Nihonggo No Benkyou: The Case of Filipino ESL Teachers in Graduate School

Bethany Marie Cabantac-Lumabi[1,]

[1]College of Education, Assistant Professor, University of Caloocan City, Caloocan City 1406, Philippines

Abstract: In 2010, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) institutionalized the offering of foreign languages in the curricular programs of higher education institutions to accord global acceptance of local graduates in the Philippines. In graduate school, Nihongo is one of the foreign languages commonly offered in the local university. Theoretically, the second language acquisition of adult learners (i.e., graduate students) is crucial and different from adolescent language learners. And there is a dearth of literature on Filipinos learning Nihongo; most of them involve college students and overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) and less among ESL teachers in graduate school. This study: (1) contributed to the limited evidence in Japanese language learning of Filipino students; showed qualitative evidence on the CPH of adult learning a third or fourth language. Results revealed that though most of the ESL teachers in graduate school were middle-aged, they partly considered their age crucial in learning Nihongo and declared that their age was not the only factor in recognizing their difficulties in learning a foreign language rather other learning limitations such as affective factors, learning environment, workload, etc.; (2) presented the ESL teachers' difficulties in learning Nihongo language in the graduate school such as writing and translating sentences and phrases, vocabulary and pronunciation; and (3) showed their strategies in learning the Japanese language as an academic requirement were creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, reviewing well, and employing actions. Thus, this study presented recommendations for the effective teaching of Japanese language among graduate students in the Philippines.

Keywords: ESL Teachers, Filipino Graduate School Students, Learning Nihongo

1. Introduction

Japan is one of the leading countries in economy, technology, pop culture, literature, and many more. The world's inclination to Japan includes learning its national language, Nihongo. In 2011, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) reported that Japanese language was the fourth most studied foreign languages in the US public schools in the 2007-2008 academic year with 72,845 enrollees and sixth in the US higher education in 2013 with 66,740 enrollees (Uniglo, 2020). It increased 5% until 2016 in the higher education according to Modern Language Association (MLA) (Luca, 2018). Learning Japanese brings various business opportunities worldwide and gateway to understanding other Asian languages and cultures (Morgan, 2018). Undeniably, these figures proved that learning a foreign language is an important development with the increasing Japanese presence and culture all over the world and the Internet.

---

* Corresponding Author: bmclumabi@gmail.com

In local context, the learning of Japanese language or Nihongo was introduced in 1920s to Filipino students and obliged the government officials and the elite during the brief Japanese occupation in 1940s (Gonzales, 1998). When the Japanese Embassy in Manila was established in 1956, diplomatic ties between these two countries prospered into many bilateral cooperation in different areas, most especially in education. In 1994, there were 50 institutions offering Japanese language in the Philippines (Lamina, 2017). And in 2010, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) institutionalized the offering of foreign languages in the curricular programs of higher education institutions to accord global acceptance of local graduates. In fact, Filipino university students were primarily motivated to learn Japanese language for their future career and better employment opportunities (Gonzales, 1997; Alberto, et al., 2008). The provision included the curriculum for graduate students with 6 units of foreign language course (CHED Memorandum Order number 23, series of 2010) and Nihongo is one of the foreign languages offered.

Theoretically, the second language acquisition of adult learners (i.e., graduate students) is crucial and different from adolescent language learners. Based on the critical period hypothesis (CPH) established by Lenneberg (1967), language acquisition (first, second, third, and so on, language) from early childhood to adolescence is a period of growth with possible full native competence. In acquiring a second language (L2), the prevalent view is a critical time in the brain development when it is inclined for successful language learning (Lightbown and Spada, 2006), and when learning a new language is naturally and effortlessly done (Ellis, 1985). In other words, the CPH has implications to graduate students since language experts believe that adults do not acquire new languages as easy as children and teenagers because of internal (i.e. neurological) and external (i.e. environment, workload) factors.

There is a dearth of literature on Filipinos learning Nihongo and most of them involve college students and overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). For instance, Filipino students in Metro Manila used personal factors as their strongest motivation to learn Nihongo with the employment of compensation and social strategies such as making intelligent guesses and interacting with others. It was found out that when learners were exposed to these, language acquisition was easier and progressive (Lim & Ong, 1996; Gonzales, 1997). Meanwhile, OFWs believed that their Japanese language proficiency was not as necessary as their technical skills in their skilled work. Nonetheless, they recognize its advantage in work communication and higher employment opportunities in Japan (Alberto, et al., 2008). Despite the advantages, Filipino college students were found to be challenged in learning Japanese language because of their limited vocabulary and poor listening comprehension which influenced their reading and writing skills. However, their difficulties were the result of the inexpert teaching of Japanese language. Thus, strengthening the instructional materials with cultural context and technological innovation and consulting Nihongo experts were recommended in the study (Quintos, 2021).

