

# **Educational Revolution: Exploring the Homeschooling Boom in the United States and its Relevance to Japan**

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This article researches the homeschooling situation in the United States and Japan. First, it will introduce the history, demographics, motives, and challenges in both countries to give the reader basic knowledge. Then it will compare the situations, and look for overlaps and differences. After that, in the discussion part, the study will discuss the relevance of homeschooling to Japan. This will be done by highlighting issues in public schools, where homeschooling could mean a valid solution by providing a safe space for education at home. Finally, it will give ideas for future research.

## **Introduction**

Homeschooling in the U.S. has experienced an immense boom in recent years and gained much attention in research. However, homeschooling in Japan is still in the beginning stage and relatively unexplored. This article provides an analysis of the development, motives, challenges, and implications of homeschooling in both countries and investigates its relevance to Japan by highlighting various issues at public schools in Japan, where homeschooling could provide a possible solution.

## **Methodology**

A comprehensive literature review has been conducted to gather and synthesize existing research on homeschooling in the U.S., to analyze trends, identify patterns, and draw conclusions from a wide range of academic resources. Given the limited amount of research about homeschooling in Japan, information has been gathered through various sources: Directly from the NPO organization HoSA, the Homeschooling Association of Japan, and through personal blogs, YouTube vlogs, and articles by homeschooling parents or previously homeschooled children.

Furthermore, a poll was done online in the Facebook group “Homeschooling Japan”, where homeschooling parents living in Japan were queried about their reasons for homeschooling. A total of 129 responses were gathered. All results were anonymized. The full results of that poll can be found in the appendix.

## **History**

Homeschooling in the United States has a long and varied history. Its origins date back to colonial times, when home-based education was common, but it nearly disappeared after that (Ray, 2021). In the 1960s and 1970s, it began to gain popularity again due to parents' dissatisfaction with public education. At that time, those who chose to homeschool their children faced legal challenges, but they persevered, and homeschooling began to get established as a legitimate and legally protected option (Kreager, 2011). Acceptance and numbers grew, and it eventually became a mainstream choice. As a result, the number of homeschooled children has increased incredibly since the 1990s and homeschooling has obtained an immense legal, political, and social power (Ray, 2017; Ray, 2021; Carper, 1992; Hill, 2000; Cooper & Sureau, 2007; Jolly & Matthews, 2017). In the U.S. there are currently more than 3 million students engaged in homeschooling. In contrast, it has hardly developed at all in Japan and the number of homeschoolers is minimal. The number has been estimated to be between 1,000 and 5,000 students. Although homeschooling is still not very popular, so-called “free-schools” and online-schools so-called “tsuushinkou” are starting to gain attention (Nhk, 2023).

## **Demographics**

The demographics and specifics of homeschooling parents in the US are very well studied. They are a diverse group of different ethnicities, religions, etc., but we can discern some tendencies. Although the majority are white, people of Color are on the rise. The majority of them are middle class Christians, who have a college degree or more, married, have more than three children and

the instructing parent is the mother. The Japanese homeschooling families are not well known. It may be guessed that a majority might be Japanese, given the homogenous makeup of society in Japan, and another large portion would be made up of expats from countries where homeschooling is dominant, like the US. Furthermore, characteristics like religion, education, number of children, and such might align with the average Japanese person or with the expat country.

## **Motives**

The motives can be categorized into various classifications. Green-Hennessy and Mariotti (2023) divided them into proactive and reactive motives, Van Galen into ideological and pedagogical (Jolly & Matthews, 2017), and Stevens (2001; as cited in Beck, 2015) into heaven-based and earth-based motives. Parents in the United States choose to homeschool for a variety of reasons (Isenberg, 2007).

One of the most prominent reasons to homeschool is to integrate religious and moral beliefs into the curriculum (Kunzmann, 2010; Thomas, 2019; Saghir, 2011). Parents may simply wish to spend more time as a family together (Forlin & Chambers & Banks, 2023). Many parents show dissatisfaction with the education level and quality of the teachers and education and instead favor the benefits of home education. Also, concerns about the school environment play a significant role, since the numbers of alcohol and drug abuse cases at school are rising.

Due to the diverse population in the U.S., many homeschoolers choose to homeschool to protect their children from being exposed to racism at school (Dennis & Fields-Smith, 2020; Ray, 2015; Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Mazama & Lundy, 2014; Dennis and Cheryl Fields-Smith, 2020). Furthermore, bullying at school or the bullying experience of the parents makes them wish to homeschool. Children with special needs require accommodations to help them succeed. For that reason, parents of gifted children, children with physical disabilities, or mental disorders opt to educate

their children at home (Pfeiffer, 2008; Jolly & Matthews, 2018; Forlin & Chambers & Banks, 2023; Forlin & Chambers, 2023).

