

Finland as a Study Abroad Choice for Japanese Students

Case: JAMK University of Applied Sciences

Hanna-Stina Hiljanen

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Abstract <p>Travelling to foreign countries to pursue new experiences and gain insights into different cultures is not by any means a new phenomenon. Nowadays, choosing to study abroad is almost commonplace.</p> <p>The study explores what Japanese students consider when choosing to study abroad – be it as an exchange student or as a degree student. The focus was especially on why Japanese students might choose or not choose Finland as a destination, and what can possibly be done to affect their choice in favour of Finland. The goal was to provide information for JAMK University of Applied Sciences so that the school can further develop their own student exchange programmes.</p> <p>To build a base for further research, the theoretical framework features both Japanese perspective and Finnish perspectives. Student mobility trends are examined to see in what directions they are developing. Next, the countries' education systems are explored in order to find out what kinds of similarities and differences there might be, so as to know how students might benefit from these. In addition to these topics, possible cultural differences are also taken into consideration.</p> <p>Following the theoretical framework, an analysis of in-depth questionnaires completed by five Japanese students with experience of studying in Finland explores their ideas about study abroad and life in Finland. The data collected connects to ideas and perspectives that emerged from the literature review. The combined results allow for the creation of appropriate and practical suggestions regarding how to further develop the study abroad programmes between Japan and Finland.</p>		
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<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Ulkomaille matkustaminen löytääkseen uusia kokemuksia ja tutustuakseen erilaisiin kulttuuriin ei ole missään nimessä uusi ilmiö. Nykyaikana on suorastaan varsin yleistä lähteä ulkomaille opiskelemaan.</p> <p>Tämä tutkimus selvittää mitä japanilaiset opiskelijat ottavat huomioon harkitessaan opiskelua ulkomailla – oli se sitten vaihto-oppilaana tai tutkinto-opiskelijana. Painopiste oli etenkin siinä, miksi japanilaiset opiskelijat valitsisivat, tai eivät valitsisi, Suomea kohteekseen, ja miten tuohon päätökseen voisi vaikuttaa niin, että se puoltaisi Suomea. Lopullisena päämääränä oli välittää tietoa Jyväskylän Ammattikorkeakoululle, jotta se voisi kehittää omia opiskelijavaihto-ohjelmiaan.</p> <p>Rakentaakseen pohjan myöhemmälle tutkimukselle, teoreettinen runko pitää sisällään niin japanilaisen kuin suomalaisenkin näkökulman. Opiskelijaliikkuvuuden trendejä tarkastellaan, jotta nähtäisiin mihin suuntaan ne ovat kehitymässä. Sen jälkeen tarkastellaan molempien maiden koulutusjärjestelmiä, jotta löydettäisiin eroja ja samankaltaisuuksia niiden välillä ymmärtääksemme miten opiskelijat voisivat hyötyä näistä. Näiden aiheiden lisäksi myös mahdolliset kulttuuriset erot otetaan huomioon.</p> <p>Teoreettisen rungon jälkeen analysoimme seikkaperäisten kyselylomakkeiden tuloksia. Vastauksia on saatu viideltä japanilaiselta opiskelijalta, joilla on kokemusta Suomessa opiskelusta, ja ne tutustuvat heidän käsityksiinsä ulkomailla opiskelusta ja Suomessa elämisestä. Tästä kerätty data kytkeytyy ajatuksiin ja näkökulmiin, joita tuli esille tutkittaessa kirjallisia lähteitä. Näitä tuloksia hyväksi käyttäen voidaan laatia asianmukaisia ja käytännöllisiä suosituksia liittyen siihen, miten opiskelijavaihto-ohjelmia Japanin ja Suomen välillä voidaan kehittää.</p>		
Avainsanat (asiasanat) japanilainen koulutus, opiskelijaliikkuvuus, kansainvälinen koulutus, suomalainen koulutus, opiskelijavaihto, opiskelijavaihto-ohjelmat		
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1 INTRODUCTION

The Finnish universities have a rising number of non-Finnish students studying in their degree and exchange programmes. Few of the motives for the attraction abroad could have been said to be because of the high praise that the Finnish schooling system receives on an almost yearly basis, as well as the fact that most of Finnish schools didn't have a tuition fee system. However, in 2015, the 74th Government of Finland, the Sipilä Cabinet, discussed and introduced a tuition fee system to the non-EU students in English-taught Bachelor's and Master's programmes (Foreign students face tuition fees in Finland 2015). Despite this, Finnish schools could still be considered a more economic option compared to other schools, e.g., in the United States.

While the long-time effects of the change to the tuition system remain to be seen, before it most of the degree students coming to Finland to study were from countries such as China, Russia, Vietnam, and Nepal, whereas most of the exchange students were from Europe (Korkeakoulujen tutkinto-opiskelijoiden 5 yleisintä kohde- ja kotimaata 2014 [5 of the most common destination and home countries of higher-education degree students]). One possible explanation for the popularity among other European countries could be the short distances and easy mobility within the EU area, as well as the Erasmus programme, which provides scholarships for exchange programmes in Europe. As for the degree programmes, one of the most popular reasons in coming to Finland has been its free tuition system as well as the good reputation of its education system.

However, while inspecting the data, despite the great number of Asian students, very few of them come from Japan.

For this research, we looked how the situation is in JAMK University of Applied Sciences (hereinafter referred to as JAMK). JAMK hasn't publically released statistics concerning its student population and their nationalities, but a bachelor's thesis by Kalmukoski (2012, 18) found out that in 2011 exchange students were mostly from such European countries like France, Germany, Spain, etc. During that academic year, there were only two Japanese exchange students, making up only 1% out of 190 exchange students. This might be explained by the fact that most of JAMK's

partnerships are with other European schools, but also by possible limits in the student intake numbers for exchange students.

On their site, JAMK currently lists having established partnership with seven schools in Japan: Seinan Gakuin University in Fukuoka, Kindai University in Osaka, Juntendo University in Tokyo, Ryukoku University in Kyoto, Shimane University in Matsue, Takasaki University of Health and Welfare in Takasaki, and National Institute of Technology, Okinawa College in Okinawa. (International Partners - JAMK)

Research problem and objectives

The aim of this research is to find out why Japanese students don't often choose to study in Finland. This means providing better understanding on what opportunities Japanese students are looking for in their foreign study programmes and how Finnish universities could assist them to get the best experience out of their student exchange. With the results of this research, JAMK, and possibly other Finnish schools, could potentially use them to develop the school's own study abroad programmes down the line.

Once a theoretical framework (1) has been established for the research, the factors listed above were then taken into consideration in order to develop the research content (2) further. In the end, the research should be able to answer the following questions:

1. What differences are there between Finnish and Japanese education?
2. What are the trends for student mobility in Finland and Japan?
3. What opportunities Japanese students could have studying in Finland?

