Undergraduate Students Language Survey
20 October 2017

Background

The Language Committee of Council requested that the undergraduate students language survey conducted in March 2017 be repeated in September 2017 with more specific questions relating to the three language options for teaching and learning as specified in the Language Policy (see Addendum A for the September 2017 survey). **E-mail and sms invitations** to complete an online survey were sent out to **all undergraduate students** (19 268)[1] on **18-19 September 2017** to solicit their feedback on the implementation of the new Stellenbosch University Language Policy in the learning, living, co-curricular and administrative environments. The e-mail invitation read as follows:

> *Beste student*
> *Ons wil graag weet hoe jy die gebruik van taal binne en buite klas ervaar. Die vraelys is anoniem en die resultate sal slegs in opgesomde formaat beskikbaar gestel word. Voltooi asb. die vraelys teen **26 September 2017, 17h00.***
> *Let wel: Voltooi asseblief hierdie opname op grond van jou ervaring van die implementering van die nuwe Taalbeleid gedurende hierdie huidige semester (tweede semester van 2017).*

> *Dear student*
> *We would like know how you experience the use of language inside and outside class. The questionnaire is anonymous and the results will only be made available in aggregated format. Please complete the questionnaire by **26 September 2017, 17h00**.*
> *Note: Please complete this survey based on your experience of the implementation of the new Language Policy during this current semester (second semester of 2017).*

An email reminder was sent to all students who had not responded on 25 September and the deadline of the survey was extended to **2 October 2017** to complete the survey. A total of **2521 responses** were received, which amounts to a **response rate of 13%. The response rate of the first semester survey was 24%.**

The survey consisted of three sections:

- Section A: Personal information

- Section B: Language in the learning environment

- Section C: Language in the living, co-curricular and administrative environments. This section included questions related to the reporting and resolution of students' dissatisfaction with language-related issues in the learning, living, co-curricular and administrative environments

The main objective of the survey was to solicit undergraduate students' feedback about their perceptions of the implementation of the 2016 Language Policy during the second semester of 2017, in order to:

- track changes in the implementation of the Language Policy between the first and second semester;
- address any issues that students might have with the 2017 implementation of the Language Policy;
- provide feedback to the faculties;
- provide feedback to the Language Committee of Council about the implementation of the new Language Policy; and
- inform research about the implementation of the Language Policy.

This report contains a summary of the results organised according to the sections of the survey, compared where possible, with the results received in the March 2017 survey. Separate reports with the feedback disaggregated according to faculty will be prepared for each faculty.

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[1] Students from Elsenburg were excluded because the Language Policy does not apply to them.

Section A: Students' personal information

Q 1: Your faculty

As Figure 1 shows, the majority of the respondents in the both surveys, were from the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences followed by the Faculty of Engineering.
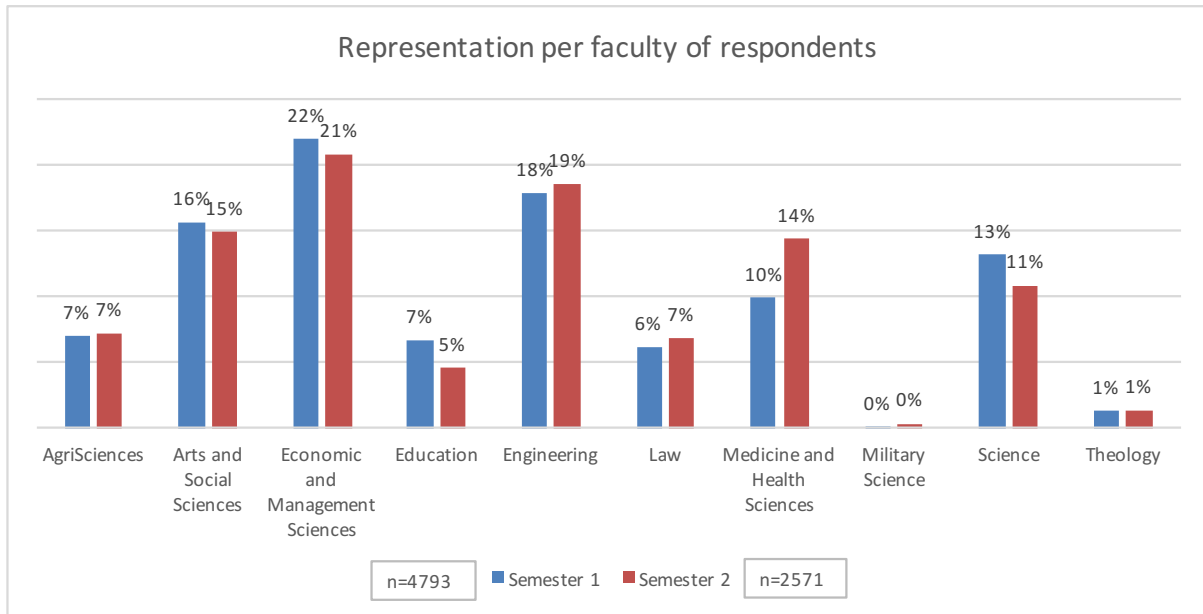

Figure 1: Response rate per faculty

When considering the percentage of respondents per faculty, the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences was the best represented with 42% of the faculty's undergraduate respondents completing the questionnaire, with the response rates of the other faculties between 2% and 23%, as Figure 2 shows.
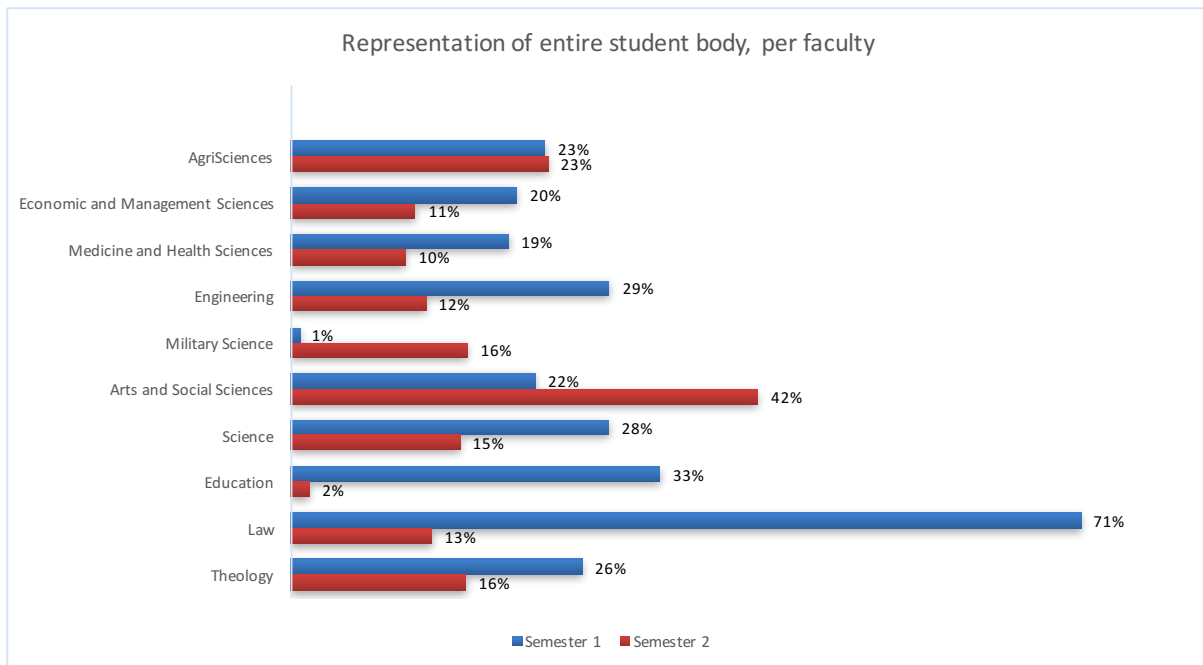

