Learners' Attitudes Toward "English-Only" Institutional Policies: Language Use Outside the Classroom

Elena Shvidko

It is commonly believed that intensive English programs (IEP) are designed to immerse learners in an English-speaking environment to help them effectively develop their language skills. Therefore, despite countless studies on the importance of a learner's first language (L1) in second language learning, some IEPs enforce English-only policies that prohibit L1 use both in and beyond the classroom. Knowing students' attitudes toward such policies is essential; however, research says very little to help us understand students' perspectives. Thus, in this study, IEP students of various proficiency levels and L1 backgrounds described their attitudes toward the institutional English-only policy at an intensive English program associated with a large U.S. university. Data were collected through a survey (n = 158), interviews (n = 6), and focus groups (n = 4). Positive attitudes included feeling that the English-only policy helped students to improve their English proficiency, prepare them for the high demands of using English proficiency in real-world interaction, and demonstrate respect for other students and teachers who cannot understand their first language, as well as for other students' learning goals and efforts. Nevertheless, several aspects of the policy were perceived negatively, including the ways teachers dealt with students speaking their L1 outside the classroom, methods of punishment that could impact students' grades, the unconditional character of the policy that denied learners their agency, and the lack of systematic implementation. Based on these findings, suggestions are provided for designing institutional environments that could more effectively maximize target language use rather than demoralize learners.

Il est communément admis que les programmes d'anglais intensifs sont conçus pour immerger les étudiants dans un environnement anglophone de sorte à les aider à bien développer leurs compétences linguistiques. Ainsi, et en dépit d'innombrables études sur l'importance du rôle que joue la première langue (L1) de l'apprenant dans l'apprentissage d'une deuxième langue, certains programmes d'anglais intensifs imposent une politique d'unilinguisme anglais qui interdit l'emploi de la L1 dans la salle de classe et ailleurs. Il est essentiel de connaitre les attitudes des étudiants par rapport à de telles politiques; pourtant, la recherche nous en dit très peu sur leurs perspectives. Cette étude porte sur des étudiants d'un programme d'anglais intensif ayant des compétences et des L1 variées qui ont décrit leurs attitudes face à la politique d'unilinguisme anglais dans une grande université américaine. Les données ont été recueillies par un sondage (n = 158), des entrevues (n = 6) et des groupes de discussions (n = 4). Parmi les critiques

positives, les étudiants ont noté que la politique d'unilinguisme anglais les avait aidés à améliorer leur compétence en anglais, à affronter les exigences élevées liées à l'emploi de l'anglais dans leurs interactions avec le monde réel, à faire preuve de respect envers les autres étudiants et les enseignants qui ne comprennent pas leur L1, et à apprécier les objectifs et les efforts académiques des autres étudiants. Toutefois, les étudiants ont jugé plusieurs aspects de la politique négativement, y compris la façon dont les enseignants géraient l'emploi par les étudiants de leur L1 à l'extérieur de la salle de classe, les punitions qui pourraient avoir un impact sur leurs notes, le caractère inconditionnel de cette politique qui refuse aux étudiants le droit d'agir de façon autonome et le manque de mise en œuvre systématique. Ces résultats forment la base de nos suggestions visant la création de milieux institutionnels qui maximisent l'emploi de la langue cible de façon plus efficace et sans démoraliser les apprenants.

Students' language use in educational contexts—both inside and outside the classroom—has been a topic of much interest in English language teaching. Although there is strong support in the literature for limited, strategic L1 use as a valuable resource for second language learning (e.g., Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Macaro, 2005; Rivers, 2011a; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Turnbull & Daily-O'Cain, 2009), students' language use still appears to be the subject of debate in foreign language pedagogy. It seems to be particularly controversial in the case of intensive English programs (IEP), whose purpose is to help learners develop their language skills through extensive exposure to the target language. It is no secret that in many IEPs, teachers and administrators enforce policies, rules, and guidelines in regard to student language use, both in class and outside the classroom. While some IEPs simply encourage students to maximize their L2 use, others enforce policies that restrict the use of students' L1, including English-only policies that prohibit the use of the learners' L1 at any time within the confines of the language school (McMillan & Rivers, 2011; Rivers, 2011a).

In programs supporting such English-only policies, administrators and teachers implement a variety of strategies and invent "elaborative games, signals, and penalty systems to ensure that students do not use their L1" (Auerbach, 1993, p. 16; also see Rivers, 2014). Unfortunately, in many cases, such restrictive policies seem to be rather ineffective and even harmful (e.g., Grant, 1999; McMillan & Rivers, 2011; Rivers, 2011a; Rivers, 2014; Shvidko, Evans, & Hartshorn, 2015). For example, Rivers (2014) suggested such English-only policies

> are often guided toward a dark emotional pathway of shame (in not
> being good enough to participate), guilt (in breaking the contract of

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> obligation to their classmates, the teacher and the institution) and ultimately fear (of the impending consequences and exclusion). (p. 111)

In a similar vein, Littlewood and Yu (2011) mentioned the feeling of alienation that the exclusion of learners' L1, required by English-only policies, can cause for them.

To set the background for the study, an informal online survey for administrators of intensive English programs in English-speaking countries was conducted. The survey was sent through the online email list known as "TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) Program Administration Interest Section"; 28 administrators completed the survey. The questions on the survey attempted to determine the policy positions of English language institutions on students' language use within the confines of their language learning facilities.

