ZEMI RESEARCH CONVENTION 2026
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THE STILL-ALIVE SOCIOLOGISTS

Higher Scores, Better Futures?

The Reality of Shadow Education in Japan

塾に通えば、未来は開ける？ 日本の教育格差を考える

How has shadow education revealed the gap in education outcomes, socio-economic inequalities, and possible mental health costs in Japanese society?

‘Shadow Education’

Educational services outside formal schooling that mimics school curricula

Provided by

- Commercial companies
- Schoolteachers "moonlighting" for extra income
- Informal suppliers

→ Raises quality control concerns

Unlike China (2021 Double Reduction) or South Korea (1980 Ban & 2000 Unban), Japan has not banned juku (Sakuma, 2026)

Participation Rates



	Sixth grade	Ninth grade
National average (public school)	46.1%	61.5%
Big cities	53.7%	69.0%
Core cities	45.9%	62.6%
Other cities	43.8%	59.9%
Towns and villages	37.6%	50.8%
Remote areas	27.0%	32.3%

(Sakuma, 2026, p. 45)

Methodology

- Quantitative data collection through a survey
- Between Oct 12-21, 2026.
- 22 participants, snowball sampling method (students in Japan)

Socio-economic Inequalities

Hot House Effect:

Students in high-SES environments face stronger educational expectations and competition, increasing participation in shadow education. (Araki, 2025; Matsuoka, 2013; Matsuoka, 2018)

School Tracking System:

Japan’s high school tracking system may **concentrate advantaged students in elite schools**, where competition **encourages further investment** in tutoring and preparation for prestigious universities. (Matsuoka, 2013)

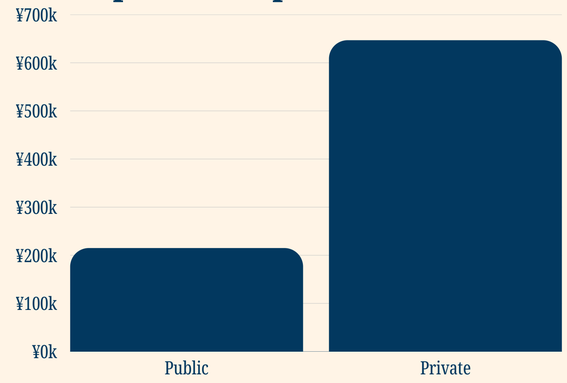
Student Agency:

Although family wealth shapes educational opportunities, **students’ personal aspirations and choices,** including affordable alternatives such as correspondence courses, also **influence their educational pathways.** (Entrich, 2015)

Shadow education **may reproduce existing class inequalities** rather than simply compensate for differences in formal schooling.

Education Outcome Gap

Higher out-of-school activity spending in private vs. public schools



MEXT (2018). Includes juku and other out-of-school activities.

How does the gap emerge?

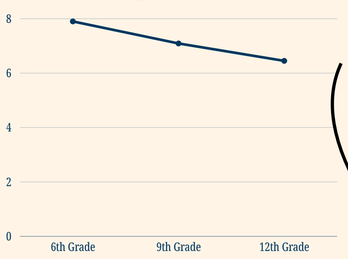
Greater family resources → More access to juku and exam preparation → Potential advantage in educational transitions

Key takeaway:
Shadow education may reinforce existing educational inequalities by providing unequal access to additional academic preparation.

On Mental Health

No Japanese study directly tests whether Juku affects mental health. The evidence shows possible pathways, not proven harm.

Sleep Loss



Reasons:

- Busy schedules (e.g., cram school).
- Maternal aspirations in education.

Educational Maltreatment

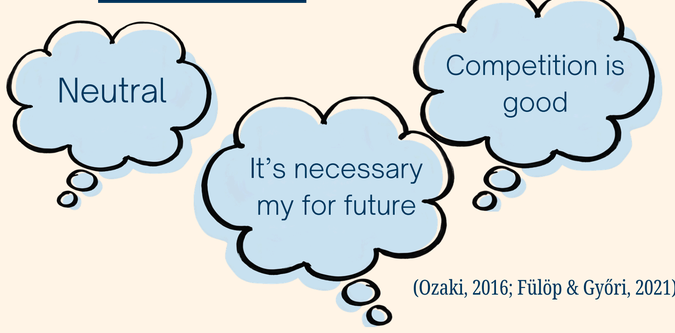
(Nagase, 2026; Yamashita & Tsuchiya, 2025)

Time Poverty

Long hours on cram school → Lack of free time → Social & Peer Deprivation

(Ozaki, 2016; Fülöp & Győri, 2021)

Students’ POV

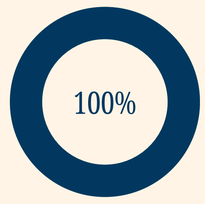


(Ozaki, 2016; Fülöp & Győri, 2021)

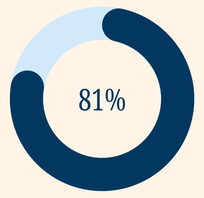
Findings

Limitations: The small sample size and lack of consideration for high school type and school-provided academic support may have affected students’ perceived need for juku and their educational outcomes.

