

Classroom Strategies and Challenges: A Case Study of a Filipino Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) in Japan

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ABSTRACT

English instruction plays a pivotal role in Japan's national curriculum where foreign instructors known as Assistant Language Teachers, or ALTs, are hired through various agencies and government initiatives to aid in education. Filipino ALTs occupy an important position in Japan's English language classrooms, yet they face unique struggles that impact their effectiveness as educators. Since studies on ALTs in Japan have primarily profiled native English speakers, little has been documented about the experiences of Filipino ALTs. This case study explores the contributions of one such ALT, examining his teaching methods in terms of English instruction and the pedagogical challenges inherent in the Japanese education system. Findings showed he employed a blend of interactive and learner-centered techniques including code-switching, games, scaffolding, and cultural ties to boost comprehension. While effective, such approaches were tested by barriers like difficulties communicating with co-teachers, lack of student participation, and disparities in culture and teaching style. In response, he fostered close bonds with Japanese staff, aggressively pursued self-guided professional growth, and drew strength from fellow Filipino ALTs. Though displaying resilience and adaptability, administrative support greatly affected his performance. Several lessons learned from this case study were enumerated in the last part. The findings of this study have implications for policy reforms and institutional support mechanisms that can foster a more inclusive and productive teaching environment for foreign educators in Japan..

Keywords: Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), English Education in Japan, Filipino ALTs, classroom strategies, case study, Japan.

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INTRODUCTION

On the global stage, English has become the all-pervasive language for commerce, education, and communication (Dash & Gandhi, 2022). So that students might be more fluent in the language, several non-English-speaking countries have integrated English language programs that hire non-native and native speakers of English to teach them (Schurz et al., 2022). Some studies (Zheng et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2022; Sato et al., 2025) seem to suggest that effective pedagogical methods are key to mastering

English in regions where it is not the first language. Although the demand for English-language education has grown markedly in recent years, such things as cultural diversity (Hossain, 2024), instructional philosophies (Kim, 2021), and institutional constraints (Kohnke et al., 2024) still affect teacher language experiences around the world in significant ways.

English instruction is a major part of the national curriculum in Japan where foreign Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) are hired by various dispatch companies

and government-led initiatives such as the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program. Though the programs aim to invigorate English instruction in public schools, ALTs often face challenges concerning their role in the classroom, communication with Japanese instructors, and institutional expectations (San Jose & Refareal, 2025). For Filipino ALTs, as non-native speakers of the language, there are certain challenges requiring the use of specific kinds of pedagogical strategies to get students engaged in the learning process (San Jose et al., 2025). Meanwhile, the experiences of Filipino ALTs have not been well noted in Japan's ALT research, which has focused mainly on native English-speaking ALTs.

The researchers were teaching, at the time of conducting this study, in different regions of Japan where Filipino ALTs were hired either by different dispatch companies or the local Board of Education (BOE). Many Filipino ALTs who chose to stay with their dispatch companies have been underrepresented in scholarly studies. Most of the Filipino ALTs hired directly from the Philippines by the dispatch companies in Japan are professional licensed teachers. The researchers were interested in how Filipino ALTs navigate the classroom strategies and challenges in their new situations in Japan. Although the value of ALTs in general has been studied in the past, few studies have looked at the unique experiences of Filipino teachers by employing a case study method. By bridging this knowledge gap, the study offers insights into their pedagogical approaches, the challenges they face, and the institutional assistance required to improve their effectiveness in the classroom.

Therefore, the purpose of this case study is to investigate the contributions of Filipino ALTs in Japan in terms of English language instruction, particularly their pedagogical strategies and existential challenges in the context of Japanese education. The findings of this study would be helpful for concerned stakeholders and decision-makers related to Filipino ALTs' working condition in Japan. It also offers lessons that could be useful for those Filipino ALTs preparation in the Philippines before they depart for Japan. The lessons learned from this case study would also be beneficial in the ongoing discussions on non-native English speakers in the international context of English language teaching.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative research that used the instrumental single case study. Since it aimed to investigate the Filipino ALT's classroom strategies and challenges in a Japanese school, the instrumental single case study was appropriate. An instrumental case study aims to study an issue rather than the case itself (Kekeya, 2021), making it suitable for understanding the experiences, strategies, and challenges faced by the participant in the Japanese educational system.

