

Social Class, Cultural Capital, and Education: Japanese and International Students' Perceptions of “Oya Gacha”

Yuki AMAKI

College of Economics, Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo, Japan
yukiamaki@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-6794-8870

ABSTRACT

This study examines the perceptions of Japanese and international students in Japan regarding the concept of “Oya Gacha” (“Parent Lottery”). The analysis applied Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction as a theoretical framework. “Oya Gacha” reflects the notion that a child’s life is significantly influenced by their family’s socioeconomic status because it affects their access to educational opportunities and career options. This study used a mixed-methods design incorporating qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the survey responses of 115 college students. Quantitative analysis indicated that Japanese and international students showed similar overall levels of agreement with the concept, although international students displayed greater variation in their responses. The results suggest that, although both groups recognize the influence of parental background on life outcomes, Japanese students are more likely to agree with the concept of “Oya Gacha.” In contrast, international students’ perspectives varied based on the social mobility structures of their home countries. Further qualitative analysis revealed that students interpreted the concept differently. Some emphasized structural inequality, whereas others stressed the importance of individual effort in overcoming disadvantaged circumstances. This study highlights the importance of cultural capital in shaping students’ beliefs about inequality. The findings contribute to discussions on social inequality by showing how students in different cultural contexts interpret the relationship between family background and individual effort. Future studies should use larger samples and analyze international differences in greater detail.

Keywords: Oya Gacha (parent lottery), educational inequality, cultural reproduction theory, social mobility, cultural capital

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, several North American studies have shown that a child’s academic achievement and college choices are influenced by their family’s socioeconomic status (SES). This includes factors such as parents’ income, educational background, and home environment. In the 1970s, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu introduced the concept of “cultural reproduction” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), which posits that cultural elements of the home, such as parents’ knowledge, values, education, and habits, are passed on to children and reinforced through the education system. This leads to the reproduction of social class and highlights how differences in educational and career opportunities are transmitted across generations. This concept has strongly influenced research in sociology and education.

Since around 2020, the term “Oya Gacha” (“parent lottery”) has been widely discussed in the Japanese media. It refers to the idea that one’s life is largely shaped by the circumstances of one’s birth. “Oya Gacha” highlights that children have no control over who their parents are, likening life to a game of chance. It combines “Oya” (parent) and “Gacha” (a random capsule from a toy vending machine or mobile game) to symbolize the randomness of birth circumstances. The term has sparked substantial public debate because it redefines long-standing concerns regarding social inequality in a clear and modern manner. Its circulation through social and mainstream media has raised public awareness of educational inequality and social mobility. Consequently, issues such as educational inequality and social mobility are being widely discussed. In 2021, the Japanese publisher Jiyu Kokuminsha (2021) identified the term as one of the top 10 buzzwords of the year.

Opinions regarding the validity of this concept are divided. Some believe that family background significantly affects educational attainment and success. Hida (2021) interviewed Professor John List of the University of Chicago about the “parent lottery,” and he concurred with the concept, emphasizing that parents’ wealth and SES strongly influence their children’s academic performance. He argued that because parents shape both genetics and the environment, the “parent lottery” is a valid concept. Furthermore, several studies have shown that financial stability and parental education are important for accessing educational and career development opportunities.

In contrast, some view “Oya Gacha” as less valid because it ignores personal effort and negates responsibility. They argue that success is determined not only by parents but also by individuals’ hard work and good choices.

However, the interview by Hida (2021), Professor List refuted the claim that the “parent lottery” denies personal responsibility, noting that not all wealthy children succeed, and that some individuals overcome disadvantages. Thus, this study examined how Japanese and international college students in Japan perceive “Oya Gacha,” and explored how cultural and social contexts shape their views.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study analyzed how Japanese and international students view “Oya Gacha” in Japan, based on the perspective of cultural reproduction theory. This study also examines how students’ environments and social contexts influence their opinions on “Oya Gacha.” The argument put forth in this study is that students’ cultural backgrounds and SES likely shape their perceptions of “Oya Gacha.” Japanese students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds who are more familiar with the term, often recognize the effects of inequality. However, international students’ perspectives may vary according to their home countries’ social systems and values. Those from societies that emphasize personal effort may be more skeptical of the concept, believing that individual choices determine life outcomes.

3. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1 BOURDIEU’S THEORY OF CULTURAL REPRODUCTION

“Oya Gacha” can be analyzed through the lens of Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argued that family, education, and social class shape people’s thoughts and behaviors. These factors transcend personal opinions or values and become a shared social structure that people subconsciously internalize (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). This structure allows people to subconsciously follow social rules that facilitate daily life. Thus, ingrained behaviors are learned through family life, schooling, and social class.

