

Engaging Multiculturalism from Below: The Case of Filipino Assistant Language Teachers in Japan

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Abstract

Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) refer to English language speakers employed to assist Japanese teachers to teach English to Japanese elementary and high school students. Hired through the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET) which aimed to promote internationalization or *kokusaika* (国際化), ALTs were expected to provide improved foreign language education and international exchange throughout Japan's local communities. Although known as among the English-speaking countries in the world, the Philippines was not tapped as a major source of ALTs for the JET Program. However, this situation changed in the early 2000s when more Filipinos were hired as ALTs in various parts of Japan. While previous literature focused on the shortcomings of the JET Program in terms of its English language teaching methods, its impact to internationalization, and its prospects based on budgetary concerns, this study will focus on the situation of Filipino ALTs as well as the implications of this new type of employment for the promotion of multiculturalism. This paper will show that although Filipino ALTs face work-related challenges, their ALT work allows them the opportunity to promote multiculturalism at the grassroots level. Their entry as ALTs also offers another positive site for deeper cultural engagement with the Japanese and other nationalities through the wider incorporation and participation of the Filipino community as a whole within Japanese society, through the educational system.

Keywords : Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), internationalization and multiculturalism in Japan, Filipino community in Japan

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I Introduction

Filipinos, since their noticeable increase from the 1970s, have been among the top largest migrant groups in Japan. In 2008, the Filipinos ranked fourth among migrant groups in Japan with 210,617 registered nationals (MOJ, 2009). Although mentioned as those among the other nationalities hired to teach English in Japan as Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), the surge in the number of Filipino ALTs was observed only from the mid-2000s (Tutor, 2006a). The term ALT, *gaikokugo shido joshu* (外国語指導助手) or “foreign language instruction assistant” refers to English language speakers employed to assist Japanese teachers to teach English to Japanese elementary and high school students. ALTs are also referred to as Assistant English Teachers (AETs).

The hiring of ALTs started through the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET), which aimed to promote internationalization or *kokusaika* (国際化) throughout Japan’s local communities through improved foreign language education and international exchange at the community level (CLAIR, 2009). Implemented in 1987 with the purpose of increasing mutual understanding between the people of Japan and the people of other nations, the JET Program involved the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC), with the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) as an administrative body. Recruited mostly from the US and three other countries (United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand), the pioneer ALTs were sent to various schools throughout Japan and with their Japanese counterparts, and were assigned to teach English in public elementary, junior and senior high schools.

Although known as among the world’s English-speaking countries, the Philippines was not tapped as a major source of ALTs for the JET Program (CLAIR, 2009). However, as mentioned earlier and which will be further explained later, the situation changed in the early 2000s when more Filipinos were hired as ALTs in various parts of Japan.

While previous literature focused on the shortcomings of the JET Program in terms of its English language teaching methods, the socio-cultural difference between the ALTs and the Japanese, its impact to internationalization, and, its prospects based on recent budgetary concerns, this study will focus on the situation of Filipino ALTs. Furthermore, since most of them are long-term residents in Japan, this paper intends to analyze the implications of the ALT

experience for multiculturalism in Japan.

Although this paper is still exploratory in nature and is limited by the study's survey sample size, this paper is confident in presenting current trends and prospects for ALTS tapped from qualitative methods as key informants, semi-participant observation, and focused group discussions.

This paper stresses that although Filipino ALTs face work-related challenges, ALT work is a positive step for Filipinos as well as other foreign ALTs to promote multiculturalism at the grass-roots level. The ALT experience also offers another positive site of engagement toward the incorporation of the Filipino and the rest of the foreign community as a whole within Japanese society by allowing foreigners to be more visible in society.

II Methodology

This paper presents preliminary data obtained through literature review, online and questionnaire survey, participant observation, and key respondent interviews with twenty-seven respondents ($n=27$) answered the online and questionnaire surveys from July to December 2010, that asked about the ALTs' personal and household profile, work conditions, satisfaction, and attitude ratings.

Participant observation and focus-group discussions with 14 ALTs and other Filipino English teachers was done last July 17 and December 11, 2010, during skills training sessions among Filipino ALTs from various prefectures, mostly from Ibaraki-ken.

Lastly, in-depth interviews, conducted from August to December 2010, were done with four key informants. Key Respondent A has worked as an ALT for 10 years and is currently employed as a direct-hired ALT by a local board of education (BOE). Key Respondent B meanwhile is employed by a placement agency and has worked as an ALT for 6 years. Key Respondent C, while no longer an ALT at the time of the interview, was consulted for actively introducing many Filipinos as potential ALTs during the employment surge of 2003–2005. Lastly, Key Respondent D, while also no longer an ALT at the time of the interview, was one of the pioneering Filipino ALTs in Ibaraki.