An Assistant Language Teacher who qualified in the following inclusion criteria was the participant in this study: 1) a Filipino national, 2) with at least one year of experience as an ALT in Japan, 3) working in a public school under either a government or private dispatch company contract, and 4) willing to participate in interviews and classroom observations. Such criteria attested to the participant's experience with the teaching environment, setting up meaningful environments for dialogue about his strategies and hurdles.

The study used semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and classroom observations as its main tools to collect pertinent data. While preserving a formal framework for uniformity, semi-structured interviews offered freedom in delving into the participant's experiences. Direct analysis of teaching methods, student relationships, and classroom management practices was made possible via classroom observations. To supplement the information gathered from interviews and observations, related documents were also examined, including lesson plans and instructional materials. A broad understanding of the participant's teaching methods and difficulties is ensured by the combination of these tools.

Pre-data collection, data collection, and post-data collection were the three stages of the data gathering process. The participant and the appropriate school officials were consulted before the study was carried out. To gain informed consent and clarify the study's goals, an initial briefing was held. Over a predefined length of time, the researchers gathered instructional materials, observed teaching sessions, and conducted interviews as part of the data gathering phase. While the observation notes concentrated on teaching strategies, student participation, and difficulties faced, the interviews were audio recorded and accurately transcribed. To resolve any questions and confirm preliminary interpretations of the data, the researcher spoke with the participant again in the post-data collection phase.

Following Braun and Clarke's framework (2024), which includes familiarization, coding, theme identification, review, definition, and reporting, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected. This method allowed for a systematic and flexible analysis of qualitative data, ensuring that emerging themes accurately reflected the experiences of the participants. Manual coding was done, with a focus on patterns related to classroom strategies, instructional challenges, and coping mechanisms. The themes that were identified were then reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and relevance to the research objectives.

The study followed Lincoln and Guba's criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in order to determine the reliability of the data (Ahmed, 2024). Using a variety of data sources, including observations, interviews, and documents, triangulation was used to establish credibility. By giving readers rich, detailed information on the participant's experiences, transferability was addressed and readers were able to evaluate how well the findings applied to comparable situations. Replication of the study was made possible by the thorough documenting of research protocols, which preserved reliability. By keeping an audit trail and asking participants for input to confirm interpretations, confirmability was guaranteed.

Every step of the research process was carried out with strict respect to ethical guidelines. The participant gave his informed consent after being assured that participation would be voluntary and that he could withdraw at any time. To maintain privacy and anonymity, the participant was assigned a pseudonym, and no personally identifiable information was disclosed. Additionally, because the study adhered to ethical guidelines for data protection and preservation, recorded interviews and notes were securely stored and only the researchers had access to them. The study maintained the integrity of the research while ensuring the safety and well-being of the participant by adhering to these ethical principles.

RESULTS

The results of the case study were boiled down into four major themes: classroom strategies employed by the Filipino ALT; challenges faced by the Filipino ALT; coping mechanisms and adaptive strategies; and institutional support and areas for improvement. These themes are presented below including their sub-themes.

Classroom Strategies Employed by the Filipino ALT

The study found that in order to keep students interested in English classes, the Filipino ALT used a mix of communicative and student-centered teaching techniques. In addition to helping students learn English, these strategies—which included code-switching, game-based learning, scaffolded education, and cultural connections—also improved students' enjoyment of their time in class.

Scaffolded Instruction: The Art of Slowly Letting Go

The ALT used scaffolded education, giving students detailed instructions before promoting self-directed learning. With the use of gestures, visual aids, and simple language, this method made sure that even students who did not speak English well could understand the lecture. One successful strategy was the "I say, you say, we say" method, in

which the students attempted pronouncing a sentence independently after the ALT demonstrated it and they repeated it together.

For example, the ALT was once teaching the difference between "this" and "that" with real objects and there was one unforgettable moment. Holding a pencil close to his chest, the ALT said, "This is a pencil. Then, withdrawing the pencil, they went on, "That is a pencil. To make it interactive, the ALT invited students to give it a shot with their own belongings.

One curious student wanted to test the notion and pointed at the ALT from a distance, saying, "That is a teacher!" The students laughed out loud, and this ALT replied playfully, "Yes, but this teacher is watching you!" "This moment of humor reinforced learning and relaxed students enough that they were able to play with language in an enjoyable situation.

Game-Based Learning: Turning the Classroom into a Playground

The ALT also recognized that Japanese students, particularly young learners, tended to thrive on games, and she used them often, in the form of vocabulary races, charade-type activities, and role-playing scenarios. Such activities not only reinforced language learning but also allowed students to overcome their initial reluctance to speak English.

