

Transforming English Language Education: The Role of Filipino Assistant Language Teachers in Japan's Internationalization Efforts

Cyrus Pontawe Casingal¹, Lovejoy Rivero Caerlang²

Curriculum and Implementation Division, Department of Education, Makati City, Philippines¹,
Yamaguchi, Japan²

Corresponding Author Email: cyrus.casingal@deped.gov.ph

Abstract: This study examines the experiences, challenges, and contributions of Filipino Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in Japan's educational system. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from seven Filipino ALTs across different Japanese prefectures through structured questionnaires examining demographic characteristics and professional experiences, complemented by in-depth narrative accounts of their cultural adaptation processes. Findings reveal that Filipino ALTs navigate complex cultural territories in their professional practice. In doing so, they develop hybridized professional identities that bridge Filipino and Japanese educational paradigms. These educators integrate distinctive pedagogical approaches from Philippine educational practices, including interactive learning strategies and culturally responsive teaching methods. Language barriers emerged as the most significant challenge. However, participants demonstrated remarkable resilience in developing adaptation strategies to overcome these obstacles. The unique cultural positioning of Filipino ALTs as Asian English language educators challenges traditional assumptions about native speaker models. Their experiences offer innovative approaches to cross-cultural education that draw from both Eastern pedagogical traditions. This research contributes to understanding how teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds navigate international educational contexts. It demonstrates how these educators develop professional identities that bridge multiple cultural traditions while maintaining their distinctive pedagogical contributions.

Keywords: Filipino Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), Cultural hybridization, English Language Education, Cross-cultural Adaptation, Team-teaching Dynamics

A. Introduction

Japan's education system has undergone major changes in English language education, particularly through adding Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) to public schools. While the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program traditionally recruited teachers from Western English-speaking countries, recent years have seen more Filipino ALTs in Japanese classrooms. This change offers a unique chance to study how teachers from an Asian English-speaking country work in and contribute to Japan's schools through their distinctive cultural and teaching approaches.

Filipino ALTs represent a complex mix of educational migration, cultural exchange, and teaching innovation. As English teachers from a multilingual Asian country with strong Western influences, Filipino educators hold a unique position in Japanese schools. Their presence challenges traditional ideas about English teaching while potentially offering new approaches to cross-cultural education. Unlike Western ALTs, Filipino teachers bring Asian cultural

sensitivity combined with English expertise, possibly providing more culturally appropriate ways to teach English in Japanese classrooms.

However, Filipino ALTs face unique challenges in establishing their professional identity as English teachers, dealing with expectations shaped by both Western and Asian educational systems. In Japanese schools, they must balance multiple roles as English teachers, cultural ambassadors, and educational innovators. Their experiences depend on relationships with Japanese Teachers of English, students, school administrators, and local communities, which affect both their teaching success and professional growth. Understanding these relationships is important for creating better support systems for ALTs from diverse backgrounds and contributes to broader discussions about English education in Asia and the role of non-native English teachers in international settings.

Cultural Navigation and Identity Formation

This cultural navigation process involves continuous adaptation and identity reconstruction as Filipino ALTs balance their roles as English language educators with their Asian cultural heritage. Studies by Park (2015) suggest that Asian English teachers often develop unique strategies for maintaining cultural authenticity while meeting the expectations of their host institutions. The experience of Filipino ALTs in Japan exemplifies what Berger et al. (2024) terms "cultural hybridization" in international education, where educators create new professional identities that bridge multiple cultural paradigms.

Distinctive Pedagogical Approaches

Filipino ALTs bring distinctive pedagogical approaches shaped by their own educational experiences and cultural backgrounds. The Philippine education system's historical influences from both American and Asian educational models (Weisband, 2018) enable Filipino teachers to implement teaching strategies that effectively bridge Western and Asian pedagogical traditions. This unique positioning allows them to develop innovative approaches that respond to the specific needs of Japanese students while maintaining alignment with established English teaching methodologies.

Research by Hung et al. (2021) indicates that Filipino ALTs often incorporate elements of Philippine educational practices, such as interactive learning and community-based teaching approaches, into their Japanese classroom activities. These adaptations demonstrate what Rawat & Yadav (2024) describe as "pedagogical transformation," where teachers modify and enhance their teaching methods to create culturally responsive learning environments. Consequently, the resulting synthesis of teaching approaches contributes to the diversification of English language education in Japan.

Professional Relationships and Collaboration

The development of professional relationships within Japanese schools represents a critical aspect of Filipino ALTs' experiences. Studies by Hiratsuka (2023) emphasize the importance of effective collaboration between ALTs and Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) in creating successful learning environments. However, Filipino ALTs must navigate complex interpersonal dynamics while establishing their professional authority and building trust with colleagues.

