

〈Research Report〉

Profile and Motivations of Filipino ALTs in the JET Programme: An Exploratory Study¹

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Abstract

Since the Philippines has been included in the group of countries eligible to send Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) through the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme in 2014, the number of Filipinos JET ALTs has dramatically increased. While studies have been conducted on the profile, motivations and contributions of Filipino ALTs to Japanese society, there are only two that exist to date, and they focus on those hired by local Boards of Education and private dispatch companies. In order to fill gaps in the literature, this exploratory sociological study on Filipino ALTs participating in the JET Programme was conducted. It attempted to provide a description of the Filipinos chosen to take part in the said programme. In addition, it aimed to identify and analyze the motivations behind their decision to move to Japan and work as ALTs. Data was collected from August to September of 2019, through semi-structured interviews with a total of 17 Filipino ALTs. Interviews were then transcribed and coded through a general inductive approach. As this study is still in its preliminary stages, the report focused only on personal data and key themes in that emerged in the first two readings of the transcripts, which were then compared with existing literature in order to identify similarities and differences with their non-JET counterparts.

Keywords: English language education in Japan, ALTs, JET Programme

1. Background of the Study

Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) refer to English language speakers employed to teach alongside Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) in elementary, middle, and high schools. Team-teaching with ALTs was first introduced in 1987 through the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, and is aimed at improving foreign language education, as well as developing international exchange in local communities. A vast majority of ALTs hired are “native English speakers,” a term that is often used to refer to a people from an “Inner Circle” (Kachru 1991) country, (i.e. the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Ireland) who have learned English since childhood and has been

educated in English. Scholars note that Japanese educational culture generally deem native English speakers as the most desirable and appropriate candidates to teach and model the language, and this notion has had a substantial influence on English teaching pedagogy and the recruitment of teachers (Braine, 1999; Cook, 1999; Goto Butler, 2007; Rivers, 2017).

However, the deregulation of the Worker Dispatch Act in 1999 extended the scope of worker dispatching to include office work and education. Schools have since been able to obtain ALTs from outside of the JET Program through private dispatch companies and language schools, viewing them as a cheaper alternative. It also allowed for the entry of “non-native English speakers,” who, until then, have not had the opportunity to work as ALTs because they were ineligible for the JET Programme.

Filipinos were among those recruited by such private companies, and their numbers have been increasing steadily since the early 2000s (San Jose and Balleascas, 2010). Apart from their number, one of the more significant points about the Filipino ALTs’ case is their eventual inclusion in the JET Programme from 2014 as an ALT-sending country. Moreover, from sending only 2 representatives on its first year, they are currently the highest group of non-native English speakers in the program with 136 participants, along with South Africa (also 136), even outnumbering ALTs hired from Ireland (105) (CLAIR, 2019).

Since the introduction of team-teaching with ALTs in Japanese schools, much has been written about non-native speaking teachers, although they were focused mainly on JTEs’ perceptions on communicative language teaching (CLT) and team-teaching (Gorsuch, 2000; Nishino, 2008), how they teach, and the challenges they face as they shift to CLT and working with native speakers (McConnell, 2000; Kachi and Lee, 2001; Kikuchi and Browne, 2009).

To date, only two studies specifically investigate the case of Filipino ALTs. San Jose and Balleascas (2010) looked into the profile of Filipino ALTs and the impact they have on multiculturalism. On the other hand, Balgoa (2019) sought to determine the motivations of Filipinos to migrate and work as ALTs in Japan, and examined the ways they reshape their identities as they go about their work. Both of these studies are of importance, as they give us insight into the general profile of Filipino ALTs, the challenges they face at work, and their contributions to multiculturalism and language education in Japan. Balgoa’s sociological approach in examining English teaching and learning in Japan, as well as her interrogation of the high value Japanese educational culture puts on “nativeness” also help us understand the power relations affecting language use and teaching in Japan.

However, it is also important to note that the ALTs chosen to participate in these studies were hired directly by local boards of education, or through dispatch companies, and there are no studies conducted to date that focus on Filipino ALTs employed through the JET Program.

