

Understanding Language Ideologies at SSIS MS/HS

Findings from Faculty and Administrator
Reflections

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Research Question

What are the prevailing language ideologies among SSIS Secondary faculty and administrators, and what influence do these ideologies have on instructional practices and students' access to learning?



SSIS
SAIGON SOUTH
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Literature Review

Key Points: Language Ideologies in International Schools

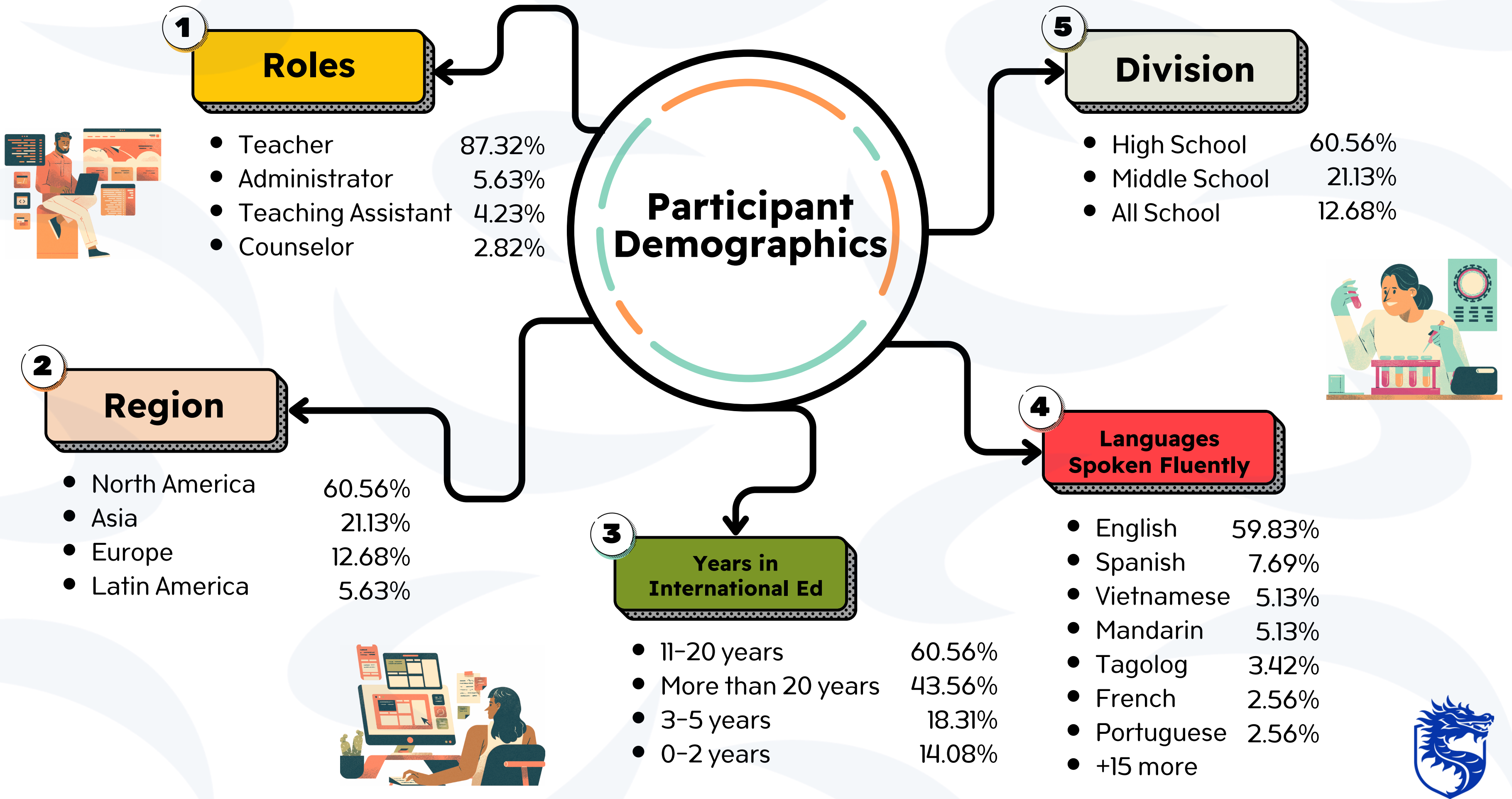
- Language ideologies shape instructional practices and student experiences.
- Multilingualism is an asset but often undervalued in English-dominant systems.
- Academic language proficiency and identity affirmation are critical for equitable access.

Challenges of English Medium Instruction

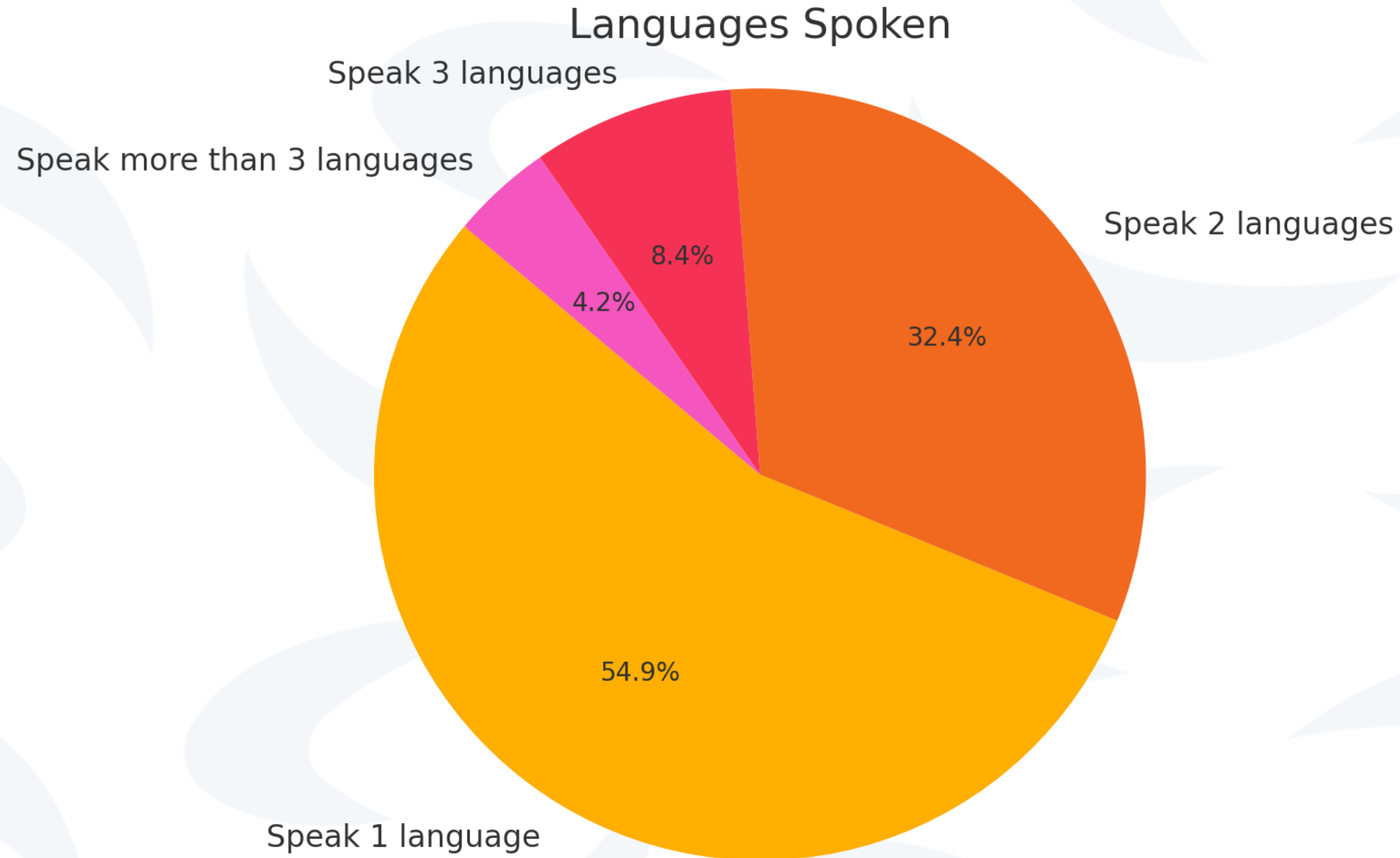
- Risk of linguistic and cultural marginalization.
- Tension between English-medium instruction and linguistic diversity.
- Importance of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Methodology

- Online anonymous survey: 71 participants
- Likert scale + open-ended questions.
- Focus areas: beliefs about English, multilingualism, school responsibilities, EMI.
- Thematic analysis conducted on open-ended responses.



Multilingual Profile





Key Patterns Across Demographics

Multilingual and experienced educators show greater support for integrating home languages.

Non-native English speakers and Europeans are more critical of English-only environments.

Teachers consistently recommend scaffolds and culturally responsive practices for multilingual learners.

Language inclusion is directly tied to identity, emotional well-being, and academic confidence.

Key Themes Across Groups A–D

Support for multilingualism and linguistic equity.

Importance of academic language scaffolding.

Language deeply tied to student identity and well-being.