Research Gap

This study addresses a significant gap in research by examining the lived experiences of Filipino Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in Japan's educational system, specifically focusing on how they navigate their unique position at the intersection of cultural heritage,

professional responsibilities, and host country expectations. While existing literature covers general ALT experiences and Asian English teacher challenges separately, there is limited understanding of how Filipino ALTs serve as cultural bridges through "cultural diplomacy skills" while facing distinct challenges including communication barriers, workplace adaptation, and professional isolation. The research explores how these educators contribute beyond traditional instruction by challenging assumptions about English teaching and introducing innovative cross-cultural educational models that enhance student engagement and represent "transformative international education," though they must navigate complex professional relationships, particularly in team-teaching partnerships where cultural proximity can both facilitate collaboration and complicate role expectations. The study addresses seven key research questions examining Filipino ALTs' experiences, motivations, cultural navigation strategies, professional challenges, relationship development, unique educational contributions, and career development impacts, while highlighting how current support systems may inadequately address their diverse needs, ultimately aiming to provide in-depth insights into their complex professional experiences and educational impact within Japan's school system.

B. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of Filipino ALTs' experiences in Japan (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023). The research design followed a concurrent triangulation strategy (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2023), where different types of data were collected simultaneously and integrated during the analysis phase. This approach allowed both breadth and depth in examining the multiple dimensions of ALTs' professional lives, challenges, and contributions (Johnson & Christensen, 2024).

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to identify Filipino ALTs working in Japanese educational institutions. The inclusion criteria required participants to be Filipino nationals, currently employed as ALTs in Japanese schools, and with at least six months of teaching experience in Japan. The study recruited participants (N=7) from diverse prefectures across Japan (Aomori, Nara, Osaka, Yamaguchi, Ibaraki, Tokyo, and Kanagawa) to capture regional variations in the ALT experience. The demographic profile in Tables 1-3.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	Category	Number of Participants (N=7)
Gender	Male	3
	Female	4
Age Range	26-30 years	2
	31-35 years	5
Educational Attainment	Bachelor's Degree	4
	Master's Degree	2
	Doctorate Degree	1

Table 2. Professional Background of the Participants

Characteristics	Category	Number of Participants (N=7)
Field of Study/Specialization	Education/English	2
	General Education	2
	Linguistics	1
	Business	1
	Science	1
	None	1
Teaching Experience in the Philippines	Less than a year	1
	4-6 years	2
	7-10 years	1
	More than 10 years	2
Years as ALT in Japan	Less than 1 year	4
	1-2 years	2
	3-5 years	1

Table 3. Current Teaching Placement in Japan

Characteristics	Category	Number of Participants (N=7)
Prefecture	Aomori	1
	Nara	1
	Osaka	1
	Yamaguchi	1
	Ibaraki	1
	Tokyo (Bunkyo)	1
	Kanagawa	1
	Elementary School	4
School Type	Junior High School	2
	Senior High School	2
	Other	1

**Note: Some participants taught at multiple school types.*

Data Collection Procedures

This study employed a comprehensive multi-method data collection approach to thoroughly examine Filipino ALT experiences in Japan. The primary method involved a detailed online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms between February and March 2025, which gathered demographic information, Likert-scale assessments of participants' self-reported competencies in six key areas (Japanese language skills, cultural understanding, teaching methodology, classroom management, cross-cultural communication, lesson planning, and team-teaching), multiple-choice questions on motivations and professional development, and open-ended questions exploring preparation strategies, challenges, cultural adaptation, pedagogical contributions, integration of Filipino teaching methods, and career plans.

Complementing the questionnaire, participants provided extended written narratives addressing four critical dimensions of their ALT experience: Journey Reflection (decision-making processes, expectations versus reality, preparation methods, and family responses), Cultural Navigation (strategies for bridging Filipino and Japanese environments with specific school-based examples), Professional Challenges and Solutions (obstacles and innovative solutions, particularly regarding communication barriers, team-teaching dynamics, and

student engagement), and Support Systems and Impact (valuable resources, additional needs, and methods for building professional connections). The research was further contextualized through document analysis of ALT program guidelines, school curricula, English language education policies, previous research literature, and official statistics on Filipino ALTs in Japan's education system, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences within broader institutional and policy frameworks.

Data Analysis

The study employed a comprehensive analytical approach to address the mixed-methods nature of the data. For quantitative analysis, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software (version 28.0) to calculate frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations for demographic variables; analyze Likert-scale responses on self-reported competencies; identify patterns in multiple-choice responses regarding challenges, motivations, and contributions; and generate cross-tabulations to examine relationships between variables (e.g., prior teaching experience and reported challenges).

For qualitative analysis, data from open-ended survey responses and narrative accounts were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-step approach: familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and report production. Two researchers conducted line-by-line coding independently using NVivo 14 software. The analysis focused on four predetermined thematic areas aligned with the research questions: cultural navigation and professional identity, pedagogical innovations and teaching approaches, professional relationships and community integration, and challenges and support systems.