One of the most popular games was called "The Whisper Challenge," in which students would stand in line and whisper a sentence to one another until it reached the last person, who would have to say it out loud. One day, the game started with the original sentence being "I like to eat sushi on Sundays" and after passing through ten students the final sentence came out as "I like to eat sushi in the bathtub!" The whole class, including the ALT, started laughing. That made students more eager to engage in the class, and less terrified of making mistakes.

In another case, the ALT opted for a simple Q&A relay game. When one student could not find an answer, another teammate panicked and flopped dramatically to the floor, shouting, "Noooo, my brain is dead!" The ALT calmed the class down and said, "Hey, don't worry, English CPR coming!" and pretended to revive the student with "oxygen words." The use of humor in language practice was stress relieving as it made the language practice enjoyable.

Code-Switching: A Strategic Survival Tool

Though instruction was primarily in English, the ALT discovered that occasional code-switching can aid instruction by clarifying instructions, especially for very young students and beginners. By using basic

Japanese terms rather than reasoned explanations in English, the ALT was able to keep the lesson moving.

For instance, during the lesson on preposition, students found it difficult to grasp concepts in the phrases such as: “The book is under the chair.” After trying to explain several times in English, the ALT finally sighed, pointed at the book, and said, “Isu no shita desu.” (It’s under the chair.) The students’ faces suddenly lit up with understanding.

But code-switching also gave rise to some unintended, but hilarious, moments. So, one day, the ALT asked the other students a question, when he got to a shy student who hesitated for so long, the ALT kind of jokingly said, “Mou, chotto gakkari da yo!” (To be honest, I’m a bit disappointed!). A gasp of surprise and laughter filled the whole class, and finally one student yelled out, “Sensei, nihongo sugio!” (Your Japanese is too good!). It gave the ALT confidence that meeting students halfway in their language process was appreciated.

Cultural Connections: Bringing a Slice of the Philippines into the Classroom

In an effort to make learning English more relatable, the ALT infused Filipino culture into lessons, finding parallels between Japanese and Filipino culture. When talking about holidays, the ALT opened up a presentation and showed a picture of a Filipino Christmas celebration and asked, “*When do we put up Christmas decoration in the Philippines?*” to which, one animated student guessed, “*December?*” The ALT grinned and said, “*NOPE! September!*” Students were shocked, with the collective reaction: “*Ehhh?! Sugoi! Hayasugiro!*” (*Wow! Too early!*) This led to a spirited discussion comparing Japanese and Filipino holiday traditions, giving the students practice in English conversation while their brains were still spinning top to bottom.

The other example of cultural exchange was when food vocabulary was being taught. The ALT churned out Filipino fare such as adobo, halo-halo and balut. Some students shrieked in horror while others gasped in wonder when they saw the balut (a fertilized duck egg). It was at that point that one curious student asked, “*Sensei, you eat this?!*” The ALT nodded and said, “*Yes! It makes you strong. Want to try?*” The class erupted with laughter, one student shouted “*Kimoi!*” (*It’s gross!*), and a few students jokingly flexed their arms, claiming to have acquired “*balut power.*” Not only were such moments more interesting in English lessons, but they also stimulated awareness and interest in other culture.

Challenges Faced by the Filipino ALT

Despite the effectiveness of the strategies employed, the ALT faced several challenges in the Japanese classroom

setting. These included language barriers with co-teachers, low student participation, and cultural and pedagogical differences. While these obstacles sometimes led to frustration, they also provided opportunities for learning, adaptation, and—more often than expected—humorous moments.

The Language Barrier: Lost in Translation

Communicating with Japanese Co-Teachers and Home Room Teachers (HRTs) was one of the biggest obstacles that the Filipino ALT encountered. Some teachers spoke English a bit well but most had very low English knowledge, which would lead to misunderstandings and unclear lesson objectives. The ALT experienced many instances when he was left interpreting the exact meaning of what the HRTs wanted to happen in the class and often misinterpreted by the ALT.

For example, a Japanese teacher during a team-teaching class delivered a series of instructions rapidly in Japanese. The ALT nodded excitedly, pretending to understand they would be leading the entire lesson, only to find out a minute later that he would have to lead the entire lesson. As students looked up at them expectantly, the ALT paused then shouted, “*Oh! It’s my turn? Okay! Let’s go!*” The entire class burst into laughter, and even the Japanese teacher smiled as she understood the misunderstanding. Since that day, the ALT double checked everything before entering the classroom.

