

Undergraduate Students Language Survey

7 April 2017

Background

E-mail and sms invitations to complete an online survey were sent out to **all undergraduate students** (19 935) between **3 and 5 March 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.

Dear student

We would like to 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.

The students had **until 10 March 2017** to complete the survey. A **reminder** was sent on **8 March 2017** to those students who had not responded. A total of **4 793 responses** were received, which amounts to a **response rate of 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 in 2017 in order to:

- address any issues that students might have with the 2017 implementation of the Language Policy as early as possible;
- provide feedback to the faculties for their faculty reports to Senate at the end of the semester about the implementation of the Language Policy in their respective faculties;
- provide feedback to the Language Committee on 27 March 2017 about the early implementation stages 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. Separate reports with the feedback disaggregated according to faculty will be prepared for each faculty.

Section A: Students' personal information

Q 1: Your faculty

As Figure 1 shows, the majority of the respondents were from the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, followed by the Engineering and Arts and Social Sciences faculties.

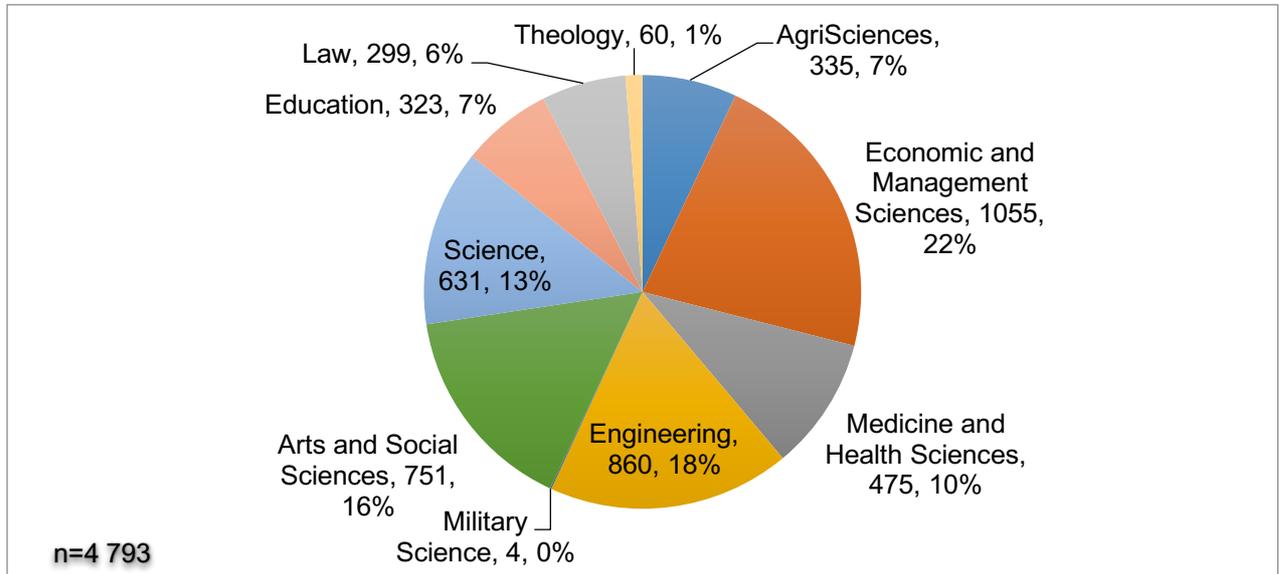


Figure 1: Response rate per faculty

When considering the percentage of respondents per faculty, the Faculty of Law had the greatest response rate with 71% of the faculty's undergraduate respondents completing the questionnaire, while the response rates of the other faculties lay between 20% and 30%, as Figure 2 shows.