Following the mixed-methods design, quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated using a triangulation protocol (Farmer et al., 2006). This process involved sorting findings from each data source, comparing findings to determine convergence, complementarity, or dissonance, creating a unified set of meta-themes that represented the integrated understanding, and member checking with a subset of participants to validate interpretations.

Table 4. Self-Reported Competency Levels of Participants

Competency Area	Mean Score	Range
Japanese Language Skills	1.86	1-3
Understanding of Japanese Culture	3.57	2-5
Teaching Methodology	4.43	3-5
Classroom Management	4.29	3-5
Cross-cultural communication	3.43	2-5
Lesson Planning	4.57	4-5
Team-teaching	4.14	3-5

Ethical Consideration

This study implemented comprehensive ethical safeguards to protect participants and ensure research integrity. All seven Filipino ALT participants provided written informed consent after receiving detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights including voluntary participation and withdrawal. Multiple identity protection measures were employed, including pseudonyms, removal of identifying information, data aggregation, and secure password-protected storage of raw data. Researchers addressed potential power dynamics by assuring participants that their responses would not affect employment status and that findings would be presented with cultural and professional sensitivity. Compliance with data protection regulations included encrypted digital files stored on secure servers with

restricted access, and participants were offered reciprocal benefits including access to study findings, virtual workshops, and professional development resources.

The methodology acknowledges several important limitations that may affect the study's scope and applicability. The small sample size of seven participants limits generalizability to the broader Filipino ALT population in Japan, while self-selection bias may have attracted participants with particularly strong opinions or experiences. Language barriers were minimized by conducting research in English, though some experiential nuances might have been better captured in Filipino languages. The cross-sectional design provides a snapshot of experiences at one point in time rather than tracking longitudinal changes, and the reliance on self-reported data without classroom observations may limit validation of participants' accounts of their actual teaching practices. These limitations, while acknowledged, do not diminish the study's value in providing initial insights into this under-researched population.

Table 5. Primary Challenges Reported by Participants

Challenge	Number of Participants Reporting (N=7)	Percentage
Language barrier	6	85.7%
Cultural differences	3	42.9%
Communication with Japanese teachers	5	71.4%
Classroom Management	3	42.9%
Student engagement	2	28.6%
Work-life balance	1	14.3%
Administrative duties	1	14.3%
Others	2	28.6%

Table 6. Reported Contributions to School Communities

Contribution	Number of Participants (N=7)	Percentage
Improved students' English-speaking skills	7	100%
Enhanced cultural understanding	7	100%
Introduced innovative teaching methods	5	71.4%
Strengthened school-community relations	2	28.6%
Supported extra-curricular activities	5	71.4%

C. Results

The findings of this study are organized around four thematic areas: (1) Cultural Navigation and Professional Identity, (2) Pedagogical Innovations and Teaching Approaches, (3) Professional Relationships and Community Integration, and (4) Challenges and Support Systems.

1. Cultural Navigation and Professional Identity

Motivations and Preparation

Filipino ALTs reported multiple motivations for pursuing teaching positions in Japan, with cultural exchange (71.4%), interest in Japanese language and culture (71.4%), and financial opportunities (57.1%) being the most frequently cited reasons. Professional development (42.9%) and career change (57.1%) were also significant factors in their decision-making process. One participant explained:

> "When I first came here, it was really mixed emotions. Like, I am excited but at the same time nervous because it was my first time to be this away from my family and from what I got used to be doing. But I just chose to be strong and optimistic because I need to do this not only for myself but for my family who needs me the most."

Preparation strategies varied among participants, with most engaging in independent research about Japanese culture and the educational system (71.4%). Others took more structured approaches, including TEFL certification courses (14.3%) and participation in company-provided training programs (28.6%). This variation in preparation approaches reflects what Hashimoto (2015) noted about the diverse pathways through which international educators enter the Japanese education system. Most participants acknowledged limitations in their preparation, particularly regarding Japanese language skills, which received the lowest self-reported competency rating ($M=1.86$ on a 5-point scale). This finding supports previous research by Widodo et al. (2020) highlighting the challenges faced by Asian teachers in establishing their professional legitimacy in foreign contexts, particularly when linguistic barriers compound other adaptation challenges. The limited language preparation also reflects what Escarda (2024) identified as a common challenge among Filipino ALTs working in Japanese elementary schools, where communication barriers significantly impact initial teaching effectiveness.

Cultural Hybridization

Filipino ALTs develop what researchers call "cultural hybridization" - they create professional identities that blend Filipino and Japanese educational approaches through continuous adaptation and identity reconstruction. Participants emphasized that learning Japanese culture is essential, with one noting that you cannot simply apply home country practices without respecting local customs. This adaptability emerged as a key strength, with 57.1% of participants highlighting how Filipinos' multicultural backgrounds help them adjust to Japanese school environments more easily than other nationalities might.