Consequently, this paper contributes to the limited evidence in Japanese language learning of Filipinos and shows qualitative evidence on the CPH of adult learning a third or fourth language. Specifically, this paper presents the ESL teachers' experience in learning Nihongo language in the graduate school. It describes their difficulties and strategies in learning the Japanese language as an academic requirement. From the data gathered, this study presents recommendations for the effective teaching of Japanese language among graduate students in the Philippines according to language teachers themselves.

2. Method

This qualitative study used a modified interview questionnaire, adopted from Quintos (2021) to identify the difficulties and strategies of graduate students in learning Nihongo as part of their academic requirement. The ESL teachers' difficulties were classified and analyzed using thematic description. Thematic analysis is a flexible and useful research tool for case studies in educational research, which can potentially provide a detailed and comprehensive, yet intricate account of data. Themes are generated inductively from the data patterns and then sourced out in the existing literature. To contextualize and represent the findings, the data are presented in tables with descriptive codes illustrating relationships, threads, and contradictions (Peel, 2020). While the ESL teachers' strategies in learning Japanese language were classified descriptively using Oxford's (1990, cited in Gonzales, 1997) direct (i.e., memory, cognitive, and compensation) and indirect language learning (i.e., metacognitive, affective, and social) strategies.

The case study involved ten graduate students under the program of Doctor of Philosophy in English language and literature (ELL) in a Catholic university in Bulacan, Philippines. During the conduct of the research, they were ESL teachers in junior and senior high school in both private and public schools in different regions of the Philippines and Japan. Their qualitative responses were collected through Google form since the mode of learning in the graduate school was purely online.

3. Result Discussion

The purpose of this study was to describe the difficulties and strategies of Filipino ESL teachers in learning the Nihongo language as an academic requirement in the graduate school. The following results in tables were revealed upon analysis of their descriptive responses in an open-ended questionnaire.

Table 1. Profile of ESL Teacher Participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Level Taught	English Subjects Taught
1	Female	39	Tertiary	• Purposive Communication • Speech and Oral Communication
2	Female	29	Senior high school	• Oral Communication • Reading and Writing skills
3	Male	32	Junior high school	• No answer
4	Undisclosed	29	Senior high school	• 21st Century Literature of the Philippines and the World • Creative Non-Fiction • Oral Communication in Context • Reading and

				Writing Skills
5	Female	35	Senior high school	• Oral Communication in Context • Reading and Writing Skills
6	Female	36	Tertiary	• Receptive Communication Skills
7	Male	30	Junior high school	• English
8	Undisclosed	45	Tertiary	• English for Business • English for IT • English for Engineering
9	Male	26	Junior high school	• English
10	Female	34	Junior high school	No answer

Table 1 presents the profile of the ESL teacher respondents consist of 5 females, 3 males, and 2 undisclosed genders. They were middle-aged ESL teachers; three of them were in their 20s, six of them were in their 30s; and one was in 40s. Four (4) of them were teaching English and related subjects (i.e. literature, oral communication, purposive communication, receptive communication skills, reading and writing), in junior high school; three (3) in senior high school; and three (3) in tertiary. One of them was exempted in taking the Nihongo class because he was teaching in English in Japan and proficient in Nihongo. However, his inputs in the data collection were still considerably significant. Their profile shows that graduate students learning Nihongo are mostly middle-aged, female, and teaching in junior high school. School-based Japanese language course is offered as foreign language requirement in the graduate level among varying profiles of adult students (Gonzales, 1997).