Homeschooling parents strongly believe they can offer a better education at home, which also gives them the possibility to offer a more individual and customized curriculum. This gives them also more flexibility in their lifestyle (Ray, 2010). Furthermore, some parents homeschool for ideological reasons. For example, many Christians don't agree with the theory of evolution or their children's exposure to sex education at school, so they homeschool to protect their children. Some also homeschool because they have to move constantly due to their job. Some famous actors and athletes are known to have been homeschooled. Lastly, during Covid-19 many people had to homeschool involuntarily.

In Japan, there are a variety of reasons for homeschooling, which are still largely unknown because there is no research on homeschoolers. According to this study's online Facebook poll research, the most cited reasons were the benefits of learning English and having more family time. Although not as prominent as in the United States, morals and religion demonstrated prominence as well. According to information from HoSA, the Homeschooling Association of Japan, disability is a major reason for many parents, but this was not the case in our study. There are also some cases where the child wanted to pursue an artistic career from a young age. For a very short period, parents had to homeschool their children during Covid-19. But it is up to discussion whether to count this as "real" homeschooling. When we compare these reasons, we can see that some reasons overlap between the two countries and some don't.

## **Challenges**

In the United States, the laws differ from state to state. Some are heavily regulated while others are not (Forlin & Chambers & Banks, 2023). Parents in heavily regulated states usually complain about the strict regulations, which hinder them from homeschooling freely and the pressure to be constantly observed. Homeschooling in the United States usually has a strong affiliation with religion, which is

why recently some not highly religious parents have complained about the pressure they experienced, for example having to change their church to the preferred church of the local homeschooling community, to fit in (Dennis & Fields-Smith, 2020). They would prefer homeschooling separated from religion. Furthermore, although homeschooling has a significant place in the US, those who choose homeschooling still have to fight some stigma. Homeschoolers are often associated with white, conservative, Christian, middle-income homes, which is not always the case since homeschoolers are a very diverse community (Dennis & Smith, 2020).

In contrast, homeschoolers in Japan are more likely to have to struggle with vague laws. Homeschooling in Japan is not explicitly forbidden, but also not explicitly allowed. That's why parents usually face a lack of understanding and backlash based on wrong information from various sides, such as the ward office bureaucracy, as well as from schools. The small number of homeschoolers is also a problem. Their small representation gives children less opportunity to socialize with other homeschoolers. Compared to the US, finding fellow parents who homeschool their children is hard. Community spaces, learning materials, and support like legal protection are not as widely available as it is in the US. One more point is, that while in the US all homeschoolers have legal protection by HSLDA, the Home School Legal Defense Association, homeschoolers in Japan don't. Homeschoolers also face issues with university admission and job hunting. Due to cultural norms in Japan like uniformity and conformity, homeschoolers, who are outside the strict norm, are more likely to face the stigmas of being outsiders or school dropouts.

## **Limitations of the Research**

One limitation of this research is that these studies generally draw participants only from parents who voluntarily cooperate with the research, which might influence the outcome. As for Japan in particular, a significant obstacle is that research on homeschooling is scarce to nonexistent. As for the online poll, which was conducted

by the author of this paper, which attempted to uncover parents' reasons for homeschooling in Japan, there is no accompanying demographic information about them because an effort was made to keep it as simple as possible to only focus on the motives, thereby getting as many people as possible to participate. Additional questions might have seemed like a burden to people and they might have refrained from responding to the poll. It is unclear whether the respondents were Japanese. Given the international nature of Facebook, many group members were likely to be foreigners. Further research is necessary.

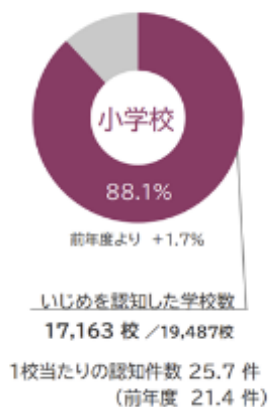
## **Relevance for Japan**

I researched the relevance of homeschooling for Japan by investigating possible areas where alternative learning methods, like homeschooling, could provide a valuable option in Japan. It is clear that there is a need to provide options for students when we see all of these factors at play: bullying, truancy, suicide, disability, giftedness, strict rules, and competitive testing systems. These were not found to be major reasons for homeschooling in Japan at this point, which might mean that families suffering from them did not yet consider the option of homeschooling. Here further research would be necessary. Those factors that may eventually lead Japanese parents to choose to homeschool their children will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