The organization of this paper is presented as follows: first, the context of the entry of Filipino ALTs will be discussed by reviewing the substantive debates on ALTs and the JET Program, together with a brief background on the changing ALT job market which led to the entry of Filipino ALTs. Next, a closer look on the profile of the surveyed Filipino ALTs will be presented together with discussions about their work conditions and long-term concerns. Analysis on the changing nature of English language education through ALTs and how this relates to the incorporation of resident foreigners through multiculturalism will then be discussed. Lastly the

impact of the ALT experience for the Filipino community and its relation to the movement towards Japan's multiculturalism will be discussed in the conclusion.

III The Filipino ALTs: Setting the Context

1 Literature Highlights about the JET Program: Strengths, Shortcomings and Issues

In his research about the JET Program in Hokkaido, Aldwinckle argues that the structure of the JET Program led to issues of quality of instruction. The JET Program 1) did not require the ALTs to have teaching certifications, such as the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL); 2) hired young, adjunct, and temporary ALTs; and 3) did not provide tenure for the hired ALTs which prevented them to become long-standing members of their communities. These factors posed limitations on the quality of English instruction and also limited impacts on local *kokusaika* (1999, p. 7).

Meanwhile, in his pioneering research on the JET Program, McConnell traces the history and issues surrounding the program that he describes as the centerpiece of a top-down effort to create "mass internationalization." He explained that the JET Program started in the context of pressure applied, in the mid 1980's, by Western trade partners for Japan to open up trade and financial regulations. In response, Japan resorted, through the JET Program, to "import diversity" to facilitate Japan's becoming cosmopolitan (2002).

While the program went underway, various issues came forth. One involved the struggle to cope with the diversity in ethnicities, cultures and values between the ALTs and their local communities (McConnell, 2000). McConnell cites the case wherein Japanese officials reacted negatively when they discovered a few ALTs were planning to advertise a gay support group in a program-sponsored newsletter (2002). Another example noted the struggle of an African-American or non-Caucasian participants who experienced some form of discrimination. These cases show how CLAIR negotiated between its desire to foster understanding of diversity and the reality of widespread preference for whites at the local level (2000, p. 81).

Furthermore, while host institutions tried to create avenues for the understanding of cultures, there was little expectation for the ALTs to really "join the group," rather they were treated only as short-term guests (McConnel, 2002; Aldwinkle, 1999).

McConnell concludes that in spite of all its shortcomings, the JET Program, by and large, has been successful based on the following:

- a) it adjusted to the challenges of managing diversity in schools and offices across the country at the local administrative level;
- b) it promoted team-teaching which bridged the differences in English education philosophy

- between the ALTs and their Japanese colleagues; and,
- c) it facilitated “mass-internationalization” in the host-community, between Japan and its participating foreign partners

McConnell concludes that the manner by which Japanese communities handled the influx of ALTs is cause for optimism as it reflected the likelihood of them meeting the considerable challenges posed by diversity in Japan’s future (2000, p. 27).

Below is a summary table of the literature highlights of the merits and challenges of the JET Program.

Table 1 Strength and the Shortcomings of the JET Program

Strengths	Shortcomings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Successful in promoting Japan’s Internationalization - Promote interactions between foreigners and Japanese - Promotion of English language as a fun and international language - Institutional support for JET Participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Not tasked to promote Multiculturalism - Although there is respect and awareness, foreigners are still considered as outsiders - Focused on young, fresh and often transient JET participants which brought a lack of continuity - Not focused on growing number of resident foreigners in Japan - Doesn’t transcend the exam-oriented English language educational system in Japan - Budget concerns of the JET Program

Source: Summarized from various sources (Aldwinckle, 1999; McConnell, 2000 & 2002; Hosaka, 2010)

2 Recent Changes Affecting ALTs

While the merits of JET Program, such as bringing internationalization to the community level and radically changing traditional teaching methods through English language team teaching, have been acknowledged (McConnell, 2000), the recent decade saw criticisms of the program, raised especially by the ruling Democratic Party of Japan, that have targeted 1) the huge budget of 1 billion yen proposed for the Program to pay for airfare, orientation costs, and counseling services of foreign ALTs hired from abroad, and 2) the practice of CLAIR of accepting and giving plush jobs to retiring senior bureaucrats, termed as *Amakudari* or descent from heaven (Hosaka, 2010).

Despite these criticisms, the JET Program as well as the demand for ALTs is expected to proceed as Japan continues to see the need to learn English to be globally competitive as well as for fostering better understanding through the continuation of internationalism. Furthermore, aside from English being part of the present curriculum in the elementary schools under the elective “International Understanding” and as a compulsory subject in junior high school (Tutor, 2006a), the policy to have English education mandatory for fifth graders starting 2011 is

expected to increase the demand for ALTs (Fukuda, 2010).