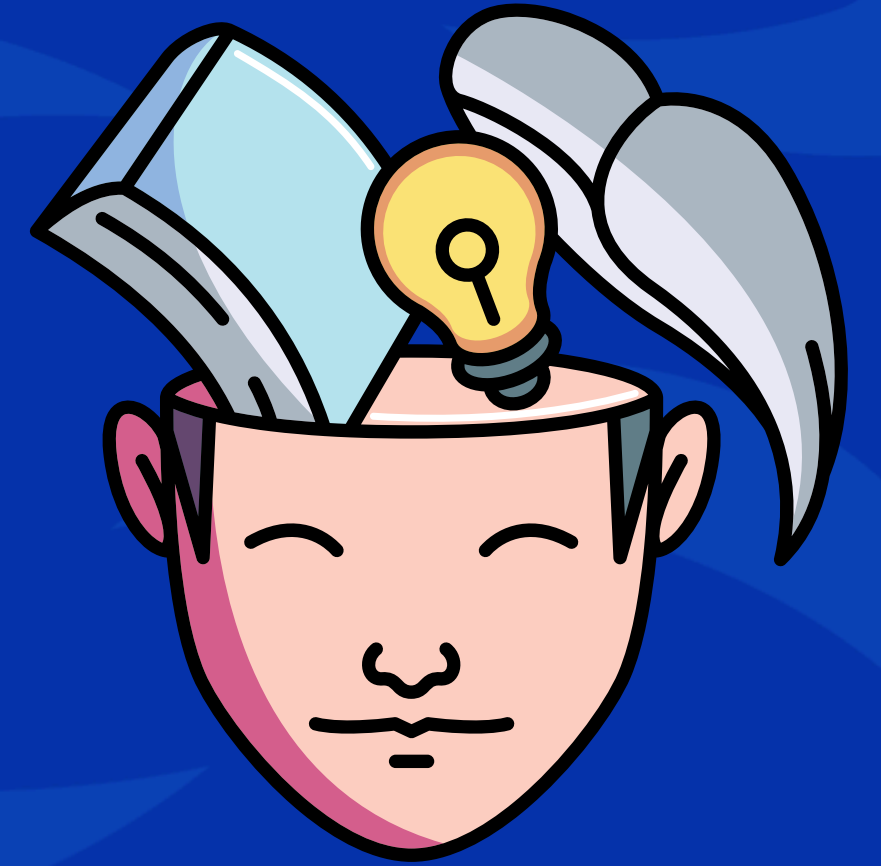
Need for stronger instructional support structures under EMI.



Findings: Group A

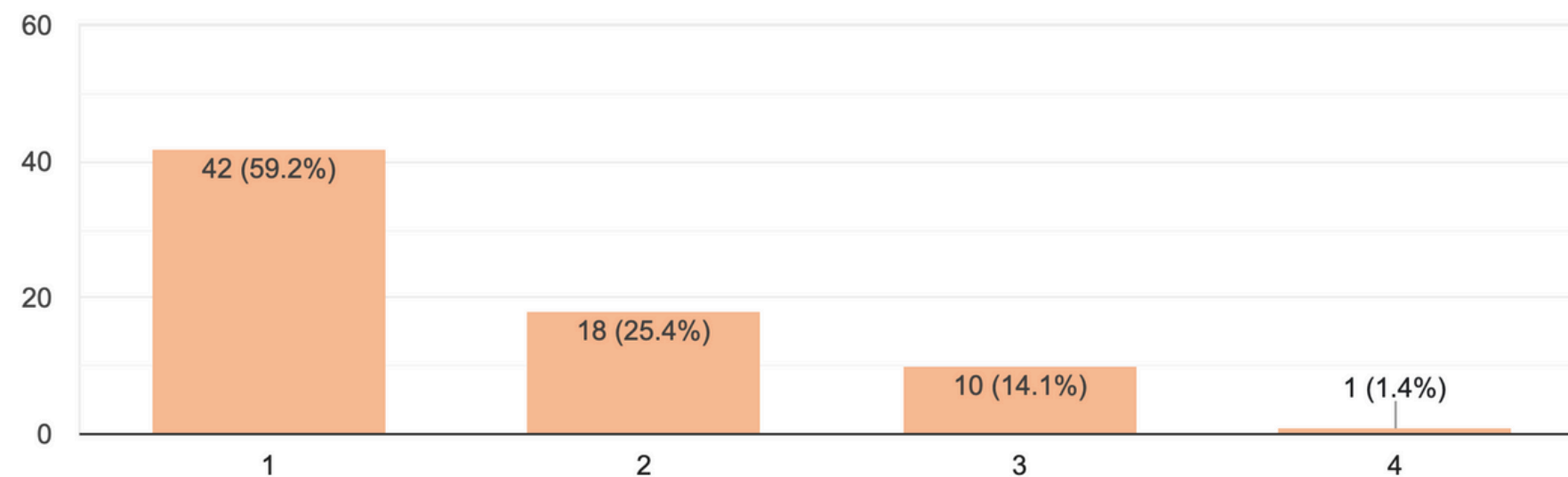
Beliefs about Languages

- Recognition of English's global utility but critiques of linguistic hierarchies.
- Broad agreement that “correct English” depends on cultural context.
- Validation of diverse English varieties.



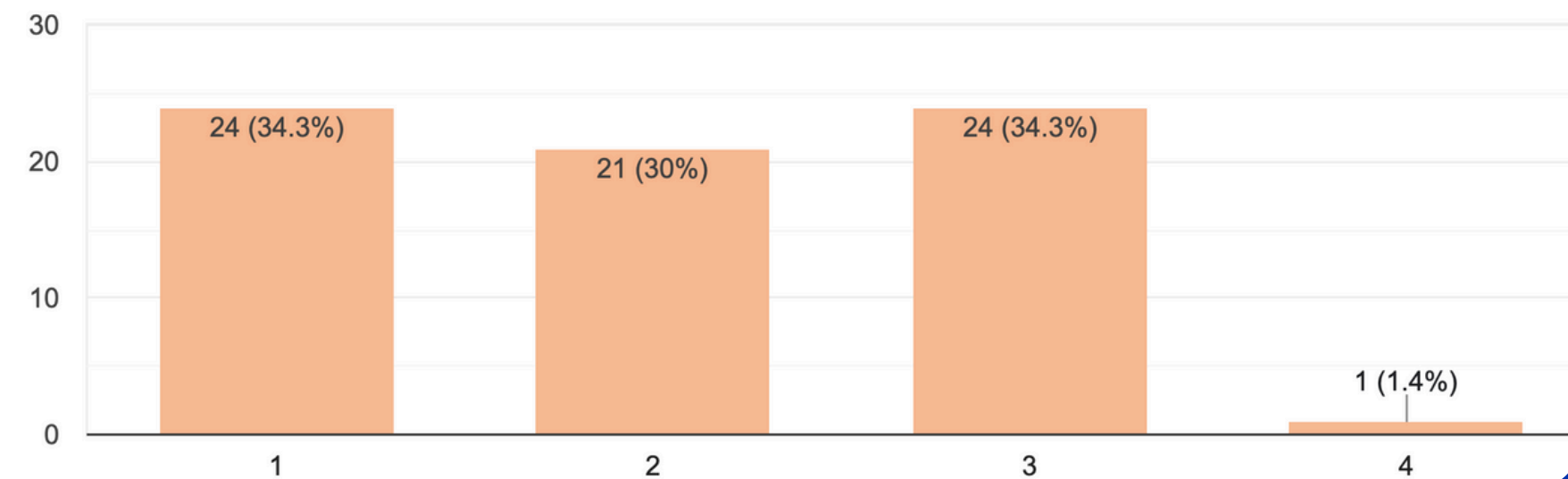
There is only one correct form of English.

71 responses



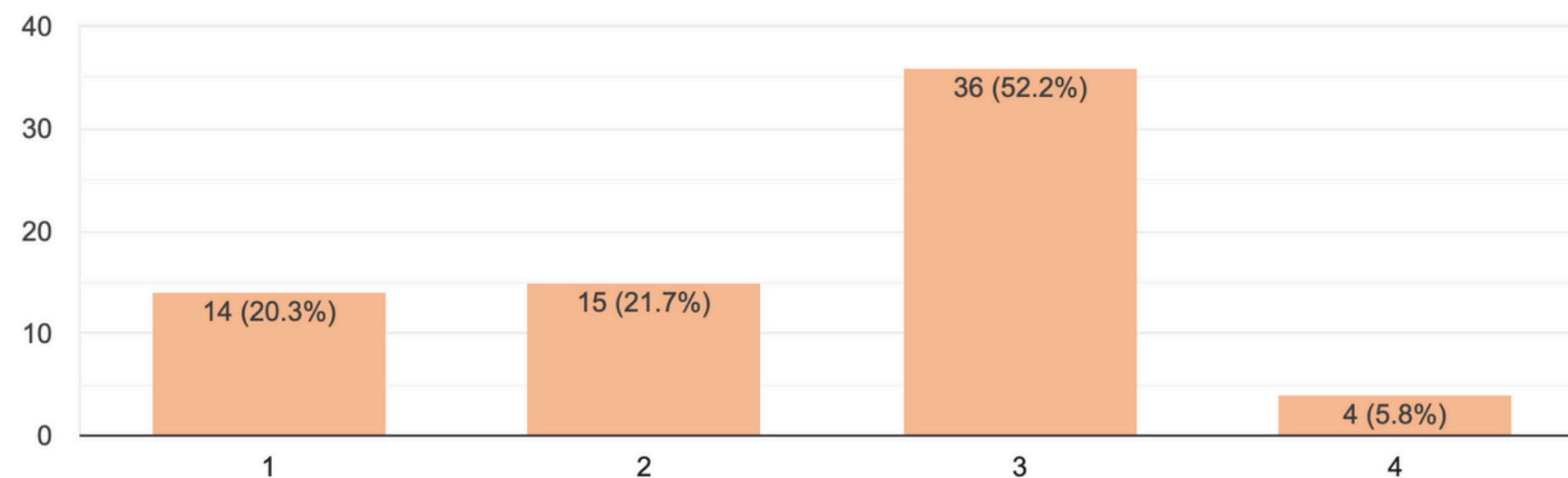
English is more valuable than other languages in society.