Of the 28 administrators who completed the survey, 23 admitted that, regardless of the school statement in terms of language use, students continue to communicate in their L1 between classes: "We try a lot, but in the end I would say it falls short. Students continue to speak their L1"; "If students have a choice, they mostly always choose not to use English"; "One-on-one, they admit they will speak English, but overcoming the bait of speaking their own language to another L1 speaker always seems to win out." A note of despair is heard in some responses:

- "It is really frustrating to admit we are so ineffective, but despite a great deal of effort, it seems the L1 is still very evident in the classroom area";
- "Enforcing [the English policy] is a nightmare";
- "Even if we wanted it, it is entirely impossible to enforce an English-only policy outside of class";
- "I've asked students why they want us to have to deal with this issue through punishment and why they cannot make the commitment to speak in English for [the] five hours a day they are in our program. They say they want to but can't break the habit. We have not been able to figure out how to break this habit."

As seen from these comments, students' language use is still a major concern, even in IEPs that enforce strict English-only policies (14 of the 23 administrators indicated on the survey that their programs applied some form of an English-only policy). Although administrators may implement English-only policies with the learners' best interest in mind, the simple assumption that these policies will foster students' language development is an insufficient basis on which to design such policies. Because students themselves can provide valuable input in regard to their language learning experiences, teachers and program administrators should actively seek out student voices and reflect student standpoints in all curricular implementations, including language policies. As Shvidko et al. (2015) pointed out, "A clearer understanding

of student perspectives is essential if we are to maximize student language learning" (p. 12).

Accordingly, the current study is aimed at providing empirical data based on attitudes of learners themselves toward an English-only policy in an intensive English program. It is hoped that the insights gathered from this study will be useful for administrators and faculty in helping to inform policy changes.

Review of Literature

Role of L1 in L2 Learning and Teaching

There has been a long debate over the use of L1 in second language learning and teaching. Proponents of the exclusive use of the target language (e.g., Chambers, 1991; Chaudron, 1988; Nunan, 1995, 1999) have asserted that maximum exposure to the target language leads to successful acquisition. For example, according to Chaudron (1988), "the fullest competence in the TL [target language] is achieved by means of the teacher providing a rich TL environment, in which not only instruction and drill are executed in the TL, but also disciplinary and management operations" (p.121). Thus, some researchers believe that the use of students' L1 in the classroom is "unthinkable" (Mattioli, 2004, p. 21) and that the L2 should be the sole medium of interaction.

The other side of this debate is represented by those who consider the L1 an effective tool in second language learning (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Levine, 2009; Macaro, 2005, 2009; McMillan & Rivers, 2011; McMillan & Turnbull, 2009; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009). According to Macaro (2005), "the language of thought for all but the most advanced L2 learners is inevitably his/her L1" (p. 68). Classroom-based research (Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Polio & Duff, 1994; Reis, 1996; Rivers, 2011a, 2011b; Schweers, 1999) has likewise demonstrated that some instructors use students' L1s to explain challenging grammar principles, deal with classroom management issues, and teach vocabulary. Studies exploring student group work provide further evidence for the importance of classroom use of the L1, suggesting that it promotes greater participation and more effective accomplishment of tasks (Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Brooks & Donato, 1994; Swain & Lapkin, 2000).

Students' Perspectives on Exclusive Use of the L2

The issue of appropriate language use in L2 learning most often arises in EFL contexts, in which learners normally share the same L1. As a result, research exploring students' attitudes toward English-only classrooms has focused primarily on EFL environments. Grant (1999), for example, examined students' perceptions of English-only classrooms in many foreign language

schools in Japan. He found that students' reactions were predominantly negative; only 30% of participants perceived their schools' English-only policies positively. Grant explained, however, that the students' negative attitudes were mostly directed toward institutional consequences for not using English, such as punishment or scolding, rather than toward the policy per se.

In Storch & Wigglesworth (2003), participants displayed positive attitudes toward L2 use in the completion of learning tasks. They believed that they were expected to "maximize the use of the target language as a means of improving their English speaking skills" (p. 766). However, despite these positive perceptions, the participants utilized their L1 among themselves to discuss definitions of unfamiliar words, understand their assignments more clearly, and thus "complete the task more easily" (p. 768). Based on these results, Storch and Wigglesworth suggested that the L1 could be a helpful mediating tool that learners use to "gain a shared understanding" (p. 767).

Students' mixed attitudes were similarly described by Burden (2000). In this study, English learners in university English classrooms in Japan believed that class time should be mainly spent on communicative activities in the target language. Most participants (211 out of 290) thought that teachers should use English when explaining grammar and class rules, giving assignments and instructions, as well as checking for understanding. At the same time, the majority of the participants (61%) indicated that they needed their L1 to relieve stress and relax. Based on these findings, Burden argued that L1 use helps create "a supportive and open environment" in the classroom, and thus provides "a more humanistic approach" to language teaching (p. 147).

Research also shows that some teachers incorporate the students' L1 into their teaching as a result of learners' negative perceptions of the monolingual approach. For example, Reis (1996) found that students at a low proficiency level viewed imposing the English-only rule in the classroom as a "restriction upon communication freedom" (p. 62). Therefore, the instructor collaborated with the students in creating a classroom practice that they called "Portuguese Break," during which the learners could ask questions about issues related to class activities in their L1—Portuguese.

Students' Perceptions of L2 Use Outside the Classroom

Learners' attitudes toward L2 use outside the classroom are explored in both educational and community contexts (Barker, 2004; Davis, 1986; Hyland, 2004; Kang, 2006; Park, 1998; Rivers, 2011a). Barker's (2004) study, conducted in an educational context, described Japanese students' perceptions of English use in their communication with other learners outside the classroom. Barker reported that many Japanese students did not believe that their use of English with non-native speakers was effective and helpful, and most participants said they avoided communicating in English with their friends in school as they perceived that type of interaction as "the blind leading the

blind" (p. 80). The findings revealed specific reasons why students avoided interaction in the target language. First, they feared to pick up each other's mistakes and thus worsen their English. Furthermore, students thought that by using English with other non-native English speakers, they would never know when mistakes were made. Students also believed that their interaction with non-native peers in English did not help them improve their pronunciation. Finally, they avoided using English outside the classroom due to their lack of language proficiency.

