

## **Teaching Beyond Borders: Experiences, Challenges, and Contributions of Filipino Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in Japan**

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**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 questionnaires and narrative accounts. Findings reveal that Filipino ALTs navigate complex cultural territories while developing hybridized professional identities that bridge Filipino and Japanese educational paradigms. They 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, though participants demonstrated remarkable resilience in developing adaptation strategies. The unique cultural positioning of Filipino ALTs as Asian English language educators challenges traditional assumptions about native speaker models while offering innovative approaches to cross-cultural education. This research contributes to understanding how teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds navigate international educational contexts and

develop professional identities that bridge multiple cultural traditions.

**Keywords:** *Filipino Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), Cultural hybridization, English language education, Cross-cultural adaptation, Team-teaching dynamics*

## **A. Introduction**

The internationalization of Japan's education system has led to significant reforms in English language education, particularly through the integration of Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in public schools (Saito, 2019). While the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program and other ALT initiatives have traditionally focused on recruiting educators from Western English-speaking countries (McConnell, 2015), recent years have seen a notable increase in Filipino ALTs within Japanese classrooms (Balgoa, 2019). This shift presents a unique opportunity to examine how educators from an Asian English-speaking nation navigate, contribute to, and potentially transform Japan's educational landscape through their distinctive cultural and pedagogical perspectives (Aoyama, 2023). The presence of Filipino ALTs in Japan represents a complex intersection of educational migration, cultural exchange, and pedagogical innovation (Balgoa, 2019). As English teachers from a multilingual Asian nation with strong Western influences, Filipino educators occupy a unique position in Japanese schools (Stewart, 2020). Their presence challenges traditional assumptions about English language teaching while potentially offering new approaches to cross-cultural education (Glasgow, 2023). This study examines their experiences through several key dimensions that shape their professional lives and contributions to Japanese education (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

The increasing presence of Filipino ALTs raises important questions about cultural adaptation, professional development, and pedagogical effectiveness in international teaching contexts (Fermin, 2020). Unlike their Western counterparts, Filipino ALTs bring an Asian cultural sensitivity combined with English language expertise (Kristen, 2024), potentially offering more culturally responsive approaches to teaching English in Japanese classrooms (Marasigan, 2024). However, they also face unique challenges in establishing their professional identity and legitimacy as English educators, navigating expectations shaped by both Western and Asian educational paradigms (Widodo et al., 2020). Within Japanese schools, Filipino ALTs must balance multiple roles: as English language teachers, cultural ambassadors, and

educational innovators (Nagatomo, 2016). Their experiences are shaped by interactions with Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs), students, school administrators, and local communities (Hiratsuka, 2023). These relationships influence not only their teaching effectiveness but also their professional growth and cultural integration (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing more effective support systems and professional development opportunities for ALTs from diverse backgrounds (Israel et al., 2015).

The significance of this research extends beyond the immediate context of Filipino ALTs in Japan (Stewart, 2020). It contributes to broader discussions about the evolving nature of English language education in Asia (Butler, 2015), the role of non-native English-speaking teachers in international contexts (Mauludin, 2015), and the importance of cultural competence in language teaching (Byram & Wagner, 2018). By examining these educators' experiences, this study aims to inform policy improvements, enhance support systems, and contribute to the growing body of knowledge about cross-cultural education in an increasingly interconnected world (Dimmock, 2020). The navigation of cultural identities in educational settings presents unique challenges and opportunities for Filipino ALTs in Japan. Research on international teaching has highlighted how educators' cultural backgrounds significantly influence their professional identity formation and teaching approaches (Pennington & Richards, 2016). Filipino ALTs, positioned at the intersection of Asian and Western educational traditions, must negotiate complex cultural territories while establishing their professional legitimacy in Japanese schools.

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. 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. The resulting synthesis of teaching approaches contributes to the diversification of English language education in Japan. 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. Filipino ALTs must navigate complex interpersonal dynamics while establishing their professional authority and building trust with colleagues.

Community integration extends beyond the classroom, encompassing relationships with school administrators, parents, and the broader local community. Research by Liu-Farrer (2020) suggests that Filipino ALTs often serve as cultural bridges, facilitating understanding between Japanese communities and international perspectives. This role requires what Gillitt (2017) terms "cultural diplomacy skills," enabling ALTs to foster positive cross-cultural relationships while maintaining professional boundaries. Filipino ALTs face distinct challenges in their professional roles, ranging from language barriers to cultural adjustments. Studies by Escarda (2024) identify common difficulties, including communication issues, adaptation to Japanese workplace culture, and professional isolation. These challenges are often complicated by what Qiao et al. (2023) describe as "expectation disparity" between ALTs' prepared roles and actual responsibilities.