The study found that 42.9% of participants reported positive reception from Japanese colleagues and students, particularly regarding their accent intelligibility and cultural affinity as fellow Asians. This challenges traditional assumptions about native English speakers being superior teachers, as one participant explained that students and staff prefer Filipino ALTs because their accent is easier to understand and they adapt better to school environments. Their position as Asian English educators offers unique advantages in cross-cultural communication and student engagement, allowing them to serve as effective cultural bridges between Filipino and Japanese educational contexts while maintaining professional authenticity.

2. Pedagogical Innovations and Teaching Approaches

Teaching Methodologies

Filipino ALTs brought distinctive teaching methods from their educational experiences in the Philippines, including explicit teaching (28.6%), inductive method (14.3%), and whole brain-based teaching (14.3%). These approaches were adapted to meet the specific needs of Japanese students learning English as a foreign language. One participant with extensive Philippine teaching experience explained they use the inductive method because they find it effective for their type of learners, while another noted that their Japanese Teacher of English praised explicit teaching as very effective for learning sentence structures.

The teaching methods Filipino ALTs use reflect their ability to bridge Western and Asian educational traditions, drawing from the Philippines' historical influences from both American

and Asian educational models. These educators modify and enhance their teaching methods to create culturally appropriate learning environments that work well in Japanese classrooms. The collaborative validation from Japanese teachers shows that Filipino ALTs bring valuable teaching perspectives that can improve English language instruction, particularly through their ability to adapt proven teaching methods to local educational contexts.

Cultural Integration in Lessons

Most participants (85.7%) incorporated Filipino cultural elements into their lessons, especially during special occasions and cultural events. This approach serves both teaching purposes and promotes cross-cultural understanding by using cultural content as a vehicle for language learning. One participant explained how they use Filipino tourist spots, festivals, and cuisine in grammar examples and slides, while also introducing Filipino holiday traditions like Christmas and New Year customs during conversation classes and games.

Participants also integrated Filipino games into classroom activities, with one describing how they shared Filipino games during a Christmas party with students. These cultural sharing practices make language learning more meaningful and engaging for students by providing authentic contexts for English use. This approach allows Filipino ALTs to serve as cultural bridges between Japanese students and international perspectives, creating valuable cross-cultural learning experiences that enrich English education while challenging traditional teaching assumptions about what content should be used in language classrooms.

Student Engagement Strategies

All participants reported using interactive teaching methods like games, role-playing, and participatory activities to engage students. Over half (57.1%) connected these engagement strategies directly to Filipino educational values and teaching styles. One participant explained how they learned to incorporate games into lessons while teaching English in Thailand, always ensuring activities align with daily learning objectives. This approach combines fun with educational rigor to create effective learning experiences.

Participants noted that their Filipino "fun-loving nature" makes it easier to achieve the ALT goal of making English lessons enjoyable for students. One participant explained that being Filipino helps them create wonderful learning experiences through fun activities and games. This shows how Filipino ALTs use their cultural characteristics as teaching strengths, drawing on their natural inclination toward interactive approaches to boost student motivation and language learning in Japanese classrooms.

3. Professional Relationships and Community Integration

Team Teaching Dynamics

Team-teaching relationships between Filipino ALTs and Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) or Homeroom Teachers (HRTs) were central to participants' professional experiences. While participants rated their team-teaching competency relatively high, 71.4% identified communication with Japanese teachers as a significant challenge. Team-teaching arrangements varied greatly across schools, with some participants serving as main teachers while JTEs assisted, while others followed traditional models where they assisted Japanese teachers and needed approval for all activities.

These contrasting experiences show how role expectations and professional boundaries can differ significantly between schools. The effectiveness of partnerships often depended on clear communication and role definition, with participants emphasizing the importance of pre-planning meetings with HRTs and JTEs before classroom instruction. Some participants found

team-teaching to be their best form of support, while others had to adapt completely to Japanese teaching styles and cultural expectations. These varied experiences reflect the ongoing need for continuous negotiation of roles, responsibilities, and cultural expectations in successful Filipino ALT-Japanese teacher partnerships.

Relationships with School Community

Participants reported generally positive relationships with Japanese colleagues, students, and school administration, with average ratings of 4.14, 4.57, and 3.71 respectively on a 5-point scale. However, cultural and linguistic barriers sometimes limited the depth of these relationships:

> "Before coming to Japan, I thought I would make Japanese friends in the workplace, but the people I'm closest to at school are my foreign coworkers. It's difficult to build friendships with Japanese colleagues due to the language barrier and their culture of keeping to themselves."

Several participants (42.9%) described serving as cultural bridges within their school communities, facilitating understanding between Japanese and international perspectives. All participants (100%) reported contributing to enhanced cultural understanding in their schools, and 71.4% noted introducing innovative teaching methods.

