"NIHONGO KINSHI"? LANGUAGE POLICY AND PRACTICE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING SPACES

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English Only!

Please try to use English here!

English First

日本語禁止 ZONE!

Let's speak foreign languages!

THANK YOU FOR SPEAKING ENGLISH.

Japanese

This is an English language community.

P.L.O.P.!

SELF-ACCESS CONTEXTS

Most research is from classroom contexts, but:

- **Translanguaging in a SAC** (Adamson & Fujimoto-Adamson, 2012)
  - One centre's journey from English-Only to a more flexible language policy

- **The Language of Advising**
  - Advising should be in the learners' L1 (Gremmo, 1995; Riley, 2003)
  - Reflection in L2 fosters Autonomy (Little, 2007)
  - Advisor perceptions of L1 & TL use (Thornton, 2012)

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LANGUAGE LEARNING SPACES

- Explicitly designed to provide opportunities for naturalistic target language use (esp. in EFL environments)

- Often rely on voluntary usage from students

- May be multilingual

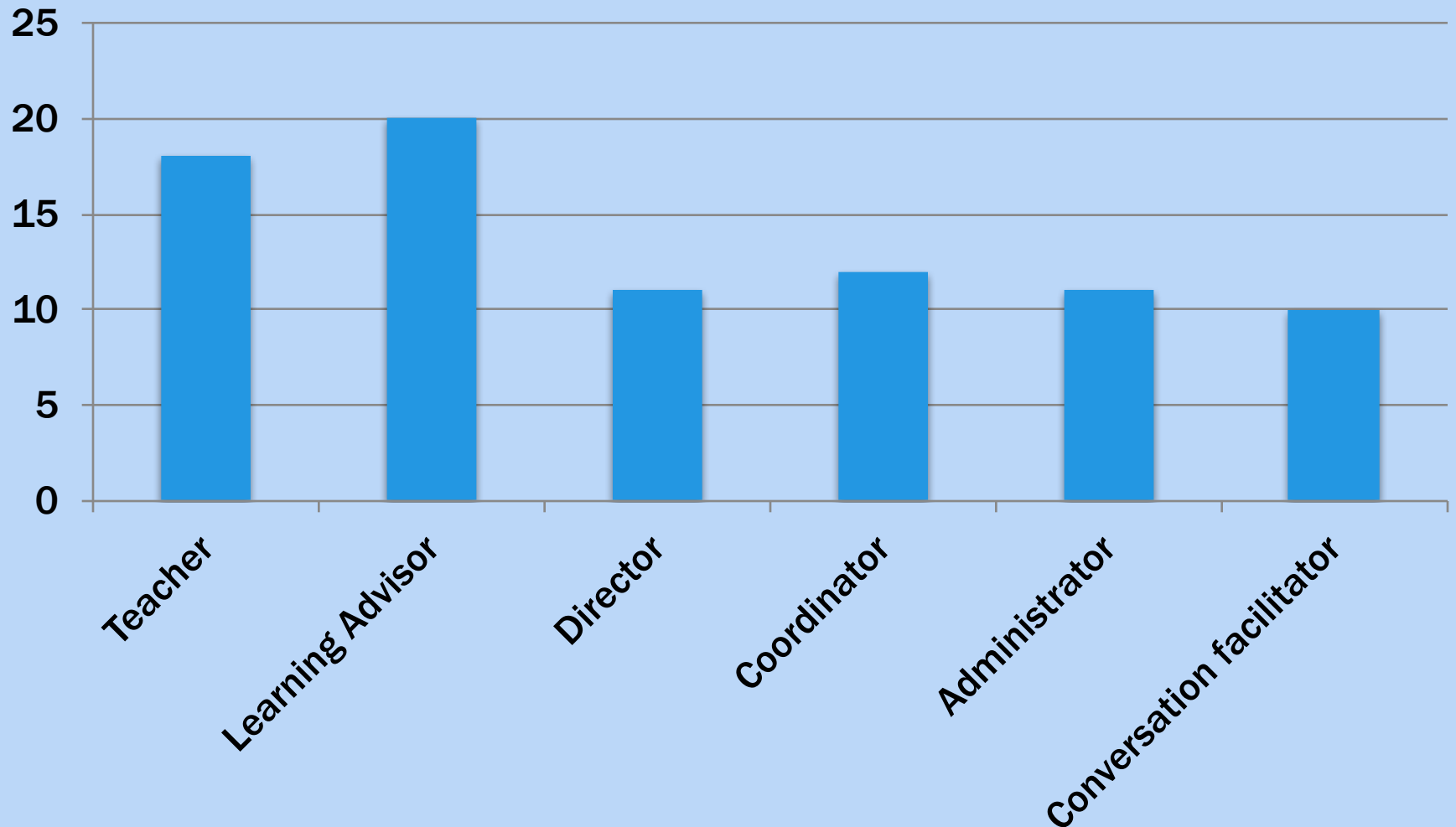- Cater for different levels of proficiency

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do LLS practitioners regard the issue of language use & policy in their own centres?
  - Rationale given for policy
  - Reality of language use
  - Enforcement
  - Own attitudes to policy
  - Attitudes of other stakeholders

- How do students in one centre see this issue?