70 responses



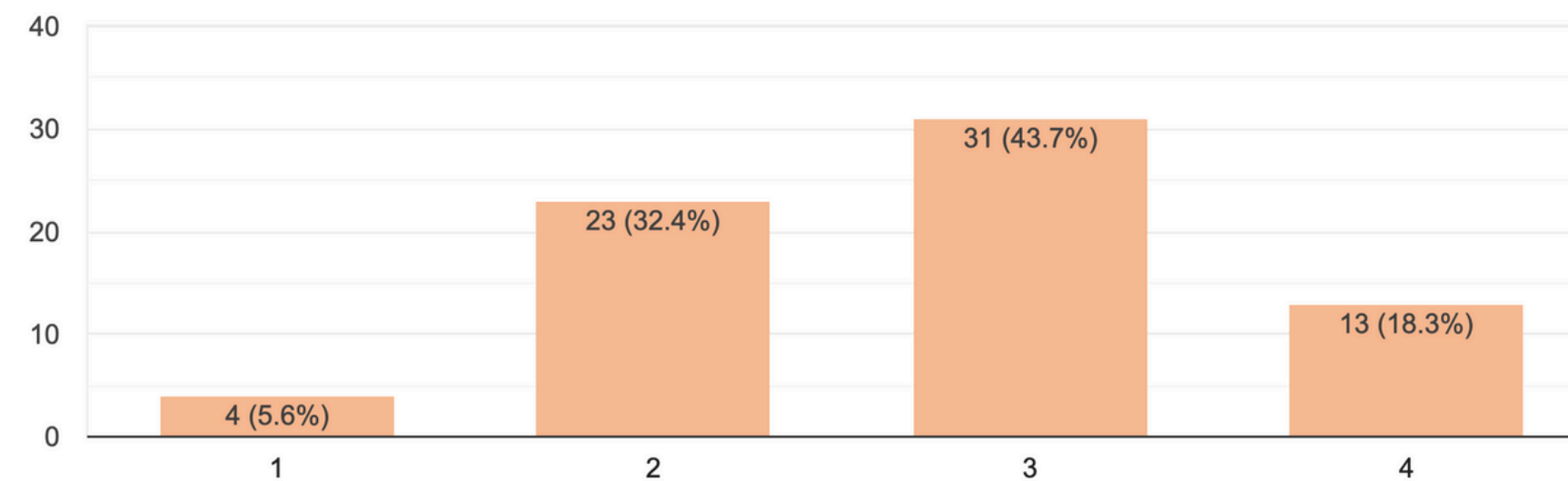
It is beneficial for English to be the primary global language.

69 responses



Emphasizing English puts other languages and cultures at risk.

71 responses



Findings: Group A

Findings: Group B

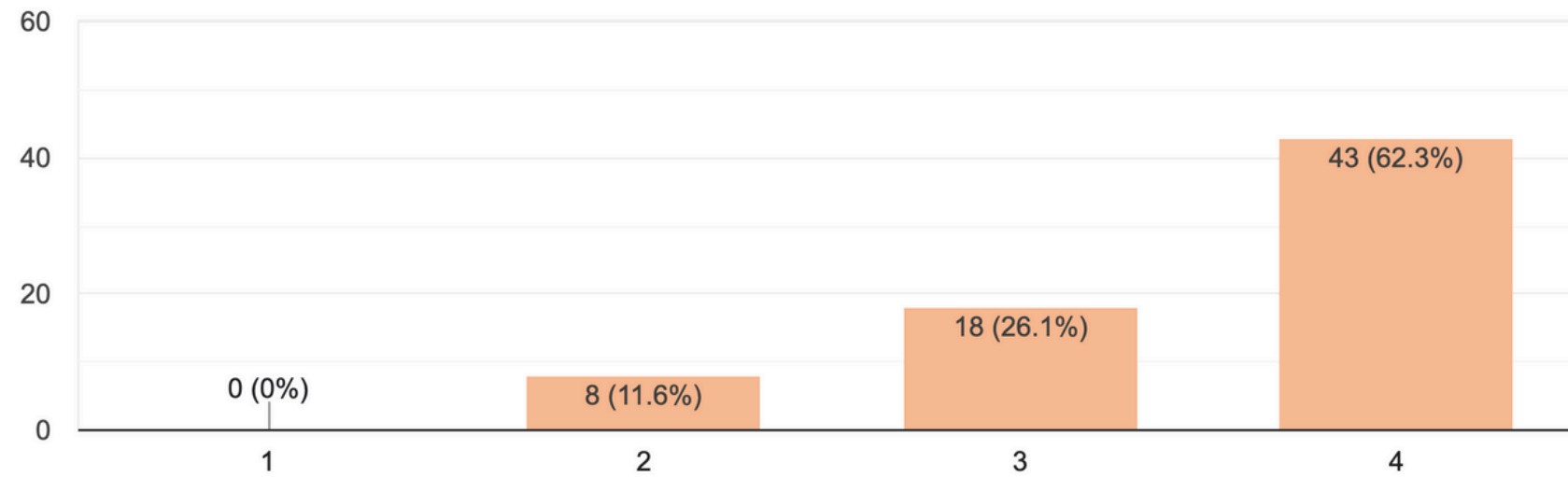
Mother Tongue & Linguistic Diversity

- Multilingualism viewed as a major asset.
- Home languages linked to academic success and cognitive growth.
- Working in one's home language supports professional identity and authenticity.



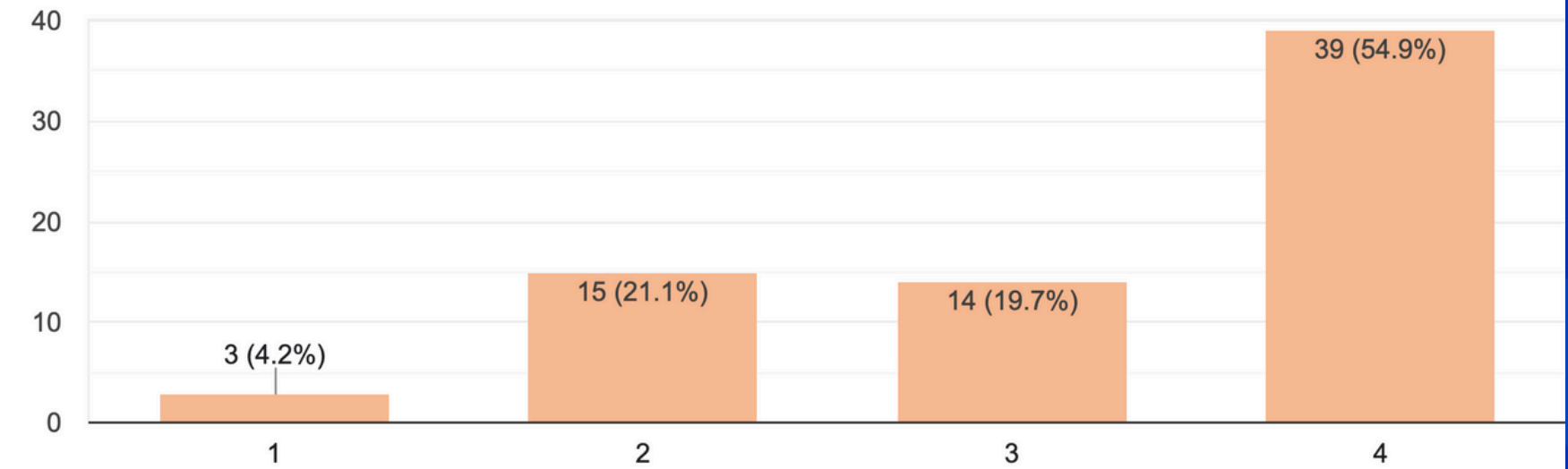
Developing a student's home language is essential for overall academic success.

69 responses



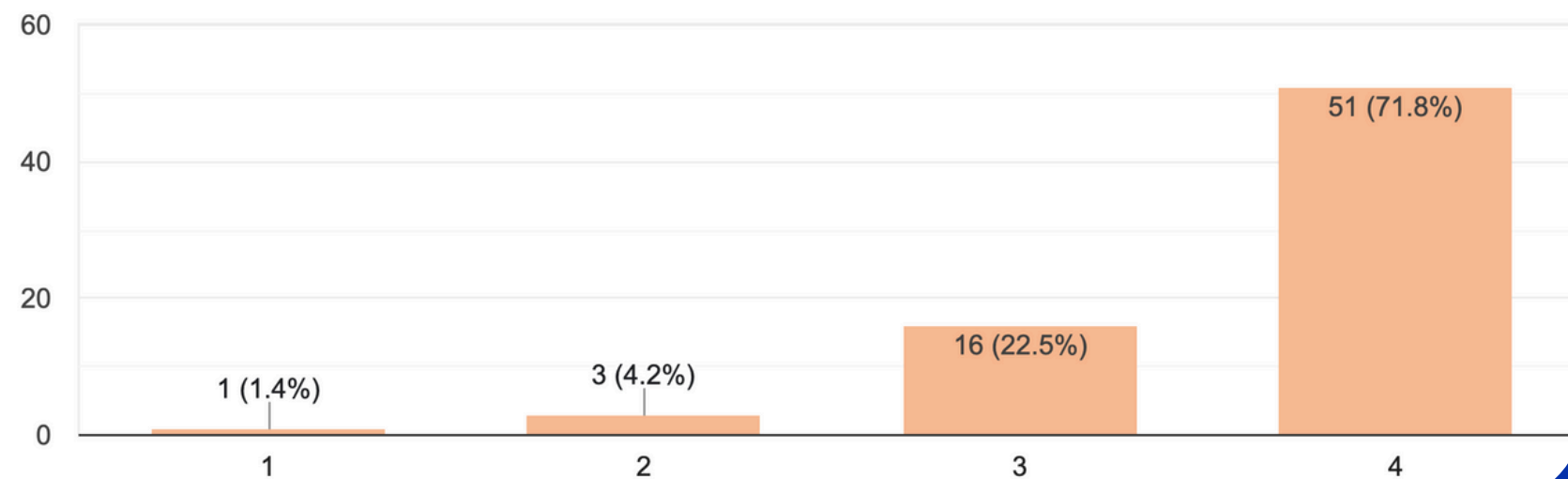
Being able to work professionally in my home language is important to me.

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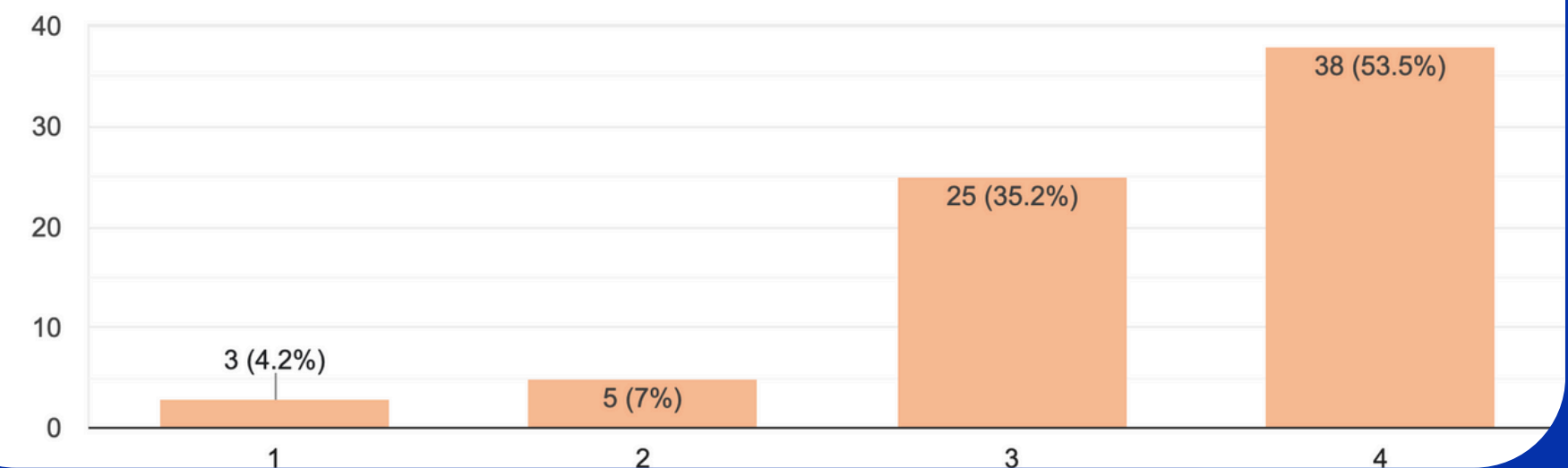
Students who are fluent in multiple languages have an advantage over monolingual students.