4. Challenges and Support Systems

Primary Challenges

Language barriers represented the most significant challenge for Filipino ALTs, reported by 85.7% of participants. This barrier affected multiple dimensions of their professional experience, including classroom instruction, collaboration with Japanese colleagues, and administrative tasks:

> "Having a rowdy class. I asked the Japanese teacher to help me out with classroom management."

> "Language barrier is very high. When in conversation with the JTEs, adjustment is really a key to understanding. Some JTE only say keywords but not full sentences, so I need to guess the meaning of those words and what does he/she want to convey."

Cultural differences (42.9%), classroom management (42.9%), and student engagement (28.6%) were also identified as significant challenges. Several participants noted difficulties navigating Japanese educational norms and expectations:

> "Being ALTs we are not in-charge of the discipline inside the classroom and each HRT (Homeroom teacher) has their own teaching strategies and classroom management rules that we have to consider."

Adaptation Strategies

Participants developed various strategies to address these challenges. For language barriers, approaches included:

- ✓ Using translation apps and services (42.9%)
- ✓ Learning basic Japanese language skills (85.7%)
- ✓ Employing visual aids and gestures (57.1%)
- ✓ Requesting assistance from Japanese colleagues (71.4%)

One participant described their adaptation process:

> "Since communication barriers has the greatest impact, I would say that I struggled to this the most. Its good that there are translation apps but it isnt sufficient. You really need to learn the language. I tried to listen and watch videos."

Support Systems

Participants identified several valuable support systems for their professional development, including:

- ✓ Prefecture-organized training (57.1%)
- ✓ Online courses (57.1%)
- ✓ Peer learning groups (42.9%)
- ✓ School-based workshops (28.6%)
- ✓ Company training programs (28.6%)
- ✓ Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) conferences (28.6%)

Fellow ALTs, particularly those with Japanese language skills or longer experience in Japan, were frequently mentioned as important sources of support:

> "I am grateful that when I started at this school, there was an ALT who can speak Japanese. He understood how things worked and helped us by sharing important information."

> "Having a Filipino co-ALT in my school is a great help in staying motivated with my work. We talk and exchange ideas related to work."

Professional Development

Most participants (85.7%) expressed a strong intention to continue working as ALTs in Japan, indicating high job satisfaction despite the challenges encountered. Many participants (71.4%) reported that their ALT experience had significantly influenced their professional goals and career trajectories:

> "My experience as an ALT has significantly shaped my professional goals by deepening my passion for education and cross-cultural communication. Working in Japanese schools has taught me the importance of adaptability, patience, and creativity in the classroom."

> "My experience as an ALT motivated me to enroll in a diploma program at UPOU to enhance my teaching strategies in English as a foreign language, especially for Japanese students who primarily study English for academic purposes."

D. Discussion

Cultural Competence and Professional Identity

The experiences of Filipino ALTs in Japan illustrate the complex interplay between cultural background, professional identity, and teaching effectiveness in international educational contexts. The findings align with Park's (2015) research on Asian English teachers, which suggests that educators from non-Western backgrounds develop unique strategies for maintaining cultural authenticity while meeting the expectations of host institutions. Filipino ALTs in this study demonstrated this process through their conscious adaptation to Japanese educational norms while leveraging their Filipino cultural background as a professional asset.

The concept of "cultural hybridization" (Berger et al., 2024) is particularly relevant to understanding how Filipino ALTs navigate their professional roles. Unlike ALTs from Western countries who may experience greater cultural distance from Japanese educational contexts, Filipino educators occupy an intermediate position, sharing certain Asian cultural values while

bringing distinctive perspectives on English language education. This cultural positioning allows them to serve as what Liu-Farrer (2020) terms "cultural bridges," facilitating understanding between Japanese communities and international perspectives.

The participants' emphasis on adaptability as a Filipino cultural strength supports Widodo et al.'s (2020) findings on the construction of language teacher professional identity in global contexts. As Balgoa (2019) observed in previous research on Filipino English teachers in Japan, this cultural adaptability represents a significant advantage in establishing professional legitimacy and effectiveness within Japanese schools. However, the challenges of navigating between Filipino and Japanese educational paradigms also illustrate what Kumar (2024) described as "cultural expectation dissonance," requiring continuous negotiation and adaptation.

Pedagogical Contributions and Teaching Approaches

The pedagogical approaches reported by Filipino ALTs reflect a synthesis of Philippine educational practices and adaptations to Japanese educational contexts. This aligns with research by Hung et al. (2021) suggesting that Filipino educators often incorporate elements of Philippine teaching approaches into their international classroom activities. The emphasis on interactive learning, explicit teaching methods, and engagement strategies demonstrates what Rawat & Yadav (2024) describe as "pedagogical transformation," where teachers modify and enhance their methods to create culturally responsive learning environments.