Another study with Japanese learners of English was conducted by Rivers (2011a). The study reports on a project during which the English-only policy enforced in the research site was temporarily set aside, and students were asked to reflect on the language choices they made in interactions with each other. Students' responses revealed a truly damaging nature of a language policy that excludes learners' L1: "The result was that I […] felt very uncomfortable and defeated"; "I do not like the feeling that using Japanese is bad. I want to learn English but not at the expense of Japanese"; "I like the policy which gives me more freedom in my language choices"; "I want to be recognized as a Japanese speaker of English. For me it is more important to be viewed as being Japanese than as an English speaker" (p. 108).

Hyland (2004) examined language use by native Cantonese teachers of English in Hong Kong. Participants included full-time students majoring in English language, part-time students who were also practicing teachers, and full-time primary school instructors on language-enhancement courses. Hyland found that they were reluctant to use English with each other, considering it awkward, unnatural, and even embarrassing. Some participants believed that English teachers were expected to speak it perfectly, and since they lacked confidence in their proficiency level, most of their interactions with each other were in their L1—Cantonese.

In another study conducted in an educational setting, Park (1998) examined reasons why Korean students had negative attitudes toward the exclusive use of English both in class and outside of the classroom. Park described four categories of factors that influenced learners' unwillingness to communicate in English with their peers: social (e.g., peer pressure, social norms, and Korean cultural communication patterns), institutional (e.g., teachers' [in]ability to motivate students), psychological (e.g., lack of confidence in using English with peers, fear of being judged by peers), and linguistic (e.g., translating habits, lack of listening comprehension, and limited linguistic resources).

Davis (1986) and Kang (2006) looked at language use in noneducational environments. The majority of participants in Davis's (1986) study—Korean learners of English in the United States—strongly expressed their disagreement with the idea of using English outside the school context. They considered their L1 a way of maintaining closeness to their families and culture, and giving it up was seen as a betrayal of their culture. Kang's (2006) participant,

on the other hand—a Korean physician who came to the United States as a visiting scholar—perceived the use of English as an important part of his sojourn, and this motivation helped him to seek more contact with native speakers and to overcome the feeling of insecurity about speaking English in the presence of other Koreans.

The current study attempts to contribute to the advancement of disciplinary knowledge on learners' attitudes toward L2 use outside the classroom by exploring this issue in the context of an intensive English program. As mentioned earlier, many IEPs implement the English-only policy as a way of maximizing students' language development, assuming that immersion in the TL environment is the best way to achieve a high proficiency in TL. Some programs may also use the English-only policy as a selling or a recruitment tool, as stated by McMillan and Rivers (2011), "designed to attract more—or more highly-motivated or highly-proficient—students" (p. 258). However, a one-size-fits-all policy is certainly not able to cater to diverse students' levels, abilities, and personal language-learning goals. And whereas the exclusive use of the TL may hold considerable hegemony as a common sense ideal model, in reality it is hardly achievable, and therefore, as Rivers (2011b) rightly stated, "a [by]product of this unrealistic demand is a negative impact upon the learner's psychological and emotional well-being through the promotion of feelings of guilt, disappointment, resignation, and indifference" (Rivers, 2011b, p. 42).

Interests of various stakeholders should be considered while designing institutional policies, including the ones that affect students' behaviour outside the language classroom. Therefore, students' perspectives should play an important role in the decision-making processes. The analysis of the existing literature shows that little is known about how learners themselves perceive the exclusive use of English outside the classroom of intensive English programs. Taking this issue as a point of departure, the purpose of this study was to explore students' attitudes toward the English-only institutional policy in one large intensive English program.

Method

Context

The study was conducted at the English Language Center (ELC)—an intensive English program associated with a large private university in the southwestern United States. The purpose of the program is to help students develop English proficiency in both interpersonal communication and academic studies. The curriculum of the program consists of two tracks: the Foundations English track, which is further divided into Foundations Prep and levels A, B, and C (ranging from novice low to intermediate high); and the Academic English track, which is further divided into Academic Prep and levels A, B, and C (ranging from intermediate high to advanced high).

Whereas most students at the ELC plan to attend a university in the United States after finishing the program, some of them wish to return to their home country and either continue education at a local university or pursue a career. Those who stay in the United States for further education usually see their studies at the ELC as preparation for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the General Record Examination (GRE), the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), or the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT).

The ELC administration has dealt for a number of years with the issue of creating an effective English-speaking environment. A number of strategies were implemented in the past to encourage and even force students to speak only English inside the school building. The majority of these strategies utilized various methods of punishment against those students who used their L1. These included losing the privilege of using the computer lab, being assigned to erase pencil marks from library books, and losing class participation points. Other efforts to control students' L1 use were based on combinations of reward and punishment, including a system of "red/green cards" (modelled after the carding system in soccer), which was implemented at the ELC for several semesters. According to this policy, students who spoke English inside the school building received green cards, and the class that collected the largest number of green cards by the end of the semester was rewarded with a party. In contrast, students who disregarded the policy and used their L1 in the building received red cards, which resulted in the deduction of participation points in their listening/speaking classes.

At the time of this study, the ELC continued to endorse an English-only environment; however, the rule was not enforced systematically. More specifically, students were expected to use English in all areas in the building except for the gym at lunchtime, but because of the lack of clear guidelines from the school administration, teachers did not always know where or when they were expected to enforce the English-only policy, and many students freely spoke their L1. As no specific instructions were provided, some teachers continued taking off points for L1 use, others reminded students to speak English, and yet others simply ignored the issue.