To answer these questions, a structure for the thesis process was developed to figure out the overall strategy. This included finding out research methods (3) and design most suitable for the nature of this research. Once the research method for data collection had been decided on and carried out (4), the results could then be used to provide insight for developing exchange and degree programmes with Japanese students in mind (5). The structure of the thesis is shown in Figure 1 below:

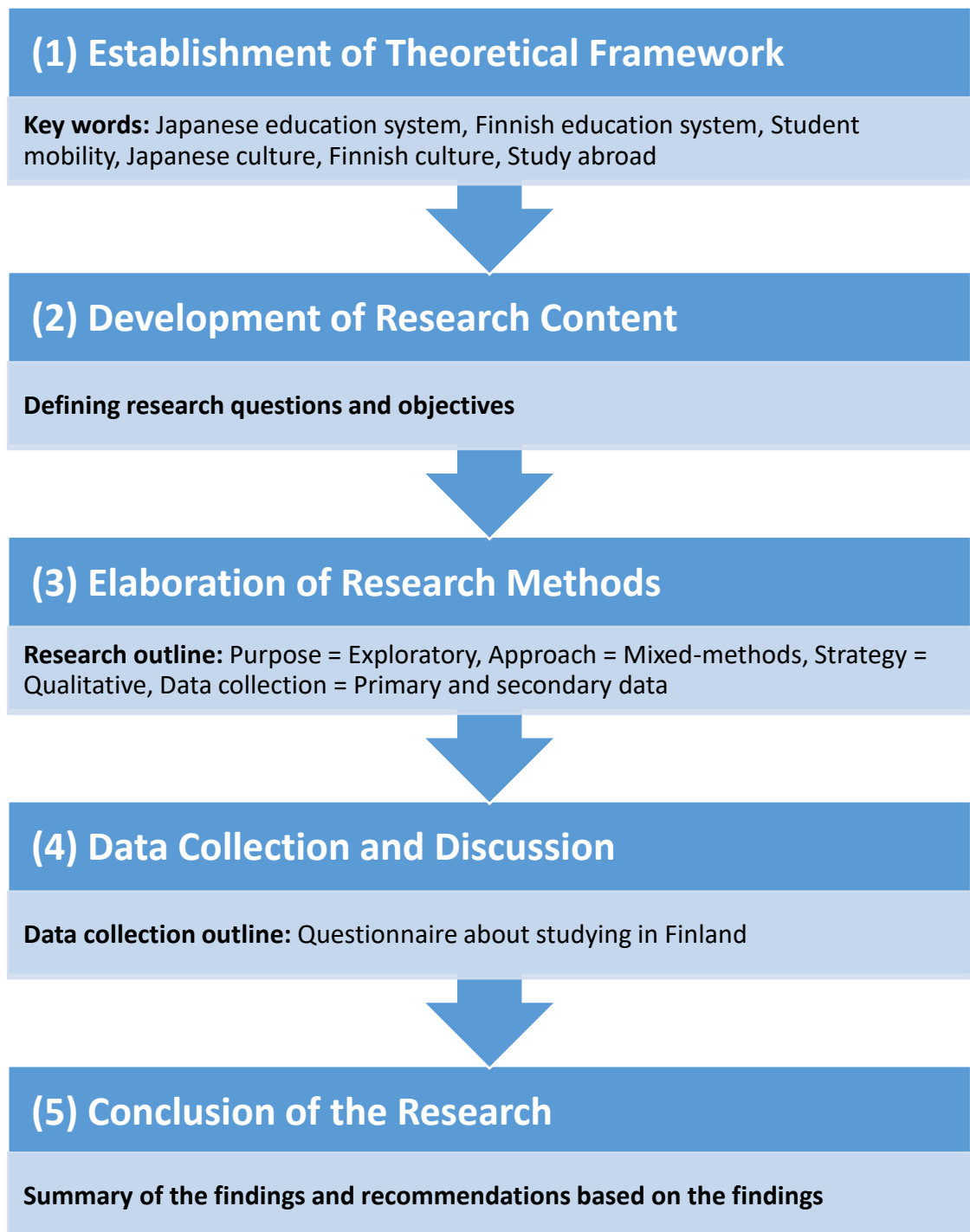


Figure 1. Overview of the thesis development

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Labaree's (see Labaree 2017, The Introduction: Theoretical Framework), one definition of theoretical framework is that it "consists of concepts and, together with their definitions and reference to relevant scholarly literature, existing theory that is used for your particular study." Furthermore the theoretical framework is

described as needing to demonstrate an understanding of theories and concepts relevant to the topic.

With this in mind, this chapter has been narrowed down to three main concepts that were deemed relevant to the topic of this research. Each concept will be considered from both Finnish and Japanese viewpoint.

First, we will start by examining how the international mobility of students works in each country to get an understanding of what are the current trends in international mobility when it comes to students. For example, what are students seeking from the experience, what affect their decisions when deciding a host country, etc.?

After that we move on to the second concept of education systems. We will explain the basic layout of each education system, in the end focusing on higher education, and observe how education is treated and carried out in each country.

Third and last, we will also take cultures into consideration, as studying in a foreign environment exposes a student to a lot of cultural differences, which in turn can have a major effect in their studies. We will try to seek out any major differences or similarities between the Japanese and Finnish cultures.

2.1 Student mobility

There are plenty of words to choose from when describing the international movement of students. For this research, we have chosen to use "student mobility" as the umbrella term to refer to international degree students, exchange students, study abroad, etc. To be more exact, in the case of this research it means specifically international mobility of students and not, for example, getting expelled, as seen used in Education Week's *Student Mobility: How It Affects Learning* article (Sparks 2016).

Seeking new learning opportunities and experiences overseas isn't by any means a new phenomenon in this time when travelling overseas has been made easier than ever. As written by Lee (2012) in her article on The Complete History of Study Abroad, she states that international education has been going on for nearly a thousand years in written history.

While back in the days of old international education might have only been a privilege of the royal elite, today international student mobility is stronger than ever. OECD reported in 2015 that the number of foreign tertiary students had increased by 50% between 2005 and 2012. They estimated that the number of students enrolled outside of their home countries could surpass five million in 2015. (New OECD report summarises global mobility trends 2015.)

2.1.1 Student mobility in Japan

After seven years of decline, the number of Japanese students studying abroad finally turned into positive growth in 2012, Aoshima (2016) reported for the BCCIE News. Globalisation has become a key word and the government wants to develop the nation's youth, who can contribute to global success and competitiveness in the future (ibid.).

The British Council reported that the general belief is that a so-called “inward-looking” mindset could be behind the unwillingness of studying abroad, which had led to the decline in the first place. This mindset is defined as an “attitude in which young people are unwilling to venture past the comfort of their home country.” To further examine the sentiment, the British Council carried out their own survey: *Japan: Debunking the 'inward-looking' myth*. From their findings, seven points stood as factors affecting the Japanese students' decisions. We will focus on a few of those points from the report to get a better understand of the Japanese mindset. (Esaki-Smith 2014.)

The students saw the biggest advantage of overseas studies being gaining language skills and also listed foreign language courses as one incentive, along with financial support and increased employability. Simultaneously, however, inadequate language skills, along with cost and concern over safety, were seen as one obstacle to overseas study (ibid.). A similar study conducted by Recruit Marketing Partners Co. in 2013 listed similar reasons – the expenses and language barrier – but also similarly said that study abroad could improve their language skills and prove advantageous for securing employment (Desire to study abroad gains ground).

As stated earlier, measures are being taken to improve the situation and make Japanese students understand globalisation better. Hirai (2014) reports that, e.g., Hitotsubashi University will require its students to study abroad starting 2018, though this will likely increase its tuition fees also.

Another good example is the "Tobitate! Ryugaku Japan (*Go abroad! Study Overseas, Japan*)" campaign, which launched in 2013 and aims to double the number of Japanese students studying abroad by 2020. The campaign, which will be funded by donations from private sector businesses, was launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology - Japan (hereinafter referred to as MEXT). (Aoshima 2016.)

Despite the declines, Japanese students still travel overseas to study. In 2014, a total of 69,869 Japanese students studied overseas, with Anglophone countries dominating the top 10 destinations list: United States, Canada, United Kingdom, and Australia being the top 4 (Outbound Mobility - Past Years). However, China seems to be rising in popularity, as in 2016 the Nan Fang reported that for the first time ever Japanese students had gone on an exchange to China more as opposed to the United States (Liu 2016). As for Japanese degree students, MEXT reported that in 2003, the top three countries of destination were the U.S., China, and the U.K (Outline of the Student Exchange System in Japan 2006, 36).