Table 2. ESL Teacher Respondents Experience, Difficulties, and Benefits
in Learning Nihongo in Graduate School

Participants	Experience	Difficulties	Benefits
1	*I find the lessons and activities challenging. Nihongo is such a strange subject. The pronunciation is different from that of English and Filipino. During the first lessons, memorization and repetition are necessary. If you kept on repeating, you'll surely remember the translations. But as time progresses, lessons file up and the*	*Writing the characters, the pronunciation, the tons of translation to remember. The characters are difficult to write, too. What gets hard is, you can't practice since there is no one there to communicate with. You'll need to exert more effort, unlike if it is in English, there are a lot of English*	*Exploring another language that is so different with what I already know makes me understand the difficulty of my students in learning the English language. And another is, if I plan to go to Japan and be an EL Teacher or even if I am here and I would tutor Japanese students, I'll have background of their language, which is very*

	pronunciation gets difficult.	*speakers already.*	*important.*
2	*Lessons were at first interesting due to its simplicity but as time went by, it became complex especially to beginners like me.*	*Topics like sentence construction wherein you have to convert it to Nihongo itself. Those are challenging for me. I think age is not a factor with regard to this problem.*	*Nihongo has been widely used by other countries and therefore this is beneficial.*
3	*I was exempted from the class because of my proficiency in the language.*	*None.*	*The class itself doesn't have any benefits to me but the language has its many uses because of the nature and environment of my job as an English Teacher in Japan.*
4	*It's quite entertaining and helpful especially I am an anime lover. So the way the characters in the anime speak, I understand them and even how they react were also given meaning.*	*Writing for its ways of writing is quite difficult. Yes I think age made is challenging for the focus I have right now is not learning a new language but because this is needed so I have to give effort in learning it.*	*If you plan to work abroad especially Japan this will be helpful for these basic skills in writing and speaking will be used once you're already there for you have to do translation method for you teacher and your learner to understand each other.*
5	*The lessons are useful because it is all about the basic communication skills in Japan. The activities are relevant to the lessons discussed.*	*When the language is applied in statements especially during a conversation. I don't think age is a factor. Anyone can learn Nihongo.*	*It broadens my knowledge in language.*
6	*I have been teaching Nihongo in college for two years now, and I handle basic and intermediate Nihongo. In our FL2 class, I find the lessons basic yet there are errors which may really cause confusion. I let them pass often and just follow what's in the lecture file. The teacher also seems authoritative in her class. At the beginning of the term, the teacher inquired who among us already had background in Nihongo or attended classes*	*Since I already have background in Nihongo, most lessons are easy to follow. Only the memorizing part is challenging. However, that cannot be skipped since it is imperative in learning a new language.*	*On a practical note, the challenges in memorizing vocabulary, grammar, structures, etc., in Nihongo can/ should make an ESL teacher become more understanding of their own students who are "slow" in mastering English. These difficulties, when at least acknowledged, can help an ESL teacher, for example, to "slow down" and identify effective ways to engage learners with the language.*

	before. One of our classmates who is residing and teaching in Japan identified himself, and he was asked by the teacher not to attend our sessions anymore. He was also tasked to create lesson files and a course outline based on the syllabus (?). I did not want to miss the class since I consider myself not an expert of the language, so I did not admit to attending a Nihongo class before (online class, no collab activities). I also wanted to get some ideas on how to teach the course better. I like it when there are recitations.		
7	*They are fun although sometimes they are confusing and perplex.*	*Constructing sentences and negations were challenging for me. Yes, I think my age is somehow a factor that makes those lessons challenging to learn.*	*It is beneficial to learn new language beside English because it may come in handy especially if I am to teach Asian lit focusing in Japanese folklores.*
8	*Lessons are basic and appropriate for the learners' level; it is also interactive.*	*Sentential translation*	*It may be useful later especially if a teacher has a plan of teaching English among Japanese learners.*
9	*Though I am a language teacher, I am having difficulties learning a new language which allows me to realize a lot of things and how do my students might feel as they learn English in my class. The Nihongo class though provides me the basic tool to communicate in the language, though I have not achieve that conversational level yet. At least I know some vocabulary and some of the most important phrases. Moreover, the*	*One of the most challenging lessons in Nihongo is the translation of phrases itself because there are certain structure and vocabulary in that language that are not the same with the language I know at present. I don't think age is really a factor in learning new language, I think my level of interest and capacity are the main factors. But, in terms of acquisition, of course, it would be better if we*	*It allows me to realize how do my students feel learning a new language. Also, learning new language allows me also to broaden my vocabulary since lots of these are only derived from different language, thus broadens my knowledge in language in general.*

	teacher promotes ease in learning the language, though I was expecting it to be tough and pressuring. The Nihongo class, in general, allows me to access the macro skills that I need to learn in the language in a relax and exciting way.	*will be expose with the language at our crucial age so we can acquire the language easily.*	
10	*I find it fun and exciting every Saturday class in Nihongo.*	*The memorization of grammar rules.*	*As a language teacher it is important to learn other language to share my students. It gives me an opportunity to explore and learn not only the Nihongo but also their culture.*

