

Conditions that Foster Agency in Multilingual Learners: A Descriptive Analysis

MLRC Capstone Project 2026



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**What conditions
enable multilingual
learners to have
agency in their
learning?**



Research Question



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Literature Review

Defining Agency

“Agency is the capacity to act or not to act,
contingent upon various conditions.”

(SAENKHUM, 2016)

With reference to:

Ahearn, L. M. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30(1), 109–137.
(annualreviews.org)

Hauser, G. A. (2004). How ought we to understand the concept of rhetorical agency? Report from the ARS. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 34(3), 9–17. (tandfonline.com)

van Lier, L. (2009). Sociocultural theory and second language learning. [Publisher details not retrieved in search results above] (cambridge.org)



Classroom Environment

- Classrooms that value multilingualism give students more confidence and freedom to participate, problem solve, and express ideas using all of their language resources (García & Wei, 2014).
- Flexible multilingual classroom norms, such as translanguaging, support deeper understanding and encourage students to make meaningful choices in their learning (Canagarajah, 2013).
- Access to digital tools, bilingual supports, learning apps, and online resources helps students become more independent and self-directed learners (Reeve, 2009).
- Time and pacing matter; students need enough time for collaboration, reflection, and peer feedback in order to fully demonstrate agency and ownership of learning (Mercer, 2011).
- School policies and classroom expectations strongly influence whether multilingual learners feel safe and encouraged to use their home languages and cultural knowledge as strengths in learning (Cummins, 2007).



Teacher Relationships & Facilitation

- Strong, trusting teacher–student relationships help multilingual learners feel safe to participate, take risks, and develop confidence in their learning identities (Gay, 2018).
- Teachers who view students' home languages and cultures as strengths help challenge deficit thinking and encourage greater student agency and engagement (Paris & Alim, 2017).
- Teacher flexibility in adapting curriculum, tasks, and materials can increase student ownership and motivation, while rigid instruction may lead to disengagement (Damşa et al., 2010).
- Clear teacher modeling, scaffolding, and guided support are important affordances that help students participate more independently and confidently in collaborative learning tasks (Mercer, 2011).
- Emotional and academic support from teachers encourages students—especially multilingual and minoritized learners—to ask for help, advocate for themselves, and take greater initiative in learning (Ryan & Deci, 2020).



Instructional Strategies

- Translanguaging and flexible language choice allow multilingual learners to use the languages that best support their understanding, communication, and learning goals (García & Wei, 2014).
- Instruction that includes student choice increases ownership, motivation, and engagement by giving learners more control over how they demonstrate understanding (Reeve, 2009).
- Structured peer feedback and reflection help students build self-regulation, collaboration skills, and reciprocal learning relationships when teachers provide clear scaffolds and sufficient time (Mercer, 2011).
- Learning tasks that connect to students' identities and experiences help learners challenge deficit narratives and engage more authentically in literacy and classroom activities (Paris & Alim, 2017).
- Integrating digital tools, bilingual glossaries, and online resources into instruction encourages independent, learner-driven exploration and expansion of linguistic repertoires (Cummins, 2007).



Peer Interactions & Socio-Cultural Supports

- Collaborative peer interactions help multilingual learners develop agency through shared problem solving, discussion, and mutual feedback (Mercer, 2011).
- Reciprocal peer learning environments encourage students to become more proactive, reflective, and engaged in their own learning processes (Damşa et al., 2010).
- Help-seeking from classmates, teachers, family members, and the wider community is an important form of agency, allowing students to access additional knowledge and support networks (Bandura, 2001).
- Family encouragement and strong sociocultural connections strengthen students' motivation, confidence, and persistence, particularly for multilingual and minoritized learners (Yosso, 2005).
- Positive classroom norms and teacher mediation can transform peer resistance or disengagement into productive collaboration and meaningful participation (Paris & Alim, 2017).





