

Adapting, Learning, Excelling: Narrative Inquiry on How Filipino ALTs Grow in Their Careers

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ABSTRACT

Despite the increase of Filipino ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers) in Shizuoka, Japan, research about these teachers' lived experiences and their stories of professional development remains quite scarce. Hence, this narrative inquiry investigates the professional development of Filipino ALTs in Japan, focusing on the adjustments they make and the skills they acquire to succeed in an educational and cultural environment so different from their own. From the stories told by two participants, three key themes emerged: adapting to a new educational and cultural landscape, learning through relationships and reflection, and excelling as educators and cultural mediators. The Filipino ALTs' journeys demonstrate that global education can be relational, intercultural, dialogical, and transformative. Despite the study's limitations, the findings have implications for educational institutions, policymakers, Japanese and Filipino educators, teacher education, and researchers.

Keywords: Filipino ALTs, Japan education system, intercultural education, narrative inquiry

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers of foreign languages have increasing responsibilities in today's globally interconnected educational world, extending beyond merely imparting language competencies to the students. The role of these teachers has become dynamic, multifaceted, and quite integral to promoting understanding among peoples of different cultures (Kobuljonova, 2024). While countries across the globe invest in the teaching of English for the purpose of giving their citizens the ability to communicate and compete on a global stage, the demand for highly qualified English teachers rises (see Kariya, 2024). But who are these English teachers? What kind of education do they have? What kind of life experiences have they had that have brought them to this place where they now teach English in a foreign land?

Countries across Asia have implemented a range of policies aimed at boosting English language education, like Japan, choosing to bring in Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) from English-speaking or English-proficient countries. This has, quite properly, generated a lot of interest in understanding the kinds of educational and professional experiences these foreign teachers bring with them, and in understanding what kinds of experiences they are having once they are here.

The ALT system in Japan is now embedded in programs such as the JET Programme and through direct hiring by Boards of Education and private dispatch companies. The visibility of Filipino ALTs has increased dramatically in recent years, and many now occupy roles that extend well beyond the realm of language instruction. Indeed, some would argue that the role of an ALT in a Japanese

educational context is much more about cross-cultural mediation and community engagement than it is about English instruction per se. However, the growth of Filipino ALTs within the Japanese educational system has not been explored in much detail.

Focusing on Shizuoka Prefecture, a space characterized by the active engagement of foreign teachers and an increasingly multicultural population, we find that it is an ever more diverse and vibrant professional community of Filipino ALTs. Their presence allows us to focus on a newer facet of the larger narrative of the ALT program and Japanese public schools.

Even with an increasing number of Filipino ALTs in Japan and particularly in Shizuoka, there remains a significant dearth of research focusing on these teachers' lived experiences and their narratives of professional growth. The studies that do exist primarily conduct analyses of the policies under which the teachers work, the teachers' language proficiency, or the students' outcomes. Very few look at the personal and professional development of the teachers themselves. And these teachers are not given an opportunity to tell their own stories in ways that would give us a better understanding of them as individuals and as professionals.

This narrative inquiry study seeks to bridge that gap. Its focus is the lived experiences of Filipino ALTs in Shizuoka Prefecture, Japan. Their stories serve as the basis for exploring both how they adapt to the idiosyncratic Japanese educational system and how they learn, grow within, and eventually excel in their roles as educators. Insights in this study not only contribute to the field of foreign teacher development but also reveal structures and supports that enable meaningful professional growth. This research holds significance for policymakers, educators, researchers, and stakeholders with a vested interest in improving English education and who are supporting diverse teaching workforces in our multicultural society.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used the qualitative research design with a narrative inquiry method to delve into the Filipino ALTs' experiences in Shizuoka Prefecture, Japan. Narrative inquiry, as Connelly and Clandinin (2012) define it, is the study of experience as it is expressed in story form. This research method allows for a profoundly personal and professional exploration of the ALTs' trajectories. Their stories capture the complexity of human experience and the many contexts through which it unfolds. Using narrative inquiry also foregrounds the voices of the ALTs. They are given a space in which to tell not only their side

of the story but also to reflect on how they've adapted, learned, and even thrived throughout their time as teachers in a foreign educational system.