Participants

Out of 214 students enrolled in the program at the time of the study, 158 (73.83%) completed a web-based survey sent to all students at the end of the first semester of the study as part of their class evaluations. All proficiency levels—from low beginning to advanced—were represented in the sample (see Table 1).

Participants' L1 and the percentage of each L1 group in the sample are shown in Table 2.

Table 1
Survey Participants' Proficiency Level

Foundations English Track		Academic English Track	
Foundations Prep	2	Academic Prep	23
Level A	14	Level A	23
Level B	18	Level B	24
Level C	49	Level C	5
		Total: 158	

Table 2
Survey Participants' L1

Participants' L1	Percentage (Number of Participants)
Spanish	35.4 (56)
Korean	24.0 (38)
Portuguese	15.2 (24)
Mandarin	8.2 (13)
Japanese	7.0 (11)
French	3.1 (5)
Russian	2.5 (4)
Ukrainian	1.9 (3)
Arabic	0.6 (1)
Bengali	0.6 (1)
Nepalese	0.6 (1)
Vietnamese	0.6 (1)

The participants for the individual interviews were strategically selected by the author—who was also teaching at the ELC during the entire time of the study—from the 158 survey respondents during the second semester of the study. Interview participants were selected to represent the most common L1 groups in the student population: Spanish, Korean, Portuguese, or Mandarin. Furthermore, considering the rather challenging nature of the interviews, only those students who were at least at the Foundations C level at the time of the interviews were considered potential interviewees. To compensate for the misbalance of proficiency levels in the interviewee sample, this measure was not taken into account when recruiting focus group participants (see Table 3, also see Shvidko et al., 2015, for further description of the interviewee selection process). Six interview participants were selected, and the following codes are used to identify them when reporting the results of the study: SF-AP (a Spanish-speaking, female student, Academic Prep), SM-AB (a Spanish-speaking, male student, Academic B), KF-AP (a Korean-speaking,

female student, Academic Prep), KM-AB (a Korean-speaking, male student, Academic B), PF-AA (a Portuguese-speaking, female student, Academic A), and MF-AB (a Mandarin-speaking, female student, Academic B).

During the third semester of the study, four student focus groups were formed, based on the most representative L1s at the ELC: Spanish, Korean, Portuguese, and Mandarin. Through invitation emails, which were sent to all ELC students, the groups were formed as follows: Spanish (n = 9, Korean (n = 17), Portuguese (n = 9), and Mandarin (n = 7). (For more details on interview and focus group participants, see Shvidko et al., 2015.) The proficiency level of the focus group participants is shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Focus Group Participants

	Gender			Proficiency						
L1	M	F		FA	FB	FC	AP	AA	AB	AC
Spanish	5	4		-	-	-	3	2	1	3
Korean	11	6			5	4	5	2	1	-
Portuguese	4	5		2	1	2	2	1	1	-
Mandarin	4	3		-	3	3	1	-	-	-

Note. FA = Foundations Level A; FB = Foundations Level B; FC = Foundations Level C; AP = Academic Preparation; AA = Academic Level A; AB = Academic Level B; AC = Academic Level C.

Data Collection

The survey consisted of 15 items, including both close-ended items (multiple-choice, 6-point Likert scale) and open-ended questions. Additional space was also provided for all multiple-choice items if participants wanted to elaborate on their responses. The survey asked students to indicate and briefly explain their general attitudes toward the existing English-only policy at the ELC and their opinion on how the issue of language use should be handled in school. They were also prompted to identify possible benefits of using English beyond the classroom and their personal goals and motivations in terms of speaking English. The survey also asked participants about factors that influenced their language choices outside the classroom context, and situations in which the use of their L1 should be allowed. Finally, students were asked to offer recommendations for the ELC administration to improve the language-learning atmosphere in school. At the end of the survey, participants were invited to indicate whether or not they were willing to participate in an interview discussing the issue of language use at the ELC.

Student interviews and focus groups allowed for further understanding of student attitudes toward the ELC's English-only policy. They were conducted as part of a larger study, the primary focus of which was to examine factors that influenced student language use outside the classroom at the

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ELC—that is, all areas of the building except for the gym during a lunch break (see Shvidko et al., 2015, for the analysis of these data). However, they also revealed student attitudes to the English-only policy. Therefore, relevant quotes from the interviews and the focus groups were included in the data analysis for the purpose of this report (see *Data Analysis* below).

The six interviews were conducted during the second semester of the study. Although the same protocol was used for each, each interview was unique in terms of its structure and various follow-up questions asked of each interview participant. The interviews were conducted in English and audio-recorded. The length of the interviews was between 35 and 65 minutes.

Four focus groups were conducted in the third semester of the study. The focus groups were composed of students with the same L1 backgrounds used in the individual interviews: Spanish, Korean, Portuguese, and Mandarin. The protocol for the focus groups was generated from the interviews. Although group facilitators with the same L1 backgrounds as the group participants were selected to create more solidarity with the participants (Hwang, 1993), the discussions were held in English.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the survey data included labelling, counting, and examining frequencies and percentages of student responses. Certain responses (see Table 4 as an example) were categorized into larger thematic groups. The open-ended responses were coded for categories, themes, and patterns, of which some were generated from the multiple-choice and Likert-scale items, while others emerged from the analysis. Finally, both the responses to the close-ended items and the respondents' additional comments were classified into two larger groups: "positive attitudes" and "negative attitudes." As far as the interviews and the focus groups goes, only comments pertaining to students' attitudes toward the English-only policy were examined for the purpose of this report. Thus, the qualitative data from the interviews and focus groups were used to confirm, explain, and further elaborate on the results obtained from the survey.

