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Active participation in synchronous online learning

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EDEN Annual Conference, Dublin , 18-20th June 2023



The Open
University

SYNCHRONOUS ONLINE LEARNING

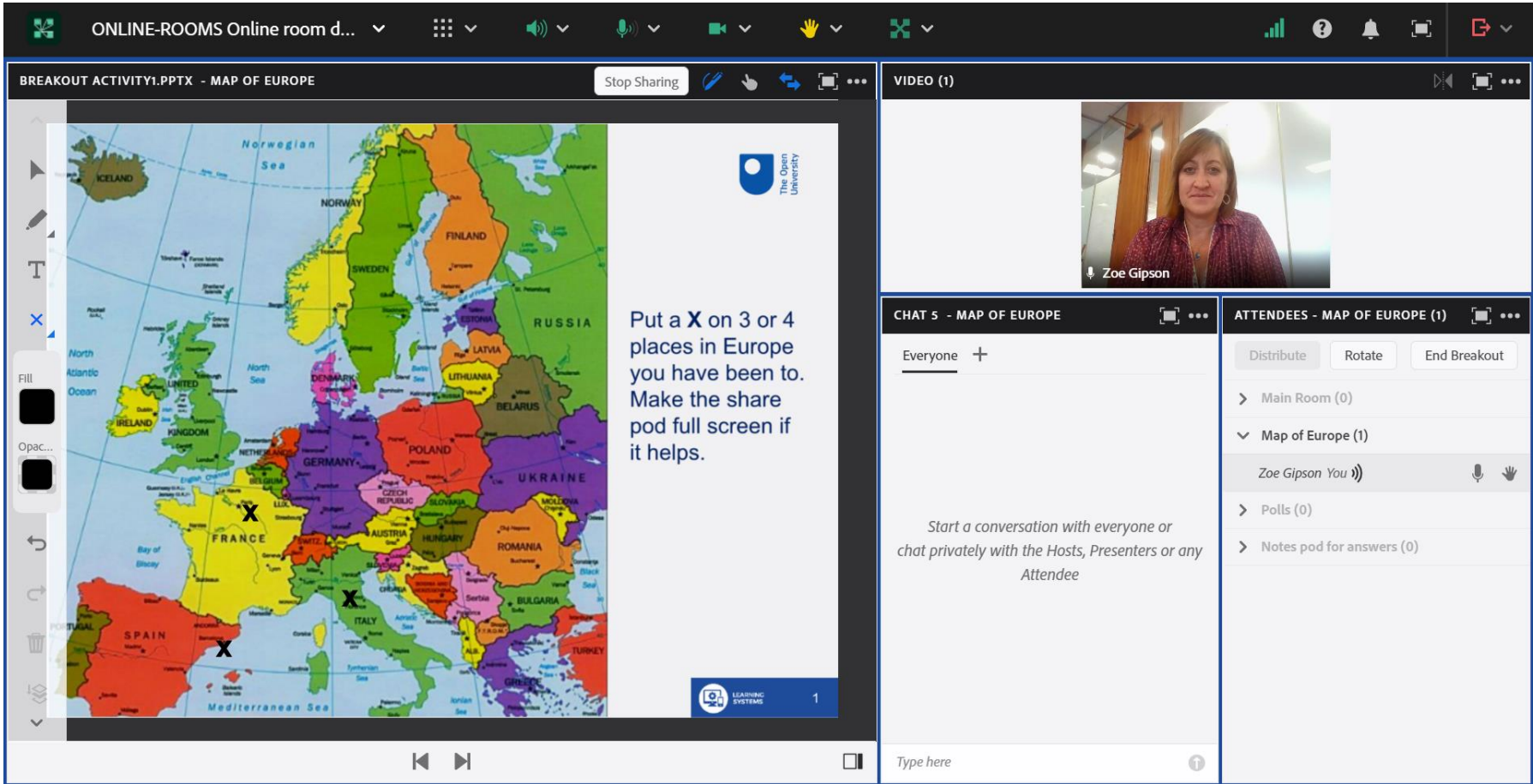
Online synchronous tutorials, led by a tutor and using Adobe Connect, are an important part of Open University distance learning.

