children's school rights, what are the rights here in Sweden"* – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg).

From the perspective of social workers, obtaining legal status or permanent residency is a basic pass for children and families to access their rights and resources. Temporary stay of the family most of the time intensifies stress in a family. In Amadora, parents without a social security number cannot access social subsidies and they are struggling financially to pay for lunch for their children. Moreover, their children without the number also cannot access books.

"They have residency cards, social numbers, they have family support from the state. The ones that come from now have just a passport. So, they can't have books. The school helps them with that" – (Respondent 1, Amadora).

The permanent status is the first step that leads to solving other problems. As said,

"if you have a permanent stay, I believe it's always easier for the family. Because when you have a status, then you have the opportunity as a parent to learn the language yourself, to find a job and so on, and have permanent housing. But when you don't have a permanent stay, it's very stressful for parents" – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg).

Besides dealing with the immigrant status, language for communication is the primary challenge addressed by many social workers. However, social workers from both contexts handle the language barrier differently. In Gothenburg, social workers can ask for translator support in which the school will take care of the expenses. *"We always use the translator. The school pays for that. So, your request and then the school will arrange a translator for you"* – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg).

Some school also has international teachers and staff to facilitate a variety of languages spoken in school.

"For the bigger languages, we have parts of our staff for teachers, speak those languages. And persons at school, both teachers and others are also international. So, we tried to get in as many languages as working as well" – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

On the other hand, there is no official translator support for schools in Amadora. Social workers ask for help from other relatives or neighbors of the family to do a translation. They solve problems by using the resources they could have from the community.

"We ask for some other family relatives or friends to come and try to translate at the moment. Some families already come with some friends or neighbors, they already speak Portuguese, because they are here. And they came with that help already. For some of them, I'm thinking about the Chinese family. The mother comes and brings the dictionary. So, she's looking for words. And then in the end when she has questions. She asked us to write something because afterward, they ask a friend to explain again to her to be sure she understands everything. So, it can be very different to the approach depending on the families" – (Respondent 1, Amadora).

Understanding the situation of immigrant families is the extra awareness of social workers in immigrant-dense schools. To work in this context of schools, professionals need to have the knowledge to provide advice about legal residency, rights of family and children to access resources, and know-how to seek help or utilize the resource in communicating with the families in the languages they understand.

5.4.2 Working in immigrant-dense schools: professional social work perspectives

Doing social work with students from immigrant backgrounds demands awareness and knowledge. Moreover, the perspectives of social workers also made the experience of social work in this context of schools different. There are perspectives of workers towards students from immigrant backgrounds and perspectives that social workers implement in their practice.

Perspectives toward students from immigrant backgrounds

The dialogue with several social workers from Amadora and Gothenburg reflected on their perspectives of how they perceive or view students with an immigrant background. From many social workers' perspectives from both contexts, it could be explained that the immigrant background does not make the students different from students with a non-immigrant background. As said,

"I think it's really important to address the topic, but at the same time, I think it is also important to address that they are students, these are kids, they are youngsters, in almost all issues, they are like everyone else" – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

There are some differences from the outer that could be spot on, such as the way they dress and religion. But those do not influence their difference or separation from general children. They experience the same emotions and feelings as a basis of human being's characteristics and that requires the same social work practice at the individual level. As stated,

"The native-born and immigrants, are similar in the way they dressed. And the way they present themselves. Some have a little difference, like wearing a hijab. Looking at them, we don't see a difference between non-natives and natives" – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

"If I work at the individual level, in any school, of course, children have the same problems. It doesn't matter where you come from, I mean, you have problems with friends, you are sometimes sad, you are sometimes happy, you fall in love, you have an argument with your parents, I mean, that happens in any school" – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

The backgrounds of students also cannot determine the performance in school nor the difficulties they face. As mentioned,

"These challenges happen because of the family dysfunctions that could happen even they are immigrants or not" – (Respondent 4, Amadora).

"The Swedish native children, and the children with the parents from other parts of the world, are very similar. I think. In many things. So, in general, I don't see a big difference. It's a difference in how you dress may be or what you like to eat or so but not in the performances school. They have issues and difficulties from all parts of the world backgrounds" – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

The perspectives that several social workers conveyed are aligned in that social work is not practiced differently with students from immigrant backgrounds or students from any other backgrounds. Social work professionals acknowledged the difficulties some students face. But they would explain that those hardships are associated with other difficult circumstances in their life, and not their race or ethnic backgrounds itself. As said by one social worker that *"because the social conditions of families are similar, and it is not related strongly on ethnicity"* – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

Social workers do not consider the immigrant background of children matters as much as their strenuous situation. However, social workers also perceive that the number of students in this context of schools has a challenging experience from their family or home environment. As said,

> *"For some of them, school is actually the only thing that might be normal in their life. So school is also a place where they feel quite kind of safe and on vacation from a quite strenuous life situation"* – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

Perspectives towards social work practice

The perception of social workers towards children also reflects on the perspectives towards their work and practice in schools.

