



Analyzing Student Errors and ALT Collaboration: The Experiences of Filipino Assistant Language Teachers in Japanese English Language Classrooms

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Abstract. This study examines the experiences of Filipino Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in Japanese classrooms, focusing on their interactions with students and Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs). Using a qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach, the research identifies common language errors among Japanese students, analyzes the collaborative dynamics between ALTs and JTEs, and explores the pedagogical interventions employed to enhance English instruction. Findings reveal persistent grammar, writing, speaking, and spelling challenges despite Japan's continued emphasis on English education. While ALT-JTE collaboration is generally positive, cultural and structural barriers limit the full integration of ALTs into lesson planning and classroom instruction. ALTs implement structured preparation, scaffolding strategies, and personalized support, yet traditional teaching approaches often constrain their effectiveness. The study highlights the need for more comprehensive ALT training, improved team-teaching frameworks, and professional development programs that promote communicative language teaching. These insights provide valuable implications for policymakers, JET Program administrators, and educators seeking to enhance English language education in Japan.

Keywords: Filipino Assistant Language Teachers, JET Program, English Language Teaching, Japan

INTRODUCTION

The increasing demand for English-speaking individuals has intensified global interest in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educational systems. As English continues to function as the primary medium of international communication, countries worldwide have invested significantly in English language education, acknowledging its crucial role in globalization (Cameron, 2012). This investment reflects a broader trend where English has transitioned from merely being a communicative tool to becoming a valuable commodity in academic, professional, and economic spheres (Sharma, 2018). The commodification of English is intricately linked to internationalization, propelled by advancements in digital communication and global connectivity (Cameron, 2012).

Despite the global emphasis on English proficiency, many countries still struggle to achieve desired levels of language competence. This has led to various educational reforms aimed at enhancing English language instruction. Historically, English emerged as a lingua franca during the British colonial era, and contemporary strategies such as teacher exchange programs have become prevalent in improving English education (Binns, 2022). Notable international initiatives, including the English Program in Korea (EPIK), the Chilean English Open Doors Program (EODP), and the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program,

exemplify efforts to integrate native and non-native English teachers into foreign language education systems (Brown, 2024).

Focusing on the JET Program, this initiative recruits foreign teachers, known as Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), to bolster English education in Japan. The program aims to promote internationalization and enhance English language education by introducing native and near-native English speakers into Japanese classrooms (Brown, 2024). However, Japan's persistent low ranking in English proficiency compared to its neighbors raises questions about the effectiveness of ALT integration in the classroom (Binns, 2022).

The team-teaching model is a critical aspect of the JET Program, where ALTs collaborate with Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) to facilitate language learning. Most ALTs are sourced from Inner Circle English-speaking countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom. However, the program has recently expanded to include ALTs from countries where English is an official or second language, such as the Philippines (Brown, 2024). The growing representation of Filipino ALTs in Japan—from just two participants in 2014 to 298 in 2022—highlights the need for further research on their contributions to English language instruction (Binns, 2022). Previous studies have examined various aspects of their experiences, including their roles in multicultural education, migration motivations (Price, 2014), and professional backgrounds (Sharma & Phyak, 2017). However, there remains a significant gap in research regarding their specific experiences in English language instruction, particularly concerning common language errors among Japanese students, ALT-JTE collaboration, and the pedagogical strategies employed in the classroom (Binns, 2022).

Given the increasing number of Filipino ALTs in Japan and the limited research on their contributions to English language instruction, this study aims to explore the English language interactions between Filipino ALTs and their students. Specifically, it seeks to identify common English language errors made by Japanese students, analyze the nature of ALT-JTE collaboration, and examine ALTs' interventions to address language difficulties. By addressing these areas, the study aspires to provide valuable insights for JET administrators, policymakers, and educators, thereby informing efforts to enhance English teaching methodologies and professional development programs for ALTs in Japan.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in several key theories explaining the English language challenges Japanese students face, the collaborative dynamics between Filipino Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) and Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs), and the pedagogical interventions employed to improve student's English proficiency. These theoretical foundations provide a lens through which the study's findings can be analyzed and understood.

To explore the common English errors of Japanese students, this study draws on the Error Analysis Theory (Corder, 1967; Selinker, 1972). This theory classifies errors as interlingual (influenced by the learner's first language) or intralingual (resulting from overgeneralization within the second language). The study's findings confirm that Japanese students struggle with subject-verb agreement, sentence structure, verb tenses, and spelling, supporting previous research indicating that English grammar remains a significant challenge despite Japan's grammar-heavy instruction (Bryant, 1984; Yamanaka & Takeuchi, 2009). Furthermore, the frequent omission of articles and prepositions reflects linguistic structures absent in Japanese, aligning with studies on Japanese learners' systematic difficulties (Izumi et al., 2003; Tsukimi, 2012).

