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Language Attitude of Students towards the Indonesian Language: A Study on Japanese Language and Literature Students in North Sumatra

(Sikap Bahasa Mahasiswa terhadap Bahasa Indonesia: Sebuah Studi pada Mahasiswa Bahasa dan Sastra Jepang di Sumatera Utara)

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Abstract

Many students strive to learn foreign languages, including Japanese. This phenomenon inevitably affects the existence of the Indonesian language. Over time, the Indonesian language may become less utilized and replaced by foreign languages. This research was conducted from May to July 2023, using survey data obtained from students enrolled in the Japanese Language and Literature Program in North Sumatra. Based on data analysis, it can be concluded that the students exhibit a positive language attitude. This is evidenced by their excellent understanding of Indonesian language rules and their affective aspects. Despite studying a foreign language, the students remain proud of and continue using Indonesian. Several factors contribute to this language attitude: 1) the students are aware of the important role of the Indonesian language in education, 2) they feel more confident when speaking in Indonesian, and 3) they believe that the Indonesian language will continue to exist due to its large number of users. Thus, it can be inferred that foreign language learning, such as Japanese, can be a valuable complement without compromising the role of the Indonesian language in daily life, education, and culture.

Keywords: Language Attitude; Indonesian Language; Japanese Language and Literature Students

Abstrak

Banyak mahasiswa yang berusaha belajar bahasa asing, salah satunya bahasa Jepang. Hal ini tentu saja berpengaruh terhadap keberadaan bahasa Indonesia. Seiring berjalannya waktu, sangat mungkin jika bahasa Indonesia sudah jarang digunakan dan digantikan oleh bahasa asing. Penelitian ini dilakukan dari Mei sampai Juli 2023. Adapun data adalah hasil angket mahasiswa yang bersumber dari seluruh mahasiswa Program Studi Sastra dan Bahasa Jepang di Sumatera Utara. Berdasarkan analisis data dapat disimpulkan bahwa mahasiswa memiliki sikap bahasa yang baik. Hal ini dibuktikan dengan pemahaman akan kaidah bahasa Indonesia yang sudah baik juga. Demikian juga pada aspek afektif. Meskipun mempelajari bahasa asing, mahasiswa tetap bangga dan menggunakan bahasa Indonesia. Adapun faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan kecenderungan sikap bahasa tersebut: 1) mahasiswa menyadari peran penting bahasa Indonesia dalam pendidikan, 2) mahasiswa lebih percaya diri jika berbicara dengan menggunakan bahasa Indonesia, dan 3) mahasiswa yakin bahwa bahasa Indonesia akan tetap eksis karena banyaknya jumlah penggunanya. Sehingga dapat disimpulkan bahwa pembelajaran bahasa asing seperti bahasa Jepang dapat menjadi pelengkap yang berharga tanpa mengorbankan peran bahasa Indonesia dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, pendidikan, dan budaya.

Kata kunci: Sikap Bahasa; Bahasa Indonesia; Mahasiswa Sastra dan Bahasa Jepang

1. Introduction

The protection of the Indonesian language is guaranteed by law. Government Regulation No. 29 of 2009 in Indonesia specifically regulates the language, flag, and national emblem. This indicates that the existence and sustainability of the Indonesian language have a strong and clear legal basis. Of course, this protection did not come about without underlying factors. In the current technological development, Indonesian is not the only language mastered by individuals. Technological advancements facilitate communication, both domestically and internationally. Therefore, individuals are not only able to speak Indonesian but also other languages. Many factors drive individuals to want and be able to speak languages other than Indonesian.

In linguistics, languages originating from countries other than Indonesia are referred to as foreign languages. Currently, many language courses and formal education institutions offer foreign language learning, including Japanese. For example, in Medan, Indonesia, state universities have Japanese language and literature departments, such as the Universitas Sumatera Utara. Private institutions like the Universitas Harapan Medan also have a Japanese language department. (Gapur & Taulia, 2023; Pujiono, Taulia, et al., 2022; Pujiono & Gapur, 2020; Yusuf et al., 2023).