The ESL teachers are used to language learning, but their experience in learning Nihongo as a minor language course in graduate school varies as shown in table 2. Most of the ESL teacher respondents describe their Nihongo learning experience positively as interesting, entertaining, interactive, useful, fun, and exciting, while three of them used the words challenging, perplex, and confusing in their description. They all recognize that the Nihongo lessons they learned are basic, relevant, simple, and elementary. Few of them differentiated the pronunciation and meaning of Nihongo from Filipino. In most schools, the beginner level of Japanese language is offered and taken by both undergraduate and graduate students (Gonzales, 1997).

However, the ESL teacher respondents' narration of their learning experience was associated to their difficulties in learning Nihongo. Writing and translating sentences and phrases are the most identified difficulties of ESL teachers in learning Nihongo. Translation task is a common method of second-language learning because word conversion involves problem-solving processes in L1/L2 semantic and syntactic correspondences while translating. Though students are found to avoid translating literally, translation task enables them to use the target language generatively and creatively to make them aware of correct L1/L2 correspondences in words and structures (Uzawa, 1997). The act of translating is a holistic activity, which immediately compels the students to focus on the second or foreign language text. It encourages their awareness of form and meaning in context and improves their reading and writing skills in second or foreign language. This method further enhances their general skills of noticing and observing details of the linguistic systems, cultures, and societies of first, second, and foreign languages, to deliver the messages between the two languages. This can expand the SL/FL learning to beyond the classroom (Machida, 2011).

Second, vocabulary and pronunciation are challenging for graduate students given the limited time of synchronous learning or recitation and people to communicate with. Similarly, in the study of Quintos (2021), Filipino students learning Nihonggo are found to have limited vocabulary because of the absence of cultural context in the learning materials which caused minimal retention and understanding on the lessons listened by the students. Thus, poor listening comprehension makes the students difficult to respond and express themselves during class recitation. Moreover, in terms of pronunciation, Nihongo syllable, stress, and intonation deviate from their native linguistics which consequently affects their reading and writing skills.

Apparently, four ESL teacher respondents admit that their age is crucial in memorizing vocabularies and grammar rules in Nihonggo; three of them say otherwise; and three do not mention

it. Age was the most researched variable in language learning since critical period hypothesis (CPH) (Lenneberg, 1967) was associated with second language acquisition (SLA) which posited that adult L2 learners (e.g. graduate students) are less receptive to foreign or new language learning than child L2 learners because (Vanhove, 2013) because they claim that the brain reaches its adult values until puberty and that there will be a loss of brain plasticity and its reorganizational capacities (Gursoy, 2011). Although these claims have been argued by contemporary linguists and justified that the late starters do better than the early starters, since they are able to acquire as much second language knowledge as the earlier starters within a considerably shorter period, and thus, progress faster than younger starters (Singleton & Leśniewska, 2021). Despite the inconsistencies, the studies on CPH have provided great insights to language teachers in understanding age differences and contextual factors of their students. Nevertheless, age is not the only factor in recognizing difficulties of ESL teacher respondents but other learning limitations such as affective factors, learning environment, workload, etc.

On a practical note, four of the ESL teacher respondents find learning Nihongo beneficial when they apply a teaching job in Japan. This is also mentioned by Gonzales (1998) that the topmost motivation for Filipinos to learn Japanese is for more opportunities in their future career and their interest to get a scholarship in Japan. However, in the findings of Alberto, et al. (2008), the Japanese proficiency of Filipino employees in Japan does not necessarily affect their work assignments and employment benefits.

While the rest of ESL teacher respondents value their Nihongo class as another language to learn, a way to understand the language learning of their students, and an opportunity to learn Japanese language and culture. In contrast, these findings are not evidently manifested in the college students' responses in learning Nihongo (Gonzales, 1998). Thus, cultural education and appreciation should be established equally with professional benefits when learning a foreign language such as Nihongo.

In table 3, the learning strategies of ESL teacher respondents during their synchronous and asynchronous class in Nihongo, as foreign language requirement in graduate school, are presented. Their descriptive responses are classified using Oxford's (1990, cited in Gonzales, 1997) direct (i.e., memory, cognitive, and compensation) and indirect language learning (i.e., metacognitive, affective, and social) strategies.