The collaborative interactions between ALTs and JTEs in Japanese classrooms can be understood through Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), which emphasizes learning as a socially mediated process. In the study, ALTs play a supportive yet secondary role in co-teaching, reinforcing that learning is enhanced through scaffolding provided by more experienced teachers. However, the hierarchical structure of Japanese schools affects ALT-JTE collaboration, as ALTs often have limited influence over lesson planning. Additionally, the Japanese concept of "Tatemaie" (indirect communication) (Davies & Ikeno, 2002) creates

challenges in direct feedback exchange, highlighting the need for more explicit role expectations in ALT-JTE partnerships.

The pedagogical interventions employed by ALTs align with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980), which prioritize language use in meaningful contexts. The study finds that ALTs utilize preparation and practice techniques to help students develop confidence in speaking and scaffolding strategies such as peer editing and modeling correct usage. However, the gap between traditional grammar-focused instruction and communicative approaches remains evident, as students perform well on grammar-based tests but struggle with writing and speaking fluency (Saeko, 2012). This finding suggests that increased emphasis on real-world language use could improve student outcomes.

Finally, the cultural and professional dynamics of ALT-JTE interactions can be further examined through Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence Model (1997). Filipino ALTs work within a Japanese-dominated school culture, so their ability to navigate linguistic and cultural barriers directly affects their teaching effectiveness. The study's findings indicate that ALTs who actively build rapport with JTEs and students through informal interactions tend to foster stronger collaboration and more engaging classroom environments. However, cultural differences in communication styles and hierarchical school structures sometimes limit ALT involvement in lesson planning and decision-making. This suggests a need for professional development programs that address cross-cultural collaboration.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of Japanese students' language difficulties, the ALT-JTE collaborative framework, and the effectiveness of ALT-led pedagogical interventions. The findings highlight the need for a more balanced team-teaching approach, more substantial support for communicative language instruction, and better cultural adaptation strategies for foreign ALTs in Japanese schools.

Limitations

This study, while offering valuable insights into the experiences of Filipino ALTs in Japan, is subject to certain limitations. The research is specifically focused on the perspectives of Filipino ALTs within the JET Program, which inherently limits the generalizability of the findings to ALTs from other countries or to English language teaching contexts beyond the JET Program. Furthermore, the study's scope is confined to ALT observations and experiences concerning Japanese students' English language errors, ALT-JTE collaboration, and ALT teaching interventions, excluding direct assessment of student outcomes or in-depth analysis of JTE viewpoints. The sample size, comprising ten Filipino ALTs, is relatively small, appropriate for qualitative phenomenological research but limiting statistical generalizability; the findings represent the participants' experiences and may not fully represent all Filipino ALTs in Japan. Participant selection, using purposive sampling, may introduce bias, as volunteers may have particularly strong opinions, though this method did allow for targeting individuals with relevant experience. Potential biases were addressed through methodological rigor; researcher bias was mitigated using Colaizzi's seven-step method and reflexivity, social desirability bias was minimized by ensuring confidentiality and emphasizing honest communication in informal interviews, and recall bias was reduced by focusing on recent experiences of participants. By acknowledging these limitations and detailing the steps taken to address potential biases, the study aims to provide a transparent and credible account of its findings.

Research Questions

This study aimed to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are the most common English language errors made by Japanese students, as observed by Filipino ALTs?
2. How do Filipino ALTs collaborate with their Japanese Teacher of English (JTE) counterparts in the classroom?
3. What interventions do Filipino ALTs implement to help students overcome English language difficulties?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The qualitative research method, namely descriptive phenomenology, was utilized in this study. Descriptive phenomenology was frequently used in social science research to explore and describe an individual's experiences. This was a fact-finding analysis coupled with an in-depth examination of the report. It concerns current conditions, actions, values, ideas, and processes (Bryman, 2012). This method was utilized according to the study's objective of uncovering ALT experiences. Qualitative procedures frequently outperform quantitative research techniques that aim to comprehend viewpoints, as they enable the presenting of unique and intrinsically subjective experiences, resulting in comprehensive, deep, and profound information. When examining the study problem in detail, the descriptive phenomenological technique was the most appropriate method for analyzing the responses. Phenomenology was concerned with the experience of life and how that experience is converted into knowledge. The objective of descriptive phenomenology was to provide an account of a particular event or its presence through the respondent's lived experience. A detailed account of the events, one's thoughts, consciousness, interpretation, and emotion provide personal experiences and a clear comprehension of the event. Descriptive phenomenology has produced a valuable, comprehensive account of someone's experience.