Figure 2: Response rate per faculty

Q2: Your year group

Figure 3 shows that the greatest number of respondents in the first semester survey were first years, followed by non-final year and final-year students. For the second semester, it was non-final year, first year and then final year.
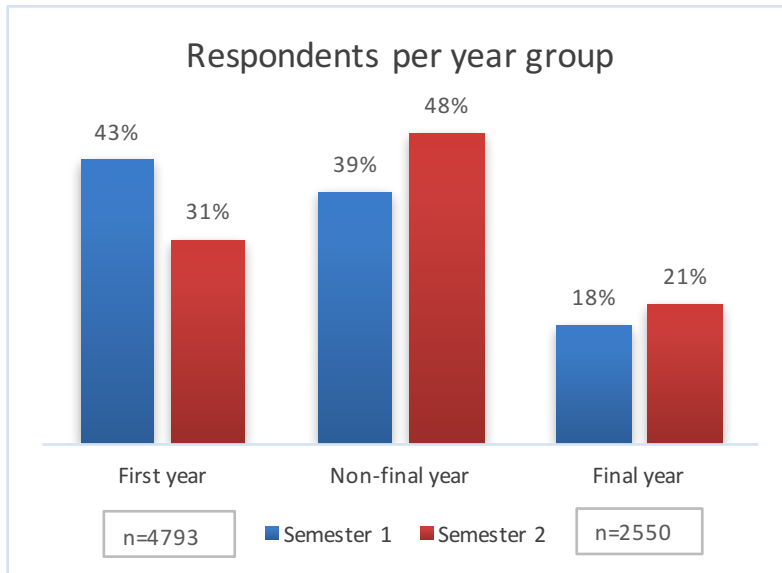

Figure 3: Respondents per year group

Q3: What is your home language?

The majority of the respondents in the second semester survey indicated that their home language was Afrikaans (51%), followed by English (37%). The Afrikaans respondents were therefore three percentage points higher than in the first semester.
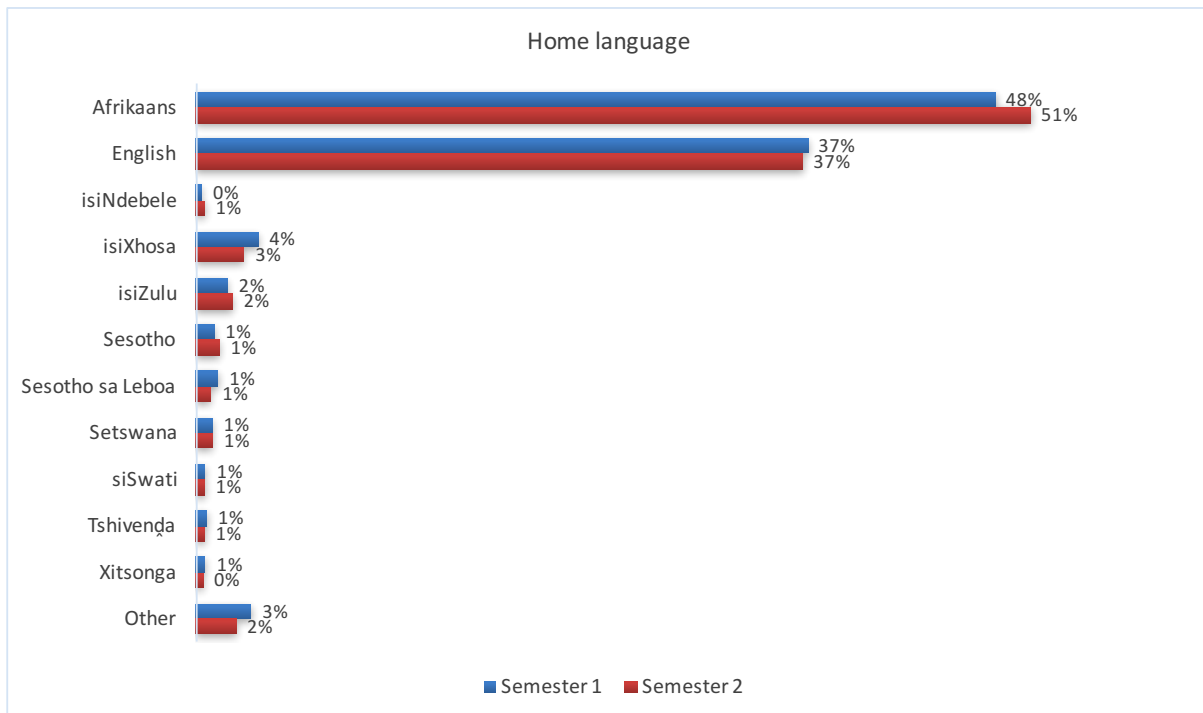

Figure 4: Response rate per home language (n=2 516)

Q4: What is your language of preference for learning with regard to lectures, tutorials and learning materials?

Despite the higher number of Afrikaans respondents, there was a preference for English lectures (63%), tutorials (61%) and learning material (68%) with very little variance between the first and second semester surveys.
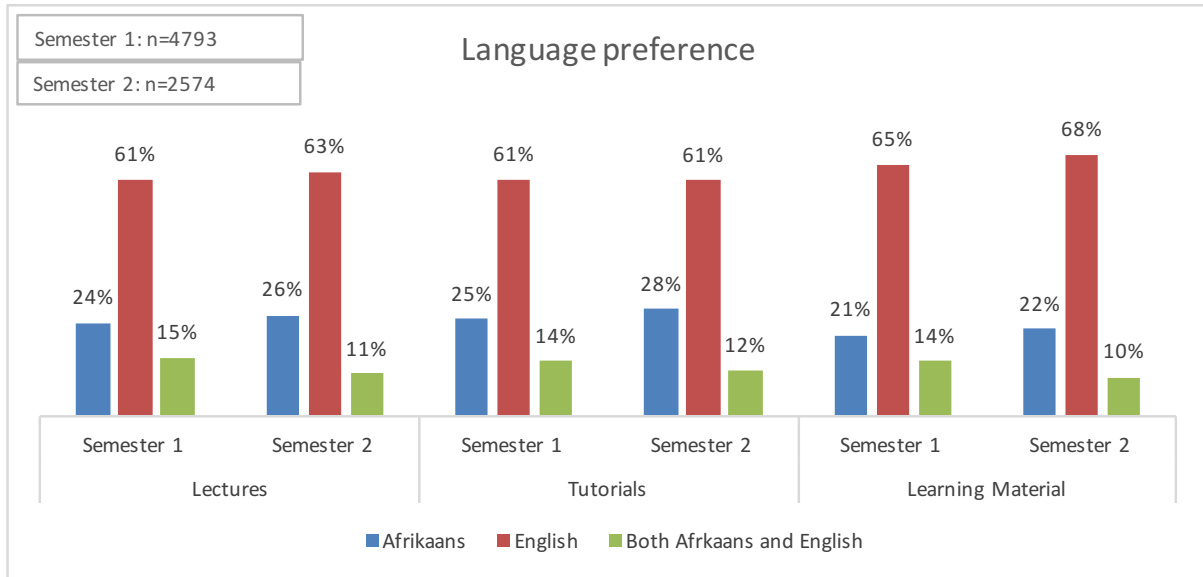