> *"It's about a valuable thing to have intervention based on those spaces: empathy, comprehension, the possibility, confidence, the smile…It's a very proximity intervention because a lot of students lack affection in their home"* – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

The perspectives of social work practice in working with students in schools in immigrant-dense areas are general. Some professionals described their job as work "behind the scenes". For instance, *"There is a lot of under-the-surface work, speak to people about how to think when they meet the children"* – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg). And *"trying to fulfill the needs of each one individually, we're trying to solve the problems without doing a big show of them"* – (Respondent 1, Amadora). Making changes or doing their best in everyday work would fit the best description of what these professionals do in schools.

The technique of their social work practice is embedded in their daily task, attitudes, dialogue, treatment, and interaction with children and families. Educating themselves as a worker, building trust and empowering children and families are the main highlights.

Social workers from Gothenburg are active in self-education to improve their professionalism. Understanding the condition of the student is essential and they attempt to achieve it from constant education for new knowledge or perspective. As said,

> *"We kind of educated ourselves on the conditions of our students, it was a realization that we had to be more accommodating that our kids come from a variety of different situations that we need to accommodate as good as we can"* – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

The self-work of social workers is sometimes challenging, and it has much impact on their work performance with children and families. Some of them mentioned a challenge in working up to

their expectation. Empowering themselves to empower students and families is an unoverlooked perspective.

> *"The challenge sometimes is not giving off the things of the kids. And for some of them, you can make the changes just because you don't give up on them"* – (Respondent 1, Amadora).

Building trust with students is a basis of social work practice in schools. School social workers are the ones who often speak on children's behalf, especially in the context of Gothenburg. They are also ones that should be approachable to support students in many matters. In Amadora, one professional mentioned the absence of punishment in the school culture and that builds up trust from students with the professionals. As said,

> *"They come in knock on the door and ask for help. Sometimes they just need a place to stay and cry a bit in the middle of the class. Or sometimes for some kids, come to breathe so they can control anger. For other ones. They can just say hi. It depends on some of them, they just need some kind of attention"* – (Respondent 1, Amadora).

> *"I have really good relations with my students. Also, because they feel that I do support them. I am quite I often advocating their cases or supporting them in talks in conflict with adults in school and so on"* – (Respondent 6, Gothenburg).

One characteristic of school social workers is to work with families. A social worker in Gothenburg said that it is a shared responsibility between the school and the family. *"The parents also have on their other half their obligation to solve their own situation"* – (Respondent 1, Gothenburg). Family engagement could be very challenging as reported by many respondents who work in schools of Amadora due to family challenges, such as being single parents or having an overloaded working schedule. Schools need collaboration from the family. Therefore, empowering the family is an essential part of social workers. One social worker in Amadora shared that communication, approach, and non-judgmental attitude are crucial in empowering the families to share responsibility with the school. As said,

> *"The way of communicating and the approach are the most important for people to be receptive to that help. Because if I am perceived by the family, as someone credible, then they feel empowered and share more responsibility…Most of it is being open and non-judgmental towards the parents and realizing that's their context, no matter what happens*

there, we tried understanding so that they can meet in the middle" – (Respondent 4, Amadora).

One professional in Gothenburg uses the method of reminding parents of the same goals that social workers and families have towards their children to motivate them in parental participation. As said,

> *"I will continue trying to motivate them and their parents trying to show and point out that these things will make these problems in school. Because most of the children want to have an education, they want to go to school, they want to do well in school. They want to be good children…and they have dreams about their future"* – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

The elaboration of social workers in this section is valuable to deepen understanding of how social work unfolds in schools situated in immigrant-dense areas. The dominant perspective of social workers towards students with immigrant backgrounds as a majority in school presents that they should not be perceived or treated any different from general students. Children in social workers' hands are not strongly defined by their backgrounds whether immigrant, non-immigrant or whatever. Nevertheless, professionals from both contexts acknowledged students' difficulties and some typical challenges associated with the immigration experience of themselves or their families. There is a notice that the immigration experience of students and their families vary, and social workers raised awareness in avoiding stigmatization and stereotype based on students' immigrant background. The challenges of the students in this context of schools exist, but often the explanation of social workers also contributes to other factors, such as the socio-economic disadvantaged areas they are living in and the family problems.