3.2 TYPES OF CAPITAL AND THEIR SOCIAL EFFECTS

Recently, the term “Oya Gacha” has been widely discussed in Japan, raising awareness of how the family environment affects a person’s life. It is based on the idea that a child’s future is largely influenced by the family into which they are born. This concept is closely related to Bourdieu’s notion of cultural reproduction. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) emphasized that capital is not limited to money but exists in various forms, all of which have significant effects on individuals’ lives. Although “capital” is often associated with economic wealth, Bourdieu argued that cultural, social, and symbolic capital are crucial in determining social success. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argued that societal success is not only determined by individual effort but also strongly influenced by wealth, knowledge, and social connections. Kosutic (2017), who conducted a study of 534 high school seniors, provided empirical evidence to support Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction. Privileged students tend to excel academically and attend college at higher rates than their less-privileged peers (Kosutic, 2017). Thus, a person’s birth circumstances can significantly affect their life trajectory, and this inequality is perpetuated and reproduced across generations, thereby deepening social disparities. Moreover, these forms of capital vary according to family background and social class. For example, children from affluent families tend to have greater access to quality education, and their social connections and status often provide them with significant advantages in terms of career opportunities. Children from low-income families struggle to acquire cultural capital, which limits their educational and career opportunities. The concept of “Oya Gacha” refers to this inequality.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 “OYA GACHA” AND THE THEORY OF CULTURAL REPRODUCTION

“Oya Gacha” refers to the idea that a child’s life is significantly influenced by the circumstances of their birth. This concept is closely related to Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). High-SES children adjust more easily to school, whereas low-SES children struggle more, thus widening the academic gap between rich and poor. Sengonul (2022) found that SES shapes the impact of personal commitment on achievement, which reinforces educational inequality. Grant and Kniess (2023) analyzed rural students’ experiences at flagship universities in the U.S. and how they adapted and succeeded compared to their urban counterparts. Their findings were consistent with the notion of “Oya Gacha” in Japan, further indicating that a child’s future is determined by family environment factors, including parents’ incomes and educational backgrounds. Moreover, high-SES children experience greater parental involvement in maintaining their status, whereas low-SES children often receive less parental input. White et al. (2020) analyzed the challenges faced by first-generation and low-SES college students from a cultural capital perspective, highlighting how parental education influences a student’s ability to adjust to college life.

4.2 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Parental involvement at home and school positively affects academic achievement. Sengonul (2022) argued that parental involvement has a particularly strong effect on children from low-income families because educational support at home plays a critical role in academic improvement in economically disadvantaged environments.

However, when parents themselves have limited education or are economically disadvantaged, providing educational support to their children can be challenging (Sengonul, 2022).

Grant and Knies (2023) found that rural students experience significant cultural differences in terms of language, food culture, and dress compared to urban students, which affects whether cultural habits acquired at home match the university environment. Urban parents can often provide their children with the knowledge and experience required to help them adjust to the college environment, whereas rural parents may struggle to do so. Consequently, rural students face greater challenges, not only academically but also socially and culturally. White et al. (2020) found that first-generation college students struggle to adapt to academic culture, college rules, and academic literacy requirements more than students whose parents attended college. Accordingly, the concept of “Oya Gacha” captures the structural advantage that children from educated involved families have in accessing and succeeding in higher education. In contrast, children without such support often find it difficult to adapt. According to Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, students who succeed in higher education typically utilize knowledge and skills inherited from their families. However, many first-generation college students lack this advantage, increasing the likelihood of encountering academic and social difficulties (White et al., 2020).

4.3 ROLE OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

SES mediates the impact of parental involvement on academic success. High-SES families invest in education, instill study habits in their children, and utilize strong networks. In contrast, in low-SES families, although increased parental involvement can positively affect children’s academic performance, financial constraints and a lack of educational experience may limit its effectiveness. White et al. (2020) analyzed how SES differences affect educational outcomes and college adjustment, highlighting the difficulty low-SES students face in “getting a read on college.” Even when they have the opportunity to attend college, financial burdens and cultural differences make it difficult for them to persist in their studies.