Data provided by the MEXT which showed a drop in the number of JET Program ALTs from 5,676 in fiscal 2002 to 5,057 in fiscal 2006 and the doubling of non-JET ALTs from 3,090 in fiscal 2002 to 5,951 in fiscal 2006 confirm that many local governments (which in the past have paid for the recruitment and salaries of ALTs hired through the JET Program) have shifted to cheaper private outsource companies (Takahara, 2008).

Filipino ALTs have been among these non-JET ALTs recruited by private companies. However, this shift, from direct hiring of ALTs by local boards of education (BOE) to outsourcing which is a new cheaper route and practice of hiring non-JET ALTs, comes at the expense of the non-JET teachers' low salaries and lack of benefits, including health insurance, unemployment insurance, pension and less paid leave (Takahara, 2008).

The number of Filipinos, who are among these non-JET ALTs, has been observed to increase in the early 2000s. As already mentioned, except for some brief mention that there were six Filipinos who participated in the JET Program since 1998 (Aldwinckle, 1999; MOFA, 2009), so far there has been, to date, no systematic research about Filipino ALTs.

The next section contributes to a wider understanding of Filipinos ALTs in particular and of the ALT system in general, of Japan's policy related to internationalization, and to the related multicultural awareness and exchange that has emerged and continues to emerge through the ALT system practiced in primary and secondary schools in various locations throughout Japan.

IV Conditions and Concerns of Filipino ALTs

1 Profile and Conditions

(1) The Initial Phase When and how did the Filipinos get involved as ALTs? As already mentioned, Filipino ALTs had been reported to have been recruited through the JET Program but their numbers were not significant compared to the large numbers observed from the early to middle of 2000 through placement agencies (Tutor, 2006). Like other foreign ALTs, these early Filipino ALTs were JET participants from the Philippines through the earlier mentioned public admission channels such as Japanese embassies.

In the early 2000s, there were a number of Filipinos who were directly hired by the board of education of certain local governments. These Filipinos were former Japanese Ministry of Education (Monbusho) scholars who had graduated from Japanese universities. Exactly when the surge in recruitment of Filipino ALTs took place is still unconfirmed, but Key Respondent C mentioned having introduced about 60 Filipinos for ALT employment to private agencies within the period of 2003–2004.¹

What prompted the surge and increase in the recruitment of Filipino ALTs the last decade? A

Filipino newspaper in 2006 pointed to the “liberalization of the Japanese Labor Dispatch Law of 1999 which widened the scope of manpower deployment to non-traditional sectors (including teachers as well) and the *Kokusaika* or internationalization program of the Japanese government” which allowed English lessons in public schools as significant facilitating factors for the increased involvement of Filipinos as ALTs (Tutor, 2006a).

Without specifying the exact year that this happened, the same source mentioned the aborted plan of a private placement agency to recruit Filipino English teachers directly from the Philippines. With the Japanese Labor Dispatch Law of 1999 including manpower deployment to non-traditional sectors, this particular private placement agency had earlier optimistically expected the easy approval by the Japanese Immigration office of the entry to Japan of these Filipino English teachers from the Philippines whom they had scheduled to dispatch that year to various schools of a local government that had accepted their agency bid over other competitors. Although promising, this attempt has been snagged and finally aborted due to administrative hurdles on Japan’s side related to labor recruitment technicalities (Tutor, 2006b).

The unexpected Japanese government disapproval of their directly-hired Filipino ALTs from the Philippines resulted in the frantic rush and search by that particular private placement agency for ALTs from among the Filipino residents in Japan through aggressive recruitment methods that tapped the various Filipino social networks, and that offered monetary rewards paid for every Filipino ALT introduced, and hired to the placement agency.

Due to the urgency of getting enough ALTs for that school year, Key Respondent C recalls that the placement agency prioritized ALT applicants who had the proper visa requirements (those allowed to work legally), college diplomas, and those that had a pleasing disposition. During that particular recruitment rush period, English language competency or background, which is now considered an important prerequisite for all ALT applicants, was not considered of utmost priority then.²

Over all, active recruitment of more Filipino ALTs (which may have started earlier than 2003) was definitely observed to have accelerated from 2003 due to some factors:

- a) Japan’s policy to continue internationalization to remain globally competitive through the promotion of English Language learning
- b) Expanding compulsory English education to the elementary school level,
- c) The decision of local governments to award and require placement agencies with the lowest bids to supply ALTs to various schools within the prefecture, and,
- d) The aggressive recruitment and recommendation system encouraged by private recruitment agencies that paid *Shokai* fees (about 30,000 yen per person) to those who introduced Filipinos who were eventually hired as ALTs.

