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Active participation in synchronous online tutorials

EADTU – I.HE2022 conference

19-21 October 2022

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SYNCHRONOUS ONLINE LEARNING

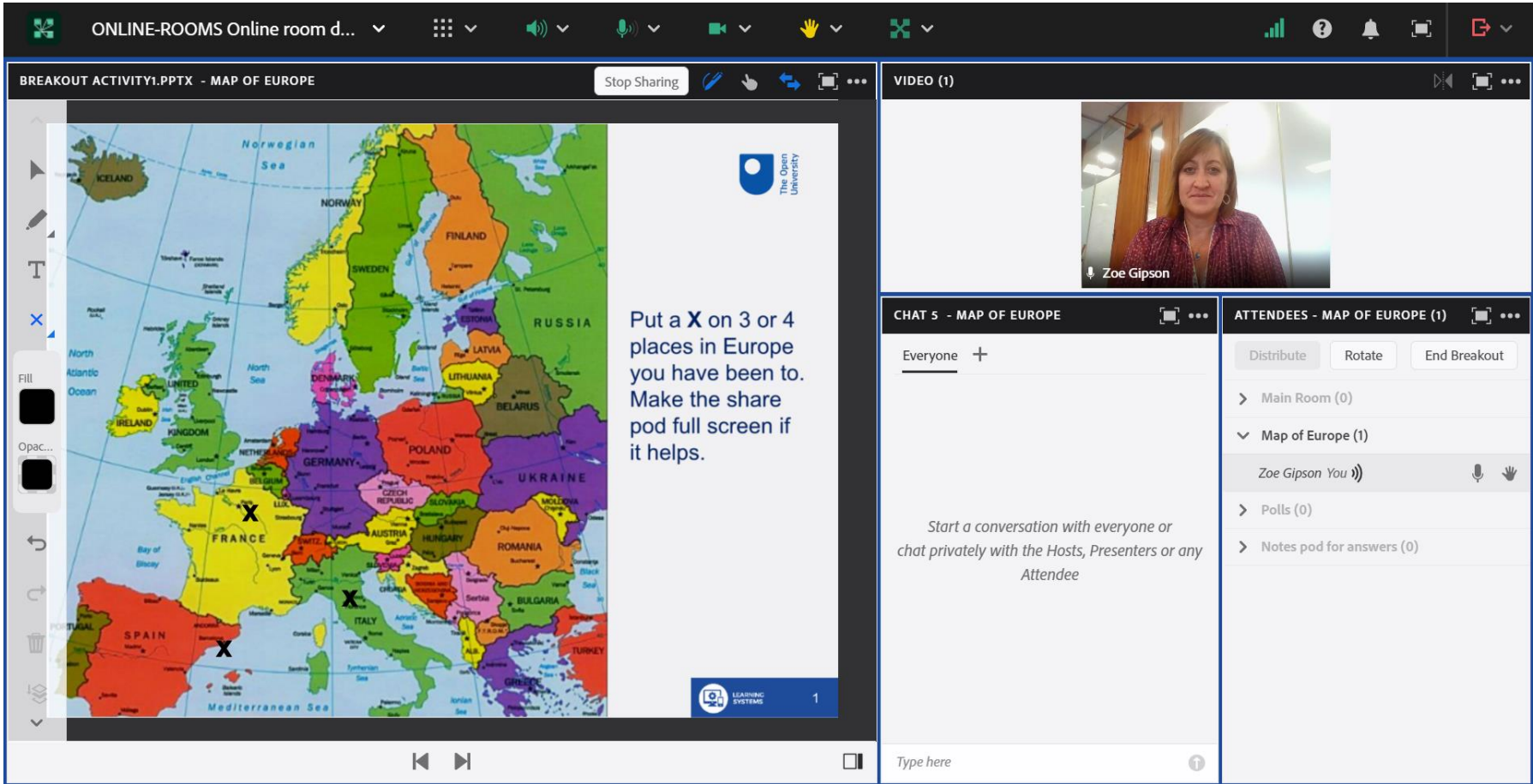
Online synchronous tutorials, using Adobe Connect, are an important part of the UK Open University's teaching.

