

Lifelong Learning: Research About Adult Students With the Insight of an Actual Adult Student

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I am a student in the English Literature Department at Aoyama University. I am originally from Austria, turning 33 soon. When I was young, besides my native tongue German, I studied English, Latin, Italian, French, Japanese (and more recently, Mandarin as well). I was an exchange student multiple times in various countries due to my passion for languages. I went to Cambridge, London, Tokyo, and Modena to study the language there. Soon after graduating high school and briefly experiencing university life at the University of Innsbruck, I moved to Tokyo, and I have been living here on and off for more than 15 years now. I have spent my 20s fulfilling my dreams while traveling the world. I had the chance to work all over the globe. Now in my 30s, having reached all my goals, I was looking for a new challenge in life. As I always loved languages, naturally I decided to study American and English literature.

This essay focuses on the research on the topic of studying at university as an adult: the reason for studying as an adult, the global situation, the situation in Japan, the positive effects of studying on the adult student, and lastly the difference between young and adult students. It is based on data and research provided by institutions and my own, illustrated with real-life experiences from myself as an adult student. The results of this research were positive and generally paint a positive picture of society. The main aim is to expand the understanding toward adult learners to reveal the strong importance of adult students and demonstrate the positive effects of adult studying.

Introduction

While outside of Japan adult students are nowadays highly common, steadily increasing, and even taken seriously and supported like the traditional student, adult students in Japan are still extremely rare. They are being looked down upon and facing discrimination from institutions, companies, and society. This age discrimination is problematic because it leads to further issues, which result in negative outcomes for the prospective student. Above all, studying in adult life holds numerous positive effects on the student itself and society as well. The aim of this research is to highlight the rising number as well as the significance of adult students on a global level, as well as to raise awareness of the age

discrimination they are facing even nowadays here in Japan. I chose this topic because as an adult student in Japan I have faced so many difficulties with enrolling in a university and society. That is why I want to take the opportunity to point out the difficulties adult students face. I want to raise awareness of these issues and make society realize the importance of adult students. I will showcase the reasons why adult students and studying in adult life are so important for us. In that vein, I will highlight the positive effects adult students, and studying in adult life itself, have for us.

Reasons for Late Enrolment

In general, studying later in life for various reasons is common in numerous countries outside Japan. People often decide to do things that they can only do while they're young: for example, to be a professional sports athlete, work as a fashion model, etc. Even cabin crew staff have restrictions; within Emirates Airlines, the age limit to apply is realistically seen to be up to 30 years of age according to the site (Kristal, 2021). According to the site, "there is no maximum age to apply for a position, but it's well known that Middle Eastern airlines, if you are more than 30 years old, then the chance of getting hired are slim." After the former cabin crew staff has accomplished their goals, they just simply start studying and hunting new career goals.

In most countries, there are no age restrictions for entrance to higher education as there are in Japan. Additionally on top of that, in most countries in Europe, studying is free anyway, so people have no pressure to enter university right away, or the chance to study will be gone forever and always. People have options. They are allowed to make their own choices; they can weigh their options and decide which one they want to go for. There is no pressure from society, institutions, universities, the government, parents, etc. Additionally, in Europe, graduating from university doesn't guarantee you a job, so many like to collect work experience beforehand. Or, since languages are such a crucial asset in Europe—since speaking multiple languages is extremely common—many go abroad to another country to learn the language

from native speakers, to have better chances later in the work field. The image of studying later on in life is also not negative in any way. This is supported by the doctoral thesis *Why do some students delay college enrollment? Does it matter?* (Lin, 2019). I conclude that financial constraint is not the only explanation. Students might rationally adjust the timing of enrollment to maximize their welfare, based on their personal capabilities, preferences, and economic conditions. Factors such as behavioural bias and sociological constraints also influence students' educational decisions.

The reason why I decided to start studying again in my 30s: I was at a point in my life where I had reached all my goals and dreams, so of course, I was looking for a new challenge, a new task. Also, I didn't see anything weird in it. It was a very natural decision. In my country challenging yourself and improving yourself by taking on studies later on in life is rather seen as very admirable, even noble, a decision that would be worthy of praise. The motto "You're never too old to learn!" is a reality.

Global Situation

In the graph shown in Figure 2, based on the data from The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development from 2022, we can see the enrollment age of post-secondary/tertiary education. Analyzing the chart, Japan has the lowest enrollment age, and the average enrollment age is below 19. In comparison, we can see that the average enrollment age, especially in Nordic and Scandinavian countries, is the highest. Concrete numbers can be seen on the chart added in the appendix.

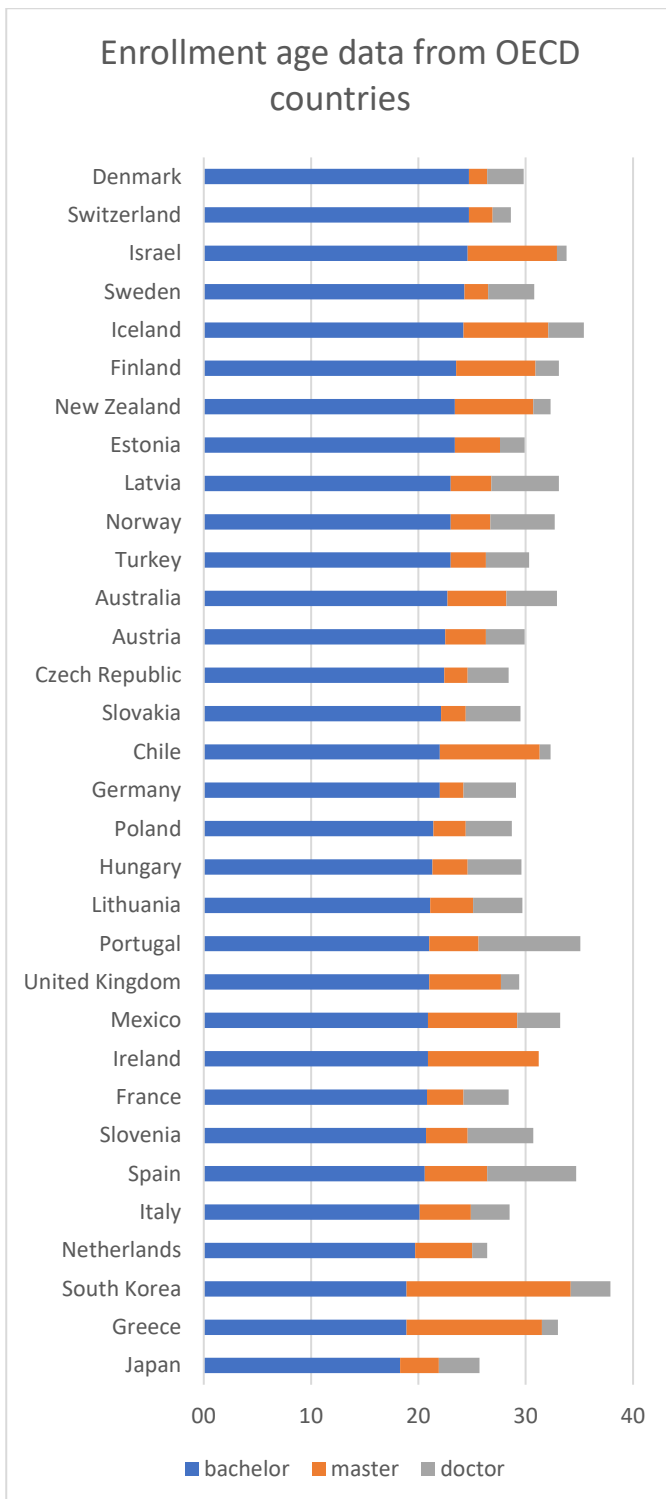


Figure 1: Chart for Enrollment Age Data From OECD Countries (data extracted from OECD via happybanana)