Participants

There were two participants determined purposively following these inclusion criteria: (1) Filipino nationality, (2) at least two years of experience as an ALT in Japan, (3) working in Shizuoka prefecture, and (3) an openness to sharing personal and professional experiences in an in-depth manner. The first participant (P1) is assigned to two elementary schools and one junior high school in a highly urbanized city. The second participant (P2) is assigned to one junior high school and one elementary school in a rural area. Both of them work under a private dispatch company in Shizuoka prefecture.

Instrument

The primary research instrument was a semi-structured interview guide. This was intentionally designed to elicit the real and raw narratives of the experiences that participants have had enacting the role of ALT in Japan. Guided interviews were employed as the method of data collection as this best served the intent of the research to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. The interviews were characterized by a free and open conversational style while ensuring the researchers' concerns were part of the discussion, too. Sample questions included: "*How do you find your ALT position experience in Japan?*" and "*How do you pursue professional development as an ALT in Japan?*"

Data Collection Procedure

We collected data through in-depth, one-on-one interviews conducted either face-to-face or via secure video conferencing platforms, depending on participant availability and location. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes, and all were conducted in English or Tagalog. We audio-recorded the interviews with participant consent and transcribed them verbatim. Participants were given the opportunity to review and clarify their transcripts to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the data, aligning with the collaborative nature of narrative inquiry.

Data Analysis

The study employed Riessman's Thematic Analysis Framework (2008) for analysis of the collected narratives. This framework keeps intact each participant's unique story while simultaneously identifying thematic patterns across cases. Riessman's method does the following: attends to the narrative by understanding how each participant structures and delivers their story; identifies themes within and across narratives by seeking out similar ideas, patterns,

metaphors, and emotional expressions that recur in multiple stories; contextualizes the themes by placing the narrative themes within the broader cultural, institutional, and social contexts of the participants' lives; constructs meaning by interpreting the narrative themes as a collective message about the significance of the participants' experiences in light of the research questions.

Data Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed Lincoln and Guba's criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Kumar et al., 2025). Credibility was established through prolonged engagement and member-checking (participant validation of transcripts). Transferability was addressed by providing thick descriptions of the participants and contexts, enabling readers to assess applicability to other settings. Dependability was supported by maintaining an audit trail of research decisions and processes. Confirmability was ensured by researcher reflexivity and peer debriefing, minimizing personal bias.

Ethical Considerations

We observed ethical practices in conducting this study. Informed consent was secured from each participant to whom the purpose of the study was fully revealed. They were told that they had every right to refuse to participate and that they could withdraw from the study at any time when they felt uncomfortable. The participants' identities and their institutions' names were also kept confidential. They were also assured that the data they provided would be used for research purposes only.

RESULT

The stories of six Filipino ALTs in Shizuoka Prefecture were analyzed to explore how they experienced professional growth while navigating the complexities of teaching in Japan. Through narrative inquiry and thematic analysis, three overarching themes emerged that captured the participants' journeys: (1) adapting to a new educational and cultural landscape, (2) learning through relationships and reflection, and (3) excelling as educators and cultural mediators. Each theme is illustrated with direct excerpts from participants' narratives, using pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Adapting to a New Educational and Cultural Landscape

The early phase of careers in Japan was profoundly cultural and professional for the Filipino ALTs. In interviews, participants referred to this shift as a "baptism by fire" stage when their ideas about teaching and communication were repeatedly challenged. They were not only negotiating the

practical details of life in Japan – language, transportation, and housing – but also working through more nuanced adjustments to school culture, classroom dynamics, and societal expectations.

"I didn't know where I belonged."

P1, who worked as a licensed English teacher in the Philippines before moving to Japan, remembered the confusion and professional displacement she initially felt. She said: *"In the Philippines, I was the main teacher. I had control over my class. But here, I wasn't sure what my role was. Sometimes the JTE didn't talk to me at all, or just handed me a worksheet before class. I didn't know if I was just a speaker, an entertainer, or a real teacher."*

Roles were uncertain, and this was a sentiment expressed often. Participants spoke about the communication that was lacking and how this affected their confidence. They described feelings of being underutilized and mentioned that they just were not clear on what they were supposed to be doing.

