

Cultural Transition and Academic Achievement of Minority Youth: A Content Analysis of Empirical Research on Acculturation



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RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Background: An achievement gap between immigrant and non-immigrant students has been identified in most OECD countries and the high school dropout rate among immigrant students has become a serious challenge for national educational systems. The school failure of immigrant youth is embedded in the process of their acculturation in the host country.

Purpose: The school context has been recognized to be the crucial context for minority youth's acculturation in the host country.

"Schools and other educational settings constitute the main acculturation context for immigrant children and youth. [...] School adjustment can be seen as a primary task, and as a highly important outcome, of the cultural transition process" (Berry et al., 2011, p. 326).

The academic achievement of minority students is thus embedded in the acculturation process, which involves cultural identity development, psychological adjustment and behavioural adjustment. The study is aimed at analysing and systematizing the findings of empirical research on youth's acculturation in the school context with a focus on minority youth's academic achievement.

Conceptualization of acculturation: Originally, acculturation was conceptualized and defined by anthropologists (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936), but today the issue of acculturation and its effects on group relations and individual development has gained a prominent place in the social sciences in general. In the tradition of cross-cultural psychology, acculturation describes individual or ethno-cultural group changes in behaviour and attitudes in the situation of intercultural contact. Acculturation has

been described as a stressful process and acculturation orientations adopted by immigrant and minority youths have been shown to have an impact on their adjustment (e.g. Berry, 2005). Overall, acculturation is a multifaceted construct that distinguishes between acculturation outcomes, acculturation orientations, and conditions of acculturation (Arends-Toth & van de Vijver, 2006).

