

Title: Japanese Homeroom Teachers' Perspectives on Daily Non-Academic Activities in Elementary Classrooms: Challenges and Expectations in *Tokkatsu*

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Abstract

Research overview:

Overall, this study explores Japanese homeroom teachers' perspectives on the planning and implementation of *tokkatsu* in elementary school classrooms with migrant children. Drawing on ethnographic observations and teacher interviews, the research examines how teachers navigate inclusion, diversity, and classroom participation within daily non-academic activities in increasingly diverse Japanese school environments.

Purpose of study:

While previous studies on migrant children in Japan have largely focused on Japanese language acquisition and academic achievement, limited attention has been paid to teachers' experiences in facilitating migrant children's participation in the non-academic dimensions of school life. Due to that, this study explores Japanese homeroom teachers' perspectives on the planning and implementation of *tokkatsu* in elementary school classrooms with migrant children. *Tokkatsu*, or non-academic group activities embedded within Japan's holistic educational approach (Tsuneyoshi et al 2019), includes daily routines such as classroom cleaning, school lunch serving, and school events intended to foster cooperation, responsibility, and social relationships among students (Curriculum Research Center 2018).

Research methods:

This research draws on ethnographic observations conducted over two academic years at two Japanese public elementary schools, focusing on daily *tokkatsu* routines (including cleaning and serving lunch) and school events (such as Sports day and picnics). In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine Japanese homeroom teachers who had experience teaching migrant children. The study examines how teachers understand, manage, and respond to diversity within the context of collective classroom activities.

Results and discussion:

The findings suggest that many teachers implemented *tokkatsu* routines without extensive prior planning regarding migrant children's participation. Although teachers generally expressed goodwill and a desire to include all students, they faced significant constraints in practice. Observations revealed that strict school schedules and time pressures often prioritised the smooth operation of activities over opportunities to address migrant children's emotional or communicative difficulties. In situations where children's concerns were not immediately visible, teachers frequently struggled to respond in ways that fully acknowledged those difficulties.

The study also identified uncertainty among teachers regarding how to respond to cultural differences and behavioural issues involving migrant children. Several teachers reported limited confidence in addressing situations involving language barriers, non-responsiveness, or differing cultural practices. For example, one teacher described difficulty mediating between Japanese students and a newly arrived Vietnamese child whose eating practices differed from classroom norms during school lunch activities. Such findings suggest that teachers often navigate multicultural situations without sufficient institutional guidance or professional preparation in diversity and intercultural education.

At the same time, some teachers demonstrated inclusive practices aimed at supporting classroom belonging. These included assigning supportive peer buddies, encouraging empathy among classmates, and recognising children's differing strengths beyond language ability. However, many teachers also emphasised expectations for migrant children to adapt to existing classroom norms through Japanese language acquisition, behavioural adjustment, and rule-following. This indicates that inclusion within *tokkatsu* may simultaneously involve expectations of assimilation.

Drawing on recognition theory (Honneth 1995), the findings suggest that *tokkatsu* functions as an ambivalent pedagogical space in which both recognition and misrecognition can emerge simultaneously. While collective activities may provide opportunities for peer interaction and belonging, they may also reproduce pressures toward conformity within culturally diverse classrooms.

This study contributes to discussions on multicultural and inclusive education in Japan by examining how Japanese homeroom teachers negotiate participation, diversity, and classroom belonging within *tokkatsu* activities. The findings call for greater institutional support, teacher training in intercultural competence, and the development of practical guidelines for diversity-

responsive implementation in daily school routines. More broadly, the study raises questions about what kinds of professional knowledge and pedagogical approaches are necessary for teachers working in 21st-century classrooms with a growing diversity.

Keywords:

Tokkatsu, teachers' practices, migrant inclusion, multicultural education, Japanese elementary schools