Another instance was during staff meetings: everything was in Japanese. The ALT remembered sitting through a long meeting, nodding occasionally to give the impression of participation. At one point, the principal locked eyes with him and asked a question. Panic mode activated. The ALT had no clue what was being asked, so he responded with his well-practiced survival phrase: “*Hai!*” (Yes!) The principal, content, continued, but a few moments later, a teacher leaned over, “*Sensei, you just said you’d participate in the PTA sports event.*” The ALT “*inwardly groaned, realizing he had unwittingly signed up to run a relay race with the PTA members.*”

Student Participation: The Great Wall of Silence

The other big challenge was getting students to speak English. The students lacked exposure to English outside schools and especially in rural areas many were too timid or embarrassed to speak. The ALT often met the Great Wall of Silence, where saying “*How are you today?*” was greeted with a room full of blank stares and nervous fidgeting.

To get things rolling, the ALT tried some fun introductions. Instead of the standard “*Hello, my name is _*,” he dramatically introduced himself with, “*I am a*

secret agent from the Philippines, and my mission is to teach you English!” Other students laughed, as some eyed each other with wide eyes. One daring student muttered, “*Really?*” Then the ALT winked and replied, “*Maybe... but that’s a secret.*” As soon as these interactions happened, students were more curious and ready to get engaged, wanting to find out more about their “mysterious” teacher.

But not every technique proved effective. The ALT once attempted to reward participation with stickers. When he said, “*Who wants to answer?*”, the students learned to not make eye contact like pros.” Desperate, the ALT upped the said: “*If nobody responds, I will sing a very bad karaoke song.*” A long pause. Then one student, reluctantly, said: “*I don’t want to hear sensei sing...*” The whole class erupted with laughter, and from that day forward the threat of “karaoke punishment” became an inside joke that motivated participation.

Cultural and Pedagogical Differences: The Battle of Teaching Styles

Another adjustment was getting used to Japan’s supervised and hierarchical education system. Not used to such rigid schedules and strict atmosphere in the classes, the ALT found these adjustments difficult sometimes as he was used to more variations in his teaching method.

For instance, in one lesson about adjectives, the ALT prompted students to describe their favorite foods with exciting words like “super yummy!” and “Crazy spicy!” But the Japanese teacher, who favored a more traditional approach, pushed the students gently to correct themselves, telling them to use textbook language instead. Even though creativity was explicitly encouraged in the institution’s teaching philosophy, the ALT discovered that many Japanese teachers placed greater emphasis on accuracy and discipline than in self-expression.

A second cultural difference stemmed from classroom greetings. In the Philippines, students generally greet teachers with a more familiar, “*Good morning, Ma’am!* In Japan however, students lined up with complete discipline, waited for a signal from their teacher, and then chanted in unison: “*Good morning, sensei!*” The ALT was not used to such discipline since he was less experienced, and so he got blindsided on his first day, not knowing the need to prepare. When students stood and bowed simultaneously, the ALT panicked in an effort to be on the same wavelength as its students and accidentally bowed three times instead of once. The students laughed, and one added, “*Sensei, too polite!*”

Patience and compromise were essential in bridging these cultural differences. Gradually, the ALT discovered

how to merge the two, balancing interactive games with structured lessons, never losing touch with either engagement or professionalism.

Coping Mechanisms and Adaptive Strategies

The Filipino ALT employed a number of coping strategies to deal with the difficulties of teaching in Japan, which enhanced classroom experiences, strengthened teamwork, and facilitated easier communication. Developing close bonds with Japanese educators, pursuing self-initiated professional development, and asking for assistance from other Filipino ALTs were some of these strategies. Even while the adjustment process was not always simple, it frequently resulted in humorous circumstances, personal development, and stronger bonds with coworkers and students.

Building Bridges: Navigating Communication with Japanese Teachers

One of the most crucial survival strategies for any newcomer was establishing collaborative partnerships with colleagues. Given differences in language, culture and teaching philosophies, it was important to cultivate an environment of mutual understanding, patience and solidarity.