Figure 5: Response rate for language of preference

If the feedback pertaining to lectures in Figure 5 is disaggregated into the home language groups Afrikaans, English and Other, half of the Afrikaans home language respondents preferred lectures in Afrikaans, followed by lectures in English only, with lectures in both Afrikaans and English the least preferred option (17%), as may be seen in Figure 6. This is a slight shift from the feedback received in the first semester survey. Nearly all the English and Other home language students preferred only English for lectures.
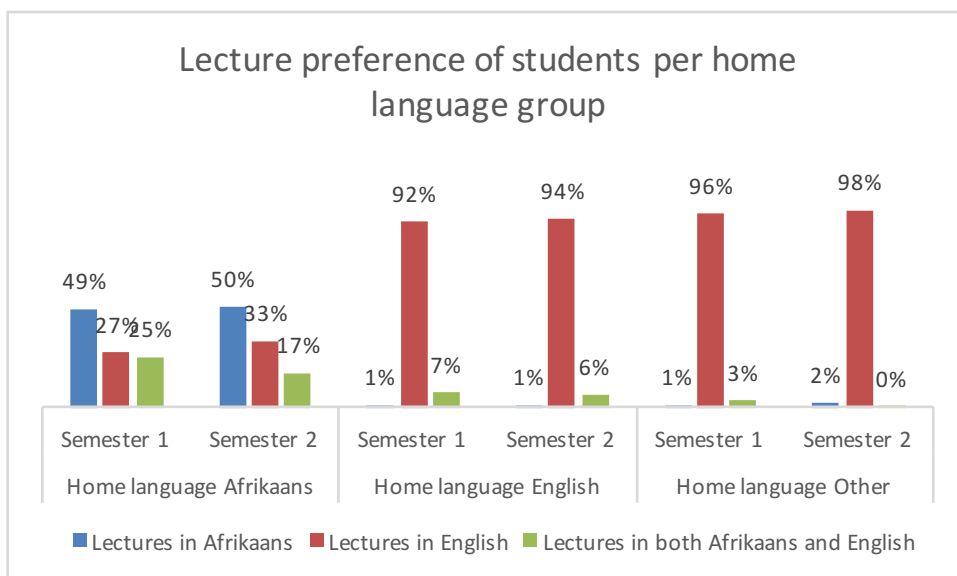

Figure 6: Lecture language preference of students per home language group

A similar shift in the Afrikaans home language group was discernible with regard to tutorials/practicals/clinical sessions and learning material. What is interesting to note, is that here has been a change from the first semester to the second semester response, where more Afrikaans home language students prefer tutorials and learning material in English only, rather than in both Afrikaans

and English (Figure 7). As with lectures, there were no discernible shifts in the English and Other home language groups.
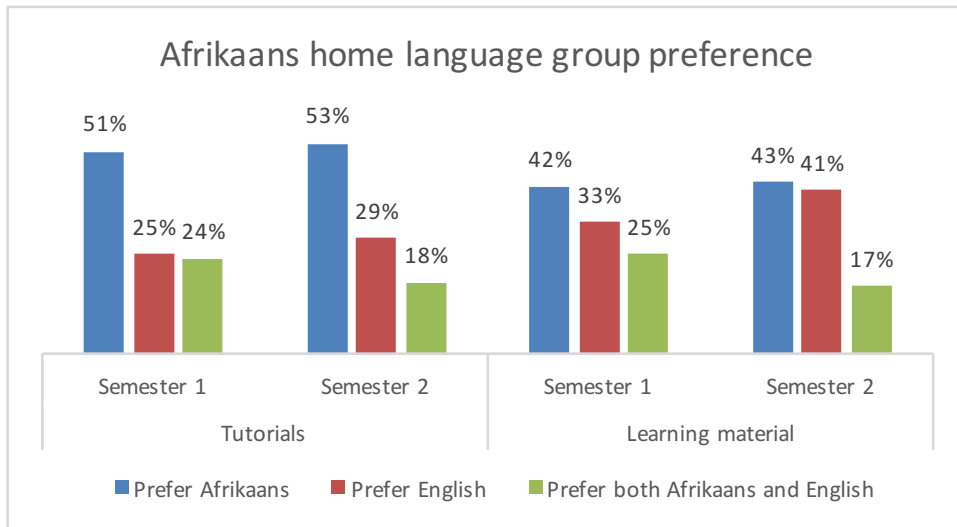
Afrikaans home language group preference

Figure 7: Afrikaans home language students: Language preference for Tutorials and Learning material

Q5: Have your lectures been available in your language of preference?

The majority of the respondents indicated they could attend their lectures in their language of preference (83%).
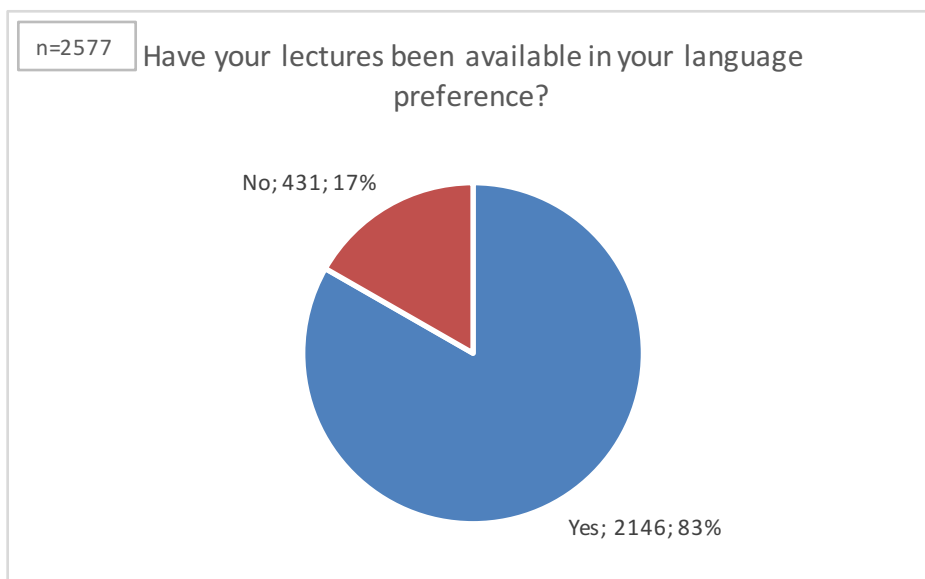
Figure 8: Availability of lectures in language of preference

If the feedback pertaining to availability of lectures in the students' language of preference in Figure 8 is disaggregated into the home language groups Afrikaans, English and Other, it shows that 71% of Afrikaans home language respondents felt they could attend their lectures in their language of preference, where English and Other home language groups reported 97% and 95% respectively (Figure 9).
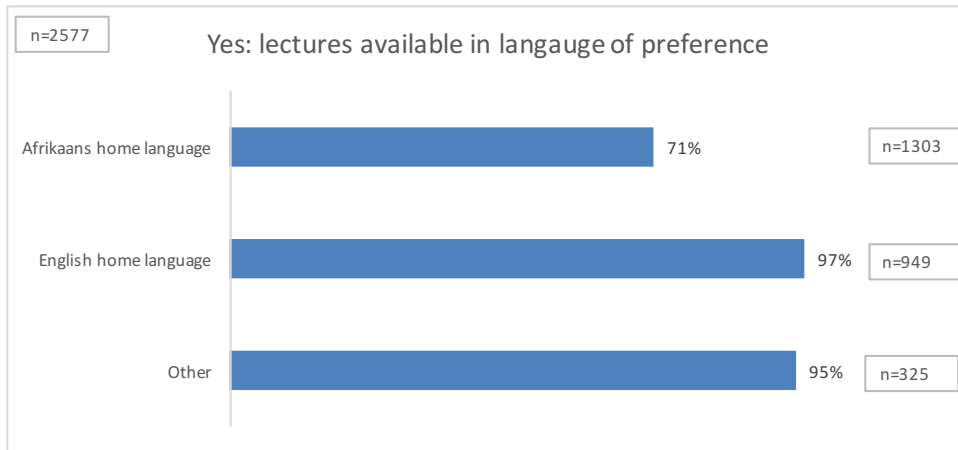
Figure 9: Availability of lectures in language of preference, per language group