Direct strategies include memory strategies also known as mnemonics which involves arranging things in order, making association, and reviewing. It involves (a) creating mental linkages, (b) applying images and sounds, (c) reviewing well, and (d) employing actions. Cognitive strategies range from repeating to analyzing expressions to summarizing them. The compensation strategies, on the other hand, enable learners to use a language for either compensation or production despite the limitation in knowledge. These strategies construct the limitations in grammar and vocabulary.

Indirect strategies include metacognitive strategies described as actions that go beyond purely cognitive devices, and that they provide a way for learners to coordinate their learning processes. These strategies include (a) centering their learning, (b) arranging and planning their learning, and (c) evaluating their learning. Affective strategies involve emotions, attitudes, motivations, and values. There are three main sets of affective strategies: (a) lowering anxiety, (b) encouraging oneself; and (c) taking emotional temperature. Lastly, the social strategies involve (a) asking questions, (b) cooperating with others, and (c) empathizing with others. These strategies promote learning using social interactions.

Table 3. Learning Strategies of ESL Teacher Respondents
in Learning Nihongo in Graduate School

Participant	Learning Strategies	Classification

s		
1	*I usually watch YouTube, especially on how to write the different strokes of each character, like which comes first and on how to pronounce words well. I also listen to podcasts, specifically the one entitled, "Learn Japanese with Masa Sensei." I also have downloadable materials about learning Japanese to read. The problem is, I don't have much time to read and watch.*	Direct
2	*I preferred to use lecture-based learning where I could easily go back to lessons as a pattern in answering the activities.*	Direct
3	*None.*	None
4	*Practice Elaboration Words and Visuals*	Direct
5	*Memorization and comprehension.*	Direct
6	*I review my own lecture files used in my classes prior to sessions. I also jot down notes or take screen shots of the slides used by the teacher because there are differences versus the contents in some of my lectures.*	Direct
7	*Just like any language, Nihongo has grammar rules to follow, so I am sticking to those rules for me to answer the given activities.*	Direct
8	*Direct translation, repetition, vocabulary acquisition*	Direct
9	*Presence of mind and advance reading, few hours learning the language is not enough for a beginner like me to learn the language. Thus, I make sure that before attending the class, I am emotionally and physically ready to participate the class. For some certain reason, it gives me extra confidence learning the language when I watched YouTube or searched on Google about the next lesson before entering the class.*	Indirect and Direct
10	*Jotting down important information, listening attentively and practice reading of the vocabularies.*	Direct

Predominantly, the ESL teacher respondents employ direct learning strategy. First, *direct translation* describes creating mental linkages. Second, *watching YouTube, listening to podcasts, listening attentively, and visuals* describe applying images and sounds. Their other learning strategies are *downloading materials, reading texts or slide screenshots, reviewing lecture files, and studying grammar rules*, which describe reviewing well in the direct strategy. Lastly, the jotting down important information, reading of vocabularies, and repeating vocabularies describe employing actions. On the other hand, one ESL teacher respondent employs indirect learning strategy because of the following responses: *presence of mind* (centering their learning); *I make sure that before attending the class, I am emotionally and physically ready to participate the class* (arranging and planning their learning and encouraging oneself).

The graduate students' strategies in learning Nihongo are opposite to the learning strategies of Filipino students in the study of Lim and Ong (1996). Primarily, they used compensation and social strategies (indirect) to make intelligent guesses and to interact with each other than use other language learning strategies. The second widely used strategy is the metacognitive strategy followed by memory and cognitive strategies (direct). This proves that strategies in learning Nihongo are influenced by time and resources available to the students.

In fact, in the narration of the ESL teacher respondents' learning experience, they have included their teachers' ways in delivering and facilitating the Nihongo lessons and activities in class:

"I was exempted from the class because of my proficiency in the language; The teacher also seems authoritative in her class; My classmate who was residing and

teaching in Japan was also tasked to create lesson files and a course outline based on the syllabus; I also wanted to get some ideas on how to teach the course better; I like it when there are recitations; and the teacher promotes ease in learning the language, though I was expecting it to be tough and pressuring."

As ESL teachers, they have developed effective skills and expertise in teaching a second language which entitle them to suggest teaching strategies of Nihongo in the perspective and knowledge of both a teacher of second language and a student of foreign language. Table 4 presents the responses of ESL teacher respondents' suggested teaching strategies of Nihongo among graduate students.