The study of the Japanese language is commonly pursued to provide Indonesian workers with the necessary skills to work overseas or in Japanese companies. Furthermore, mastery of the Japanese language can facilitate communication for individuals on social media platforms and allow them to pursue their hobbies and interests related to Japanese culture (Gapur et al., 2019; Pujiono, Gapur, et al., 2022; Pujiono & Gapur, 2020).

The phenomenon of increasingly open and easy cross-country communication has also impacted the use of the Indonesian language. One of the phenomena is the decreasing number of Indonesian language users, especially among young people and students. This is due to the perception that those proficient in foreign languages are considered skilled individuals. Consequently, many students strive to learn English. However, this certainly has implications for the existence of the Indonesian language.

Over time, there is a high possibility that Indonesian will be used less frequently and replaced by foreign languages. Therefore, a study is needed to anticipate this situation. This study is referred to as a language attitude study.

As time passes, there is a high likelihood that the usage of the Indonesian language will diminish and be replaced by foreign languages. Hence, it is crucial to conduct a study to anticipate this phenomenon. This study is known as the language attitude study.

Language attitude refers to a set of beliefs or cognitions that are relatively long-lasting regarding language, which predisposes an individual to react in a preferred manner (Chaer & Agustina, 2004). According to Kridalaksana (2009), language attitude represents the mental position or feelings towards one's or another language. Language attitudes can be categorized as positive or negative. Positive language attitudes encompass three characteristics, namely, 1) language loyalty, 2) language pride, and 3) awareness of language norms.

Language loyalty refers to the inclination of a language community to preserve their language, which can manifest as a resistance to various foreign languages. Language pride motivates individuals to develop and use their language as an identity and a unifying factor within the community. Awareness of language norms encourages people to use their language carefully and respectfully. On the other hand, negative language attitude represents the opposite of these positive attitudes. It implies a preference for using languages other than Indonesian. Many people in society are increasingly using English or other foreign languages, indicating a negative language attitude. This phenomenon is particularly evident among teenagers who prefer to communicate in English or other foreign languages. Negative language attitudes arise when there is a lack of passion or motivation to preserve the language. Various factors contribute to the erosion of language, including politics, race, ethnicity, and prestige (Chaer & Agustina, 2004).

In Indonesia, education is divided into several levels, namely elementary school, junior high school, senior high school, and higher education. Higher education represents the highest level individuals pursue after completing senior high school. Higher education can include academies, polytechnics, colleges, and universities. Individuals studying in higher education are commonly referred to as students. This aligns with the notion that students are individuals pursuing knowledge in higher education or its equivalent (Saragih & Valentina, 2015). Generally, students are between the ages of 18 and 25. Based on the psychology of learning, this age range falls into late adolescence and early adulthood. At this stage, individuals solidify their life goals (Hulukati & Djibrán, 2018). The following are characteristics of an individual's development in late adolescence: 1) accepting physical changes, 2) acquiring emotional freedom, 3) developing social skills, 4) finding role models for identification, and 5) recognizing and accepting one's own abilities (Gunarsa & Gunarsa, 2001). During this period, students undergo development in various aspects, including language attitudes. This is especially true for students who specifically study foreign languages, such as Japanese as their major.

A study conducted by Wardhaningtyas et al. (2023) revealed that using the first language in foreign language learning, particularly in speaking classes, leads to positive attitudes among teachers and students. This research also emphasizes the importance of awareness of language norms and identifies commonly used measurement methods in linguistic attitude studies. Furthermore, Mulyaningsih's study (Mulyaningsih, 2017) concluded that students who learn English have a positive attitude towards the Indonesian language, as evidenced by their good understanding of Indonesian language norms.