I researched the relevance of homeschooling for Japan by researching the possible areas where alternative learning methods like homeschooling could provide a valuable solution in Japan. Some of these areas are bullying, truancy, suicide, disability, giftedness, strict rules, and competitive testing systems. It is clear that there exists a need to provide other options for students suffering in these categories. These areas were not major reasons for homeschooling, which might mean that families suffering from these issues did not yet consider the option of homeschooling. Here further research would be necessary. The areas mentioned will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Many students in Japan suffer from bullying, leading to consequences such as truancy and even suicide (Ministry of Education, 2022). The number of bullying cases is at a record high, with more than 600,000 students affected. The data of the Ministry of Education shows that the percentage of schools that detected bullying at the elementary, junior, and high school levels amount to as much 79.9%. The percentage at for elementary schools at 88.1%, is even higher than the averaged figure across the various levels. This suggests that almost every elementary school in Japan faces bullying issues. The data from the Ministry of Education shows a great increase over the past 10 years. There is one anomaly in 2020, which might be related to the forced homeschooling during Covid-19. The fact that the numbers were lower during the homeschooling time suggests that homeschooling might have a positive impact on bullying statistics.

#### 学校種別の状況



**Figure 1: Percentage and number of elementary schools that acknowledge bullying at their schools. Adapted from Munbukagakusho (2022).**

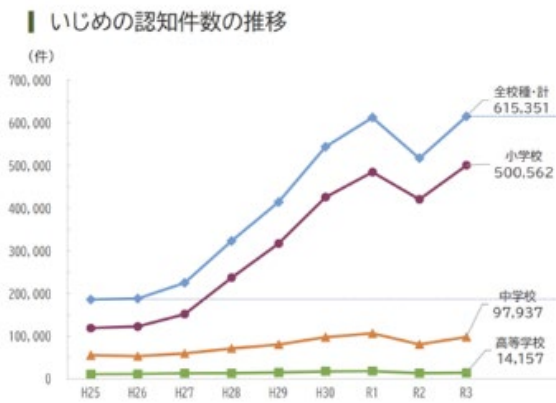


Figure 2: Changes in the numbers of recognized cases of bullying at schools. Adapted from Ministry of Education (2022).

Numbers for truancy in Japan are at a record high (Ministry of Education, 2022) as well. More than 500,000 students have been found to be truant from school. The numbers for truancy have doubled in the past ten years. Truancy is especially high among junior high students, followed by elementary school students. Truancy has various factors behind it. But, one thing that is common among truancy cases is that the image people have of truant students is very negative, and homeschooling is currently placed in the same category as truancy for statistical purposes.



Figure 3: The change in number of truant child cases. Adapted from Yomiuri Online (2022)

A perennial topic in Japan has been the high suicide rates. Previously the image was that those at greatest risk of suicide were white-collar workers who experienced burnout at “black companies.”, They could not see any other solution than suicide. But recently, in the past ten years, the number of suicides among teens has risen. The numbers have nearly doubled. In particular,



suicides among high school students are especially high. High schoolers make up roughly 4/5 of the suicides of school-age children (Asashi Shinbun Digital, 2023). The number of suicides of teens over the past 100 years shows that the numbers are at a record high (Ministry of Education, 2022). They even surpassed the high numbers during World War I (Ishii, 2019). [Are you sure you don't mean World War II?] The fact that the suicide numbers are high is a concerning matter.

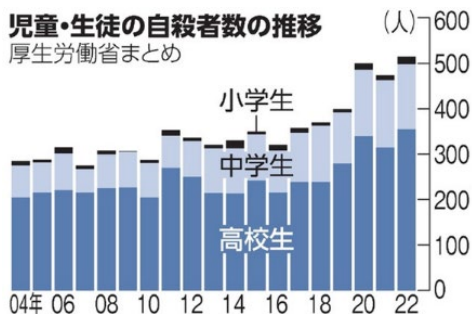


Figure 4: The changing rates of suicide in children/students. Adapted from Asahi Shinbun Digital (2023).