- What does this reveal about how different policies are working in practice?
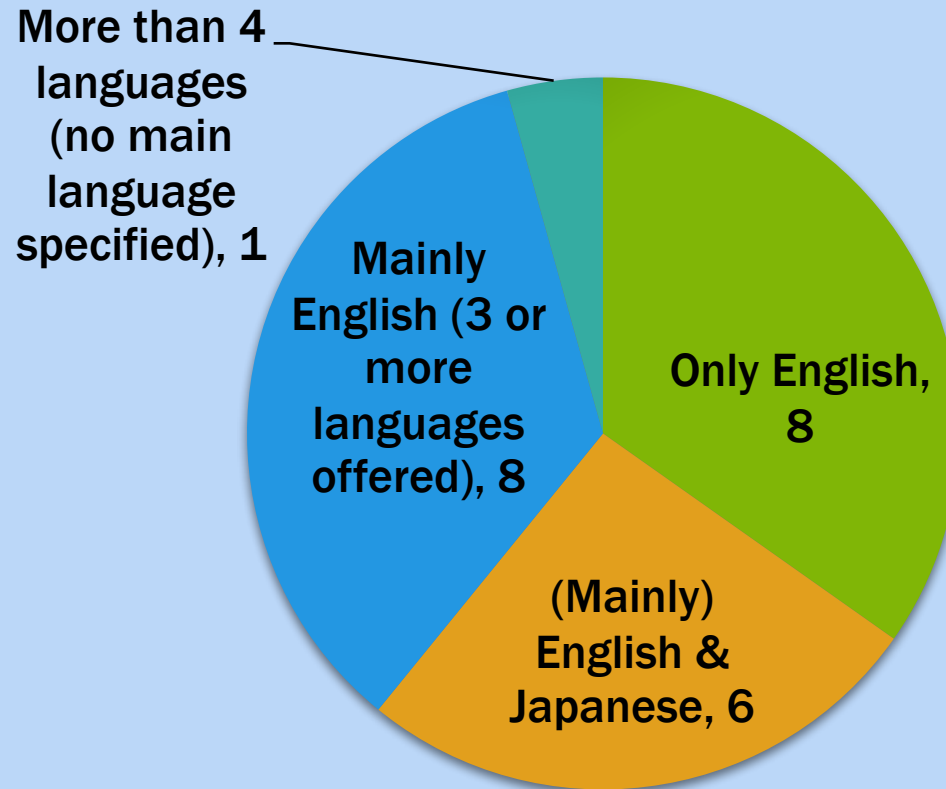
METHODOLOGY

- **Email Questionnaire to SiSAL & JASAL contacts**
  - 1st round Summer 2016
  - 2nd round (Japan only) Sep – Oct 2017

- **Responses filtered for Japan:**
  - 64 responses, 50 full responses, 37 from Japan.

- **Thematic analysis using HyperRESEARCH software**

ABOUT THE RESPONDENTS (N=37) (MULTIPLE ROLES)

NO. OF LANGUAGES CATERED FOR (N=23)