Results

The results indicated that participants held both positive and negative attitudes toward the English-only policy. Several distinct patterns emerged across students' comments, each of which is described below under the categories "Positive Attitudes" and "Negative Attitudes."

Positive Attitudes

Survey responses showed that 133 students (84.2%) identified their attitude toward the English-only policy as "generally positive." Overall, these positive attitudes were associated with the benefits of using English in school.

Table 4 indicates a range of benefits, including improving English proficiency, preparing for the high level of English proficiency required in real-world interaction, and respecting other people.

Table 4

Student Perceptions of Benefits of Using English in School

Categories of Benefits	Benefits	Number of Responses (Percentage)
Improving English proficiency	Improving speaking skills	146 (92)
	Learning new vocabulary	109 (69)
Preparing for high level of English proficiency required in real-world interaction	Gaining confidence in English	96 (61)
	Overcoming fear of making mistakes	79 (50)
Respecting other people	Helping other student practice English	90 (57)
	Demonstrating respect for others	84 (53)

Improving English proficiency. Students' comments demonstrated their understanding of the positive relationship between the use of English and increased language proficiency. For the question asking participants why it was important for them to speak English in school, several options were provided, along with a space allowing participants to explain their responses. As seen in Table 4, "Improving speaking skills" and "Learning new vocabulary" were the most frequently selected options—92% and 69%, respectively. In the open-ended responses, nine participants also mentioned that, by encouraging them to speak English, the policy helped them keep their language goals in mind. Some of these comments include "We are not here to learn other languages, and yes to learn English, and this rule motives me to speak more English," "I like this rule because it forces me to think in English and use more vocabulary," and "This policy can help us to never forget practicing English all the time."

Five of the six interviewees (all but one SF-AP) also felt that the policy helped them to remember to practice English more often. They acknowledged that they improved their speaking skills by interacting in English with other students at school. For example, one student (KF-AP) said, "We came here to study English. I think it's very good … To me, I always speak English, so I improved a lot, faster than other people. So I think it's a very good rule." Another interview participant (MF-AB) mentioned that speaking English challenged her to learn new words and phrases: "When my friends and I have conflicts, we use English to argue. That's really difficult! But it helps me a lot!" Another student (PF-AA) expressed the same idea, stating, "I love the rule! We are here to learn English, so if you want to speak Portuguese, go back to your country!" She regretted, however, that she did not use English as

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much as she should have. With great emotion she expressed her disappointment in herself: "I know if I only spoke English all these seven months here at the ELC, my English would have improved more. I know this and I feel bad! I feel bad because I should have improved my English!"

Closely mirroring these feelings, another interview participant (SM-AB) expressed his disappointment about the chances to improve his English that were lost by speaking Spanish with his friends at school: "With Spanish speakers I definitely speak Spanish. It's so easy! But at the same time I feel like my English is not improving. It's not improving at all!" SM mentioned that during the winter break he went to Japan to visit a friend that he met at the ELC, and, while there, he noticed that his English improved tremendously: "Those two weeks I concentrated all my [conversations] in English and I could finally think in English, talk in English and naturally express in English."

Similarly, the focus group participants mentioned that using English forced them to get "out of their comfort zone" and thus helped them to improve their language skills. One of the participants from the Spanish group (AA) explained, "Sometimes when you try to say something, it can be hard, but you try hard to explain and you will remember it. But if you just keep talking in Spanish, you miss the opportunity to learn something new."

Preparing for the high level of English proficiency required in real-world interaction. It also became apparent that participants were aware of the connection between their use of English in school and preparation for growing demands for English proficiency in the real world. For example, students pointed out the value of being compelled to use English in a nonthreatening learning environment, where all students make mistakes. As Table 4 shows, 96 participants (61%) indicated that practicing English in school with other language learners helped them gain confidence in English. One response on the survey clarified this notion: "It's good to practice English with other students at the ELC because everyone is learning, and so we will get used to speaking English and will not be afraid to speak it with Americans." Furthermore, 79 participants (50%) said it helped them overcome a fear of making mistakes. As one response noted, "If you practice speak more and more, you are not scared to talk." Focus group participants discussed the importance of English for their future academic and professional endeavours, leading them to evaluate the English-only policy positively in helping them prepare for the future.

Respecting other people. Besides language development and preparation for interaction outside the school environment, participants also believed that the English-only policy was indispensable to the multilingual student population as a means for encouraging mutual understanding and respect. "Demonstrating respect for others" was selected by 84 participants (53%) among other benefits of using English in school. In their open-ended responses, some students explained that they felt uncomfortable hearing others speak their L1 in school, as they were not able to comprehend the content of those conversa-

tions. The following response reflects this concern: "When other people speak their own language, I feel like they are talking bad about me." Additionally, 90 students (57%) believed that by following the English-only policy, they were helping each other practice English and thus demonstrating respect for each other's language learning goals.

In the focus group composed of Spanish L1 speakers, the bulk of the discussion was devoted to the principle of respect. The participants mutually agreed that respect for people should be the primary reason that the English-only rule should be observed by all ELC students, regardless of each student's personal goals for learning English. One participant (AC) said,

> The English-only rule is not just for you. It's to realize that there are a lot of students here, and that they must learn too … And if you don't speak English and they don't understand you, then it's disrespectful for them.

This participant explained that he would always speak English in school, so everyone would feel comfortable. He also added that after classes he often helped students from lower levels with grammar and pronunciation.

To summarize, most participants indicated positive attitudes toward the English-only policy and expressed their understanding of its benefits in terms of improving their English skills, preparing them for the high demands for English proficiency in the real world, and maintaining a positive learning atmosphere in school by demonstrating respect for other students and their goals. Nevertheless, some participants voiced their opinions against the policy. Moreover, certain aspects of the policy seemed to receive criticism even from those participants who generally favoured it.