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

Our project addressed the following research questions:

- *What are the factors affecting active student participation in online tutorials?*
- *To what extent do the challenges of active student participation 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] [Close]

VIDEO (1) [Mute] [Close]

CHAT 5 - MAP OF EUROPE [Close]

ATTENDEES - MAP OF EUROPE (1) [Close]

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

Zoe Gipson

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]

RESEARCH METHODS

Two large-scale surveys - of students and of tutors

- Included 18 modules covering all four faculties of the OU
- Similar questions in both surveys
- 620 students responded (8% response rate)
- 197 tutors responded (22% response rate)
- Quantitative and qualitative data

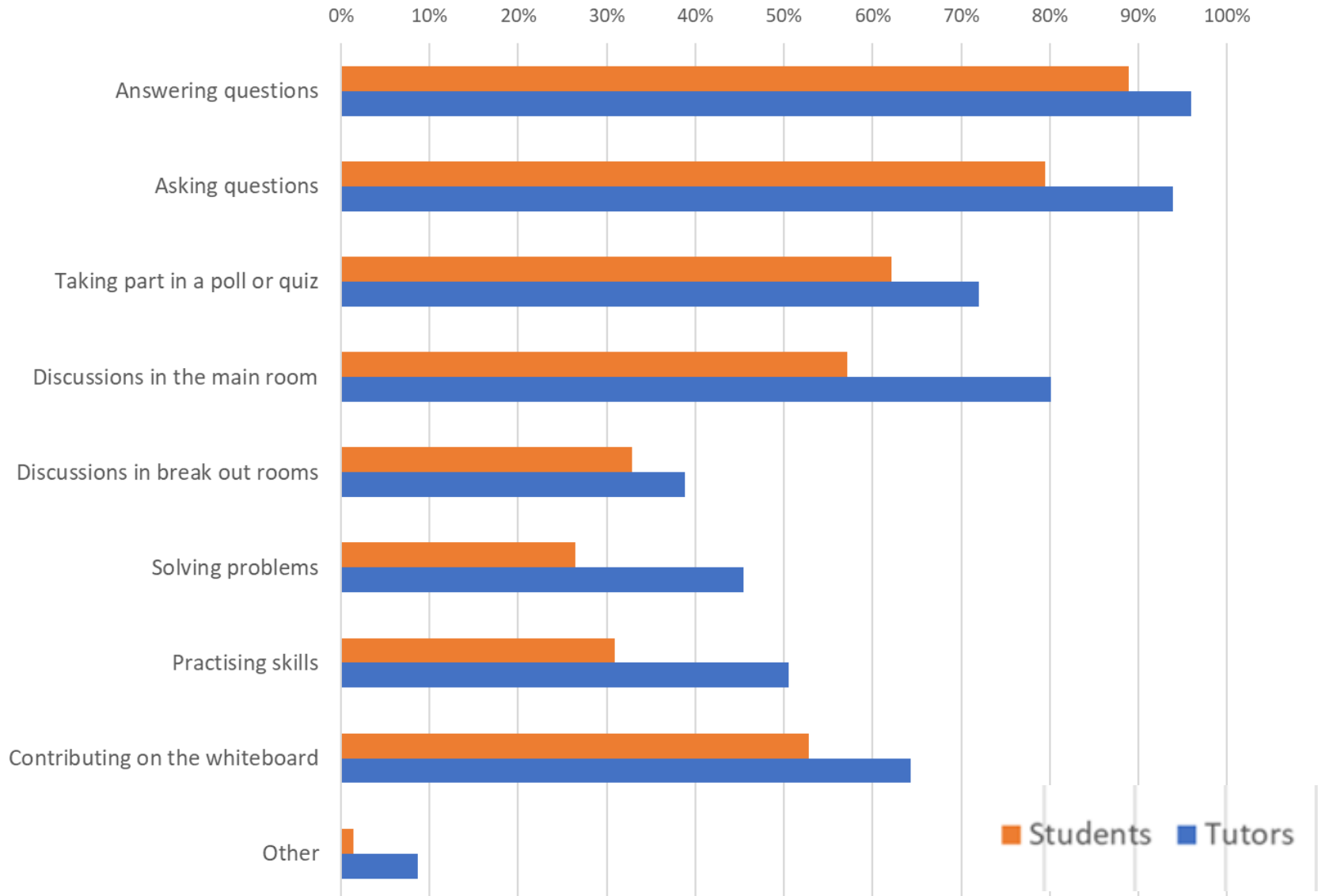
Focus groups - with students and with tutors