Another study by Tua et al. (2023) examined language attitudes and language maintenance in border communities in Telok Melano, Lundu (Sarawak, Malaysia), and Desa Temajuk, Sambas (West Kalimantan, Indonesia). The findings of this study indicated that language loyalty, language pride, and awareness of norms towards the mother tongue and national language were relatively high among the speakers. Additionally, a study by Suwartono and Stapa (2022) explored the differences and similarities in motivation and attitudes toward learning English as a global language among university students in Indonesia and Malaysia. This research revealed several interesting facts. Firstly, while the strongest instrumental motivation for learning English among Indonesian students was for international English proficiency exams, for Malaysian students, the biggest motivation for learning English was purely for entertainment. Secondly, university students in Indonesia tend to have an orientation towards native speakers in their attitudes towards learning English as a global language, while Malaysian students tend to prefer the target culture. This suggests that students in different parts of the world may have different perspectives on the role of English as a global language. These differences between Indonesia and Malaysia are likely due to the different status of English in the two countries.

Furthermore, a study by Setiyadi and Sukirlan (2016) aimed to identify how madrasah students in Indonesia perceive the English language, English teaching and learning, and native English speakers. Previously, madrasahs were often perceived to have negative attitudes towards the English language and native English speakers and were considered educational institutions that emphasized anti-modern, anti-Western, and anti-pluralistic attitudes. This study showed that madrasah students have positive perceptions towards all three categories of language attitudes, which are significantly related to each other. The empirical data from this study suggest that madrasah students in Indonesia can develop sensitivity to the culture of native English speakers while learning a foreign language without losing their own cultural identity. Madrasah students are relatively open to globalization and modernization while remaining committed to their own cultural heritage and religious beliefs.

The research conducted by Wardani, Gosong, and Artawan (2013) described the language attitudes exhibited by students of SMA Negeri 1 Singaraja towards the Indonesian language in terms of (1) the conative aspect, (2) the affective aspect, (3) the cognitive aspect, and (4) the factors influencing these language attitudes. The subjects of this study were students of SMA Negeri 1 Singaraja in the academic year 2012/2013. Data collection employed observation, paired comparison, questionnaires, and interviews. The observation and interview data analysis involved three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification. The analysis of paired comparison and questionnaire data generally followed four stages: grouping, conversion, frequency calculation, and determination of students' language attitude tendencies. The results of the study indicated that the language attitudes of SMA Negeri 1 Singaraja students towards the Indonesian language were as follows: (1) the conative aspect was categorized as negative, (2) the affective aspect was categorized as positive, and (3) the cognitive aspect was categorized as neutral. (4) The factors influencing these language attitude tendencies were both internal and external. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that SMA Negeri 1 Singaraja students tend to have a critical attitude towards the Indonesian language, influenced by internal and external factors.

Based on the aforementioned research, several research gaps can be identified. Firstly, the context and focus of the research. Previous studies have primarily examined language attitudes towards English or other foreign languages. However, the proposed research will focus on students' language attitudes towards the Indonesian language, particularly among students majoring in Japanese Language and Literature in North Sumatra. Secondly, the connection with culture. Previous research has shown that cultural factors, such as native speaker orientation, pride in the mother tongue, and awareness of language norms, can influence language attitudes. This research serves as an introduction to exploring the influence of Japanese culture on students' language attitudes toward the Indonesian language. It will provide a richer understanding of the relationship between culture, language, and language attitudes. Thirdly, the comparison with other student groups. Previous research has compared language attitudes between different student groups, such as madrasah students and university students from different countries. This study compares the language attitudes of students majoring in Japanese Language and Literature and other student groups, such as Mandarin Language or Korean Language and Literature students. This will allow for understanding the differences in language attitudes among student groups with different language education backgrounds. Based on these descriptions, this paper aims to elucidate the language attitudes of Japanese Language and Literature students in North Sumatra towards the Indonesian language.

2. Method

This research is in the form of an explanatory descriptive study (Moleong, 2014). Data was collected using a questionnaire (Cohen et al., 2013). Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, researcher triangulation, and data triangulation. The research was conducted from May to June 2023. The population comprised all North Sumatra students in the Japanese Language and Literature program/departments. The research sample included one class from each of the two universities in Medan, with a total of 50 students.