In summary, the convergence of several factors that included: a) national government policy and practice to promote internationalization by promoting English education; b) local government decision to hire ALTs, either directly through local BOEs or through private placement agencies; c) business aggressive recruitment system to supply ALTs to meet the bidding requirements of local BOEs; and d) the available pool and network of English speaking Filipinos who belong to one of the largest migrant groups in Japan seem to have paved the way for the initial recruitment and hiring of a significant number of Filipinos as ALTs from 2000.

(2) Recruitment There are more Filipino ALTs recruited within Japan through private placement agencies while only a limited number are recruited directly by local boards of education (BOE). Some of the private placement agencies mentioned in this initial research included Interac, Selti, Maxceed and Heart.³

Key Respondent B mentioned that the local BOE would call for bidding and the selected private agency is awarded a contract duration of three years. During this period, the agency is expected to field the appropriate number of ALTs depending on the needs of the local school district, and to provide institutional support to their ALTs.⁴

As already mentioned, to help facilitate the hiring of new ALTs to meet the high demand during the early 2000s, these placement agencies introduced a recommendation system wherein anyone who could introduce a prospective candidate who is eventually hired was paid 30,000 yen. Through social networks, Internet fora, church and overseas community organizations, word got around that ALTs were needed. Although the salary was not especially high compared to other available jobs at that time, the promise of higher social status and a more stable job led many Filipinos to apply as ALTs.

While criteria for recruitment may vary across private placement agencies, the following are some conditions set by one private company for prospective ALTs (Interact, 2010):

- a) applicant should be currently residing in Japan
- b) must hold a valid working visa for Japan,
- c) must have at least 12 years of education in the medium of English
- d) must have at least a Bachelor's degree from a recognized university, and
- e) Must be flexible, cheerful, energetic and a team player and a professional in all aspects of behavior.

(3) Profile Initial survey data shows that the profile of Filipino ALTs is not homogeneous. Among respondents, 56% have college degrees in various fields (elementary education, psychology, mathematics and engineering) while 41% received graduate level education. In terms of previous occupation before becoming ALTs, some of the respondents (37%) had worked in the education or research sector while the majority (63%) was employed at

manufacturing and service industries.

Regarding previous visa statuses, majority of respondents first came to Japan with dependent visas (30%), college students visas (22%), followed by long-term residents (*Nikkeijin*)(19%), spouse/child of Japanese national (11%), entertainer (11%), and those with other visa statuses (11%). At present, the majority of respondents are permanent residents (48%), followed by dependents (15%), respondents with instructor visas (15%), specialist in humanities/international services (11%), long-term residents (*Nikkeijin*) (7%) and spouse/child of Japanese national (7%). These distributions show that more and more Filipino ALTs are already exhibiting patterns of longer settlement in Japan.

Although absolute figures are difficult to gather, 2006 estimates show that there were around 100 Filipino ALTs in Ibaraki alone (Tutor, 2006b). Selti, a leading placement agency that hired most Filipino ALTs, mentioned that Filipinos comprise the largest number of their ALTs, at about 40 percent. Since they are a group of companies, the percentage to the total is just about 3 percent, but they have been working to increase this number (Tutor, 2006a).

Of the 27 sampled in our ongoing survey, 22% are directly-hired by local BOEs while the majority of respondents are currently employed through placement agencies (78%), with the majority of them working with Selti (30%), Interac (15%), followed by Heart (15%), and Maxceed (7%).

Although most of the respondents for the initial research are Ibaraki-based ALTs, according to Key Respondent C, Filipino ALTs are quite spread out in Japan. He mentioned that before becoming an ALT himself, he was able to introduce around 60 prospective ALTs for employment mostly in the Kanto region but also as far away as the Kansai region and Hokkaido from 2003 to 2005.⁵

Lastly, unlike the ALTs recruited for the JET Program who are mostly first-timers to Japan having been admitted directly from their home countries and who have to contend with adjustment needs, the present Filipino ALTs have already settled in Japan and have had years of experience working and residing in Japanese society. According to the survey data, 72% of respondents have lived in Japan for more than five years (mode=10 years) with 52% who reported Japan as their primary household residence.

While they show patterns of permanent settlement in Japan, Filipino ALTs still continue their ties with the rest of their households who are in the Philippines by sending remittances. A large 67% of those surveyed reported sending regular remittances back to the Philippines (48% of these reported sending money at least once a month). In terms of amount of remittances, respondents regularly send less than 50,000 yen (44%), 50,000–100,000 yen (19%), and, more than 100,000 yen (11%).