However, there is often a lack of active participation by students in online tutorials.

Our project investigates the factors affecting students' active engagement in online tutorials.

- *What are the factors affecting student engagement in online tutorials?*
- *To what extent do the challenges of student engagement vary across faculties?*
- *How can these challenges be addressed?*

AN ONLINE ROOM in Adobe Connect



ONLINE-ROOMS Online room d... [Grid] [Audio] [Video] [Hand] [Share] [Close]

BREAKOUT ACTIVITY1.PPTX - MAP OF EUROPE [Stop Sharing] [Edit] [Hand] [Share] [More]

VIDEO (1) [Mute] [Close]

CHAT 5 - MAP OF EUROPE [More]

ATTENDEES - MAP OF EUROPE (1) [More]

Everyone +

Distribute Rotate End Breakout

> Main Room (0)

> Map of Europe (1)

Zoe Gipson You))) [Mute] [Hand]

> Polls (0)

> Notes pod for answers (0)

Type here [Info]

Put a X on 3 or 4 places in Europe you have been to. Make the share pod full screen if it helps.

LEARNING SYSTEMS 1

RESEARCH METHODS

Two large-scale surveys - of students and of tutors

- 620 students and 197 tutors responded
- 18 modules covering all four faculties
- Similar questions in each survey
- Quantitative and qualitative data