The participants' focus on student engagement through games, cultural activities, and interactive methods reflects both Filipino educational values and strategic adaptations to the Japanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. As Stewart (2020) noted in research on Filipino English teachers in Japan, this approach represents a distinctive contribution to Japanese English education, potentially offering more culturally responsive approaches than those traditionally associated with Western ALTs.

The integration of Filipino cultural elements into English lessons serves multiple pedagogical purposes, including vocabulary development, cultural awareness, and student motivation. This practice exemplifies Byram & Wagner's (2018) concept of language teaching for intercultural and international dialogue, where cultural content becomes a vehicle for language acquisition while simultaneously fostering cross-cultural understanding. The effectiveness of this approach is supported by Butler's (2015) research on English language education among young learners in East Asia, which emphasizes the importance of culturally relevant content in language acquisition.

Professional Relationships and School Integration

The team-teaching dynamics described by participants highlight both the potential and challenges of collaborative language teaching in Japanese schools. Hiratsuka's (2023) research on the professional identities of Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) and their relationships with Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) identified similar patterns of role negotiation and collaborative practice. The varied experiences reported by participants—from serving as primary instructors to functioning as assistants—reflect the diversity of team-teaching arrangements in Japanese schools and the importance of clear role definition, as emphasized by Mattessich & Johnson (2018).

The findings regarding relationships with the broader school community align with research by Nagatomo (2016) on the multiple roles foreign English teachers must balance in Japanese educational settings. As Nagatomo observed, these roles extend beyond language instruction to include cultural ambassador and educational innovator functions. The participants' efforts

to integrate into school communities while maintaining their cultural identity exemplify what Gillitt (2017) terms "cultural diplomacy skills," enabling ALTs to foster positive cross-cultural relationships while navigating complex institutional dynamics.

The challenge of developing deeper personal relationships with Japanese colleagues, reported by several participants, reflects patterns identified in previous research on international teachers in Japan. As Liu-Farrer (2020) noted in research on immigrant integration in Japan, linguistic and cultural barriers often limit social integration despite professional acceptance. This underscores the importance of language acquisition and cultural adaptation for more comprehensive integration into Japanese school communities.

Challenges and Support Systems

The challenges reported by participants—particularly regarding language barriers and cultural differences—are consistent with findings from Escarda's (2024) research on Filipino ALTs in Japanese elementary schools. These challenges illustrate what Qiao et al. (2023) described as "expectation disparity" between ALTs' prepared roles and actual responsibilities, requiring significant adaptation and resilience. The language barrier, identified as the most significant challenge by 85.7% of participants, represents a fundamental obstacle to both professional effectiveness and personal integration, underscoring the critical importance of Japanese language acquisition for ALTs.

The support systems valued by participants reflect the importance of both formal and informal professional development opportunities. Bond & Blevins' (2020) research on faculty professional development emphasized the significance of such support networks, particularly for educators navigating cultural and professional transitions. As Rodkey & Rodkey (2020) noted, these support structures are especially crucial for Asian ALTs who must navigate both professional and cultural adaptations simultaneously.

The high reported intention to continue as ALTs (85.7%) suggests that despite the challenges encountered, participants found their experiences professionally and personally rewarding. This aligns with Fermin's (2020) research on the motivations of Filipino ALTs in the JET Programme, which identified both professional development and cultural experience as key factors in job satisfaction. The influence of the ALT experience on participants' professional goals—including further education in language teaching methodologies and career advancement—demonstrates the potential of international teaching experiences to shape professional trajectories in significant ways.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study contribute to several theoretical frameworks in international education and language teaching. First, they extend understanding of what Pennington & Richards (2016) termed the integration of personal, contextual, and professional factors in teacher identity formation, particularly in cross-cultural contexts. The experiences of Filipino ALTs demonstrate how cultural background influences teaching approaches and professional adaptation in ways that both align with and diverge from patterns observed among Western educators in similar contexts.

Second, the findings contribute to ongoing critiques of native-speakerism in language education, supporting Selvi et al.'s (2024) challenge to the native speaker fallacy. The positive reception of Filipino ALTs—particularly regarding accent intelligibility and teaching effectiveness—illustrates how non-native English-speaking teachers can leverage their own language learning experiences and cultural knowledge to enhance language education in

international contexts. As Al Amin & Greenwood (2018) argued, this represents a significant advantage rather than a limitation in language teaching.

Finally, the study contributes to understanding the internationalization of Japanese education through what Lehtomäki et al. (2015) termed "transformative international education." The presence of Filipino ALTs introduces new models of cross-cultural education that challenge traditional assumptions about English language teaching while potentially enhancing both language acquisition and cultural understanding. This aligns with Dimmock's (2020) vision of connecting educational leadership across Western and Asian contexts through cross-cultural comparative perspectives.