The movement of exchange students to Japan mostly comes from North America and Europe. The majority of degree students coming to study in Japan, mostly – 92.7% in 2014 – come from other Asian countries, such as China, Vietnam, Korea, Nepal, and Taiwan. (Strong growth in Japan's foreign enrolment in 2014.)

While proximity can be considered to be one major factor, so is affordability as well. In Japan, tuition fees average to around ¥535,000 (around \$5200) per annum, although tuitions can run up to ¥1.4 million (around \$135,500) at private colleges. (ibid.)

While studying at an American university may be tempting, tuition fees run on average between \$32,000 and \$41,000 – Ivy League schools being even more expensive. Chinese students also mentioned Japanese culture, especially pop culture, as one drawing point to come to Japan. (Clavel 2015.)

As Japan tries to send more of its students overseas, it also tries to attract 300,000 foreign students by 2020 – both part of the government's plans to further the globalisation of Japanese higher education (Kakuchi 2014). This project, however, has seen competition coming from China with similar initiatives. Japan Times reported in 2014 that globally China had become the third most popular destination for higher education, while Japan had fallen to eight place in the rankings. (Clavel 2014.)

The booming economy was once the main draw for international students to come to Japan, but now China is benefitting from the same phenomenon. Dorsey told the Japan Times that “when the downturn of the Japanese economy sank in, the enrollments were really supported by the anime, manga, J-pop crowd.” Some have criticised that rather than internationalising Japan's higher-education sector, it has undergone an "Asianisation". While China attracts students from all over the world, Japan mainly attracts students from other Asian countries, who, e.g., are more willing to accept the Japanese style of teaching than American style of education. (ibid.)

2.1.2 Student mobility in Finland

The interest towards studying abroad has grown steadily in Finland year after year. HeiHei! Study&Travel writes that the Finnish youth has become braver, more international and determined. And with the world around them growing international as well, the experiences they gain from studying abroad are more and more from the employer side as well. While some students might have practical reasons behind their decisions, such as avoiding entrance exams, many seek to develop their language and social skills, as well as become more independent and international with the experience; all traits that companies wish from their workers. (Miksi Aasia opiskelukohteena on se “next big thing” [Why Asia is the “next big thing” as a study destination].)

Probably the most informative site on student exchange and internationalisation in Finland is by the organisation CIMO, an expert organisation in international mobility and co-operation working under the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. Aside from being an all-in-all informative network on internationalisation, CIMO also co-ordinates exchange programmes, trainee opportunities and scholarship schemes,

and supports the teaching of Finnish language and culture in foreign universities and raising the international profile of Finnish education. (CIMO in brief 2016.)

Based on their most recent data from 2014, Finnish exchange students most often choose other European countries as their host country. Among the most popular countries are Germany, Spain, United Kingdom, Sweden, and Netherlands.

(Korkeakoulujen tutkinto-opiskelijoiden 5 yleisintä kohde- ja kotimaata 2014 [5 of the most common destination and home countries of higher-education degree students].)

A major factor in choosing European destinations over other continents could be the fact that there are more scholarship programmes for European destinations. While Finnish students already receive student allowance from The Social Insurance Institution Kela, they can apply for additional grant through these programmes. Some schools, such as JAMK, offer their own grant to their students, though in this case it isn't given to those already signed up to another scholarship programme. The two most commonly used exchange programmes for Finnish students are Erasmus and Nordplus. Out of the two, the Erasmus programme is bigger, having partnered up with the majority of European higher education institutes. Nordplus, on the other hand, only offers exchange opportunities between the Nordic countries. (Vaihto-opiskelu [Study abroad].)

Students heading outside of Europe usually choose either the United States or China (Suomalaiset opiskelijat ulkomailla [Finnish students overseas]). Other Asian countries, such as Japan and South Korea, have been steadily growing in popularity over the recent years; in 2005 only 77 students studied in Japan, whereas in 2014 192 students had chosen Japan as their destination (Vaihto-opiskelu Suomesta kohde- ja lähtömaittain 2005–2014 [Study abroad in Finland by destination and home country 2005–2014], 1). This could be explained in part by the fact that the economy in Asia has been growing rapidly in the recent years and some have woken up to the possibilities this could offer them on the future labour market (Miksi Aasia opiskelukohteena on se “next big thing” [Why Asia is the “next big thing” as a study destination]).

For Finnish degree students studying in universities abroad, proximity seems to be one factor affecting their choices. In 2014/2015, the top five countries for degree students were the United Kingdom, Sweden, Estonia, the United States, and the Netherlands (Suomalaiset opiskelijat ulkomailla [Finnish students overseas]). Out of these, only the United States stands out, as the other four are EU countries and relatively close to Finland. However, Sweden also stands out in the way that it is the only country of the five, where Finnish students aren't required to pay any tuition fees, whereas the United Kingdom is regarded as having the most expensive tuition fees (Opiskelun kustannukset vaihtelevat suuresti Euroopassa [Cost of studies vary greatly in Europe]). Therefore, maybe other deciding factors aside from proximity could be language and the reputation of the host country – British and American universities are usually considered to be world-famous.

The exchange student flow to Finland is rather similar as from Finland. Other European students dominated in the top 10 countries in 2014, China being the only non-European country in the list (Vaihto-opiskelun 10 yleisintä kohde- ja lähtömaata 2014 [The top 10 most common destination and home countries with study abroad]). Like with more Finnish students leaving for student exchange, the number of exchange students to Finland has also grown, e.g., 61 Japanese students in 2005 versus 160 in 2014 (Vaihto-opiskelu Suomesta kohde- ja lähtömaittain 2005–2014 [Study abroad in Finland by destination and home country 2005–2014], 6). However, differences can be found in foreign degree students, where the top countries of origin are Russia, China, Vietnam, Nepal, and Estonia (Korkeakoulujen tutkinto-opiskelijoiden 5 yleisintä kohde- ja kotimaata 2014 [5 of the most common destination and home countries of higher-education degree students]).

While the quality of Finnish education system getting praises around the world could entice students to come study in Finland, one other appealing factor has most likely been free tuition. However, in 2015 the 74th Government of Finland, the Sipilä Cabinet, discussed and approved of a law allowing institutes to collect a tuition fee from non-EU/EAA students in English-taught Bachelor's and Master's programmes. Minimum annual tuition fee was set to be 1,500 euros and the tuition fees were set to be implemented in August 2017 at the latest. (Foreign students face tuition fees in Finland 2015.)

JAMK has set its tuition fees as 8,000 €/academic year for bachelor's degrees and 9,000 €/academic year for master's degrees. (Tuition fees for non-EU/EEA citizens at JAMK University of Applied Sciences 2016; Non-EU tuition fees and scholarships.)

At the time of writing this research, the long-term effects remain to be seen on how the law will affect the foreign degree students' movement to Finland. However, if we look at Denmark's example, who introduced tuition fees to its non-EU/EEA students in 2006, one possible outcome is the number of foreign students collapsing (Suominen 2009).

2.2 Education systems

There is no simple way to define education, or educational, system. In this chapter, however, we look into the education systems of Japan and Finland from a structural viewpoint, as well as how education is regarded.

2.2.1 Japanese education system

The Japanese law guarantees free education to all Japanese citizens for compulsory education, however supplementary fees such as transportation and food expenses are left to the families to handle on their own (Education). Tuition is also free for public high schools, although students at private high schools are provided with support funds to pay their tuition fees (Free tuition fee at public high schools / High school enrollment support fund system).

The basis of the Japanese single-track school system is built on 6-3-3-4 model, which is fundamentally made up of primary schools, lower secondary schools, upper secondary schools, and universities (Educational System & Practice in Japan). For Japanese students, compulsory education is comprised of primary education and lower secondary education, lasting a total of 9 years and until the students are 15-years of age or so (Education system Japan, 7). The structure of the Japanese education system can be seen in Figure 2 below.