Methodology

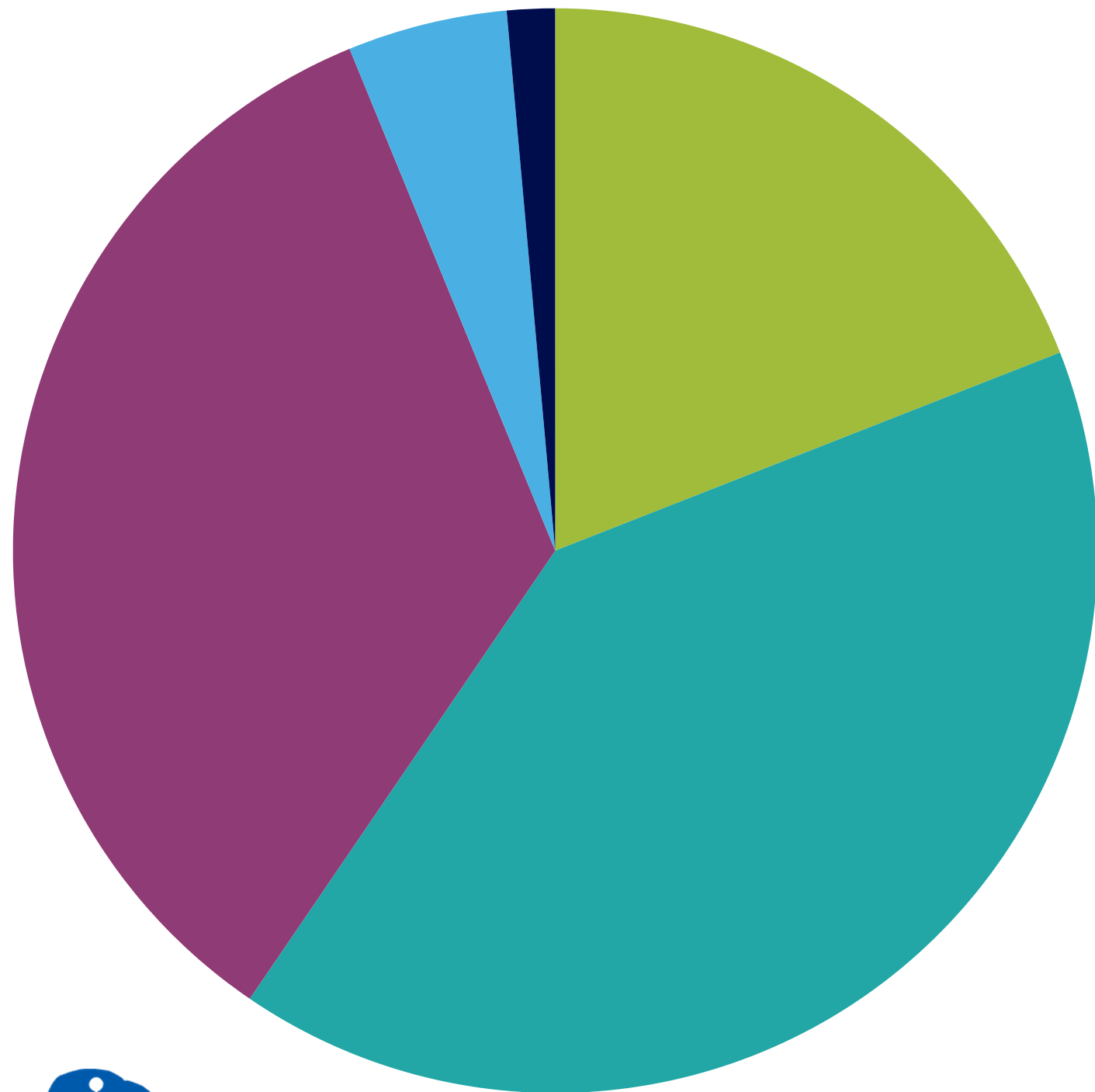
Descriptive Analysis

This descriptive study examined the relationship between student agency and the inclusion of multilingual learners (MLLs) across Grades 1–12. The research team began by reviewing 2 years of school-wide Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) survey data to identify trends, strengths, and gaps in students' sense of agency, with a particular focus on the experiences of multilingual learners. These findings informed the development of targeted follow-up tools, including semi-structured interviews with elementary students and an anonymous survey for middle and high school students designed to gather qualitative data. This approach allowed the team to build on existing data while gathering more detailed, student-centered insights. By combining large-scale survey analysis with more focused qualitative data collection, the study provides both a broad overview and a deeper understanding of how students experience agency in relation to inclusion.



Sampling & Sample Size

● Elementary School ● Middle School ● High School ● Teachers ● Admin



Sample Size: 210 ISB Students & Staff

- ***Elementary (G1-G5)***
 - LES- 13 students
 - UES- 27 students
- ***Middle School (G6-G8)***
 - 85 students
- ***High School (G9-G12)***
 - 72 students
- ***Staff- 13***
 - Teachers- 10
 - Admin- 3

Sampling:

ES: Convenience sample- We asked students questions during recess, and they could opt out. All interviews were conducted in English

MS/HS: Optional anonymous survey shared by MS Humanities teachers, HS English teachers, and an online announcement link



Interview Questions ES

Question 1: Theme: Decision-making in learning (Choice)

- LES: What choices do you make at school?
 - follow up... what about in your homeroom? Special class?
- UES: When do you make choices about what you learn or how you learn?