Reading the Invisible Rules

Another main obstacle was comprehending the unspoken rules and the norms of behavior. P2 recounted how, at first, he was really confused by the "tatemae vs. honne" dynamic in Japanese culture. He said: *"I'd ask if I could suggest an activity, and they'd say 'maybe next time.' I thought that meant they were open. But it actually meant 'no.' It took me months to realize how indirect communication works here."*

He also shared how a simple cultural misstep, sitting in a seat meant for the vice principal, embarrassed him early in his placement. No one corrected him directly, but the tension in the room made him realize he had made a mistake. He recounted: *"It was a small thing, but I felt so ashamed. I learned to watch everything like body language, how others behave. I became hyper-aware."*

Language as a Barrier and a Catalyst

The ALTs communicated in English at school, but the participants recognized that a barrier of language limited the kinds of connections they could make with both faculty and students. P1, who spoke very little Japanese at first, felt quite isolated in the staffroom. She shared: *"They'd be laughing and talking in Japanese, and I'd just sit there quietly. I didn't want to interrupt. I felt invisible sometimes."*

The challenge eventually became a motivator. P1 enrolled in Japanese language classes and began using simple phrases to greet and thank her coworkers. Over time, this built rapport and trust. She said: *"Even just saying 'otsukaresama desu' every day helped me feel like part of the team. I saw how they appreciated the effort."*

Daily Life as a Learning Ground

Adaptation extended beyond the school. Participants mentioned how navigating daily life in Japan contributed to their resilience. P2 recalled getting lost on his first day of work: *“The bus system was confusing. I couldn’t read the kanji. I ended up in the wrong town. I almost cried in the convenience store. But a kind obaa-chan helped me and even called my school.”*

Even though experiences like these are stressful, they become tales of humility, guts, and transformative power. They helped participants build empathy for their students and a deeper appreciation of Japanese hospitality and social etiquette.

Negotiating Stereotypes

Adapting also meant dealing with stereotypes, both positive and limiting. They talked about how they had become almost performance artists, always being merry or “fun”. They said this kind of expectation limits them professionally. P1 shared how one of the Japanese Teachers of English was surprised when she shared a grammar activity: *“Some teachers thought I was just there to play games or dance. When I tried to suggest a grammar activity, they looked surprised. Like, ‘Oh, you actually know English well.’ It was frustrating.”*

To challenge these assumptions, P1 started to set up more formal activities and asked to plan the lessons with her. She started to appear competent in the eyes of some of the teachers, which led to her becoming a more tolerated figure on the team.

The experiences of Filipino ALTs indicate that adaptation is a personal and often emotionally charged journey. It is not a simple process of becoming like the others but an intricate negotiation of self, where they are not only ALTs but also persons with Filipino identities. As these educators make their way in the Japanese landscape, they unfold a vision of what it means to be both an ALT and a person with a unique cultural identity. Their stories reveal a pattern of initial confusion and discomfort, followed by cultural learning, identity reconstruction, and gradual empowerment.

Learning Through Relationships and Introspection

The growth of Filipino ALTs was powered by relationships and introspection. Once they moved beyond the initial phase of adaptation, they began to grow, but not because of formal training and not because of rigid curriculum materials. They grew because of people – students, Japanese colleagues, fellow ALTs – who were in their lives. Moreover, they grew because they intentionally reflected

on their lived experiences. These human connections became the most powerful drivers of their development, shaping both their teaching skills and personal identities.

Mentorship and the Power of One Ally

For the participants, having even one supportive Japanese Teacher of English (JTE) made a lasting impact. In sharing a pivotal experience, P1 described a senior JTE who invited her to co-plan lessons. She shared: *“He didn’t just tell me what to do, he asked me what I thought. It was the first time I felt like a collaborator, not just an accessory. It was empowering. After that, I started suggesting more ideas, and I wasn’t afraid to lead warm-up activities or any part of the lessons anymore.”*

This mentorship relationship shifted P1’s self-perception. Instead of seeing herself as a temporary or replaceable figure, she began to identify with voice and agency as a legitimate teacher. P2 had a similar experience as he stated: *“One student always ignored me. I felt helpless. But my JTE didn’t scold me or blame me, he said, ‘Let’s try talking to him together.’ That moment taught me how discipline here is more relational than punitive. I learned to be more patient and compassionate.”*