(4) Work Conditions Contracts for privately hired ALTs are always one year in

duration and are renewed on an annual basis regardless of previous performance or experience. Contracts stipulate that they work for 29.5 teaching hours per week but 40% of respondents reported having 40 work-hour weeks at their schools.⁶

Reported monthly wage levels range from 160,000–300,000 yen (after income taxes) and are based on work experience and length of service within the agency. As an incentive for experienced ALTs to complete and renew their contracts, salaries and benefits are gradually increased every year.

Based on preliminary survey data, 48% of respondents have monthly salaries that range from 200–250,000 yen while 37% received salaries below 200,000 yen and 4% above 250,000 yen. Aside from salaries, ALTs can also receive monthly transportation allowance and perfect attendance bonuses of 10,000 yen each and a contract completion bonus of 100,000 yen.

Comparing the salaries and benefits of Filipino ALTs with “native-speaker” ALTs, Filipino ALTs face salary differentiation since JET ALTs typically receive monthly salaries of 300,000 yen with further benefits that includes Employment Insurance and Employee’s Pension Insurance (CLAIR, 2009, p. 2) while those hired by placement agencies receive salaries above 250,000 yen.⁷

Although the above mentioned contract conditions represent current industry rates, salaries and benefits also vary depending on the placement agency and the awarded contract. If one is employed in a large agency, which has an existing agreement with a BOE with sufficient educational budget, then one can expect to enjoy better contract and salary conditions. Some placement agencies that are awarded by some BOEs with more limited educational budgets provide lower salaries and fewer benefits to their ALTs.

As mentioned earlier, ALTs can either be hired directly by local BOEs or through placement agencies. Although their starting salaries are relatively higher and while they enjoy additional benefits, direct-hired ALTs also share the same workload and conditions, responsibilities, and a yearly renewable contract as their placement agency counterparts. Since direct-hired ALTs are entitled to additional benefits such as housing subsidies and social insurance (*Shakai Hokken*), this is a big incentive for resident Filipinos who are planning on long-term settlement in Japan. On the down side, however, direct-hired ALTs are expected to work on their own and do not receive institutional support and further skills training as their placement agency ALTs counterparts do. Furthermore, since they are considered as public servants (*Komuin*), they do not follow regular school calendars and Japanese language proficiency is an implicit requirement for these direct-hired by the BOE.⁸

(5) Job Security Since ALTs are only offered yearly contracts, it is in their best interest to perform well in their schools, avoid absences, and to complete their contract, which allows them as well to receive their contract completion bonus. In terms of overall job security,

as long as an ALT performs well and does not have any problem with students or their colleagues, they are more or less assured of a contract renewal within the three year BOE-agency contract duration in their work assigned areas.

While many people were employed during the massive recruitment from 2003-2005, Key Respondent C noted that most of the under qualified ALTs' contracts were not renewed, but succeeding Filipino ALTs have had higher retention rates.⁹ Furthermore, although most Filipino ALTs complete their contracts, 44 % of the respondents have experienced transferring to other placement agencies for better salaries, benefits, and more convenient work assignments and locations.

While ALTs consider their work as not being secure because of its contractual nature and the changing work area assignments, Key Respondent B considers it as a "stable job" since the education sector is not affected by national economic conditions. Furthermore he values how his work as an ALT has enhanced his social position in Japan.¹⁰

2 Long-Term Concerns of Filipino ALTs

(1) Continuing professional development as ALTs Given that most of these ALTs have not received formal education as language teachers, the need for everyone to achieve optimum proficiency as teachers of the English language has been considered of paramount importance (Tutor, 2006b). As such, Filipino ALTs are serious about continually upgrading their skills as ALTs. Various professional and support organizations were created to address common concerns of professional development and for opening avenues for mutual help as far as working conditions are concerned.

In one workshop organized by the Association of Filipino English Teachers (FEAT) in Tsukuba, Ibaraki, the participants shared work experiences, ideas and teaching methods (using games, rhymes, and visual aids). Since Filipinos reported not being considered as "native speakers" by their employers, but rather as "native-level" English speakers (Tutor, 2006a), the Filipino ALTs recognize the necessity of continuing professional development among themselves for more effective English teaching performance and evaluation by school administration and students they interact with.