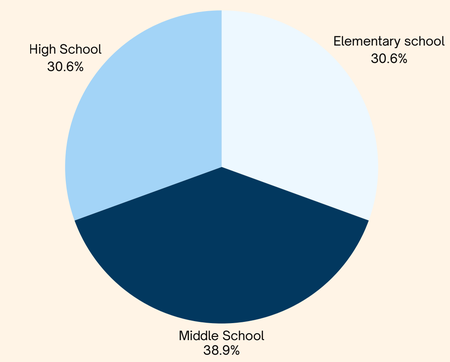
Description		Quantity	Ratio
Sex	**Female**	16	72.70%
	Male	6	27.30%
Age	19	2	9.10%
	20	1	4.50%
	21	9	40.90%
	22	8	36.40%
	23	1	4.50%
	29	1	4.50%
Upbringing	**Inside Japan**	17	77.30%
	Outside Japan	5	22.70%
	Total	22	



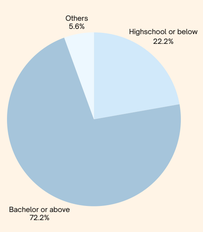
100% of people have heard of juku



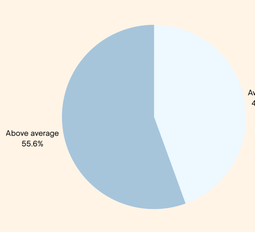
81% atttended



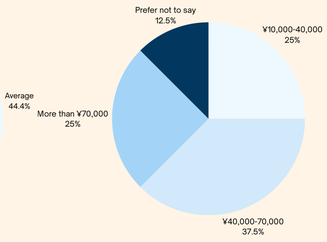
→ Higher-income families spend slightly more on juku.
→ **Socioeconomic background** may influence **the intensity of educational investment.**
(Acknowledging that our sample does not allow us to assess income-based barriers to access)

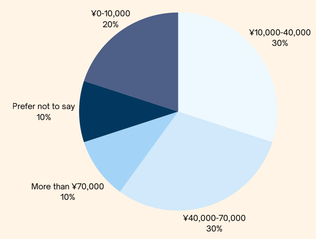


Parents’ education background

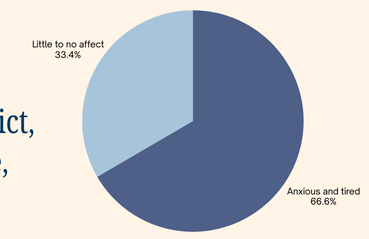


Family’s financial background





Above average (householde income) vs average’s external education expense



Although most students sleep a healthy 6-8 hours and face little peer competition or hobby conflict, 66.6% report significant academic and exam anxiety, over half often feel too tired to concentrate, and experiences vary by juku format and friend support.

Overall rating of juku	★★★★★★★★★★
Average (household income)	★★★★★★★★★★
Above-average (household income)	★★★★★★★★★★

→ Many perceived juku as **beneficial**, suggesting a potential academic advantage through extra preparation.

However, the survey shows no significant outcome’s perception differences based on juku’s expense and attendance time

Conclusion

- Shadow education refers to private tutoring and other supplementary educational services outside formal schooling that mirror school curricula and are provided by commercial enterprises, teachers, or informal tutors. Participation rates in middle school are higher than in other grades.
- Shadow education may reinforce existing class inequalities by encouraging greater educational investment among higher-SES families, although our survey findings are insufficient to establish income-based barriers to access.
- Although external education was perceived as beneficial, our survey could not establish an educational outcome gap due to differences in students’ academic needs and the lack of data on high school backgrounds and academic performance.
- Shadow education and exam competition in Japan are associated with sleep loss, time poverty, and academic stress, but because most evidence is correlational and students mostly view juku as normal or necessary, it remains unclear whether juku and competition themselves cause mental health harm

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