Table 4. Suggested Teaching Strategies of Nihongo in Graduate School by ESL Teacher Respondents

Participants	Suggested Teaching Strategies of Nihongo
1	*Online learning is really difficult. I know in face-to-face, the strategies employed by our teacher will be different, too. Hence, I understand the difficulty of employing it. But nonetheless, how to write the characters must be taught first hand, so learner would know how to write it. Just like how we teach the "ABCs" in English.*
2	*I think collaborative approach could also be effective in delivering Nihongo lessons.*
3	*Comprehensive input & more communicative tasks and interaction between and among students and teacher in the class.*
4	*More on conversational speaking activity and reading coz this are the things needed to be learned.*
5	*Dialogue-type of teaching, so that students will make use of the language.*
6	*Modelled language approach can really help. In my Nihongo classes, I begin by introducing a grammar unit (ex: Japanese particle) which will be written in kana, and it will be used in a sentence. That sentence will be in a script. The script will be based on a dialogue/ speaking activity. The script is based on a context which is familiar to the learner. The dialogue can make it exciting and easy to remember.*
7	*During my Nihongo class, I used application such as Google translate for me to translate and know the meaning of specific words. In addition, I used to watch Anime so it helped me to be familiar with some words and expressions.*
8	*Vocabulary learning; phrasal expressions; situational/practical conversations and dialogues; repetition; audio lingual approach*
9	*I think slide decks are still the best in learning and teaching Nihongo as long as the content available there is complete and can be understood even when the teacher does not discuss it (applicable for independent learning).*
10	*Handouts and audio recordings*

Thematically, the ESL teacher respondents suggest teaching writing Nihongo like teaching the English alphabet; facilitating collaborative learning, dialogue, and communicative activities using basic Nihongo vocabularies and expressions; modeling the Nihongo language; and using multimedia resources specifically audio-video materials, translation apps, slide presentations, and handouts.

Therefore, it is needed to rationalize the teaching and learning of Nihongo among graduate students. While these data are informative for strengthening the instructional material for learning Nihongo, it also highlights the need for the university to consult Nihongo experts on how to best teach and learn it, such as using the latest and cutting-edge technologies and innovations (Quintos, 2021).

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of this study contributed to the limited evidence in Japanese language learning of Filipino students; showed qualitative evidence on the CPH of adult learning a third or fourth language; and presented the ESL teachers learning Nihongo language in the graduate school particularly their difficulties and strategies in learning the Japanese language as an academic requirement. From the data gathered, this study presented recommendations for the effective teaching of Japanese language among graduate students in the Philippines.

Consequently, despite the limitations of this study, the following research conclusions were drawn. The ESL teachers in graduate school experienced positive learning experience in their Nihongo class. Though, they recognized its perplexity, they agreed that their Nihongo lessons were basic and intended for beginners like them. Writing and translating sentences and phrases are their most identified difficulties in learning Nihongo and vocabulary and pronunciation given the limited time of synchronous learning or recitation and people to communicate with were their second identified difficulties.

ESL teachers in graduate school were mostly middle-aged, so partly they considered their age crucial in learning a foreign language. However, age was not the only factor in recognizing difficulties of ESL teacher respondents, but other learning limitations such as affective factors, learning environment, workload, etc. Nevertheless, the ESL teachers in graduate school recognized the value of learning Japanese as a new language and culture more beneficial than professional advantage in Japan. Lastly, they used direct learning strategy in learning Nihongo specifically creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, reviewing well, and employing actions.

Therefore, to further improve the learning of Nihongo in graduate school, the ESL teachers suggested effective ways in teaching Nihongo based on their strategies as language teachers themselves. First, teach writing in Nihongo in a way of teaching the alphabet to beginner writers. It should start by writing Nihongo in English alphabet before introducing the Japanese characters using tracing worksheets.

Second, facilitate collaborative learning, dialogue, and communicative activities using basic Nihongo vocabularies and expressions. The teacher may pair or group students in presenting or reading the Nihongo vocabularies and expressions in class instead of reading them individually. Communicative and collaborative activities are more student-centered and experiential for graduate students to apply the foreign language given the absence of local speakers at work or in the household. Likewise, indirect learning strategy for graduate students in Nihongo classes can have a potential in future research.

Lastly, continue to model the Nihongo language, but use multimedia resources specifically audio-video materials, translation apps, slide presentations, and handouts. Using multimedia resources promotes differentiated teaching, which may help graduate students learn, understand, and use a foreign language in various contexts.