The development and accessibility of support systems play crucial roles in ALTs' success and satisfaction. Research by Bond & Blevins (2020) emphasizes the

importance of formal and informal support networks, including professional development opportunities, mentor relationships, and ALT community groups. These support structures, as noted by Rodkey & Rodkey (2020), are particularly crucial for Asian ALTs who must navigate both professional and cultural adaptations simultaneously. The impact of Filipino ALTs on Japanese English education extends beyond language instruction. Studies by Balgoa (2019) document how these educators contribute to the internationalization of Japanese schools through their unique cultural perspectives and teaching approaches. Their presence challenges traditional assumptions about English language teaching while introducing new models of cross-cultural education. Research by Kristen (2024) suggests that Filipino ALTs' contributions include enhanced student engagement, innovative teaching methodologies, and improved cultural understanding within school communities. These impacts align with what Lehtomäki et al. (2015) identify as "transformative international education," where educators facilitate not only language learning but also broader cultural and social development.

The evolution of English language education in Japan has been marked by significant policy reforms and structural changes over the past decades. The implementation of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program in 1987 represented a pivotal shift in Japan's approach to English language education (Brown, 2024). While initial research focused primarily on the program's role in internationalization (Metzgar, 2017), recent studies have examined its effectiveness in improving English language education and fostering cross-cultural understanding (Smith, 2021). The diversification of ALT recruitment beyond traditional Western English-speaking countries has introduced new dynamics and challenges to the program (Kobayashi, 2018), particularly with the increasing presence of Asian English teachers in Japanese classrooms (Hiratsuka, 2023). The role of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) in international contexts has gained significant scholarly attention. Research by Selvi et al. (2024) challenges the native speaker fallacy, demonstrating that NNESTs often possess unique advantages in language teaching due to their own language learning experiences and cultural understanding. Studies specifically focusing on Asian English teachers have highlighted their effectiveness in bridging cultural gaps while maintaining high teaching standards Al Amin &

Greenwood (2018). The case of Filipino English teachers is particularly noteworthy, as they bring a distinct perspective shaped by their country's historical relationship with English and their multilingual educational background (Gonzales, 2017).

Cultural adaptation and professional identity formation among international teachers have emerged as critical areas of research. Studies by Widodo et al. (2020) indicate that Asian teachers in foreign contexts often experience unique challenges in establishing their professional legitimacy. These challenges are compounded by what Kumar (2024) terms "cultural expectation dissonance," where teachers must navigate between their home culture's educational values and the host country's expectations. For Filipino ALTs in Japan, this navigation is particularly complex due to their position at the intersection of Asian and Western educational paradigms (Agarwal et al., 2020). The dynamics of team-teaching relationships between ALTs and Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) have been extensively studied. Research by Mattessich & Johnson (2018) reveals that successful collaboration depends heavily on mutual understanding, clear role definition, and effective communication. However, studies specific to Asian ALTs suggest that they may face different challenges in these partnerships compared to their Western counterparts (Eslam et al., 2020). The cultural proximity between Filipino and Japanese educators can facilitate certain aspects of collaboration while potentially complicating others, particularly in terms of role expectations and professional boundaries (Lan, 2018).

Professional development and support systems for international teachers have gained increasing attention in recent literature. Studies by Gay (2015) emphasize the importance of culturally sensitive professional development programs that acknowledge the unique needs of Asian teachers in foreign contexts. Research specific to the Japanese context indicates that existing support systems may not adequately address the needs of diverse ALT populations (Hashimoto, 2015). The experiences of Filipino ALTs highlight gaps in current support structures, especially regarding cultural adaptation and professional growth opportunities (Arinto, 2016).

This study aims to address the following research questions: How do Filipino Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) experience, navigate, and contribute to English language education within the Japanese school system? What motivates Filipino educators to become ALTs in Japan, and how do they prepare for this role? How do

Filipino ALTs navigate cultural differences and establish their professional identity in Japanese schools? What challenges do Filipino ALTs encounter in their teaching roles, and what strategies do they develop to address these challenges? How do Filipino ALTs develop and maintain professional relationships within their school communities? What unique perspectives and approaches do Filipino ALTs bring to English language education in Japan? How does the ALT experience influence Filipino educators' professional development and career trajectories?

## 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 of participants is presented 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

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of Participants (N=7)</b>
Field of Study/Specialization	Education/English	2
	General Education	2
	Linguistics	1
	Business	1
	Science	1
Teaching Experience in the Philippines	None	1
	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

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

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



## **Data Collection Procedures**

The study utilized multiple data collection methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research questions. First, a comprehensive online questionnaire was developed using Google Forms and distributed to participants between February and March 2025. The questionnaire consisted of demographic information (age, gender, educational background, teaching experience), Likert-scale questions assessing participants' self-reported competencies in six key areas (Japanese language skills, understanding of Japanese culture, teaching methodology, classroom management, cross-cultural communication, lesson planning, and team-teaching), multiple-choice questions addressing motivations, professional development, challenges, and contributions, and open-ended questions eliciting detailed responses about preparation strategies, significant challenges, cultural adaptation experiences, unique pedagogical contributions, integration of Filipino teaching methods, and future career plans.