Question 2: Theme: (Voice)

- LES: When do you feel like you can share your ideas?
 - Follow up- say/express your opinions, feelings, ideas of what to do/how to solve a problem
- UES: When do you feel like you can share your ideas or opinions?
 - Follow up- say/express your opinions, feelings, ideas of what to do/how to solve a problem

Question 3: Theme: (MLL Inclusion & Voice)

- LES: When, at school, do you feel like your home language is valued?
 - explain the definition of valued-important/appreciated/respected
 - follow up- what language(s) do you speak at home
- UES: When, at school, do you feel like your home language is valued?
 - explain the definition of valued-important/appreciated/respected
 - follow up- what language(s) do you speak at home



ES- Elementary School
LES- Lower Elementary
School
UES- Upper Elementary
School

Survey Questions MS/HS

Theme: Decision-making in learning (Choice)

- When and where do you feel you have the ability to learn and do things you want to do at ISB?
 - (in classes, activities, certain spaces, times of day, parts of your schedule, etc.)
- When and where do you get to make decisions about what you do at ISB?
 - Examples: what topics you study, how you are doing the learning (group work vs. individual, choice of materials, seating, etc.)
- When and where do you get to make decisions about what you do at ISB?
 - Examples: what topics you study, how you are doing the learning (group work vs. individual, choice of materials, seating, etc.)
- How does it feel when you get to make decisions about what you do at school?
- Can you tell us about a time when you made a choice in your learning at ISB or elsewhere?
 - What happened? What was it like? How did it feel to be able to make choices about your learning?

Theme: (MLL Inclusion & Voice)

- In which spaces or activities do you feel like your home language is valued?
- During what times, places or activities at school do you feel you get to really be YOURSELF?
- After answering all of these questions, how much agency do you feel you have at school?
- In which times, places or activities at school do you get to use your home language/s?
- What languages do you use at ISB?
- In what times, places, or activities at school do you get to choose which languages to use in your learning?
- How does it feel when you get to use your different languages at school?

**Format: anonymous
survey on Microsoft
Forms**



Findings Elementary

Findings: Elementary — Overall Elementary Agency

Emerging Patterns

- Students most often describe **small, localized choices**
- **Agency is strongest in:**
 - Performing Arts
 - Visual Arts
 - Recess
 - Flexible/social spaces
- **Students describe more choice in:**
 - how they learn rather than what they learn
- **Younger students often interpret agency as:**
 - behavioral choices
 - social choices
 - safe choices



Findings: Elementary — Overall Elementary Agency Quotes

Representative Quotes

“I make safe choices at school like say kind words.”

“I think, what do I learn doesn't matter, but how do I learn is the key point.”

“After I finish the work that I'm supposed to do, I get to get some choices.”





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Choice and Decision Making

Findings: Elementary — Decision Making

When and where do students make decisions?

Area	Examples
Creative spaces (~35%)	Performing Arts, Visual Arts, music, dance
Social/free spaces (~30%)	Recess, lunch, friends
Task/process choices (~20%)	Choosing books, seating, presentation format
Compliance structures (~15%)	Teacher-directed learning, limited curricular choice

Key Tension

Students experience agency primarily in:

- social spaces
- creative environments
- task completion structures

...but far less in:

- curriculum
- pacing
- assessment
- content direction



Findings: Elementary — Decision Making Quotes

When and where do students make decisions?

“Most of the time, the teacher tells us what to learn.”

“I don't feel like I have enough choice to pick what I learn.”

“I think I get the most freedom in performing arts, homeroom, and visual arts.”

“Sometimes in music class, sometimes in visual arts, and in our homeroom.”



Findings: Elementary — Choice Feels Different by Context

How does choice feel in ES?

Positive/Empowered

- freedom
- creativity
- ownership
- confidence
- engagement

Neutral/Procedural

- “follow directions”
- “finish work first”
- “teacher tells us”

Constrained

- limited curricular choice
- teacher-directed pacing
- structured routines

Emerging Pattern

Students describe the strongest positive emotions when:

choice connects to identity

creativity is involved

peers are involved

adults step back





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Voice

Findings: Elementary — Voice

Where Students Feel Comfortable Sharing Their Voice

Space	Frequency
Morning Meeting	High
Turn-and-Talk	High
Recess/Friends	High
Performing Arts	Medium-High
Whole Class Discussion	Medium
Teacher Questioning	Medium
Tests/Assessment	Very Low



Findings: Elementary — Voice

When do students feel heard?

Common Spaces for Voice

- Morning meeting
- Turn-and-talk
- Sharing time
- Performing Arts
- Partner/group work
- Raising hands

Emerging Pattern

Students often describe voice as:

- permission to answer
- being called on
- sharing ideas safely

rather than:

- shaping learning
- influencing curriculum
- co-constructing understanding



Findings: Elementary — Voice Quotes

When do students feel heard?

“When I raise my hand.”

“Probably at a morning meeting.”

“The teacher asks questions especially in Math.”

“I share my ideas and opinions the most during recess with my friends.”