Negative Attitudes

In contrast to the vast majority of positive responses about the English-only policy at the ELC, only six students (3.8%) expressed wholly negative attitudes: one student from Foundations A, one student from Foundations B, two students from Foundations C, one student from Academic A, and one student from Academic B. The remaining 19 participants (12%) indicated their attitudes as "neither positive nor negative." However, comments conveying disagreement and displeasure with the policy were found in multiple responses across the survey. The most frequently expressed ideas were associated with teachers' reactions to students speaking their L1, punishment, denying students their agency, the unconditional character of the policy, and the lack of systematic implementation. Each of these issues will be addressed below.

Teachers' reactions to students speaking their L1. One reason that some students expressed negative feelings about the English-only policy was the teachers' reactions to students speaking their L1 in the school building. Interestingly, 84 survey respondents (53%) said they would like to receive regular reminders from teachers to encourage them to speak English; however, the

open-ended responses suggested that students expected teachers to do it in a more motivating and nonjudgemental manner. More specifically, in 13 open-ended comments (8%), participants clearly expressed their frustration over the fact that some teachers acted in an insensitive way and made no effort to understand the reasons why students used their L1 with each other. As one comment states, "English-only is important, but it has to be treated with care, not so stressful like teachers do. I don't like when teachers tell us rude to speak English." Another student said, "Teachers need to know the reasons why we speak native language before they say 'English only'!"

SF-AP shared an experience that made her develop a negative attitude toward the policy. She was trying to explain to her friend how to use a printer in the computer lab. But because the friend's English proficiency was quite low, SF-AP gave her instructions in Spanish. At that moment, a teacher was passing by, and approached SF-AP, telling her to speak English. SF-AP said she felt frustrated because the teacher's comment was made without any attempt to understand the situation.

Apparently, SF-AP was not alone in this perspective. Several students in the focus groups shared their experience of giving explanations in their L1 about an important concept or a homework assignment to a friend and having a nearby teacher ask them to switch to English without attempting to understand the reason for their language choice. One participant in the Spanish group (AP) said that when teachers acted without being aware of students' circumstances, they only discouraged learners from speaking English. He added, "I personally just want to close my mouth and not to speak at all."

Punishment. Another factor contributing to students' negative perceptions of the English-only policy was the idea of punishment, which was enacted at the ELC through reducing students' class participation points, which could potentially affect a student's final grade. The majority of the survey responses (111, or 70.25%) indicated students' disagreement with the administrative consequences for using L1. The issue of punishment was raised during the interviews and focus groups, and it was clear that some participants were displeased with this idea. "I think punishment is useless because students are not kids," said SM-AB. Similarly, KM-AB believed that most ELC students were sensible and mature adults, and thus punishment was not a proper approach to deal with the problem. Besides making students feel less mature, punishing them also seemed to trigger tension in students' relationships with teachers. For example, in the Portuguese focus group, the participants strongly expressed their disagreement with the idea of teachers watching out for those students who do not follow the policy. One participant in the Portuguese group jokingly called it "Big Brother."

Denying students their agency. Several participants, including some who acknowledged the usefulness of the English-speaking environment, strongly voiced their opinion against the idea of imposing the policy and forcing students to speak English. Answering the survey question "Why do you think

many students in school speak their native languages?", 37 students (23%) selected the option "They don't like being told what to do." The following open-ended responses on the survey are telling: "I think it's not under your control. Everyone has to decide that by himself"; "This is a personal commitment. Those who want to learn faster than others, choose to speak only English. But it's a personal choice"; "Just let people decide for themselves."

The interview and focus group participants also believed that the school administration should not impose the policy and compel the students to follow it; instead they should respect students' agency. For example, KM-AB felt that learners themselves must be led to develop a deep understanding of the reasons encouraging their study of English and the benefits obtained from this study. He said, "It is important to make students think for themselves: 'Why should I speak English? Why did I come here? What is my purpose?' I believe students are mature to do this." Similarly, a student from the Spanish focus group (AA) expressed his viewpoint in this way: "We need to find our own reason for using English … The ELC can spend millions of dollars on signs and videos, but if we don't understand our reasons, we will never speak English!" Participants in other focus groups concurred that the administration is helpless if the students are not motivated in their studies.

The unconditional character of the policy. Frequent comments across the survey pointed out the irrationality of the unconditional nature of the English-only policy. To illustrate, 75 students (47.47%) expressed their agreement with the statement "Both native languages and English should be equally accepted in the ELC building." As one respondent noted, "English-only rule is a good idea, but it's not realistic. No one will do it for 100% of the time." According to survey responses, students believed that L1 use was absolutely necessary in certain circumstances. For example, more than half of the survey participants ($n = 84$, 53.16%) believed that L1 should be allowed for students of lower proficiency levels. L1 should also be permitted for clarification reasons, according to many students. To illustrate, 74 respondents (46.84%) noted that students must be allowed to explain in their L1 unclear parts of lessons, including grammar, vocabulary, difficult concepts, and classroom instructions. In addition, 7 participants (4.43%) also thought they should be allowed to speak their L1 when communicating with their family members on the phone. And in their open-ended responses, students also mentioned emergency situations, including problems related to health, money, insurance, and relationships, as occasions in which they should be allowed to use their L1.

Participants also commented on the restriction that the English-only policy put on their ability to freely communicate with each other. For example, 124 students (78.48%) noted that, when interacting with people who speak the same L1, it is usually much more convenient to express ideas in L1, and in fact, 89 respondents (56.33%) also thought it was awkward for them to use English with friends from the same L1 background. The policy seemed also to be restrictive on the affective level, and some participants ($n = 43$, 27.22%)

viewed the use of their L1 as a way of relieving stress and cognitive fatigue. Consider the following comments: "We deserve a time to relax, learn English is already hard and stressful" and "After 2 hours of class is very hard for some people to continue thinking in English and working on that. It would be very good if we had a break."