More than 4 languages (no main language specified), 1

Mainly English (3 or more languages offered), 8

Only English, 8

(Mainly) English & Japanese, 6
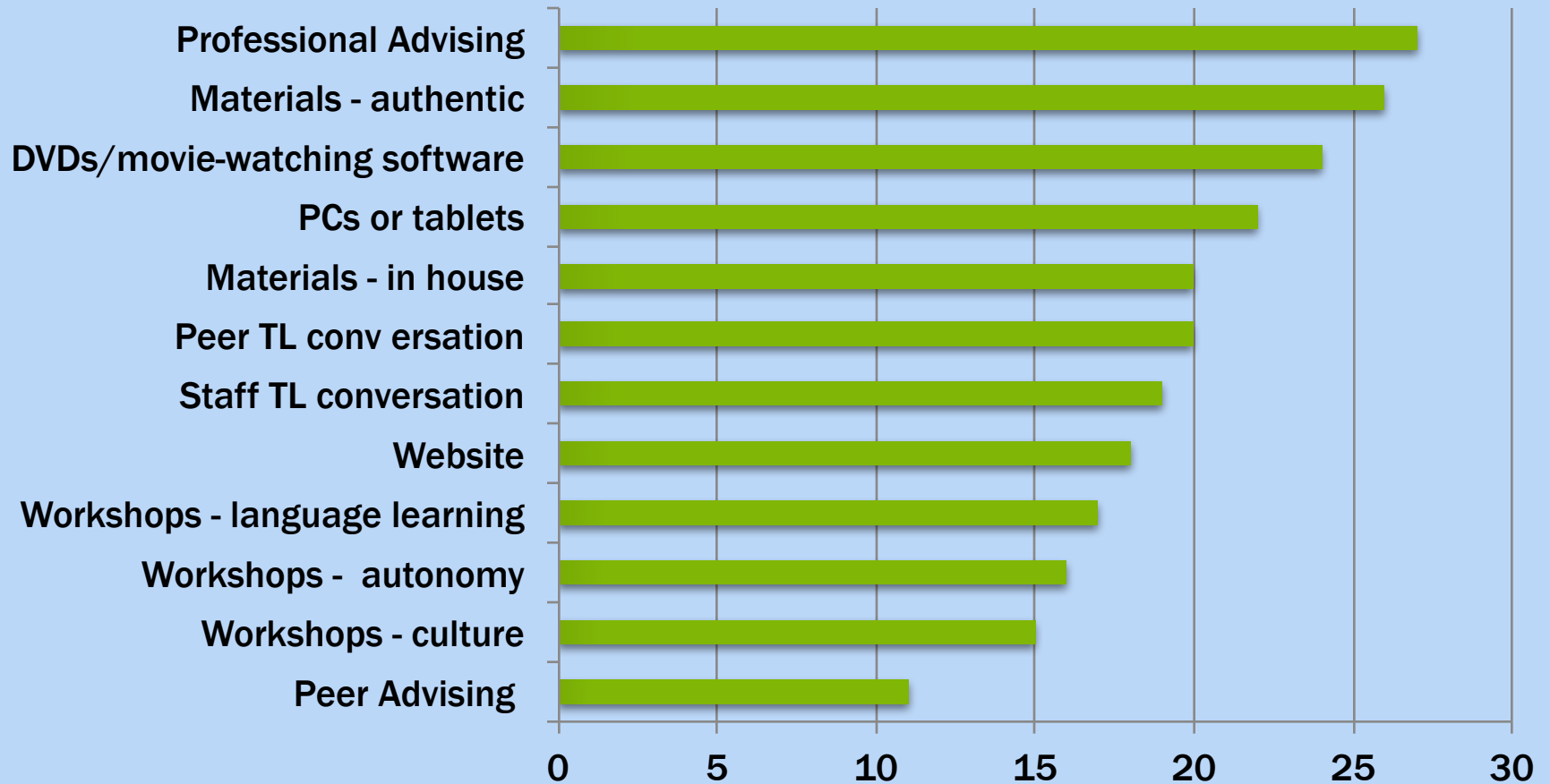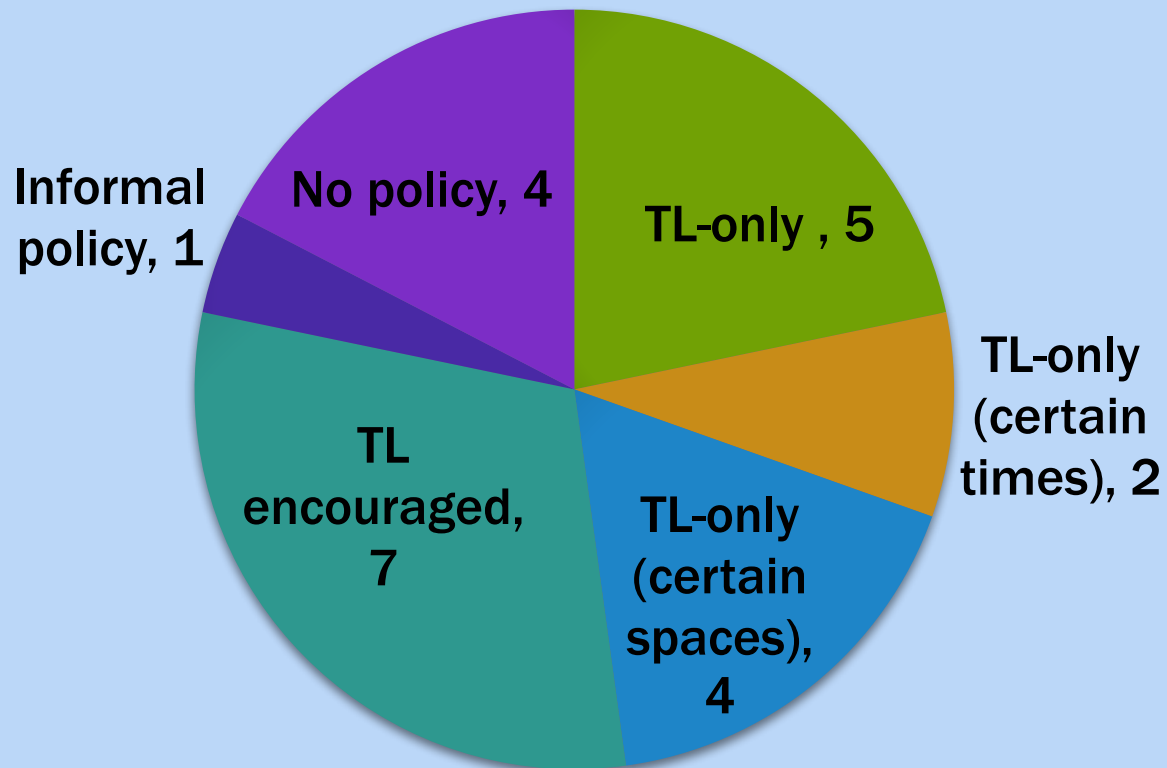
In all LLSs, English is the or one of the main Languages