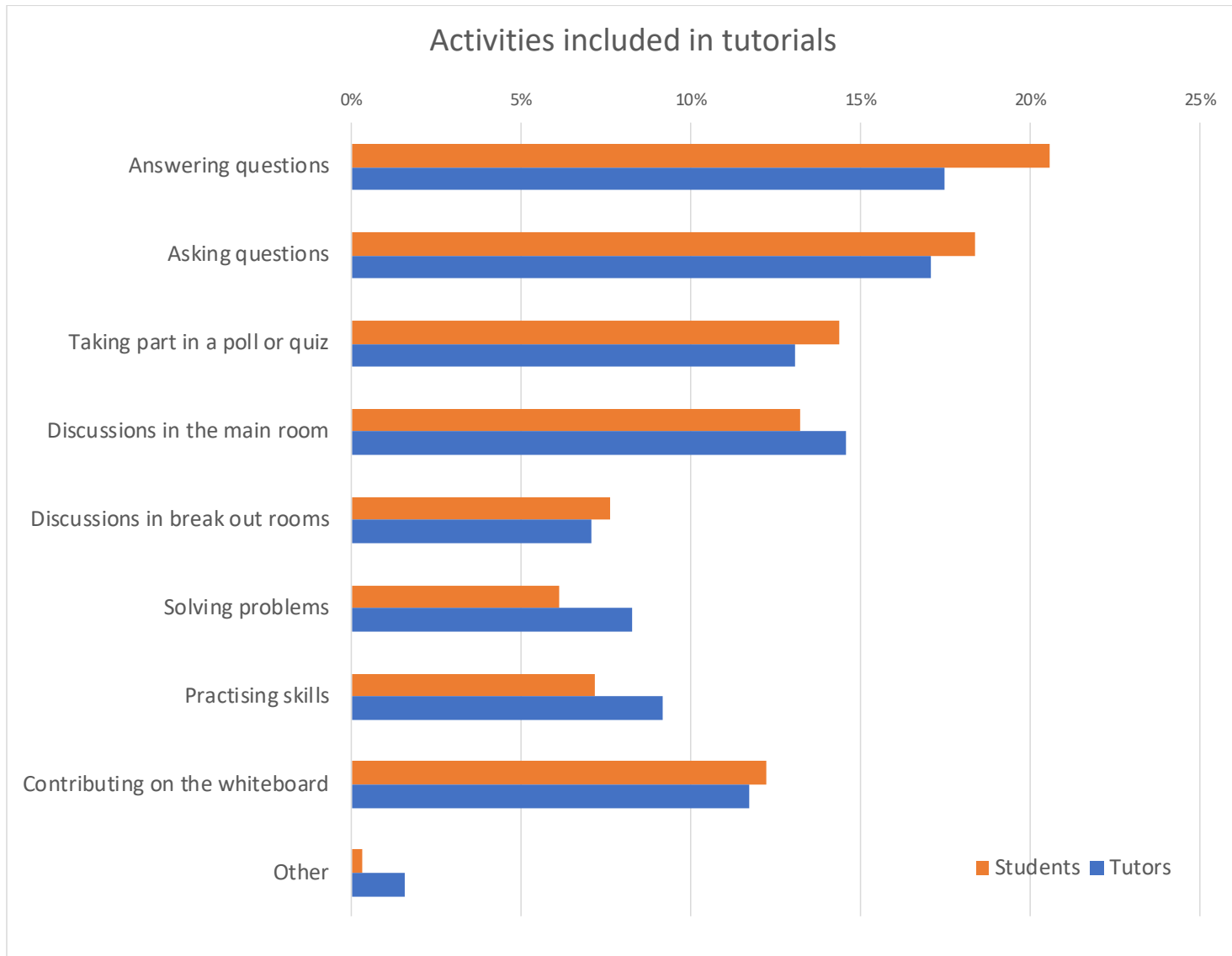
Focus groups - with students and tutors

- 14 online focus groups
- Separate groups for students and tutors
- Covered (separately) all four faculties

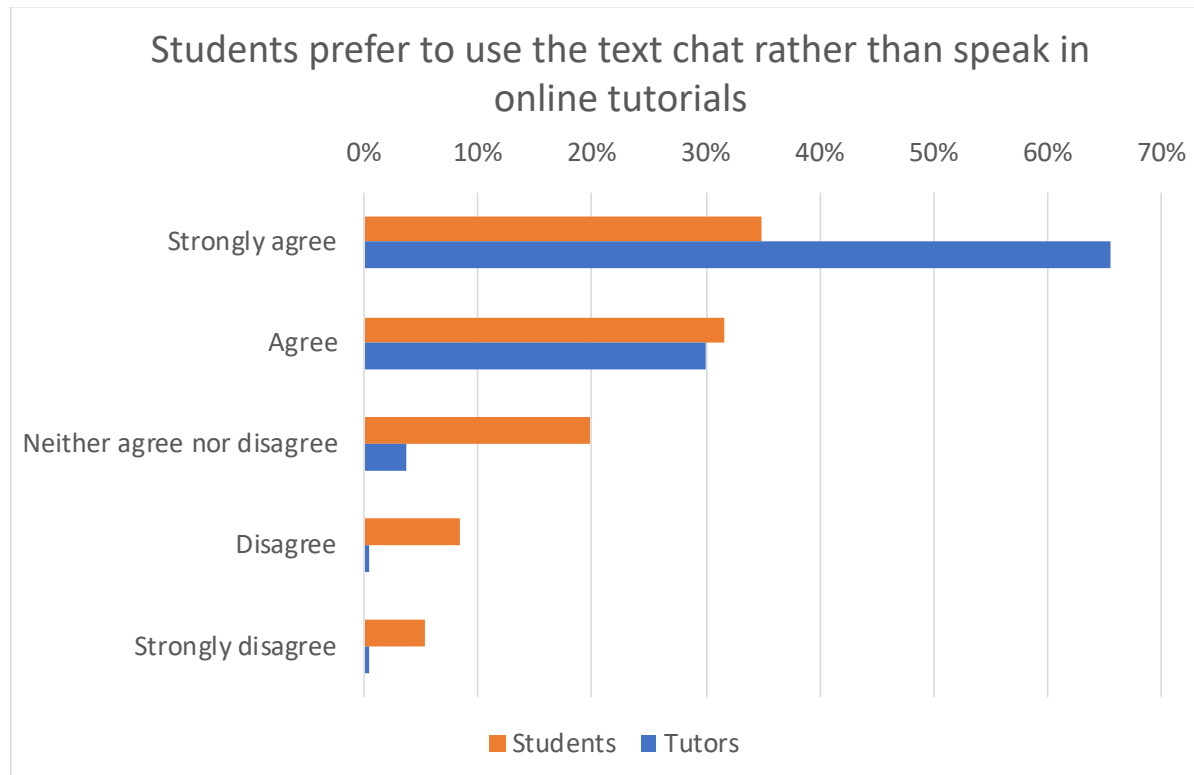
Questions about topics such as ...