2. Significance of the Study

Studies focusing specifically on Filipino JET ALTs would be important for several reasons. First, Filipino JET ALTs would mostly likely have a very different profile from direct hires or private dispatch ALTs, because the JET Programme strictly follows a set of criteria against which they evaluate and accept candidates. Different social locations would mean facing different challenges, and using varied strategies to navigate the socio-political landscape of the Japanese educational system. Second, a close examination not just of the general profile, but also of the screening process would give us a better insight into the kind of Filipinos that the Japanese government favors to teach Japanese students. Such a study would place our analysis within the wider context of Philippine-Japanese bilateral relations. It would also help us better understand the social, cultural, and political dynamics that affect, as well as result from the JET Programme. In addition, from a language studies perspective, an investigation of Filipino ALTs and their classroom strategies may be effectively used in English language classrooms in Japan.

The results of this study may also provide insights on how Japanese educational institutions could better approach multiculturalism, not just in terms of English language pedagogy and curriculum development, but also in relation to hiring practices, and language teacher management and development. Looking at case studies such as this research can inform educational institutions of the challenges they face as they encounter the global, with the hope that they would find ways to overcome them and be able to produce truly global minded-students and future professionals ready to face a fast-changing world.

3. Objectives

This pilot study thus attempts to explore and analyze the motivations Filipino JET ALTs have for joining the JET Programme, and the impact their work has on English language education in Japan. However, as the study is still in the exploratory stage, the researcher focused on determining the general profile of Filipino JET participants, and the various factors that contributed to their decision to move to Japan and work as ALTs. In particular, the study sought to answer the following questions to fill the gaps in the literature:

1. Who are Filipino JET ALTs? How were they selected to participate in the JET Programme?
2. Why did they apply as ALTs for the JET Programme?

4. Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a total of 17 key informants. Conducting semi-structured interviews rather than questionnaires was chosen because face-to-face meetings help researchers create rapport and trust with key informants, which would encourage them to give detailed, honest accounts of their motivations and insights into their experiences working in the JET Program. This method also allows researchers to properly convey their intentions, address any concerns that research participants may have about the study, as well as ensure their cooperation in the future stages of the research project.

Participants from this study were primarily recruited through the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines. The researcher was able to secure an introduction to embassy staff involved in the JET Programme through a former colleague in the Philippines in July 2019, and from there formally sent a request for assistance in finding prospective interviewees. The researcher specifically requested for participants working in the Kansai, Chubu, and Kanto regions, as these regions had the highest number of Filipino JET ALTs as of program year 2018-2019. The Embassy of Japan then sent out a call for participants to all current JET ALTs in the said regions, and provided a list of 22 people interested in taking part in the study. The researcher then contacted everyone in the list via e-mail, and requested for a face-to-face interview. Of the 22 who expressed interest in participating, 15 responded to the interview invitation.

Two of the participants in the study, however, were recruited not through the Embassy of Japan, but through referral sampling. One of them was introduced by the researcher's friend, who is working as a BOE direct-hire ALT, while the other was invited by one of the participants who signed up for the study through the embassy.

All the interviews were conducted at the participants' time and place of choice, and were recorded with their express consent. Clean verbatim transcriptions of the interviews were then made because the meaning of what the participants said is of greater value than how they were said for this study. Thus, none of the questions and statements were paraphrased, and only filler words, false starts, and conversational affirmations were omitted from the interview records.

Interview data was coded using a general inductive approach. This approach allows for research findings to emerge from the significant and frequently occurring themes inherent in raw data without the restraints imposed by more structured methodologies. Deductive data analysis such as those used by experimental and hypothesis testing research tend to obscure or re-frame certain key themes due to preconceptions in the data collection and analysis. This approach helps close the gap between theory and empirical research, as it allows for data-driven analyses and theories of social phenomena.

The interview transcripts were read twice, and such process allowed the researcher to identify major

themes and categories. Segments of interview texts were coded, enabling analysis of interview segments on a particular theme, the relationship between themes important to participants.

As this study is still in its preliminary stages, the report focused only on personal data and key themes in that emerged in the first two readings of the transcripts. These were then compared with existing literature in order to identify similarities and differences with their non-JET counterparts.