- 14 online focus groups
- Covered (separately) all four faculties

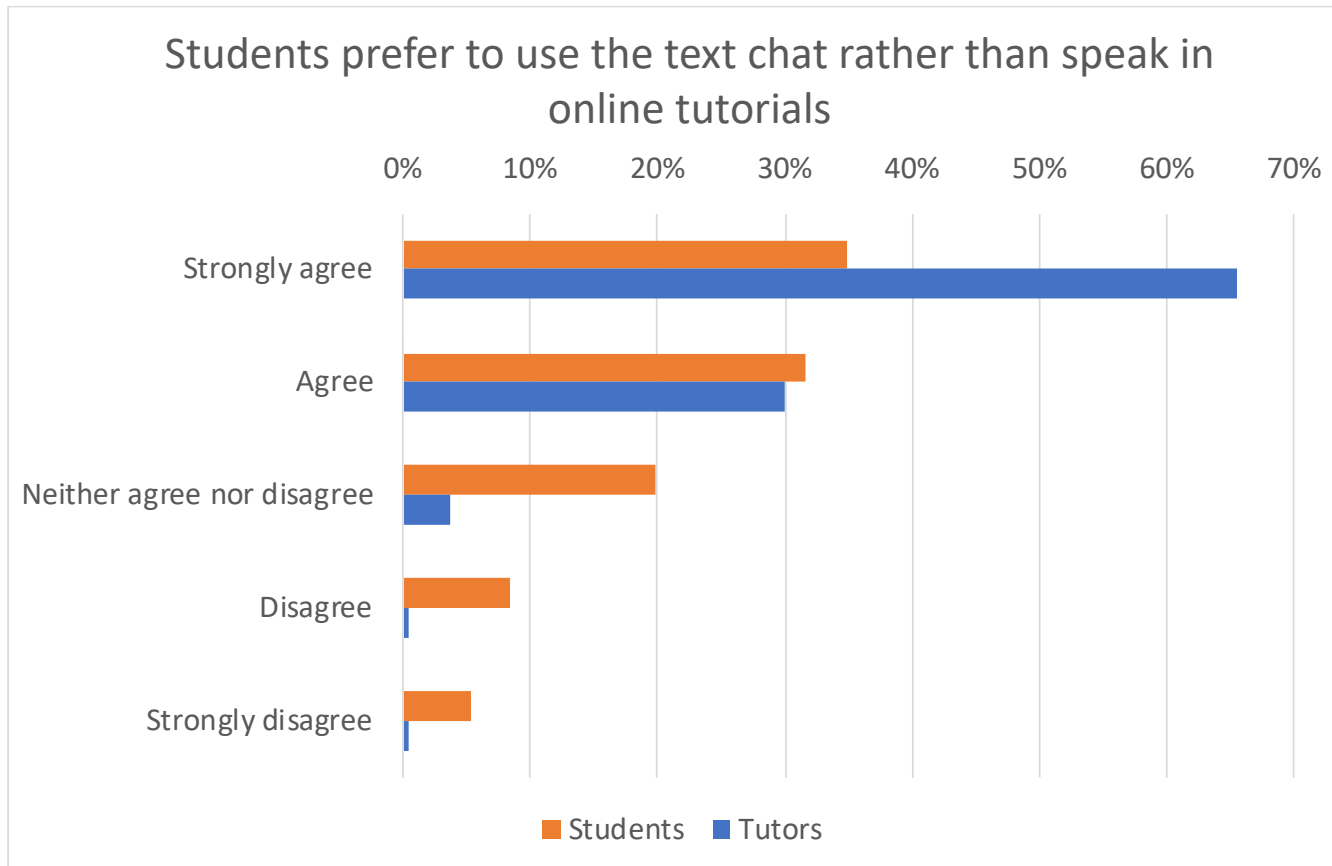
Questions (in focus groups and surveys) about topics such as ...