Regarding social work practice, social workers perceive that the most impact of their work is upon their daily practice and attitude. The primary step is to educate themselves and understand the condition of students and families as much as they can. They build rapport and trust with children and family by using their open-minded and empowering communication.

5.4.3 Contribution of social work in schools

There are multi-professionals in schools working for the best interest of students. All professionals have their expertise in responding to the specific needs of pupils. Social workers are one of them. This section will discuss professional perspectives regarding the importance of school social work and professional contribution to working with students from different backgrounds.

Social workers are not teaching personnel. In Sweden, they belong to the health team support. In Portugal, they are in the category of non-teaching personnel group. They are known to work in a supportive function and not the core of school that is education. As said, *"you will always feel a bit as you are aside. I mean, the school is about education, about teachers and students. And then we are some other people also in school"* – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

Social workers are less directly involved in solving specific challenges of immigrant students, such as language and learning problems. They could only bridge students to teachers and services, including to follow up the feedback. But not teaching itself. Therefore, social workers are not "magic professionals" who could solve all challenges of students from immigrant backgrounds, the focus of this study. However, the richness of the study is to present what social workers can do in school and what they can bring to the table along with other professionals.

Collaboration is one of themes to explain the characteristic of social work in schools. The differences among professionals can be sometimes challenging as they could see the problem from different perspectives. However, many respondents agreed that different backgrounds of other workers benefit the work they do. As said, *"we are applying all the backgrounds we have, so we can give the best answer to the problems"* – (Respondent 1, Amadora).

Collaboration between professionals is necessary for the field of social work in schools. As said,

> *"We need to be a mix of professionals. It's not capable for teachers to figure it out for themselves. They need me and I need them. So, we can make it good for the students…So, we are interested in collaboration"* – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

Social workers reflected that they are important in schools. Their profession always contributes to the team for the best benefit of children. The study found that the perspectives, knowledge, and skills of social workers make their professional unique and different from other professionals in schools.

Holistic and ecological perspectives

> *"The teachers' main goal is to teach. The school nurse's main goal is to provide care and to provide vaccines and our whole job as social worker is to look at the person from every angle. And to have contact with people in that person's life"* – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

The uniqueness of school social work is the ecological perspective. As mentioned in chapter 2, social work utilizes ecological systems theory in understanding that individual's life is inseparable

from the environment. The individuals interact with their physical, social, and cultural surroundings (Teater, 2014). Social workers believe that school is not the only aspect of students' life. Family and community are also a part of them. As said, *"they (social workers) believe in education on the logic of responsibility of the family, students, and community"* – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

Holding this perspective, social workers conceptualize and treat problems with an integrative approach and work from micro to macro systems (Pardeck, 1998). One social work professional mentioned that school is a suitable place to do social work. It is the area where social workers can connect with the ecological system of students, which is advantageous for individual and group level work. As explained,

> *"It's good to do social work in school because all children in Sweden, or school are obliged to go to school. So, it's a place where you meet everyone. If you are working on a group level, you can reach out to everyone. But it's also good when you work on an individual level because that person has friends or family that you have something to relate to or something that you want to change"* – (Respondent 7, Gothenburg).

The ecological perspective also benefits social workers in having a holistic point of view regarding children's life. One professional explained that social workers are the only workers trained to understand the person from a different point of view to help the person go through life. And that makes social work essential and different from other professionals. As mentioned,

> *"Social Work is extremely important in school because we are the people who are trained to see everything, to see all parts of the child's life. And to understand that what happened two months ago could be affecting the child now"* – (Respondent 8, Gothenburg).

> *"Social work is the only worker that can see the student with all its interactions both with other students, both with teachers, both with the family, all of their multiple layers. And having that holistic view. Then I believe I am empowered to solve the actual problem"* – (Respondent 4, Amadora).

A holistic viewpoint also helps workers understand students from another perspective instead of quick judgment towards students' behavior. As one social worker in Amadora said,

> *"The school, a lot of the time, has more of the approach of judging. The student has bad grades. He has bad behaviors. Because this is all bad. The student is bad. Social workers*

look at it from another perspective. So, instead of judging the student, I'm just trying to call him to his right sense of behavior" – (Respondent 4, Amadora).