Regarding being a leader in the education system, if we take other research into account, like the article “10 Reasons Why Finland's Education System is the Best in the World” (2022), we can

see that Finland, which has a late enrollment rate, is known to have the best school system. Therefore, we could argue that there exists a correlation between the freedom to choose your own timing for studying and a good education system. Nordic and Scandinavian countries are known to have the best education system globally. Therefore, it could be argued that the independent system of such leaders in top education, is far better than the strict outdated system in Japan. Not only is it outdated, but it is also oppressing the young promising children. The many suicides could be linked to the harsh school drill. According to the Mainichi article “Suicide Rise Among Japan Kids Blamed on Stifling Schools Amid Calls for Societal Change” (n.d.), the education system is to blame. They quote Shiko Ishii, who says that “Suicides and avoiding school are signals from children who find even attending school painful.” The cram school is even called “an unnecessary evil” by Kittaka from the Japan Times (Kittaka, 2013). According to research (The Mystery Behind Japan’s High Suicide Rates Among Kids, n.d.), “suicide was the leading cause of death for Japanese children between the ages of 10 and 19.” Furthermore, we can read in this article that according to the research by Hokkaido University professor Kenzo Denda “1 in 12 Japanese elementary school-aged children, and 1 in 4 junior high school students suffer from clinical depression.” According to the NHK article (Saori, 2022), another survey by National Center for Child Health and Development found that “24 percent of all respondents have had suicidal thoughts, while one in six children said they had self-harmed.” These numbers are highly alarming. Although the reasons are far more complex and a study worthwhile on its own, it cannot be denied that there might be a correlation to the strict school system in Japan, which leaves no space for creativity and mental well-being.

Furthermore, if we take the correlation to happiness into account, we should take a look at this research from The World Population Review (2022), we can see that the top countries from the previous ranking are in the leading position again.

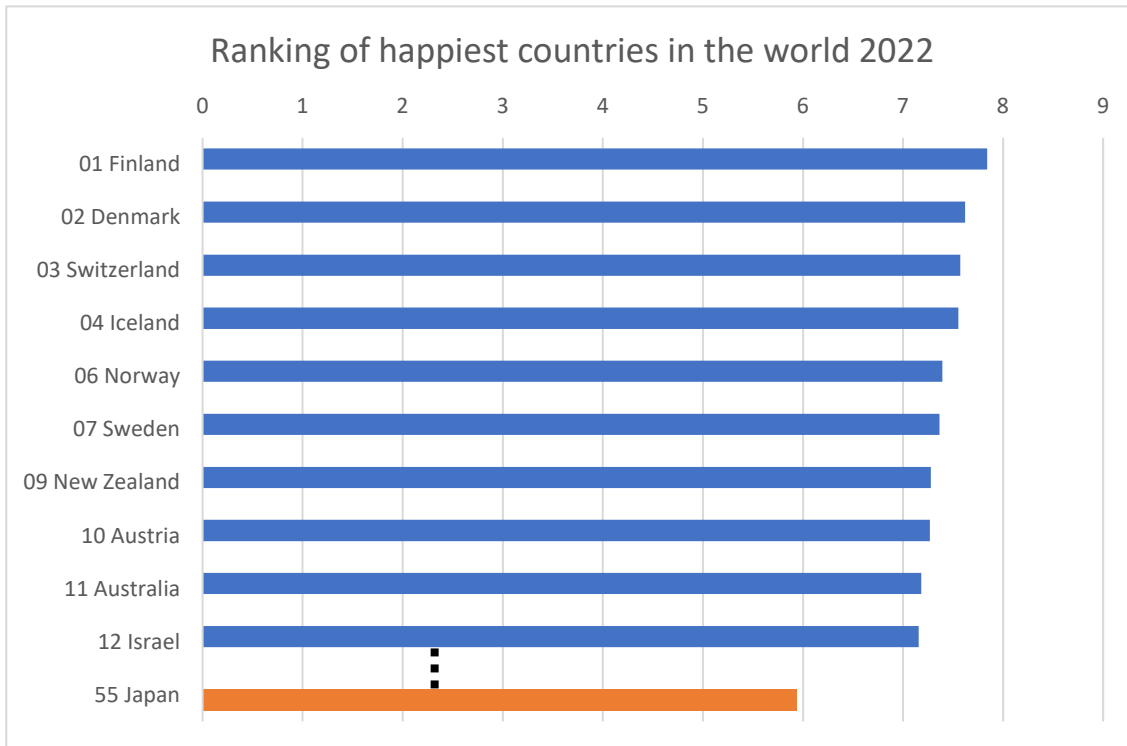


Figure 2: Worldpopulationreview (2022): Happiest Countries in the World

Overall, we can see a high degree of overlap between the chart of late enrollment countries in the top 12 and the top 12 of most happy countries. All of the Nordic and Scandinavian countries are represented in the top ranks, and multiple Central European and Oceanian countries are in the top range as well. If we take this research into account, we can see a correlation between the freedom to choose your own timing of studying and happiness in life. We could argue that having the freedom to choose the timing of how and when to walk your academic path in life can significantly influence your overall happiness and contentedness. On the opposite end of the ranking, we see Japan ranking 55th. While there may be many other factors to consider, personal freedom like choosing when you want to study is surely one of them.

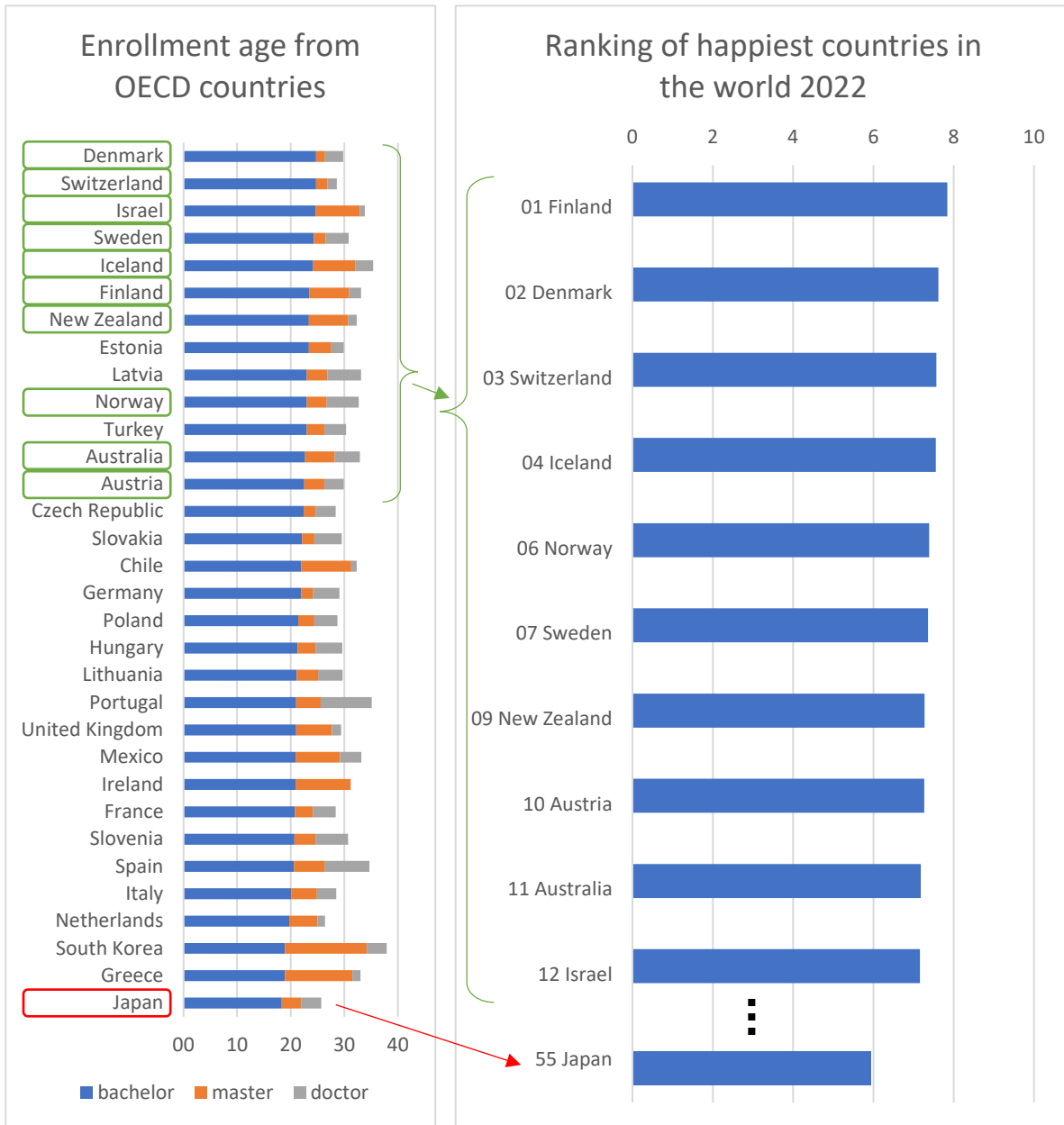


Figure 3: Connection Between the Enrollment Age of OECD Countries and the Happiness Index From Worldpopulationreview