According to the participant, “one of the most important strategies for survival or success in any situation is to achieve a good working relationship with homeroom teachers (HRTs) and co-teachers. I’ve found that, because of the language barrier and differing teaching styles rooted in one’s training and culture, this is best done in a cooperative, patient atmosphere where everyone is trying to understand the other person better.” Non-verbal communication proved an essential part of this learning curve for the ALT. One particularly fraught occasion came when the ALT was trying to explain a classroom activity idea to an English-challenged Japanese teacher. Using Google Translate, repeated attempts at hand gestures and a host of theatrical charades all proved absolutely useless. Having moved on to the fourth or fifth ‘big idea through art,’ suddenly the Japanese teacher exclaimed “*Ahhh, wakatta!*” (I got it!)—which, it turned out, he might have understood all wrong. In the end, the ALT used stick figures drawn on the board. This worked surprisingly well; soon they were joking that “*Art is the universal language!*”

Another point was that ALTs proactively initiate dialogues with teachers. In a given situation the ALT would always inquire about the form his lesson should take, ask for opinions and ensure, in short, that things were clarified beforehand. This is especially useful when some teachers are unwilling to offer much in the way of guidance. Thus during a planning meeting one day, the ALT inquired of

the Japanese teacher: “What’s my part in this activity?” Smiling optimistically, the teacher relied on a standard expression which said little: “Do your best!” The ALT was able to clarify lesson tasks and make more valuable contributions in class after learning how to ask more direct questions.

Leveling Up: Self-initiated Professional Development

To continuously improve his pedagogical skills, the ALT took the initiative to participate in online training and sessions or workshops typically organized by his fellow ALTs or by JALT (Japan Association of Language Teachers).

One especially memorable experience was an event on “Motivating Young Learners in EFL.” The ALT was eager to evaluate fresh interactive methods and without delay put them to use in the classroom. However, a single activity—where students had to race to the board and form sentences—ended in unexpected confusion. Rather than forming proper sentences, students began dashing full speed similar to Olympic athletes, knocking over chairs and each other. The ALT had to quickly change the rules of the game to prevent further chaos. When questioned about the occurrence, one student smiled and mentioned, “*Sensei, English class is like a sports day!*”

Beyond formal preparation, acquiring knowledge from experience also played a significant role in professional progress. The ALT kept a sort of pedagogical journal where he recorded what worked and what failed. Eventually, he developed a “survival kit” of go-to lesson plans, emergency filler activities and student engagement techniques. One little trick that always worked was using dramatic reactions — pretending to faint if students gave a wrong answer or acting completely shocked when they got something right. This made lessons much more engaging and also helped students practice their English speaking skills in a more relaxed environment.

Finding Strength in Community: The Filipino ALT Support Network

Apart from the strategies he learned in the classroom, one of the greatest comforts was fellow Filipino ALTs. Teaching in a different country had its share of struggles, cultural readjustment, and homesickness, but he had a support system thanks to other “kababayans” (fellow Filipinos).

Group chats with other Filipino ALTs became life-savers. Whenever one ALT was having a rough day, be it a silent class, a culturally awkward interaction or a surprise event at the school for which he was unprepared, he could always call on the group for advice, encouragement, and relief. One ALT related how he walked into a staff meeting

intended for homeroom teachers only, and rather than leave, just sat there nodding for an hour, pretending he belonged. One ALT confessed that they accidentally used the wrong Japanese honorifics while referring to the school principal with a term meant for close friends, horrifying their Japanese colleagues. These shared experiences reminded people that they were not alone in their struggles.

Filipino ALT meetups also provided comfort beyond the virtual space. Whether they were discussing home-cooked Filipino food, venting about classroom disasters or swapping teaching tips, the meetups helped relieve some of the stress of being in a foreign environment. The ALT remembered going to a potluck in which one teacher gave an impassioned retelling of how a child tried to cheat on a spelling quiz by writing the answers on their forearm — only to forget that they had to roll their sleeves up for an activity. Everyone laughed, and it became a running joke of “creative problem-solving.”o laughter, and it became an ongoing joke about “creative problem-solving.”

Institutional Support and Areas for Improvement

Even though the Filipino ALT showed tenacity and flexibility, their teaching experience was greatly influenced by the level of institutional support. The ALT was able to carry out their duty more easily at schools that offered clear rules, frequent collaboration sessions, and access to instructional materials. On the other hand, bewilderment, loneliness, and poor classroom integration were frequently the outcomes of a lack of institutional assistance.

Guidance and Orientation: “Wait, What’s My Job Again?”

When he started at a new school, one of the main challenges the ALT faced was that there was no defined role. Though his official title was “Assistant Language Teacher,” what that actually entailed varied greatly from school to school. Some schools offered structured guidance for these loads, had scheduled co-planning time, and integrated ALTs in a defined role during lessons. Others, though, gave him little or no orientation, leaving ALTs to figure things out for themselves.