“Visual arts, homeroom, and performing arts are all pretty good.”



Findings: Elementary — Voice Tension

Key Tension: Voice

For many students, voice exists:

- after invitation
- inside routines
- within teacher-controlled structures

Students rarely describe:

- initiating learning
- changing direction of learning
- influencing classroom systems

Voice is often **responsive** rather than **generative**





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Language Use and Belonging/Inclusion

Findings: Elementary — Language Use & Belonging

Language Use

Zone	Examples
Social/informal (~45%)	Recess, lunch, friends
Language classes (~30%)	Chinese class, immersion
Teacher-supported moments (~15%)	Translation help, buddies
Academic meaning-making (~10%)	Collaborative clarification

Emerging Pattern

Students associate home language primarily with:

- comfort
- identity
- friendship
- belonging

rather than:

- academic thinking
- intellectual contribution
- deeper learning



Findings: Elementary — Language Use Quotes

Language Use & Inclusion

“I can talk with my teachers and classmates all in Chinese at Chinese class.”

“I would like to add Korean labels to your Performing Arts classroom because it feels special.”

“My home language is Chinese but I want it to be English.”

“I don't speak a lot in my language in school, but nobody is making fun of it.”





Teacher Perspectives

Findings: Elementary — Teacher Perspectives

Teachers identify agency most often in:

- writing topics
- reading choice
- projects
- seating/grouping
- presentation formats

Teachers acknowledge:

- writing topics
- reading choice
- projects
- seating/grouping
- presentation formats



Emerging Pattern

Teachers frequently describe:
“choice within structures”
rather than
student-directed learning

Findings: Elementary — Meaning units from Teachers and School Leadership

Students have choices in formative tasks but not in summative assessments.

Students have choices in writing when choosing topics, especially in opinion and narrative writing.

They have it during passion projects, but this is not part of the curriculum.

Students have voice all the time. This is especially true in morning meeting, turn and talk, class discussions and during warm-ups especially in Math .

Students use translation to help other students understand. I tell them that they can use it.

Using the home language is not shamed here. They can use it to process but not in the final product.

Home language is spoken everywhere. Students rely on it.



Note: We decided to use meaning units rather than quotes to minimize the chance of awkward feelings for educators.



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Elementary Overall Emerging Patterns

Findings: Elementary — Systems Tensions

Emerging Cross-System Tensions

Compliance vs. Agency

Students are offered small choices inside tightly controlled systems.

Voice vs. Control

Students can respond, but rarely shape learning.

Inclusion vs. English Dominance

Home languages are welcomed socially more than academically.

Creativity vs. Assessment

Agency is strongest in low-stakes creative spaces.

Belonging vs. Performance

Students feel most authentic away from evaluation.



Findings: Elementary — LES vs UES Emerging Differences

Emerging Differences Across Divisions

LES

- Choice interpreted behaviorally/socially
- Strong reliance on teacher structures
- Simpler understandings of agency

UES

- Greater awareness of constraints
- More nuanced reflections on learning
- Stronger desire for authentic choice

Shared Across Both

- Recess and friendships matter deeply
- Performing Arts and Visual Arts emerge repeatedly
- Home language tied strongly to comfort and belonging



Findings: Elementary — Key Finding

Key Finding

The strongest experiences of agency occur when students experience:

meaningful choice

- personal relevance
- creativity
- peer connection
- positive emotion

Students do not simply want “freedom.”

They want:

- ownership
- relevance
- trust
- flexibility
- authentic participation



Findings Secondary



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Agency

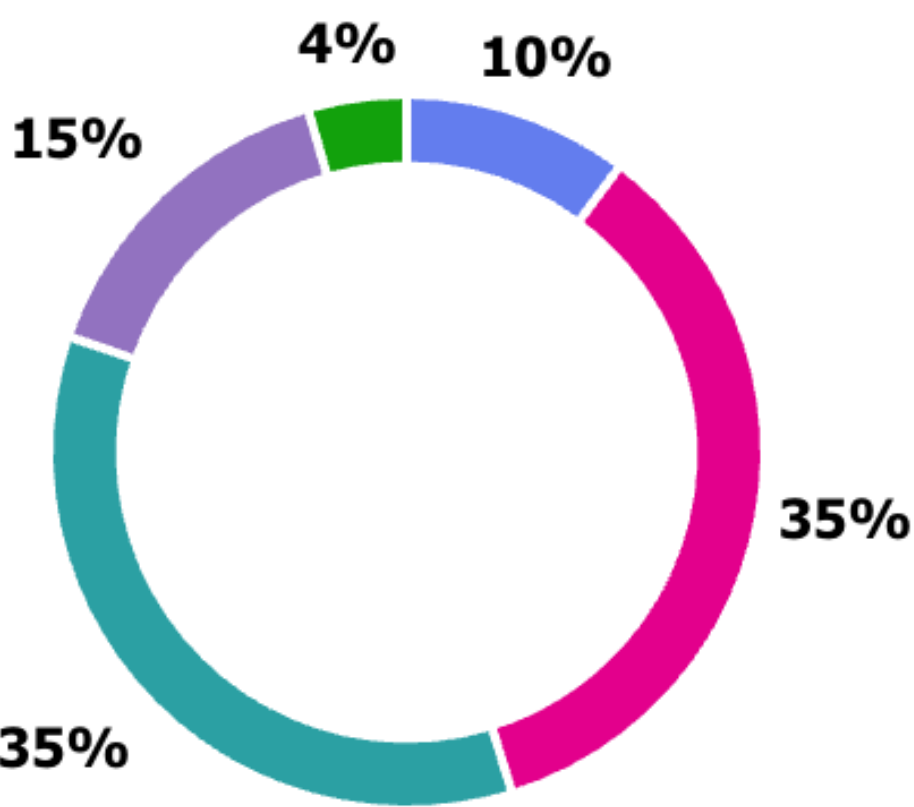
Findings: Secondary (MS/HS): Overall Agency