References

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STUDY

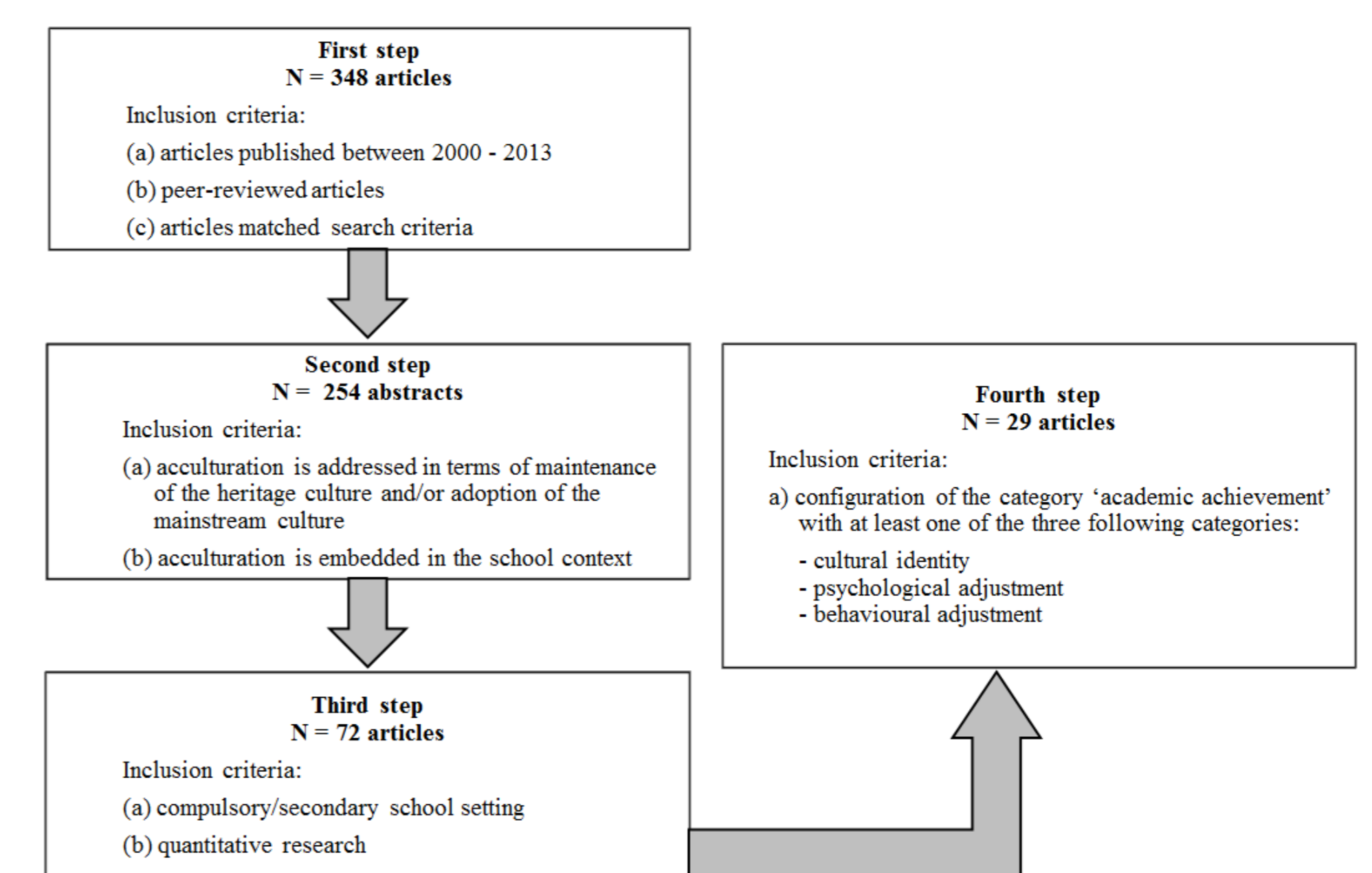
Research questions

- Q1. How are different acculturation orientations of ethnic minority youth* related to their academic achievement?
- Q2. What are the acculturation orientations that are most conducive to ethnic minority youth's psychological and behavioural adjustment in the school context?
- Q3. How do contextual characteristics influence ethnic minority youth's adjustment in the school context?

*Research on acculturation has applied the concept to a variety of ethnic minority groups who are culturally different from the majority, such as immigrants of all generations, other ethnic and racial minorities, indigenous and colonized groups. In this study we use the term "ethnic minority" to describe these diverse groups, recognizing that these categories sometimes overlap and have different meanings in different national contexts.

Design and methods

For purposes of this study 29 peer reviewed articles from a total of 348 articles that matched the search criteria in the database of the Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC) were selected according to inclusion criteria. The selected articles addressed minority youth's academic achievement in relation to at least one of the issues of youth's acculturation such as cultural identity, psychological adjustment, and behavioural adjustment. The articles were analysed by applying the method of qualitative content analysis, using MAXQDA software. The findings presented in the selected articles were analysed and integrated according to a deductively developed and inductively enriched category system. The following flow chart illustrates the source selection.