*08 Luxembourg is not an OECD member so it is not included in here

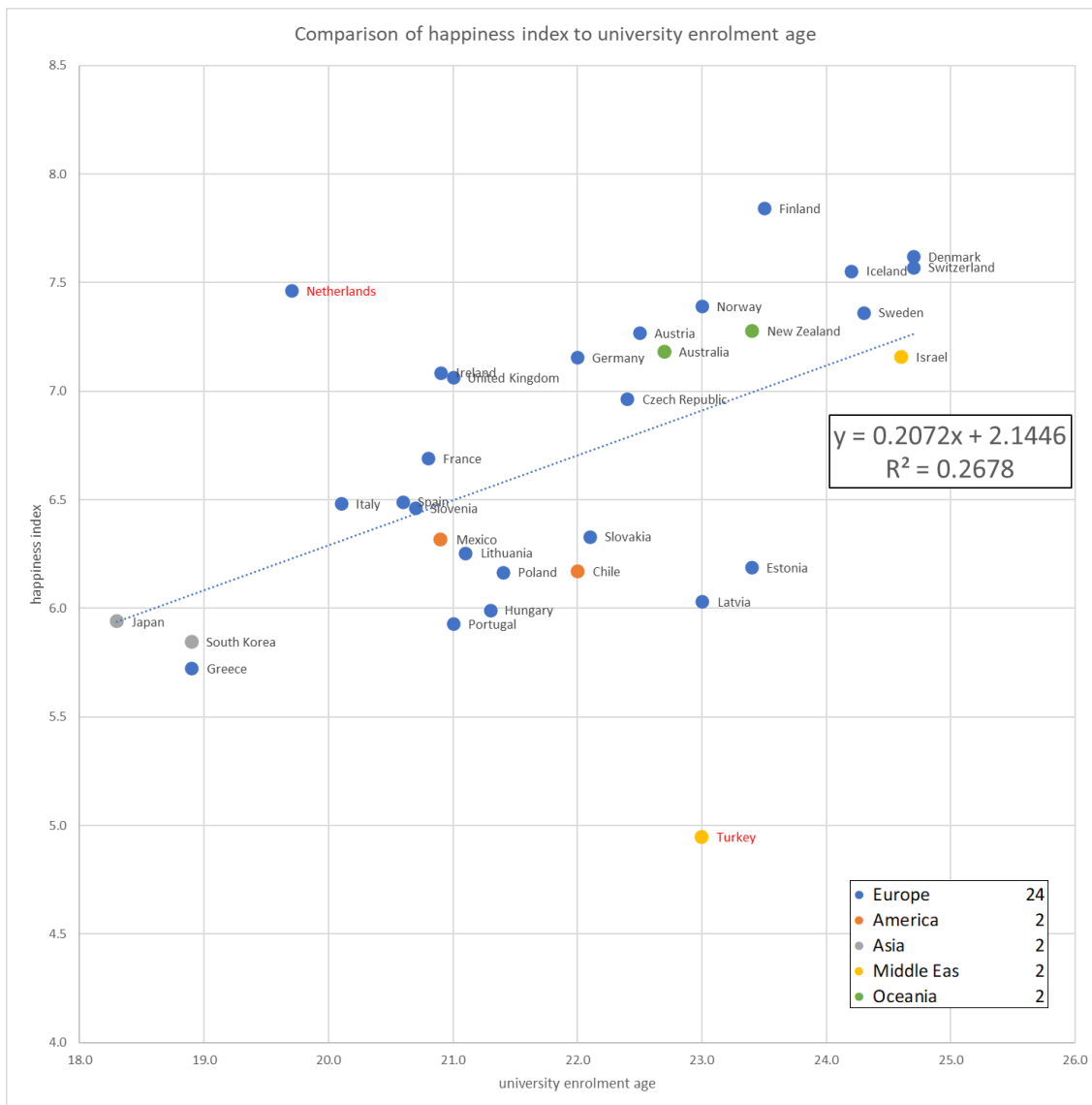


Figure 4: Worldpopulationreview (2022)'s Happiness Index Compared to University Enrolment Age of OECD Countries

In general, we can see here that the higher the enrollment age rises, the more the happiness index rises. While there might be other factors as well to consider, it is still a significant factor. There is still space for further research regarding the correlation between these factors.

Since the number of adult students is rising, many countries are adjusting to the new era by offering special support for adult students in other countries. The research study “Adult Students in Mixed-Age Postsecondary Classrooms: Implications for Instructional Approaches” (Panacci, 2017) has been focusing on

Canada and its significant increase in adult students in the past years. It says that while in 2008-2009 in Ontario around 12 percent of university baccalaureate degree students were aged 25 years or older, in 2010 already 60 percent of part-time and 13 percent of full-time undergraduate students in Canada were 25 years old or older. This research also showcases the outstanding programs and services they provide for adult students, including on-campus childcare for students with children. These services are still unimaginable in Japan at this current point. A support system like this demonstrates how very much tailored support is needed for adult students. It reveals how much there is still to explore and expand in the world of the adult student. It proves that there is a significant demand for it. It also shows that rather than abandoning adult students, universities rather need to focus on specifically targeting this new group as Canada does. The research found the following:

Institutions have offered a wide range of programs and services, including adult-focused courses and programs (e.g., pathway, preparatory, and upgrading programs, non-formal learning programs, continuing education, distance education, evening, and accelerated courses and programs, and part-time programs), orientation, academic advising, learning support, credit for life and work experience, financial aid, and on-campus childcare (Panacci, 2017, p. 3).

Situation in Japan

First of all, we need to understand what the main university admission methods are. In Japan, there are mainly three types: *ippan* (traditional entrance exam), *suisen* (entrance by the recommended students system), and AO (measured by your character and your desire to join the department/university), out of which the first and second one are most common.

