

From Studying to Learning: Japanese International Student Experiences at Danish Folk High Schools

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02

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Introduction



**Have you heard of
“folk high schools”?**

Folk High School

- Non-formal residential schools
- First established in Denmark in C19
 - Usually seen in Nordic countries
- Anyone older than 17 can attend
- Typical program length: 4 months
- Courses offered in almost any subject
- No grades, exams, degrees given
- Existing literature: focus on students with different backgrounds: disabilities (Bernhard and Andersson 2017), senior citizens (Hugo and Hedegaard 2020), refugees (Borsch et al. 2019)









Education in Japan

- Academic credentialism
 - Where you go to school MATTERS: “ronin” (Ono 2007)
- Pressure (Bossy 2000)
 - At school and home
 - Emphasis on entrance exams
- Extensive use of shadow education (“juku”) (Entrich 2015, Yamato and Zhang 2017)

Research Questions

- 1 What are the experiences of Japanese international students in folk high schools?
- 2 How might their experiences in folk high schools compare to their educational experiences in Japan?
- 3 What are their thoughts on introducing the folk high school model in Japan?



Methods

In-person Interviews

- Visited three different folk high schools in Denmark in December 2024
- 15 total participants: All Japanese
 - 8 from School 1 / 4 from School 2 / 3 from School 3
- Length: 22-62 minutes
- Four sections:
 - 1. Demographic Information
 - 2. Education Prior to FHS
 - 3. Experience at FHS
 - 4. Thoughts on FHS and Introduction in Japan

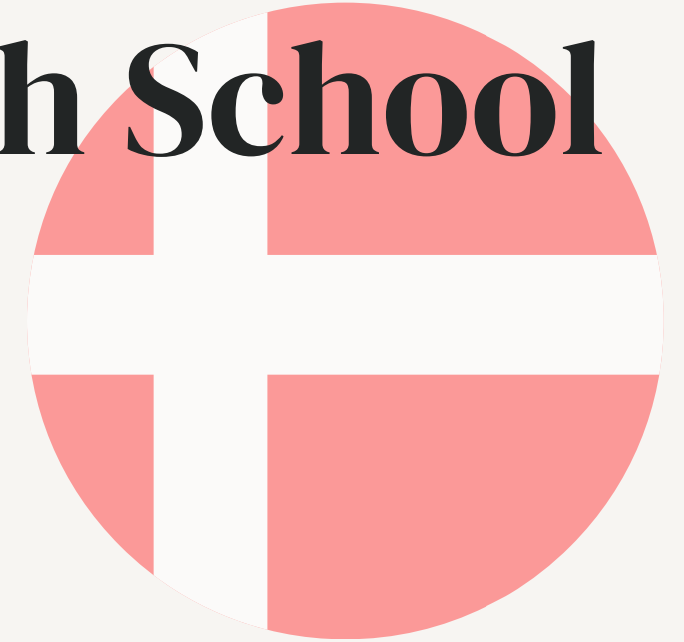
Results

Educational Experience in Japan

- Reflected on a **negative** note
 - 11 out of 15 participants: solely negative
 - “Passive and linear” learning
 - Education as a means to develop academic ability
 - Visible socially ideal “paths” (e.g., attending med school)
- Use of supplemental education
 - All 15 participants had utilized some type of supplemental academic resources outside of school
- Fierce academic competition
- Feeling pressure



Educational Experience at Folk High School



- Reflected on a **positive** note
- Active learning
 - Learning both inside and outside of classrooms
 - Lots of discussions with no right or wrong answers
- Teachers
 - Open-minded
 - Enthusiastic about what they teach
- Peers
 - High political awareness: +
 - Childlike irresponsible behaviors: -
- New discoveries
 - New talents, new sides of themselves, new perspectives