Lack of systematic implementation. It was previously mentioned that the ELC did not have a set of concrete guidelines for language use in the school building at the time of the study. As evidenced from participants' responses, this lack of systematic implementation caused students confusion and frustration. A case in point is the following comment: "Some teachers take out points and some don't. I feel lost." Another student said, "I want more strong management from ELC." In general, most survey participants acknowledged the lack of systematic implementation of the policy in school.

Interview participants also expressed dissatisfaction with the way the policy was implemented in school. To illustrate, KM-AB felt that the rule was not clearly presented at the beginning of the semester: "They just showed us a poster." In his opinion, the administration should clearly explain the requirements regarding the use of English in school as well as motivate and encourage students to speak English. Another interview participant, SM-AB, felt very strongly about the way the English-only rule was implemented in school. According to him, every semester "the ELC environment becomes weaker and weaker." He said, "Today nobody pays much attention to the rule anymore; they just say 'English-only' automatically, without providing any examples or explanations." According to SM, students did not take the English-only policy seriously because, as he put it, "there is a law, but there is no environment for the law." The general feeling of confusion caused by the inconsistency of the policy implementation was also expressed by the majority of the participants in the focus groups, and summed up nicely by a student from the Spanish-speaking focus group: "It only causes frustration!"

Summary of Student Attitudes

The analysis of the data revealed that the participants in this study seemed to understand the benefits of being exposed to large amounts of English outside the ELC classrooms. While not fully accepting the exclusive use of TL, maintained by the English-only policy, most students believed that the policy did exactly what it was created for—help them practice English, improve their language skills, and accomplish their language-learning goals. Responses also indicated the participants' appreciation for the opportunity to practice English in a safe school environment and to prepare for growing demands for English proficiency in real-world interaction. Students further believed that choosing to speak English demonstrated their respect for other students and teachers who could not understand their first language, as well as for other students' learning goals and efforts.

Despite the prevalence of these positive attitudes, students also expressed negative reactions to the policy. Some of these were caused by teachers' reactions to students who used their L1 at school. Furthermore, the deduction of class participation points as a penalty for using the L1 was another feature of the policy toward which some participants expressed their strong dissatisfaction. They felt that such methods of punishment were discouraging and ineffective, and thus should not be imposed upon language learners. In addition,

Table 5
Summary of Student Attitudes Toward the English-Only Policy

Attitudes	Sample Responses
Positive	
Improving English proficiency	*Improving speaking skills*
	"If we do not practice our English, we will never get the fluency. That is why I know this rule is a positive rule for us."
	Learning new vocabulary
	"I like this rule because it forces me to think in English and use more vocabulary."
Preparing for high level of English proficiency required in real-world interaction	*Gaining confidence in English*
	"It's good to practice English with other students at the ELC because everyone is learning, and so we will get used to speaking English and will not be afraid to speak it with Americans."
	Overcoming fear of making mistakes
	"If you practice speak more and more, you are not scared to talk."
Respecting other people	*Helping other students practice English*
	"It is really disturbing when other students speak their native languages. I am losing my English abilities!"
	Demonstrating respect for others
	"If you don't speak English and they don't understand you, then it's disrespectful for them."
Negative	
Teachers' reactions to students speaking their L1	"English-only is important, but it has to be treated with care, not so stressful like teachers do. I don't like when teachers tell us rude to speak English."
Punishment	"I think punishment is useless because students are not kids."
Denying students their agency	"This is a personal commitment. Those who want to learn faster than others, choose to speak only English. But it's a personal choice."
The unconditional character of the policy	"After 2 hours of class is very hard for some people to continue thinking in English and working on that. It would be very good if we had a break."
Lack of systematic implementation	"Some teachers take out points and some don't. I feel lost."

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the very idea of rule enforcement seemed to be criticized by students as well: as evidenced by multiple students' responses, they thought that speaking English was a personal decision of each individual learner, and the administration of the ELC should by no means impose the rule upon the entire student population. Finally, the existing policy could have been improved, according to participants, by providing room for exceptions and establishing concrete guidelines. A summary of student attitudes with sample responses is provided in Table 5.

Discussion

As McMillan and Rivers (2011) stated, "'English only' continues to enjoy hegemonic status in some teaching contexts, with students and teachers being prevented or dissuaded from using the students' L1" (p. 251). Intensive English programs may similarly implement various kinds of language policies in their institutions, which in fact was evidenced by the results of the informal survey of program administrators mentioned earlier. Certainly, all IEPs must decide for themselves what position to take in terms of language use in their institutions. However, as became apparent in this study, students may provide valuable insights; therefore, program administrators should "seek the voices of the participating students and … carefully weigh the policy's true effects" (Shvidko et al., 2015, p. 20).

While participants in this study understood that L2 practice would lead to their improvement, they also considered their L1 as a valuable resource in their interaction with each other. This finding corresponds with previous research (e.g., Burden, 2000; Reis, 1996; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Moreover, as evidenced by the responses, it was not the policy per se that caused students' negative reactions, but rather the way it was implemented at the school. Learner dissatisfaction with the logistics of the policy was also mentioned in Grant (1999), who found that students' reactions to the English-only policy in different schools varied due to the degree of its implementation. Many participants from the schools with a formal English-only policy had positive perceptions, whereas the majority of negative attitudes were observed in the schools in which the policy was employed by individual teachers, rather inconsistently and arbitrarily.