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

FINDINGS : Activities in online tutorials



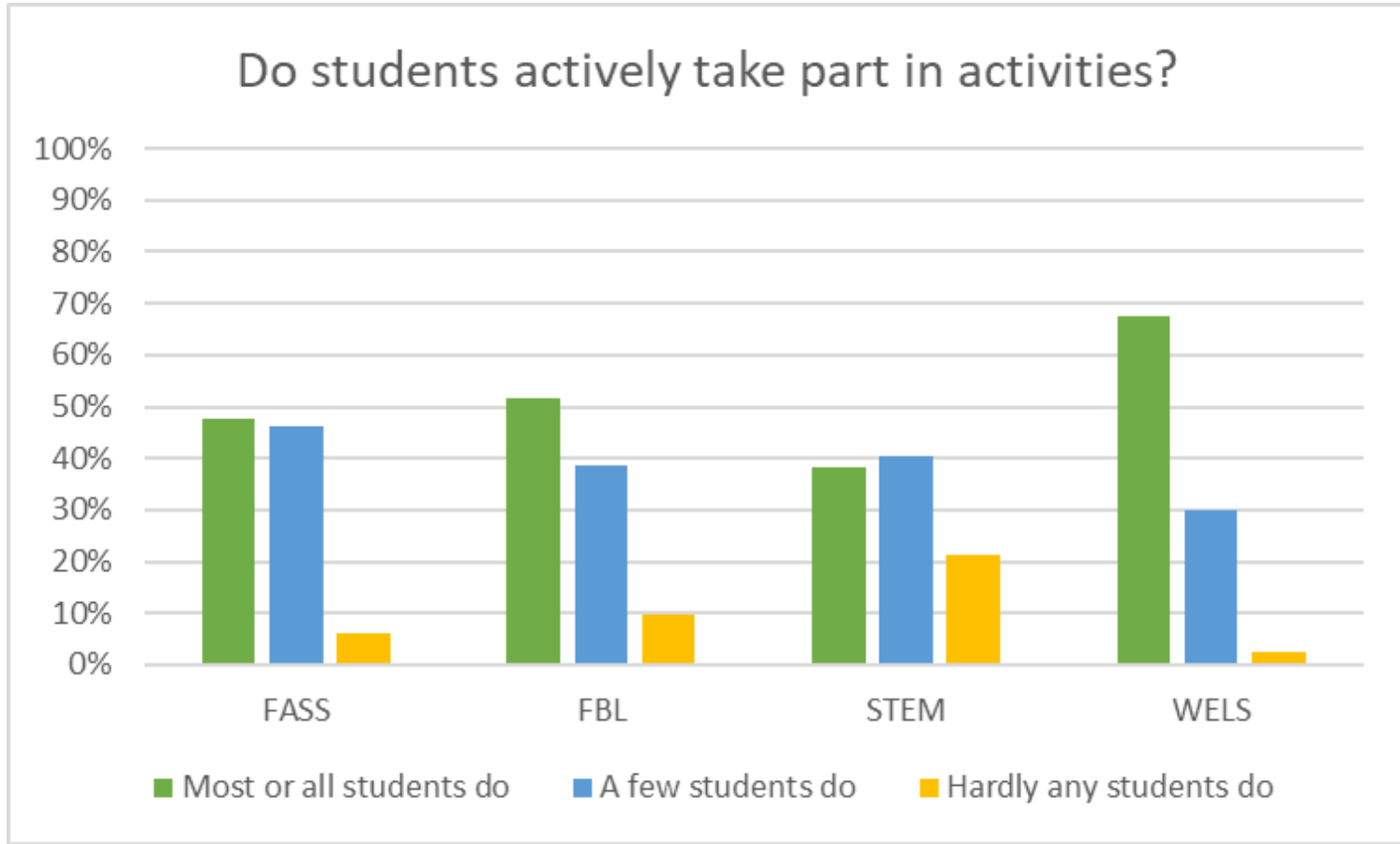
FINDINGS : Text chat versus speaking