Sengonul (2022) also found that children from high-SES families are more likely to engage in intellectual activities, such as visiting museums and reading books, because they understand the value of formal culture. In contrast, children from low-SES families receive fewer opportunities to engage in such cultural activities and are less exposed to informal education. These differences significantly affect academic performance and dropout rates in higher education. Thus, as the concept of “Oya Gacha” suggests, children’s lives are heavily influenced by the family environment into which they are born, which is a factor that they cannot control. These prior empirical findings are consistent with Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction, which describes how socioeconomic inequalities are perpetuated across generations through unequal access to cultural capital and education.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study focused on Japanese and international university students in Japan. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants from intercultural studies courses at two Japanese universities. The questionnaire took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and all respondents provided informed consent before participation. Participants were assigned ID numbers to protect their identities. Participant data pertaining to gender and country of origin were excluded to protect their identities. Data related to country of origin were excluded because of the risk that such information could be used to identify participants, particularly where the number of international students from a certain country was small.

This study employed quantitative and qualitative analyses. In the quantitative components, respondents evaluated the validity of “Oya Gacha” using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from “totally agree” to “totally disagree.” In the qualitative items, respondents provided free-text responses explaining their thoughts as to whether and why “Oya Gacha” was valid. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software, and a cross-tabulation analysis was conducted. Descriptive statistics were initially calculated to summarize the response patterns, including the means and standard deviations for all groups. Then, group differences were examined using Welch’s t-test because the assumption of equal variances was not met.

Free-text responses were analyzed using KH Coder (Higuchi, 2016, 2017) to identify word patterns and co-occurrence networks. This approach enabled the examination of how key concepts and themes emerged in the participants’ responses. First, all free-text responses were anonymized and imported into KH Coder. Variations in spelling and wording were standardized such that words with the same meaning were treated consistently in the analysis. Second, a morphological analysis was conducted to segment the text and identify frequently occurring nouns, verbs, and descriptive expressions. Third, a co-occurrence network was generated to show which words tended to appear together across responses. Fourth, the clusters identified by KH Coder were examined and compared with the original responses to develop broader interpretive themes. This step was necessary because network results alone do not automatically produce themes. Instead, the themes were developed by repeatedly

reading the clustered words and full student responses. Finally, representative quotations were selected to illustrate each theme, ensuring that the interpretations remained closely grounded in the original data. Qualitative analysis followed a two-step procedure to improve analytic transparency. Keyword patterns were identified using a computer program, and then the themes were interpreted. This approach enabled the systematic text analysis to be combined with careful consideration of the contextual meanings conveyed in students’ responses.

6. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

A survey was conducted among Japanese students (n = 85) and international students (n = 30) on their perceptions of “Oya Gacha.” The survey used a 4-point Likert scale, and the response patterns in the data were analyzed. Table 1-1 presents the descriptive statistics, including the means (M), standard deviations (SD), and coefficients of variation (CV) for both groups. Table 2 presents the response distributions. Table 1-2 reports the results of Welch’s t-test comparing the two groups. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine whether the two groups demonstrated any significant differences.

Table 1-1: Descriptive statistics of responses on “Oya Gacha” among Japanese and international students

Group	N	Mean	SD	CV
Japanese students	85	3.16	0.61	19.30
International students	30	3.23	0.77	23.84

Table 1-2: Results of Welch’s t-test comparing Japanese and international students

<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean difference	SE difference	95% CI lower	95% CI upper
-0.44	42.60	.663	-0.07	0.16	-0.38	0.25

Table 2: Distribution of responses on “Oya Gacha” among Japanese and international students

	The Concept of “Oya Gacha”					Total
		Totally disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Totally agree	
Japanese students	N	1	7	54	23	85
	%	1.2%	8.2%	63.5%	27.1%	100%
International students	N	0	6	11	13	30
	%	0%	20.0%	36.7%	43.3%	100%

Tables 1-1 and 1-2 show that the mean score for Japanese students was 3.16 (SD = 0.61), whereas that for international students was 3.23 (SD = 0.77). Japanese and international students showed no significant differences, $t(42.60) = -0.44, p = .663$. Welch’s t-test was conducted because the assumption of equal variances was not met. The mean difference was -0.07 , 95% confidence interval (CI) $[-0.38, 0.25]$. The effect size was very small (Cohen’s $d = -0.10$). These results suggest that both groups generally agree with the concept of “Oya Gacha.” However, the SD (0.77) and CV (23.84) for international students were higher than those for Japanese students (SD = 0.61, CV = 19.30). These results suggest that opinions on “Oya Gacha” may vary more widely among international students.

Table 2 shows that 27.1% of Japanese students strongly agreed, while a higher proportion (43.4%) of international students selected the same response, indicating stronger agreement among international students. However, 8.2% of Japanese students chose “somewhat disagree,” compared to 20.0% of international students. This suggests that international students were also more likely to view “Oya Gacha” as ambiguous. Overall, these descriptive results indicate that although the average levels of agreement are similar, the distribution of responses among international students is more polarized.