Respondents/Participants

Ten (10) Filipino JET ALTs or assistant language teachers volunteered to participate in this study. The average age of the ten participants was 32.7 years old. Eight, or 80%, of the respondents were female, while two, or 20%, were male. Most participants have been ALTs in the JET Programme for an average of 4.6 years, except for one participant who had just taught for a year during the interview. The respondents came from different prefectures in Japan. Four of the ten ALTs taught in senior high schools, three taught in elementary schools, and two taught a combination of junior high and elementary schools or junior high and senior high schools. All participants were still involved in the JET Program during the interview.

Sampling

The informants were selected using purposive sampling, also known as self-selection sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method, and it occurs when elements selected for the sample are chosen by the researcher's judgment (Black, 2010). When selecting possible respondents for this study, the researcher ensured that the individuals had direct experience with the studied topic. In this regard, participant selection was based on: 1) they must either be actively employed as ALTs within the JET program or have served during the last four years to assure a relevant timeframe, and 2) they must be a JET ALT from the Philippines. The four-year timeframe was chosen because the researcher had access to additional group members who started working for the JET program in almost the same current timespan; delving deeper into the JET program's four-year history could end up causing information to be incoherent concerning differences in the Japanese teaching system over the years. Respondents were recruited by sending invitations via social media, messaging applications, and email to several current Filipino JET Programme participants.

Instrument of the Study

A semi-structured interview guide was the primary research instrument used in this study to explore the experiences of Filipino ALTs in the JET Program. This format allowed for the collection of rich, detailed qualitative data regarding the ALTs' observations of Japanese students' English language errors, the nature of their collaboration with JTEs, and the specific interventions they employed in the classroom. The interview guide consisted of three main sections: an introduction to establish rapport and provide context, a body containing questions directly aligned with the study's research objectives, and a conclusion to summarize and close the interview.

Data Gathering Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the English language interactions of ALTs in the JET Program. This interview format was chosen as it allows for eliciting clear and understandable responses, aligning with the epistemological framework guiding this study. The interview guide was followed closely and consisted of three main sections. The first section, the introduction, was used by the researcher to establish rapport, explain the purpose of the interview, obtain consent to proceed, and outline the timeline for the interview. The second section, the body, contained questions directly related to the study's objectives. The final section served as the conclusion, wrapping up the interview process.

Interviews were held via Zoom, a video conferencing platform with recording capabilities. Before each interview began, participants were asked for permission to record the conversation. The interviews were

conducted in an informal manner to ensure a comfortable environment. The researcher and participants communicated in English and Filipino, facilitating a more natural and transparent exchange. The researcher avoided leading questions and actively listened to the participants' responses, accepting them without bias. Upon completion of the interviews, participants were invited to complete a brief follow-up survey, encouraging them to reflect on their interview experience. This process supported the epistemological goals of the study, fostering a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. The feedback process made the overall experience enjoyable and insightful for the participants.

The researcher summarized the participants' responses, expressed gratitude for their involvement, and outlined the next steps. Following the interviews, participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview if needed. Prior to distributing the interview items, a third party ensured their consistency. Colaizzi's seven-step method was used for data analysis in this study. The first phase involved an in-depth reading and review of the interview transcripts to understand the participants' responses comprehensively. During the second phase, the researcher revisited the transcripts, annotating the margins with initial thoughts and insights from the second reading. In the third phase, significant words and statements were highlighted using color coding, with each color representing a distinct concept. These key points were then compiled into a separate document, with the relevant page numbers and column details noted. The researcher derived meanings from essential statements and grouped them into subcategories, further broken down into subunits to generate themes. Stage five involved integrating the identified principles into a coherent written explanation of the phenomena. In stage six, the detailed findings were condensed into a concise statement, focusing only on the elements most pertinent to the phenomenon under study. Finally, the researcher reviewed the participants' responses in stage seven to ensure their experiences were accurately represented and aligned with the research objectives (Morrow et al., 2015).