Learning from Students

Students have frequently turned out to be an unexpected yet powerful source of learning for the participants. In the interview, P1 detailed a single moment with a reticent first-year junior high student that changed her understanding of her presence in the classroom. *“He never spoke in class, but one day he gave me a tiny note after school that said, ‘I like your smile.’ It reminded me that even when I feel I’m not getting through, I am making a difference just by being kind and consistent.”*

These seemingly small moments helped participants recalibrate their definitions of success, from delivering perfect lessons to being present and building trust and warmth with students.

Peer Support and Shared Wisdom

Besides their Japanese colleagues, fellow Filipino ALTs played a crucial role in shaping the professional development of the participants. They leaned heavily on ALT networks, especially during their early years. P1, who had a limited teaching background before moving to Japan, admitted that peer support was her main source of pedagogical knowledge. She shared: *“We’d meet every other weekend, Filipino ALTs from nearby towns. We shared everything: lesson plans, horror stories, budgeting our weekly meals, dealing with Japanese colleagues, even how to explain ‘present perfect tense’ in simple English. That’s where I learned most of what I know.”*

P2 shared the same experience as he regularly met his fellow Filipino ALTs. *"We usually meet at a restaurant or café to discuss many different things, whether related to work or not. I learn a lot from my senpai (senior ALTs) and I appreciate their sincerity to be of help to me. Sometimes we gather in each other's apartment, cook Filipino dishes, and talk about various things until dawn."*

Altogether, Japanese and Filipino colleagues shaped the participants' professional development in powerful ways. While the former provided mandatory teacher training, the latter offered a model of what the working world could be.

The Role of Reflection in Growth

Both participants narrated taking part in personal reflection. This reflection was done in various ways, such as journaling, praying, communicating with family back home, and quiet mental processing. This particular habit of mind emerged as the norm in response to challenges. Reflecting on not-so-great moments was used as a way to try to make sense of them. P1 shared how she began journaling after a particularly difficult school year.

She shared: *"There were days I questioned everything, if I was even helping anyone. Writing helped me see how much I'd grown. I remembered how scared I was on my first day, and now I was leading school events. That shift gave me strength. Other than journaling, I engage in mindfulness activities like meditation in the morning and before going to bed. And almost every day, I pray and hold on to my faith in God."* (P1)

P2 shared the same experience: *"I think the quietness of the morning and the night leads me to personal reflection, which I learned back home, especially in the church. Yes, prayers are helping me face the daily challenges in the workplace. It also helps me see who I am and what potential I can actualize so I become the best version of myself..."* (P2)

Also, P2 narrated how reflection helped him reframe failure. He recounted a lesson that fell apart due to technical issues and students losing focus. *"I was so embarrassed, but instead of blaming the students or technology, I asked myself, what could I control? I learned to always have a backup plan, and to be okay with imperfection."*

Introspection helps the participants build resilience, develop their teaching philosophies, and gradually gain confidence in their ability to thrive, not just survive.

This theme shows that the growth of Filipino ALTs was profoundly relational and internal. Mentoring, collaborating, and connecting created fertile conditions for learning, while personal reflection became a powerful

force for professional and emotional development. Altogether, relationships and introspection provided a duo of solid platforms upon which participants could stand as they consolidated learning and verified an evolving sense of purpose in the work of teaching. In the end, Filipino ALTs appeared to be building teacher identities, with quiet confidence, that are deeply rooted in forms of empathy, resilience, and community.

Excelling as Educators and Cultural Mediators

Filipino ALTs faced challenges while adapting to their new environment, but they learned to overcome these challenges by reflecting on their experiences and building relationships with others. They navigated their way around obstacles in the classroom and became more effective teachers. But more than that, they filled the roles of cultural bridge, mentor, and community contributor exceptionally well. For them, excelling was not about titles or promotions (which are limited in ALT roles) but by growing a sense of agency, professional pride, and the tangible impact they had on students and school communities.