Section B: Language in your learning environment

Students were reminded of the three options for the use of language in the University learning environment as specified in the Language Policy and were then asked to respond to questions about the implementation of the three options. The options are:

1. **Parallel medium teaching**, i.e. you can choose whether you want to attend an Afrikaans or English lecture
2. **Both Afrikaans and English** in the same class group, where all information is conveyed at least in English, with summaries or emphasis of the key concepts in Afrikaans interspersed in the same lecture.
3. **Only one language** of presentation (Afrikaans or English)

Q6: Did your lecturers tell you beforehand in which modes the module will be offered and explained what it entails?

Figure 10 shows that 75% of the respondents indicated that language arrangements were made clear in most or all of their modules in both first and second semester.
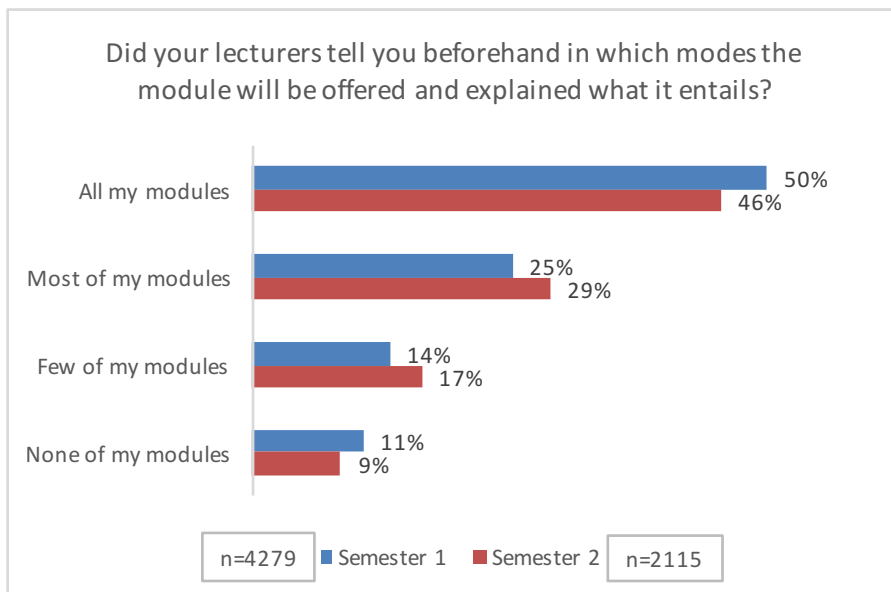

Figure 10: Response rate for language arrangements

The next three questions in the questionnaire probed whether the three language options were implemented, as communicated by the lecturers, in lectures, tutorials, assessment, learning material and one-to-one conversations with the lecturers. Since the questionnaire was administered electronically, these options only became available once the students indicated that they were enrolled in a module presented by means of a specific option.

Q7: Are any of your modules taught in parallel medium?

More than half of the respondents in both semesters one and two indicated that some of their modules were taught in parallel medium. (Figure 11).
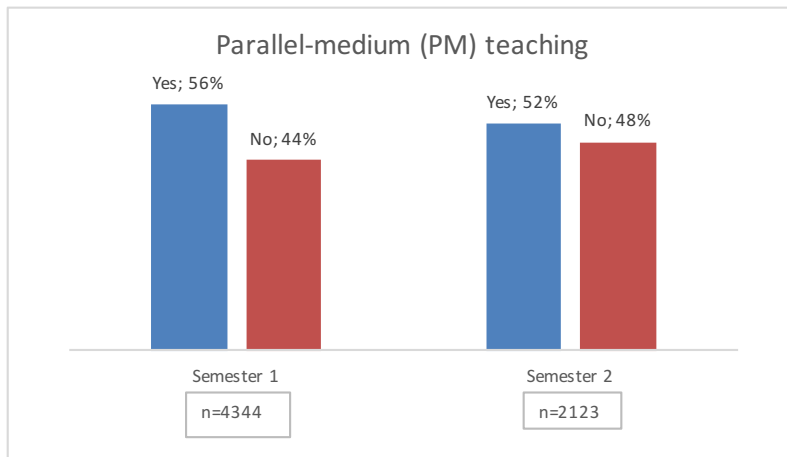

Figure 11: Percentage of respondents whose modules were taught in parallel medium.

Only those students who answered "yes" to the question of whether some of their modules were presented in parallel medium were shown the next question which was changed in the second semester survey to align more closely with the Language Policy specifications for the parallel medium option. The majority of the respondents indicated that the parallel medium option was implemented, as communicated, in all or most of their modules (Figure 12).
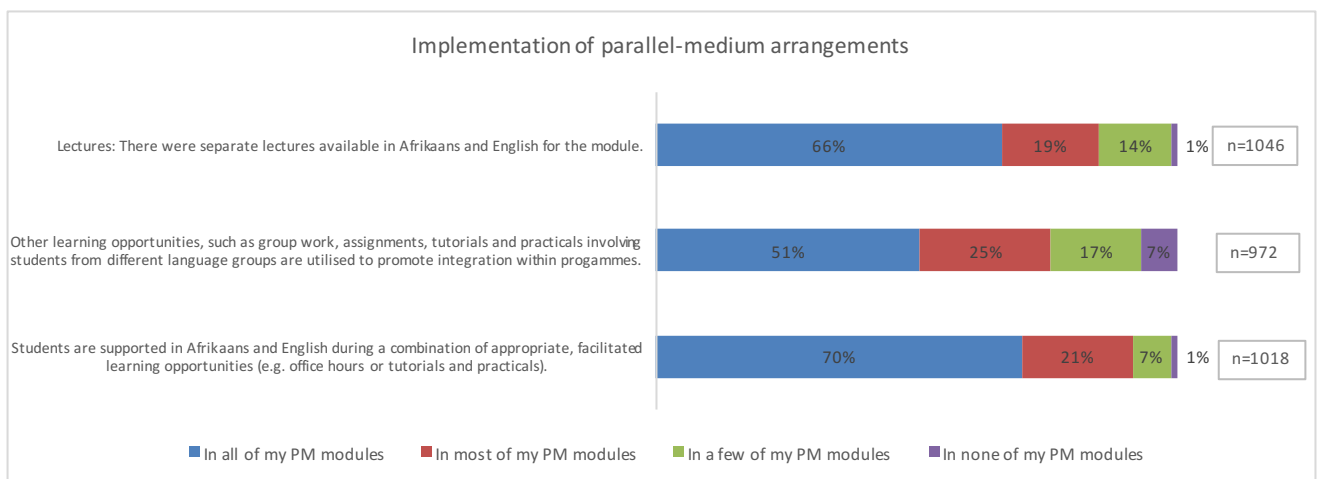

Figure 12: Percentage of respondents indicating that parallel medium was implemented, as communicated

Q9: Are any of your modules presented with the dual-medium language arrangement that both Afrikaans and English are used in the same class group?