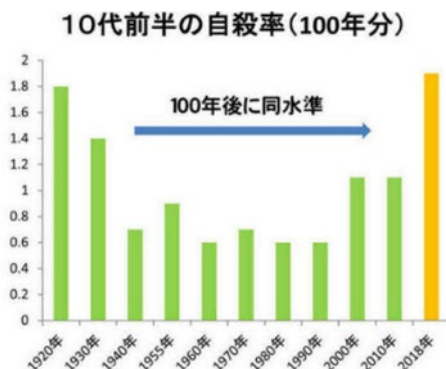
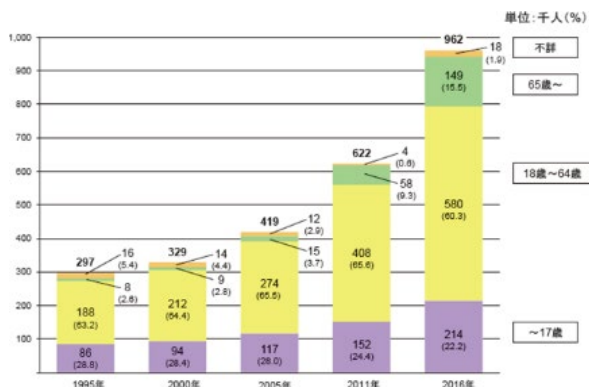


Figure 5: Suicide rate of teenagers (past 100 years). Adapted from Ishii (2019).

According to the Cabinet Office of Japan, the number of children with disabilities has more than doubled in the past 20 years (Cabinet Office, 2021). This sudden rise in the number disabled children poses a great challenge for Japan to accommodate them and cater to their needs (Pasteljamupu, 2022). Furthermore, there are children who might be categorized in a gray zone (LITALICO Life, 2022). These are children who do not [Avoid using contractions in formal, academic writing.] fulfill all points, so the families are not eligible for any support and do not have any possibility to consult

with anyone. All these reasons factors show the necessity for some sort of improvements to be made in order to support struggling families.



**Figure 6: Chart showing changes in the number of disabled people in Japan (Cabinet Office, 2021).**

Gifted children face unique challenges as well. The lessons at school are not challenging enough, which is a burden for them. Many students end up not going to school anymore, which means an immense loss of future talent for the country. One issue is the low recognition of giftedness in Japan. The importance of giftedness support has yet to be established. The Ministry of Education only mentioned in 2022, for the first time, support for gifted children in their plan (Yomiuri, 2022). They plan to support these children nationwide, but the project is still in the beginning stages and whether the project will bring positive effects in the coming years is still unclear. Therefore, parents with gifted children right now search for alternative methods to better support their children.

Japan's school system is widely known for its strict rules. About 80% of the public junior high schools in Fukuoka City have rules regarding the students' underwear (Mori, 2023). These rules depict the dictate for example the color of the students' underwear. These invasive rules, involving the students' privacy, are seen as human rights violations. Schools also determine uniforms based on gender, which may be seen as gender discrimination. Reports from students have included statements that they had to line up and open their shirts to be checked, even girls in the presence of male students. They have even had to take off their underwear if it was

the wrong color in some cases, which can be seen as sexual harassment. There are also regulations requiring female students to tie their hair below their ears because it is thought that “boys will be aroused by the shape of the neck”, which can be seen as victim blaming. Others prohibit certain hairstyles. One student of African descent was forbidden to wear braids at school and excluded from the graduation ceremony when she flouted the rule. This can be seen as racism. Students who voice their opinions at assemblies have been told that it would affect their school records. Excessive restrictions like these may lead parents to consider other options than the regular school.

One more thing Japan’s school system is widely known for is its fixation on highly competitive and rigorous testing and achievement (Berlatsky, 2013). But Japan’s school system is outdated. The current educational system was originally built after World War II to prepare students to work in Japan’s capitalist economy. High scores on tests were a must to ensure a job at a respectable company. This system still remains today. However, studies conducted over the past few decades show that emphasis needs to be placed on soft values and more alternative methods must be put forward. Also, testing stress is said to be related to the bullying issue.

In sum, homeschooling may provide a valuable option for children who struggle with the conventional approach to education. Homeschooling could provide a legitimate, positive alternative for those who need to find safety and protection at home, while still continuing to study in pursuit of a career in the future.

## **Future Research**

There is still a lot of room for research on homeschooling in Japan. Most areas are still unexplored, and research barely exists. It is most important to properly differentiate between “real” homeschoolers and *futokou*. Some other possible topics might be the demographics of homeschooling families, the kinds of parents who chose to homeschool and their motives, as well as how their decision affects their children mentally or academically. The results

of their homeschooling is also of interest. Follow-up studies could include information on whether homeschooled children faced discrimination in their job search or when looking for a romantic partner. Most importantly, by researching the reasons for homeschooling, we can find out what to improve at public schools. With that important information, the situation for regular students can be improved as well.