The participant remembered his first day at a new school, thinking he would be introduced to his students, staff would meet and the staff would outline some expectations for his lessons. Instead, the staff gestured to an empty desk and smiled and said, “Ganbatte kudasai!” (Do your best!) before walking away. No one comes to hand a schedule, no materials, no idea who to report to. The ALT awkwardly sat at his desk the entire morning pretending to be busy by trying to arrange his pencil in a way that made him feel productive. In the first class, the Japanese teacher

spoke to the ALT, “Sensei, please teach them today.” Panic set in. Teach what? How? For how long? With what materials? The ALT managed to wing a self-introduction lesson, complete with cringe-inducing drawings on the board, but stepped out of the classroom thinking, “So... is this my job from here on?”

Such experiences could be prevented if ALT orientation programs were better. This structured introduction—detailing lesson expectations, teacher roles, and school culture—ensures that ALTs can integrate in school more effectively.

Teacher Collaboration: “Surprise! You’re Leading the Class Today!”

One way that the level of collaboration between ALTs and their Japanese counterparts manifest itself was in their teaching effectiveness. A more established practice found among schools which regularly organized shared lesson preparations and fostered team-taught approaches, was that even teaching coordination became easier: classrooms ran more smoothly and students were more engaged. However, not all schools operate in this manner.

One challenge the ALT faced repeatedly was what became known as the “Surprise! You’re taking the class today!” moment. The ALT described situations where he would enter a classroom expecting to help out, only for the Japanese teacher to suddenly announce, “*Sensei, please do the whole lesson today!*”—sometimes without any warning or lesson prep beforehand. So came some hilarious but stressful improvisations like turning a simple exercise on greeting into an impromptu storytelling session about a cat that gets lost in Tokyo.

In comparison, schools that designated regular co-teaching meetings implied that lessons were well-prepared and on the same page. At one school, the ALT and the homeroom teacher created a shared Google Doc to map out lesson targets, key vocabulary, and teaching techniques. This made the teaching more organized and efficient: one can imagine the awkward scenario of, during the lesson, discovering that both teachers had prepared completely different activities from each other!

Formalized co-planning sessions and collaboration would increase the effectiveness of ALTs and decrease classroom confusion.

Teaching Resources: “What Do You Mean There’s No Printer?”

Having access to teaching materials was another factor that influenced the effectiveness of the ALT. Schools that offered textbooks, worksheets, and digital resources made lesson preparation smoother. Yet sometimes resource limitations require creative thinking from the ALT.

Particularly hilarious—though it was also kind of vexing—was a time when the ALT was preparing an interactive vocab game and they spent most of their hour creating the worksheet. However, as it turned out the only printer working in school had gone out of order. Frantically they dashed to office—“*Sorry, no budget for printing this month.*” Without any copies available at all, the ALT had to re-draw every single worksheet by hand on whiteboard; what began as a supposed to be fun hands-on activity turned very soon into hours of painful board-writing or at least scribbling. Students sitting there watching, “*Sensei, sugoi! (Amazing) You can be an artist!*”

This was in stark contrast to schools where ALTs were provided with proper teaching materials and could use printers, digital tools, and classroom furniture. It is something schools need to think about. Schools should allocate budgets for ALT materials so that they can conduct high-quality lessons without any unreasonable pressure being put on them.

Professional Development: “Is There a Handbook for This Job?”

Structured professional development for ALTs was another area of major need. Japanese teachers often have regular trainings but ALTs were mostly determined to learn from experience.

One time, the ALT thought he would attend a professional development workshop but it turned out to be entirely in Japanese. He listened to a two-hour lecture, nodding away, pretending to understand, until the instructor pointedly asked, “*Any questions?*” The ALT hesitated, then replied with, “*Uh... sumimasen, eigo de ii desu ka? (Excuse me, can I speak in English?)*” The room erupted in laughter, and the instructor replied, “*Oops, apologies! I forgot you’re an ALT!*”

Thus, it is suggested that ALTs professional development workshop opportunities in English (classroom strategies, cultural adaptation, team teaching, etc.) be provided to support and help improve these experiences. Schools could also develop a handbook for new ALTs with basic lesson planning, Japanese classroom norms, and solutions for common problems.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this case study demonstrate the diverse function of the Filipino Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) in Japanese classrooms. The ALT used a range of teaching techniques to help students learn English, faced a number of obstacles, adjusted by developing coping skills, and made his way via institutional support systems. These results are associated with existing theories on second

language learning, communicative teaching strategies, and teacher adaptability in foreign educational environments.