3. Results and Discussion

As mentioned earlier, the data for this research was collected using a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 15 statements, including:

1. I acknowledge that the Indonesian language is more interesting.
2. I use the Indonesian language as the main language in learning.
3. I feel more comfortable and polite using Indonesian with classmates for discussions during learning.
4. I used Indonesian to ask the lecturer if I did not understand the presented material.
5. I use the Indonesian language to answer questions posed by the lecturer.
6. I use the Indonesian language to discuss with friends outside of learning.
7. I always use the Indonesian language outside of learning.
8. I prefer using the informal or casual Indonesian language.
9. I feel that the formal Indonesian language is too difficult.
10. I am proud to speak Indonesian.
11. I believe that over time, the Indonesian language can replace foreign languages.

12. I believe that the Indonesian language can exist in the world.
13. I prefer using the Japanese language.
14. I feel that learning the Japanese language is shifting the use of the Indonesian language in daily interactions.
15. I am prouder if I can speak a foreign language.

The options provided for each statement were: 1) never, 2) sometimes, 3) often, and 4) always. The following are the results of the 50 questionnaires filled out and returned by the participants.

The majority of participants stated that the Indonesian language is interesting. This is because Indonesian is the language of Indonesia's national identity. Therefore, it is reasonable for all Indonesians to learn the Indonesian language.

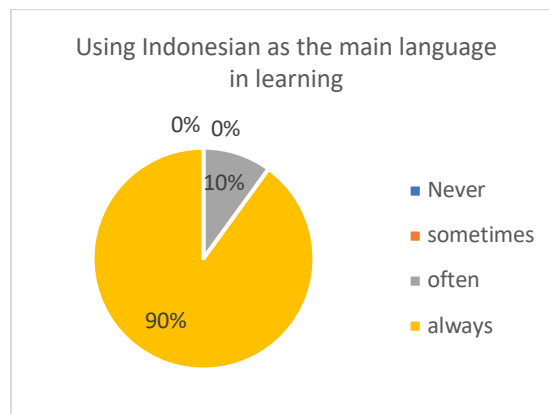


Fig. 1. Using Indonesian as the main language in learning

The majority of students use the Indonesian language in their learning. This is because the instructors also use Indonesian to provide detailed explanations related to understanding course materials.

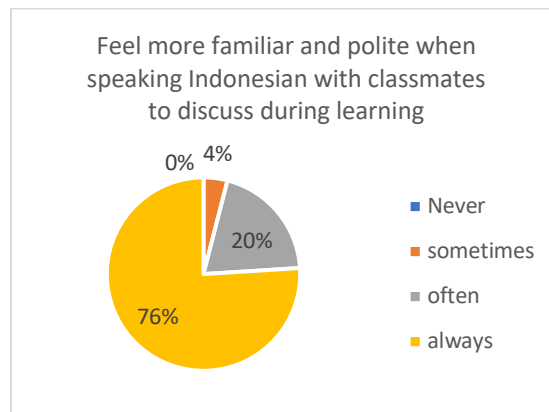


Fig. 2. Feel more familiar and polite when speaking Indonesian with classmates to discuss during learning

The same applies to other students as well. Students feel uncomfortable and rarely use languages other than Indonesian during the learning process in class. Moreover, this phenomenon proves that students still love Indonesian more than foreign languages. Students feel more comfortable when discussing using the Indonesian language. Students come from different places or regions, resulting in different languages being spoken. For example, students from Malay, Batak, and Karo ethnic groups, in order to avoid misunderstandings during discussions, use the Indonesian language.

Students are highly aware of the role of the Indonesian language in education. This is demonstrated by their consistent use of the Indonesian language when asking questions to lecturers. The use of the Indonesian language indeed aids in the learning process in class. Cultural and linguistic differences can be resolved by using the Indonesian language. Students also do not need to study hard to master the Indonesian language because they have been using it since childhood.