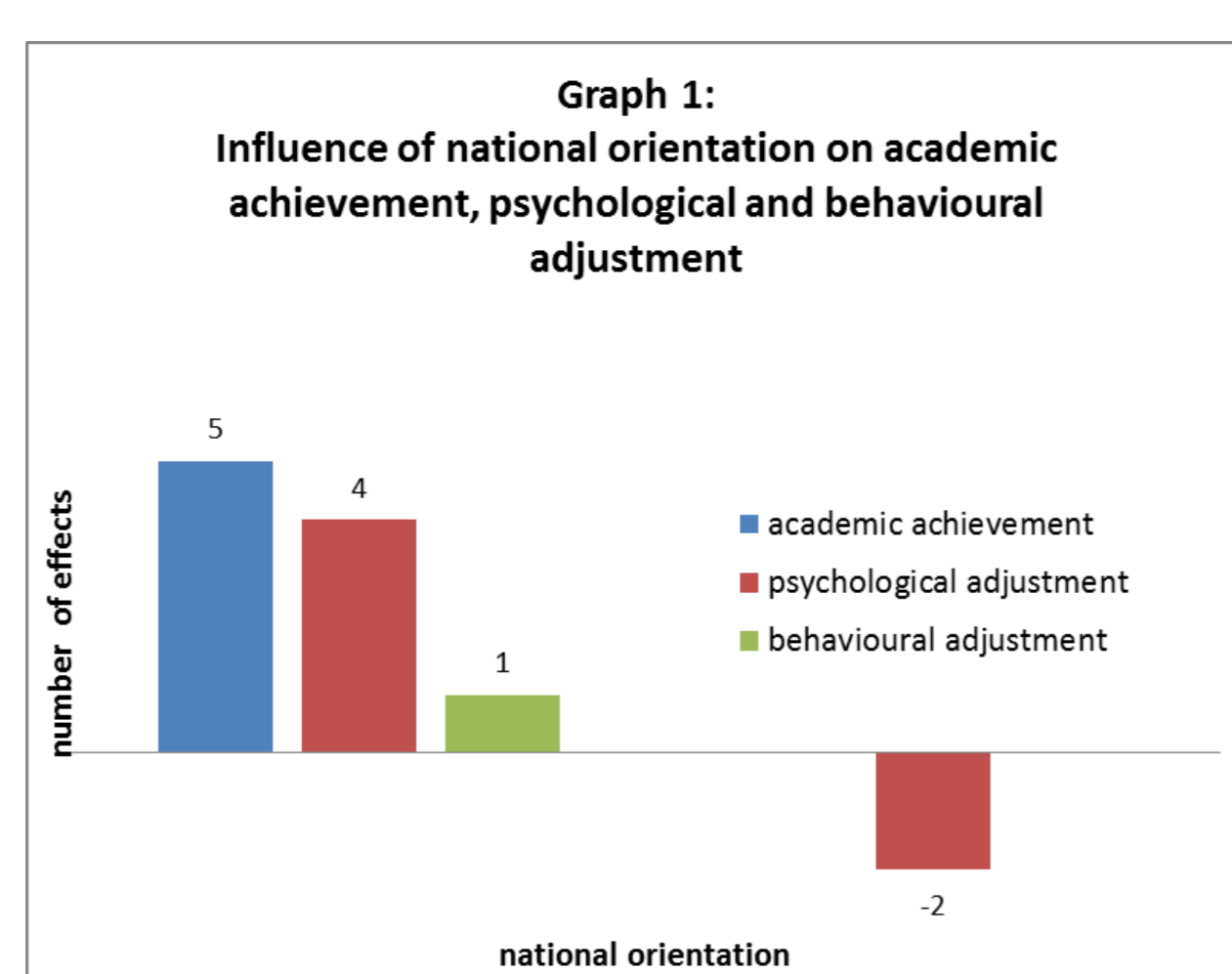
RESULTS

Q1 & Q2: Acculturation orientations and school adjustment

Overall, the results of our study provide multifaceted insight into issues of ethnic minority youth's acculturation in relation to their academic achievement. Moreover, the findings of our study reveal the complexity of relations between youth's cultural transition and their psychological and behavioural adjustment in the school context. In particular, our study has revealed the following impacts of different acculturation orientations of minority youth on their academic and adjustment outcomes:

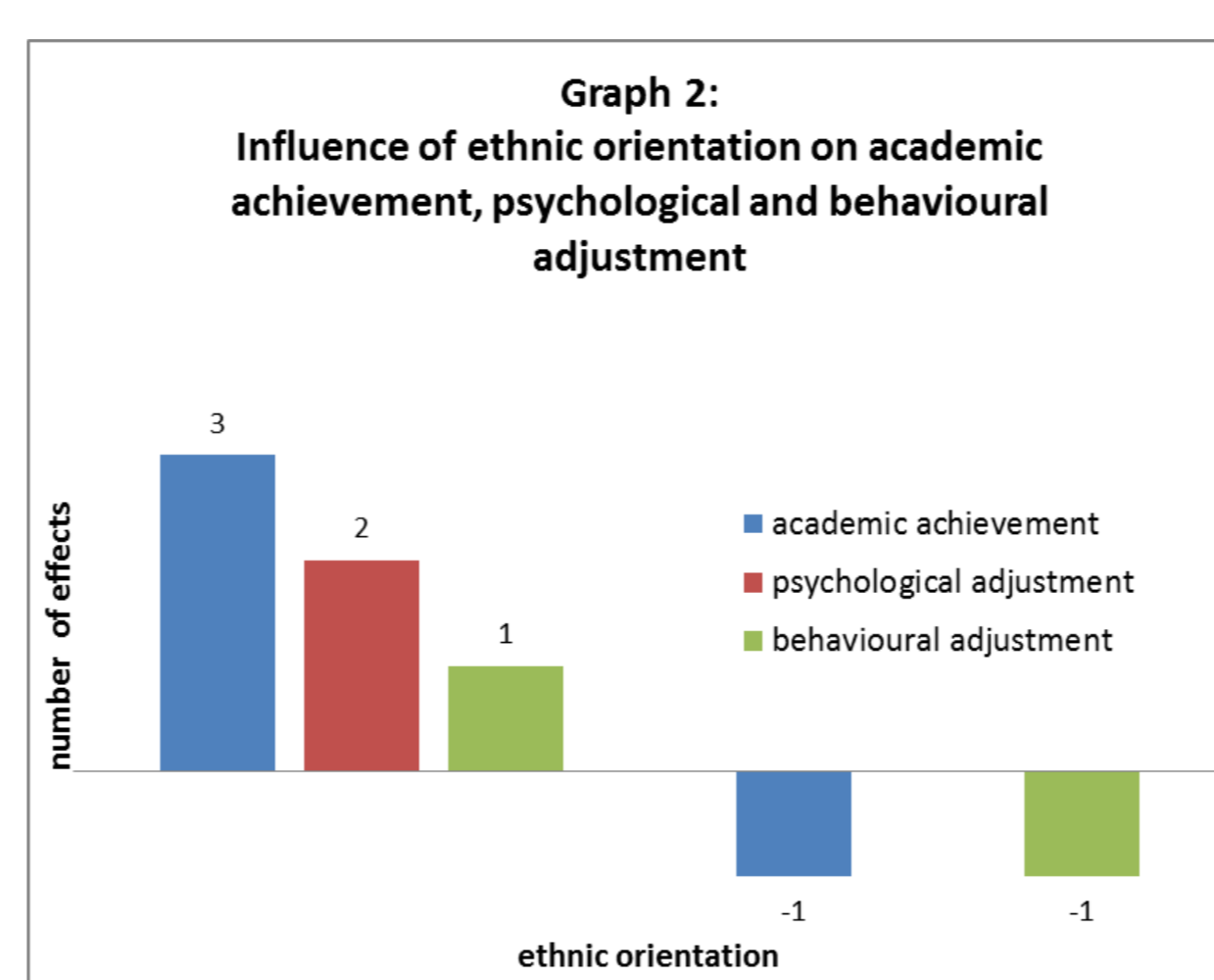
Ethnic minority youth's national orientation

- none of the studies reported a negative impact of ethnic minority youth's assimilative attitudes on their academic outcomes;
- the orientation towards national identity was positively related to ethnic minority youth's academic outcomes, their psychological and behavioural adjustment;
- assimilative pressure was found to be a source of acculturative stress and negatively affect ethnic minority youth's psychological adjustment.