11. After answering all of these questions, how much **agency** do you feel you have at school?

Definition:

agency = the power, resources, and ability to learn and do things you want to do

● I have agency all the time at school.	16
● I have agency most of the time at school.	55
● I have agency some of time at school.	55
● I rarely have agency at school.	24
● I never have agency at school.	7



n= 157



Findings: Secondary (MS/HS): Student Agency

When and where do you feel you have the ability to learn and do things you want to do at ISB? (in classes, activities, certain spaces, times of day, parts of your schedule, etc.)

Where they feel it	Electives (art, design, photography, robotics), PE/sports, study hall, library, project-based classes with topic choice
Where they don't	Core classes with rigid rubrics; after school when spaces close; anywhere with "strict teachers"
The split	Many distinguish sharply: "to learn and to do things I want are not the same"*



Findings: Secondary (MS/HS): Student Agency

“Outside of classes, there's not many opportunities to pursue what you want to do unless the course is specifically for that activity. Courses such as studio art (semester and yearlong), music creation, or self dependent courses like passion project are good options to pursue creativity, but I personally feel like **students only choose these courses because they're 'easy' to get good grades in.**”



Findings: Secondary (MS/HS): Student Agency

When and where do you get to make decisions about what you do at ISB?

Individual/group work choices (~30%) — picking partners, working alone vs. together, project topics

Seating (~25%) — free seating in some classes, assigned in others; a persistent pain point

Course/elective selection (~20%) — IB courses, ASAs, clubs — the "big" decisions

Project customization (~15%) — choosing topics, presentation formats, materials

Breaks/lunch/after school (~15%) — where to go, who to be with

Key tension: Students experience micro-decisions (partners, seating, topics) within macro-structures they don't control (curriculum, assessment format, schedule).



Many note that even "choices" are bounded by rubrics, teacher preferences, or the threat of behavioral consequences.

Findings: Secondary (MS/HS): Student Agency

How does it feel when you get to make choices at school?

Category	Feelings Included	%
Positive / Empowered	good, great, amazing, happy, free, empowered, powerful, confident, proud, respected, valued, heard, trusted, included, engaged, motivated, interested, curious, excited, optimistic, relieved, fulfilled, courageous, brave, honored, thankful, content, satisfied	54%
Neutral / Ambivalent	normal, regular, okay, fine, alright, nothing, idk, not sure, not determined, sometimes, almost never, not very often	16%
Negative / Constrained	anxious, nervous, scared, worried, stressed, tired, annoyed, depressed, regretful, unsafe, difficult, unpleasure, hard, confused, constrained, no choice	13%
Critical / Alienated	"never get super big choices," "abnormal," "I don't have that," "I've never got opportunities," tsundere-style deflection (#108), meme responses (#116)	10%
Complex / Mixed	"happy but nervous," "fulfilling but strenuous," "free but scared to mess up," "good and sad and angry," "liberating but minor"	8%

The paradox: Most students say it feels good to choose, but ~40% qualify, minimize, or reject the premise, suggesting the "choices" offered are either too small, too bounded, or too rare to generate genuine positive affect.

The modal positive response is "good" (minimal); the modal negative response is a full paragraph (maximal).

Intensity correlates inversely with satisfaction.



Findings: Secondary (MS/HS): Student Agency

Tier	Examples	~% of responses
Curriculum/structural	Course selection, IB electives, switching courses, language choice	25%
Project/task-level	Picking topics, presentation formats, group vs. individual, mediums (art, engineering)	35%
Micro-environmental	Seating, study hall time allocation, where to sit during flex	20%

“I made a choice in my learning at ISB during art class when I got to choose the topic, medium, and composition of my final artwork. The assignment was merely to make anything that showcased my technical and conceptual skill. There was no specific task sheet or rubric that I had to follow. As a result, I felt more passionate about what I was making because I had agency and autonomy to choose how I learned.”