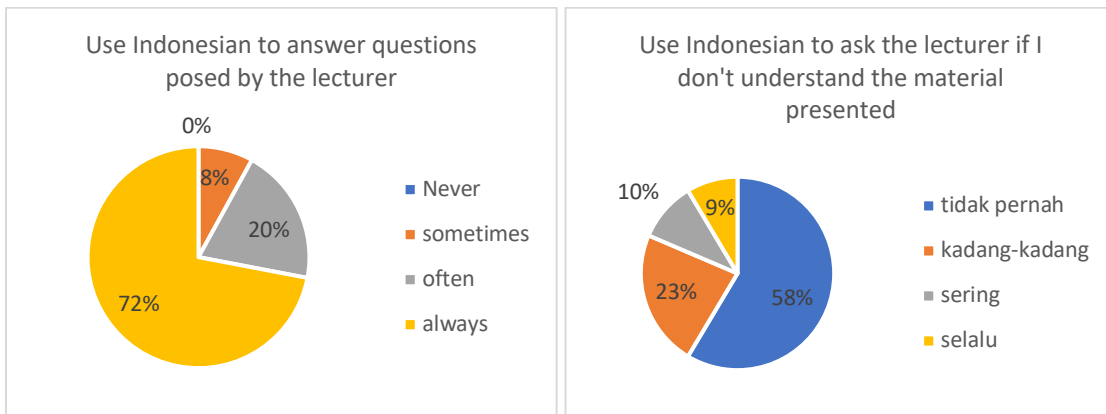


Fig. 3. Use Indonesian to answer questions posed by the lecturer and Use Indonesian to ask the lecturer if I don't understand the material presented

The same applies when answering the lecturer’s questions. Students choose to use the Indonesian language to avoid misunderstandings that may occur when using the Japanese language. Students are not hesitant to answer questions using the Indonesian language. Although sometimes regional elements of the Japanese language still appear, it is limited to one or two uses of Japanese vocabulary. If in the context of practicing language skills, the lecturer uses the Japanese language to explain and ask questions, but if it appears that students have difficulty understanding, the lecturer explains in the Indonesian language. Similarly, if students feel that the question in the Japanese language does not fully express the intended meaning, they use the Indonesian language.

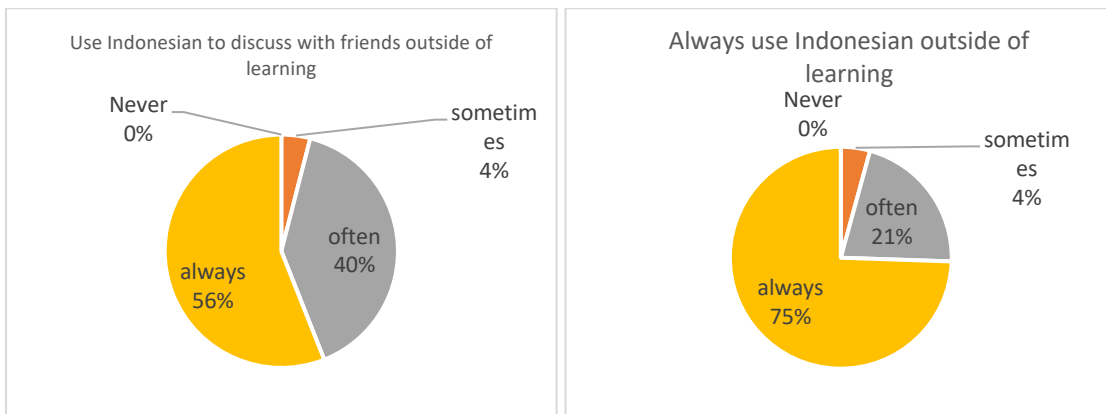


Fig. 4. Use Indonesian to discuss with friends outside of learning & always use Indonesian outside of learning

When discussing outside the classroom, students do not use the Indonesian language entirely. This is because the discussions are informal and only involve a few people. This statement is related to the next statement. Some students do not use the Indonesian language outside the classroom. Some students use the Japanese language or their respective regional languages. This is done to create a sense of familiarity and to put into practice the Japanese language skills they have acquired in class when discussing with friends.