- What sort of activities are included in online tutorials?
- Do students actively participate?
- If they don't, why might this be?

FINDINGS : Tools and activities



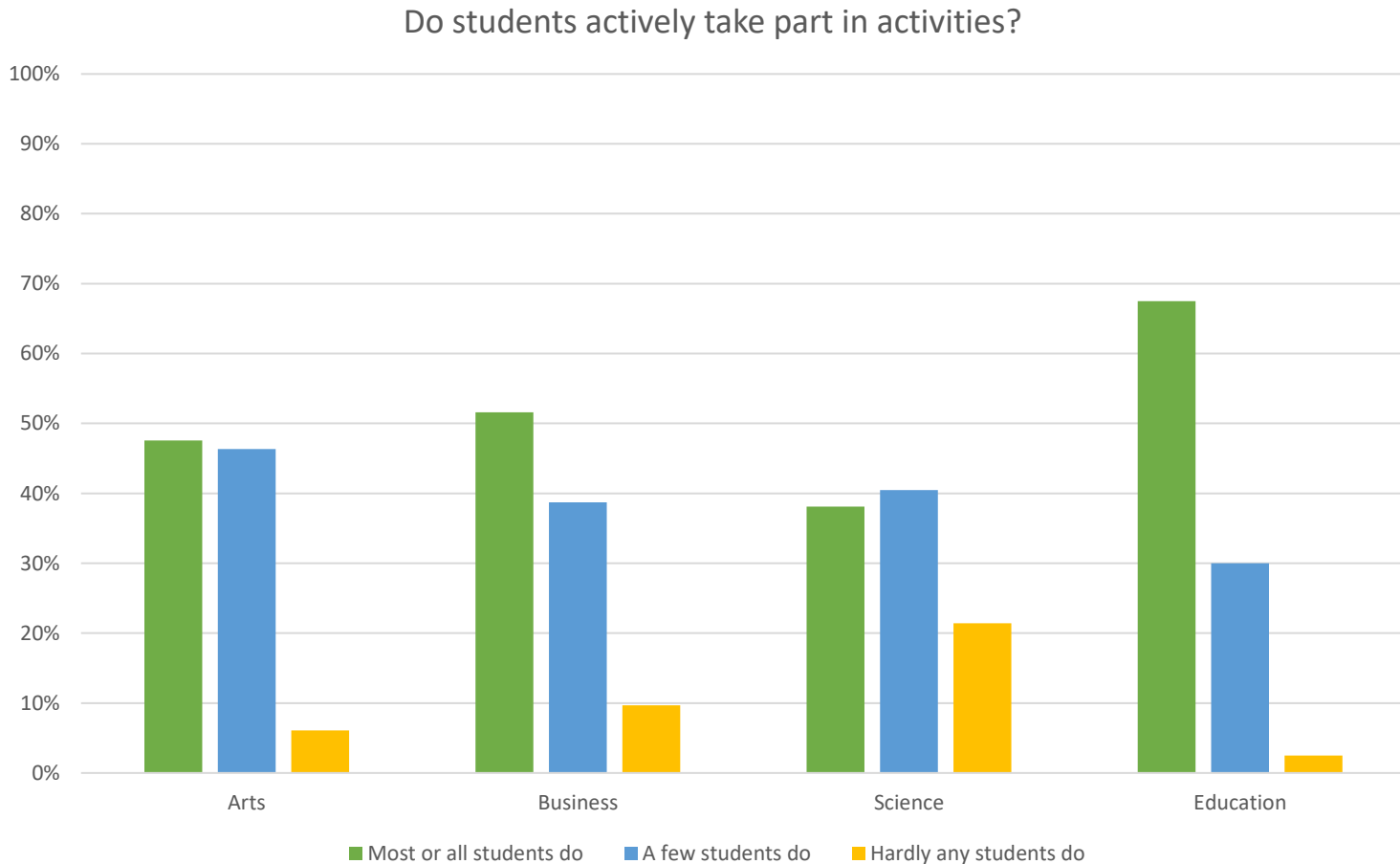