Table 2 further shows that 90.6% of Japanese students combining “somewhat agree” and “totally agree” supported the concept of “Oya Gacha,” indicating strong recognition of the intergenerational transmission of SES. Among international students, 43.3% strongly agreed; however, 20.0% somewhat disagreed. This is potentially because acceptance of the concept of “Oya Gacha” may be lower in countries with greater social mobility, whereas students from countries with greater educational inequality may adhere to the idea more.

This study examined differences in perceptions through the lens of cultural reproduction theory, which links families’ cultural capital to educational attainment. In Japan, educational opportunities are highly dependent on parental financial status and educational background, indicating that Japanese students may consider the concept

of “Oya Gacha” to be relatable. The results in Table 1 show that although the mean score of Japanese students (3.16) was almost the same as that of international students (3.23), the lower SD and CV indicate that Japanese students’ opinions were more consistent. This may be because of the strong presence of the cultural reproduction of inequality in Japan, making awareness of the influence of family background more common and widespread. In contrast, the greater variation in responses among international students may be related to variations in social structures and educational systems between countries.

7. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

7.1 JAPANESE STUDENTS’ POSITIVE RESPONSES (AGREEMENT WITH “OYA GACHA”)

In this study, 115 students shared their views on the validity of the concept of “Oya Gacha.” Figure 1 shows a co-occurrence network of key terms extracted from students’ responses. KH Coder software was used to analyze characteristic words extracted from positive and negative appraisals made by Japanese and international students. The KH Coder analysis identified three key themes in Japanese students’ positive responses (Figure 1).

7.1.1 PARENTAL FINANCE: IMPACT ON CHILDREN’S LIVES

Japanese students observed that parental finances influence educational and career opportunities, positing that wealthier families offer stability, whereas financial struggles limit these opportunities. They argued that “Oya Gacha,” highlights how family finances shape a child’s future. Japanese students provided the following comments:

Financial stability aids success, but money alone doesn’t define happiness. Even less wealthy parents can be great.

Effort matters, but parental income shapes the future. I could only attend college with my grandparents’ financial support, proving “Oya Gacha” exists.

Children from low-income families have fewer education options. Many can’t reach the starting line despite effort, as parental investment shapes opportunities.

These Japanese students emphasized that family finances determine education and career options, thus reinforcing “Oya Gacha.” These comments suggest that students recognized the influence of economic resources on access to educational and future life opportunities. Several responses indicated that financial support from family members plays a critical role in enabling students to pursue higher education. This perception reflects the notion that family economic capital affects educational trajectories and contributes to the reproduction of social inequality.

7.1.2 THE CONCEPT OF “OYA GACHA” AND INFLUENCE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Some Japanese students recognized that environmental factors influence outcomes, while also contending that effort can foster success. They viewed “Oya Gacha” as an important social issue among several others and provided the following comments:

Children cannot choose their parents. In an education-oriented society, parental wealth shapes the future, but national and environmental factors also matter.

“Oya Gacha” is partly true since parents shape children’s lives. It also shifts blame from individuals to systemic issues, raising social awareness.

These comments highlight the perceived importance of parental backgrounds, while acknowledging that effort and wider social support can play key roles in determining life outcomes. These responses also suggest that some students view “Oya Gacha” as a reflection of family background and a means of drawing attention to social and institutional conditions. In this sense, the concept is viewed as raising awareness of the structural factors that influence educational opportunities and life outcomes.

7.1.3 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATION AND POVERTY

Some students focused on how financial status affects education and limits options. They recognized that differences in values across society are influenced by economic disparities, while qualifying this by stating that other factors can limit this effect. These Japanese students provided the following comments:

“Oya Gacha” is mostly true. Family wealth determines educational advantages, with wealthy children accessing private schools and children from poor families struggling with tuition.

roles of social institutions, public policy, and economic structures in shaping educational and life opportunities. From this perspective, discussions of “Oya Gacha” can encourage reflection on the structural causes of inequality and need for systemic reform.

7.2.3 OVERCOMING ADVERSE LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES

Some students argued that despite poverty being a significant factor, life is shaped by personal choices and actions. These students saw life as being determined by choices, not chance. The link between “college” and “poor” denoted how scholarships and effort were seen as helping disadvantaged students access higher education. One student stated, “Many students who are born into poor families study hard, earn scholarships, and attend college. We can’t choose our parents, but a good life depends on our actions.” Another student wrote, “We cannot choose our parents, but whether we can lead a good life depends on our own actions.” A belief that personal choices and effort are more important than the situation into which individuals are born was prevalent among this group. These responses suggest that some students emphasized the importance of individual agency and perseverance in overcoming disadvantaged circumstances. Although they acknowledged the constraints associated with family background, they also highlighted the possibility of upward mobility through effort, education, and institutional support, such as scholarships. This perspective reflects a belief in meritocratic values, in which personal initiative and hard work are considered essential for success.