5. Results and Discussion

(1) Profile of Filipino JET ALTs

Before we look into the general profile of Filipino ALTs, let us first look into a number of general eligibility requirements for the JET Program. While there is no minimum or maximum age limit, all candidates must hold a bachelor's degree or higher, or obtain said qualifications by the designated arrival date. Applicants do not need to have a specific degree or background, as there is no mention of any such requirements in the eligibility criteria. However, it sets limits on prospective candidates' years of residence in Japan or prior participation in the JET Program. They must not have lived in Japan for a total of six or more years in the past ten years before their departure for Japan. In addition, while previous JET ALTs are welcome to re-apply, those who have participated for three years since their departure², or have participated in the program for more than a total of five years are ineligible for the program. Furthermore, applicants should not have declined a position with the JET Program in the program year after receiving notification of placement.

Data from the key informant interviews suggest that Filipino ALTs hired through the JET Program are largely homogeneous based on a number of attributes. In terms of age, successful candidates are usually between 21 to 35 years old at the time of arrival in Japan, and the median age is 27 years old. In terms of gender distribution, there were 13 female and four male participants, which may suggest that more females apply and/or are chosen for the programme.

Their academic backgrounds are also very similar to each other. 11 out of the 17 ALTs interviewed hold bachelor's degrees in education, nine of whom specialized in English for secondary education, and two in special needs education. Among the six who do not hold bachelor's degrees in education four hold degrees in English-related fields, such as English language, English and/or American literature, and English communication arts. Only two hold degrees that are not related to education or English: European studies, and engineering.

In addition to undergraduate studies, 11 have gone on to pursue graduate degrees. Of the 11, three have completed master's degrees in English language education or teaching, and one has completed a doctoral degree in education management. Of the seven who have not completed their degrees, three have completed their coursework and only need to submit their dissertation, while the rest have only

earned some course units.

In terms of work experience, regardless of degree and educational attainment, all of them have teaching experience. All but one have taught English courses in formal educational institutions in the Philippines at some point in their careers, ranging from preschool to university education. One has taught in a private tuition center that provides review classes for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Moreover, two of the ALTs interviewed have already taught outside of the Philippines prior to their participation in the JET Program. Given the participants' median age, it can be expected that the current group of Filipino ALTs would have had an average of seven years' work experience by the time they were accepted into the JET Program. In fact, two of the participants who have had more than seven years of experience have been holding administrative positions, such as master teacher, head teacher, and school registrar, when they were accepted into the program.

As for residence in Japan, none of the ALTs interviewed have stayed in Japan for more than two years at a time. While eight of the 17 people interviewed have been to Japan before, five came in on a tourist visa. In particular, four of them came for a few days of sightseeing with family members, while one stayed for two months to visit a parent who was working in the country at that time. On the other hand, three came to Japan on government-sponsored training programs: one under a Japan Foundation language training program, one under the Ministry of Education's two-year teacher training program, and one under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Kizuna Project.³

There are two striking differences that can be seen in the type of Filipino ALTs chosen to be part of the JET Programme versus those from private language schools and dispatch companies. First, is the marked preference for candidates with an educational background in English and/or education, as well as those with teaching licenses or experience. Previous studies have shown that the backgrounds of private dispatch company ALTs are more diverse. They obtained their undergraduate degrees in various fields, and only a third of respondents' studies conducted by Balgoa, and San Jose and Ballescas have teaching or academic work experiences. In particular, over 60% of respondents in San Jose and Ballescas state that they were employed in the manufacturing and service industries prior to doing ALT work (2010: 171-172). While Balgoa did not give detailed information about work experience of the participants of her study, she noted that only six of her 18 key informants have teaching experience, none of them have any background in teaching English as either a foreign language or a second language (2019: 259).

This difference can be explained by the JET Programme evaluation committee's strong preference for candidates with a bachelor's degree or higher in English, a professional teaching license, and/or general teaching experience. According to the official announcement, additional evaluation points would be given to those with such credentials (Embassy of Japan in the Philippines, 2019). It should be noted that these are not expressly stated in the eligibility criteria or official announcements in other

participating countries. In addition, all applicants have to prepare to give a teaching demonstration on a topic of their choice on the day of their interview, a process that, according to my respondents, their non-Filipino counterparts in the program did not have to go through.

This is a significant point to consider, since the JET Programme has been criticized for hiring candidates with little to no background in teaching, as well as for inadequately preparing and training ALTs for their work in Japanese classrooms (Ohtani, 2010). Martin (2010) notes that since the entry of dispatch company ALTs in Japan's English education system, expectations from ALTs began to move away from providing mere cultural exchange to fulfilling more teaching responsibilities (151). Data from this study suggest that the JET Program selection committee in the Philippines may have recognized this shift, and thus created a more stringent evaluation process in order to select the best possible candidates that would fill the needs of Japanese schools.