71 responses



Faculty and administrators who are fluent in multiple languages have an advantage over monolingual faculty and administrators.

71 responses



Findings: Group B

Findings: Group C

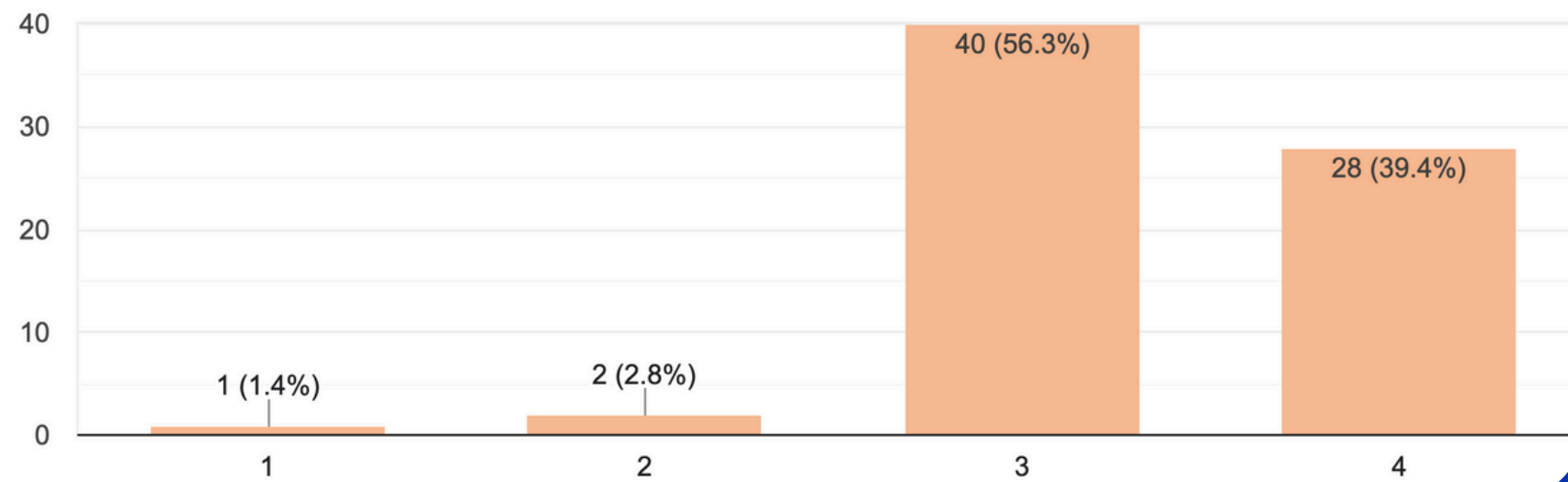
Role of International Schools

- Strong belief that international schools must support multilingualism.
- Affirming student cultural identity enhances learning.
- Academic language is crucial but other funds of knowledge should also be valued.



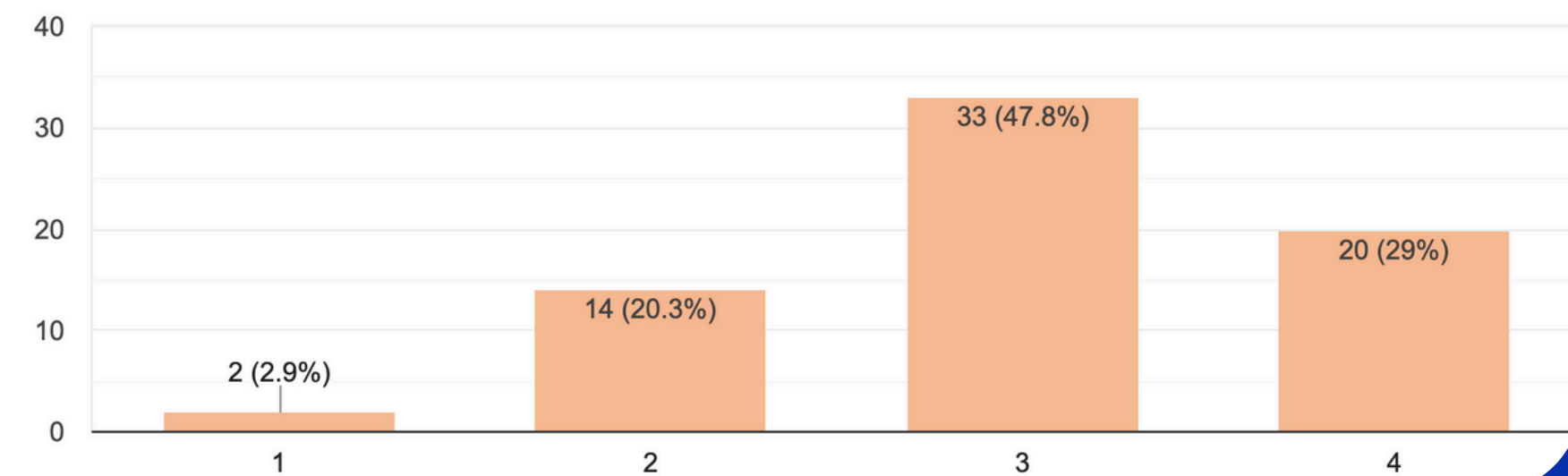
A student's use of academic language (using content-specific vocabulary and complex grammatical structures) impacts their mastery of a standard.

71 responses



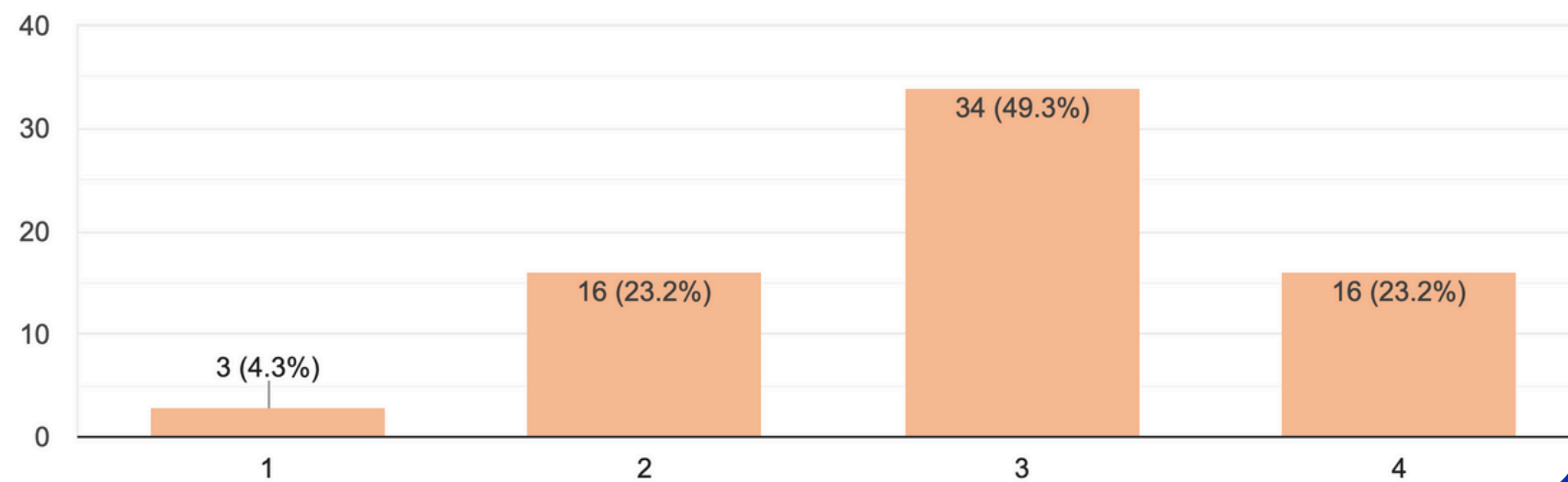
The incorporation of a student's cultural background and identity in the classroom influences their mastery of content.

69 responses



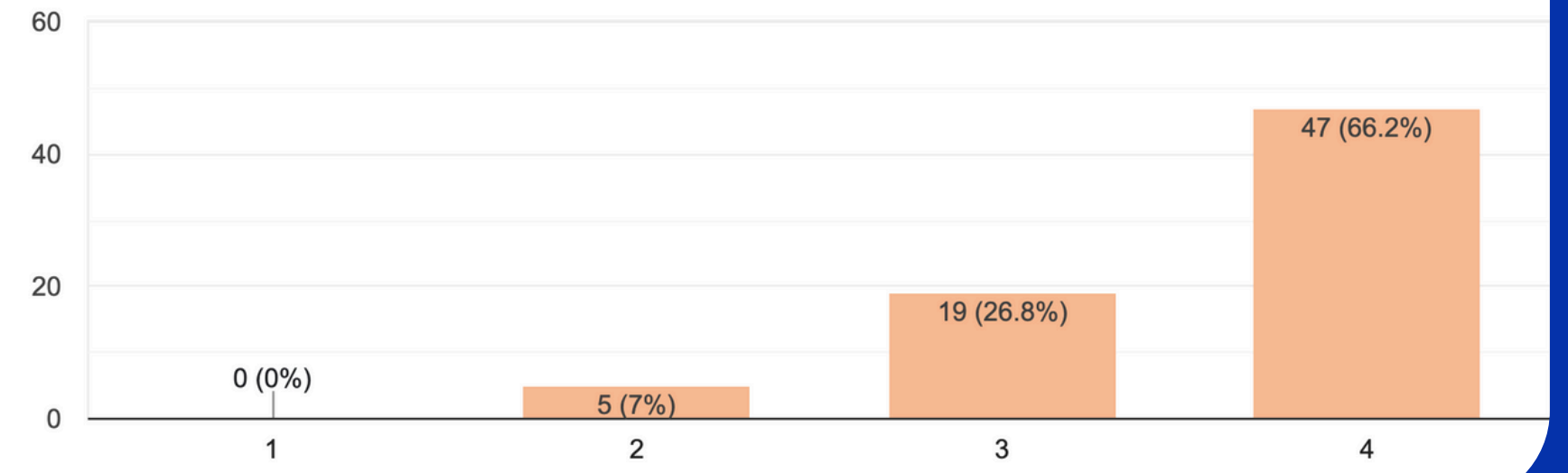
English proficiency is as important as content mastery.