Findings: Secondary (MS/HS): Student Agency

The most powerful responses share a structure:

meaningful choice → personal relevance → increased engagement → better outcome → positive emotion.

This suggests students don't just want "freedom" abstractly, they want choice that connects their learning to their identity, interests, and goals. When choice is constrained to picking between equally unappealing options, or when it comes without support, it generates **anxiety rather than empowerment.**





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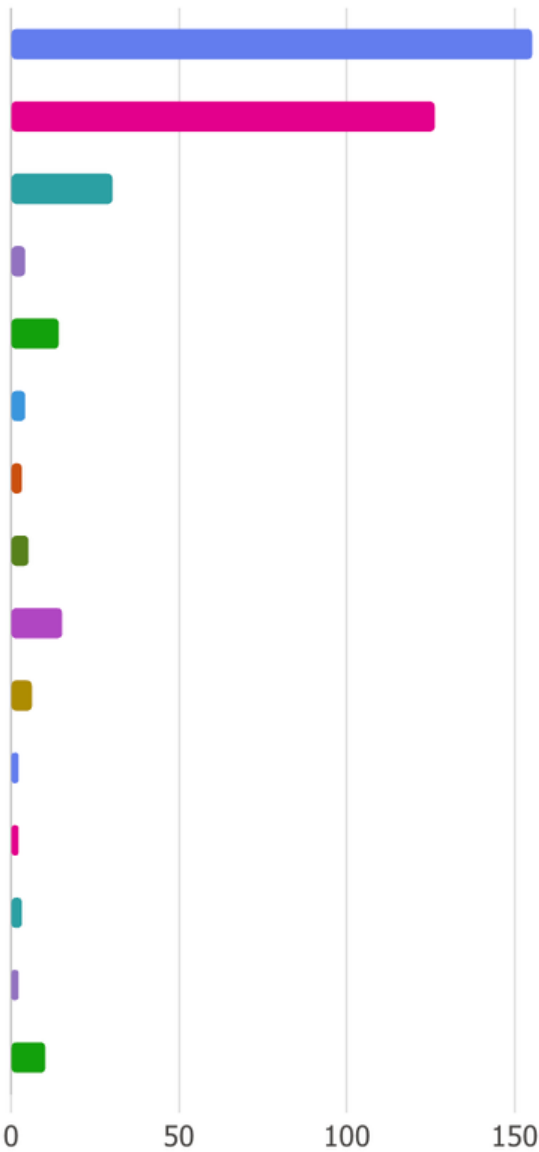
Language Usage

Findings: Secondary (MS/HS): Language Use

7. What languages do you use at ISB?

You can choose more than one answer if applicable.

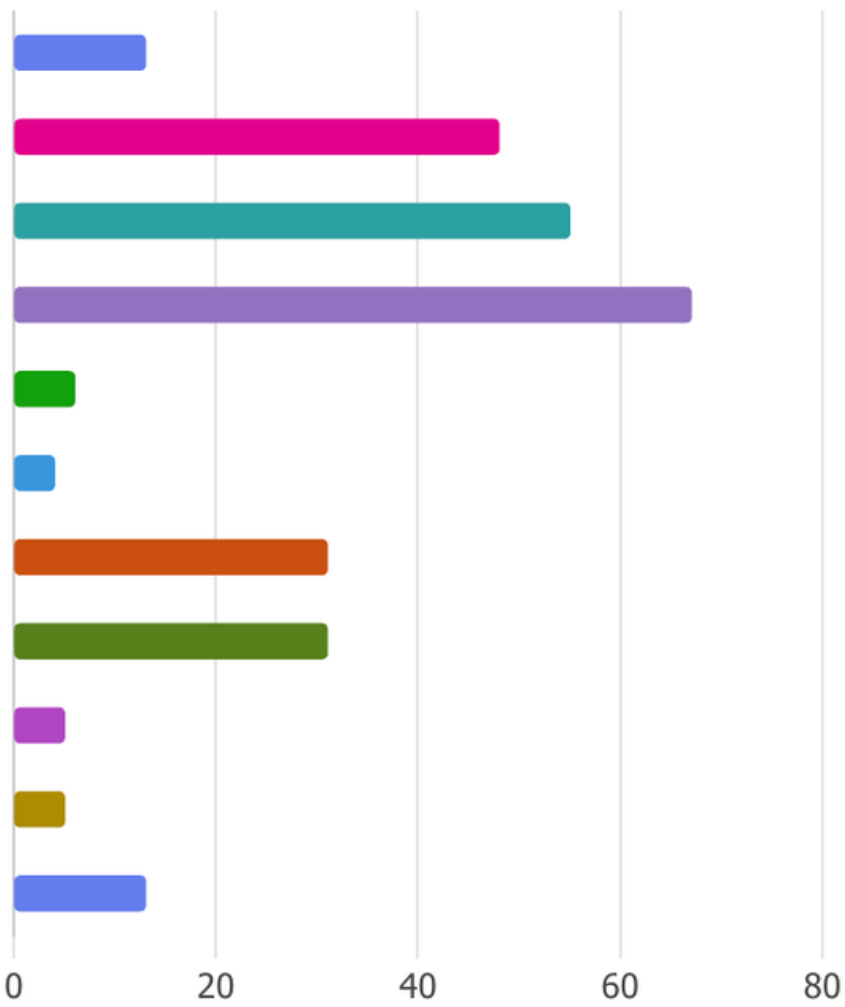
English	155
Chinese (Mandarin)	126
Korean	30
Japanese	4
Spanish	14
Arabic	4
Amharic	3
Polish	5
French	15
Russian	6
Kinyarwanda	2
Bulgarian	2
Kazakh	3
Turkmen	2
Other	10