Pedagogical Strategies and Theoretical Perspectives

The participant's pedagogical strategies like scaffolded instruction, gamified learning, and code-switching opportunities paired with culturally rich lesson identities fit well within Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Tzuriel & Tzuriel, 2021), which emphasizes the importance of guided learning and social interaction in cognitive development. Scaffolded instruction, especially, reinforces the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Alghamdy, 2024), where learners are aided appropriately until the work is done without guidance. The "I say, you say, we say" model is an example of this, slowly handing over the responsibility to the students.

Secondly, game-based learning whose efficiency the ALT heavily depends on reflects Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (Lou, 2024) that claims that learning of a language is facilitated in a low-anxiety situation. Games with emotional humor kept atmosphere off strain and made students feel comfortable making mistakes and joining. Research by Ahmed et al. (2022) affirms that game-based learning can motivate language delivery and engage students, especially young learners. This is also affirmed by the study of San Jose and Refareal (2025) in the use of games in English lessons though in the context of Japanese eikaiwa institutions.

The thoughtful application of code-switching is in line with Almusharraf's (2021) and Metruk and Rafajdusová (2024) findings that careful use of L1 may help learners to understand in the L2 learning process. Although immersion in the target language is advantageous, research indicates that selective use of students' native language is helpful to clarify complex concepts and decrease cognitive load (Pérez-Cabello & Quinn, 2024). The code-switching strategy of the Filipino ALT has therefore been used as an effective instructional approach in overcoming barriers to the lesson due to language.

In addition, the infusion of Filipino cultural perspectives resonates with intercultural communicative competence (Iswandari & Ardi, 2022), as it motivates a deeper understanding of other cultures and improved communication skills. By comparing Japanese and Filipino traditions, the ALT promoted cross-cultural awareness, an important aspect of language learning (San Jose et al., 2024; San Jose & Madrigal, 2023).

Challenges and Adaptation Strategies

The study revealed the major challenges, such as language barriers, low student participation, and cultural and

pedagogical differences. These results align with research conducted on non-native English teachers working abroad (San Jose et al., 2025). Some of the participant's colleagues spoke little or no English, which created a language barrier when the participant had to communicate around; adaptive strategies to bridge that communication gap included "charades" in the classroom, getting clarification through questioning when he felt confused, and playing out the lesson plan as he made it. The ALT adopting a humorous approach to handling miscommunication is an excellent demonstration of resilience and adaptability, two key features for working in foreign teaching environments (Baatz & Wirzberger, 2025; San Jose & Refareal, 2025).

The limited student participation, especially among rural Japanese schools, is consistent with research on English language anxiety in Japanese learners (San Jose et al., 2025). Also relevant to the level of these findings is the "Great Wall of Silence" phenomenon in which cultural beliefs surrounding speaking emerge that prioritize accuracy over fluency, resulting in student reluctance to engage in spontaneous speech (Inada, 2022). These creative tactics by the ALT — including playful threats of "karaoke punishment" — illustrate an innovative solution to this challenge, in keeping with the idea of affective scaffolding (Pan et al., 2023).

Cultural and pedagogical differences further complicate matters. The structured education system in Japan is diametrically opposed to the more flexible and interactive styles of teaching that teachers trained in the Philippines frequently favor. The ALT's skills to balance formal teaching expectations with engaging activities underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability in cross-cultural teaching settings (Oberste-Berghaus, 2024)).

Institutional Support and Areas for Improvement

The results demonstrate the significance of strong institutional support for ALTs in Japanese schools. In Japan, there is no formal training program for ALTs and little information on their professional growth, despite the expectation that they will serve as a bridge between languages and cultures. Their prospective contributions are thus severely limited. Professional development models will require quantifiable enhancements to address this deficiency. Here are some specific suggestions:

A structured onboarding process. Many ALTs come to the task only knowing a little about the system and didactics as practiced in Japan. What they need is in the orientation program, which should feature key teaching methodologies as well as classroom management strategy and cultural considerations. This could incorporate mentorship by

experienced ALTs or Japanese teachers to help them get established smoothly.

Workshops for ongoing Professional Development. This means regular workshops concentrating on effective teaching strategies, cultural sensitivity and classroom engagement. They should be interactive and adaptive, suited to the problems faced by ALTs such as how to handle mixed-ability classes or narrowing down Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) techniques.