Second, as San Jose and Ballescas point out, compared to JET ALTs who are mostly first timers to Japan and have been hired directly from their home countries, direct-hire and private dispatch ALTs have already shown patterns of permanent settlement in Japan prior to engaging in ALT work. Almost 50% of their respondents have already acquired permanent resident status, while many more hold dependent visas, or are children or spouses of Japanese nationals (171). Balgoa's study also show similar residence patterns, as all her respondents had been living in Japan for several years for various reasons, such as education, work, or marriage to Japanese nationals (258-259). This gives them an advantage over JET ALTs, as most of them had adjusted to daily life in Japan, have acquired some level of proficiency in the Japanese language, and, to a certain, extent understand the workings of Japanese society. As the JET Program is still, after all, an exchange program, preference for those who have not lived in Japan for a long time is understandable. However, it must also be noted that the selection committee also highly evaluates candidates who have studied about Japan, or have shown initiative in learning the Japanese language by either passing the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT), or demonstrating some knowledge of the Japanese language in the Nihongo conversation test during the interview. And the data I have presented earlier in this section strongly suggest that this is indeed the case.

When asked whether they would continue to work as ALTs for up to five years, the maximum number of years one can work under the JET Program, if given the chance, 12 have expressed interest in doing so. While two have already left the program at the time of the interview, one of them has married a Japanese national and continues to live in Japan. This seems to suggest that while majority of Filipino JET ALTs are first-timers in Japan, many of them tend towards mid-term, or even possibly long-term settlement in the country.

(2) Motivations for Participating in the JET Programme

When asked to talk about their why they decided to apply for and continue to participate in the JET Programme, there were several recurring themes that came up in interviewee narratives. One key motivating factor mentioned was the remuneration and working conditions. The following is a summary of the annual remuneration based on number of years of service as stipulated in the 2020 application guidelines, and the monthly salary JET ALTs are expected to receive:

Year of Service	Annual remuneration	Monthly salary
First year	¥3,360,000	¥280,000
Second year	¥3,600,000	¥300,000
Third year	¥3,900,000	¥325,000
Fourth and fifth year	¥3,960,000	¥330,000

Source: Embassy of Japan in the Philippines (2019), “The 2020 Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme Application Guidelines”

Many of the ALTs interviewed related their surprise when they first saw or heard about the annual remuneration offered by the JET Program, and that it was definitely much higher than what they were paid back in the Philippines. When asked how much higher their remuneration is now, they estimate that their current pay as ALTs is about three to five times higher than what they used to receive. Public school teachers in the Philippines with Teacher I (entry level) rank were paid Php20,179 or ¥44,000 per month, and Master Teacher IV (highest) rank were paid Php52,554 or ¥114,000 per month as of 2018 (Department of Education, 2019). Moreover, it is estimated that 60% of the private school teachers are paid much lower, approximately Php12,500 or ¥30,000 per month. Given this huge wage gap between Japanese and Filipino teachers, the JET Program offers an opportunity to vastly improve one’s financial standing. This is particularly true in the case of two of my informants, who mentioned family issues, such as the loss of a breadwinner, as the main reason they needed to find a higher paying job and thus apply for the JET Program.

In addition, my informants also mentioned that working conditions of ALTs are much better than teachers’ in the Philippines, or in some cases, even in other countries. Mark⁴, a seasoned high school teacher who has worked in the public school system for 11 years, spoke emphatically about the working conditions he faced, and how this led to his decision to apply for the JET Programme:

Mark: I imagined that an Assistant Language Teacher’s work involved organizing teaching materials, preparing visual aids...something like that. That’s going

to be the job. And I'd need to resign from my work in the Philippines. I wasn't really ready to let go of my work at [the Department of Education]. (laughs) I still had hope in DepEd. That is, when [the Embassy of Japan] released the announcement for 2018, I kind of already lost hope in [the Department]. It got so difficult because there were just so many things to do.

Interviewer: If you don't mind me asking, what do you mean when you said that you "lost hope?"