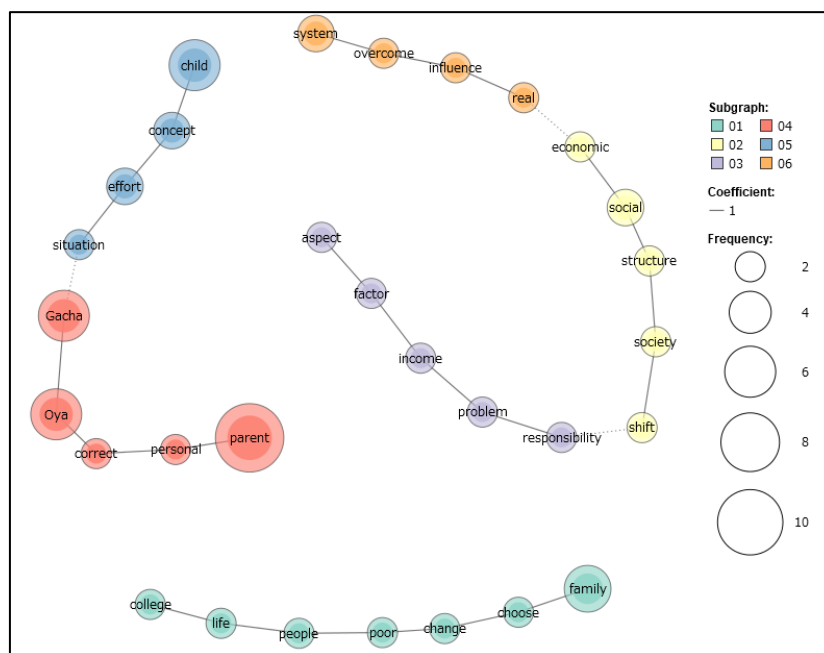


Figure 2: Co-occurrence Network of Japanese Students’ Critical Responses

7.3 INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ POSITIVE RESPONSES (AGREEMENT WITH “OYA GACHA”)

The co-occurrence network analysis categorized international students’ positive views of “Oya Gacha” into three themes (Figure 3).

7.3.1 THE INFLUENCE OF “OYA GACHA” AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

This group highlighted that family wealth shapes education and opportunities, with many international students agreeing that financial status is crucial for shaping a child’s future. International students stated the following:

Wealthy children can access quality education stress-free, while poorer children struggle with financial worries.

A family’s financial situation has a great impact on a child’s mental state, which affects his or her personality.

These comments show that some international students felt that parental wealth determines education quality, and economic status affects well-being and the formation of personality traits. Other international students stated the following:

People born into poor families have to work much harder than others, especially compared to those

born into wealthy families, to escape the cycle of poverty.

Differences in family values have a big impact on a child's life.

These responses suggest that many international students recognized the significant impact of the family environment on educational opportunities and life outcomes. In particular, financial resources and family values were viewed as important factors that shape educational access and personal development. This reflects a recognition that family background can create unequal starting points for children in society.