Ethical Considerations

The researcher utilized the ethical considerations guidelines outlined by Bell and Bryman (2007). Regarding their participation in this study, the participants were not harmed. Prior to recruitment, the approval of all Filipino JET ALTs was secured. This was accomplished through online communication between the researcher and participants. In addition, the confidentiality of the participants was protected. They were assigned a number and referred to as "Participants" and their assigned number in the study's presentation and analysis. Participation voluntarily was regarded as vitally crucial. In addition, they were informed that they could withdraw from this study at any time if they so desired. The collected data were managed with sufficient confidentiality. Any form of misleading information and biased presentation of findings from original data were avoided. On the other hand, preserving the highest level of objectivity throughout the study discussions and analyses was considered. In addition, this study received no financing from other sources or organizations. Lastly, all communication related to this study was conducted with integrity and transparency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first theme emerging from the participants' narratives is the common language errors of Japanese students. English is a complex and time-consuming language to master. Japan has received one of the lowest scores in the current edition of the Education First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI), which ranks 111 nations by English proficiency based on the results of 2,100,000 people who took English tests in 2021. Therefore, identifying common errors students make will provide insight into their difficulties in learning English, allowing for the implementation of corrective measures.

Common English Language Errors: Grammar, Writing, Speaking, and Spelling

P1 mentioned that the most common language errors committed by the students are "subject-verb number agreement, confusion on tenses, misplaced modifiers, run-on sentences, and vocabulary and spelling." This was further supported by P2, who stated:

"Students need clarification on this grammar point due to the contrasting Japanese and English sentence construction order. In addition, the subject-verb agreement is part of their struggle, too, because remembering and applying all the subject-verb rules is already too much."

P6 reported a similar observation of her students: *"They compose English sentences in a Japanese sentence pattern, so instead of SVO, they make English sentences using SOV."* P7 also added that the students are having a hard time with subject-verb agreement: *"My students are aware of the rules of subject-verb agreement;*

they can get good results during exams. However, they commit mistakes with subject-verb agreement in writing and speaking.” Similarly, P8 explained:

“Japanese students can exhibit their knowledge in a test on subject-verb agreement, but they need help to apply that knowledge when writing an essay. Most Japanese students may be able to have grammar knowledge but find it difficult to apply this knowledge in both speech and writing.”

P9 claimed, *“...number one is spelling. And then the use of pronouns and verb tenses.”* P8 supported this, stating that *“common errors that students commit are errors in the use of capitalization, spelling, and vocabulary.”* P10 mentioned that:

“The English competence of the Japanese students I have encountered so far is a mix of two extremes. The higher end tends to be considered fluent in the language as they can correct themselves when another notices an error. The lower end, where most of my students lie, struggles with the basics (e.g., phonics), which are important to learning a language. A strong foundation in a language is necessary to achieve mastery of it. The errors my Japanese students commit are nothing new to language learners, but they are more noticeable to them than my Filipino students back at home since they lack practice. Most of them struggle with the basics (e.g., phonics, syntax, etc.), and naturally, these are the more advanced facets of English.”

The participants identified subject-verb agreement, verb tense confusion, parts of speech, vocabulary, and spelling errors as the most frequent language mistakes their Japanese EFL students made. Despite the predominance of grammar-based instruction in Japanese EFL courses, students' primary issue is with grammar. This conclusion is supported by Yamanaka and Takeuchi's (2009) research into why Japanese students struggle to learn English, which concluded that grammar was the most significant obstacle for unsuccessful students. Recent studies have corroborated these findings, indicating that grammatical errors remain a significant hurdle for Japanese EFL learners. This was further highlighted by Mizumoto and Watari (2023), who claimed that grammatical errors are learners' most frequently committed errors.

Saeko (2012) claimed that grammar and vocabulary drills have been the main activities in English classrooms for many decades in Japan. However, studies and anecdotes have repeatedly shown that knowledge of syntax is not enough to use English for communication. Bryant's (1984) conclusion regarding the typical English errors of Japanese students is noteworthy. According to him, Japanese ESL students frequently commit interlingual (i.e., mother-tongue or L1) errors and intralingual (or L2) errors, which are typically the result of misinterpretation and syntactic overgeneralization. While most errors are L2 errors, the L1 errors impede communication the most. This is further supported by Mizumoto & Watari (2023), who identified key grammatical errors in Japanese learners, emphasizing the need for focused grammar instruction to address these persistent issues.