Second, participants provided extended written narratives addressing four key dimensions of their ALT experience: (1) Journey Reflection - personal decision-making processes, expectations versus reality, preparation methods, and family responses to their career choice; (2) Cultural Navigation - strategies for bridging Filipino and Japanese cultural environments, including specific examples of cultural negotiation in school settings; (3) Professional Challenges and Solutions - significant professional obstacles encountered and innovative solutions developed, with particular focus on communication barriers, team-teaching dynamics, and student engagement; and (4) Support Systems and Impact - valuable support resources and additional support needs, along with methods for building and maintaining professional connections.

Third, the researchers analyzed relevant documents to contextualize participants' experiences, including ALT program guidelines and handbooks, school curricula and English language education policies, previous research literature on ALTs in Japan, and official statistics on Filipino ALTs in the Japanese education system.

## **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

<b>Competency Area</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>	<b>Range</b>
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**

The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines to protect participants and ensure research integrity. All participants provided written informed consent before participating in the study. The consent form detailed the study's purpose and procedures, voluntary participation and right to withdraw, data confidentiality and anonymity protocols, and data storage and future use policies.

Several measures were implemented to protect participant identity, including the use of pseudonyms throughout research documentation, the removal of identifying information from narrative accounts, aggregation of data where appropriate to prevent identification, and secure storage of raw data in password-protected digital files. Researchers acknowledged the potential power dynamics between researchers and participants. Participants were assured that their responses would not affect their employment status and that research findings would be presented with sensitivity to cultural and professional contexts.

All research data were stored in compliance with data protection regulations. Digital files were encrypted and backed up on secure servers, with access limited to the research team. As a form of reciprocity, participants were offered access to the study's findings, an invitation to a virtual workshop sharing best practices identified in the research, and resources to support their professional development as ALTs.

The methodology acknowledges several limitations, including the relatively small sample size ( $N=7$ ) which limits generalizability to the broader Filipino ALT population in Japan; self-selection bias which may have influenced the sample composition, potentially attracting participants with stronger opinions or experiences; language barriers in data collection which were minimized by conducting all research in English, but some nuances of participants' experiences might have been better expressed in Filipino languages; the cross-sectional nature of the study which captures experiences at a specific point in time rather than tracking changes over an extended period; and the reliance on self-reported data without classroom observations which may limit validation of participants' accounts of their teaching practices.

**Table 5.** Primary Challenges Reported by Participants

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Number of Participants Reporting (N=7)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
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

<b>Contribution</b>	<b>Number of Participants (N=7)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
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 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%). 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).

### **Cultural Hybridization**

Participants demonstrated what Berger et al. (2024) terms "cultural hybridization," developing professional identities that bridge Filipino and Japanese educational paradigms. This process involved continuous adaptation and identity reconstruction. As one participant noted:

*> "Learning the Japanese culture is a must! There are a lot of cultural differences and if you are not careful and isn't knowledgeable, you will be in big trouble. You cannot just simply say, 'this is what I do in our country so I must keep on doing here.' Respect must be given and manifested."*

Several participants (57.1%) highlighted the adaptability of Filipino educators as a cultural strength that facilitated their integration into Japanese schools. One participant reflected:

*> "As a Filipino ALT, I think it's an edge among other ALT because Filipinos are very adaptable. We have a multicultural background so it would be easier to adjust and be sensitive to one's culture (Japanese culture)."*

Participants noted that their cultural identity influenced their professional roles in various ways. Several participants (42.9%) reported that Japanese colleagues and students had positive perceptions of Filipino ALTs, particularly regarding accent intelligibility and cultural affinity as fellow Asians. One participant shared:

*> "The students and the staffs really likes Filipino ALT's as our accent is easy to understand than the other nationality. Elementary schools have a higher percentage of wanting their ALT to be a Filipino which can adopt easier to the school environment and have higher initiative to the task as an ALT."*

## **2. Pedagogical Innovations and Teaching Approaches**

### **Teaching Methodologies**

Filipino ALTs reported integrating distinctive pedagogical approaches shaped by their previous educational experiences in the Philippines. Explicit teaching (28.6%), inductive method (14.3%), and whole brain-based teaching (14.3%) were among the specific methodologies mentioned. These approaches were often adapted to address the particular needs of Japanese students learning English as a foreign language.