SERVICES OFFERED

LANGUAGE POLICY

Language Policy (by Institution, n=23)

LANGUAGE POLICY DETAILS

Target Language Only

- Exceptions for Advising

- Exceptions for Peer Advising

- Penalties for L1 use (10 yen)

LANGUAGE POLICY DETAILS

Target Language Only in Certain Spaces/Times

- TL in conversation space
- International students hired to create English atmosphere
- English-Only in beginner facility

- L1 used in Admin space
- L1 used for Advising/Test preparation
- Difficult to enforce English-only zone

LANGUAGE POLICY DETAILS

Target Language encouraged but not required

- Adjust to individual learners' level
- L1 used when necessary
- No foreign language majors so cannot require English

- L1 used for affective reasons
- Advising in L1

LANGUAGE POLICY DETAILS

No official or informal policy

- All in Japanese (except conversation sessions)
- Avoiding prescriptive policy – would discourage students from using
- Each user & staff uses whatever language they like

- Multipurpose centre
- Events naturally held in English without official policy
- Students learn both Japanese & English so no policy

LANGUAGE POLICY RATIONALE

	Target Language only	TL encouraged	No policy
Provide target language environment/opportunities	7	/	/
Users' proficiency level/majors	2	7	/
Make accessible/understandable; encourage attendance (affect)	1	2	/
Preferences/beliefs of users, staff, admin)	3	2	2
Institutional culture	1	/	1
SLA theories	2	1	/
PR/marketing purposes	2	1	/
Other LLSs' policies	1	/	/
Practical issues (Multi-lingual/purpose location)	1	1	1
Autonomy	/	1	1

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Institutional culture	1	/	1
SLA theories	2	1	/
PR/marketing purposes	2	1	/
Other LLSs' policies	1	/	/
Practical issues (Multi-lingual/purpose location)	1	1	1
Autonomy	/	1	1

TL-ONLY WOULD BE IDEAL, BUT…

- **Low proficiency of users:**
"Students proficiency: if majority are false beginners and if they can speak only target language, I personally believe it would prevent them from using the place."

  "In the context of the university and the requirements of the students I feel [TL-encouraged policy] is realistic."

- **Multipurpose/multilingual space:**
"There are multiple target languages making it logistically complex (to have TL-only policy)"

- **Staff wouldn't support it:**
"Staff and teachers: Their proficiency and philosophy matter. It is very difficult to speak to Japanese teachers in English in our university"

POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION OF L1

"The fact that we have a mixture of international and Japanese students provides an excellent opportunity for both parties to learn if one is allowed to use their mother tongue.

Mother tongue is also a valuable resource in language learning and to ban it would be counter-productive.

I suppose it could also be perceived that banning a particular language is to relegate it to an inferior position, which could have implications for the identity of the students."

HOW IS THE POLICY ENFORCED?

"I would say as a whole our department is not comfortable with policing language use but rather would like to see the students wanting to create this kind of environment."

	TL-only (n=5)	TL-spaces (n=4)	TL – times (n=2)	TL encouraged (n=7)
Staff lead by example	4	4	1	3
Staff praise language adhering to the policy	3	3	1	3
Staff actively ask students to follow policy	3	3	1	2
Staff ask non-compliant users to leave	0	0	0	0
Staff don't actively enforce the policy	0	0	1	3

IS THE POLICY FOLLOWED BY USERS?

	TL-Only	TL-spaces/times	TL-encouraged
(Near) Full Compliance	2	2	1
Mostly followed	3	2	4
TL used for "official interactions" (counter, with staff, for sessions) only but not used in private spaces/ S-S interaction	3	1	2
Rarely followed/largely ignored	1	1	1
Depends on the user	3	/	5

PRIVATE INTERACTION IN L1

"When students are in private booths, they revert to Japanese use. When staff are not nearby, they often speak in Japanese. Sometimes, students are caught speaking loudly in Japanese for all to hear."

This happens in all contexts, regardless of the official policy.

DEPENDS ON PURPOSE

"If the users are there for a specific purpose, such as a class discussion or conversation practice, they tend to use the target language. Otherwise, they don't tend to." (TL-encouraged)

"We send mixed signals to the students. Peer staff and faculty switch between languages based on what the space is being used for at the time."

But are students aware of these different purposes?

DEPENDS ON THE STUDENT

"Regular users tend to follow this policy. Those who visit primarily to borrow books are more likely to speak Japanese during their brief visits."

"I think new users try their best to use English, but regulars who hang out there sometimes get sloppy and speak Japanese with their friends."

"70% of students follow the rule. Some ignore it even when it is pointed out to them."

Regardless of official policy, many students will do as they please.

If official policy is just ignored, why have it?