Most importantly, she offers her gratefulness and worship to Lord Jesus Christ for making her life and profession meaningful and successful.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

[1] Alberto, K. B., Ferrer, I. B., & Takada, S. M. (2008). *Relationship of Japanese proficiency level and the amount of employment benefits received by Filipino IT workers in Japanese companies*. https://animorepository.dlsu.edu.ph/etd_bachelors/7254

[2] Ellis, R. (1985). *Understanding second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[3] Gonzales, R. (1997). *Japanese language education in the Philippines: Profile of learners, motivation, issues, and prospects*. First National Conference of Japanese Specialists and Educators, Ateneo de Manila University, February 7-8, 1997.

[4] ----------------- (1997). Nihongo no benkyou: why and how Filipinos learn Japanese language. *Explorations of Knowledge, Creation & Computer*, 6(3), 43-48.

[5] ----------------- (1998). Nihongo no benkyoo: Learning strategies and motivation of Filipino learners of the Japanese language. *Layag*, 3(1), 1-1.

[6] Gürsoy, E. (2011). The critical period hypothesis revisited: The implications for current foreign language teaching to young learners. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, 2(4).

[7] Hatasa, Y. A. (2011). 6 L2 writing instruction in Japanese as a foreign. *Foreign language writing instruction: Principles and practices*. https://books.google.com.ph/books?hl=en&lr=&id=wKoWEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT61&dq=ESL+Learners+Learning+Nihongo&ots=_g-wi7TPG9&sig=y3Gzta07nX0jXz6_2U7H9G6G7v4&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=ESL%20Learners%20Learning%20Nihongo&f=false

[8] Lamina, O. G. (2017). *A recall of experience: Becoming to has been a scholar in Japan*. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/60068005/articlejapan20190720-33616-zktxo5-with-cover-page-v2.pdf?Expires=1659746671&Signature=UuVYnRsEA9zlwvQbZaWpTUH4v~s21z3b7ZRtur Kc9egFy1hUCZY7ZXHGoMD7jqkc63xg8x0K5yFt5Kn~bdcPes4sfRyhCDAJbqvX~ZfIviR6g BeZpikwT-SwVMs1~5B9bmlryAmhsnfgLXzMWxy1vlPuELG1gBofrdYdJkV1FJOeBTB821l-3Fzvuaex5TU4oHgOg8nMxsybLvg1UUuZI26hPDMmUOA7lRDLfZI-KG03KaR-3pALWBS07C2EK6~aD2DjHJVyGdmfyGcvVGbuKS~2w7vjjkQRSR2lYytDqSlhJzjJbRpyrh eUfRUVZeIPxmWxzNwgtXbmlyndbP92~A__&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA

[9] Lenneberg, E. H. (1967). The biological foundations of language. *Hospital Practice*, 2(12), 59-67.

[10] Lightbown, P. M. and Spada, N. (2006). *How languages are learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[11] Lim, K., & Ong, M. G. (1996). Japanese language learning strategies of Filipino students in selected institutions in Metro Manila.

[12] Luca (2018). *What are the most studied languages in the world*. Mosalingua. https://www.mosalingua.com/en/most-studied-languages-in-the-world/

[13] Machida, S. (2011). Translation in teaching a foreign (second) language: A methodological perspective. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, 2(4).

[14] Morgan, S. (2018, July 17). *Importance of the Japanese language*. https://www.importanceoflanguages.com/importance-japanese-language/

[15] Peel, K. L. (2020). A beginner's guide to applied educational research using thematic analysis. *Practical Assessment, Research, and Evaluation*, *25*(1), 2.

[16] Quintos, Q. (2021). Difficulties in learning Japanese as a foreign language: The Case of Filipino learners. *Bicol University R & D Journal*, *24*(2).

[17] Singleton, D., & Leśniewska, J. (2021). The critical period hypothesis for L2 acquisition: An unfalsifiable embarrassment? *Languages*, *6*(3), 149.

[18] Uniglo (2020). *What are the most learned languages in the world*. https://howdoyou.do/what-are-the-most-learned-languages-in-the-world/

[19] Uzawa, K. (1997). Problem-solving in the translating processes of Japanese ESL learners. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, *53*(3), 491-505.

[20] Vanhove, J. (2013). The critical period hypothesis in second language acquisition: A statistical critique and a reanalysis. *PloS one*, *8*(7), e69172.