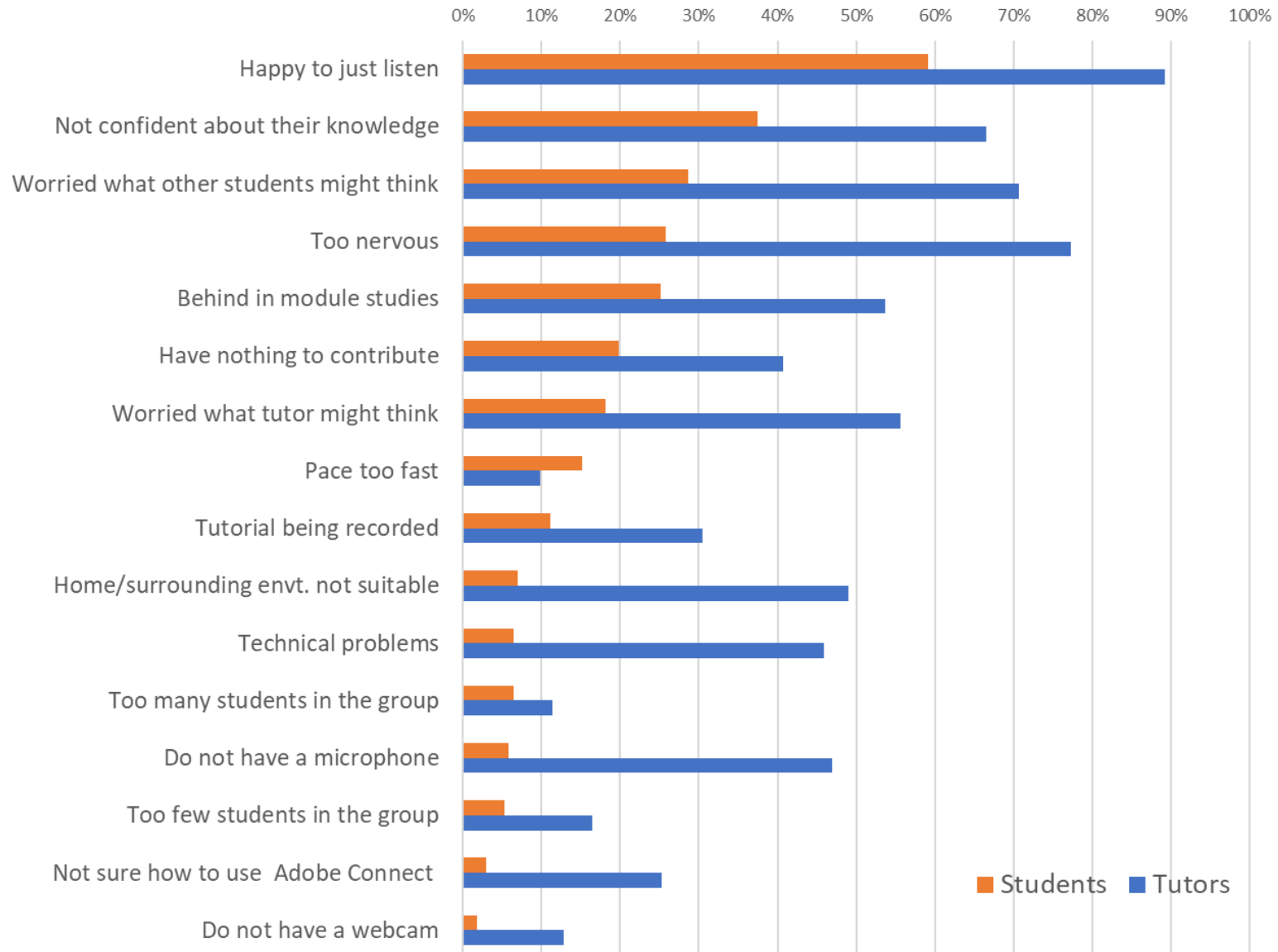
[from a student] "I'm not super comfortable speaking to strangers by any stretch of the imagination however I realise its a good skill to learn"