Certain knowledge and skills

Social workers also possess specific knowledge and skills to fill the gap that other school professionals do not own. There are roles or problems that respondents are known to intervene in the most. In other words, they tend to be more expert or responsible for specific problems of students. Those are often related to family, economic, and social issues, laws, and rights. Social workers mentioned that they are usually engaged with these categories of matters.

> *"Family problems associated, unemployment, or lack of economic possessions, economic challenges, problems with adapting to the new country for the immigrants, adapting to school, problems related to their immigrants' status e.g., documentation, and other challenges, the health problems, domestic violence, abuse, pregnancy challenges, addictions"* – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

> *"We also have the deeper understanding of families, psychosocial issues. In that case, differentiating ourselves from the teachers. We have knowledge about the law, the social laws of Sweden"* – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg).

The areas that social workers work in are much involved with challenges of students from immigrant backgrounds as discussed earlier. There are some issues that they less participate in, such as language and academic issues. However, most of the challenges they face are family, socio-economic, legal status, and rights. They are the focus where social workers intervene the most. School social workers in Sweden have the title of a school counselor. Therefore, counseling is a useful skill asset in working with both parents and individual children. As said, *"we know how to use the tools for counseling, like to enable relationships with both parents and with children"* – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg). However, social workers in Portugal considered a counseling task to be more of a role of psychologists. But they can also intervene at the individual level with children. In many cases, social workers and psychologists have some intersection in knowledge, roles, and interest. Both professionals complement each other. Nevertheless, respondents still differentiate themselves from psychologists that they work more at the group and community levels. Also, they have more interest in family and social aspects. As mentioned,

"The psychologist works more with the psychological and emotional problems. And then the social worker focuses on the family and social matters" – (Respondent 2, Amadora).

"They do not work as much as we do, maybe with the family in the social aspect. And with absence, for instance. We work a lot with social issues, family violence, parents with low income" – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg).

Amadora and Gothenburg: contribution of social work in schools

There are similarities of how school social work of two cases benefits working with students from a challenging background. However, both locations have a slightly different emphasis. In Amadora, there is a strong explanation of school social work as intervening, detect, and prevent problems that obstruct the education of students. For example,

"Social work promotes and reinforces a range of skills to the students to the multidisciplinary intervention. It's important for prevention and to detect some of the problems and situations that can be issued to the educational cause of the students" – (Respondent 3, Amadora).

Connection with the community is also an asset of school social workers in Amadora. *"The social worker is like the bridge from the school from outside to articulate the different responses"* – (Respondent 2, Amadora). Being in contact with the community and external services provides power and recognition of social workers in school. As stated, *"the main power that I feel I have in school is the communication that I make with the external services or external social responses"* – (Respondent 2, Amadora).

On the other hand, social work professionals in Gothenburg have a stronger emphasis on individual work. They consider a social worker in school to be an advocator. That refers to promoting child voice and interest, including sharing the knowledge and holistic perspective to the school and other professionals. As mentioned,

"We are also advocators of the rights of the child and the voice of the child that sees the child's best interest…we know the social issues and that we were in a holistic perspective and a lot with the families and with children in that aspect. And that we also share that knowledge with the school" – (Respondent 5, Gothenburg).

In conclusion, social workers are not the only professionals who work with the challenges of students from immigrant backgrounds. They require mutual collaboration from other school professionals and work along with them to respond to the best benefit of students. However, school social workers are important in school. Their expertise is irreplaceable. They contribute their holistic and ecological perspectives, social knowledge, and certain skills to figure out the best advantage for students. The contribution of social workers in schools from Amadora and Gothenburg are alike in many ways. But each has a slightly stronger focus. Respondents from Amadora have a sense of social work as a tool to intervene in problems and connect with the external community for an efficient response. Respondents from Gothenburg presented quality of standing firm in knowledge, being an advocator for children, school, and social work profession.

Chapter Six

Summary and Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to explore school social work in immigrant-dense areas by comparing two case studies of Amadora, Portugal, and Gothenburg, Sweden. The research consists of three questions to discover the challenges of students from immigrant backgrounds and how school social workers work with those challenges. As the study operated in two contexts, one of the research questions was to compare similarities and differences.

Understanding the concept of the immigrant background and the context of schools is a base for further findings. The immigrant background for this research is involved with the two keywords, newly arrived immigrants and descendants of immigrants. Social workers from Amadora tend to refer students from an immigrant background as those who have minimal integration into the Portuguese legal status, language, culture, and society in which the newly arrived group is in reference most of the time. Social workers in Gothenburg acknowledged the differentiation based on the understanding of the society, considering descendants of immigrants as having an immigrant background. However, most schools of participants contain both groups in which descendants of immigrants made up the majority.