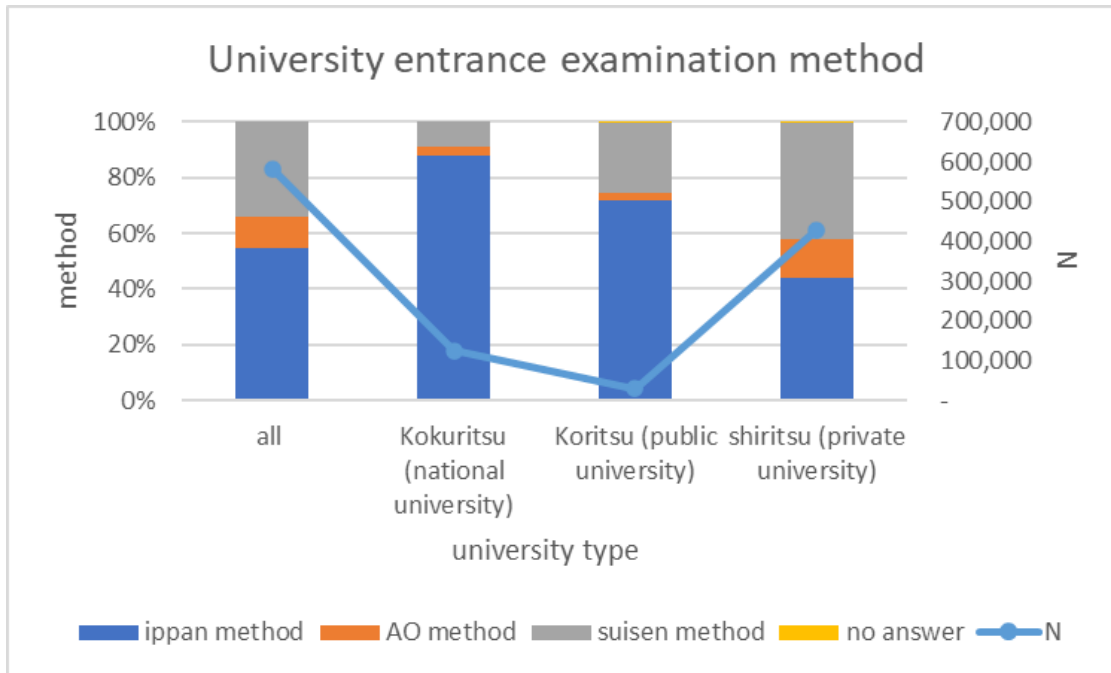


Figure 5: University Entrance Examination Method According to BetweenShinken (translated from Japanese into English)

As we can see here on the graph in Figure 5 from BetweenShinken, there is a large number of students who join the university by suisen. Particularly in the private universities the suisen students make up a significant percentage. I researched the application conditions of all the major universities in and nearby Tokyo and checked whether they have age restrictions. And by age restriction, I identify such enrollment restrictions where one has to be currently a high school student in order to be able to apply. While not clearly stating that you have to be 18 years of age, in reality in Japan, this equals being 18 years old of age. And as you can see in Figures 6, 7, and 8 based on my research, I found out that this suisen category, the percentage of universities with age restrictions is very high.

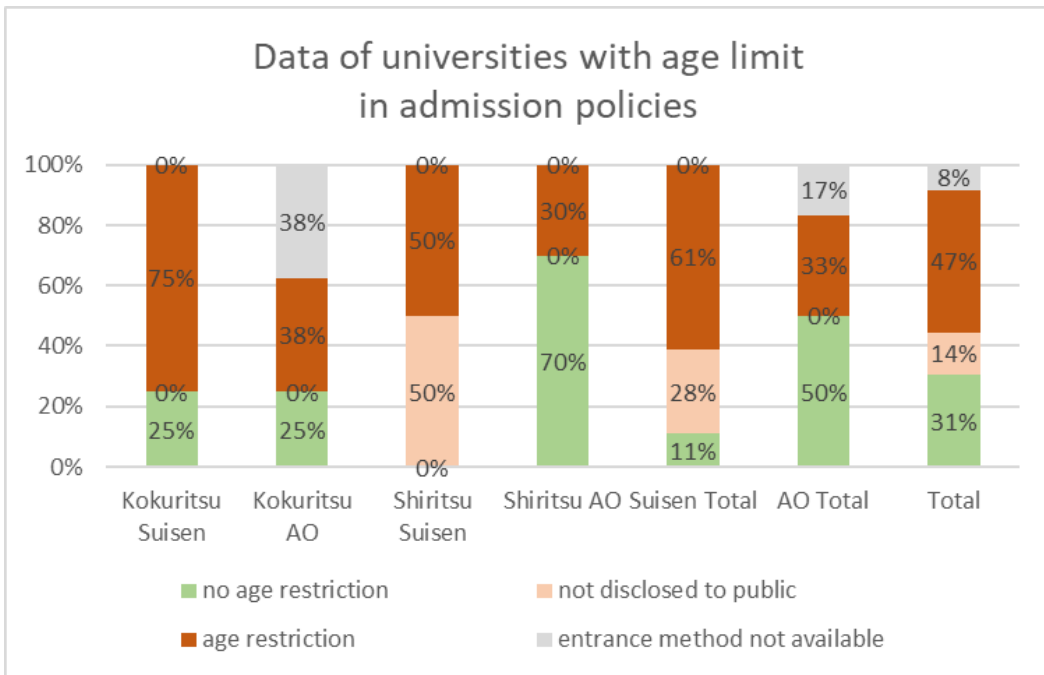


Figure 6: Personal Research: Data of Universities with Age Limit in Admission Policies (concrete data can be found in the appendix)
Kokuritsu means public university.
Shiritsu means private university.

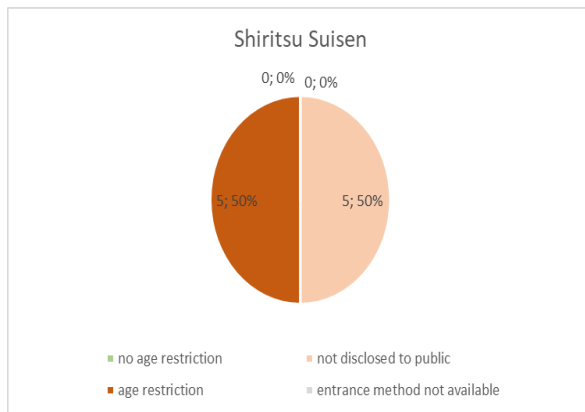
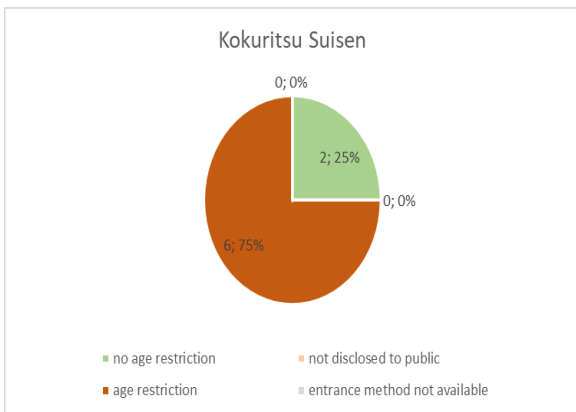


Figure 7 Shiritsu Suisen (private university preferred student method); concrete data can be found in the appendix

Figure 8 Kokuritsu Suisen (national university preferred student method; concrete data can be found in the appendix

And those universities that do not clearly state their age restrictions, do not even disclose information about whether they do

have age restrictions. So, we might suspect that they do have restrictions as well. They just do not want to make it public to avoid criticism by society, since in the past years more and more secret discrimination by universities regarding sex (Nikkei, 2022), age, ronin status (ronin is a student who has failed to enter university right after high school graduation), and nationality (Chuonippou, 2022) has been discovered. So finally, this brings us to around $\frac{3}{4}$ at the kokuritsu (national university), and at the shiritsu (private university) roughly half, but if we take the non-disclosed numbers into account, perhaps 100% of them have age restrictions in the suisen method. Considering the number of students who may wish to enter by suisen, a huge number of students are being treated completely unfairly and are being denied even though they might have had good grades and might be very suitable. You may be smart enough, but you are not even allowed to apply because of your age.

But with this limitation, they are not only discriminating against persons who decided to take another path in life, but also students who experienced certain incidents in life, which made it impossible to enroll earlier, perhaps a family crisis, a death of a family member, illness, or something similar. These severe and highly outdated restrictions are not only destroying the effort the prospective students have made over the years studying in primary and secondary school but also their future life. This equally applies to people who wish to take another path in life, study at a different time, and prefer to collect some life or job experiences first. Even a noble and respectable decision like studying abroad or taking care of a sick family member will be treated the same. This also destroys hope and aspiration from adult people who wish to improve their life and acquire wisdom and knowledge to get a better job to have a better life.