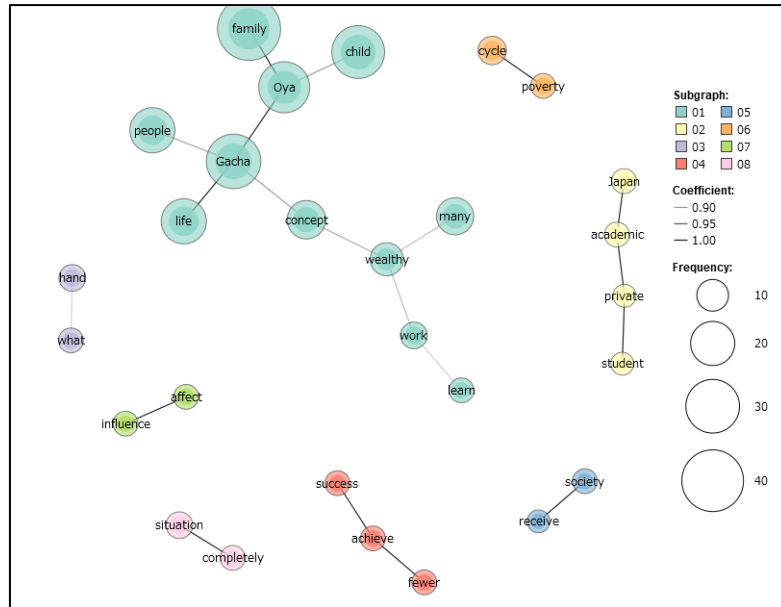


Figure 3: Co-occurrence Network of International Students' Positive Responses

7.3.2 JAPAN'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

This theme pertained to how Japan's education system influences students from different backgrounds. The terms "academic," "private," and "student" suggested that international students recognize this impact. The reference to "private" denotes that some international students believe private schools help secure academic credentials. As "Oya Gacha" relates to opportunity, many international students noted that wealthier families can afford private education, thereby increasing their chances of accessing top universities and acquiring good jobs. One student noted, "Wealthy students attend private schools and take music and sports lessons. For poor children, and even for children from average families, this is something rare." This group highlighted Japan's educational inequality, whereby wealthy children can access private education and extracurricular activities, whereas children from lower-income families lack access to these opportunities.

Some international students compared Japan's educational system to that of their own country.

In South Korea, the term "gold spoon" refers to the idea that a person's academic background and job opportunities are determined by their parents' financial status, affecting their entire life.

These students highlighted Japanese society's strong emphasis on individual effort in adulthood. Their comparisons also suggested that other societies have similar perceptions of family-based inequality, even if they are expressed differently. These observations show that international students understand the concept of "Oya Gacha" in the Japanese context and in relation to patterns of educational inequality in their home countries.

7.3.3 THE DIFFICULTY OF ACHIEVING SUCCESS

This theme highlights how family background affects success. The word "fewer" reflects the belief of some students that low-income individuals have limited opportunities, with the system favoring wealthier students. Some international students commented the following:

Children born into low-income families have fewer opportunities to get a good education compared to those from wealthy families.

7.4.2 COMBINED INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Some students highlighted that one's environment and personal choices both shape success. Effort can create opportunities, even for those experiencing poverty. However, some see this view as being inherently privileged and the product of a stable upbringing. One international student stated, "People can't choose their parents, but is it fair to blame them? Life depends on many factors, and effort can change one's circumstances." This comment conveys that life is shaped not only by parents but also by external and individual factors, such as access to education and personal choices.

Another student noted, "Poverty is cyclical. Some parents blame their children, saying 'Why are you so weak-willed?'" This comment highlights the intergenerational nature of poverty, indicating that success is about more than effort, while recognizing opportunities for self-improvement are often available. These responses also suggest that students acknowledge structural constraints and individual agency as significant factors that influence life outcomes. According to this view, success is shaped by the interaction between social circumstances and personal effort rather than by either factor alone.

7.4.3 OVERCOMING PARENTAL INFLUENCE

Some students argued that parental influence is real, but not an excuse to give up. The "Oya Gacha" mindset may discourage ambition and overlook the value of effort. Students emphasized the principle that, even in difficult economic conditions, people can change their lives through effort. As one student commented, "Parents and children shouldn't rely on others. Each person should live independently, and mutual support is key to escaping poverty." This comment conveys the value of self-reliance, suggesting that the "Oya Gacha" mindset limits effort and constrains life choices, whereas escaping poverty requires independent action. These responses suggest that some students view "Oya Gacha" as pessimistic and an underestimation of the role of individual agency. Instead, they emphasize the importance of independence, perseverance, and personal responsibility in overcoming disadvantaged circumstances.

8. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined the perceptions of Japanese and international students regarding "Oya Gacha" through the lens of cultural reproduction theory. Analyses of quantitative and qualitative data revealed common perceptions and significant differences that appeared to be shaped by the cultural and institutional contexts in which the participants were socialized.

8.1 CULTURAL REPRODUCTION AND AGREEMENT WITH "OYA GACHA"

This study found strong agreement with the concept of "Oya Gacha" among both groups. Quantitative analysis revealed that Japanese ($M = 3.16$) and international ($M = 3.23$) students exhibited similar mean levels of agreement, and the difference between the two groups was not significant. These results suggest that the recognition of how family background influences life outcomes is widely shared among students, regardless of their national background. In Japan, access to private and cram schools depends significantly on parental wealth and often determines children's educational opportunities. This is consistent with cultural reproduction theory, which links family wealth and education to academic achievement (Sengonul, 2022). Students from low-income families often lack the social and academic knowledge necessary to succeed, thereby widening the educational gap between rich and poor (White et al., 2020). Qualitative analysis showed that many students recognized the impact of parental wealth on college admissions and careers. In particular, Japan's private and cram school culture appears to reinforce economic and educational inequalities. This supports Sengonul's (2022) argument that family wealth promotes academic success. The small effect size observed in the quantitative analysis indicates that the level of agreement with the concept of "Oya Gacha" is similar across both groups despite their different cultural and national contexts.