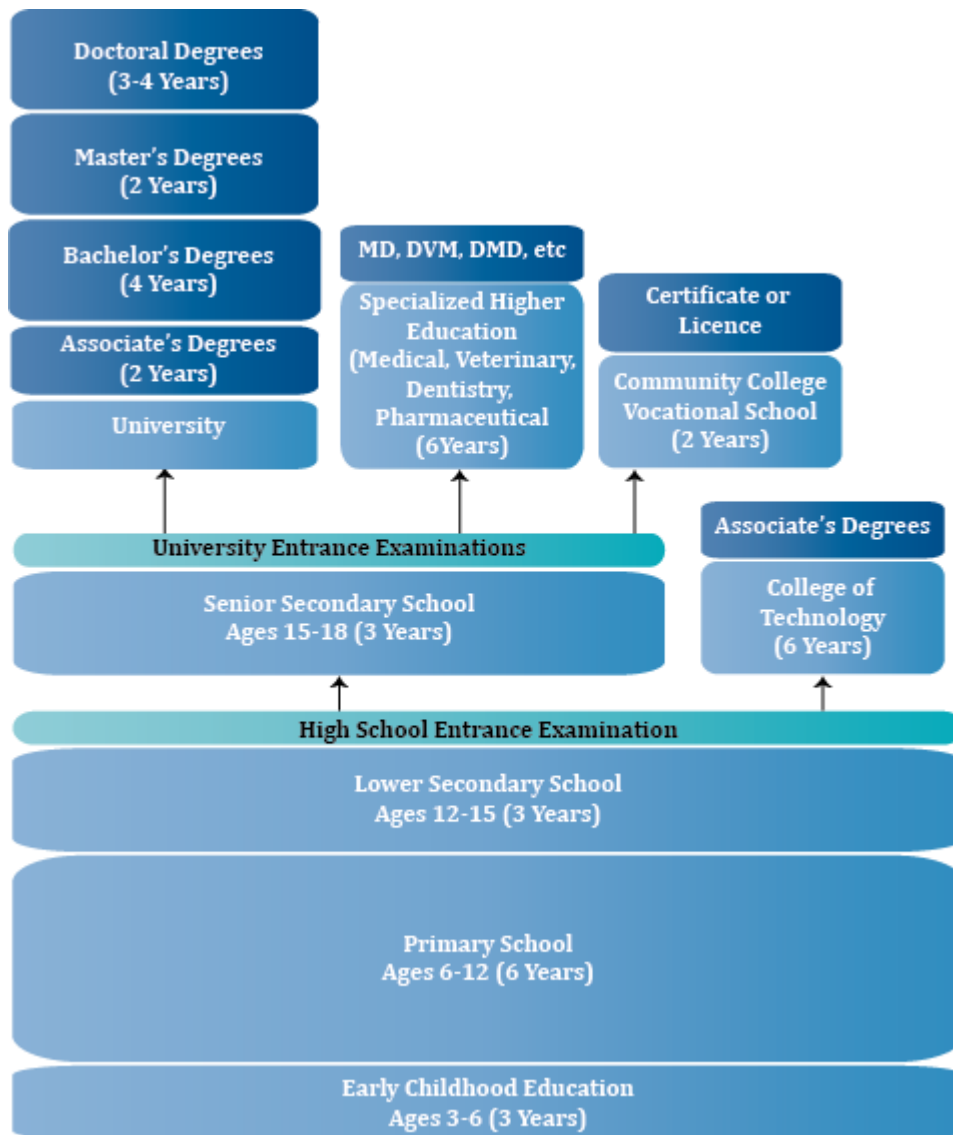


Figure 2. The Structure of Japan's Education System by NCEE (from Japan: Instructional Systems)

The system places great emphasis on using entrance exams as qualifiers for entering all levels of schooling. Once admitted, the academic year begins in April and ends the following March, with the year broken down into three main terms: April, September, and January. This means the students get to enjoy several weeks of summer holidays July-August, a two-week break at New Year's, and a shorter holiday at the end of the school year and before the beginning of a new one. Most schools also arrange different events during the year, such as cultural festivals and sports days. (Japan - Educational System—overview.)

Some schools still implement half a day of additional schooling on Saturdays on top of the five-day school week, but gradually Saturday has been dropped from their

school schedules (ibid.). Students are also expected to share the responsibilities in keeping the classroom and school grounds clean, the schools arranging a special “cleaning hour” for this activity after classes (Guidebook for Starting School, 24).

Japanese teachers carry more responsibilities than teachers in, e.g., the United States. Aside from providing education, they have various other tasks inside and outside the school, e.g., supervising afterschool club activities. The teachers are also partly responsible for their students in their leisure time; Japanese students have to follow several rules during their free time, such as not smoking or drinking alcohol. If caught breaking one of the rules, the teacher is obliged to inform the parents and even make house visits. (Vogler 2006.)

Nakata wrote for GaijinPot that in Japanese schools the teachers expect their students to stay quiet while they teach and write on a blackboard. To make sure the students were following the lectures, they would randomly ask questions. If the students themselves wanted to ask anything, it would have to wait until after class.

Japanese schools mostly use a grade point average, GPA, system as their grading system, and the valuation basis is usually from 0 to 100 points, with generally anything below 60 points being a failing grade (Grading System in Japan).

Higher education

Although the Japanese higher education has taken inspiration from countries like the United States and Germany, the system differs from most other developed countries’ in many significant ways. One notable difference is the method of acceptance, which relies almost solely on one or two tests, rather using other methods of assessment such as GPA for acceptance. (Zha 2004.)

So in order to pass their entrance exam, as the students get only one chance a year to take the test, the Japanese students study fervently while still in high school. Once they are in, things become more relaxed, as they are almost guaranteed to graduate, unlike in the United States, where entrance is easy but graduation difficult. (Osaki 2013; Nakata.)

According to MEXT, universities in Japan are divided into three categories by its founding basis: national universities, originally established by the Japanese

government (currently operated by national university corporations); public universities, established by local entities or public university corporations; and private universities, established by educational corporations (Higher Education in Japan). Universities usually last for 4 years, though medical schools are 6 years, and junior colleges 2 years (Abe, 2017). Furthermore, in 2010 there were 86 national universities, 95 public universities, and 597 private universities in Japan (私立学校の振興 [Promotion of Private Schools]).

According to the Complete University Guide, in the 2014-15 QS World University Rankings, there were a total of 5 Japanese universities in the top 100, with University of Tokyo ranking highest at 31st (Studying in Japan).

In 2004, Japanese national universities were transformed into national university corporations – NUCs – which gave the universities autonomy in management (Yamamoto, 1). Currently, however, private universities account for about 80% of all universities and nearly 80% of all university students in Japan are registered to private universities (Higher Education in Japan).

As mentioned earlier, university life itself is quite relaxed in comparison to the Japanese students' time in high school. Nakata noted that some Japanese students didn't graduate from American colleges simply because they were used to skipping classes to party, asking classmates to sign the attendance sheet, back home in Japan. The teaching style is rather similar to high schools as lecture-style text-bound curriculum, which doesn't encourage the students to actively participate in their own learning.

From the point of Japanese employers, the entrance exams are the main purpose of universities. They are a social filter for sorting 18-year-olds by ability, writes Willoughby (2015) for the Japan Industry News. While the universities see their mission as being cultivating students, polishing their spirits and elevating their souls, in reality they are merely considered a giant human resources holding centre on behalf of corporate Japan.

Willoughby (2015) continues that the four-year university system is better visualised as a two-plus-two-year system. The first two years the students do cultivate themselves – maybe not in a way that would meet with social approval, as it

involves a lot of alcohol – but they get good practise of the *senpai-kouhai* (senior-junior) dynamics, which are later important in the work life (and in most social circles in Japan).