FINDINGS : Engagement across faculties

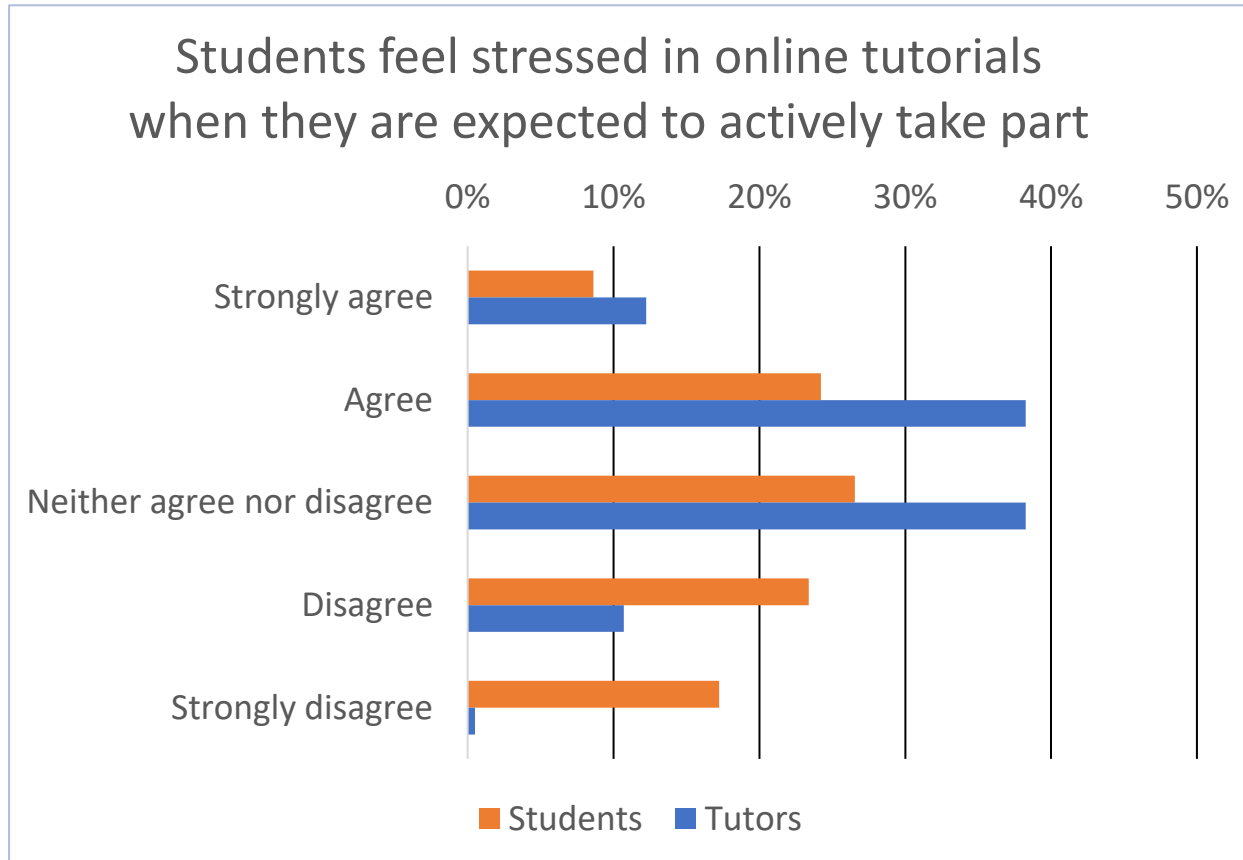
Tutor responses across faculties to ...