(2) Job Security Another source of concern among Filipino ALTs is job security. This is especially true for ALTs with permanent resident statuses that have already decided to settle in Japan. Key Respondent A and B, in particular (who have spouse and permanent resident visa, respectively) mentioned that they feel saddened knowing that they have to renew their contracts on a yearly basis in spite of their good performance and high motivation for their present ALT job and their practical experience having worked many years in Japan. While they are aware that financial difficulties have led local BOEs to hire ALTs through placement agencies and thus

could not offer them higher salaries nor long-term security, they feel that better benefits, such as offering social insurance (*Shakai Hokken*), should be considered for non-JET and non-BOE hired ALTs.¹¹

(3) Approaches to English Language Education and Multicultural Awareness Another issue that is frequently raised among Filipino ALTs relates to the fundamental approach of English language teaching in Japan. In his study of the JET Program, McConnell discussed how ALTs are, on the one hand, “trained” with the cultural theory of teaching English that stresses 1) students as active learner and teachers as facilitator; 2) communication rather than grammar; 3) a curriculum that is inherently interesting; and, 4) classes marked by spontaneity, while, on the other hand, their Japanese counterparts focus mainly on grammatical rigor. McConnell argued that this discrepancy between the mandate of teaching conversational English and the reality of ensuring that students are provided effective grammatical proficiency to pass future entrance exams has led to an immense contradiction, resulting in the underutilization of many ALTs (2002, p. 6).

Filipino ALTs have also reported encountering challenges at work due to these contradictory or different approaches to English Language Education. For example, in our own research, Key Respondent B reported that his attention was called when he attempted to teach students how to write simple words. He was told that teaching English writing was not part of the expected tasks of ALTs, and that ALTs were expected to teach English expressions and vocabulary through formal oral lessons or through games, not through writing. Key Respondent B was also urged by the Japanese counterpart not to try teaching English too seriously since the class with the ALT is “just for fun” and the ALT was tasked merely to encourage the students to appreciate English before their formal grammatical studies in junior high school.¹²

Another example of underutilization raised during a FGD with Filipino ALTs mentioned the case of a Filipino ALT who was told to simply stay at the teachers’ lounge during class hour because this ALT’s services were not needed by the Japanese co-teacher. It should be noted that the Japanese co-teacher did not have good working relations with this particular ALT, who also did not have any formal experience in teaching English grammar.¹³

Aside from reports of underutilization shared by present ALTs and those mentioned in the previously surveyed JET Program ALTs (McConnell, 2000), Filipino ALTs reported that they have the added burden of sometimes not being considered as “native-speakers” and of occasionally receiving complaints about their “Asian accents.” Since Japan follows American style English, complaints of ALTs not having proper “American accents” have been extended not only to supposedly non “native-speakers” (such as South Asian or Latin Americans), but to other non-Americans, such as Australian and British ALTs as well. Key Respondent A shares that their only recourse is to learn and to adopt American accents during their classes.¹⁴ Even as there is no

consensus about who are the native-speakers (English is spoken differently by the so-called native speakers from the United States of America, from the United Kingdom, from New Zealand and Australia), ALTs who come from nations other than the ones mentioned here or those who are not Caucasian-looking (this includes American ALTs of Asian origins) are referred to, in their work sites, as non-native English speakers.

Despite these challenges, however, Filipino ALTs consider English education not only as an important tool for communication, but above all, as an opportunity to raise multicultural awareness among their Japanese students and to a certain extent, among other Japanese adults as well, like the teachers and parents of their students. During a workshop sponsored by Filipino ALTs in Ibaraki, they shared among each other how playing Filipino children games, explaining the value of Christian faith during Christmas, and, portraying cultural products during international school festivals raised multicultural awareness among their Japanese students, faculty, and other Japanese participants. Filipino ALTs stressed that teaching English is not just a linguistic tool but also a very important cultural bridge to understand and accept diverse cultures and nationalities.

V Analysis

1 Filipino ALTs Engagement toward Multiculturalism

The previous section described the profile, recruitment, work conditions and concerns of Filipino ALTs in Japan. As many of the surveyed Filipino ALTs are settling longer or permanently in Japan, the present non-provision of long-term job security and social benefits, which Debito describes as important for foreigners to create a stake in Japanese society (2006), were raised as their major concerns. Present ALTs also face market segmentation, salary discrimination, and unregulated business practices.

Despite these challenges, however, the Filipino ALTs wholeheartedly proceed with their work as ALTs. Even as they are referred to as “native-level speakers,” the Filipinos seriously consider their ALT work as a profession that requires continuing professional development and commitment. They also see their work as ALTs as a vehicle for further social mobility within Japanese society, which view teaching and education as respectable occupations.