Better to actively embrace L1, but help students use it judicially.

TL USE NEEDS ENFORCEMENT/REMINDING

"The managers in the facility are very strict in enforcing the policy so they keep an eye out at all times. Therefore, it is followed 95%."

"Normally students, after a gentle reminder, try their best to use the target language. We also have a great number of students who do not need this prompting, and do their best to use English at all times while in the SAC."

"Assistants, all of them fluent, strictly and easily follow it with the more fluent visitors. Beginners and lower-intermediate visitors tend to lose confidence and resort to Japanese, so practically they need a lot of reminding and encouraging."

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ATTITUDES TO POLICY

Level of Support for Policy	TL-encouraged	TL in Spaces/Times	TL-Only
Support current policy	8	3	2
Support with reservations	0	2	2
Prefer stricter policy	1	0	1
Prefer more flexible policy	1	0	2
Prefer multi-space policy	0	1	3

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ATTITUDES TO TL-ONLY

- **Support (want a stricter policy)**

"I think the policy should be more strict. I would understand if the policy was flexible if the university offered other departments but since we are a foreign language university focusing on English, it needs to be thought through."

- **Support with reservations:**

"Keeping English speaking environment is necessary but many students are shy to talk friends in L2. I don't want to force them to speak in L2 but want them realize the importance of using and practicing to improve their communicative competence."

ATTITUDES TO TL-ENCOURAGED

Support:

"I think our 'English first' policy is very good. We have intentionally not posted any signs about language use as we felt the English community would evolve naturally, and it has so far."

"I love it. It took most of the pressure off students and it meant we don't really have to be English Police anymore (one of my least favourite aspects of the job)."

ATTITUDES TO TL-ENCOURAGED

However, not easy to encourage TL use:

"[...]This policy seems to work quite well, but on the other hand, students do not try hard enough to speak English when they do not have the so-called 'conversation sessions'.."

"..it is always difficult [to create TL culture]. If we could have at least one person who doesn't speak Japanese which is our native language or who can possibly pretend not knowing Japanese, it may be more natural to use the target language. It never happens."

"On a few occasions student staff members have expressed disappointment that they don't get to use enough English while on the job, especially the counter staff."

Does flexible policy really encourage TL use effectively?

THE DILEMMA

"Many low-level students use this center. We do not want to discourage them using it by having an English only policy. At the same time, we want to encourage English so that students who use English do not feel out of place when they use it in the SAC."

STUDENT ATTITUDES

The case of E-CO

ABOUT E-CO

- Mid-size LLS, opened 2013

- 40 – 100+ users per day

- Social Science majors

- Generally low English proficiency

Language Policy

- English encouraged, other languages welcomed

- Encouraged on a case-by-case basis

STUDENT STUDY - METHODOLOGY

- Questions added to general survey about LLS usage

- Administered in July 2017

- Bilingual

- 43 respondents (predominantly regular users)
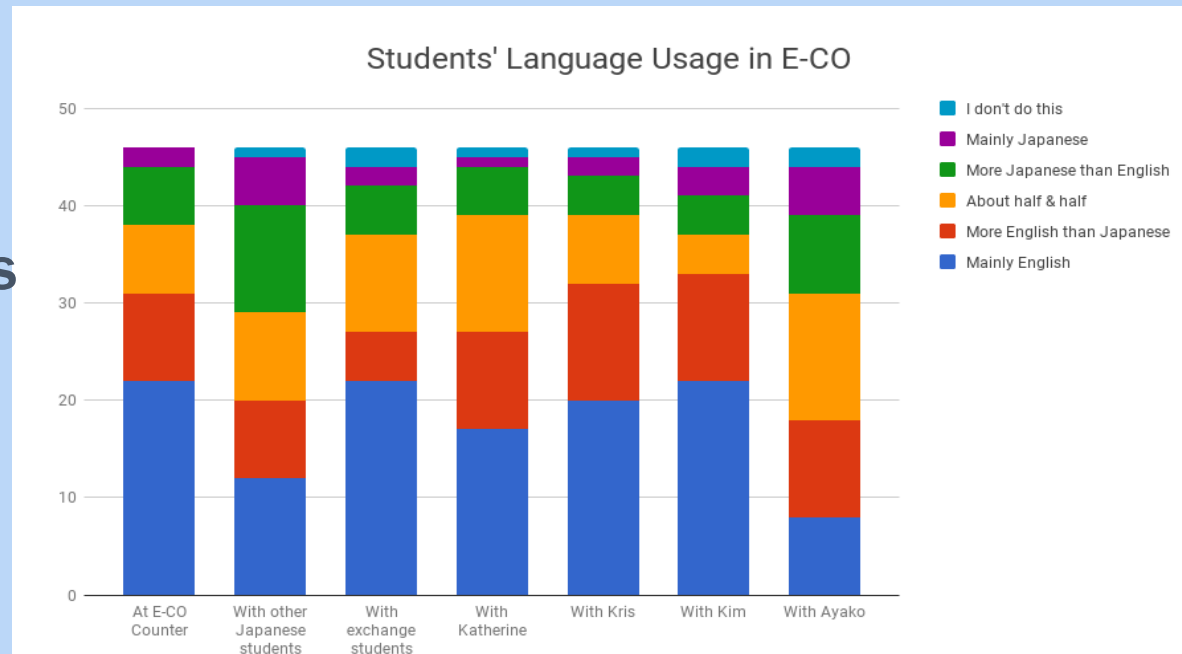
STUDENT ATTITUDES

- **Research Questions**

  - How do they see their own language use?