To talk about my personal experience with the enrollment progress, while I am very happy to be studying at Aoyama, it was also the only available choice for me. Since as a foreigner and non-Japanese native speaker the usual traditional “ippan” method of taking the sentashiken (the national center examination for University admissions), was not an option due to the language

barrier and because the material taught in high school differs from that taught in Austria. While universities do not necessarily say that foreigners can't apply, they still require you to take the same test as Japanese, which in the end makes it highly unlikely for a non-native speaker to pass. And the *suisen* was not an option for me due to my age as is the case of most universities. Only Aoyama Gakuin University would permit me to take their entrance examination, which I passed with flying colors. Aoyama Gakuin University provides prospective students with the option to take the university's own test in English instead of the traditional "sentashiken". In my opinion, this clearly illustrates the university's holistic approach to giving access to all kinds of different people, regardless of sex, age, or nationality. Furthermore, I feel this illustrates Aoyama University's approach to inclusiveness, diversity, and open-mindedness. And when I started, I could once more feel that this university is doing a great job at accommodating all kinds of people, no matter their background or group status, whether they are from a different country, a minority, part of the LGBTQ+ community, or anything else. It was clearly the right choice for me.

But discrimination against ronin is not solely from the universities that deny prospective students access to education. The discrimination reaches much further. Age discrimination regarding the so-called ronin is happening everywhere: Companies, society, and peers. Companies are hesitating, or rather refusing to hire people who have a little gap between high school graduation and enrollment, even just one year can have a negative impact and decide whether one receives the position or not. At job interviews, you will be asked about that gap year, "What happened"? We can see this reality at the site Rikuraku (Kabushikigaisha nihontsushinsabisu henshubu, 2022), which is supposed to offer you tips for job hunting. It notes "if you're a few years older than the others, it will lead to mistrust, and people will wonder whether he/she is a person who brings trouble." But also, the negative image by society is harsh. Ronin are considered "not smart enough," and are made fun of by their peers at university or later by colleagues at work. Even just one single year can have a significant influence on your future path. Even if you made it some other way

into university, that fact will always haunt you your whole life.

Even I myself have experienced this. Although in general I am surrounded by very kind people and usually do not face any trouble, I occasionally find myself in somewhat unpleasant situations where I have to explain myself and my “situation,” why I’m here, and being eyed like I’m some extremely weird species in a cage at the zoo. I’ve also had a very unpleasant experience with a career advisor, who demonstrated the typical traditional narrow thinking and prejudice against adult students. While if I would be studying overseas, most likely no one would be questioning my path. It simply wouldn’t be a cause for interest or comment. I would be just any other student, with no further discussion.

Positive Effects of Studying

Studying as an adult has numerous positive effects on the learner: mental, cognitive, physical, social, and career-related effects.

First, according to the research (*The Positive Impact of Lifelong Learning for Older Adults, 2021*), studying is linked to numerous positive effects on mental health, for example, reduction of depression and anxiety, being able to deal with stress, larger self-esteem, and a desire to look forward to the future. Hammond (2004) in the *Oxford Review of Education*, researched the effects of learning throughout the lives of the persons in the study. They came to the conclusion that lifelong learning has a significant positive effect on mental health, well-being, the ability to recover from mental health issues, and also to cope with stress. They were also able to see impacts on other aspects, like their self-esteem, having a new purpose in life, greater self-efficacy, and feeling tighter social integration. Through learning the people in the study were able to develop these psychosocial qualities.

Second, the cognitive effects showed that by studying you can stop the mental decline and even improve your brain. According to research (*6 Ways to Exercise Your Body While You Exercise Your Brain - SEEK Learning, n.d.*), exercising your mind by studying can counteract the brain’s natural deterioration process. To stay mentally fit at an advanced age, it is recommended to start studying

as early as possible. But not only that, according to research (The Positive Impact of Lifelong Learning for Older Adults, 2021) even notable institutions like Harvard University have their attention on this major topic:

Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital just recently paired up to facilitate a study on the effect of intellectual stimulation throughout the lifetime of older adults, and found a marked reduction of memory problems like those displayed in Alzheimer's disease.

Lagoy, MD, a psychiatrist with Mindpath Health organization explains the brain process as follows "It's similar to how cardio exercise every day helps benefit the health of your heart. (...) The more you keep the mind engaged the healthier you are for it (...)" ("Life-Long Learning Has Positive Impact on Brain Health and Aging," 2022). She argues that by simply using your brain you can keep it healthy and active.

Whether education can have a positive effect on the brain has also been researched by Lutz Jäncke, professor of neuropsychology at the University of Zurich, and a team of researchers under the University Research Priority Program "Dynamics of Healthy Aging." Their research article "Associations of Subclinical Cerebral Small Vessel Disease and Processing Speed in Non-demented Subjects: A 7-year study [Study]" (Hotz, 2021) shows that education in academic settings can delay the aging of the brain. It showed that education leads to less brain degeneration. According to the first author Isabel Hotz, the results revealed that "Senior citizens with an academic background showed significantly lower levels of these typical signs of brain degeneration. In addition, academics also processed information faster and more accurately (...) The decline in their mental processing performance was lower overall." Lutz Jäncke argues that "a high level of education leads to an increase in neural and cognitive networks (..) their brains are then better able to compensate for any impairments that occur."

Third, there are numerous positive effects on actual physical health. According to the article “Positive Impact of Lifelong Learning for Older Adults” in Home With You (2021), studying is linked to “lowering the rate of chronic health conditions like diabetes, stroke, emphysema, cardiovascular disease, ulcers and asthma”. Also, “simply reading for as little as 6 minutes helps minimize stress by lowering our heart rate and reducing muscle tension, bringing about lower blood pressure levels, improved cardiovascular health, and a more robust and efficient immune system”.

Next, the social effects are discussed in the article “Positive Impact of Lifelong Learning for Older Adults” in Home With You (2021), which specializes in the positive effects of learning in older adults. It says that taking classes of any kind is crucial for our general feeling of well-being. Not only studying itself, but the networks established, and forming of lasting friendships contribute in positive ways as well. They argue that “meeting new people with challenging thoughts and ideas can provide one with a fresh outlook on life. (...) providing one with different perspectives from different countries and different businesses.” Although this article specializes in older adults, this can be applied to people of all ages. Due to the COVID-19 crisis people have been more and more isolated indoors in the past years and depression has been drastically rising, as we can see in the article “New Global Burden of Disease” (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2021), which says that, “analyses show depression and anxiety among the top causes of health loss worldwide and a significant increase due to the COVID-19 pandemic”. Therefore, I would argue that studying and the social networks that come along with it have a positive social effect on students of all ages.

Lastly, studying will inevitably have positive career-related effects on your life. By studying you are not only expanding your wisdom, but by pursuing a degree it is possible for you to pursue better jobs or receive a promotion. A higher salary will also expand your possibilities in life and upgrade your living standards, ultimately leading to a higher satisfaction level. The numerous positive effects of studying could be compared to a snowball effect. With a small action like studying, you have the chance to change your whole life.

As for myself, joining the university has significantly changed my life for the better. It had a major impact on many aspects of my life: emotionally, mentally, physically, and career-wise. University has motivated me to step up my game. It has given me motivation, passion, excitement, and positive feelings. I never expected to do so well although most of the lessons are conducted in Japanese, so being able to do well has given me self-confidence. Having a fixed everyday routine gave me a solid foundation and a sense of security. It made me feel more settled in life, like I've finally arrived where I'm supposed to be. Also, by stating that I am a student at Aoyama Gakuin University, people seem to have more trust in me.

All of these things involved, a stable routine, friends, and small successes made me emotionally stable and content. Also, being able to socialize daily with my peers, laugh, and just have fun, had a significant effect on my mental health. Before I had been so busy traveling, I rarely had the chance to enjoy time with friends, so there were times when I felt alone and lonely. So, I would personally count this as a large advantage of university, especially face-to-face classes. You have someone to rely on, someone you can count on. It is commonly acknowledged that social contact with other humans, especially laughing is said to have a major positive effect on humans.