Practical Implications

The findings highlight critical areas for enhancing Filipino ALTs' effectiveness in Japanese educational settings. Most urgently, comprehensive language support systems are needed to address the significant communication barriers that hinder professional integration and teaching effectiveness. This should be coupled with robust cultural orientation programs addressing both general Japanese cultural norms and specific educational practices. Additionally, standardized team-teaching guidelines, tailored professional development opportunities, and structured community integration support would significantly enhance ALT performance and satisfaction.

Recognizing and leveraging Filipino ALTs' unique cultural perspectives and pedagogical approaches would transform their perceived challenges into assets for Japanese English education. Their cultural proximity to Japan as fellow Asians, combined with their distinctive educational background, positions them as valuable bridges between Eastern and Western educational paradigms. By implementing these practical measures, educational institutions can harness the full potential of Filipino ALTs, not merely as language instructors but as transformative agents in Japan's ongoing internationalization of education, benefiting both students and the broader educational community.

E. Conclusion

This study examined Filipino Assistant Language Teachers' (ALTs) experiences in Japan's schools, showing how they balance Asian and Western educational approaches while establishing their professional credibility. Filipino ALTs create blended professional identities that connect different educational traditions and cultural perspectives.

The research found that Filipino ALTs bring unique teaching methods to Japanese English education, using interactive learning, direct teaching, and community-based approaches from Philippine schools. When adapted to Japanese classrooms, these methods offer new solutions for English instruction challenges. Filipino ALTs develop teaching approaches that work well with Japanese students while bringing international viewpoints to their classes.

Professional relationships in Japanese schools were crucial for Filipino ALTs' success. Team-teaching arrangements varied between schools, but successful partnerships required clear communication, mutual understanding, and well-defined roles. Filipino ALTs often acted as cultural bridges in their school communities, helping connect Japanese and international perspectives and supporting Japan's educational internationalization.

Language barriers were the biggest challenge for Filipino ALTs, affecting many aspects of their work. However, participants showed strong resilience by developing coping strategies like using translation tools, non-verbal communication, and actively learning Japanese. Support

systems, especially peer networks and professional development programs, were essential for their growth and adaptation.

Filipino ALTs' experiences represent an important example of how international education is changing. As Asian English teachers, they challenge traditional ideas about native speakers being the best language teachers while offering new culturally-responsive teaching approaches. Their adaptability, cultural awareness, and teaching innovations benefit not only English education in Japan but also broader conversations about international education. This research helps us understand how teachers from different cultural backgrounds can successfully work internationally and contribute to language education policy and teacher training programs.

F. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations emerge for enhancing the effectiveness of Filipino ALTs in the Japanese educational system. For program administrators and educational institutions, implementing comprehensive language support programs, enhancing cultural orientation, establishing standardized team-teaching guidelines, creating tailored professional development opportunities, and fostering community integration initiatives would significantly improve ALT experiences and effectiveness. Current and prospective Filipino ALTs would benefit from prioritizing Japanese language acquisition, developing cultural adaptation strategies, cultivating reflective teaching practices, strategically leveraging Filipino cultural assets in their teaching, and building supportive professional networks with both Filipino and international ALT communities.

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies tracking Filipino ALTs over extended periods, expanding participation to include more diverse respondents across different regions and school types, incorporating perspectives from Japanese teachers and students, examining pedagogical effectiveness through classroom-based methodologies, and conducting comparative studies with ALTs from other cultural backgrounds. These recommendations, if implemented, would enhance both the professional experiences of Filipino ALTs and the quality of English language education in Japanese schools, maximizing their contribution to Japan's educational internationalization while providing valuable professional development opportunities for the educators themselves.

References

- Al Amin, M., & Greenwood, J. (2018). The UN Sustainable Development Goals and Teacher Development for Effective English Teaching in Bangladesh: A Gap That Needs Bridging. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*, 20(2), 118–138. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jtes-2018-0018>
- Balga, N. G. (2019). Filipino English teachers in Japan: "Nonnativeness" and the teaching and learning of English. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 10(2), 256–263. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1002.07>
- Berger, M. D., Czarnowus, A., Danesin, M., Elliott, A. B. R., Osei-Bonsu, J., Gedacht, A. G., Guerra, L. F. A., Hajduk, M. L., Kline, D. T., & McShane, K. L. (2024). *Medievalisms in a Global Age* (Vol. 27). Boydell & Brewer. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781837651313>
- Bond, M. A., & Blevins, S. J. (2020). Using faculty professional development to foster organizational change: A social learning framework. *TechTrends*, 64(2), 229–237. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-019-00459-2>