  - How do students feel about how English and Japanese (and other languages) are currently used in E-CO?

  - What is their ideal language policy?
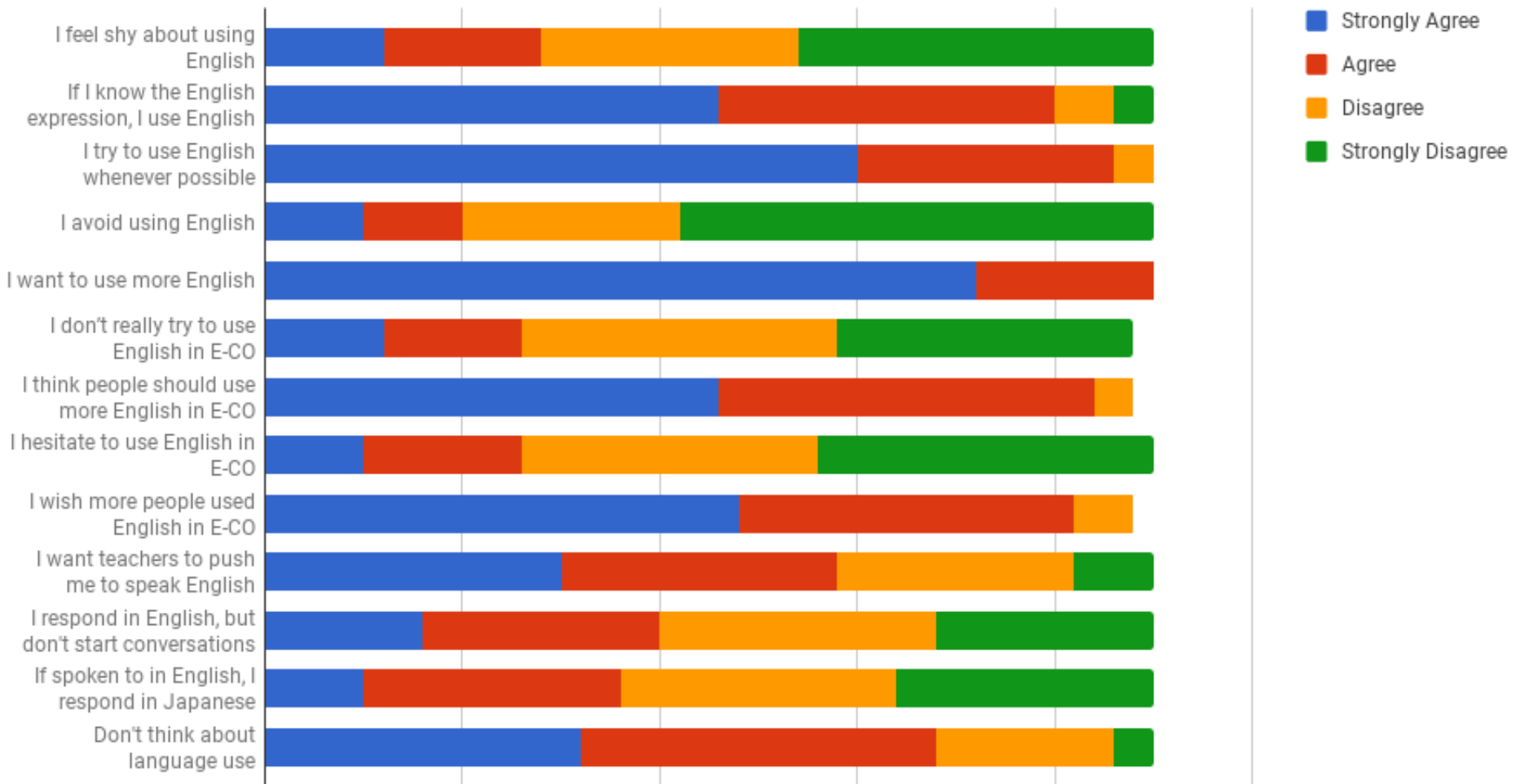
WHICH LANGUAGE DO YOU USE?

Students see themselves as using more English than Japanese with most people in most contexts (staff, fellow students, counter)

But..

staff observations say otherwise!