FINDINGS : Tools and features



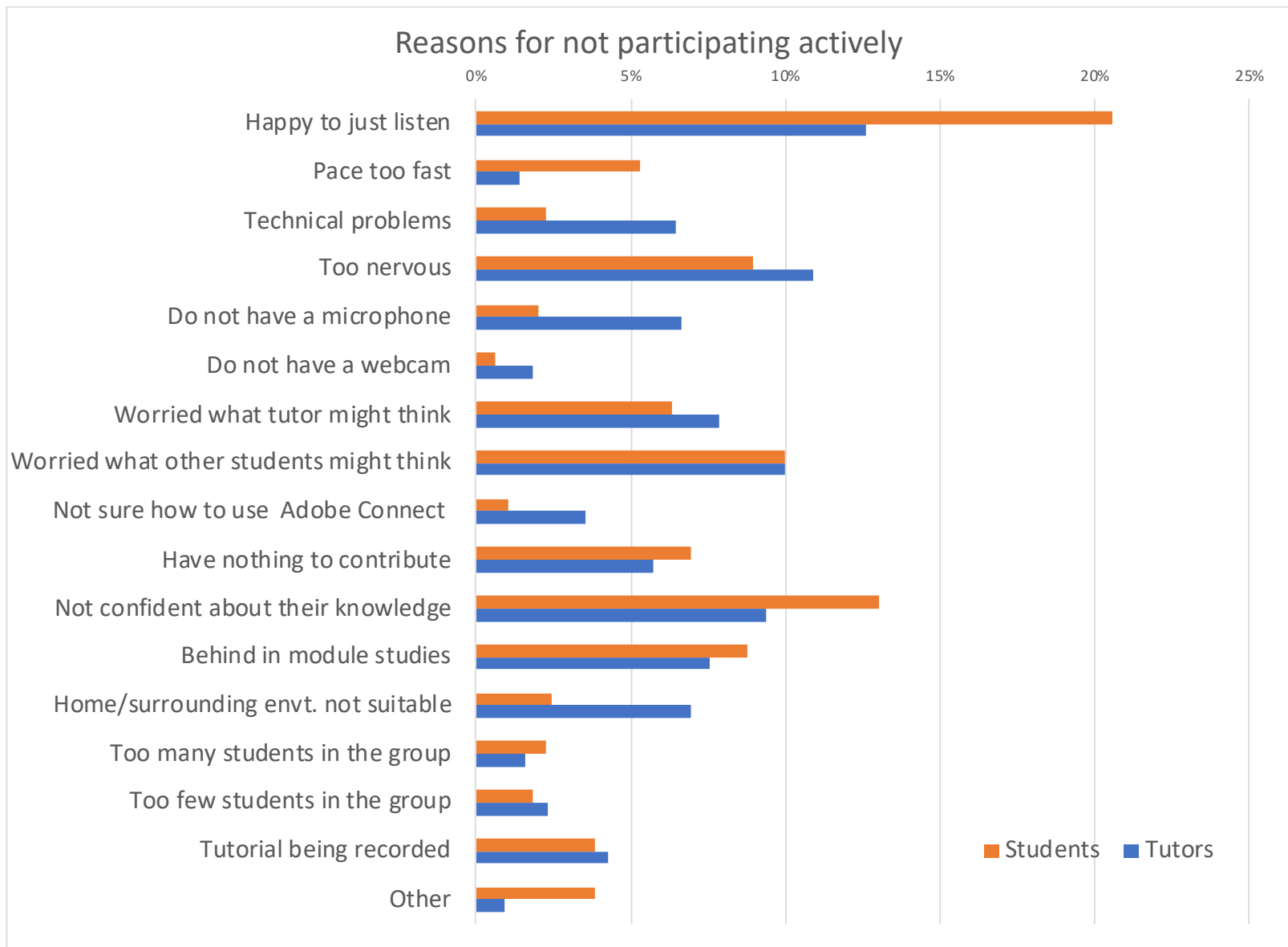
"I'm a nervous speaker however there's no pressure and often when I use the chat box my comment is addressed which is good confidence boost." [student]