P4 observed that her students struggled with the use of articles. The absence of articles in Japanese makes it more difficult for students to learn the language. Frequently, Japanese speakers omit definite and indefinite articles from their sentences. Article errors were pointed out as the most frequently occurring mistake in Japanese learners of English (Izumi et al., 2003; Tsukimi, 2012). Similarly, respondents claimed that their students also showed difficulties in using prepositions, which is evidently because the Japanese language lacks prepositions. Students who have never encountered prepositions in their native language may find them especially difficult to comprehend. This aligns with findings from Sudhakaran (2015), who noted that the absence of formal grammar teaching exacerbates the difficulties learners face with prepositions.

Participants also identified spelling errors as a common mistake committed by their students. Mitton and Okada (2007), Okada (2004), and Okada (2005) investigated Japanese EFL learners' spelling errors, focusing on those that occurred in the word-initial and word-final positions. They also examined Japanese English learners using a spell-checking application to analyze spelling errors and the impact of L1 on L2 spelling. Cook (1997) compared the spelling of adult and child L1 and L2 speakers. Error rates and category distributions exhibited comparable patterns for native and non-native authors. Certain L2 groups exhibited peculiar errors, including the L/R confusion of Japanese learners. He mentioned that the confusion may not be solely a phonology issue.

In a follow-up interview, respondents to the present study shared the same observation regarding their students' L/R spelling confusion. This phenomenon is echoed in the work of Long & Yui (2018), who

highlighted the significance of understanding learners' errors as a means to improve language acquisition strategies.

Although undoubtedly not the only errors the Japanese students may make, they are unquestionably the most frequent. Fortunately, given that ALTs are aware of these errors and why they are mistakes in the first place, they can arrange the proper exercises to assist Japanese learners in learning the English language as effectively as possible. In addition, the present study revealed that most respondents' students struggled with written and spoken English despite possibly possessing a certain level of syntactical competency.

Since English education was introduced in Japanese schools, this issue has recurred. In 2015, the Ministry of Education stated that high school students in their final year significantly underperformed on government goals in the English competency test and had specific problems with speaking and writing. Nevertheless, past studies on the subject have already been published, showing the high incidence of errors among Japanese students regarding verb inflection and verb tenses, even before this issue garnered considerable attention in Japan (Stronge et al., 2011).

Concerning the study mentioned above, Yamasaki (2016) revealed that the average Japanese ESL student spends 11 months in language classes abroad to master speaking and writing, which is longer compared to other Asian students. Difficulties corroborate the research mentioned above findings. Since they spend an average of nine months working on their English speaking and writing skills, most Japanese clients feel discouraged and behind. Due to globalization, Japan's ability to improve its English proficiency is crucial for its future. The Japanese government is currently implementing a new course of study geared toward a more communicative approach to teaching English in their educational system. Nevertheless, despite the introduction of numerous reforms, they have not been adequate in increasing the quality of English instruction. Increasing the number of hours schools devote to English conversation may prove beneficial.

Collaboration with Co-teachers

The second theme emerging from the participants' narratives is their collaboration with co-teachers. Respondents were asked specific questions about their working relationships with Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs). Given that the JET Program promotes team teaching as a core instructional model, understanding these interactions is crucial for evaluating its effectiveness. The participants' experiences highlight both positive and challenging aspects of ALT-JTE collaboration, shaped by workload distribution, communication styles, and cultural expectations.

While some ALTs found their JTEs welcoming and cooperative, others encountered challenges in achieving equal instructional roles, particularly due to the hierarchical structure of Japanese schools. The findings suggest that successful collaboration depends on the degree of openness and flexibility of JTEs, as well as the ability of ALTs to adapt to Japanese work culture. This aligns with recent research by (Turner, 2020), which emphasizes the importance of collaborative teaching practices in enhancing student learning outcomes in bilingual programs.

Welcoming Nature of JTEs

A prominent sub-theme that emerged is the welcoming nature of JTEs and school staff. Several respondents described their colleagues as friendly and approachable, making day-to-day interactions comfortable. P1 shared a positive experience:

"Most of my JTEs are friendly and approachable, so talking to them outside the class is easy. However, I can barely talk to my JTEs in some schools because they are too busy. Given that high school teachers in the countryside are given more tasks than teaching their respective subjects, I do not get to spend time with my JTEs outside of school unless the school organizes events like welcome and goodbye parties."

P7 similarly noted:

"I am lucky to be surrounded by very friendly and helpful co-workers and students. We get along well. Likewise, I make sure that I help anyone in need. We used to socialize, but when COVID-19 hit, our usual gatherings outside of work were prohibited."