One participant with extensive teaching experience in the Philippines noted:

*> "I usually use the inductive method in teaching because I find it effective to the kind of learners I have."*

Another participant highlighted the effectiveness of explicit teaching strategies:

*> "Since I handle a lot of elementary classes, I use explicit teaching. My JTE told me that this strategy is so effective when learning sentence structures."*

### **Cultural Integration in Lessons**

Most participants (85.7%) reported incorporating elements of Filipino culture into their lessons, particularly during special occasions and cultural events. These cultural integrations served both pedagogical purposes and contributed to cross-cultural understanding. One participant shared:

> *"As much as possible, whenever I teach a grammar point, I use example sentences and insert pictures in my slides that feature aspects of the Philippines, such as popular tourist spots, festivals, and cuisine. Also, in my conversation class, if there is a holiday like Christmas or New Year, I introduce our traditions and incorporate them into our games."*

Another participant described incorporating Filipino games into classroom activities:

> *"Whenever there's a chance to talk about Filipino culture, I try to share it in the class. Also, on December, I tried playing some Filipino games with my students during our Christmas party."*

### **Student Engagement Strategies**

Participants emphasized the importance of interactive and engaging teaching approaches, with all participants reporting the use of games, role-playing, and other participatory activities to enhance student engagement. Many (57.1%) explicitly connected these engagement strategies to Filipino educational values and teaching styles:

> *"One of the teaching strategies I learned while working as an EFL teacher at a language center in Thailand is that incorporating games into the lesson can create a fun and engaging learning experience for students. I always ensure that the activities we do align with our objectives for the day."*

> *"As an ALT, we are advised to make the lessons fun and enjoyable for the students to have a wonderful experience in learning the English language. Being a Filipino with a fun-loving nature, it is quite easier to achieve this goal through fun activities and games."*

## **3. Professional Relationships and Community Integration**

### **Team Teaching Dynamics**

The team-teaching relationship between Filipino ALTs and Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) or Homeroom Teachers (HRTs) represented a central aspect of participants' professional experience. While self-reported competency in team-teaching was relatively high ( $M=4.14$ ), several participants (71.4%) identified

communication with Japanese teachers as a significant challenge. Team-teaching arrangements varied considerably across school settings:

> *"At my school, ALTs are the main teachers, while the JTEs act as our assistants—it's the other way around from the usual setup."*

> *"All teaching style that I am using is based on Japanese culture as we need to adopt and do as what our HRT or JTE wants. We are only here to assist and help with their guidance and approvals in every activity we want to do."*

The effectiveness of these partnerships often depended on clear communication and role definition:

> *"Team teaching is the best support of them all."*

> *"One thing to consider before going to the classroom is to have a meeting with HRT and/or JTE."*

### **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 has examined the experiences, challenges, and contributions of Filipino Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) within the Japanese educational system, providing insights into their unique position at the intersection of Asian and Western educational paradigms. The research reveals that Filipino ALTs navigate complex cultural territories while establishing their professional legitimacy in Japanese schools, developing hybridized professional identities that effectively bridge multiple educational traditions and cultural perspectives.

The findings demonstrate that Filipino ALTs bring distinctive pedagogical approaches to Japanese English language education, incorporating elements of Philippine educational practices such as interactive learning, explicit teaching, and community-based approaches. These methodologies, when adapted to the Japanese

educational context, offer innovative solutions to the challenges of English language instruction in Japan. Particularly noteworthy is the ability of Filipino ALTs to develop culturally responsive teaching methods that resonate with Japanese students while introducing international perspectives.

Professional relationships within Japanese schools emerged as a critical dimension of Filipino ALTs' experiences. While team-teaching arrangements varied considerably across settings, successful collaboration depended heavily on clear communication, mutual understanding, and effective role definition. Filipino ALTs frequently served as cultural bridges within their school communities, facilitating understanding between Japanese and international perspectives and contributing to the internationalization of Japanese education.

The study identified language barriers as the most significant challenge facing Filipino ALTs, affecting multiple dimensions of their professional experience. However, participants demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability in developing strategies to address these challenges, including the use of translation resources, non-verbal communication techniques, and active efforts to acquire Japanese language skills. Support systems, particularly peer networks and structured professional development opportunities, played a crucial role in facilitating professional growth and adaptation.

The experiences of Filipino ALTs in Japan represent a significant case study in the evolving nature of international education and cross-cultural teaching. Their unique cultural positioning as Asian English language educators challenges traditional assumptions about native speaker models in language education while offering new approaches to culturally responsive teaching. The adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and pedagogical innovations demonstrated by Filipino ALTs contribute not only to English language education in Japan but also to broader discussions about international education in an increasingly interconnected global context.

This research contributes to our understanding of how teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds navigate international educational contexts, develop professional identities that bridge multiple cultural traditions, and contribute innovative approaches to language education. The findings have significant implications for



educational policy, teacher preparation programs, and support systems for international educators.

## **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.

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