FINDINGS : Practices across faculties

Tutor responses across faculties to ...



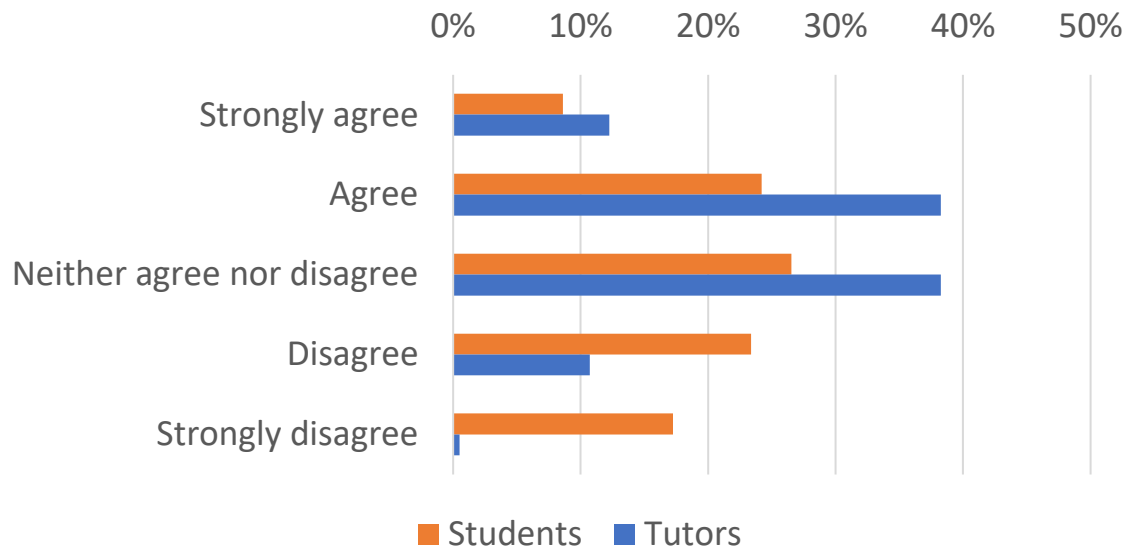
FINDINGS : Students' confidence with active participation



FINDINGS : Students' confidence with active participation

- Before a tutorial 50% of students looked forward it, 10% felt anxious

Students feel stressed in online tutorials when they are expected to actively take part



Around a third of students (32.7%) feel stressed when expected to take part and half of tutors (50.5%) thought that students felt stressed

'For me personally, it's confidence. I always feel as though I'm going to make myself look stupid with what I might want to say.' [student]

FINDINGS : Passive attendance versus active participation

- I am [students are] happy just to listen' - was the most popular choice for why students do not actively participate (selected by 20% of students and 13% of tutors)

"I'm more of a listener than a talker and I prefer to take in what everyone else contributes than to miss something thinking about what I might contribute -..." [student]