69 responses



International schools have a responsibility to actively support and promote multilingualism.

71 responses



Findings: Group C

Findings: Group D

English Medium Instruction Reflections

- Students' language proficiency can hinder content access.
- Strong call for scaffolding and EAL support.
- Maintenance of home languages seen as vital for emotional and academic success.



What are the benefits of English Medium Instruction?

“Full immersion in the language provides authentic context and opportunity for development.”

“Proficiency in English opens a lot of doors in higher education and in the workplace. It also promotes a shared inclusive culture within the school.”

- **“...[access to] a vast array of learning resources available in print and online...”**

What are the challenges of English Medium Instruction?

“...impacts the development of their home language. The emphasis on the mainstream curriculum can also limit opportunities to learn about their own countries and cultures, sometimes reinforcing the idea that English-speaking countries are superior.”

“Varied experience with the language in the same grade.”

“Differentiation.”

“I imagine that it is, at first, very difficult for a non-native speaker to find themselves in an EMI environment. They may be shy to engage, and suffer from a lack of confidence or motivation.”

What types of support should schools provide to students learning through English Medium Instruction?

“... schools should offer comprehensive language and academic assistance...”

“...a true co-teaching model. Lots of PD would be needed to get everyone on the same page. Constant and clear communication from admin to faculty about the how and the why ...”

“...translanguaging, diverse curriculum materials that highlight different languages and cultures...”

What strategies have you used (or observed) that help multilingual students succeed in an English Medium environment?

“Translation between English and mother tongue. Vocabulary lessons. Comparative connections between English themes or narratives and those from other linguistic traditions. Reading works in translation and exploring the challenges and benefits.”

“...teachers should simplify language, use visuals, and pre-teach vocabulary, while also offering varied assignments. Creating a welcoming environment that values all languages and encourages collaboration is key.”

“Culturally responsive strategies and differentiated instructions...”

Discussion

Bringing It All Together

- Faculty value linguistic and cultural diversity.
- Instructional practices must meet English proficiency goals while supporting identity validation.
- Stronger, clearer support structures are needed for multilingual students.

Reflecting on the Process

- Engagement was inferred, not directly measured.
- Findings are based on self-reported beliefs and practices.
- Strong qualitative insights, but more student perspectives could enrich understanding.

Looking Forward

1. Offer professional development on academic language scaffolding and culturally responsive teaching.
2. Establish shared guidelines for academic language use.
3. Facilitate voluntary focus groups to deepen understanding.
4. Collaboratively review and update language policy.
5. Audit curriculum for multilingual and cultural inclusivity.

Language shapes learning. By embracing multilingualism, we open more doors – for students, for our community, and for each other.

Thank you for being part of this important conversation!

Appendix

Further exploration of the data:

1. Breakdown by demographics
2. Scaled Responses for Group A-C

Findings

Breakdown by Demographics

Perspectives on Multilingualism



- Multilingual respondents were more likely to **advocate for multilingual support and identity inclusion.**
- **Asian and European respondents** leaned more strongly toward **valuing multilingualism** compared to North American respondents.
- Years of experience mattered: educators with **11+** years voiced **stronger support for integrating home languages** and cultural background into learning.

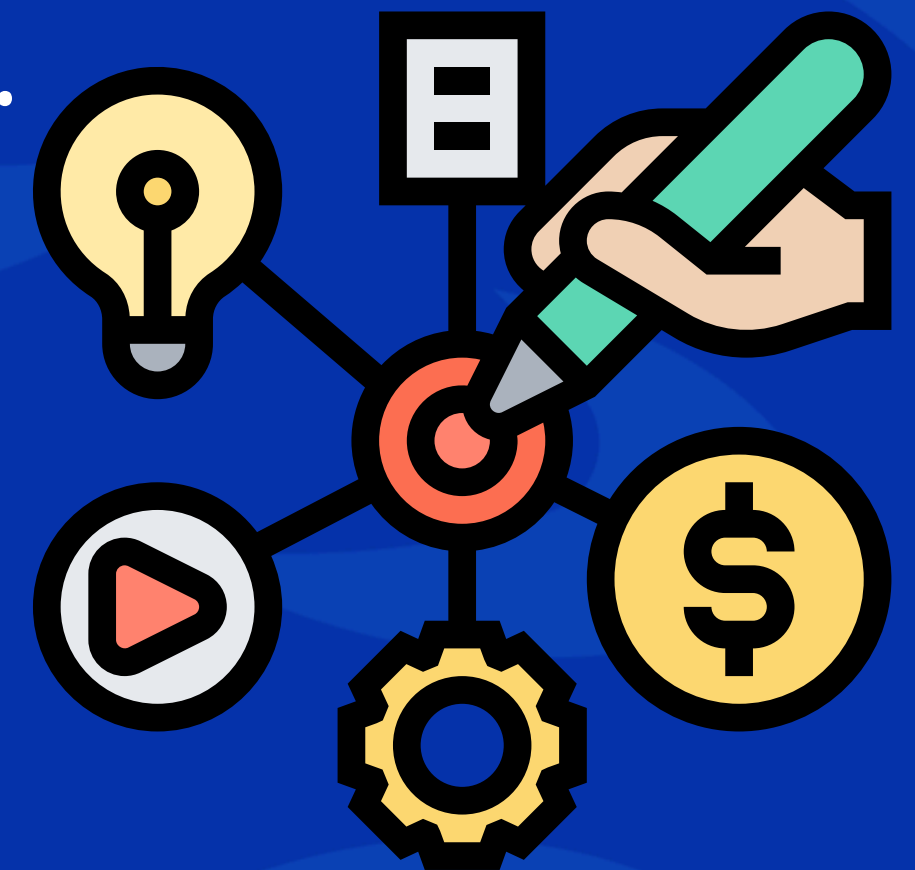
English Dominance

- Non-native English speakers and those from non-Western backgrounds **expressed more concern** about English dominating school culture.
- Some educators noted that “standard English” expectations **can marginalize students’ voices.**
- Experienced educators, particularly from Europe, were more likely to **critique the idea** of one “correct” English.



Instructional Practices and Support for Multilingual Learners

- Teachers **favoured translanguaging**, while administrators focused more on policies and systems.
- Multilingual respondents **highlighted culturally responsive teaching** and mother tongue affirmation.
- **Scaffolding strategies** mentioned: visual support, pre-teaching vocabulary, home language integration, code-switching.



Language, Identity, and Student Experience

- Strong link noted between **language affirmation** and **student confidence**.
- Respondents from Asia and South America emphasized the **need** for students to **feel seen and heard** in their own language.
- **Identity, motivation, and emotional safety** were repeatedly mentioned as tied to language visibility in class.

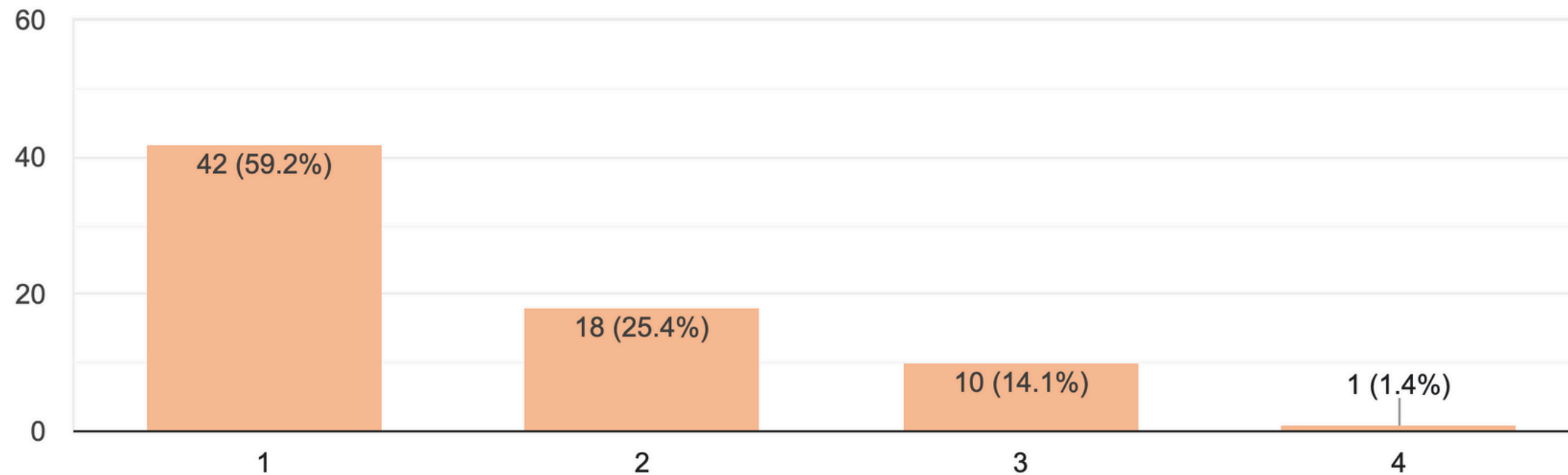


Findings: Group A

Beliefs about Languages

There is only one correct form of English.

