

# **From Microaggressions to Social Justice: Identity Negotiation among Ethnic Minority Teachers in Japan, Sweden, and Finland**

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## **Research Overview**

This study explores how ethnic minority teachers in Japan, Sweden, and Finland experience racial and ethnic microaggressions during teacher training and professional practice. It also examines the resources and strategies they use to negotiate and affirm their identities while navigating stigma and discrimination within school contexts.

## **Purpose of Study**

Ethnic minority teachers play a crucial role in promoting the inclusion of migrant students and fostering more socially just educational environments. However, they also encounter significant social and legal barriers in both teacher training and professional practice, often rooted in institutional racism (Tereshchenko et al., 2024).

The purpose of this study is to examine how ethnic minority teachers in Japan, Sweden, and Finland experience racial and ethnic microaggressions during pre-service teacher education and throughout their careers. It further analyzes the resources and strategies they employ to negotiate and affirm their ethnic identities in the face of stigma and discrimination in school contexts. Particular attention is paid to both the possibilities and constraints shaping these identity negotiation processes. Ultimately, the study highlights participants' social justice practices in responding to racism within teacher education and classroom settings.

## **Research Methods**

This is a qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews with ethnic minority teachers in Japan, Sweden, and Finland. Interviews were conducted in Japanese, Chinese, and English with eight ethnic minority teachers in Japan who have teaching experience in elementary, junior high and high schools and hold teaching qualifications recognized by the Japanese government. In addition, two ethnic minority teachers from Sweden and two from Finland were interviewed. All participants have first- or second-generation immigrant

backgrounds and possess teaching qualifications recognized by the authorities in their respective countries.

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling across academic networks and teacher communities. Data were collected as audio recordings of interviews conducted between 2023 and 2026; each participant was interviewed at least once, and the recordings were transcribed and translated by the researcher in collaboration with a professional transcription service. The data were analyzed using the Grounded Theory Approach, guided by Mantel's (2021) framework, which discusses the relationship between migrant teachers' pedagogical resources, structural constraints, and social justice commitments.

## **Results and Discussion**

Preliminary findings suggest that ethnic minority teachers across Japan, Sweden, and Finland commonly encounter racial and ethnic microaggressions from both students and colleagues. In Japan, participants of Chinese and Korean heritage appear to face particularly frequent forms of ethnic microaggressions, often requiring them to strategically de-escalate politically sensitive interactions in order to maintain classroom relationships. In response, participants sometimes conform to normative or stereotypical identity expectations to avoid friction in everyday professional interactions.

At the same time, participants expressed varying levels of commitments to social justice, often rooted in their own experiences of marginalization. This commitment informs pedagogical practices that seek to positively represent their ethnic backgrounds and challenge racial or ethnic stereotypes and prejudice within school settings. In this study, such practices are conceptualized as forms of social justice pedagogy and understood as a key dimension of teachers' identity negotiation strategies.

However, important cross-national differences emerge. In Japan, these pedagogical practices are often enacted informally and remain largely outside the formal curriculum, receiving limited institutional recognition or support. By contrast, Sweden and Finland provide more structured institutional pathways and support systems for teachers with migrant backgrounds, alongside greater societal recognition. For example, Sweden offers a Fast Track programme for newly arrived teachers (Economou, 2020), while Finland recognizes foreign teaching qualifications (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2025). Provisions such as mother tongue education also create spaces in which ethnic minority teachers can draw on their

linguistic and cultural backgrounds as professional assets. Overall, these contexts also offer more opportunities—both institutional and interpersonal—for teachers to access resources to interpret and respond to microaggressions. In Japan, however, such opportunities tend to be concentrated among English teachers.

Nevertheless, ethnic minority teachers in Japan also mobilize distinctive resources in navigating microaggressions, including collegial networks and ties to ethnic communities, particularly among Korean participants. While they often face limited institutional support, they draw on these social, historical, and community-based resources to respond to microaggressions and, in some cases, to challenge discrimination within their schools.

These findings remain tentative, as data collection is ongoing, and will be further refined through continued analysis.

## References

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