I've realized that I'm also more focused on my physical well-being. I'm trying to be my best self. Therefore, I'm trying to eat healthily; I work out every single day before heading to the campus, and I feel more fit and awake. It clearly changed my sleep schedule for the better. I definitely live a healthier life. But not only that. My everyday life at the campus is exciting and full of fun. Furthermore, being in such competitive surroundings (in a positive way), has made me more goal-focused and made me aspire to new future job goals. It gave me a perspective I never had. It gave me the confidence to be able to achieve those new goals, which society in Japan always made me believe that I could not aspire to, because I didn't go the traditional route.

While mature students are still extremely rare in Japan and looked at suspiciously, they are quite common in other countries and it has been proven by research that having mature students in

class has highly positive effects. According to Panacci (2017), “mixed-aged classes have a positive effect on the whole class and learning environment, with instructors frequently indicating that the participation of adult students in mixed-age classes results in more sophisticated class discussions and an improved intellectual environment.” Surprisingly, their research has shown that both the mature and the traditional student even prefer mixed-age classes compared to traditional classes: “while adult students may initially express concern about their presence and acceptance (...) adult students and traditional students consistently indicate that they value, prefer, and learn more in mixed-age classes than age-segregated classes and that mixed-age classes help them see different perspectives.” These research results prove that having a mixed-age class can have a positive effect on the whole class environment and elevate the learning process.

As for my personal experience with other students, I feel I was able to make a positive impact on my classmates and peers. I had the impression that having a person in the position somewhere between “older sister” and “mum” gave many of them a sense of safety, secureness, and confidence. I feel that having students from various backgrounds, age groups, etc., has a positive effect on the group. Different kinds of people can bring different kinds of wisdom, life experiences, and opinions to the table. Due to my age, I feel I have more confidence in speaking up, asking for things, and helping. To give an example, when the teacher made a mistake with everyone’s grade, I was the only one to speak up. But not only that, other girls consulted me regarding more severe problems like domestic violence, abuse, legal issues, financial issues, and suicidal thoughts, and I was luckily able to provide advice due to my experience in life. I think with my maturity and experience I can give them a feeling of safety and a sense of security which I wouldn’t have been able to do when I was younger and inexperienced.

Additionally, it gave me confidence, too. Being able to help others, being the “big sister,” or maybe even the “mum,” gave my self-esteem a little push. Being able to help others makes me happy. Furthermore, I didn’t have any problems with acclimating with my young peers. There has never been any weirdness, trouble,

exclusion, or discrimination due to my age. While there is so much age discrimination by the institutions and society, there has never been any during my university life from my fellow students. Probably many adults worry about standing out on campus, but that has never been an issue for me so far. There was always a large inclusiveness and acceptance among everyone. We all help each other out and accept everyone as they are.

Differences Between Elder Students and Young Students

Adult students learn more easily and are more motivated. According to the research *Adult Students in Mixed-Age Postsecondary Classrooms: Implications for Instructional Approaches* (Panacci, 2017), adult students learn much better since they are much more engaged than their younger peers:

Adult students consistently demonstrate significantly higher levels of engagement in classwork and interaction with students and faculty in the classroom than traditional students (...) the percentage of adult students who participated in classroom discussion was more than twice that of traditional students.

Also, according to the article “Why Being a Mature Student is Great!” (Durham, 2020) by Saranne Durham from the South African College of Applied Psychology, they’re much more motivated and participated more than their peers, so they are more likely to succeed than the traditional young student:

Mature students tend to be highly motivated, have the advantage of a greater success rate over their younger peers, generally tend to be more focused, have better problem-solving skills, are more independent, and better able to articulate original ideas. They start with a fire in their bellies, knowing what they want out of a course, and are better able to deal with the ups and downs that are inevitably part of studying.

Also, the research found that adult students' learning experience is very different from that of traditional students. Kasworm's (2005) research (quoted in Panacci, 2017) showed that "in contrast to children's and youths' subject-centered orientation to learning, adults are life-centered. Adult students emphasize the need to be able to relate classroom learning to their life and work experiences, roles, and goals."

Since I chose to study out of passion, and not because of the pressure of parents or society, I enjoy the study part itself very much. It is my true passion. While others are busy experiencing all the exciting new things in life since they are still young, I really try to focus on studying even in my free time. I have already been there and done that, so those banal activities mean no distraction to my study life. I can really focus on university. Plus, being older than the others makes me even more motivated to catch up. I have a constant feeling that I must not lose any precious time on distractions, which makes me goal focused and efficient.

Furthermore, since I am already at a point in life where I am quite financially stable, I do not have to worry about side jobs to pay for university and other things, which is a significant advantage. I can completely focus on studying and can save energy. This allows me to study very efficiently. Too many fellow students from my course have collapsed on the train because they have been juggling university and part-time jobs. Having a little financial cushion is a large advantage for older learners. When I was younger, I surely would not have had that financial stability. University life would have been more hectic and side jobs might have negatively affected my physical and mental health. Overall, I would say that now being older I can appreciate studying more. It is like a privilege to me. While others see it rather as a burden or are simply not that interested. This brings me to my next section.

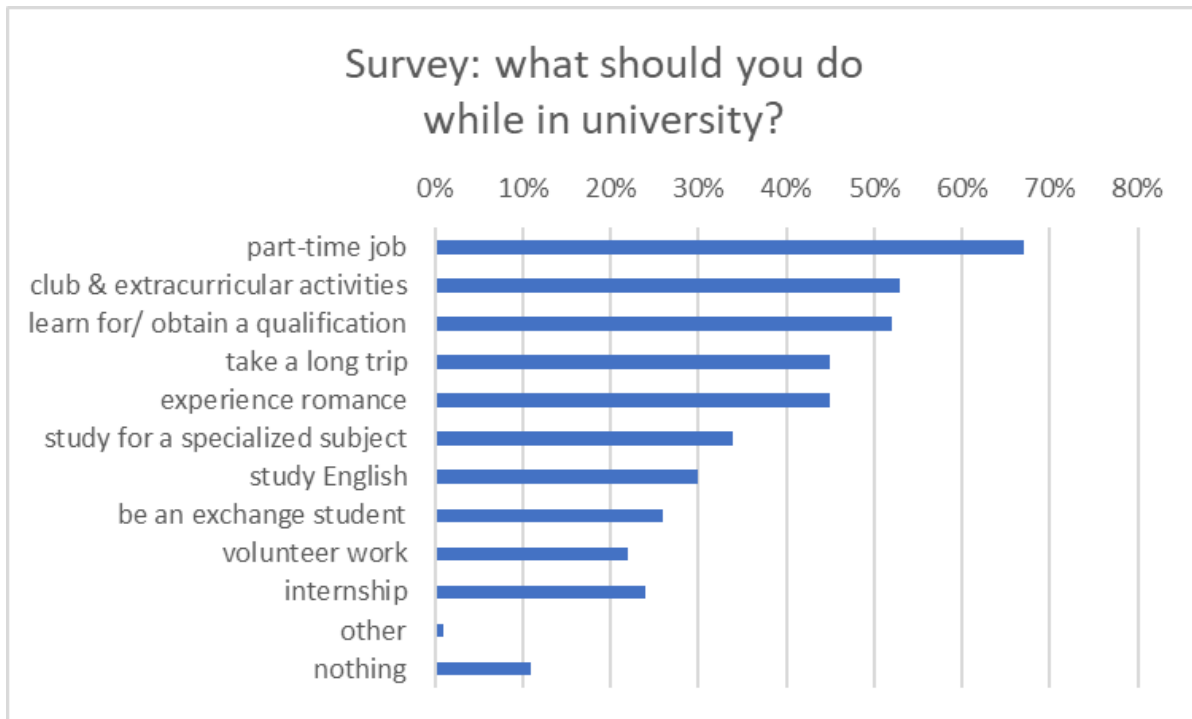


Figure 9: What Should You do While in University? Survey data retrieved from Townwork Magazine and translated from Japanese to English

Research on traditional Japanese university students shows their motives for enrollment, their plans during university life, or their reflections on what has been positive during their time at university. Based on the survey results (Figure 9 above) and additional graphs in the appendix) we can see that the main motivation from young Japanese university students is as follows: besides the natural choice of “studying” and “pressure from society,” a significant percentage of students go to university just for fun, making friends, hanging out, joining clubs, being able to have free time, or not needing to work. Nearly half of them answered that they join university because they finally want to have some free time, which is shocking if you consider the high tuition their parents pay. Quite a large amount even answered “traveling”, which does not seem to have anything to do with studying. It is common knowledge that after the harsh years of studying in high school until late at night every day, these young people want to finally enjoy their hard-earned freedom. This results in many not taking their studies

seriously. Their focus mainly lies on having fun. They do not have the same drive to strive for high academic success and goals as adult students.