Collaborative Teaching Training. To build cooperation between ALTs and Japanese teachers, its professional development must also include training in team-teaching formats. If joint training sessions were held it would mean clearer lines of responsibility and make for better communication and coordination among staff members at all levels.

Action Research Opportunities. By asking ALTs to engage in action research, such projects could benefit their own professional development and provide a great deal of useful feedback for others too who are involved in educational administration. If funding or back-up were made available for small-scale research programs studying language acquisition and classroom interaction, it would heighten the professional status of ALTs as well.

Clear Career Advancement Paths. Many ALTs come to feel a lack of future prospects after stagnating. Institutions should bring in some career advancement channels or tracks that allow for progression, such as positions directing curriculum development in leading curricular areas or, alternatively, through training vacancies within the education system itself leading onto full-time teaching roles.

As the result of such targeted measures, institutions can expect to develop motivated, high-quality ALTs. In this way, English language teaching quality at Japanese schools throughout Japan will be improved. These recommendations are consistent with research which emphasizes the importance of teacher training for improving outcomes among students and overall teaching efficiency (Acosta-García & Navarro-Ibañez, 2025).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The authors acknowledge the limitations of this study while it provides useful insights into the experiences of Filipino ALTs. The case study design limits generalizability, as the findings stem from the experiences of only one ALT. Future research could use mixed-methods designs, providing a survey and/or interviewing several ALTs from multiple areas in Japan to discern wider trends.

Specifically, future studies might focus on the effects of

ALT-led interventions on student language outcomes. There are rare longitudinal studies that track student progress from year to year under different ALT teaching strategies and the empirical results could help determine pedagogical best practices for teaching English in Japanese public schools.

Lastly, institutional policies regarding ALT employment are an area for future research, with particular attention to workload distribution, collaboration frameworks with Japanese teachers, economic situations, and pathways to promotion and career advancement. We believe that addressing these factors will allow Japan to adopt a more sustainable and effective ALT system.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the complexity and multi-faceted aspects of a Filipino Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) in the context of Japan's education system. Although ALTs play an important role in English language instruction, the findings from this study suggest that they operate in a system with little ongoing institutional support, systematic professional development, or career pathways. As a result, this reality leaves a philosophical conundrum regarding the ethics of hiring foreign educators without properly socializing them into a profession that already exists within the education system. From a critical standpoint, the current model reflects broader systemic issues in education policy—namely, the tension between globalization and localized educational structures.

The findings encourage contemplation over the extent to which ALTs are treated as full-fledged educational professionals as opposed to mere conduits of cross-cultural exchange within the present institutional framework. Therefore, if ALTs are to be treated as part of language education, institutional stakeholders should not only recognize their pedagogical potential but also create procedures for their professional development within the institution. They state that with views of ALTs often being temporary there is a genuine need to shift our thinking away from perceiving ALTs as existing in a temporary level of importance and instead take steps towards providing a sustainable working environment that provides equal footing for all staff members, therefore helping providing results of increased autonomy for staff members ultimately leading to better learning for the students involved.

Finally, the study emphasizes the need for a critical reexamination regarding the incorporation of ALTs in Japan's educational system. Policy trends may attract sustainable employment for educators, better professional development and a more inclusive stance towards foreign teachers in language education.

Below are the most important lessons learned from this case study.

The necessity of institutional assistance. For ALTs to have the greatest possible influence in the classroom, they need mentorship opportunities, organized training programs, and continual professional development. They are far less successful without this kind of assistance.

A Clearer Definition of the ALT Role. Job expectations and performance are frequently inconsistent when roles are unclear. A uniform structure for ALT duties will facilitate better cooperation with Japanese educators and increase the efficacy of instruction as a whole.

Overcoming Pedagogical and Cultural Divides. Effective cooperation is hampered by cultural norms and differences in teaching philosophies. Training initiatives that encourage cooperation and understanding between ALTs and Japanese instructors should be implemented by schools.

Career advancement and employment stability. The existing lack of professional advancement and short-term contracts deter qualified educators from making long-term investments. Creating opportunities for career progression may increase ALTs' motivation and retention.

Concerns about Ethics in ALT Employment. In order to ensure that ALTs receive fair treatment, competitive salaries, and possibilities for career advancement, the study emphasizes the necessity of ethical recruiting methods that are in line with fair labor norms.

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