Also, not only does teaching English present an opportunity to highlight the Philippine culture and the value of multicultural awareness among the kids, it also is a chance for the Filipino teachers to appreciate Japanese culture and traditions. During an FGD with the ALTs, they demonstrated how they incorporated Japanese sensitivities and values during role-playing and games with the kids. One such activity involved acting out the days of the week in English, combining Japanese and English terms for the days of the week, for example, Monday is taught

doing a “moon” gesture, Tuesday with a “fire” gesture, Wednesday with a “water” gesture, and so forth. This shows that multiculturalism in the classroom is a genuine two-way process, so much so that before the FGD, the Filipino ALTs started their training session with a prayer, asking for their Japanese students to be blessed and offering, in prayer, the betterment of their ALT work. Furthermore, Filipino ALTs are also in active engagement with other hired foreign ALTs at work and during upgrading sessions sponsored by their hiring agencies.

Filipino ALTs also recognize that by teaching English, they are creating a genuine stake within Japanese society by engaging the future generation of Japanese children, together with their parents and other adults in schools to be more open to multiculturalism, to be more accepting of cultural diversities and to be more cognizant that ethnicity is not an issue for language learning and that more open and frequent communication and exposure make the presence of the non-Japanese and resident foreigners visible along with the Japanese in Japan (Tai, 2009). As ALTs, Filipinos are engaged in transnationalism from below (Smith, 1998) and continue to teach English as a positive step to promote multiculturalism.¹⁵

2 Beyond Internationalization toward Multiculturalism

“*Kokusaiika*” or internationalization was touted as the official reason for the introduction and the expansion of English Language Teaching in Japan through the JET Program. In its earlier inception, however, the JET Program was observed to have been conceived more to appease Japan’s major trade partners, as “Pillar of U. S. -Japan relationship” and the “best public diplomacy program that any country has run” (Hosaka, 2010) rather than to promote genuine international cultural exchange among the JET Program ALTs and the Japanese in the various participant schools all throughout the country.

The selection and recruitment of ALTs from the so-called major native English speaking countries (see **Table 2** below) also lend support to the observation that at best, Japan embarked on a “selective” not genuine internationalization scheme that would have involved Japan in sincere cultural engagements with various nations of the world. However, limited merits mentioned earlier showed that having ALTs do help to promote internationalization through more interactive dialogue and engagements with the Japanese participants in various schools and communities all throughout Japan.

Table 2 JET and CLAIR Participants by Country of Origin Since the Program Started

Year	Total	USA	UK	Australia	Canada	Other English speaking countries (a)	Others (b)
1987	848	592	150	83	0	23	0
1988	1443	871	248	143	127	54	0
1989	1987	1090	370	146	290	79	12
1990	2284	1249	396	145	366	112	16
1991	2874	1545	488	142	488	175	36
1992	3325	1708	595	181	589	210	42
1993	3785	1881	696	221	658	260	69
1994	4185	2174	733	244	686	259	89
1995	4628	2406	825	276	720	270	131
1996	5032	2581	917	315	762	287	170
1997	5322	2536	1069	335	831	326	224
1998	5687	2614	1128	355	874	350	366

Source: (Table 1 in Aldwinckle, 1999, p. 5)

Table Notes:

(a) New Zealand, Ireland

(b) Countries mostly without English as the official national language: France, Germany, China, South Korea, Russia, Brazil, Peru, Portugal, Spain, Israel, Italy, Mexico, South Africa, Belgium, Finland, Czech Republic, Mongolia, The Ukraine, Argentina, Austria, Laos, and starting from 1998: Turkey, Bulgaria, Indonesia, Poland, Switzerland, Holland, The Philippines, India, and others “unspecified” (mitei). The “country” with the largest proportional representation in 1988, is “unspecified” (80) followed by China (68) and South Korea (52).

The experiences shared as well by this study’s respondents show the strong potential of the ongoing English Teaching policy to promote genuine multiculturalism, rather than just selected internationalization or *kokusaika* which should be focused not only on building bilateral ties nor on merely making Japan globally competitive but on genuine multiculturalism where respect for and acceptance of cultural diversity is promoted throughout Japan.

With a growing foreign population in Japan and as foreigners had begun to settle, Kondo observed the creation of various multicultural coexistence initiatives or *tabunka kyousei* (多文化共生) among local governments (2008).¹⁶ Multicultural co-existence, like internationalization, is variedly interpreted from mere “international exchange where foreign guests are welcomed and expected to share their positive experience upon their return to their home countries to one where resident and foreigners build relationships as equal members in the same community, aimed at promoting social participation” (Ibaraki, 2010).

Kondo observes that, in practice, the Japanese government never supported an integration policy, but used the rubric of “internationalization” policy since the 1980s (2008, p. 38). Nagy,

who studied about the *tabunka kyousei* policies in Tokyo's wards also observed that although cultural exchange and mutual understanding between Japanese and foreign residents are encouraged, Japanese cities consistently reinforce differences rather than similarities (2009, p. 182).