Mark: The system is really bad. Like, there are so many things they ask the teachers to do. They expect too much output from the teachers, but the rewards or...compensation, right? Teachers' wages are really falling behind. And then there's too much politics when it comes to promotions, the programs and things that they fund. Teachers are already struggling in the classroom, but when they leave the classroom, they still have so many other things to do. Those who are on top just keep on throwing so much work our way! They do not seem to remember that teachers are also human, that they also get tired.

Interviewer: And how about lesson plan submission?

Mark: There is a ton of paperwork, and they have such high expectations in terms of the children's performance. But, as I've said, teachers just can't focus. They can't concentrate because there are just too many things to do. (Mark, Personal interview, August 14, 2019)

Mark's sentiments are expressly shared by six other informants. They said that their pay is not commensurate with the amount of paperwork and other extra-curricular tasks that they are expected to do apart from their regular teaching load. Unrealistic expectations set by administrators on both student and teacher performance, and the pressure it puts on teaching staff have taken a toll on some of the informants, and the JET Programme provided an opportunity to still be engaged in the teaching profession, but be properly compensated for the services they render.

These economically-driven motivations of JET ALTs are very similar to those mentioned by participants in aforementioned studies on Filipino ALTs. This is, however, unsurprising, as low wages push many Filipinos to migrate abroad in order to either support family members back home, or to improve their personal financial situation. For many Filipino migrants, English is used as an economic capital, a distinct advantage when seeking employment abroad, especially in Japan, with their need to internationalize (Balgoa, 2019: 260). However, in the JET ALTs' case, their teaching credentials are considered as additional cultural capital, which they can use not just to be globally competitive, but also to break away from stereotypical notions of Filipinos in Japan, and contribute to society and their

local communities. This is one form of capital that many of the private dispatch ALTs do not possess.

Another thing that sets apart Filipino JET ALTs' experiences from their direct-hire and private dispatch counterpart is their perceived treatment as "native speakers" by JTEs and students, and receiving the same pay as their Inner Circle colleagues in the program. Balgoa points out that the essentialist view towards English prevalent in Japanese educational culture has, more often than not, led Filipino ALTs to be evaluated based on the native/non-native speaker dichotomy, as well as be "othered"⁵ in the workplace (261). In addition, San Jose and Ballescas point out that Filipino ALTs working for private dispatch companies face anywhere between a 15-30% salary difference compared to "native speaker" ALTs, especially those from the JET Programme (171). In contrast, my informants said that JTEs and students refer to them as "native speakers," and majority reported that they were not made to feel unqualified to teach English merely because they were Filipinos. Toni, another seasoned teacher with a total of ten years of experience, talked about her experience of wage discrimination when she was working for an international school abroad, and the appeal of the JET Programme's equal pay policy:

Toni: ...The painful thing is that in schools [in some countries in Southeast Asia], we are paid based on our race. The discrimination is really bad. For example, even if we do the same job as other people white people, they get a higher salary just because they're white.

Interviewer: Not even because they're considered as native speakers?

Toni: Yeah, because they're native speakers, so that's their edge. But even if you're not a native speaker, you're just teaching at the elementary school level, right? You teach different subjects. So, if you're teaching a variety of subjects, it's not just about English. It's about the race [of the teacher]: because they're white, they get a higher offer. Filipinos are offered lower pay. I thought to myself, no, I don't like this. We do the same job, and then sometimes they're lazy. They just want to surf and go on holiday. They're working [in the country] only for the visa. So, I felt that I wasn't growing in that place because everyone is always just on holiday vibe. I wanted to grow.... When I saw the package offered by the JET Program, I thought that this was just right. It gives the same salary to everyone, and we do the same job. So, I thought that I wanted to do this. (Toni, Personal interview, September 3, 2019)

However, one notable observation that can be made is the embarrassment or guilt that Filipino JET ALTs say they feel when they admit that the relatively high remuneration was one of the main reasons they applied to the program. In most cases, it took a while before my informants expressly mention the salary as a big factor in their decision to be JET ALTs. Their admission is also often preceded with “I’m sorry, but...,” “I’d have to admit that...,” or “I’d be a hypocrite if I don’t say that...,” as though their desire to earn a higher wage was something that they needed to apologize for. Informant narratives suggest that not everyone was completely happy with their decision to leave the Philippines. For example, a number of former public school teachers like Mark mentioned that they held on for as long as they could in their former jobs, with the hope that working conditions would improve. Others, such as Liza, was feeling ambivalent about taking a teaching job in abroad:

Liza: I really didn’t want to work abroad. It wasn’t in my plans to do so. I didn’t like the idea of going abroad [to work] because I feel like I’m serving a different country. I feel like I’m going to become a slave there.