Students' Language Usage in E-CO

Legend:
- I don't do this
- Mainly Japanese
- More Japanese than English
- About half & half
- More English than Japanese
- Mainly English

Categories: At E-CO Counter, With other Japanese students, With exchange students, With Katherine, With Kris, With Kim, With Ayako

ATTITUDES TO ENGLISH USE

Student Attitudes to Using English in E-CO

Legend: Strongly Agree (blue), Agree (red), Disagree (orange), Strongly Disagree (green)

Categories:
- I feel shy about using English
- If I know the English expression, I use English
- I try to use English whenever possible
- I avoid using English
- I want to use more English
- I don't really try to use English in E-CO
- I think people should use more English in E-CO
- I hesitate to use English in E-CO
- I wish more people used English in E-CO
- I want teachers to push me to speak English
- I respond in English, but don't start conversations
- If spoken to in English, I respond in Japanese
- Don't think about language use

ATTITUDES TO ENGLISH USE

- Over 90% of students agree or strongly agree they speak English "whenever possible"

- About 25% "hesitate" or "are shy" to speak English

- About 75% agree or strongly agree that they don't think about their language use in E-CO

Student Attitudes to Using English in E-CO
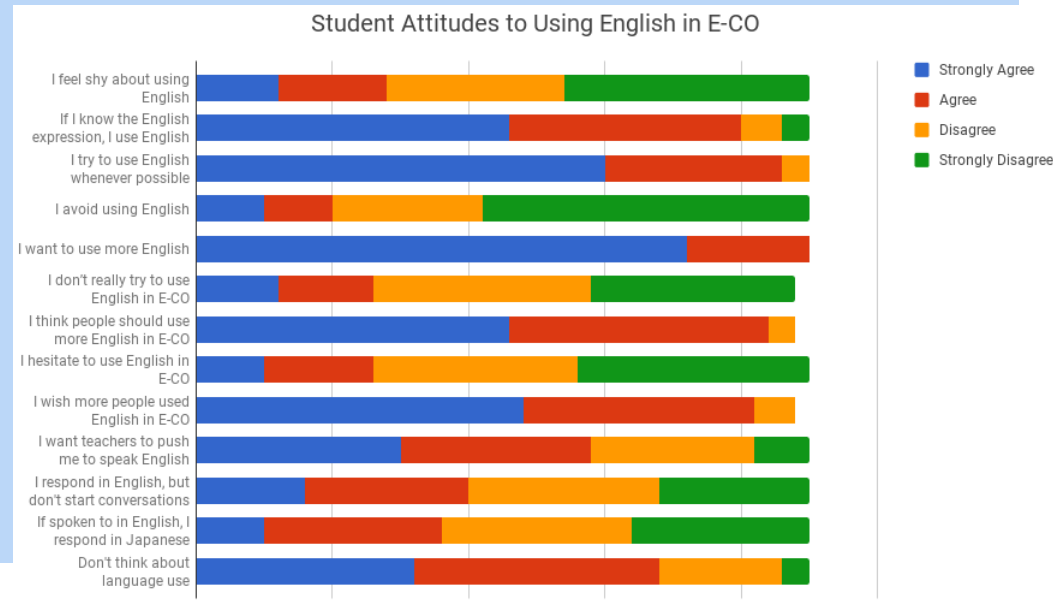
PREFERRED LANGUAGE POLICY