## **Conclusion**

This research has shown interesting similarities and differences between the United States and Japan. While the history of homeschooling and motives for choosing it are well developed in the U.S., they are scarce in Japan. There are many motives unique to the demographics of the United States. The challenges regarding regulations are quite the opposite in the two countries. Due to many social factors in Japan, homeschooling could provide a valid option for students in need of a safe space, particularly because there are many bullying victims. Even so, this option might not gain popularity due to cultural norms and restrictions. Due to the lack of research, there is still an immense number of areas that offer the possibility for further research. Perhaps, with the continuing support of researchers who can highlight advantages of it, homeschooling in Japan might become a legitimate option one day.

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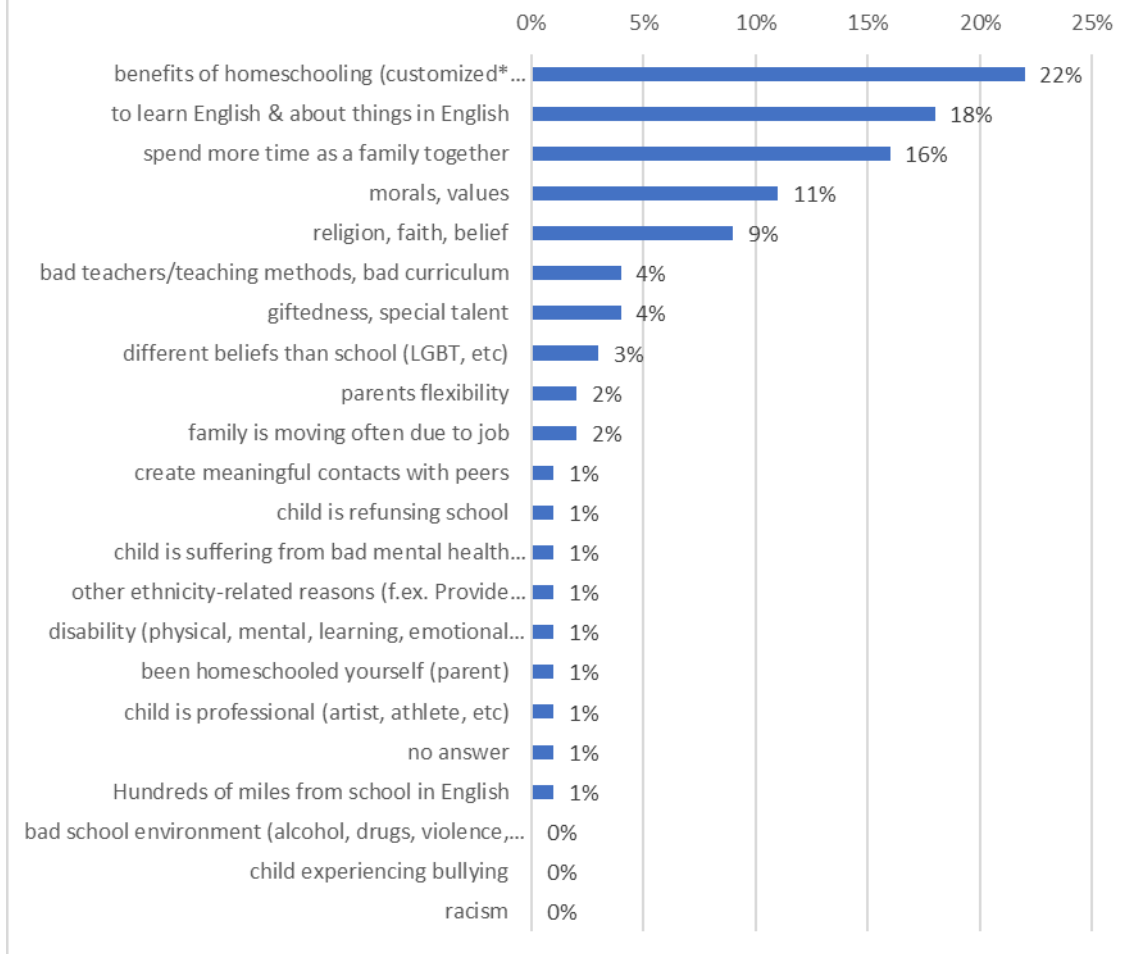
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## Appendix

Online research was conducted through a poll in the Facebook group “Homeschooling Japan”, where homeschooling parents living in Japan were asked for their motives for homeschooling their children. All participants were informed beforehand about how the research results would be used. All results displayed here were anonymized. In total, there were 129 responses. The participants were able to add their own open-ended responses as well. Two responses that were added by the participants include “to learn English & about things in English” and “hundreds of miles from school in English”.

## Motives for homeschooling in Japan



\*benefits of homeschooling (customized curriculum, flexibility, better teacher myself)