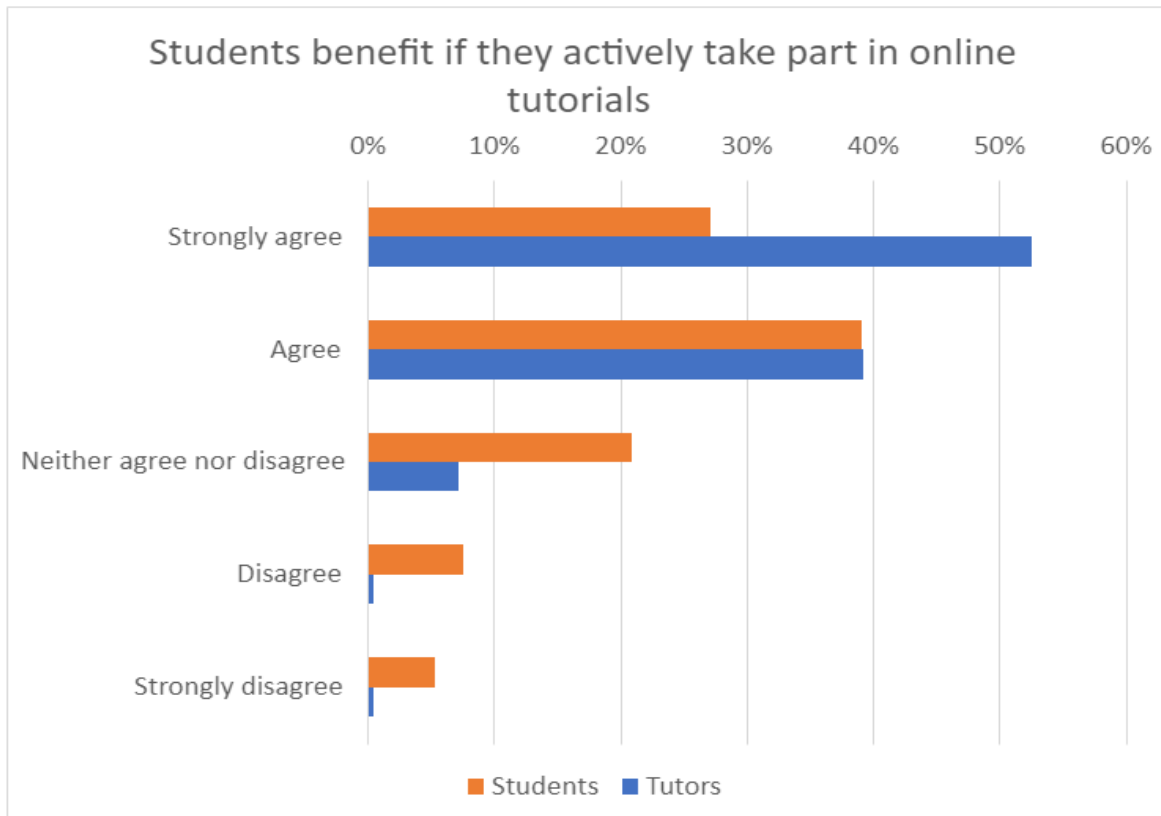
"Some people don't want to be interactive – so that should be ok. Some really enjoy it but there is no point in dragging everyone in if they don't want to."
[student]

"I say it's fine to listen without actively participating and that I don't put people on the spot." [tutor]

- Should we expect all students to actively participate?
- Are there still benefits to attending even without participating?
- Are there other underlying reasons for not actively participating?