There was an increase from 55% to 60% from the first to second semester, in respondents indicating that some of their modules were presented in both Afrikaans and English during the same class session (Figure 13).
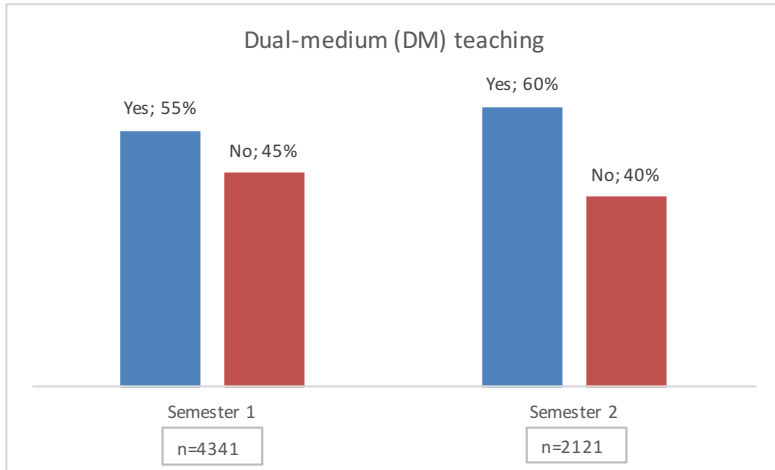

Figure 13: Percentage of respondents indicating that both Afrikaans and English were used in the same class session

Only those students who answered "yes" to the question of whether some of their modules were presented in both English and Afrikaans in the same class session were shown the next question, which was changed in the second semester survey to align more closely with the Language Policy specifications for the Afrikaans and English option. It is clear from Figure 14 that the majority of the respondents felt that this option was implemented, as communicated in all or the majority of their modules with a slightly lower percentage (64%) indicating that summaries or emphasis on content are also given in Afrikaans during each lecture.
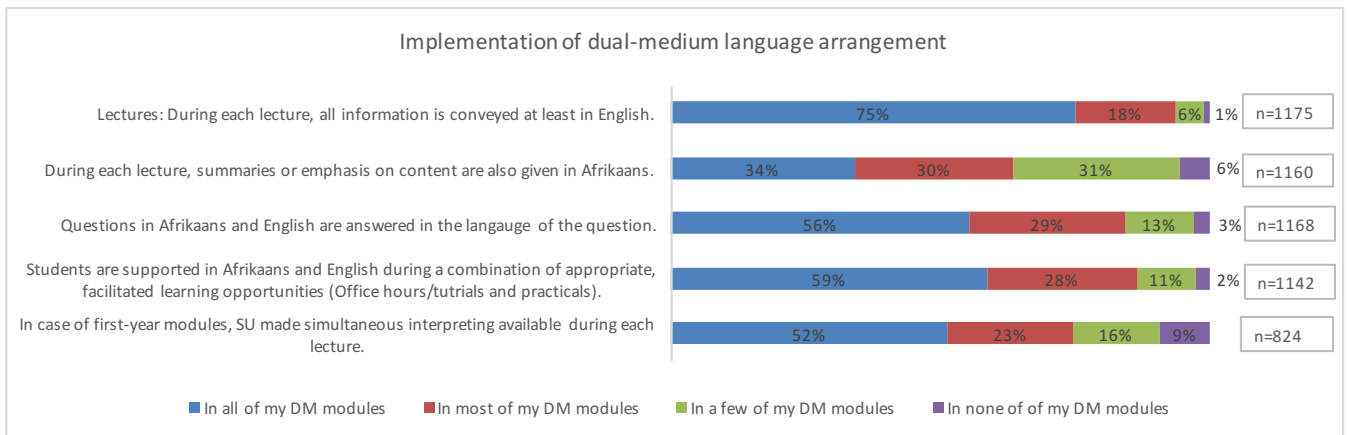

Figure 14: Percentage of respondents indicating that teaching in Afrikaans and English in the same class (dual-medium) was implemented, as communicated.

Q11: Are any of your modules presented in just one language according to the single-medium language arrangement, (Afrikaans or English)?

Most of the respondents had the experience of modules being presented in just one language (Figure 15).
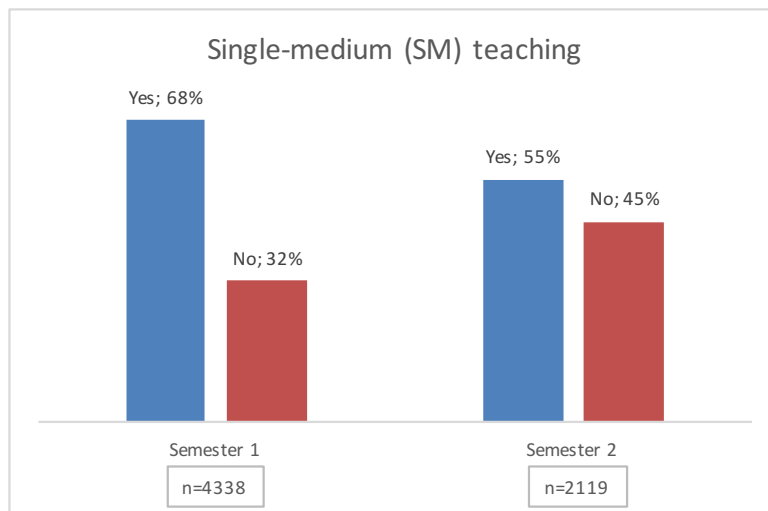

Figure 15: Percentage of respondents indicating that the one-language option was implemented, as communicated

Only those students who answered "yes" to the question of whether some of their modules were presented in just one language were shown the next question which was changed in the second semester survey to align more closely with the Language Policy specifications for the single medium option. It should be noted that the "yes" response was very high considering that only about 5% of the modules were presented in just one language. It is possible that some of the students interpreted the one-language option as the parallel-medium teaching option, where classes were also presented in one language only (although the other language was taught in parallel). Based on the feedback (Figure 16) it appears as if interpreting services were not always as indicated in the Language Policy with 62% of the respondents indicating that it was available in all or most of their first-year modules in English and 66% indicating that it was available in all or most of their Afrikaans modules. If the interpreting services are not used within the first two weeks of the semester, the services are discontinued and it could be that the services were offered, but discontinued.
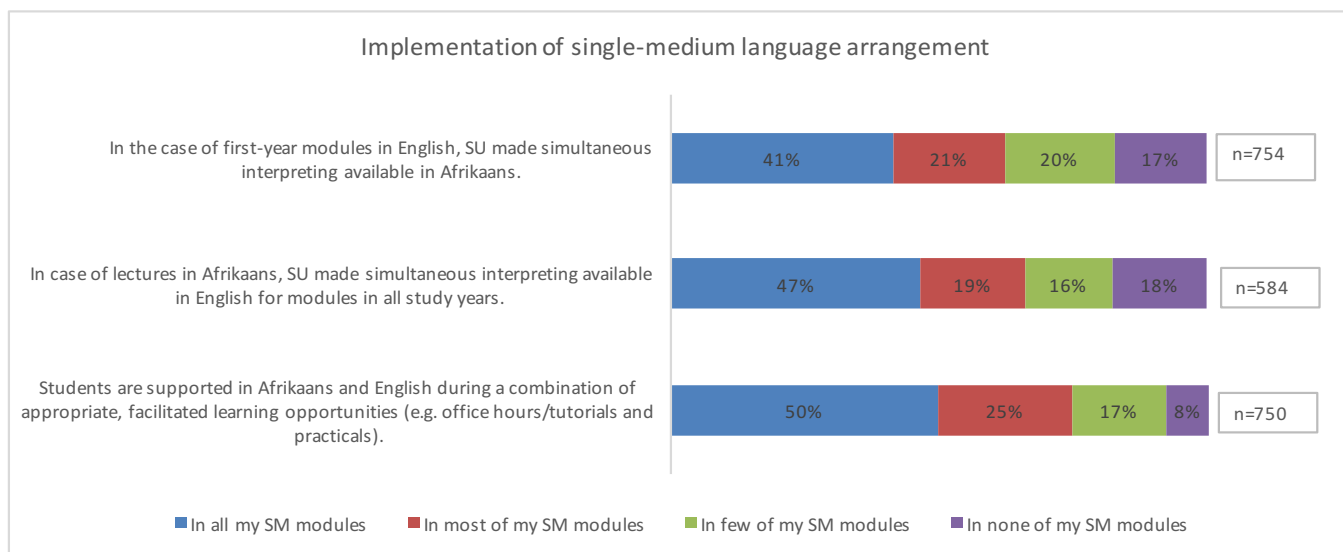