Japanese students' views were more consistent than those of international students. Although the mean scores were similar, the higher SD and CV values among international students suggest that their views were more diverse and polarized. This suggests that cultural reproduction is widely accepted in Japan; however, using data on student backgrounds may help discern whether perceptions vary because of societal and educational differences. Some international students agreed strongly with "Oya Gacha," whereas others did not. This pattern suggests that although many students are familiar with the concept of "Oya Gacha," their interpretations may differ based on their national, cultural, and educational backgrounds. These quantitative results provide important statistical context for understanding the qualitative responses presented below.

Broadly, these findings align with international research on the intergenerational reproduction of inequality. Previous studies have demonstrated that family resources influence access to educational opportunities and

students' confidence, aspirations, and ability to navigate institutional expectations. From this perspective, the concept of "Oya Gacha" can be viewed as a local expression of a global pattern: the unequal transmission of economic, cultural, and social capital across generations. Thus, this study contributes to ongoing international discussions on social inequality by illustrating how Japanese and international students articulate these concerns through culturally specific terms and narratives.

8.2 AWARENESS OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND INTERNATIONAL DIFFERENCES

The qualitative analysis revealed that Korean students referred to the concept of a "gold spoon." Similar to the Japanese students, they recognized that parental finances significantly influence educational and career opportunities. This is consistent with research showing that differences in parental involvement in education between families from different social backgrounds contribute to educational inequality (Kosutic, 2017; Sengonul, 2022). However, some international students believed that individual effort could overcome parental influence.

Compared to Japanese students, a higher percentage of international students (43.3%) strongly agreed with the concept of "Oya Gacha." This suggests that international students may be more affected by social inequality in their home countries. In contrast, Japanese students were more aware of how social structures reinforce "Oya Gacha." This difference is significant in the context of comparative research on social inequality, which indicates that attitudes toward meritocracy, mobility, and personal responsibility differ across national contexts. In societies where upward mobility is perceived as achievable, students may emphasize individual effort and personal initiative. Conversely, in countries where educational competition and class-based inequalities are highly visible, students may consider family background to be the decisive factor in one's chances in life.

8.3 INDIVIDUAL EFFORT AND THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS

Many students criticized the concept of "Oya Gacha." Both groups included students who claimed that effort shapes one's future and parental influence is exaggerated. This may be because, for those from advantaged backgrounds, the education system appears to be fair and neutral, with such individuals failing to see how it reflects the existing power structure in society and gives advantages to children who are more familiar with the dominant culture (Kosutic, 2017). Many Japanese students acknowledged that although the family environment is important, life outcomes can be affected by individual effort. This suggests that they understood cultural reproduction theory but emphasized personal responsibility as much or more than parental influence. Some students argued that the core problem is not parents but the social system itself and advocated for broader social reforms.

Similarly, international students who rejected the concept of "Oya Gacha" believed that while environmental factors play a role, they do not determine success. Students from high-mobility societies emphasized effort over parental influence in achieving success. They also noted that scholarship programs and social support systems are crucial factors in overcoming the effects of parental financial status (Sengonul, 2022). Securing funding for college is a critical factor in academic success and a significant source of stress (White et al., 2020). Therefore, expanding scholarship programs and widening access to social support systems are necessary to improve access to educational opportunities for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The findings are also related to a broader debate in global inequality research on the relationship between structural constraints and individual effort. Several respondents acknowledged the existence of inequality while questioning whether the term "Oya Gacha" might diminish people's sense of personal responsibility. This ambivalence reflects international findings showing that students from disadvantaged backgrounds often experience structural barriers and strong expectations to succeed through merit and effort. Therefore, this study suggests that "Oya Gacha" should not be understood as merely a pessimistic belief and may instead function as a social expression through which students reflect on the relationship between family background and individual effort.

8.4 FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies should include gender and country data to analyze how these factors shape perceptions of "Oya Gacha." Additionally, future research should collect a wide range of demographic and socioeconomic variables, such as nationality, gender, parental education level, household income, first-generation college student status, scholarship status, type of high school attended, and urban–rural background. Incorporating these variables would enable precise examination of how students' social positions shape their interpretations of educational inequality and whether perceptions of the concept of "Oya Gacha" vary systematically across social and demographic groups.

9. IMPLICATIONS

This study examined perceptions of educational inequalities in Japan and the validity of the concept of "Oya Gacha." It analyzed attitudinal differences between Japanese and international students using cultural

reproduction theory. The implications of this study are summarized below.