This is all preparation for the third year, when the students start their job-hunting activities. They take part in "information sessions" organised by employers, universities, and intermediary agencies. The simple goal: "to secure an informal offer of employment as soon as possible once the official selection process begins in their fourth and final year", Willoughby (2015) writes.

2.2.2 Finnish education system

First and foremost, the main objective of Finnish education policy is to offer all citizens equal opportunities to receive education. There are no tuition fees at any level of education – basic education covering almost all expenses, such as meals, books, travel fees, etc. – and in addition there is a well-developed system of study grants and loans to help with necessary expenses. (Education system.)

However, as mentioned earlier already, tuition fees were implemented in August 2017 for non-EU/EAA students in English-taught Bachelor's and Master's programmes (Non-EU tuition fees and scholarships).

The education system in Finland follows mostly the same pattern as Japan does in terms of years. Primary education takes 6 years and lower upper education 3 years, making up to a total of 9 years of compulsory basic education. From there, the pupils generally move on to either an upper secondary school or a vocational institution for 3 years, after which they can continue further on to higher education or join the work force. (Education system.) The structure of the system can be seen in Figure 3 below.

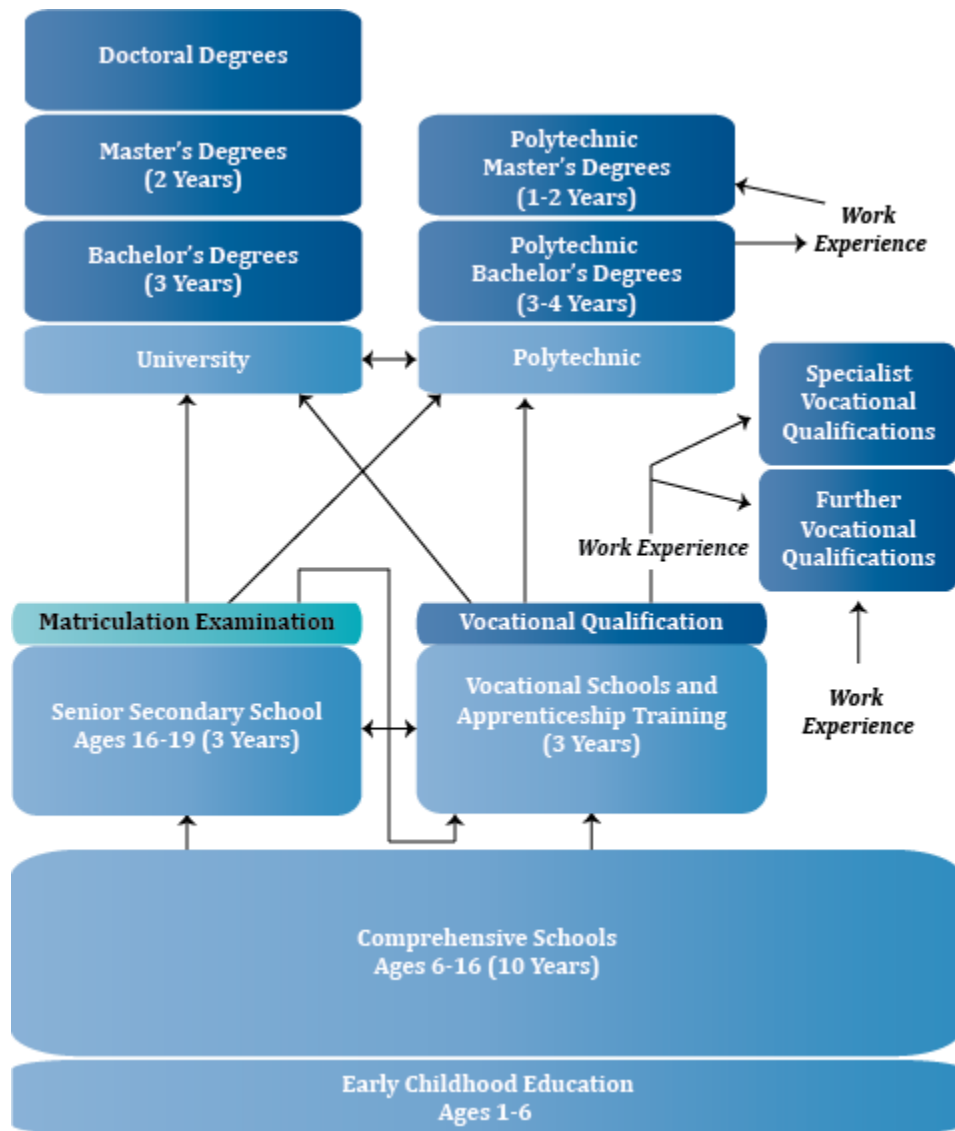


Figure 3. The Structure of Finland's Education System by NCEE (from Finland: Instructional Systems)

The academic year generally begins in the autumn around August and ends in May-June the following year. The system implements a five-day school week with Saturdays rarely being working days and if so, they are usually compensated with an extra holiday during the year. The academic year itself is generally divided into two semesters, autumn and spring, coinciding with the longest holidays of summer and Christmas. Aside from these, the Finnish students also get to enjoy autumn holidays in October and winter holiday in February-March, both which are about a week long. (Finnish education in a nutshell, 15.)

Education policy is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture, whereas the Finnish National Board of Education is responsible for the implementation of the policy aims. The two work together to developed education

objectives, content and methods, while the responsibility of local administration is left to local authorities, municipalities or joint municipal authorities. The municipalities also have autonomy to delegate the decision-making power to the schools and in many cases, e.g., budget management, acquisitions and recruitment is the responsibility of the schools. (ibid.)

The Finnish education system is praised around the world; Finland has excelled in PISA – OECD Programme for International Study Assessment – ratings over the years and is regarded as a leader in education across the globe. Multiple times when wondering the reasons behind the great success, the Finnish teaching and teachers are brought up. A career in teaching is seen as prestigious and a Master's degree is required for full-time employment. (Lopez 2012.)

It is no wonder then that the Finnish teachers enjoy educational and pedagogical autonomy at all levels. They are responsible for practical teaching arrangements as well as ensuring the effectiveness and quality of the education. (Finnish education in a nutshell, 12.)

The most typical type of assessment used in Finnish education is continuous assessment during the course of studies and final assessment. Continuous assessment is especially important in compulsory education, where students receive their final assessment only once or twice a year in their report card. As there are no national tests in basic education, the teachers are responsible for assessment in their respective subjects, though there are national assessment guidelines in all common subjects for them to follow. (ibid.)

Higher education

The Ministry of Education and Culture states "(Finnish) Universities must promote free research and scientific and artistic education, provide higher education based on research, and educate students to serve their country and humanity. In carrying out this mission, universities must interact with the surrounding society and strengthen the impact of research findings and artistic activities on society (Higher education and science)."

Admission to universities is done via a national application procedure and they are arranged twice a year: spring and autumn. The application is filled online and the

requirements are to have completed upper secondary school, the matriculation examination, or vocational qualifications (Pääsyaatimukset ja hakeminen [Admission requirements and applying]). The programmes decide their own admission criteria, but student selection is usually based either on grades, an entrance exam, or both (Who can apply?).

Higher education in Finland consists of two sectors: universities and polytechnics (universities of applied sciences). Universities provide academic education based on research, whereas polytechnics provide vocational education on a higher level and promote applied research. There are 14 universities and 24 UAS institutions operating under the Ministry of Education and Culture. (Higher education leads the way.)

The operations are built on the freedom of education and research, and with extensive autonomy, the universities and polytechnics organise their own administration, decide on student admissions and design the contents of their degree programmes (Finnish education in a nutshell).