These accounts suggest that, despite time constraints and heavy workloads, many JTEs make efforts to engage with ALTs. However, ALTs working in rural or high-school settings reported fewer opportunities

for socialization, as teachers in these contexts tend to have more responsibilities beyond classroom teaching. The Japanese cultural concept of “tatemae” (建前)—which refers to the social expectation of maintaining harmony and avoiding direct confrontation—also plays a role in ALT-JTE interactions. While Japanese colleagues may appear welcoming on the surface, some ALTs found it difficult to gauge their true thoughts about team teaching and lesson planning. This cultural nuance sometimes leads to misunderstandings in communication, particularly regarding the role ALTs are expected to play in the classroom.

Usual Interactions

Beyond initial introductions, daily interactions between ALTs and JTEs varied significantly depending on the personalities, teaching styles, and expectations of individual teachers. Some respondents described strong professional relationships, while others noted minimal collaboration beyond basic classroom duties. P2 highlighted the contrast between open-minded JTEs and traditional teachers:

“Beyond my teaching duties, I maintain a warm yet professional working relationship in the staffroom and outside school. JTEs’ styles and personalities differ. I feel more productive and that my ideas and presence are valued more when working with open-minded JTEs. I feel repetitive and unnecessary when I work with JTEs with traditional styles or those who only count on me to pronounce words and phrases.”

P3 described their interaction as strictly professional but smooth:

“We only exchange common greetings (Aisatsu) in the hallway and make small talk with teachers. Our relationship is largely professional. It is smooth and easy. My coworkers are very kind. Some need extra help more than others, but I do not mind it at all.”

Other ALTs made conscious efforts to engage beyond formal duties, with P4 emphasizing the role of informal conversations in building rapport:

“Teachers and other school staff usually talk to me in their free time. Google Translate is my lifesaver! I usually eat lunch with my Kocho-sensei on Tuesdays, and we talk about anything under the sun. My JTEs plan everything, but I help them carry out their plans. It always feels good to be able to help my JTEs.”

These findings align with Rexroat-Frazier and Chamberlin’s (2018) study on co-teaching, which emphasizes that collaborative success depends on the willingness of both parties to share responsibilities. In cases where ALTs were given clearer roles in lesson planning, their engagement in the classroom was higher. However, when ALTs were assigned passive roles—such as only modeling pronunciation or leading warm-up activities—they often felt underutilized and disengaged. This is consistent with findings from Rexroat-Frazier and Chamberlin (2018), which highlight the necessity of effective co-teaching practices to enhance teacher collaboration and student learning.

Socialization and Relationship-Building

Many ALTs noted that social engagement played a crucial role in strengthening their relationships with JTEs and school staff. Informal interactions outside of work—such as chatting in the teachers’ room, eating lunch together, or participating in after-school activities—helped break communication barriers and foster a sense of teamwork. P6 shared a simple yet effective strategy for initiating friendly interactions:

“I greeted them first in English, like Hi, Hello, or Good morning, so they greeted me back; as they got used to it, they started greeting me now in English, and I greeted them back. We even wave at each other, students and teachers alike. Yes, I did that! It is excellent, and every time we do, I get closer to them and them to me; working together no matter the situation is a good way of building rapport and trust.”

Meanwhile, P10 described how shared interests helped build connections: *“I maintain relationships with a select few who share my hobbies, such as basketball and bodybuilding. I also have casual outings with my bosses and co-workers at the Board of Education.”*

These findings support Joseph’s (2015) research on personality and teacher effectiveness, which suggests that extraversion and proactive social engagement positively impact professional relationships in East Asian educational contexts. ALTs who took initiative in starting conversations and engaging in small acts of socialization tended to experience smoother collaboration with their JTEs.

Challenges in Collaboration

Despite these positive interactions, challenges in achieving true collaboration persist. Some JTEs maintain traditional teacher-centered approaches, treating ALTs as secondary classroom figures rather than equal co-teachers. As highlighted by P2, JTEs with a rigid, grammar-focused approach often rely on ALTs only for pronunciation or scripted activities, reducing their overall contribution to student learning. This is echoed in the findings that discuss the limitations of traditional teaching methods in collaborative settings.

Additionally, the workload imbalance between ALTs and JTEs was a recurring concern. While JTEs are often overwhelmed with administrative duties, ALTs sometimes feel underutilized, leading to a disconnect in their professional engagement. Research by Fujimoto-Adamson (2016) highlights similar challenges in ALT-JTE collaboration, emphasizing that workplace support networks alone are insufficient in resolving structural issues.