FINDINGS : Reasons for not participating actively



FINDINGS : Lack of confidence about active participation



[from a student] 'nobody wants to put an opinion forward and to to be perceived as to be wrong, or that it's not the popular opinion'

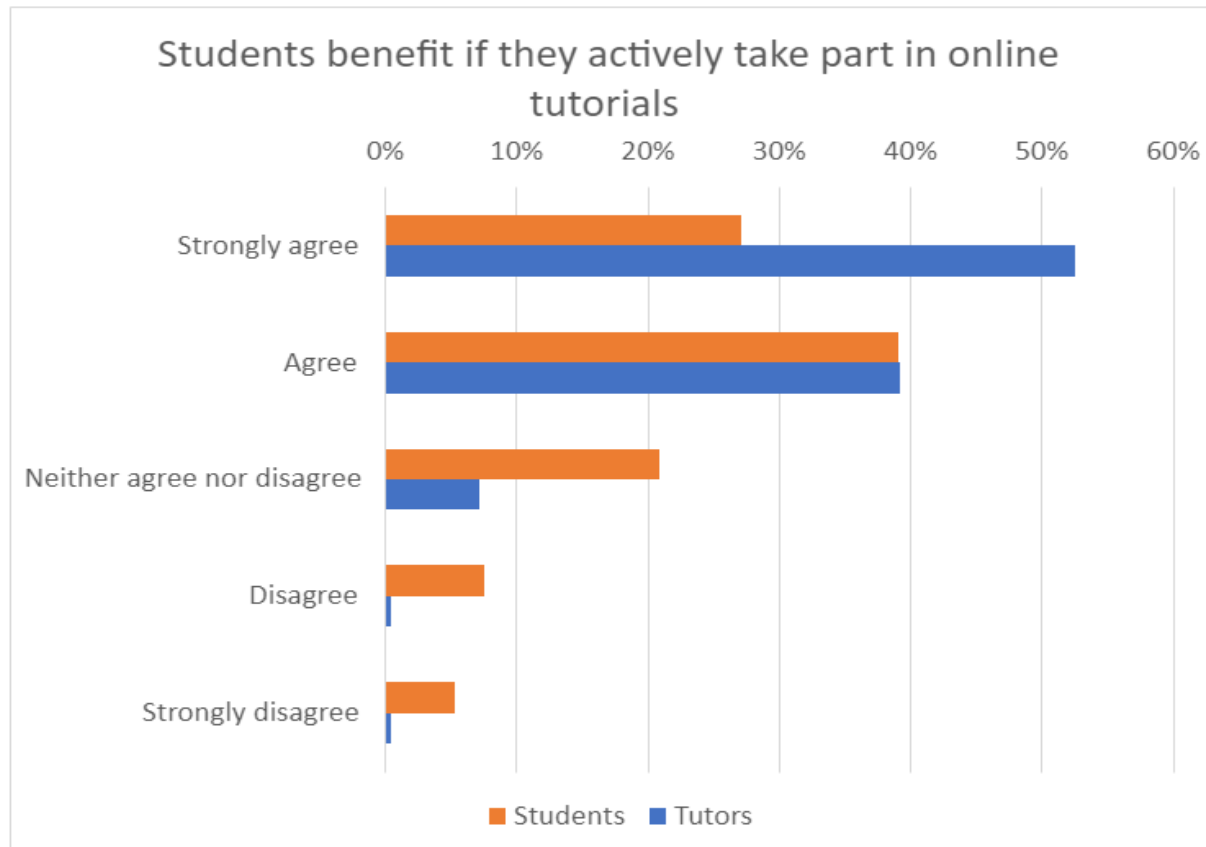
FINDINGS : Passive attendance versus active participation

[From a student] “I always attend the tutorials. I'm not a chatty person in those tutorials. I have to say I'm more of a listener and a note taker.”