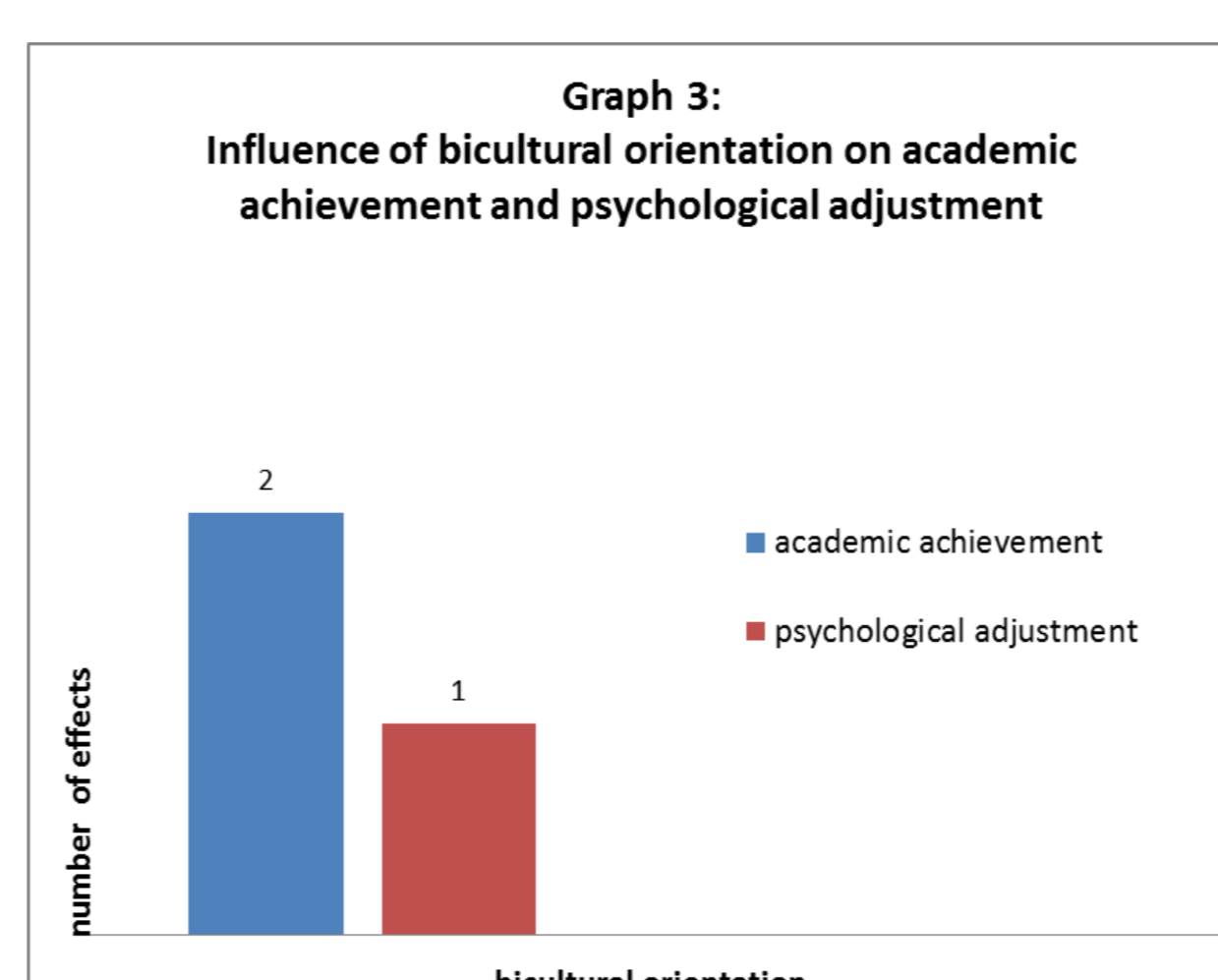
Ethnic minority youth's ethnic orientation

- was found to be negatively as well as positively related to ethnic minority youth's academic achievement and their psychological adjustment;
- was positively related to ethnic minority youth's psychological adjustment in the school context.



Ethnic minority youth's bicultural orientations

- studies reported a predominantly positive effect of bicultural orientations on minority youth's academic achievement and their psychological adjustment.



Q3: School context characteristics and ethnic minority students' adjustment

In the school context, a number of studies highlighted the negative impact of ethnic minority students' experience of discrimination on their adjustment outcomes in the school context. What is more, ethnic minority youth's experience of discrimination hampers the development of their bicultural identity. Another key finding of our study highlights the importance of positive social relationships with peers and teachers for ethnic minority students' school adjustment. Thus, supportive relationships are conducive to ethnic minority youth's psychological adjustment.

Overall, our findings also suggest that schools of receiving societies do not provide sufficient support for ethnic minority students' heritage culture maintenance or their bicultural development.

Implications

Our study provides some implications for educational institutions:

- Firstly*, schools should vet their institutional rules and routines for the presence of marginalizing practices against ethnic minorities in order to establish and to maintain a non-discriminatory and inclusive school culture.
- Secondly*, schools should combat stereotypes and prejudices in order to ensure social integration of minority youths in the school environment.
- Thirdly*, teachers should apply inclusive instructional and classroom practices.

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