Becoming Instructional Leaders

Participants spoke about how they had transcended being simply on the receiving end of lessons to become proactive contributors to lesson planning, curriculum enrichment, and extracurricular events. P1, who had once struggled with confidence, described her evolution: *"Now, the teachers ask for my input. I design full activities, like 'English Around the World' week. I coordinate with other ALTs. I never imagined I'd be leading these projects before."*

P1's transformation from a silent observer to a trusted collaborator reflected not just language proficiency or cultural adjustment, but a deepening of professional identity. P2 echoed this, sharing how he began creating customized games and grammar exercises that fit his students' interests: *"I started to see patterns, what worked with shy students, how to scaffold better. I realized I wasn't just filling time in class. I was building skills, building confidence. It's satisfying to see how my efforts contribute to the improvement of my students."*

Serving as Cultural Mediators

The ALTs from the Philippines found themselves in a unique position, mediating not only between the English and Japanese languages but also between the cultures and worldviews. This role became especially meaningful because they were able to bring their own Filipino culture into the curriculum, creating cross-cultural dialogues with their students. P1 explained how she made Filipino traditions part of her lessons: *"I talked about Sinulog and made a simple mask-making activity. The students were curious. One student said, 'I didn't know the Philippines*

had such colorful traditions. It felt good to share a piece of home."

This act of cultural sharing was not just about information, it became a source of pride and empowerment, allowing participants to assert their identity in a place where they were often seen only through the lens of "native English speaker." P2 also reflected on his role: *"Sometimes, teachers would ask me to explain things about Filipino manners or family values. I realized I was helping them understand my culture, too. It felt like a two-way exchange, not just assimilation."*

Mentorship and Advocacy

As their confidence grew, they began to mentor new ALTs, particularly those from the Philippines, providing them with the direction they needed in their earlier years. P1 shared: *"When I heard a new Filipino ALT was coming, I reached out. I helped her with her apartment, walked her through the school schedule, and even practiced keigo (formal Japanese) with her. I wanted her to feel supported, the way I wished someone had done for me."*

They also began advocating for improvements in the workplace. P2 shared how he once helped mediate a misunderstanding between a fellow ALT and their supervisor: *"They were going to cancel his contract because of a miscommunication. I stepped in, explained things in Japanese, and helped clear it up. He kept his job. That was a big moment for me, I felt I had real influence."* These actions reflect how participants not only grew personally but also began shaping the system from within.

Redefining Success

In contrast to typical career paths, ALT positions in Japan tend to offer little prospect for advancement. Despite this, participants described how they redefined what it meant to excel professionally. P1 shared: *"I don't get a promotion or a raise, but I get thank-you notes from students. They say, 'I want to study English because of you.' That's success for me."*

P2 measured his growth by impact on students' confidence, on school culture, and on his own evolving identities. He shared: *"Back home, being a teacher was about stability. Here, it's about growth. I've grown in empathy, flexibility, and communication. I may not have a title change, but I've changed."*

This theme shows how Filipino ALTs, by way of persistence, creativity, and relationship building, moved from surviving to thriving. They became more than language assistants. They emerged as instructional leaders, cultural ambassadors, and mentors in their school communities. Yet excelling in their context is not about

hierarchy; it's about impact, influence, and identity. These stories reveal how foreign educators, when supported and empowered, can go beyond the limits of their roles and become the kind of essential players that enable schools to function as intercultural learning environments.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the professional growth journeys of Filipino Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in Japan, organized into three interconnected themes: (1) Adapting to a New Educational and Cultural Landscape, (2) Learning Through Relationships and Reflection, and (3) Excelling as Educators and Cultural Mediators. These findings illuminate the transformative process Filipino ALTs undergo as they navigate, survive, and ultimately thrive in their roles. Each theme is discussed below, integrating theoretical frameworks and recent research to contextualize the participants' lived experiences.

Adapting to a New Educational and Cultural Landscape

The early encounters of Filipino ALTs with cultural dissonance reflect the common emotional and psychological strains of cross-cultural adjustment. The ALT participants in this study spoke of wrestling with a number of professional ambiguities, hesitations, and misunderstandings as they worked to integrate into Japanese schools. The participants pushed and pulled in many directions as they struggled to define themselves and their work in a linguistically and culturally complicated environment.