Finland has somewhat of an unconventional student culture, but like most universities around the world, a well-balanced student life with free-time activities and actually studying is the key. Giurca (2013) writes for Mastersportal that schedules can be hectic with some days being busier than others and having assignment deadlines and exam dates to worry about. While universities don't necessarily give out "homework", students do regularly receive home assignments, which usually include reading or doing group work activities. They are expected to invest some of their free time in order to pass modules and get good grades.

Giurca (2013) continues by adding that teachers in Finland can be considered your friends. They are well prepared and always available for questions, doubts and comments. Unlike in some countries, Finnish teachers are rarely called with monikers like "professor", but rather by their first names, a common way in Finland. Similarly, the teachers treat their students with respect and kindness, as university students are considered as being adults more often than as just youths.

Statistics Finland reported in 2016 that the employment of recent graduates had continued weakening in 2014. The number of graduates employed after a year of

their graduation was now 2 percentages lower than during the previous downturn in 2009 (Vastavalmistuneet työllistyivät edellistä taantumaa heikommin [Recent graduates found employment more poorly than during the last recession]). Heinisuo and Lehtinen write that while the general level of education has grown, the employment of highly educated has become more and more uncertain (2011).

For their research on the employment of highly educated, Heinisuo and Lehtinen not only interviewed experts from several fields, but they also sought out comments from various Internet sources. Based on this research, they suggested that rather than cultivating the career identity of the students, we should rather focus on cultivating their know-how identity. They argued that better understanding of one's know-how could raise the chances of getting employed. Heinisuo and Lehtinen also wonder if the education policy is successful at the moment, when graduates may need a training course for working life to learn skills needed for job hunting and work life. (2011, 49-53)

It is therefore easy to see that employees and universities don't work as closely together in Finland as they do in Japan. While universities may provide opportunities for networking and encourage entrepreneurship, the preparation to ensure that the students are employed immediately after graduation isn't quite on the same scale as it is in Japan.

2.3 Culture

Bailey and Peoples (2017, 23), define culture as "the shared, socially learned knowledge and patterns of behaviour characteristic of some group of people."

While Japan and Finland seem like they should be far away from each other culturally, there are a surprising number of similarities between the two cultures. For example, the countries are about the same size, though Japan has about 20 times the population size of Finland, and the two languages sound distinctly similar, even if they don't look anything alike.

In this chapter, we will focus on culture from a sociological perspective.

2.3.1 Japanese culture

Japanese culture and society are often considered as being formal and conservative. This can be observed in its language also, which showcases many levels of formality, depending on your and the receiver's social positions in contrast to one another. This will be explained in more detail below.

Perhaps due to this sense of formality, Japanese are extremely considerate of others. This is in part due to the Japanese mentality of "saving face", which usually is the reason behind why you may not get a straight denial to a question you ask from a Japanese person (Japan Guide).

This directly links to the mindset of *honne* (本音, "true voice") and *tatemae* (建前, "constructed facade"). *Honne* is the honest display of one's true emotions and intentions, which is often frowned upon, while *tatemae* expresses what they think would benefit the situation and would let them avoid confrontational interactions. (The Japanese Art of Indirectness: Honne and Tatemae.)

Nevertheless, while they are an essential part of the Japanese culture, similar behavioural mindsets can be observed in other cultures as well, as *tatemae* could be thought simply as telling "white lies" (Kopp 2014).

A similar idea can be found in the language with the concept of *uchi* (内, "inside") and *soto* (外, "outside"), or in-out. *Uchi* is one word for home in Japanese and as a concept it refers to the people you know inside a specific social circle: your family, company, etc. On the other hand, *soto* refers to all the people who are not inside a specific social circle. Japanese speech differs depending on the social context of your interlocutor, which is why it's important to understand your position in different contexts. (Nishizawa 2016.)

With these concepts in mind, it's easy to see that Japanese is a high-context culture with its indirect communication style. Considering Japan's history of long isolation, the society has been able to develop into a high-context one, where people have close connections over a long period of time and many aspects of cultural behaviour are not made explicit. (Beer.)

2.3.2 Finnish culture

Unlike Japan where politeness is considered important, Finland is a rather liberal country (Alho, 2010). There's not much etiquette to be learnt and the language divides simply to written and spoken language (ibid.). While the written language, so-called *kirjakieli* (book language), can be used to make one's speech more formal, it is not commonly heard in everyday use. Politeness can also be expressed by the use of *teitittely*, a variety of T-V distinction (Moskal 2013).

While it doesn't show in the language, Finnish people are rather modest and humble, and even surprisingly courteous (Finland Guide). While it isn't necessary to switch to an extremely formal language, words are taken very seriously in Finnish culture. Communication in Finland tends to be low-key as listening is considered very important and Finns tend to be rather reserved (Business communication).

Countries in Scandinavia are considered to be low-context cultures and so is Finland as well (Barrett 2006, 197). A publication done by the students of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences refers to Edward T. Hall (1976) – who first coined the terms high-context and low-context cultures – when describing Finland as a low-context culture. According to Hall's characteristics on low-context culture, as a low-context culture it would imply that, e.g., the Finnish communication is direct. (World-wide workforce II: An intercultural benchmark of global recruiting practices 2014, 48.)

However, some do argue that Finland does showcase some qualities of a high-context culture too. In his book, Booth (2014) argues Finland to be a high-text culture, based on another description of high-context cultures by Hall (1976). Booth refers to Finland as a society with very little ethnic diversity, which connects to Hall's idea on high-context cultures being those in which the people share, e.g., the same kind of expectations, experiences, and background. This leads Booth to argue that all Nordic countries are high-context cultures, due to being homogeneous. (Booth 2014, 237-238.)

Furthermore, a study released in 2009 by Nishimura, Nevgi, and Tella, categorised Finland as a high-context culture, although they also noted how many of those features are changing and Finland's becoming a lower context culture (2009, 788).

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design, strategy and purpose

After considering the research questions and available research approach, "exploratory research" was chosen to be used. Krishnaswami and Satyaprasad describe exploratory research as a "preliminary study of an unfamiliar problem about which the research has little or no knowledge". As the problem of this research is currently unclear in nature, or it might not exist at all, exploratory research seemed a better choice than descriptive research. While the two approaches are similar, Sachdeva describes exploratory research to be less structured and more flexible of the two (2009, 15).

Sachdeva further explains that exploratory research relies on secondary research (2009, 14). Taking that into consideration, that has been applied to this thesis as reviewing available literature and using in-depth interviews as the qualitative approach.

Depending on the results of the research, Sachdeva states that exploratory research may provide direction for more formal research or it can save time and money if the problem isn't found important enough. This, however, may make it less favourable for researchers and managers alike, as there is usually need for quick answers rather than long researches. (2009, 14)

It was also clear from the start that this research would be relying on qualitative data mainly, rather than quantitative data. So taking that into consideration also, exploratory research seemed the most fitting for this research.

3.2 Methods of data collection

Secondary data was collected through a literature review (as seen in the Theoretical framework section) to help develop theoretical background, which could later on be used to shape out and support primary data collection. For that purpose, three main topics of research were decided on: student mobility, education systems, and

culture. All three topics were inspected from a Japanese viewpoint as well as a Finnish one.

After the theoretical framework had been finished, primary data was then collected through questionnaires with mostly open-ended questions. However, the idea of the questionnaire was based on the concept of individual in-depth interviews – or IDI – but as the distance between the interviewer and the interviewees was too great for face-to-face interviews, it was decided that conducting the interviews online would be more cost and time efficient.