71 responses

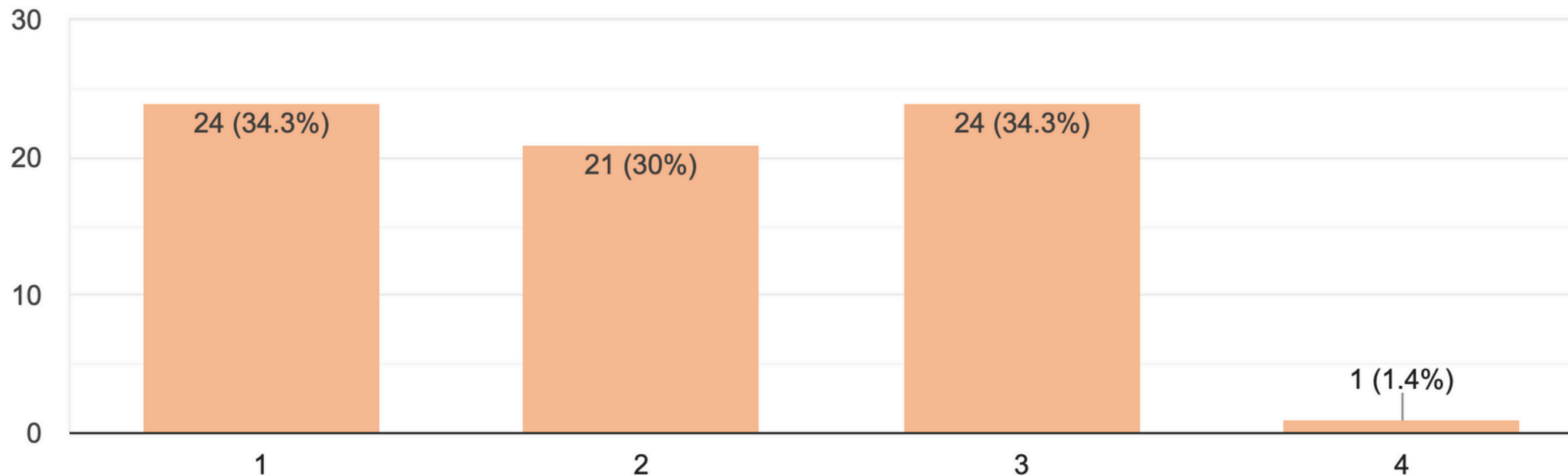


“There isn’t just one correct form of English. Language evolves over time and varies depending on geography, culture, and context.”

“In formal writing, academic settings, or professional contexts, we usually follow Standard English—this includes grammar, spelling, and vocabulary conventions that are widely accepted (like in newspapers, schools, official documents, etc.)”

English is more valuable than other languages in society.

70 responses



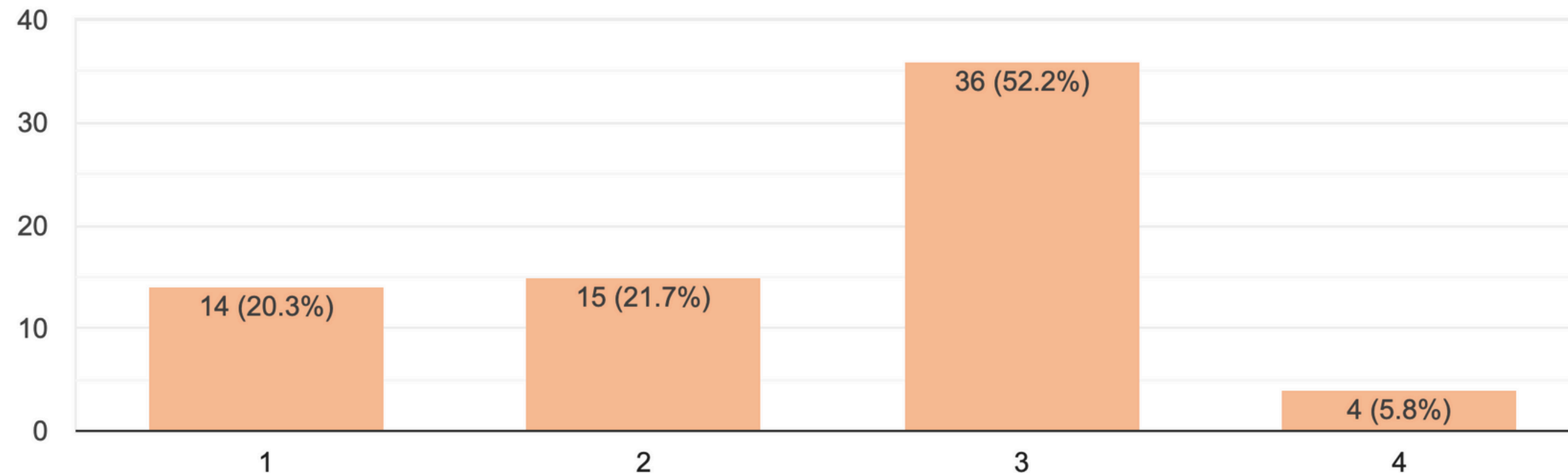
“English is indeed valuable, but definitely not MORE valuable. All languages are forms of communication for those who use them. Number of users should not equate value.”

“I acknowledge the reality that English is a widely spoken language and that it is generally helpful to be able to communicate in English for education, business, government, etc., but I wouldn’t consider it more valuable than any other languages.”

“Yes, because it helps to have a common language in which to conduct business, diplomacy, etc. No, because it is a remnant of Colonial, Euro-centric, white, male dominance.”

It is beneficial for English to be the primary global language.

69 responses

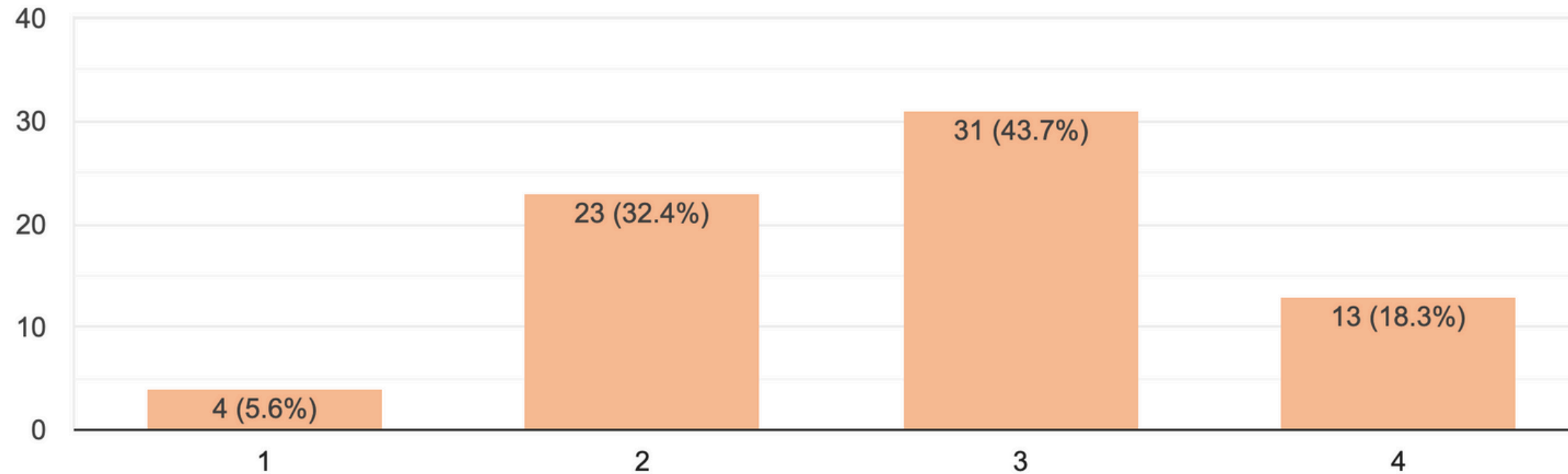


“If you speak English, it is beneficial.”

“Hard to say. In some ways, it might make it easier for people to have a common denominator language like English to go to in order to ensure communication.”

Emphasizing English puts other languages and cultures at risk.

71 responses



“Emphasizing any language over another language puts the less emphasized language and culture at risk.”

“It’s a form of assimilation. This allows common connection, but it does threaten unique languages.”

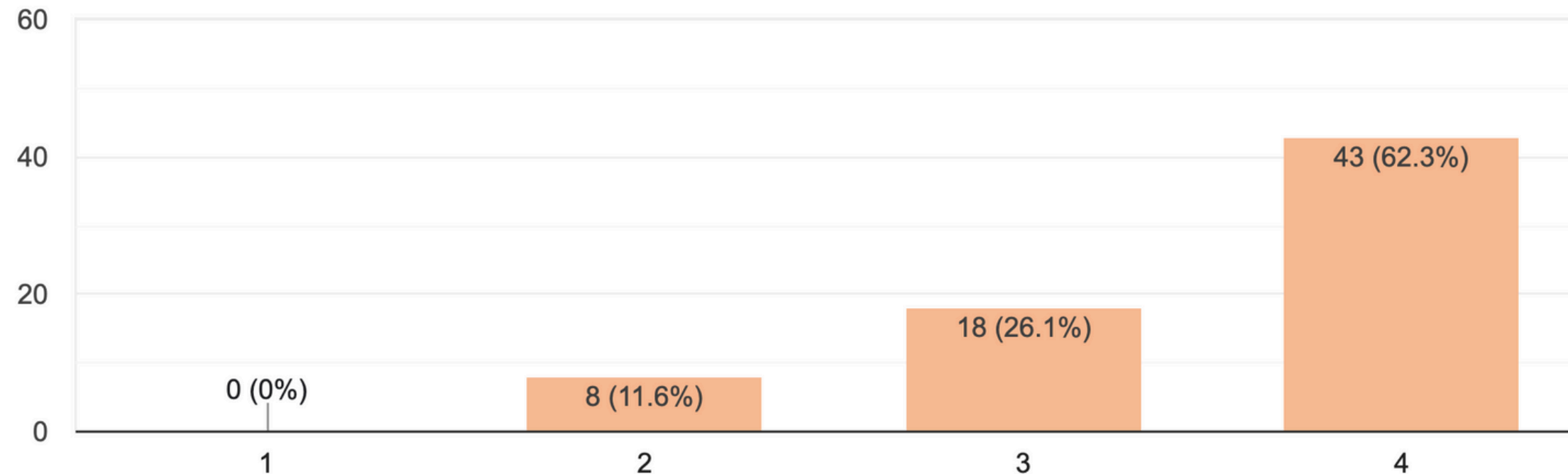
“I don’t think so; Other language still play an important role and we bring them to school and teaching like other subjects. Every language, culture of a country is very important, but we have to use one language as global communication.”