While the collaboration between ALTs and JTEs in Japan presents both opportunities and challenges, the effectiveness of this partnership largely hinges on mutual understanding, clear communication, and a willingness to adapt to each other's teaching styles and cultural expectations.

Interventions Provided by Filipino ALTs

The third theme emerging from the participants' narratives is the intervention provided by assistant language teachers (ALTs). This theme highlights the different strategies ALTs employ to assist Japanese students in overcoming common language difficulties and improving their English proficiency. These interventions fall under two primary subthemes: Prepare & Practice and Support, both of which emphasize structured learning, scaffolding, and fostering a positive learning environment.

Prepare & Practice

The first subtheme, Prepare & Practice, refers to the strategies ALTs use to help students develop their confidence and fluency in using English. Many respondents reported that allowing students time to prepare and practice before speaking or completing a task significantly improved their ability to engage with the language. As P1 described:

"During speaking activities, I always ensure that students have a preparation period. Whether it is a minute or five, I want the students to gather their thoughts on paper or in their minds. Thinking time helps students calmly set their minds to achieve the goal of expression."

This highlights the importance of structured thinking time, which allows students to organize their ideas and become more confident in expressing themselves. Research supports this notion, indicating that providing students with adequate preparation time can enhance their performance and reduce anxiety during language tasks (Li, 2020). Without such preparation, students may hesitate or struggle with fluency, especially in a foreign language.

Similarly, P5 noted the importance of observing students' difficulties and adapting lesson plans accordingly:

"I try to take notes of any difficulties they are having on a certain topic or activity and plan my future lessons accordingly. I also show as many examples as possible and always give ample 'thinking time' when doing drills with them. I go around the class to check on their work or collect their worksheets to check their answers and write comments."

This approach reflects a student-centered teaching strategy, where lessons are adjusted based on learners' challenges. By actively monitoring student progress, ALTs can provide targeted interventions to strengthen their students' understanding of key concepts. This aligns with findings from (Xu & Harfitt, 2019), which emphasize the importance of teacher awareness in scaffolding interactions to meet students' learning needs. P2 also shared a personalized approach to supporting struggling students: *"For the students who are very poor in English, I assist them in using the right reference materials while learning. I usually point out the mistake repeatedly and let them revise or correct their error on their own."* This method not only provides immediate feedback but also encourages self-correction, a crucial element in language acquisition. Allowing students to recognize and rectify their mistakes fosters independence and deeper learning, as supported by research indicating that self-correction strategies enhance language learning outcomes (Nassaji, 2016).

Meanwhile, P7 emphasized the importance of creating a risk-free learning environment to encourage students to practice speaking without fear of making mistakes:

"I do help them out during lessons with the usual practices and exercises. Apart from that, I conduct Eiken interview practices after school. More practice! However, remember that Japanese kids are hesitant to communicate to avoid mistakes. I think the first thing we need to do is establish a filter-free environment where they can make unlimited mistakes. In this way, we could get them to overcome their fear of committing mistakes, speak, and eventually learn from them."

This highlights the emotional aspect of language learning—Japanese students often hesitate to speak due to a fear of errors. By removing the fear of failure, ALTs can foster a more engaging and productive learning atmosphere, where students feel comfortable taking risks and improving their speaking skills. This aligns with findings from (Ban et al., 2023), which emphasize the importance of creating a supportive classroom environment to enhance students' speaking abilities. Respondents who had prior teaching experience in the Philippines had an advantage in offering effective interventions.

According to Merryfield (1997), overseas experience helps educators build better relationships with their students. Similarly, O'Brien (2006) found that teachers who have worked abroad refine their ability to create engaging learning environments by using diverse materials and methods. Filipino ALTs, having taught in the Philippines before moving to Japan, bring a wealth of instructional strategies that they can modify to suit their Japanese students' needs. Their ability to incorporate real-world examples and various teaching techniques enhances both student engagement and cultural awareness. This is supported by research indicating that teachers with international experience can effectively engage students by integrating culturally relevant materials into their lessons (Abushihab, 2016).

In education, adequate preparation and practice are essential for improving student performance. Teachers with international experience can capture student interest by incorporating authentic materials from their home countries. These fresh perspectives and culturally diverse resources can enrich students' learning experiences and encourage them to approach English with a broader, more global mindset.