Berry's (2017) acculturation theory, which describes how people adjust to a new culture by using strategies like assimilation, integration, separation, or marginalization, is consistent with this. The majority of participants used integration, preserving their Filipino values while adjusting to Japanese customs, such as hierarchical respect structures and indirect communication. Putting this into practice meant learning to "read the air" (空気を読む, *kuuki wo yomu*), a deeply ingrained cultural concept in Japan, as well as observing the actions of Japanese teachers and modifying interaction approaches (Jung et al., 2024).

These difficulties are echoed in recent research by San Jose and Refareal (2025), San Jose et al. (2025), and Ratunil et al. (2025) highlighting how Filipino ALTs frequently join the field with insufficient instruction on Japanese school procedures, requiring them to pick up knowledge "on the job" and through observation. In the early phases of their deployment, the need to quickly adjust without clear rules frequently led to a decrease in confidence.

Nevertheless, these early challenges also acted as growth-promoting learning experiences. From the accounts of the participants, it appears that adaptation was a process

of active negotiation of identity, expectations, and professional values rather than passive acquiescence.

Learning Through Relationships and Reflection

This second theme stresses the importance of interpersonal relationships and individual introspection in the growth of Filipino ALTs. Participants consistently punctuated the value of social learning, not the kind delivered by a formal instructor but the kind learned from a fellow mentor, from peers, or through engagement with students.

Based on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (2023), learning takes place in a social environment and is largely accomplished through observation, imitation, and modeling. In this context, Filipino ALTs learned not only strategies for navigating the classroom but also the unwritten rules of communicating in a Japanese educational setting. This study seems to suggest that informal mentorship from a Japanese co-teacher, paired with the observation of the JTE's instructional delivery has made a significant measurable difference in classroom performance for the ALT.

In addition to mentorship, communities of peers, especially the fellow Filipino ALTs, crafted safe spaces for emotional support and professional development. These communities give the participants a sense of solidarity and allow them to draw on their collective wisdom. The ALTs have indeed walked the path they are currently moving along, and hearing their counsel – insights almost in the fashion of Vygotsky's 'More Knowledgeable Other' (see Wald, N., & Harland, 2022) – is both heartening and directing.

Moreover, the participants could process their experiences, pinpoint their growth, and rethink their stumbles thanks to introspective practices (Virtue, 2021). It is one thing to work through an experience; it is another to do so while writing in a journal, having a conversation with a mentor, or simply thinking out loud to oneself. The aforementioned practices allow for a kind of dialogue to occur, first with the self, and then with the trusted other, that promotes deeper thinking and makes way for clearer, more assured cognitive connections.

Excelling as Educators and Cultural Mediators

The final theme brings out how Filipino ALTs began to excel in their roles by embracing their identities as educators and cultural bridges. As they gained confidence and credibility, they moved beyond the limited scope of assistantship and became proactive contributors in curriculum planning, lesson execution, and student development.

This professional growth involved a gradual shift in teacher identities, a new conceptual framework for teacher identity development explored by Pishghadam et al. (2022), who

describe it as a dynamic, context-sensitive construction shaped by experience, relationships, and reflection. This framework includes the following components: mirrors of power, discourse, the imagination of reality, investment, emotioncy, and capital.

Filipino ALTs often redefined success not in hierarchical terms, since ALT positions have limited promotional pathways, but in terms of the impact and influence they create. They derived satisfaction from improving their student engagement, sharing Filipino culture, and mentoring new ALTs. These actions reveal their evolution from passive participants to agents of intercultural learning, supporting both linguistic development and global awareness in their classrooms.

This also relates to theories of intercultural competence, such as that of Nemouchi and Byram (2025), whose model identifies core competencies needed for intercultural interactions. These include interpreting cultural practices, fostering empathy, and maintaining self-awareness. Filipino ALTs showed that they possess these competencies by navigating two cultures and educating their Japanese colleagues and students about Filipino traditions. They are also doing the much-needed work of promoting mutual understanding in today's world. In addition, Ratunil et al. (2025) determine that Filipino ALTs significantly affect the dynamics of team teaching in junior high schools. They motivate students and provide a significant channel for intercultural exchange not only among young Japanese students but also adult and old adult learners of English (see San Jose et al., 2024a; San Jose et al., 2024b; San Jose et al., 2024c; San Jose & Madrigal, 2023). They also bring great creativity and fresh perspectives to the job, and those factors drive their professional excellence.