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). Thematic analysis: A practical guide. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529797843>
- Butler, Y. G. (2015). English language education among young learners in East Asia: A review of current research (2004–2014). *Language Teaching*, 48(3), 303–342. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444815000105>
- Byram, M., & Wagner, M. (2018). Making a difference: Language teaching for intercultural and international dialogue. *Foreign Language Annals*, 51(1), 140–151. <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12319>
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2023). Designing and conducting mixed methods research (4th ed.). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483329659>
- Dimmock, C. (2020). Connecting research and knowledge on educational leadership in the West and Asia: Adopting a cross-cultural comparative perspective. *Comparative Education*, 56(2), 257–277. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2020.1741195>
- Escarda, G. M. C. (2024). Exploring the experiences of Filipino assistant language teachers working with Japanese elementary school teachers. *International Journal of Science and Research*, 13(1), 858–864. <https://doi.org/10.21275/SR24114132238>
- Farmer, T., Robinson, K., Elliott, S. J., & Eyles, J. (2006). Developing and implementing a triangulation protocol for qualitative health research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 16(3), 377–394. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305285708>
- Fermin, T. A. S. (2020). Profile and Motivations of Filipino ALTs in the JET Programme: An Exploratory Study1. *The Bulletin of the Graduate School of Josai University*, 23, 313–328. https://doi.org/10.20566/24349194.23.0_313
- Gillitt, C. (2017). Rachel Cooper. *Asian Theatre Journal*, 34(1), 169–187. <https://doi.org/10.1353/atj.2017.0009>
- Hashimoto, K. (2015). 'English-only', but not a medium-of-instruction policy: The Japanese way of internationalising education for both domestic and overseas students. In *Language Planning for Medium of Instruction in Asia* (pp. 16–33). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315761350-2>
- Hiratsuka, T. (2023). Professional identities of local Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) vis-à-vis their foreign assistant language teachers (ALTs). *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2023.2206040>
- Hung, K. K. C., Mashino, S., Chan, E. Y. Y., MacDermot, M. K., Balsari, S., Ciottone, G. R., Della Corte, F., Dell'Aringa, M. F., Egawa, S., & Evio, B. D. (2021). Health workforce development in health emergency and disaster risk management: The need for evidence-based recommendations. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(7), 3382. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18073382>
- Johnson, R. B., & Christensen, L. (2024). Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches (8th ed.). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781544307756>
- Lehtomäki, E., Posti-Ahokas, H., & Moate, J. (2015). Meaningful internationalisation at home: Education students' voices on the value of cross-cultural learning dialogue. *Internationalisierung Der LehrerInnenbildung*, 99–109. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-07347-0_5
- Liu-Farrer, G. (2020). *Immigrant Japan: Mobility and belonging in an ethno-nationalist society*. Cornell University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501748578>
- Marasigan, M. C. C. (2024). Investigating the experiences of Filipino assistant language
- Mattessich, P. W., & Johnson, K. M. (2018). *Collaboration: What makes it work*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119444503.ch12>
- Nagatomo, D. H. (2016). *Identity, gender and teaching English in Japan* (Vol. 47). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783094585>
- Park, G. (2015). Situating the discourses of privilege and marginalization in the lives of two

- East Asian women teachers of English. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 18(1), 108–133. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2012.759923>
- Pennington, M. C., & Richards, J. C. (2016). Teacher identity in language teaching: Integrating personal, contextual, and professional factors. *RELC Journal*, 47(1), 5–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688216631219>
- Qiao, L., Fan, L., He, Y., & Zhou, Y. (2023). Stripping path optimization decision-making of non-performing asset based on integration methods of SUMDII, fuzzy rough sets and PP. *Journal of Intelligent & Fuzzy Systems*, 45(2), 2267–2278. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JIFS-220750>
- Rawat, Y., & Yadav, P. (2024). Pedagogical Transformation: Integrating Innovative Approaches in Teaching. In *Augmented Reality and the Future of Education Technology* (pp. 168–187). IGI Global Scientific Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-1304-9.ch011>
- Rodkey, K. L., & Rodkey, E. N. (2020). Family, friends, and faith-communities: Intellectual community and the benefits of unofficial networks for marginalized scientists. *History of Psychology*, 23(4), 289. <https://doi.org/10.1037/hop0000156>
- Selvi, A. F., Yazan, B., & Mahboob, A. (2024). Research on “native” and “non-native” English-speaking teachers: Past developments, current status, and future directions. *Language Teaching*, 57(1), 1–41. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444822000441>
- Stewart, A. (2020). *Language teacher recognition: Narratives of Filipino English teachers in Japan* (Vol. 80). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788927383>
- Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (2023). *SAGE handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506335193>
- Weisband, E. (2018). *The Macabresque: Human violation and hate in genocide, mass atrocity and enemy-making*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190677886.001.0001>
- Widodo, H. P., Fang, F., & Elyas, T. (2020). The construction of language teacher professional identity in the Global Englishes territory: ‘we are legitimate language teachers.’ *Asian Englishes*, 22(3), 309–316. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2020.1732683>