Support

The second subtheme, Support, emphasizes the assistance and encouragement ALTs provide to help students overcome difficulties in learning English. Since empathy plays a crucial role in language learning, participants in this study highlighted how understanding students' struggles leads to more effective teaching.

As P3 shared: *"I verbally encourage them to try and not hesitate to ask questions. I do give demonstrations and model sentences before giving them the tasks."* Providing verbal encouragement helps reduce students' anxiety, increasing their willingness to participate. By modeling sentences before giving tasks, ALTs provide students with concrete examples to follow, making tasks less intimidating and more achievable. This aligns with findings from Pentimonti et al., (2017), which highlight the effectiveness of high-support scaffolding strategies in enhancing language instruction.

P4 further illustrated the importance of interactive learning in building motivation:

"I help the students cope with their difficulties in English learning by building up motivation and interest in English and intercultural things by creating interactive and fun activities, creating many chances to use English, communicating with each other in English, and communicating with ALT using visual materials."

By integrating fun and interactive activities, ALTs create a positive and engaging learning environment that helps students develop interest in English. The inclusion of visual materials makes lessons more accessible and comprehensible, particularly for students who struggle with language processing. This is supported by research indicating that interactive and visual learning strategies significantly enhance student engagement and comprehension (Muzammil & Saifullah, 2021).

P9 highlighted the importance of personalized feedback:

"We have this after-term test study. I participate in helping my students. My elementary students write a short reflection, and my JTEs send them to me. I make comments, and we discuss them in class. I go around the classroom during lessons to check if students are doing the exercises/activities correctly."

By offering one-on-one feedback, ALTs provide students with individualized support, allowing them to understand their strengths and areas for improvement. This level of personal attention is especially valuable for students who may struggle to keep up with the pace of regular lessons. Research has shown that personalized feedback is crucial for fostering student motivation and enhancing learning outcomes (Nassaji, 2016).

P8 shared an approach that integrates scaffolding strategies:

"I provide students with all the needed support, such as scaffolding strategies, to help them cope with their difficulties in English learning. I sometimes make them do peer editing. I also use proofreader's marks to provide them with grammar feedback and allow them to revise their essays."

Scaffolding strategies, such as peer editing and step-by-step grammar feedback, empower students to take an active role in their learning. By revising their own work, students develop critical thinking skills and become more independent learners. This is consistent with findings from Muntasir (2023), which emphasize the significance of scaffolding in language teaching to support student learning.

P6 offered another perspective, emphasizing the role of enjoyment in learning:

"In my way, the least and the best I can do is make English lessons fun; if they think it is fun, it becomes less difficult, and I receive less hate from my students. Another is if there is incidental learning, use it well."

When students associate learning English with fun and enjoyment, they are more likely to engage willingly and develop a positive attitude toward language acquisition. ALTs who incorporate games, humor, and dynamic activities help students view English as an accessible and enjoyable subject, rather than a daunting challenge. This aligns with research indicating that enjoyment in learning is a key factor in language acquisition success (Shi, 2018). The interventions provided by ALTs play a pivotal role in helping Japanese students navigate the challenges of learning English. By implementing strategies focused on preparation, structured practice, and personalized support, ALTs create an environment where students feel encouraged to take risks, express themselves, and ultimately improve their proficiency.

Additionally, the experiences of Filipino ALTs highlight how prior teaching experience and international exposure contribute to greater pedagogical adaptability. Their ability to modify teaching techniques, integrate cultural elements, and provide emotional support enables them to address students' learning needs more effectively. Furthermore, establishing a low-stress, high-engagement classroom fosters a positive attitude toward English learning. Through a combination of structured interventions, scaffolding techniques, and an empathetic approach, ALTs not only help students improve linguistically but also encourage them to embrace language learning with confidence.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study provides critical insights into the English language interactions in Japanese classrooms, focusing on the experiences of Filipino ALTs. The findings highlight persistent challenges in students' grammar, writing, speaking, and spelling, underscoring the need for targeted pedagogical interventions. Additionally, while ALT-JTE collaboration is generally positive, structural and cultural barriers hinder full instructional integration.

To enhance the effectiveness of ALTs, policymakers should consider revising the JET Program's training model to incorporate structured co-teaching frameworks and cultural competence workshops. Schools should also prioritize professional development programs that bridge the gap between traditional grammar-focused instruction and communicative language teaching.

Future research should expand the sample size and include perspectives from JTEs and students to provide a more comprehensive picture. By addressing these concerns, Japan can better leverage its ALT workforce to improve English proficiency and global communication competencies among students.

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Conflict of Interest

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