It is in this context that genuine multicultural awareness (one that accepts cultural diversities and active social participation and mutual cultural engagements) is needed to promote not only better understanding and exposure to international cultures but more importantly to make the community see that foreigners are not merely visitors, but long term neighbors and significant members of their communities.

This point needs to be stressed especially considering how internationalization was expressed within Japanese society. According to McConnell, Japanese at all levels tended to see internationalization less as breaking down walls between individuals, but as building bridges of communication between cultures or groups that they assumed would always be fundamentally different (2000, p. 226).

As shown in this survey about Filipino ALTs, agency hired ALTs, who are mostly resident foreigners, have a stake in building a more multicultural society within Japan. Unlike the transient JET ALTs hired from abroad, the non-JET Program ALTs, together with the Japanese in their work sites and in their communities of residence, play a very valuable role, through substantive bottom-up approach, in building multiculturalism within Japan.

VI Conclusion

Through an initial exploratory research about Filipino ALTs, this study proposed to contribute to a wider understanding of ALTs and their important role for promoting multiculturalism in Japan. The Filipino ALT respondents verbalized that their present work provides the Filipinos not only with the very good opportunity to have a more stable and secured life in Japan but more importantly, they see their present work as ALT as allowing them to be active participants in promoting awareness about the importance of multiculturalism within and outside Japanese classrooms. It is in this context that Filipinos engage with Japan's multiculturalism, not merely as passive receptacles, but as a means of what Kymlicka refer to as "renegotiating their terms of integration" (1998, p. 38).

Effective English language teaching is expected to continue as Japan continues to promote internationalization as well as to remain globally competitive. Strengthening the role of ALTs with their Japanese teacher counterparts and hurdling the existing work-related challenges of ALTs will not only help the Japanese students and the Japanese society meet these goals of internationalization and global competitiveness but also facilitate the emergence, within Japan,

of genuine multiculturalism that is open and accepting of diversity while striving to work for a better world for all.

Notes

1. Interviewed by the authors on August 6, 2010.
2. Interviewed by the authors on August 6, 2010.
3. While Interac is arguably the biggest ALT placement agency in Japan, it is in fact part of the Selnate/Interac group of companies that includes Selti and Maxceed (Interac, 2010). In order to maintain its brand reputation, Interac handles contracts with BOEs with higher educational budgets, while its other agencies, namely Selti, specialize in bidding with BOEs with more limited educational budgets (Key Respondent B, interviewed by the authors on August 2, 2010).
4. Key Respondent D explains that the companies under the Selnate group, being distinct entities, can and do compete for the same BOE contracts. This cartel effect favors the bidding process, and at the same time, ALTs are often channeled across the three companies' BOE contracts. This allows the companies to maximize profits by having "cheap" ALTs compensate for lower profit margins arising from higher contract prices (interviewed by the authors on October 14, 2010).
5. Interviewed by the authors on August 6, 2010.
6. ALTs consider their travel time between schools, time spent at the teachers office between classes as part of their total work hours. As such, most ALTs consider having 8 work-hour days (40 work-hour week) while their contracts only consider 29.5 work-hour weeks ($6 \times 5 = 30$ hours). This is technically correct since they handle less than 6 teaching work-hours a day, but they are expected by their Japanese colleagues to stay in school until classes formally end in the afternoon.
7. Key Respondent D explains that within the Selnate group, Selti has lowest salary rates and hires the most number of Filipino ALTs. Thus in effect, Filipino ALTs face salary discrimination compared with native speakers who are mostly hired by Interac (interviewed by the authors on October 14, 2010).
8. Key Respondent A, interviewed by the authors on August 2, 2010.
9. Interviewed by the authors on August 6, 2010.
10. Interviewed by the authors on August 2, 2010.
11. Interviewed by the authors on August 2, 2010.
12. Interviewed by the authors on July 21, 2010.
13. This was raised during the FGD with Filipino ALTs held on December 11, 2010 as they explained that the teaching skills necessary to be an effective ALT are different in the elementary, junior high school and high school levels. Filipinos with no formal training in grammar and diction skills are faced with greater challenges if they are assigned in the junior and senior high school levels. As such, most Filipino ALTs in Ibaraki are assigned to teach beginning English in the preschool to elementary level (Interviewed by the authors on December 11, 2010).
14. Interviewed by the authors on August 2, 2010.
15. Described as the process that affects power relations, cultural constructions, economic interactions, and, social organization at the level of the locality and emphasize convergence of local governments, civil

society groups and various migrant groups (Smith, 1998, p.6).

16. Kondo describes Japan's migration policy periods as: the Exclusion, discrimination and assimilation policy phase (1945–1979); Equality and “internationalization” policy phase (1980–1989), and the Settlement and “multicultural living-together” policy phase (1990–) (2008, p. 37).

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