9. How does it **feel** when you get to use your different languages at school?

Choose more than one answer if applicable.

Not applicable; I only speak English	13
It feels great	48
It feels good	55
I feel neutral about it	67
It feels stressful	6
It feels bad	4
It's fun	31
It helps me learn	31
It's distracting	5
It's confusing	5
Other	13



Findings: Secondary (MS/HS): Language Use

Zone	Where/When	Language Rules	~% of responses
Formal learning	Core classes (math, science, humanities, English)	English mandatory, or depends on class/teacher	35%
Language instruction	Chinese, Spanish, French class	Target language expected, English sometimes allowed	20%
Social/informal	Lunch, break, recess, hallways, group work, after school	Free choice	45%

Key tension: The question asks about learning, but most students answer about communication. Only ~25% describe language choice within actual academic tasks; the rest describe social contexts or note that language choice in learning is essentially nonexistent.





Being Themselves

Findings: Secondary (MS/HS): Being Themselves

Average Response

Response #13, #14, #15, #54 — Representative modal answer:

- "When I'm with my friends I feel I get to be myself" (#13)
- "with my friends at break time" (#14)
- "when I'm with friends for example lunch" (#15)
- "when I have lunch with my friends" (#54)

The average ISB student locates authenticity in friendship during unstructured time. Rather than identity expression, creative work, or values alignment, but often in being with people who don't judge them.



Findings: Secondary (MS/HS): Being Themselves

Where they feel themselves	Lunch, break, with friends, sports, arts, after school
Where they don't	Core classes, anywhere teachers evaluate them, "everywhere" for ~15%
The pattern	Authenticity requires absence of institutional gaze; school is for performance

The tension: ~25% of students experience ISB as fundamentally incompatible with "being yourself." The rest find authenticity in escape from class, from teachers, from evaluation, rather than in engagement with the school's mission. The few who name classes or teachers where they feel authentic (#32; #60: art/drama/design; #123: swimming "like a family") describe elective, chosen communities — not the core academic experience.



Findings: Secondary (MS/HS): Being Themselves

Zone	Where/When	~% of responses
Social sanctuaries	Lunch, break, recess, with friends, after school	45%
Passion spaces	Sports, arts, drama, robotics, clubs — chosen activities	25%
Nowhere/only at home	Explicit rejection of school as authentic space	15%
*Nowhere/only at home	Unconditional self-acceptance	10%

Key tension:

For most students, "being yourself" requires the absence of institutional gaze — no teachers, no grades, no behavioral expectations.

The school itself is experienced as a space of performance; authenticity happens in its cracks.



Findings: Secondary (MS/HS): Being Themselves

~8 students use explicit masking language:

"I have mask in school, so never know my really trait" (#68)

"In front of teachers sometimes u do wanna express a more academic side of yourself, therefore one is not themselves in class" (#46)

"the rest of the time 'I'm pretty restrained" (#85)

"During class, I don't feel like I get to really be myself because there is a certain way that people are expected to behave" (#136)

"I am not myself, mostly times. [except bathroom]" (#115)

The bathroom as sanctuary (#4: "in the bathroom at lunch because nobody can bother me there"; #115) is particularly telling--the only truly private space in a surveilled environment.



Findings: Secondary (MS/HS): Being Themselves

~20 students explicitly contrast school with home:

"Only at home, or sometimes with friends" (#1)

"The only time everyone can be themselves is at home, isn't it?" (#11)

"When I am hanging out with my dearest friends and when school is almost over so i can slowly transform to my real self at home" (#44)

"At home. 😞" (#105)

"when I'm at home" (#120)

Temporal sequencing: school as liminal space, home as authentic destination.