But adult students on the other hand are driven by their purpose, high goals, and motivation. They are studying to elevate their existing career or pursue a new career, a higher income, or a promotion. They have a completely different level of motivation. According to Panacci (2017) adult students are driven by career-related needs to advance their careers or increase their income. The biggest difference might be the motivation to learn as a result of differences in age, maturity and the individual's purpose to study. Their needs are different because they are in a different place in life and view the world and their future differently.

Life with professors is different as well for adult students. Adult students have advantages in their ability to interact with professors. Since the age gap between the teacher and the adult student is not so large for adult students, or perhaps even no age gap at all, the adult students want to be treated differently. According to the academic thesis *Adult Students in Mixed-Age Postsecondary Classrooms: Implications for Instructional Approaches* (Panacci, 2017):

Perhaps the most startling difference between the two groups was the non-traditional students' view that teachers should also be willing to learn from them. They wanted to be understood, recognized as individuals, and respected. (..)
Houser's (2004) research also highlighted that "comparatively, traditional students expect less recognition of who they are as students and place a greater focus on instructor presentation of material.

As for my personal experience, I always have great communication and relationship with my professors, which I feel has to do with my age and the attributes that go along with it. I always had a feeling that teachers are very kind and frank with me, talking to me like a colleague. They often even asked me for advice or my opinion,

which I didn't see as often with my younger peers. One of my professors even recommended I join academic societies and encouraged me to publish academic papers, which students usually do in their master's courses. I always felt like they take me more seriously because they could feel my passion, motivation, and engagement. Another memory that I won't forget so easily is when one of my professors told me once "basically we're colleagues now", which I was very happy about, although it was of course just a kind gesture. Honorable mention to all the professors who really mistook me for one of their colleagues.

Conclusion

In this essay, I was able to demonstrate the significance of the adult student as well as the importance of studying in adult life for the learners themselves and society. This research has focused on the topic of studying at the university as an adult. It discusses the situation of adult students globally and in Japan, as well as my own experience. In conclusion, we can summarize that adult students are extremely common and accepted worldwide, but they are still rare and discriminated against in Japan. Since they have different motives and higher passion, they are likely to achieve better results than their peers. Furthermore, I have demonstrated the high significance of adult students for society and the importance of studying as an adult in itself, as well as the numerous positive mental, physical and social effects of it. I hope to achieve the expansion of the acceptance of adult students in society in the future. In this research, I have revealed that age should not stop anyone from studying and I hope that it can inspire people to study in adulthood. As the motto goes: You're never too old to learn!

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Appendix

| Country | bachelor | master | doctor |
|----------------|----------|--------|--------|
| Switzerland | 24.7 | 26.9 | 28.6 |
| Denmark | 24.7 | 26.4 | 29.8 |
| Israel | 24.6 | 32.9 | 33.8 |
| Sweden | 24.3 | 26.5 | 30.8 |
| Iceland | 24.2 | 32.1 | 35.4 |
| Finland | 23.5 | 30.9 | 33.1 |
| Estonia | 23.4 | 27.6 | 29.9 |
| New Zealand | 23.4 | 30.7 | 32.3 |
| Turkey | 23.0 | 26.3 | 30.3 |
| Norway | 23.0 | 26.7 | 32.7 |
| Latvia | 23.0 | 26.8 | 33.1 |
| Australia | 22.7 | 28.2 | 32.9 |
| Austria | 22.5 | 26.3 | 29.9 |
| Czech Republic | 22.4 | 24.6 | 28.4 |
| Slovakia | 22.1 | 24.4 | 29.5 |
| Germany | 22.0 | 24.2 | 29.1 |
| Chile | 22.0 | 31.3 | 32.3 |
| Poland | 21.4 | 24.4 | 28.7 |
| Hungary | 21.3 | 24.6 | 29.6 |
| Lithuania | 21.1 | 25.1 | 29.7 |
| United Kingdom | 21.0 | 27.7 | 29.4 |
| Portugal | 21.0 | 25.6 | 35.1 |
| Ireland | 20.9 | 31.2 | 31.2 |
| Mexico | 20.9 | 29.2 | 33.2 |
| France | 20.8 | 24.2 | 28.4 |
| Slovenia | 20.7 | 24.6 | 30.7 |
| Spain | 20.6 | 26.4 | 34.7 |
| Italy | 20.1 | 24.9 | 28.5 |

| | | | |
|-------------|------|------|------|
| Netherlands | 19.7 | 25.0 | 26.4 |
| Greece | 18.9 | 31.5 | 33.0 |
| South Korea | 18.9 | 34.2 | 37.9 |
| Japan | 18.3 | 21.9 | 25.7 |

Figure 10: University Enrollment Age of OECD Countries, data from OECD (2022)

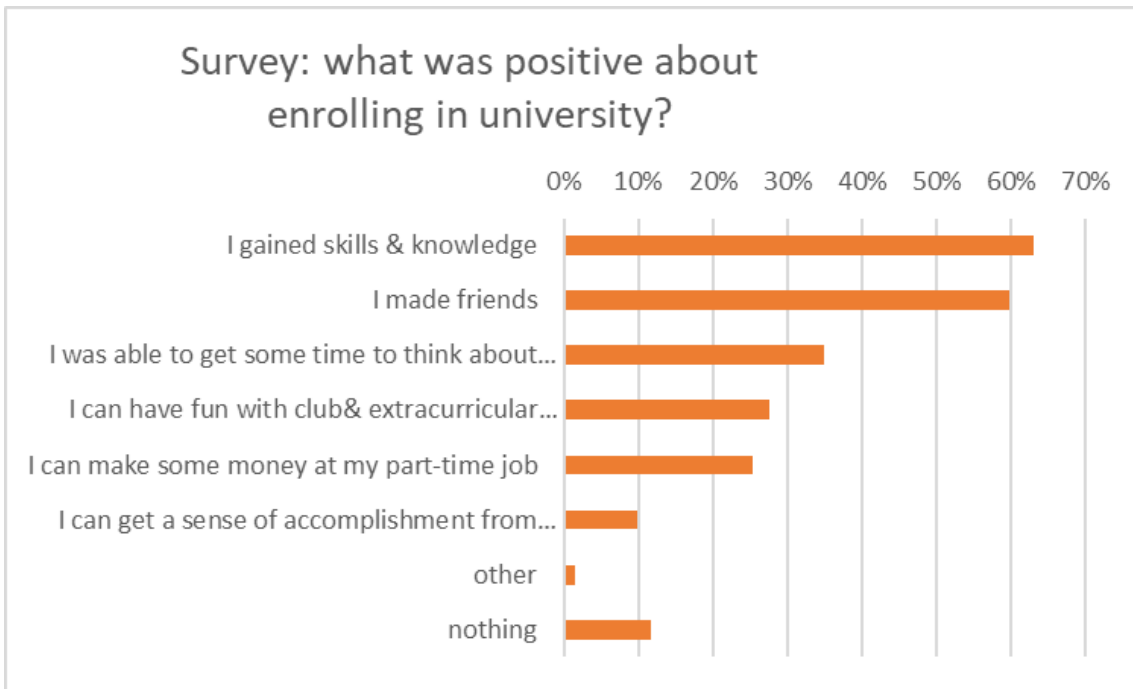


Figure 11: Survey: What was Positive About Enrolling in University? (Rikunabi, 2018)