9.1 JAPANESE SOCIAL ISSUES EXPLAINED BY CULTURAL AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION THEORY

This study found that many Japanese students believe that family wealth strongly influences educational and career opportunities, thus perpetuating social inequality. Okabe (2025) noted that SES at birth affects academic achievement and access to education, warning that overemphasizing personal effort risks misleading future leaders. He emphasized the need for future leaders to understand educational inequality. Japanese students strongly linked parental wealth to academic and career success, confirming the popularity and salience of cultural reproduction theory as a framework for understanding Japanese society. Furthermore, including international students' views provided a global perspective on educational inequality in Japan. Some international students believed that parental influence could be overcome through effort, while others disagreed, which may depend on the equality levels of their own countries.

9.2 SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF “OYA GACHA” AND POSSIBILITIES FOR CHANGING AWARENESS

This study demonstrated that “Oya Gacha” refers to more than personal dissatisfaction; it highlights social inequality. For many Japanese students, “Oya Gacha” also invites structural reforms. In Japan, where personal responsibility is emphasized, “Oya Gacha” encourages reflection on structural constraints to success. International students' views varied by country. The results suggested that those from low-mobility societies consider parental wealth to be the decisive factor, whereas those from high-mobility societies value individual effort more. This suggests that views on “Oya Gacha” vary with differences in social structures. This study can raise awareness of the role of parental influence and social structures in fostering social injustice, and future studies should examine different national and social backgrounds to assess how nationality and social context affect perceptions of the significance of parental wealth in determining life outcomes. At the international level, the concept of “Oya Gacha” could be a useful starting point for comparative research on educational inequality. Similar ideas appear in other societies under different terms, such as inherited advantage, family background effects, and class reproduction. Examining how these concepts are discussed in different countries could help researchers better understand how students perceive fairness, social mobility, and social inequality in various cultural contexts. Future studies should incorporate multivariate analyses using more extensive demographic data to determine if agreement with the concept of “Oya Gacha” is more strongly associated with nationality, family SES, parental education, or first-generation status.

REFERENCES

- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. Sage Publications.
- Grant, P. D., & Kniess, D. (2023). ‘I just kind of felt like country come to town:’ College student experiences for rural students at one flagship university. *The Rural Educator*, 44(3), 1–16.
<https://doi.org/10.55533/2643-9662.1357>
- Higuchi, K. (2016). A two-step approach to quantitative content analysis: KH Coder tutorial using Anne of Green Gables (Part I). *Ritsumeikan Social Science Review* 52(3), 77–91.
<http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/file.jsp?id=325881>
- Higuchi, K. (2017). A two-step approach to quantitative content analysis: KH Coder tutorial using Anne of Green Gables (Part II). *Ritsumeikan Social Science Review*, 53(1), 137–147.
<https://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/file.jsp?id=346128>
- Hida, M. (2021). “The concept of Oya Gacha is correct” – The reason an American economist does not deny the lottery of life. [“Oya Gacha toiu gainen wa tadashii.” Americajin keizaigakusha ga jinsei no takarakuji wo hiteishinai wake] PRESIDENT Online. December 5, 2021. Accessed December 20, 2024.
<https://president.jp/articles/-/52516?page=1> [Published in Japanese]
- Jiyu Kokuminsha. (2021). Basic Knowledge of the Year Book of the Contemporary Society Selection - U-CAN New Words & Buzzwords Award - 38th Edition - 2021 Winning Words. Accessed January 12, 2024.
<https://www.jiyu.co.jp/singo/index.php?eid=00038> [published in Japanese]
- Kosutic, I. (2017). The role of cultural capital in higher education access and institutional choice. *CEPS Journal*, 7(1), 149–169.
- Okabe, T. (2025). “Which high school you go to” is actually determined by your birth. Examining educational inequality through the unique ‘high school realities’ of Kyoto University Students.” [“Dokono Koukou ni ikuka” wa, jitsuwa “Umare” ga kimeteiru. Tokushu sugiru Kyoodaisei “Koukou aruaru” kara kyouiku kakusa wo kanngaeta.]. JBpress. January 21, 2025. Accessed January 25, 2025.
<https://jbpress.ismedia.jp/articles/-/84282> [Published in Japanese]
- Sengonul, T. (2022). A review of the relationship between parental involvement and children’s academic achievement and the role of family socioeconomic status in this relationship. *Pegem Journal of Education*

and Instruction, 12(2), 32–57.

White, J. W., Pascale, A., & Aragon, S. (2020). Collegiate cultural capital and integration into the college community. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 38(1), 34–52.