Before addressing recommendations for teachers and program administrators, one important point about students' responses must be discussed. While many students in this study seemed to have generally positive attitudes toward the English-only policy, looking at their responses as a whole it becomes evident that these positive attitudes were expressed primarily toward the benefits of being exposed to large amounts of English, rather than toward using English exclusively. In other words, it appears that while students appreciated an institutional practice designed to encourage them

to use English, the majority of respondents nevertheless commented on the necessity to make the policy more flexible by sanctioning L1 use. With this idea in mind, the following section addresses a number of recommendations for program administrators, which are aimed at capitalizing on the positive aspects and minimizing the negative consequences of English-only policies.

Recommendations

Providing Opportunities for Meaningful Use of English Outside the Classroom

Classroom environments provide students with rich opportunities to practice English in a variety of language activities. Because the classroom is perceived as a learning area, most students develop the habit of speaking English in class. Therefore, school administrators should strive to create an out-of-class environment that would also be perceived by students as a learning area—an extension of the classroom, although less formal and much less structured.

This can be achieved through the implementation of various activities, with both academic and social purposes, including conversation tables, speech contests, and interest clubs. Not only would such activities give students the opportunity to practice English in meaningful contexts, but they would also promote students' social interaction and help them develop friendships with people from other countries. In implementing these activities, however, administrators should aim at promoting language development, instead of simply giving students a chance to socialize.

Changing Teachers' Attitudes Toward Students' L1 Use

This study showed that teachers' negative reactions toward the use of students' L1 caused participants displeasure with the English-only policy. In institutions with such an atmosphere it may be challenging to cultivate positive attitudes toward L2 use and to promote student motivation. Indeed, when teachers view students' L1s as if they were an enemy or a taboo, students may take a defensive stance, which may cause their opposition to institutional rules and policies, tension in their relationships with instructors, and loss of motivation (Shvidko et al., 2015). Moreover, imposing a language policy that prohibits the use of learners' L1 assumes power and inequality (Berg, Hult, & King, 2001; Cheng, 2012; Hilliard, 2015; Song, 2011). Therefore, it is important that teachers and administrators establish the type of learning environment that diminishes power relations between English and students' L1 and values learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Kubota & Lehner, 2005).

It should also be remembered that when teachers remind students to speak English, they are perceived differently in class and outside the classroom. Because the teacher traditionally has institutional power to manage the classroom environment, students generally adhere to the English-only

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rule in class; in other words, they know they *should* speak English in class, and chances are that they will not argue if the teacher stops them from using their L1. However, the out-of-class context is an environment in which students have more control—it is the area where they have breaks between and after classes, and where they socialize with each other. Therefore, teachers' reminders directed to students speaking their L1 beyond the classroom environment may be perceived negatively.

Creating a Flexible Plan of Language Use

In this study, even those participants who generally favoured the English-only policy and acknowledged the importance of L2 practice did not believe that it was useful to totally eliminate their L1s. The findings of this study, as well as previous research (e.g., Littlewood & Yu, 2011; McMillan & Rivers, 2011; Park, 1998; Shvidko et al., 2015), indicate various factors that may influence students' needs to use their L1. Moreover, research in second language acquisition views bilingualism as an advantage rather than a hindrance (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Cook, 2001). Therefore, program administrators should aim at establishing an environment in which learners will be encouraged to use the target language—for example, through academic and social activities—but at the same time, in which they will have freedom to speak their L1 when needed. A possible language plan could be "English mainly" (McMillan & Rivers, 2011; Rivers, 2011a, 2011b)—a model that motivates learners to "use English as their main, but not exclusive mode of communication," and encourages "achievable goals for the majority of the learners without denying access to the L1" (Rivers, 2011b, p. 40).

Giving Students Opportunities to Make Decisions

Involving learners in decision-making processes may positively impact the effectiveness of an institutional language plan. First, students can provide valuable perspectives about their learning that administrators and faculty may not otherwise be aware of. Second, including students in the negotiation of institutional policies could empower learners and endow them with a sense of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Norton & Gao, 2008). Third, as an outcome of negotiation between teachers, administrators, and students, an "internally generated" language plan is likely to have more meaning for students, as opposed to an "externally imposed" policy (Saraceni, 2003, p. 74).

Conclusion

It is commonly believed that intensive English programs are designed for learners to be immersed in an English-speaking environment, so they can effectively develop their language skills. Some program administrators may assume that speaking English 100% of the time both in class and outside

the classroom is the best way to learn the language. Therefore, regardless of countless studies illustrating the importance of L1 use in second language acquisition, some programs enforce an English-only policy that prohibits L1 use both in and beyond the classroom (McMillan & Rivers, 2011). And while teachers and program administrators who implement English-only policies may have the learners' best interest in mind, oftentimes these policies are based on business interests rather than best pedagogical practice, and may potentially be harmful for learners on the cognitive, communicative, social, and affective levels.

It is important, therefore, to establish institutional policies based on empirical evidence, and to allow student voices to play a significant role in the planning process. By no means is this to say that students' requests should be fully and immediately gratified without acknowledging other contextual, pedagogical, and political factors as well as the interests of other policy stakeholders. Rather it is to argue that learner perspectives and experiences should be included as an equal piece of the puzzle in the policy-designing process. As professional decision-makers, teachers and program administrators should strive to design "localized strategies for maximizing TL comprehension and production—strategies which are supported by research and in keeping with teachers' personal beliefs" (McMillan & Rivers, 2011, p. 259). It is hoped therefore that both classroom practitioners and program administrators continue to be reflective about their personal beliefs and adhere to the findings of research on student language use in English-learning institutions, and it is hoped that this will help them design institutional environments that will maximize rather than undermine students' L2 development.

The Author

Elena Shvidko is an Assistant Professor of ESL at Utah State University. She has taught English in both academic and community contexts. Her research interests include second language writing, multimodal interaction, interpersonal aspects of language teaching, and teacher professional development.

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