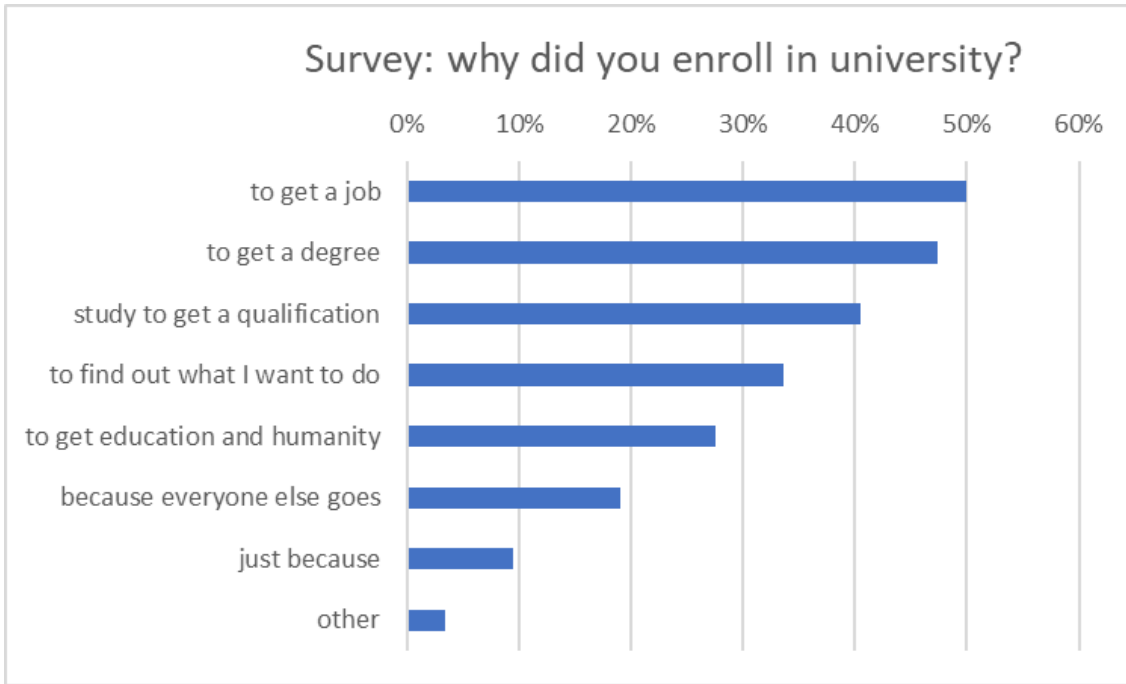
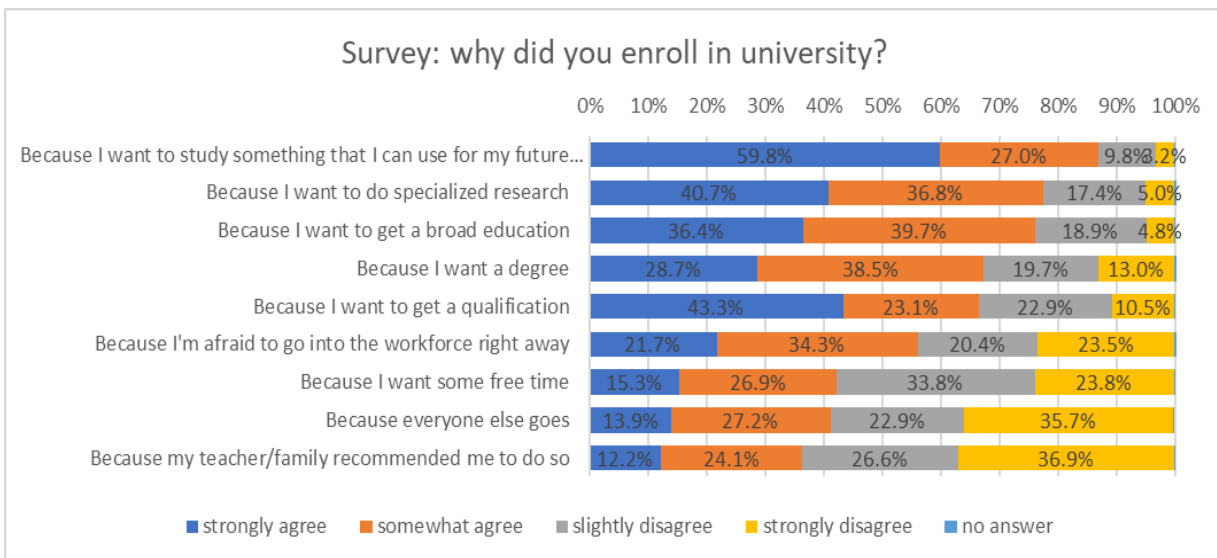


Figure 12: Survey: Why did You Enroll in University? (Try-base, 2022)



Figure

Figure 13: Survey: Why did You Enroll in University? (Benesse, 2022)

Personal research regarding age restriction for university enrollment

Survey target:

- widely known universities in and around the Tokyo area
- Department of literature (if not available, then science department)
- enrollment method either suisen or AO

○ : no age restriction
 × : age restriction existing
 △ : not disclosed to the public
 — : enrollment method does not exist

Age restriction is identified by the necessity of currently being a graduating high school student, which ultimately equals here in Japan to be 18 years of age, even if it may not be explicitly stated.

| Kokuritsu (national university) | Suisen | AO |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Tokyo University | ○ | — |
| Hitotsubashi University | ○ | — |
| Yokohama Kokuritsu University | X ¹ | ○ |
| Tokyo Gaikokugo University | X ² | — |
| Ochanomizu University | X ³ | X ⁴ |
| Chiba University | X ⁵ | ○ |
| Tokyo Toritsu University | X | X ⁶ |
| Yokohama Municipal University | X ⁷ | ○ |
| Shiritsu (private university) | Suisen | AO |
| Waseda University | X | ○ |
| Keio University | X ⁸ | ○ |
| Sophia University | X ⁹ | X ¹⁰ |
| Tokyo Rika University | X ¹¹ | X ¹² |
| Meiji University | △ ¹³ | ○ |
| Aoyama Gakuin University | △ ¹⁴ | ○ |
| Rikyo University | △ ¹⁵ | ○ |
| Chuo University | △ ¹⁶ | ○ |

¹ Faculty of Economics: suisen method only available for graduating high school students

² Faculty of Linguistics: suisen method

³ All faculties: suisen method only available for high

⁴ All faculties: AO method only available within two years after high school graduation

⁵ Faculty of Letters: suisen method only available for graduating high school students

⁶ Humanities and Social Sciences: suisen method only available for graduating high school students

⁷ All faculties: suisen method only available for graduating high school students

⁸ Faculty of Letters: suisen method only available for graduating high school students

⁹ All faculties: suisen method only available for graduating high school students

¹⁰ All faculties: AO method only available within two years after high school graduation

¹¹ All faculties: suisen method only available for graduating high school students

¹² All faculties: AO method only available for graduating high school students

¹³ information regarding designated high schools not disclosed to public

¹⁴ information regarding designated high schools not disclosed to public

¹⁵ information designated high schools not disclosed to public regarding

¹⁶ information designated high schools not disclosed to public regarding

| | | |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Hosei University | △ ¹⁷ | χ ¹⁸ |
| Gakushuin University | χ ¹⁹ | ○ |

¹⁷ information designated high schools not disclosed to public regarding

¹⁸ Department of Japanese Studies, Faculty of letters: AO method only available for graduating high school students

¹⁹ Faculty of letters: suisen method only available for graduating high school students