Interviewer: Where do you think this is coming from?

Liza: I don’t know. ...I guess I just wanted to defy the usual belief that if you go abroad...You know how it is in the Philippines, their concept of success. If you go abroad, then you’re successful. Everybody had been telling me to apply for a job overseas, because English teachers are in demand abroad. Almost everybody in my family has worked abroad...So, everybody had been telling me to apply. At that time, I told them, “but I don’t want to. I want to stay here.” I also was taking my M.A. back then, and I really wanted to finish what I started. But even before I finished my M.A., I’ve been thinking that I wanted something new. I felt that for the longest time, I’ve been teaching English [at the same high school] for nine years....But as I was finishing my M.A., I felt that I didn’t have any energy left to continue doing research after I graduated, much more apply for a Ph.D. scholarship. And, just a few weeks before I defended my thesis, the announcement for JET Program applications came up. It came at a very opportune time. (Liza, Personal interview, September 7, 2019)

Testimonies such as these seem to indicate that Filipino JET ALTs generally have a strong sense of duty and responsibility to their country as educators. However, the JET Programme presents various opportunities for financial stability, as well as personal and/or professional development, that are not accessible for them in the Philippines. Their decision to pursue these over staying to continue serving

the country is often counterbalanced by feelings of frustration or guilt. Here we are able to see how Filipino teachers' migration, at least in the case of JET ALTs, is often a complex and nuanced exercise of agency.

Aside from economic and professional opportunities, another reason given by my informants for participating in the program is their interest and desire to take part in Japan's internationalization through cultural exchange. While all ALTs said that they were interested in the opportunity to live and experience life in Japan, a little over half (nine out of 17) specifically mentioned that the opportunity to represent the Philippines and share Filipino culture to students was another reason they decided to apply. JET ALT work and experiences have often been described by participants within the programme as that of being "cultural ambassadors," as they are given the task of "promoting grassroots internationalization at the local level" (CLAIR, 2019) through their presence and involvement in Japanese schools. Programme participants are also constantly reminded of their role as representatives of their country and their responsibility of sharing their culture their local communities. This is taken seriously by my informants, and many shared the various ways through which they achieve this, given their limited role within the Japanese education system.

One of the most common and direct ways they do so is when JTEs set aside a class session where ALTs can talk about school life in their respective countries. However, such opportunities do not come very often, and the underutilization of ALTs during English classes is a well-documented problem. Educational policies do not clearly state the roles and responsibilities of ALTs during team-teaching, leading to many ALTs being reduced to merely a "human tape recorder" during classes, especially in the junior high school level. To address this problem, some of the ALTs interviewed mentioned that they have been using bulletin boards not just for English education purposes, but also as a means to share aspects of Filipino culture.

Aesthetic bulletin boards is a key part of Filipino classrooms. They help students develop an appreciation for the world around them, as well as provide opportunities for them to explore unfamiliar topics and discover interests they were not conscious of. However, Ian, an ALT of three years, observed that aesthetic English bulletin boards are not commonly used in Japanese schools. In most cases, there is no space allocated for English language materials and notices. But when he found spaces in the schools he worked at where he could potentially create English bulletin boards or post posters and other visual aids he made, he took the initiative to ask the school administration if he could use them. His effort seemed to have paid off, having drawn the interest of students and staff alike. Recalling how he started on his first project and the reception it had his school, he shares:

Actually, it started in my junior high school in 2016. I went to my vice principal and asked, "Can I use this area to stick words, and something like that?" He said yes. I think it was

somewhat effective, because my principal told me, “[Ian]-sensei, look at them. They are reading your bulletin board.” I went to my elementary school, and actually, there still weren’t any bulletin boards in my elementary school. My predecessor from the USA, I recall, made a cartolina-size poster about the United States. So, my coordinator told me, “[Ian]-sensei, could you make your own? From the Philippines?” Put everything about the Philippines. So, I made it really big, and posted it on the wall. But I wasn’t content with just one, so I posted all sorts of English stuff until it filled the entire wall! Actually, I think I just made things difficult for myself. [laughs] I have to update and change everything. My JTE liked it, and when he was transferred to another school, he made the ALT there do something similar. (Ian, Personal interview, August 17, 2019)

Five other ALTs who mentioned being given space and using bulletin boards in their jobs, reported similar curious reactions of students and staff towards the bulletin boards. They also explained that they try to make their boards interactive in order to generate interest and entice them to engage with not just the English language but other cultures as well.