Figure 16: Percentage of respondents indicating that the one-language option (Afrikaans or English) was implemented, as communicated

9

Q13: This question focused on other learning support, asking whether the following were available in your language of preference (Afrikaans or English)?

It is clear that the majority of respondents were satisfied with the availability of other learning support in their language of preference (Figure 17).
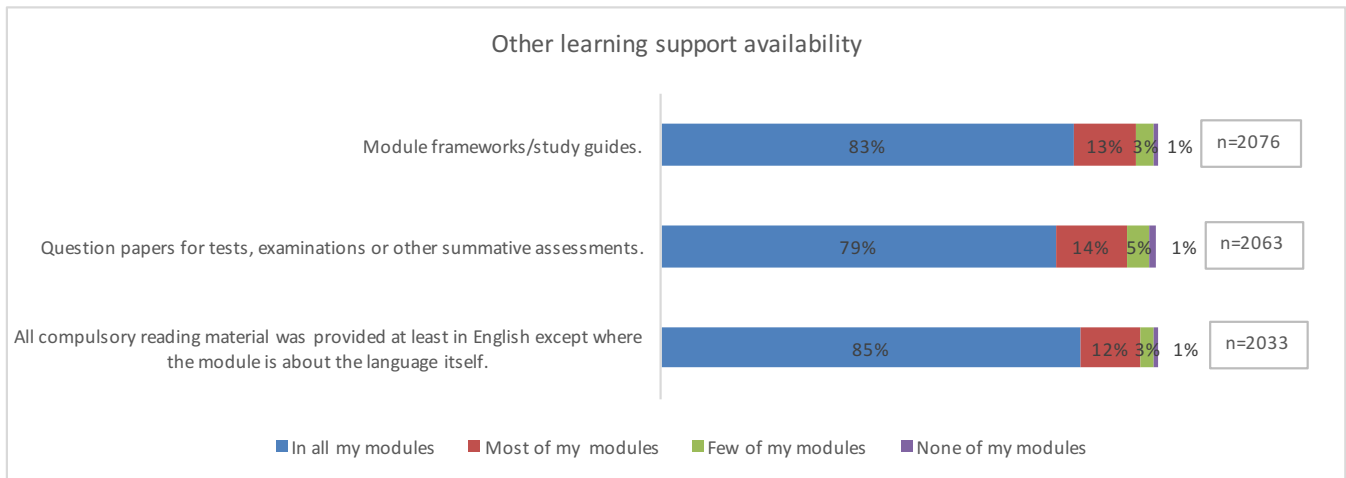

Figure 17: Percentage of respondents indicating that other learning support was made available

Section C: Living environment, co-curricular environment, administrative environment

Q15: Where do you live?

Half of the respondents in both the first and second semester surveys indicated that they lived in a residence.
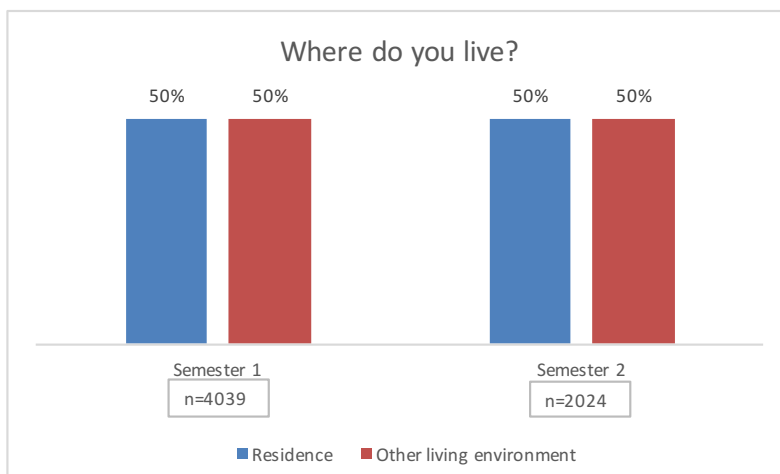

Figure 18: Percentage of respondents in residential or other living environment

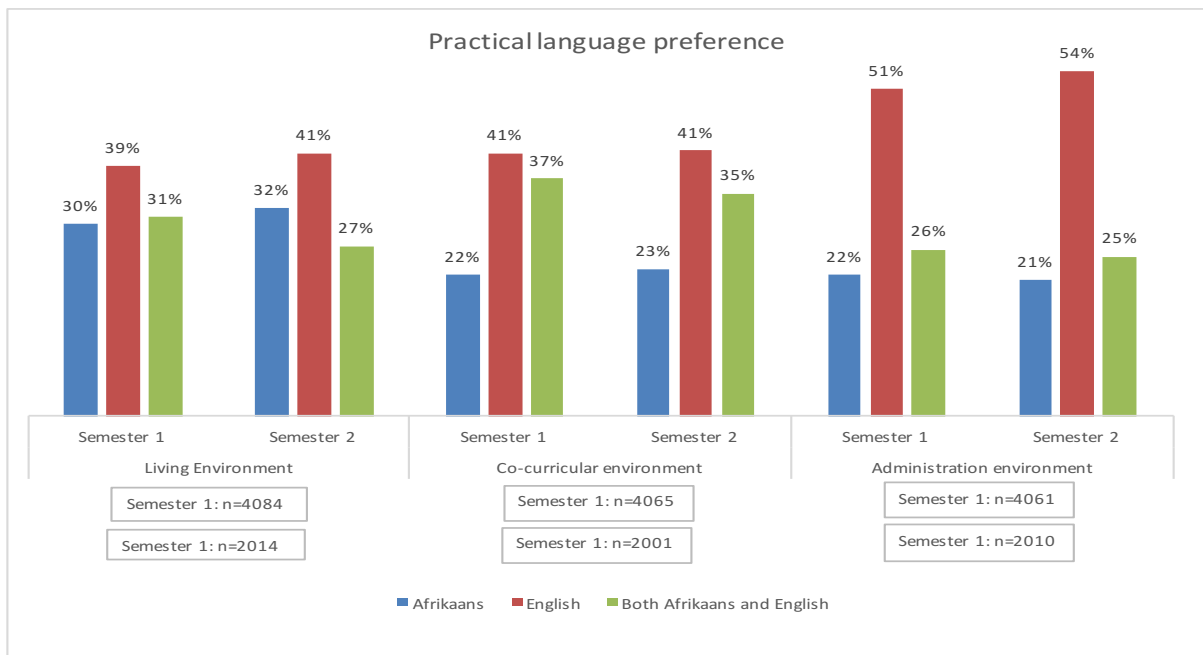**Q16: What is your practical language of preference for the following?**

Figure 19: Practical language of preference in various environments

It is noteworthy that the preference for Afrikaans was higher in the living environment than in the learning environment (cf Figure 5). Similarly, the preference for both Afrikaans and English was also higher in the living, co-curricular and administration environments when compared with the learning environment (cf Figure 5).