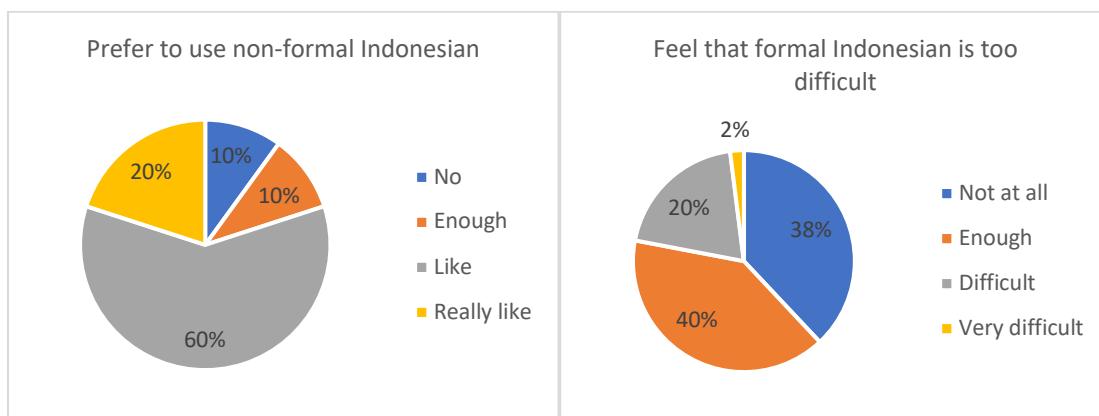


Fig. 5. Prefer to use non-formal Indonesian & feel that formal Indonesian is too difficult

The use of regional languages can also alleviate homesickness. It is widely known that students are dynamic individuals. They prefer to use the non-formal Indonesian language because it is more relaxed. The formal Indonesian language creates a sense of distance. When speaking with fellow students, informal language is the preferred choice. However, when communicating with lecturers, students will choose to use the formal Indonesian language.