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

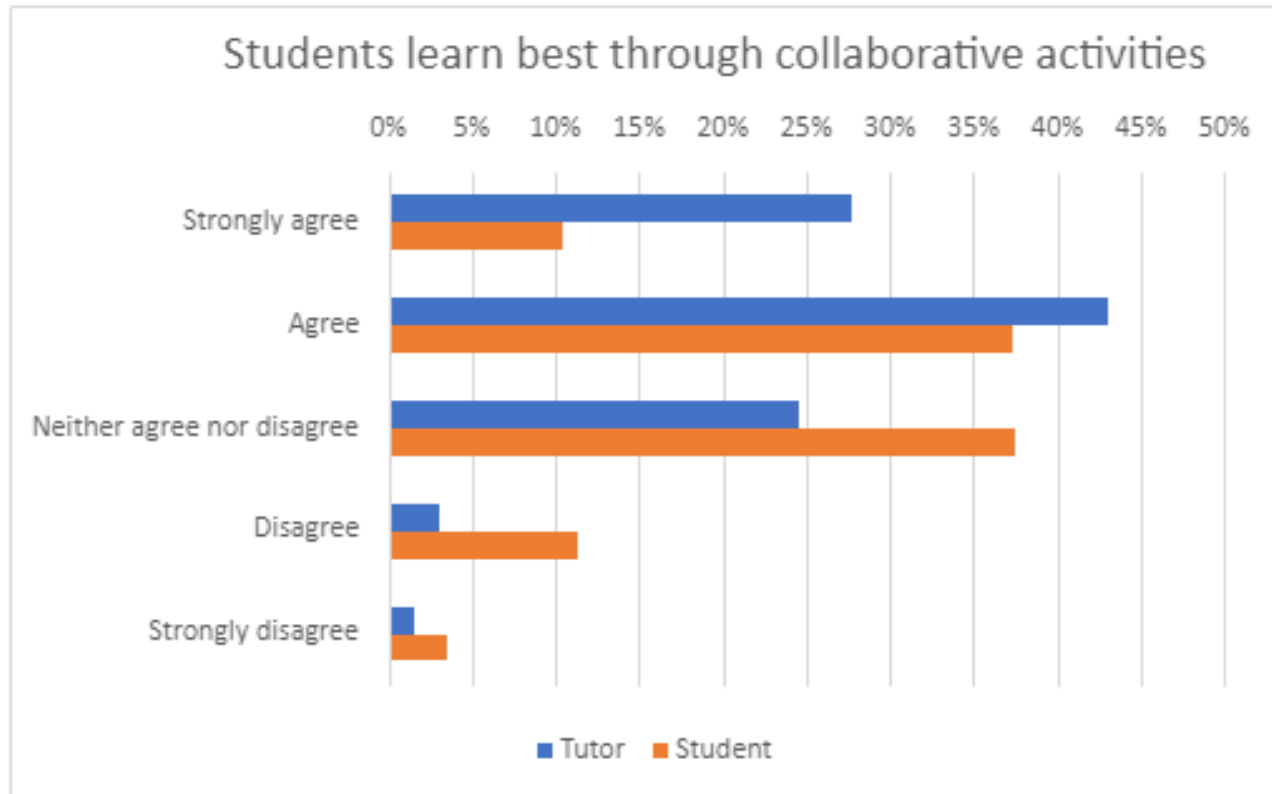
- Should we expect all students to actively participate?
- Are there benefits to attending even without participating?

FINDINGS : Benefits of active participation



[From a student] "I think it's important to take part one way or another, either to speak or to use the chat box."

FINDINGS : Beliefs about learning



[From a student] “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”

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.

Tutors' perspectives

- Tutors think interaction is helpful for students and for tutors.
- Tutors understand the limitations of online interaction, and the benefits to students of anonymous participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Encourage participation and highlight value to students

- Persuade students that active participation is valuable and give them confidence to do it!
- Discuss the 'protocols' of effective synchronous communication (e.g. value of webcam & voice; how not to dominate discussions).
- Activities to build confidence in online platform before academic use.
- Offer other ways of participating: e.g. anonymous whiteboard, polls

Development of teaching staff / tutors

- Educators should allow for student preferences, not 'force' students to participate.
- Friendly approach, materials in advance, no surprises!
- How to manage online rooms where a small number of students dominate.
- Know what to avoid - e.g. breakout rooms are difficult; don't insist on using mic

THANK YOU

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