It is clear from figures 20 and 21 that the overwhelming majority of the respondents felt that they could express themselves in their language of preference in all three environments (between 77% and 85% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Similarly, they felt included when there was communication in all three environments (again, between 77% and 83% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed).

Q17: I feel comfortable that I may express myself in my language of preference in:
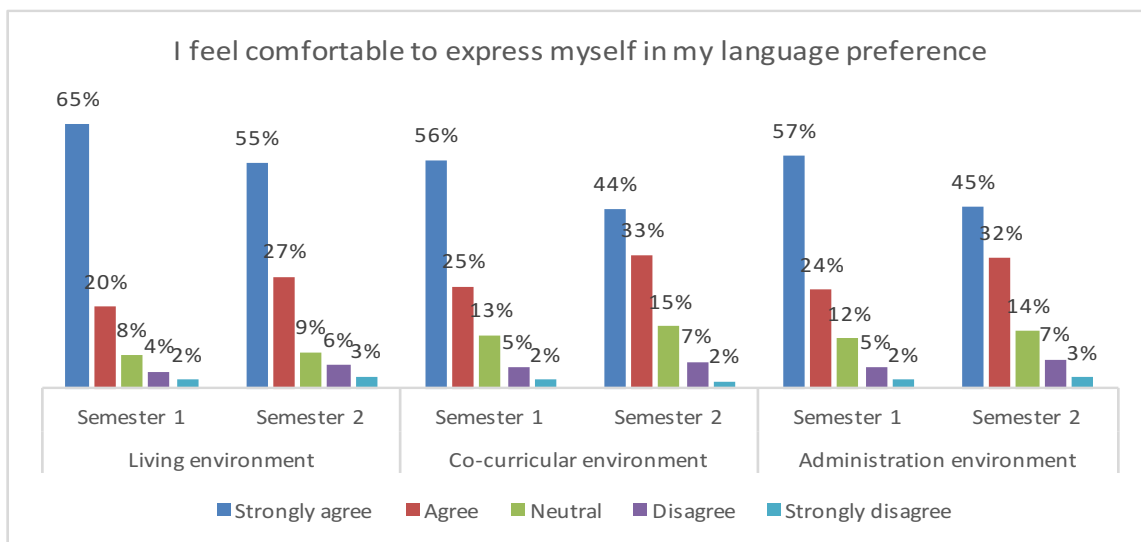

Figure 20: Students' comfort levels regarding expressing themselves in their language of preference

It is interesting to note that although the majority of respondends feel comfortable that they could express themselves in ther language of preference, there was a shift from "strongly agree" to "agree" from the first to the scond semester.

11

Q18: I feel included when there is communication in the:

I feel included when there is communication in the...

Living Environment — Semester 1: 59%, 24%, 11%, 4%, 2%; Semester 2: 50%, 31%, 12%, 5%, 2%

Co-curricular environment — Semester 1: 53%, 27%, 14%, 4%, 2%; Semester 2: 41%, 36%, 17%, 4%, 1%

Administration environment — Semester 1: 55%, 26%, 13%, 4%, 2%; Semester 2: 42%, 36%, 16%, 5%, 2%

Legend: Strongly agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly disagree
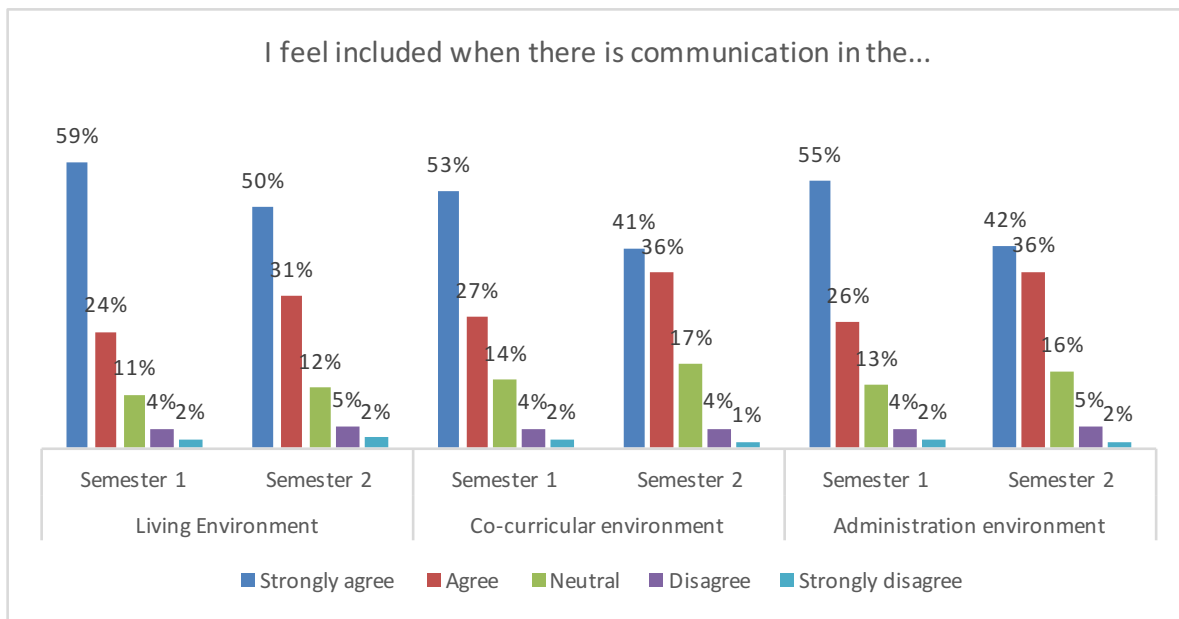
Figure 21: Students' sense of inclusion when communication takes place

It is noted again that although the majority of respondends felt included by the way languages were used in the living, co-curricular and administrative environments, there was a shift from "strongly agree" to "agree" from the first to the scond semester.

The last five questions of the questionnaire aimed to determine whether the students knew where to report their dissatisfaction with language-related issues, whether they reported dissatisfaction in either the learning, living, co-curricular or administrative environments, and whether they felt that their language-related issues were satisfactorily addressed.

Q19: Do you know where to report your dissatisfaction with language-related issues?