Although it can be argued that such online platforms as, e.g., Skype, could have also been considered as an option with interviews, rather than opting for questionnaires, IDIs generally require good language skills from the participants and are generally transcribed for later research (Sachdeva 2009, 113). By conducting the interviews in written form rather than orally, pressure could be taken off both from the interviewer and the interviewees, who neither used English – which was the language used for the research – as their mother tongue. This would allow both parties to carefully think their writing in a more relaxed environment and properly choose how to express themselves in the best possible way. This, again, turned out to be more time-efficient, as there would be no need for a transcription of the interviews, but rather all communication would already be saved in written format.

Questionnaires and interviews both fall under the category of survey research and it is often difficult to differentiate between the two. Interviews, however, are more personal in nature as the researcher works directly with the participant and has therefore a chance for follow-up questions when needed (Sachdeva 2009, 113). In this way, we could say that the term “questionnaire” in the case of this research is used to mean a written form of an interview.

Once the nature of the research had been considered along with some time issues, it was deemed enough to interview a minimum of five students from Japanese background only. The small pool of interviewees was decided on the fact that the questionnaires would be quite in-depth in nature, allowing there to be plenty of room for supporting questions if needed.

The questions were planned and decided on beforehand according to the instructions of the client and tutor. They were designed based on data collected during the literature review.

At first, a ready-made Word document with instructions and the questions would be sent to the interviewees to answer in written format. Once the first answers were collected, the interviewer would then go through them all to find out if any section needed to be opened up further with an interviewee. These were in turn handled either by email correspondence or asking on Facebook's own chatting platform.

Afterwards the answers would be compiled and analysed side-by-side, comparing answers together to find similarities and what issues might stick out. The results of that will be written in the next chapter.

3.2.1 Population and sampling

Purposive sampling was used for this research as it was necessary to find respondents that filled certain requirements, i.e., Japanese students who had attended higher education schools in Finland. At first, students from any school were considered as potential participants, but it was soon noted that because the research isn't a large-scale one, a smaller participant pool would suffice.

Because of this, the author didn't need to reach out far in order to find suitable subjects, but was instead able to utilise her own network of contacts. That proved to be rather fitting, as this research has been done with JAMK in mind, and with the author herself a student of JAMK, most of the participants, with the exception of one, turned out to be former exchange students of JAMK itself.

4 RESULTS

The author sent the questionnaire to five of her contacts and out of those five received four responses back. As the aim for responses was five, the author considered finding people outside of her own contacts next. Fortunately, one respondent offered their help with the research and sent the questionnaire to their acquaintance who had also been to Finland as an exchange student in the past.

We will start this chapter by going through the basic background of the respondents. After that, we will start examining their responses, first by focusing on two bigger topics that got brought up a lot in the responses. Once those topics have been discussed, we will examine the rest of the responses on a more general scale. Because of this, some responses may get repeated in more than one chapter alone.

4.1 Demographical information

Four out of the five respondents had been exchange students at JAMK University of Applied sciences, while one had been an exchange student at Jyväskylä University. Coincidentally, the four JAMK exchange students are female, while the exchange student at Jyväskylä University is male. All of the respondents were close in age and had been to Finland around the ages of 20 to 23.

The partner university in the case of JAMK's exchange students had been Seinan Gakuin University, whereas Jyväskylä University's partner university was Kanazawa University. They all had spent approximately 8 to 10 months in Finland during their exchange year, which is roughly the length of an academic year here. It can be assumed that some perhaps spent time travelling either after their exchange year was over or before it had started.

4.2 English skills

Unsurprisingly, almost all of the respondents mentioned English in one way or another in their responses.

A few of the respondents noted their own lack of English skills before arriving to Finland and recounting even trying their best to brush up said skills in preparation for the exchange year.

One had struggled for the first few months for not being able to communicate with their fellow students, but had nonetheless tried to speak to as many people as possibly to overcome this challenge. Another respondent had found it challenging to write long reports in English for the first time. In relevance to this, positive attitude and open-mindedness was also brought up in some answers.

Despite the challenges, a few also noted that one benefit of going for an exchange year is the possibility to learn English more effectively – so putting those skills to use, so to say. It was also noted that it's something that many Japanese students hope to achieve with their exchange years. One respondent admitted that they had expected this development in skills to happen instantaneously and dramatically, which unfortunately was not the case in the end.

Despite Finland not being an Anglophone country, one respondent found this, on the contrary, to be rather positive in nature. They explained that as Finnish people don't speak English as their mother tongue – just like most Japanese people – it was somehow easier to speak with them in English. Perhaps the thought behind this sentiment was that both nationalities may feel similarly about their skills in English – unsure and hesitant, maybe – so there wouldn't be as much judgement? The respondent did, however, also note that there were times when Finnish students would speak in Finnish to each other, which especially during group-work discussions could be troubling to the international students.

4.3 Finnish education

Three of the respondents expressed having been interested in the Finnish education system – or even Nordic education systems in general, in one case.

All of them had noticed clear differences between how classes and courses are conducted in Finland versus in Japan. One respondent had expected to receive a lot of homework for classes, but had come to learn that – depending on the class, of course – classes in Finland didn't give out a whole lot of homework. Instead, and this was noted by four out of five respondents, teachers in Finland tend to organise a lot of group works in their classes. Apparently, working in groups is somewhat rare in Japan, but one respondent did find the aspect of group works to be more motivating.

The same respondent also praised Finnish teachers for their high-level of teaching, explaining that they had been very helpful whenever the respondent had faced trouble. Two other respondents had also noticed the differences in teaching between the two countries, noting that in Finland classes are more discussion-heavy; in Japan it's customary for the students to just sit down and listen to the lecture,

whereas in Finland the students are encouraged to participate in discussions during class. One respondent found this approach more practical than just listening to a lecture and taking notes.

Other observations listed there being more field trips organised for classes in Finland (none in the respondent's home university) and differences in timetables (being more fixed in Japan).

4.4 Finland as a destination

When listing reasons as to why they chose Finland as their study abroad destination – be it their first choice or one of many – few respondents showed an interest in the Finnish education system, but other reasons like an interest in the daily life in Finland and how different it is from Japan were also mentioned. One respondent did also note that the two countries are said to be rather similar.

A few respondents had taken note of Finland's nature, one even going so far as to say that they wanted learn more about valuing nature as part of Finnish culture. Another respondent recommends experiencing Finnish nature if doing a study abroad in Finland.

When asked about what other Japanese students might want to learn by doing a study abroad in Finland, one respondent admitted that most Japanese students will most likely choose some other major country over Finland. Interestingly, all of the examples they gave for major countries were Anglophone countries. However, the same respondent did also add that those studying education will have an interested in Finland due to its education system.

One respondent did mention that some Japanese students might want to learn about Finnish culture (as most of the respondents for the research had). While the respondent didn't try doing a home-stay, they mentioned knowing Japanese students who had lived with a host-family during their time in Finland in order to take part in the daily life and experience the traditions of a Finnish family.

Three out of the five respondents expressed an interested in possibly working in Finland in the future, one describing Finland as a comfortable country to live in and

with a good welfare system. However, two did find this being possibly challenging; one respondent already having a permanent job, and the other saying it's challenging to find a job in Finland. Apparently, the companies they had looked into had all hired people with more experience.

As mentioned earlier, all of the respondents found it challenging to use English during their study abroad experience, but for more Finland-specific challenges, one respondent brought up the darkness of Finnish winter-time. They even mentioned it as part of their advice they would give to someone looking to do a study abroad in Finland. One other respondent also mentioned the Finnish climate in general.

Other perhaps smaller hindrances included Finnish public transportation system not being as good as expected, school library closing early, and the school cafeteria not offering a wide variety of dishes daily.

4.5 Preparation for the exchange programme

For four respondents, Finland was their only choice when it came to choosing where to do their study abroad. As mentioned earlier, one respondent had been interested in the education systems in Nordic countries, so they applied to other countries in Northern Europe also.