Findings: Group B

Mother Tongue & Linguistic Diversity

Developing a student's home language is essential for overall academic success.

69 responses

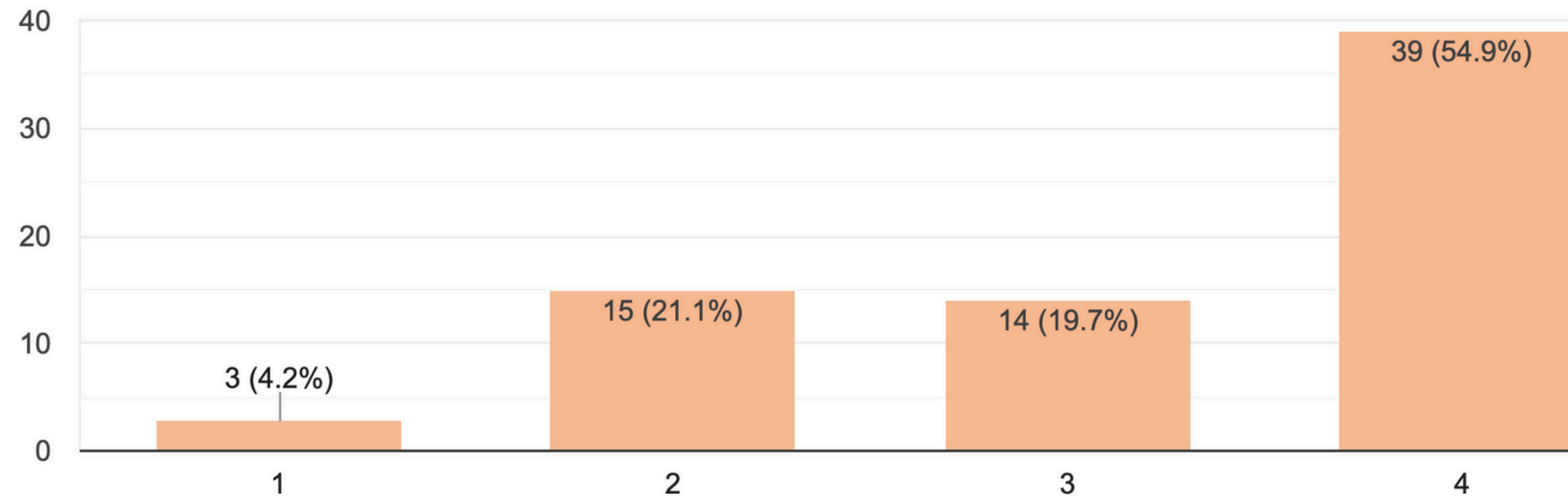


“(In my role) I see such difficult dynamics that develop for students who have a difficult time being understood by their families in their own country. It is an important aspect of identity. Social and emotional aspects also impact academic success.”

“Of course, language skills are transferable. If a student develops literacy in their home language, they can apply those skills when learning a second language, including English.”

Being able to work professionally in my home language is important to me.

71 responses



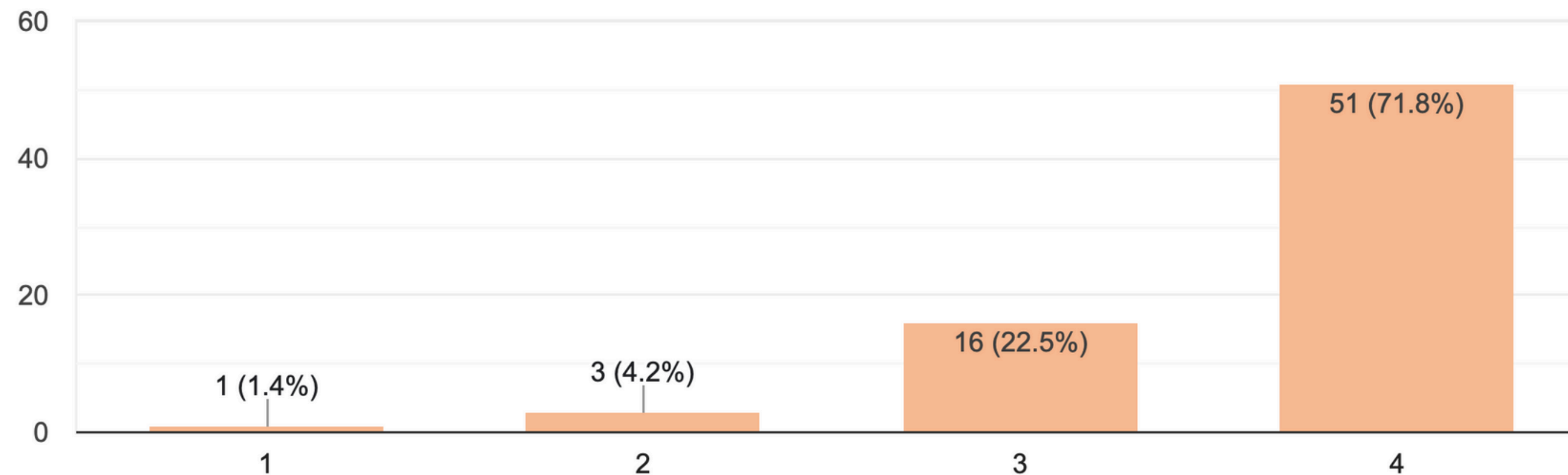
“After spending my entire life using English for communication it enables me to do a lot more than if I was unable to use it. It’s important to me because I do not have the skills to do what I do outside of my home language. If I were taught in a different language or had more work experience while using the other language English would be a lot less important to me.”

“I don’t have another one, and I’m just not willing to suddenly learn a whole new language to work professionally in.”

“I have worked in environments where my language is not the dominant one professionally and that is a humbling, but rich professional experience too.”

Students who are fluent in multiple languages have an advantage over monolingual students.

71 responses



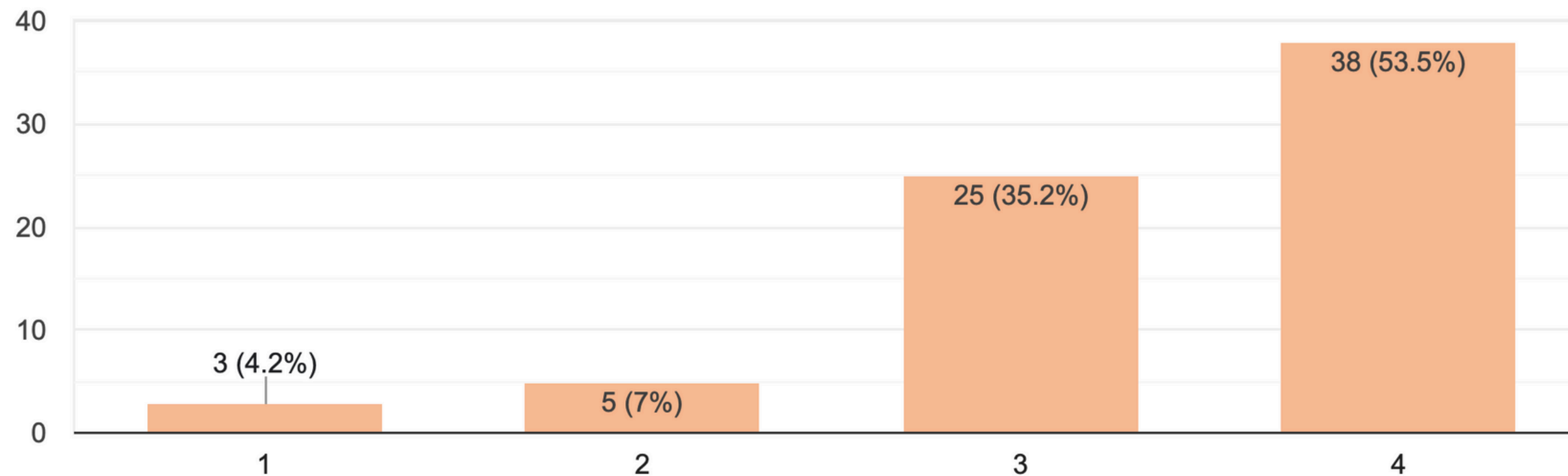
“Multiple languages opens up more ways of thinking and expressing oneself, which leads to more critical thinking and empathy.”

“Multilingualism enhances cognitive flexibility, improves problem-solving skills, and allows individuals to adapt more easily in diverse cultural and professional environments. It also opens access to a wider range of resources, perspectives, and opportunities—academically, socially, and economically.”

“Having grown up as a bilingual student myself, I don’t completely agree. Yes, there are definitely advantages, but I have noticed that many international school students and bi/trilingual students having a very poor fundamentals in their primary language.”

Faculty and administrators who are fluent in multiple languages have an advantage over monolingual faculty and administrators.

71 responses



“A big part of being an efficient and strong leader is forming relationships, and knowing/ learning your workers’ language would go a long way to achieving that.”