Findings: Secondary (MS/HS): Being Themselves

The "Everywhere" Minority (~10%)

"Anywhere in school" (#3)

"All the time, because I feel that I'm included in school when I'm being myself" (#27)

"I don't see why I can't be myself at any point of time in school" (#45)

"Anywhere because ISB is free" (#91)

These students either experience ISB as genuinely low-pressure or have internalized a self-concept that doesn't require environmental validation. Notably, several are younger students or use minimal language, which could indicate less developed critical consciousness or possibly genuine comfort.





Discussion

Discussion: Elementary School

In the Elementary School, **agency** tends to show up in **small, everyday moments rather than big decisions**. Students often talk about having choices in **how** they work, but much **less ownership over what** they learn. Their idea of **voice** is also quite structured: it usually means **answering a teacher's question or sharing during planned routines, rather than helping shape the direction of learning**. The strongest sense of **agency** comes through in **creative and social spaces** like the arts, group work, and recess, where students feel more relaxed, connected, and able to be themselves. **Home languages** play an important role in helping students feel **comfortable and included**, but they are **not** consistently used as tools for **thinking and learning** in the classroom. Overall, there is a **clear tension** between systems that focus on **structure and control**, and the kinds of **conditions** that would allow younger students to take more **real ownership of their learning**.



Discussion: Secondary (MS/HS)

In the Secondary School, students are much more aware of what agency looks like and where it is missing. They often describe having **small choices**, such as where to sit or how to complete a task, but note that the **bigger decisions** about curriculum, assessment, and schedules are mostly **out of their hands**. While many students say they **enjoy having choice**, their responses suggest that these opportunities can feel **limited or not very meaningful**. **Agency is strongest in electives**, arts, sports, and other areas where students choose to participate and feel personally connected. In contrast, **core classes** are often seen as **more restrictive**, especially when there is a strong focus on grades, rubrics, and performance. A key pattern is that students **feel** most like **themselves** in **social spaces or outside class, not during formal learning time**. Language use shows a similar pattern, with **home languages** more common in **social** settings than in academic work. Overall, these findings suggest that older students want learning experiences that feel **relevant, connected** to who they are, and built on **trust rather than just structure and evaluation**.



Discussion: Overall

Across all three divisions, a consistent message comes through: students experience the most **agency** in environments that feel **flexible, creative, and relational**, and the least in spaces that feel tightly controlled or heavily focused on evaluation. Students are not simply asking for more choice, but for **better, more meaningful choices** that connect to their **interests, identities, and goals**. In both Elementary and Secondary settings, students are more often given control over **how** they learn **rather than what** they learn, and their **voice** is usually **invited** rather than truly **shaping the learning experience**. **Home languages** are **valued socially** but are **not** yet fully part of **academic learning** in consistent ways. There is also a developmental shift: **younger** students tend to **accept existing structures**, while **older** students are more likely to **question** them and **notice the limitations**. Taken together, these findings suggest that supporting agency for multilingual learners means **rethinking not just individual classroom practices**, but also the **broader systems**, so that students are genuinely **involved as active participants in their learning**.



Closing Reflection

Students consistently locate agency in:

- relationships
- creativity
- flexibility
- trusted spaces

The challenge moving forward is not simply offering more “choice,” but creating conditions where students feel:

- intellectually trusted
- emotionally safe
- culturally valued
- genuinely empowered as learners



Research Reflection

Research Reflection

One key reflection from this research process is how much our **own assumptions** about agency were **challenged by student voices**. At the start, we tended to think of agency as providing more choice or flexibility, but the data showed that students are already navigating many **small choices** and do **not** necessarily experience these as **meaningful**. Collecting both interviews and survey responses helped us see **differences** across age groups, and also revealed **tensions** between what **teachers believe they are offering** and **what students actually experience**. As a team, the process highlighted the value of slowing down to **listen carefully to student perspectives**, especially around **identity, language, and belonging**. It also made clear that supporting agency is **not just** about **individual classroom strategies**, but about **examining wider systems, structures, and expectations** across the school.





Looking Forward

Looking Forward

Directions for further research

- Individual student interviews about how agency and engagement are fostered in specific academic spaces
- Examining the differences in student experiences of agency at MS/HS (maybe grades 9-10 vs. IB)
- Surveying teachers and administrators about their perceptions of student agency and when/how student agency is fostered in school
- Examine links between student motivation, engagement in learning, and agency



Looking Forward

Questions Moving Forward

- What would meaningful agency look like in ES/MS/HS?
- How can students shape learning more authentically?
- How can translanguaging move beyond social comfort?
- What structures support student ownership without sacrificing support?
- How might schools balance: curriculum, accountability, creativity, and agency?



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