All schools in the research context have immigrant-dense locations of the cities and appear three common characteristics. They are schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Many schools are multicultural with a variety of nationalities, languages, and cultures. Most of these schools are proactive with extra supportive programs or specialized professionals.

The immigrant background is a broad concept. Generalizing the challenges for all students in the context is not doable. However, the research presented themes of common challenges that impacted their education. Economic difficulty is the most common one. Follows by language difficulty, which leads to learning problems and lower access to resources. Stressful economic situations in the family and lower education of parents affect the emotional well-being of students and educational support from home. Often, the academic difficulty of students arises from language challenges, different pre-educational qualifications, and lacking social resources. Moving constantly with the family can cause disconnection in studying and long-distance traveling to school. There is also a higher chance of being emotionally affected by fear and trauma for students who migrated for a humanitarian reason. Lastly, attending schools with a high proportion

of students from immigrant backgrounds also leads to further social exclusion according to the perspective of most social workers.

Challenges that obstruct the education of students are varied, and social workers handle each arising problem differently. However, there are many challenges that social workers are not directly involved, such as language and academic hardship. Therefore, collaboration with other professionals is one of the necessary characteristics of school social work. The knowledge and perspectives of social workers differentiate them from other school professionals. Their expertise is the knowledge and responsibility regarding family, socio-economic issues, law, and rights. These are the areas that students in the context encountered in which social workers intervene the most.

Workers acknowledge the difficulties students face but do not correlate the immigrant background with success in school integration and performance of students. From the workers' perspective, social work is not practiced differently based on the backgrounds of students. They perceive that the most impact of their work is upon their daily practice and attitude. To educate themselves, understand the situations of students and families, build rapport and trust by using their open-minded and empowering communication.

The holistic and ecological perspectives are the strength of school social work in working with the challenges of students. Social workers conceptualize the problems from different angles and believe that school life is inseparable from family and community. Therefore, school social workers intervene and practice at many levels in the ecological systems, especially at micro and meso levels. They work at the microscale by intervention in crisis and providing supports to individual students and families. At the meso level, they collaborate with other professionals in the school environment to encourage understanding towards students, involving in group work, and connecting the school with services in the community. The involvement of social workers at the macro level is not concrete. However, their perspectives as field workers are valuable for policy advocacy.

The last research question of the study is to find out the similarities and differences between the two contexts: Amadora, Portugal, and Gothenburg, Sweden. The study found more similarities than differences in many aspects, especially the challenges of students from immigrant backgrounds and common grounds in social work perspectives and practice in responding to the challenges. However, the structure, resource, and operation of the social work profession in

schools of Portugal and Sweden are different. Uniqueness appeared between the two. School social work in Amadora tends to have fluid responsibilities. Social work has a dominant function of detecting, preventing problems, providing support, collaboration, and community. School social work in Gothenburg tends to have a distinctive role in school and a sense of professionality. Social work prominently functions in individual counseling and advocating child voice and rights.

Finally, noting that conducting qualitative cross-national comparative research was a complicated task. The study achieved the first level of comparison, to describe the similarities and differences, but not yet to idealistically explain how they are different based on the local contexts. Small numbers of cases interviewed, timeframe, limited social and cultural knowledge of researcher in the contexts of the study caused methodological limitation in this comparative study. Therefore, further research is encouraged for the richness of comparison. Nevertheless, studying both contexts is an advantage of this research which contributes richer understanding and knowledge of school social work with students from immigrant backgrounds in the European context.

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Appendices

Appendix I – Interview guide

General information

- Introduction of participants
  - Name, age, position, educational background
  - How long have you worked in this school in a specific position? / Which function did you work on before in this school? /What did you do before working in this school?
- Information about school
  - Value/community needs/geographical context of the school: How you describe the school you are working at now?
- Information about school social work
  - Could you explain the scope and responsibilities of your work in general?
  - Description of the team: do you work in a team or alone?
  - What other professionals do you contact in school? And in which situation?
  - To whom do you report your work, hierarchically? Who is your supervisor?

Challenges of students with an immigrant background in a school

- General information about students with an immigrant background in schools (definition, proportion, and common countries of origin)
- In your opinion, what are the differences between students from a migrant background and students without a migrant background in education (for example, opportunity and performance)? / How and why?
- What are the common problems/challenges reported about students with an immigrant background in this school?