As four of the five respondents were from the same school, their answers were naturally very similar when it came to describing what kind of support their school had offered for them in preparation for the exchange programme. However, the fifth respondent from Kanazawa University also had had a similar experience. The respondents mentioned attending a seminar to learn more, talking to their teachers/tutors, or getting help from their school's international centre.

Most also listed having looked up information related to Finland online or from books, be it about culture, traditions, or even the education system. For practical preparation, two mentioned having bought warm clothes for winter time. Of course, English was also mentioned, but that was already discussed in an earlier subchapter.

All respondents were seemingly satisfied with how everything had gone before their arrival to Finland, saying they hadn't needed any extra help with anything. One

respondent expressed a personal regret in not asking more what activities they should try in Finland, while another admitted that they had some trouble taking business classes, which was their major in JAMK, but not in their home university. However, same respondent did also add that the business classes had been good.

4.6 Benefits of study abroad

Beside the chance to improve their English skills, all of the respondents brought up the concept of making international connections. They saw it beneficial to learn more about other cultures, one respondent describing that by making international friends, you also learn new views in life. Another mentioned that you learn to accept differences between cultures.

While the respondents had been interested in getting to know more about Finland, through their study abroad experience, they ended up learning more about other cultures as well.

One respondent also told how they had faced a challenge relating to Finnish-language in one class, but instead of asking for help from their Finnish friends, they had handled it on their own and gained confidence through that. After returning to Japan, they felt they could do more things than before without much hesitation.

5 DISCUSSION

The objective for this research was to answer three questions: differences between Finnish and Japanese education, trends for student mobility in Finland and Japan, and opportunities Japanese students could have by studying in Finland. After, once answers for those questions had been collected, suitable recommendations on the topic of how study abroad could be developed with Japanese students in mind can be thought of.

The research managed to answer most of these questions already with just the literature review alone. While the second part of the research could've been expanded on by getting more respondents, the data gained from the questionnaires did nonetheless provide support for the earlier data. Most importantly, however, the

data from the questionnaires helped tie together the connection between Finland and Japan in this research, as the data gathered during the literature review hadn't concerned both of the countries simultaneously, and was rather one side versus the other in nature.

While this research ended up being rather small in scale, hopefully with the results and insights gained from it the subject can be examined more in the future. The research did show potential in having Finland as a study abroad destination and while this research focused on Japanese students, the results could also be used when advertising Finland for students in other countries as well. While the implementation of tuition fees is a huge change in the recent years when it comes to Finnish higher education, the education system itself is still highly praised internationally. The questionnaire answers also showed that some Japanese students could potentially have an interest in that system, especially those themselves learning about education.

The research also showed that student mobility is now starting to grow in Japan, with the Japanese government jumping in on the trend to develop the nation's youth. While there might still be some reluctance, hopefully more and more students will head abroad – be it as an exchange student or as a degree student. The results indicated that English skills – whether lack of them or the wish to improve them – was one major factor for Japanese students when it came to studying abroad. Language didn't seem to be a concern in the case of Finnish students, but rather proximity, as many chose to study in Europe. Of course, we also need to take into consideration the cost of education when comparing Finland and Japan: Finnish higher education is free (with the exception of non-EU/EAA students), while Japanese higher education isn't.

6 CONCLUSION

The main objective for this thesis was to answer the research questions that were stated in the beginning. With that in mind, we can consider this thesis to be successful as it found answers to all of the questions it had set out to answer and based on that data, it is also able to make some recommendations.

In the end, the research wasn't able to collect a large pool of responses for its primary data collection, which might affect the reliability of the results. Fortunately, none of the respondents contradicted what had been found out already during the literature review phase, so examining those responses and comparing them with earlier data turned out fine.

Based on the results, it can be said that there is potential in developing the research in the future if a larger pool of respondents can be gathered. Literature review on the subject offered a sufficient amount of info on the subjects, but as it could be seen, they didn't really tie Finland and Japan closely together. Therefore, if there's an interest in the future to develop the educational relationship between the two countries, conducting this research again on a larger scale should be beneficial.

With all of this data taken into consideration, we can now see what kind of opportunities Japanese students could have in Finland and offer recommendations for developing study abroad programmes.

6.1 Recommendations

This research was conducted with JAMK University of Applied Sciences in mind, but the results could prove to be potentially valuable for all Finnish school. As such, a more general tone will be used when writing about these recommendations, rather than addressing JAMK itself in particular.

Based on the results, Japanese students are most interested in developing their language skills when deciding on where to do their study abroad. However, as seen with the answers from the questionnaire, none of them particularly wanted to study the Finnish language, but rather develop their skills in English – a language they already knew before coming to Finland. While, naturally, the courses the students will take in Finland are taught in English, one additional idea to help them efficiently improve their skills could be to, if not develop new courses, advertise English courses even more to the exchange students.

In the case of JAMK, its Japanese exchange students can potentially come from a variety of educational background. For example, Seinan Gakuin University has a Department of Literature, which is a department that JAMK doesn't have. Therefore,

as seen in the case of at least one respondent, students coming in may be forced to take courses that are not part of their usual curriculum back at home. While courses from different fields may still be beneficial, it might be a good idea to take this more into consideration.

The respondents showed interest particularly in the Finnish education system, but others were also interested in culture, traditions, daily life, design, etc. While Finnish language courses usually also teach cultural things as well, it might be a good idea to offer, e.g., a short series of lectures on those topics.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Questionnaire for Japanese students who have studied in Finland

Japanese Students in Finland

First of all, thank you for taking part in this interview.

Our purpose is to find out reasons why Japanese students choose to come to study in Finland, as well as their perceptions of Finland and the Finnish school system. The interview is a part of my bachelor thesis research.

Please try to answer the questions to your best ability and take your time with them! Some of the questions have defining questions (a,b,c...), in which case I would like you to answer both the numbered main question as well as the alphabetised question.

This interview is anonymous and your name won't be mentioned in the final report. You can also leave the basic background section empty if you so wish, but the information in it helps with statistics.

If you have any doubts or questions at any point, please don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your cooperation!

Hanna-Stina Hiljanen
g6704@student.jamk.fi

Basic background of the responder

Home institute:

Host institute:

Degree programme:

Time spent in Finland (e.g., 8 months in 2012-2013):

Age:

Gender:

Before arrival

1. **Why did you choose Finland for your study abroad destination?**
...
2. **Did you have any other options aside from Finland? If so, please describe them.**
...
3. **How did you prepare yourself for living and studying in Finland?**
...
4. **Did you receive any help or support in Japan about your study abroad scenario?**
...
 - a) **Would you like to have gotten more help? If yes, with what?**
...

After arrival

5. **Was it difficult to get adjusted to living and studying in Finland? Can you name a few of your biggest problems during that time?**
...
6. **How did your expectations from before your arrival change once you had settled down (Regarding school, daily life, etc.)?**
...

Finnish school system

7. **What do you think are the biggest differences in studying in Finland as compared to Japan?**
...
 - a) **What do/did you like about studying in Finland the best?**
...
 - b) **What don't/didn't you like?**
...
8. **What do/did you want to learn the most in Finland?**
...
 - a) **What do you think other Japanese students would like to learn in Finland/abroad?**

...

9. Are you considering staying/working in Finland once you are done with your studies? Why?

...

10. What do you think was the biggest benefit in studying in Finland?

...

a) What do you think is the biggest benefit in studying abroad?

...

11. What was your biggest challenge in studying in Finland and how did you respond to that challenge?

...

12. What advice would you give to a Japanese student who is considering Finland for study abroad?

...

Thank you again! If there is anything more you would like to add, please do so! If not, I may contact you again later to ask for some elaborations, so please let me know if you would be fine with that.