FINDINGS : Passive attendance versus active participation

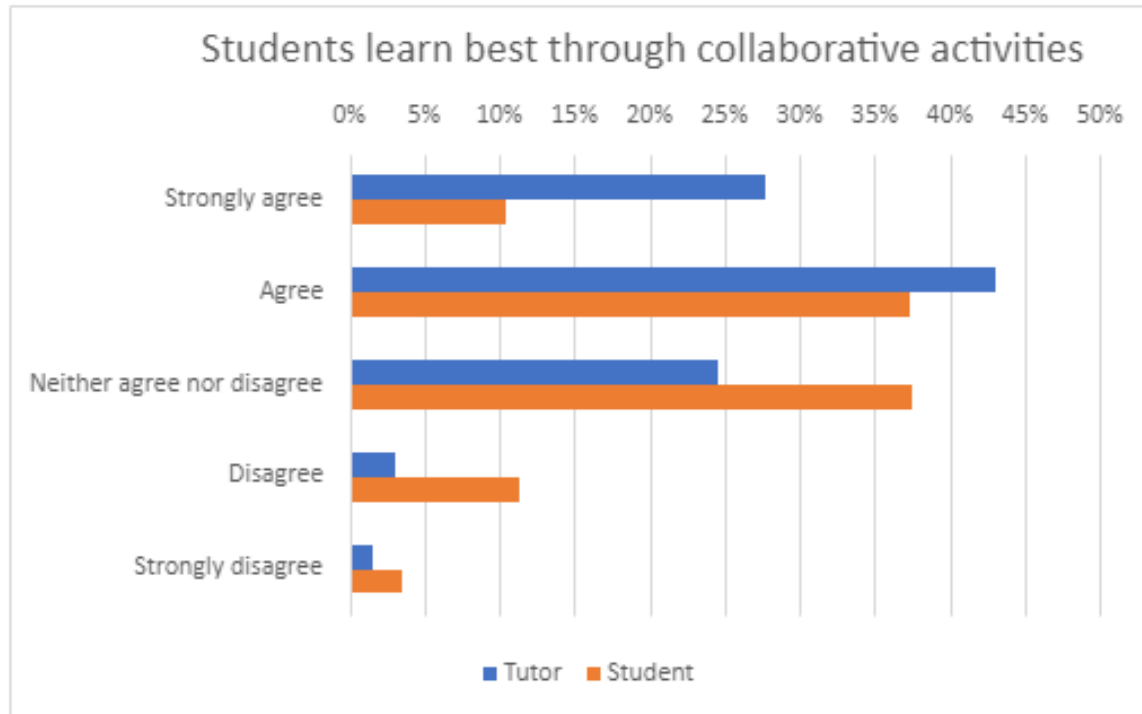
- How do we encourage students without causing stress?
- Perhaps by highlighting the benefits of taking part:



Two thirds of students (66%) and almost all tutors (92%) do feel that there is benefit in actively taking part in tutorials.

“More encouragement for anxious students to voice opinions” [student]

FINDINGS : Beliefs about learning



“it is important to participate actively, especially in terms of asking questions ... sometimes the other students ask questions that I haven't even thought about”
[student]

INTERPRETING THE DATA

Student participation in activities

- Many students enjoy participating and think it is beneficial
- But some students find it stressful

Reasons for not actively participating

- Students may not be confident in their knowledge or may be behind in the module
- They may be worried about what other students, or the tutor, might think of them
- Many are happy just to watch and listen, and they find benefits from this

Tutors' perspectives

- Tutors think interaction is helpful for students and for tutors
- Tutors understand the limitations of online interaction, and the benefits of anonymity

RECOMMENDATIONS

Encouraging participation and highlighting the value to students

- Students need to be persuaded of the value of active participation and then given the confidence to do it!
- Discussing with students the 'protocols' of effective synchronous communication (e.g. the value of visual and voice interaction; how not to dominate discussions).
- Activities are needed to build confidence in the online medium before they need to use it for academic purposes.
- Alternative ways of participating: ways to contribute anonymously (whiteboard), simple warm up activities (polls).

Development of teaching staff / tutors

- Educators need to allow for a wide range of preferences from students, rather than trying to 'force' students to participate.
- Friendly approach, materials in advance, no surprises!
- Supporting tutors in managing online rooms where a small number of students dominate discussions.
- Knowing what to avoid - e.g. breakout rooms can be difficult to get right; not asking students (repeatedly) to use the mic (or other features) - if they don't want to, they won't, and it creates frustration for students.

THANK YOU

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