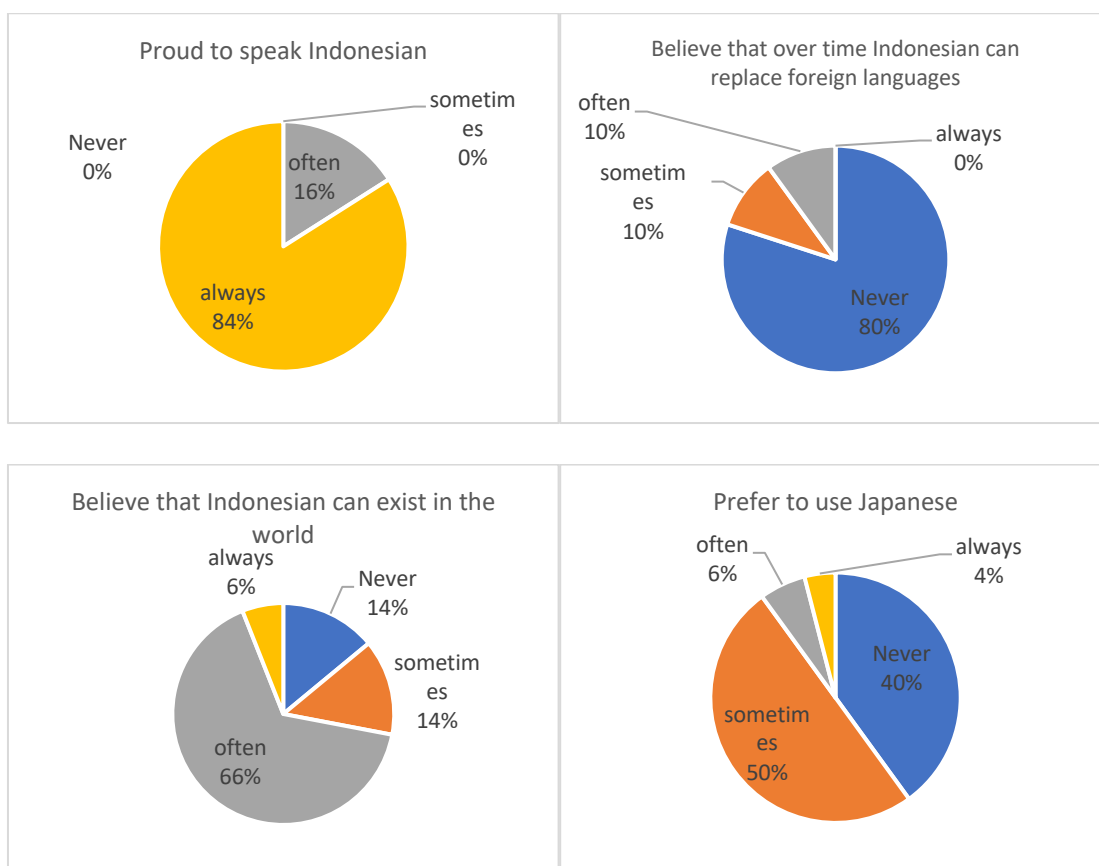


Fig. 6. Reasons for the use of student language

The data also indicates that students believe that learning Japanese does not replace using the Indonesian language in interactions. This means that despite learning Japanese, students still use Indonesian in their daily communication. Japanese is only used in specific contexts, such as when speaking with friends who also study Japanese.

Furthermore, most students (42 percent) never feel proud when speaking a foreign language, while 38 percent feel proud occasionally. This suggests that some students do not feel proud or pay much attention to their foreign language skills. However, some students feel proud when using a foreign language, possibly because they feel they have made progress in learning that language.

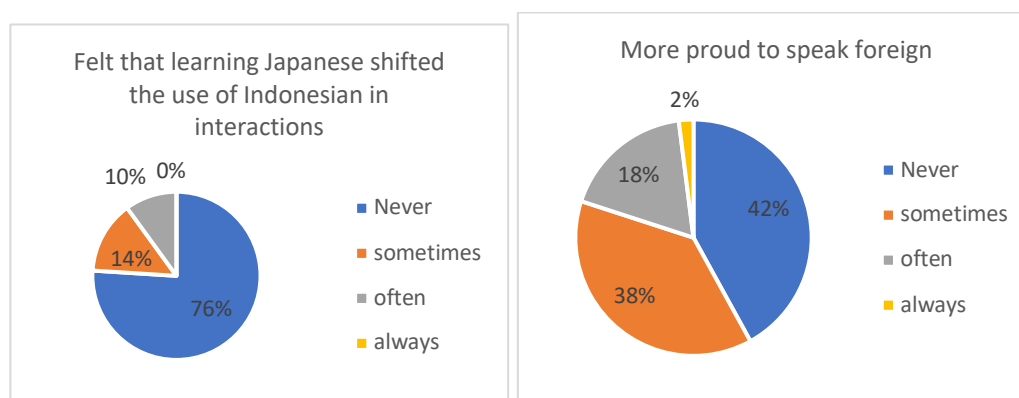


Fig. 7. Felt that learning Japanese shifted the use of Indonesian in interactions & more proud to speak foreign

The students believe that the Indonesian language will continue to exist despite the presence of foreign languages such as Korean, Mandarin, Japanese, French, and Spanish. This is because the number of Indonesian language users is significant. All Indonesian citizens, of course, use the Indonesian language in their daily communication. Although it is common for students to also study foreign languages, Indonesian remains the primary reference.

4. Conclusion

Based on the data analysis, it can be concluded that the students have a positive language attitude. This is evidenced by their excellent understanding of the rules of the Indonesian language. The same applies to the affective aspect. Despite learning foreign languages, students remain proud and use the Indonesian language. The factors that contribute to this language attitude tendency are as follows: 1) students are aware of the important role of the Indonesian language in education, 2) students feel more confident when speaking in Indonesian, and 3) students believe that the Indonesian language will continue to exist due to its large number of users.

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