The percentage of the respondents indicated that they knew where to report their dissatisfaction with language-related issues, stayed relatively the same (22% and 21%) with both surveys (Figure 22).
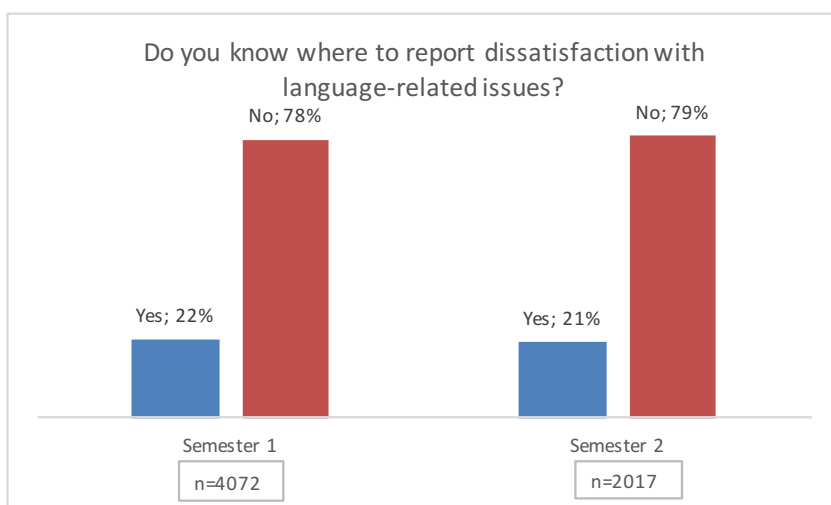

Do you know where to report dissatisfaction with language-related issues?

Semester 1 (n=4072): Yes; 22%, No; 78%

Semester 2 (n=2017): Yes; 21%, No; 79%

Figure 22: Percentage of respondents knowing where to report dissatisfaction with language-related matters

On the other hand, only a small minority of the respondents indicated that they ever had a reason to report dissatisfaction in the learning, living, co-curricular and administration environments (see figures 23–25). Given the responses to questions 17 and 18, it was not surprising that the need to report dissatisfaction was the lowest in the living, co-curricular and administration environments.

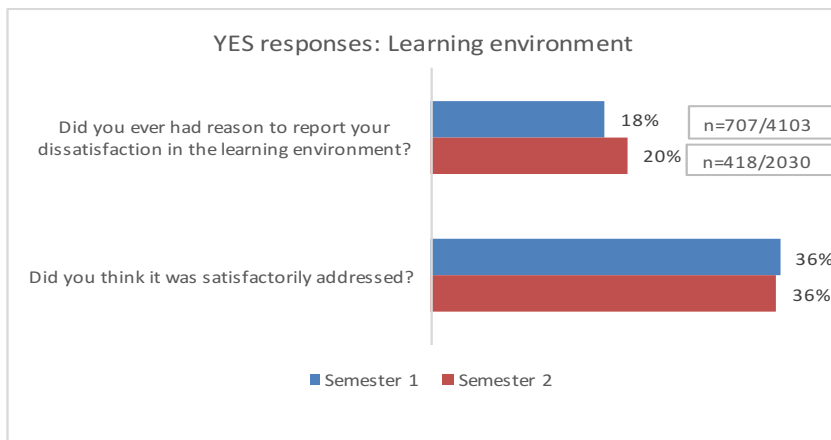**Q20: Dissatisfaction in the learning environment:**

Figure 23: Dissatisfaction in the learning environment
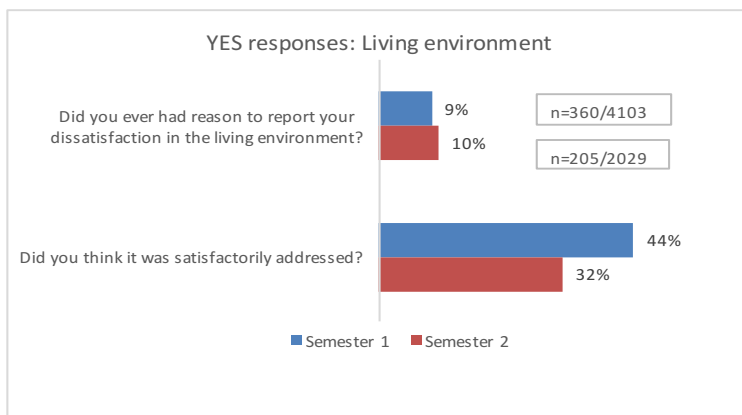
Q22: Dissatisfaction in the living environment:

Figure 24: Dissatisfaction in the living environment

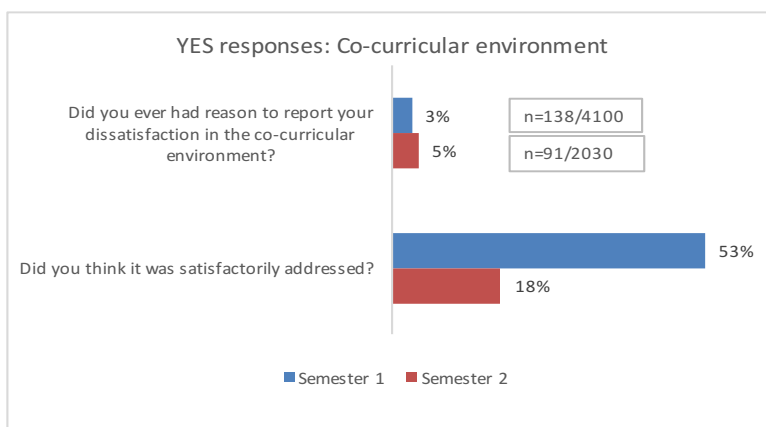**Q24: Dissatisfaction in the co-curricular environment (e.g. sport clubs and societies):**

Figure 25: Dissatisfaction in the co-curricular environment

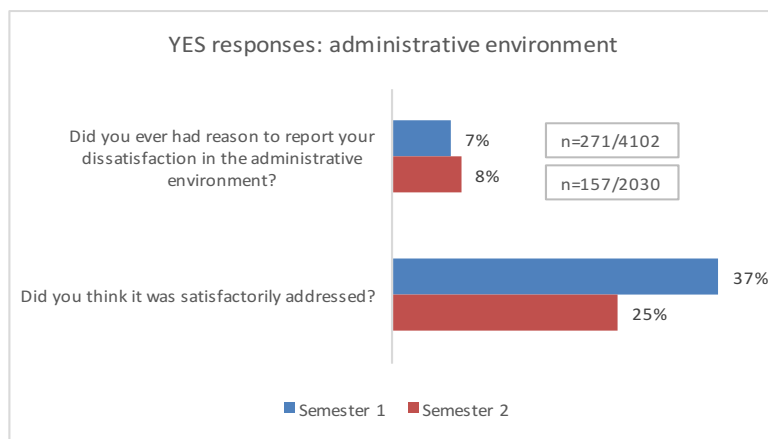**Q26: Dissatisfaction in the administrative environment:**

Figure 26: Dissatisfaction in the administrative environment

Concluding remarks

This brief report provides an analysis of the responses to the survey sent out in March and again in September 2017. All undergraduate students were polled for their perceptions with regard to the implementation of the new Language Policy. The survey had a lower response rate in the second semester, but there was a better representation per faculty. A higher percentage of first and non-final year students responded compared to the percentage of final year respondents.

With regard to the learning environment, it is encouraging to note that:

- the majority of the students (83%) indicated that they could attend their lectures in their language of preference.
- the majority of the students (75% in both surveys) indicated that the lecturers did clarify the arrangement about the use of language in class.
- the language arrangements were implemented, as communicated.

With regard to the living, co-curricular and administrative environments:

- there appears to be a greater preference for bilingualism than in the learning environment with a higher percentage of students showing a preference for both Afrikaans and English as their practical language.
- the majority of the students felt comfortable expressing themselves in their language of preference and also felt included in communication that took place in these environments.

Although the majority of the respondents (78% and 79%) indicated that they did not know where to report their dissatisfaction with language-related issues, this might be attributable to their never having had the need to do so. As seen in the second semester survey, only 20% of the respondents indicated that they had a reason to report dissatisfaction in the learning environment, 10% in the living environment, 3% in the co-curricular environment and 8% in the administrative environment.