Introducing Folk High School in Japan

None of the 15 participants agreed that folk high schools would thrive in Japan

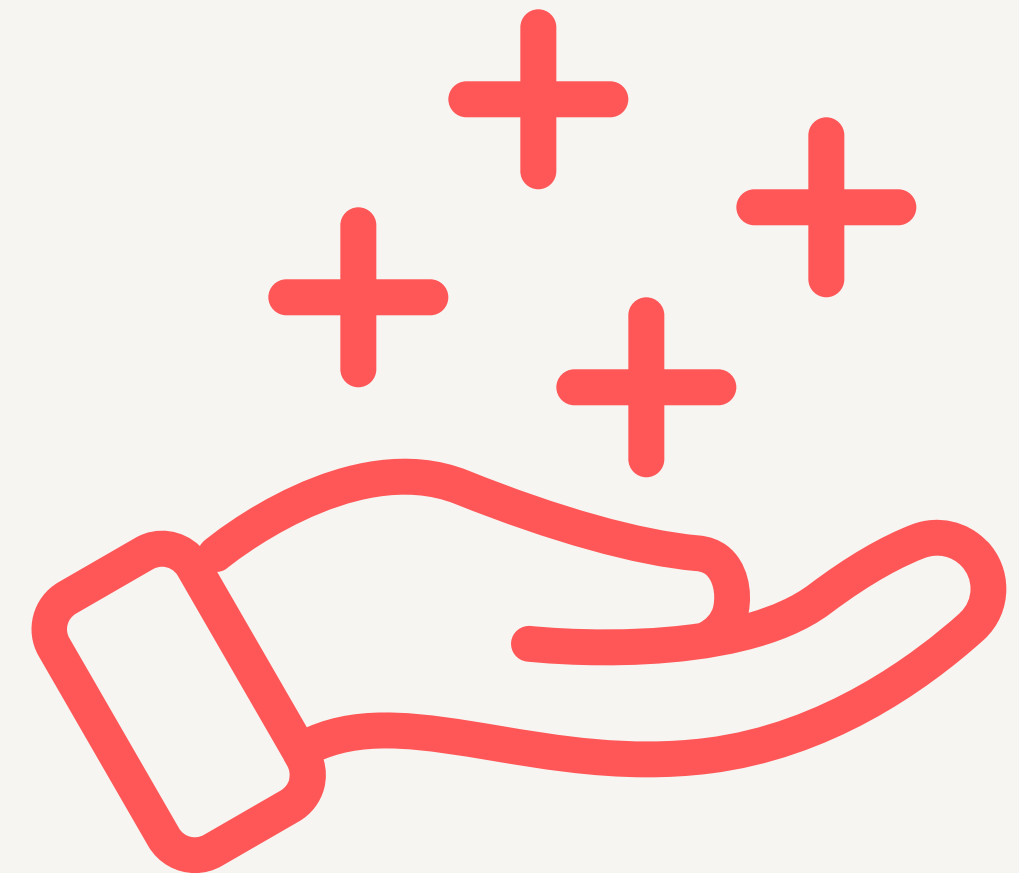
Challenges

- Taking a gap year is NOT widely accepted in Japan
- Differences in fundamental characteristics of the people/system between the two countries
 - e.g., Students in Japan are not used to speaking up in class; would discussions be as lively as they are at Danish folk high schools?

Introducing Folk High School in Japan

Benefits

- Opportunity to explore interests
 - Stepping away from the intense academic competition
- Broader perspectives
 - Higher political awareness
- More diverse educational environments
 - Beneficial for those who do not thrive in the current educational environments in Japan or Japanese society in general



Conclusion

Conclusion

RQ1: What are the experiences of Japanese international students in folk high schools?

- Overall positive
 - Interactive and active learning styles
 - Teachers and peers
 - Discovering new hobbies, new sides of themselves, new perspectives, and new outlook on life

Conclusion

RQ2: How might their experiences in folk high schools compare to their educational experiences in Japan?

- Differences > Similarities
- Less pressure to do well

RQ3: What are their thoughts on introducing the folk high school model in Japan?

- Many potential benefits
 - Higher political awareness
 - More time to explore options
- Thrive...?

Policy Suggestions

Focus on gap year

- Government could offer **scholarships** to support high school graduates in having meaningful and enriching gap years

Focus on making folk high schools more attractive

- Highlight the distinctive learning environments folk high schools provide that are not accessible elsewhere
 - Beneficial for certain types of university admission in Japan + job hunting



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