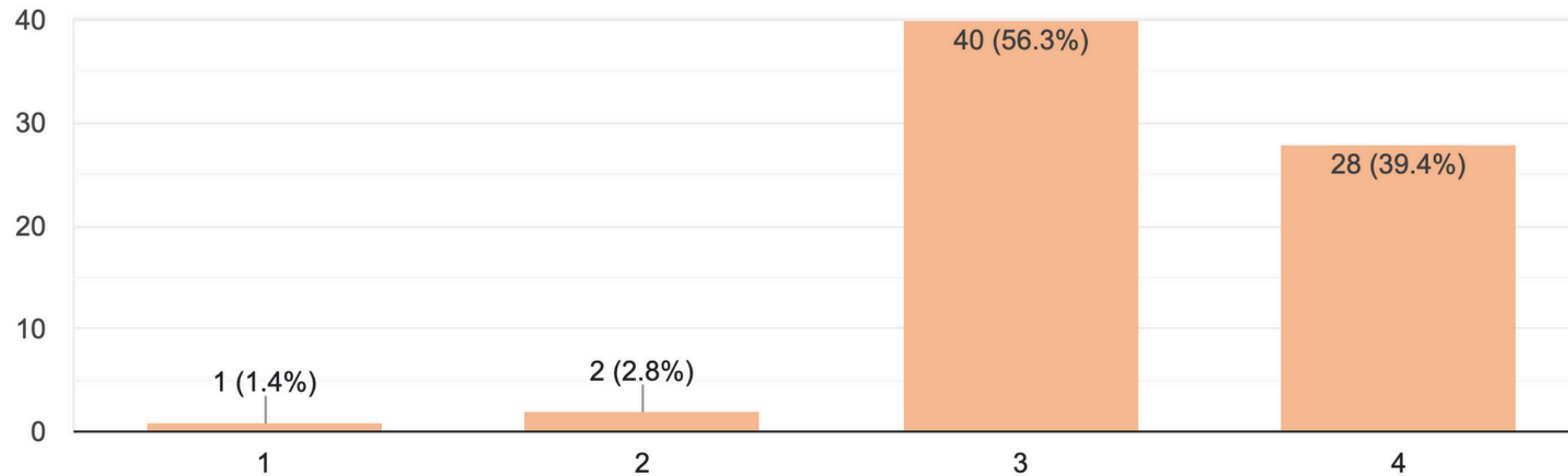
“Multiple languages allows for better understanding/living in multiple cultures. This allows for more empathy, better relationships, and better leadership in a multi-cultural environment.”

Findings: Group C

Role of International Schools

A student's use of academic language (using content-specific vocabulary and complex grammatical structures) impacts their mastery of a standard.

71 responses



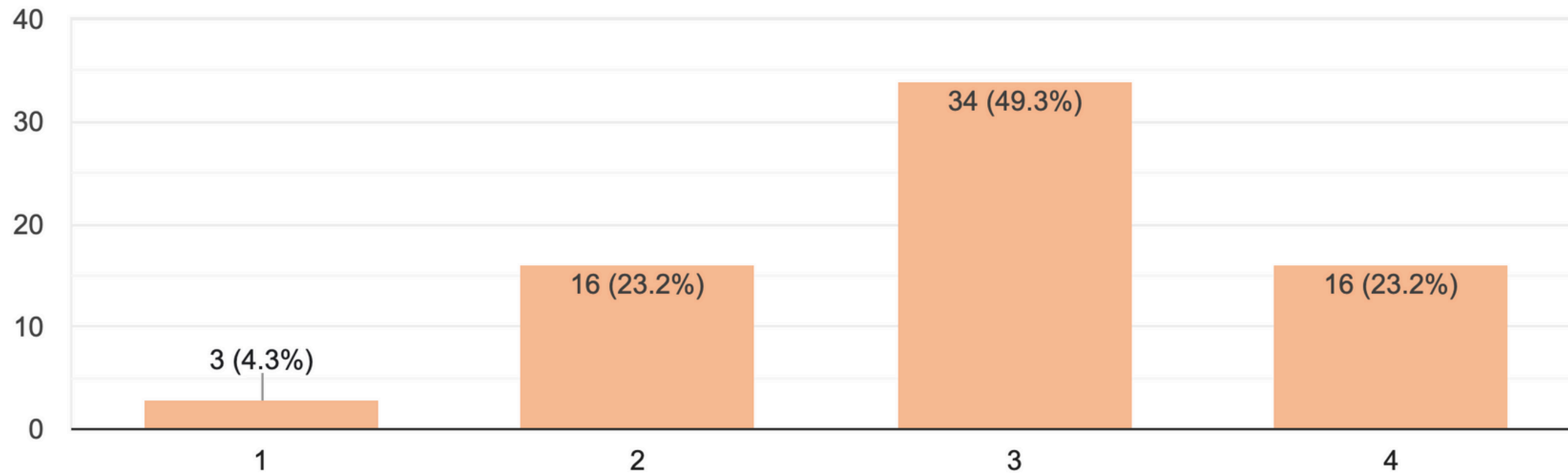
“Depends what that standard is, the age of the student, and the context for assessment. As long as students can show understanding of a standard despite complex grammatical structures, it’s probably ok.”

“For some standards related to clear and precise communication of ideas, it seems difficult for students who have difficulty using subject-specific vocabulary to achieve mastery.”

“Mastery of a standard often requires explaining, analyzing, and justifying answers using precise academic terms. I believe without academic language skills, students may find it hard to read and comprehend complex texts, write clear explanations, or engage in discussions effectively.”

English proficiency is as important as content mastery.

69 responses

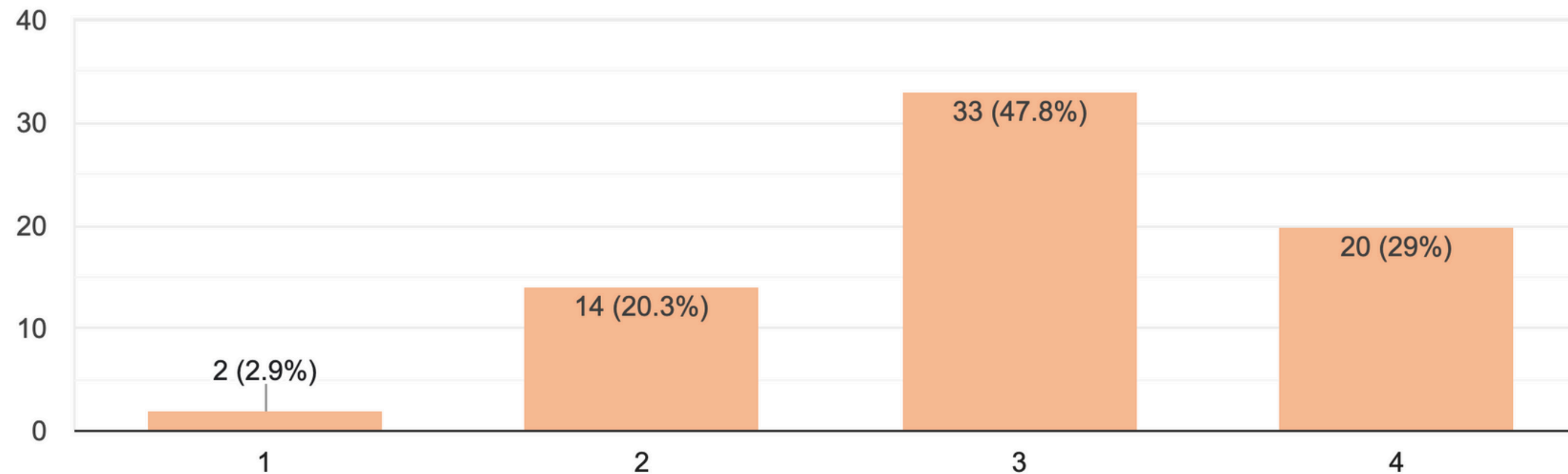


“This is important in an English curriculum school. Clearly great thinking, creation, art, music, etc. happen in many languages. It is hard to show what you know at an English curriculum school if you are not proficient in English. A school can’t be everything to everyone.”

“English mastery supports content mastery when the language of instruction is English.”

The incorporation of a student's cultural background and identity in the classroom influences their mastery of content.

69 responses

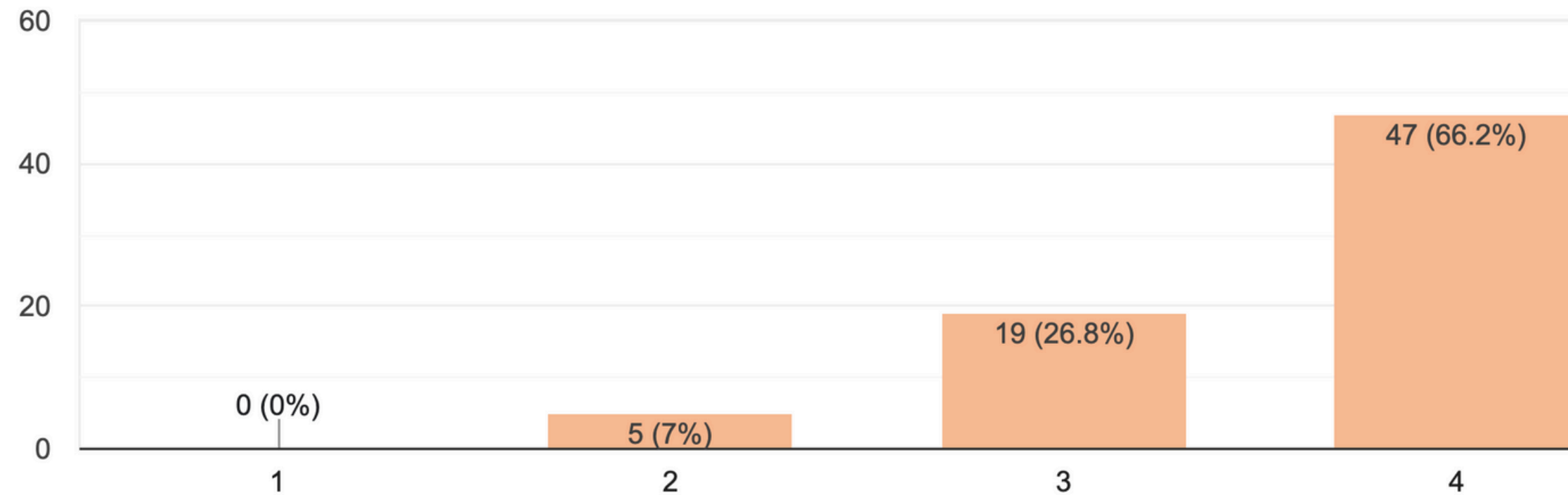


“Students do understand content better if they have a cultural connection. However, mastery of the content does not rely on cultural background only.”

“I see it as a SEL thing - recognizing a person's inherent value - who they are and where they come from - helps them in every way, mastery of content or otherwise.”

International schools have a responsibility to actively support and promote multilingualism.

71 responses



“International schools are uniquely positioned to promote multilingualism—not just as a skill, but as a mindset that values identity, cognitive flexibility, and cross-cultural understanding.”

“Promoting multilingualism affirms students’ identities, strengthens family and cultural connections, and fosters a richer, more inclusive learning environment. It’s not just an academic benefit—it’s a responsibility toward holistic education.”