This expressed interest in promoting internationalization and cultural exchange as part of their motivation for working as an ALT is clearly different from the trend in previous studies. Balgoa mentioned that none of these were in the minds of the informants when they applied to become an ALT, and economic reasons were their primary motivation when they applied for the job (259). While San Jose and Ballescas note that the ALTs in their study do their part in promoting multiculturalism inside and outside of the English classroom (174-1750), however, it was not explicitly stated whether it was a motivation for taking on work as an ALT. Differences in social position occupied by Filipino JET ALTs versus direct-hire and private-dispatch ALTs, I argue, would account for such a difference in motivation. As educators, it can be expected that they would first scrutinize the educational goals of the program and determine whether these align with their professional objectives and personal goals before applying, instead of the heavily pragmatic approach that currently available data on direct-hire and private dispatch ALT suggest.

6. Conclusions and Next Steps

This study served as a baseline study on Filipino JET ALTs, a group of English language teaching professionals who, until now, have not been the subject of academic study. It looked into the general profile and motivations that Filipino JET ALTs have for applying and participating in the programme. Preliminary analysis of data gathered show that Filipino JET ALTs tend to be highly qualified professionals who specialized in English language/literature and/or education, and have some teaching

experience. All of them are selected after a rigorous screening process that not only looked into their interest in Japan and ability to adapt and function in new environments, but also their teaching background and abilities. Also, their educational attainment and background, as well as overseas travel experiences also suggest that they mostly come from a middle class background. However, economic factors such as low pay and less than ideal working conditions pushed them to seek better work opportunities in Japan. In addition, the chance of being able to live in a country they admire, as well as participate in its internationalization efforts were pull factors in Filipino teacher migration as ALTs under the program.

The JET Programme has been criticized for hiring mostly recent graduates with no teacher training and have little to no knowledge of Japan's language and education system, presumably because of its size and the difficulty of recruiting a large number of qualified instructors (Marchesseau, 2006: 168). Compared with current data on direct-hire and private dispatch ALTs, as well as other JET ALTs in general, we can see that Filipino JET ALTs are well placed in that they have the English teaching experience and qualifications that is much needed in Japanese schools.

However, the limitations of ALT teaching work, and the lack of clarity in role expectations (Marchesseau, 2000; Martin, 2010; Sponseller, 2017) are expected to lead to certain challenges in team-taught classes between JTEs and Filipino JET ALTs. Being licensed and experienced teachers themselves, they are used to planning lessons on their own, as well as having full control of the classroom. What happens then in such situations? How do JTEs react when they are teamed up with an ALT who is equally or even more experienced than they are? What kind of issues do Filipino JET ALTs face as they go about their work, and how do they try to resolve these? These are significant questions that need to be addressed in future research.

Notes

¹ The author received funding from the Josai International University President's Fund for Research (学長所管研究費研究奨励制度) for academic year 2019.

² For example, applicants for the 2020 program year must not have participated since the 2017 program year.

³ The Youth-Exchange Project with Asia-Oceania and North America, also known as the "Kizuna Project," is a project run by the Japanese government. Its main objective is to promote international awareness and understanding of Japan's revival efforts in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake. More information about this project can be found in the following URL: <http://sv2.jice.org/kizuna/e/what/about/>

⁴ Names of research participants have been changed to protect their identities.

⁵ The term "othering" refers to the reductive act of labeling a person or a group as essentially different and inferior to the group that one belongs to. Recent language education specialists have criticized the concept of

nativeness, as it presupposes native speaker speech and pedagogy as innately superior compared to those of non-native speakers. Both Balgoa, and San Jose and Balleascas documented the various ways Filipino ALTs were made to feel inferior at the workplace by their non-Filipino colleagues.

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