Students' Preferred Language Policy
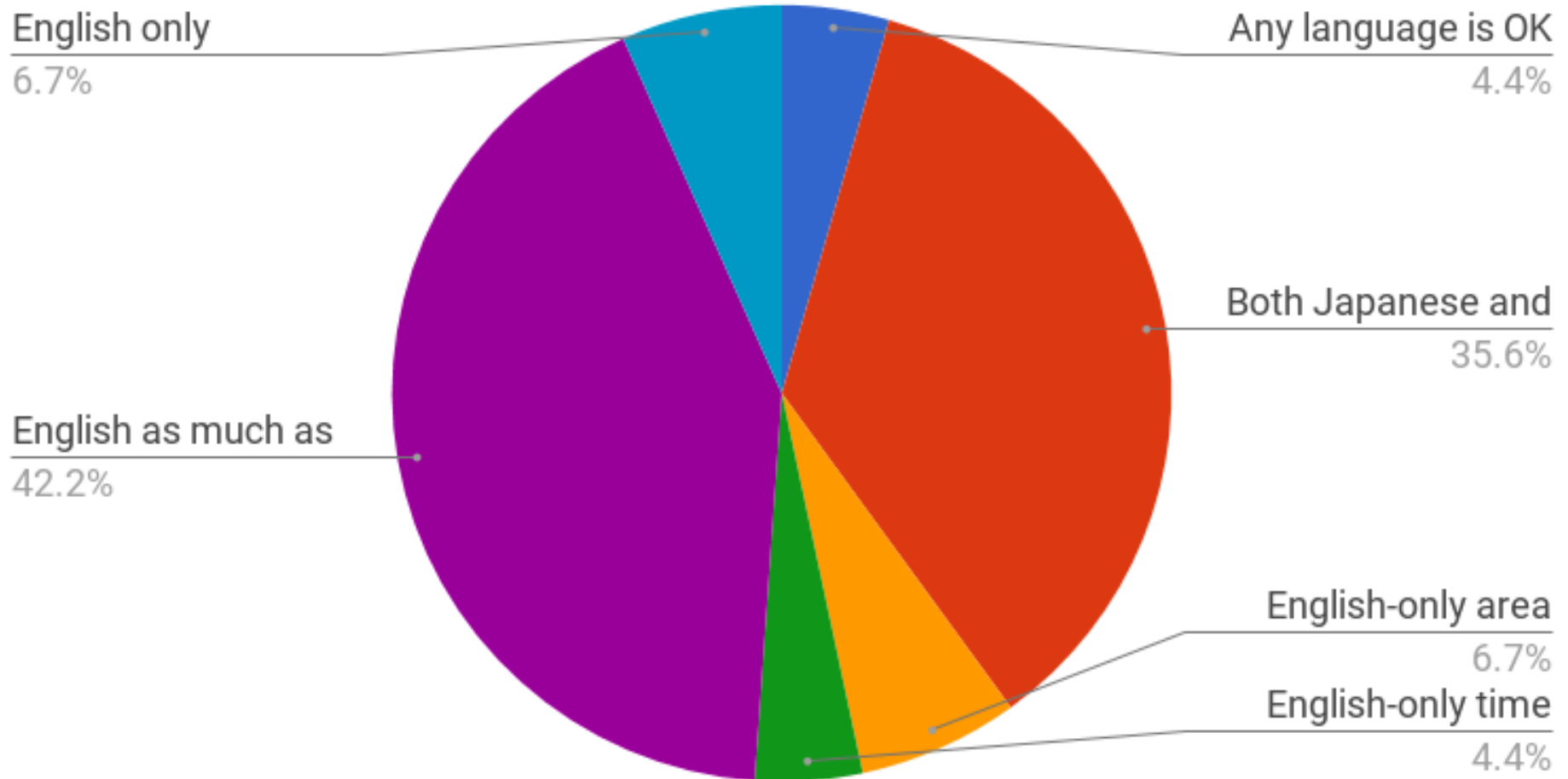
SUPPORT FOR ENGLISH AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE

"E-COでしか学べないことはたくさん存在している、大学の中で唯一英語を話せる場があるため英語をできるだけチャレンジして成長していきたい"

(There are many things that can only be learned in E-CO – it's the only place at the university to speak English so everyone should be willing to try/ step out of their comfort zone and grow.)

"E-CO is a place for learn English so I think it's normal to use English as much as possible"

"英語力がないので、わかる範囲での英語を使いながら徐々に英語力がつくようにすればよい"。

(We don't have strong English skills, so we should get these skills little by little by using what we know)

SUPPORT FOR BOTH ENGLISH & JAPANESE

"Because more student start coming to E-CO if they can use both English and Japanese."

"留学生が日本語も学んでるから日本語も使えた方がいい"

(Exchange students are also studying so we should be able to use Japanese too)

"There are 2 types of people. One can speak English, other can't. So, I want all of them to enjoy English. So I want them to try to speak English, but if they can't come up with what they wanna say in English, it's okay to say it in Japanese. Then, everyone try to solve it. So, I think people can speak English and little bit Japanese. I wish all of people in E-CO speak English though."

"日本語でいいたいことを伝え、それから英語に翻訳してもらえることで新しい英語の単語や文章を学ぶことができるから"

(You can learn new English words and grammar by saying what you want to say in Japanese and getting someone to translate)

SUPPORT FOR ENGLISH ONLY

"英語できる話さなければならないという環境が有れば、そこに行けば必ず全員が英語をはなしているで、恥ずかしがることなく英語を使おうと努力できるから、絶対全部英語にすべき"

(If there was an environment where you have to speak English everyone would try hard to speak English without embarrassment. Definitely make the whole space English.)

CONCLUSIONS

- Students have similar understanding of the issues to managers
  - Different proficiency levels in same space
  - Mix with international students learning Japanese
  - Japanese can be useful to learn English
  - Strict policy could change behaviour but also put people off

- Students don't think deeply about their own language use

- Our team at E-CO needs to
  - Create opportunities for reflection on language use
  - Encourage more students to use English more actively
  - Recognise that many students need Japanese to feel comfortable
  - Recognise that many students feel that they are trying their best

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

Strong support for flexibility in policy,
- Different policies for different spaces
  - Advising in L1
  - Designated spaces for TL interaction
- Multilingual policies
- Support use of L1 as a learning tool

However, when we lose "English Only", what do we gain?

More students engaging with community?

We still need to have active policies and support to encourage maximal TL interaction.

STUDENTS NEED SUPPORT

"The students often times have no experience speaking or learning English in their English classes so they come with the expectation that Japanese is ok or come feeling very unprepared."

"[...]This policy seems to work quite well, but on the other hand, students do not try hard enough to speak English when they do not have the so-called 'conversation sessions'.."

FURTHER RESEARCH

- Collect more data to confirm patterns

- More stakeholder views:
  - especially users
  - administrators
- Follow-up interviews

- Case studies on several institutions

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