This research shows that the professional growth of Filipino ALTs in Japan does not follow a linear path but is instead a dynamic and relational process awash with opportunities for reflection. These educators in Japan develop professionally through adaptive relationships, critical reflection, and a reimagining of their roles that transcends the demands of language instruction. The findings of this study contribute to the rather limited body of research concerned with how individuals who work at the intersections of two or more cultures navigate their professional trajectories.

The significance of backing from educational institutions is affirmed; the same goes for mentoring that is responsive to the educators' culture, and for opportunities that allow these language educators to influence decisions that affect them. These are vital in ensuring that foreign language educators have a more satisfying experience while having a strong impact in the classrooms where they teach.

CONCLUSION

This study is fundamentally about the human journey of becoming: the career paths of Filipino ALTs. It traces the experience of navigating difference. The stories told here illuminate the search for belonging and the arguably universal search for some kind of purpose in a complex social fabric. The findings show that teaching is a relational, ever-evolving vocation viewed from the stories of Filipino ALTs in Japan. Growth for them does not come through promotion but through self-discovery, cultural dialogue, and the expansion of meaning. They do not fit into the system; they stretch it, make it humane, and enrich it with their stories from another shore. This study invites us to rethink excellence. In a system devoid of straightforward routes to formal recognition, excellence emerges through something we might better call agency. It also appears, in some cases, to arise from the kind of impact that would lead us to think again about hidden forms of leadership within a fairly controlled academic environment. The Filipino ALTs' journeys show us that global education can be truly relational, intercultural, dialogical, and transformative.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This narrative inquiry presents precious insights that emerge from the real-life accounts of Filipino ALTs in Japan and carries several significant implications. These insights can play a vital role in helping to understand why teachers of English in Japan sometimes practice English in ways that are quite different from the same language when it is used in contexts outside Japan.

1. Educational Institutions and Policy-Makers. Schools and boards of education should recognize the changing role of ALTs. They serve not just as language assistants but as cultural mediators and educators, making distinct contributions to schools. Structured orientation and mentorship programs are needed for non-native ALTs. These should be tailored specifically for this population and should be delivered in a culturally responsive manner. This means that those who deliver the program should be mindful of and responsive to the different experiences and identities that non-native ALTs bring to the table. They should provide ALTs with professional development opportunities, provide clear career pathways for ALTs, and have ALTs in leadership roles in language programs.

2. Japanese and Filipino Educators. JTEs can benefit from professional learning that enhances intercultural collaboration, communication, and co-teaching strategies. Educators from the Philippines who wish to work overseas should be ready for a twofold task: identity negotiation and cultural adaptation. More importantly, they should embrace their cultural heritage, seeing it as an asset. This

should give them not only confidence but also the right disposition for the work ahead.

3. Teacher Education and Research. Teacher preparation programs, both in the Philippines and overseas, can tap into these stories to create curricula that stress intercultural competence, adaptability, and a reflective approach to practice.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is a contextual and interpretive inquiry with a qualitative, narrative form. It has several limitations. First, it focuses on a small number of Filipino ALTs in Shizuoka Prefecture, Japan. Their experiences may not fully represent the diversity of experiences across different regions, school levels, or contract types. Second, while it provides rich insights, narrative data is subjective and shaped by memory, interpretation, and the research relationship. Lastly, this study captures the stories at a specific point in time, without tracking how these professionals evolve after their ALT tenure or transition into new roles.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The limitations of this study could be addressed in future research, which could also extend the work done here, through the following: first, comparative studies may be conducted exploring how Filipino ALTs' experiences compare with ALTs of other nationalities, or how they differ between urban and rural settings in Japan. Second, longitudinal narrative studies may be done to follow participants over time to understand how their ALT experiences influence their long-term career trajectories, teacher identities, and views on intercultural education. Lastly, narrative studies from the Japanese perspective may be done to complement this research. Narratives from Japanese teachers about their perceptions of ALTs would provide a more holistic understanding of the collaborative teaching dynamic.

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