Social work interventions and activities

- (Follow-up question) What do you do to respond to those challenges of students?
- (Micro) How do you work with individual students and their families?
- (Meso) Are you involved with any school or community programs related to students with an immigrant background? What are they?

- (Macro) How do you think about the national child welfare and policy to support students of immigrants? What would you like to suggest or do as a social worker/social work professional?

Challenges in the work field

- What are the challenges for you in doing these interventions/activities?
- What are supports you receive to cope with those challenges?

The role and position of social work in schools

- What specific role does a social worker have in the school? What others in a school understand about what do you do?
- How is a social worker important in school?
- How is the collaboration with other professionals in a school?
- Can this role be strengthened? And how?
- (In the case of interviewing professionals without a social worker title) Do you think you have the same roles as a social worker? Do you identify yourself as a social worker? And how?

Appendix II – Consent form

Informed Consent

By providing your consent, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Nutthamon Sitaprasertnand, student of Social Work with Families and Children in the Erasmus Mundus program (MFamily), under the supervision of ISCTE - Institute University of Lisbon. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.
- I have got the information about the purpose of the study and how the data will be used.
- I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.
- I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.
- I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

In case you have questions, please contact Nutthamon Sitaprasertnand (student) at +351 910 442 335 or by email at nsdnu@iscte-iul.pt. You can also contact Sandra Mateus (Supervisor) at +351 217 903 000 | +351 217 903 060 | Ext. 722 161 or email sandra.mateus@iscte-iul.pt

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

☐ Yes ☐ No

Participant:

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Place and Date: _____

Appendix III – Introductory letter

Erasmus Mundus Master in Social Work with Families and Children

School social work intervention for social-educational inclusion: comparative case studies of immigrant-dense schools in Amadora, Portugal and Gothenburg, Sweden

1st April 2021

Dear invitee,

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in Social Work with Families and Children in the Erasmus Mundus program (MFamily). I am under the supervision of ISCTE - Institute University of Lisbon, as a part of collaborated universities, along with the University of Gothenburg, University of Stavanger, and Makerere University. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

Title of the study: School social work intervention for social-educational inclusion: comparative case studies of immigrant-dense schools in Amadora, Portugal and Gothenburg, Sweden

Faculty Supervisor: Sandra Mateus, Ph.D. and invited assistant professor at School of Sociology and Public Policy, ISCTE - Institute University of Lisbon (sandra.mateus@iscte-iul.pt); Tel: +351 217 903 000 | +351 217 903 060 | Ext. 722 161

Student investigator: Nutthamon Sitaprasertnand (nsdnu@iscte-iul.pt); Tel: +351 910 442 335

Information about the study

The immigrant status is associated with disadvantaged factors that place pupils at risk of social-educational exclusion. The purpose of the study is to discover challenges faced by pupils with an immigrant background from the school social workers' perspective and to find out how school social workers work and respond to reduce the risk of school failure or promote the educational achievement of immigrant children. The research studies the context of Amadora, Portugal, and Gothenburg, Sweden as a comparative study.

The request

You are invited to participate in the study. The study involves interviewing social workers in Amadora and Gothenburg working in schools with a high proportion of students with an immigrant background. The interview will be arranged online via zoom or other convenient applications. The interview duration is around 1-1.5 hours, and communication will be in English. The timeline of interviews is between early April to early May 2021.

To participate in the study, you will be asked to 1) address the available date and time for an interview. 2) indicate your convenient channel for the online interview (Zoom, WhatsApp, Skype, etc.) 3) sign an informed consent before the interview takes place.

Participants' rights

Your rights as a study participant are as follows.

- Participation in this study is voluntary.

- You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher.

- With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate the collection of information and later transcribed for analysis. If requested, I can send you a copy of the transcript to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points if you wish.

- All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used.

- Data collected during this study will be retained in the investigator's computer till the submission of the degree report. The computer on which the data is stored requires a password to log in so the data can be secured. Only the investigator and supervisor will have access.

- There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

Benefits of the study

I hope that your contribution and the results of my study will benefit social work knowledge and practice, especially in the area of social work in a school setting and the social-educational inclusion of immigrant children.

For all other questions, more additional information, and ethical concern to assist you in deciding on participation, please contact me. You can also contact Sandra Mateus, my supervisor at the School of Sociology and Public Policy, ISCTE - Institute University of Lisbon.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,
Nutthamon Sitaprasertnand
Student Investigator