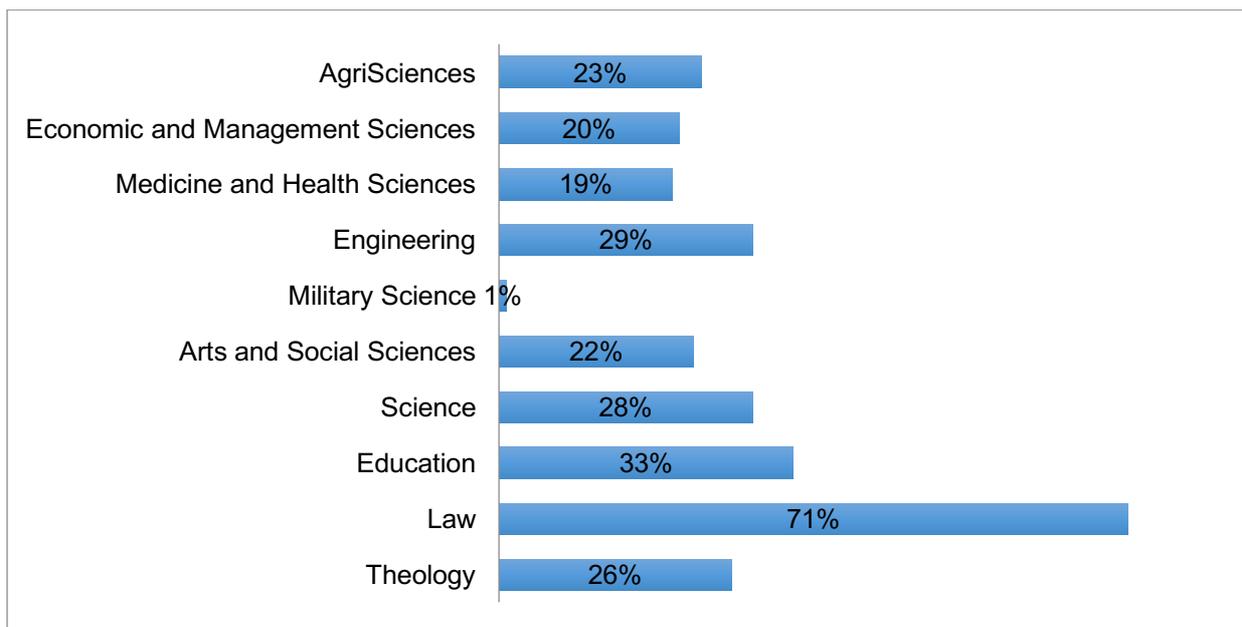


Figure 2: Response rate per faculty

Q2: Your year group

Figure 3 shows that the greatest number of respondents were first years, followed by non-final year and final-year students. Figure 4 shows the response rate per year group expressed as a percentage of the total number of students per year group. It is clear from this figure that the first and non-final year respondents constituted a higher percentage per year group than the final year students.

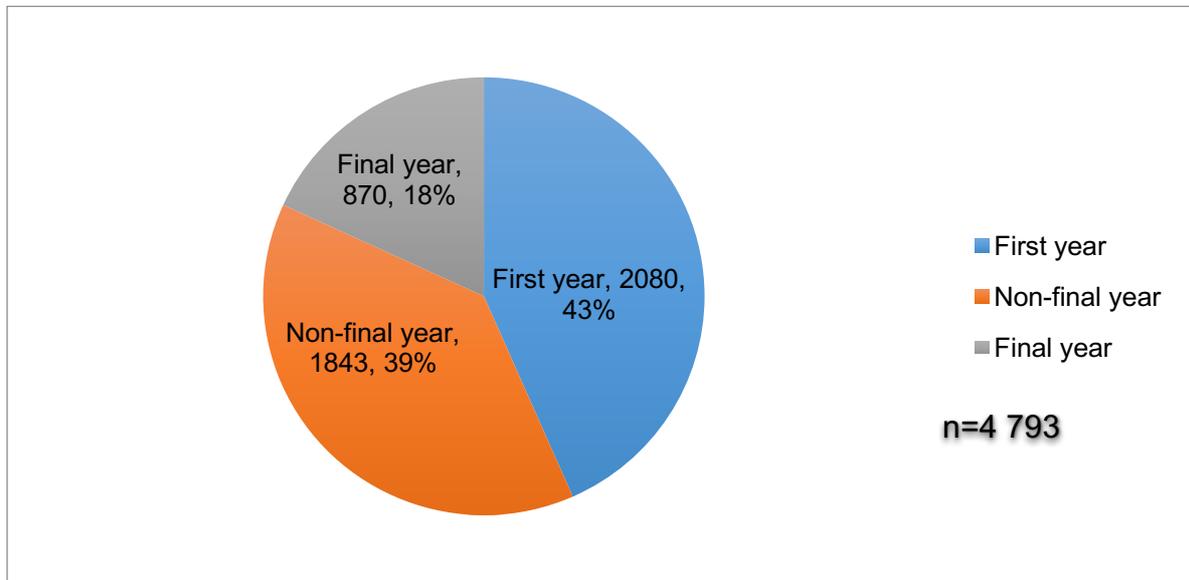


Figure 3: Respondents per year group

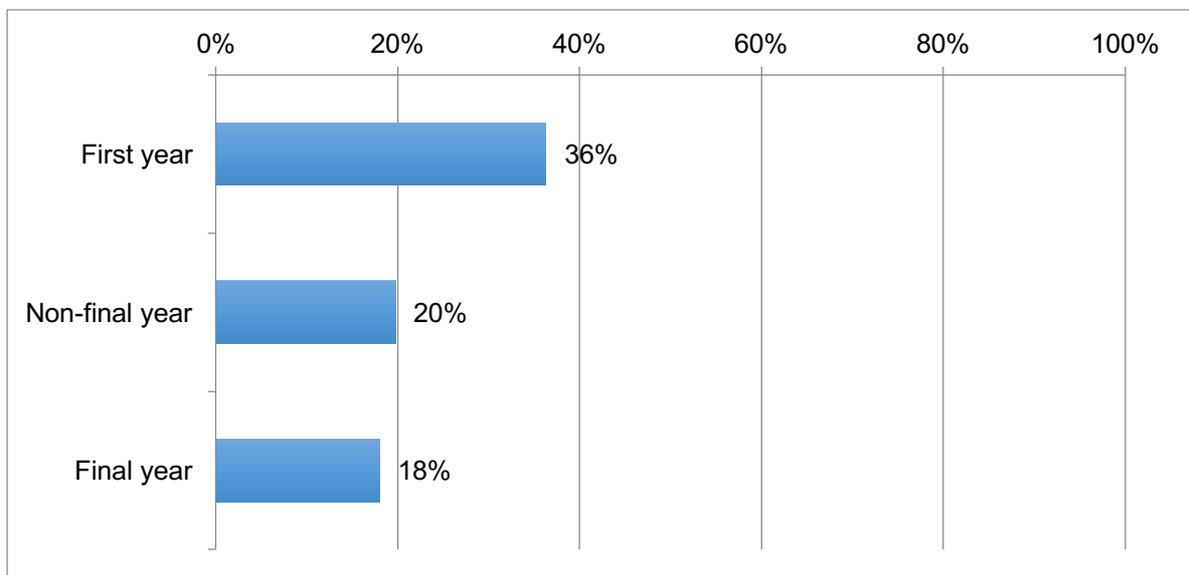


Figure 4: Response rate per year group as part of the total

Q3: What is your home language?

The majority of the respondents indicated that their home language was Afrikaans (48%), followed by English (37%).

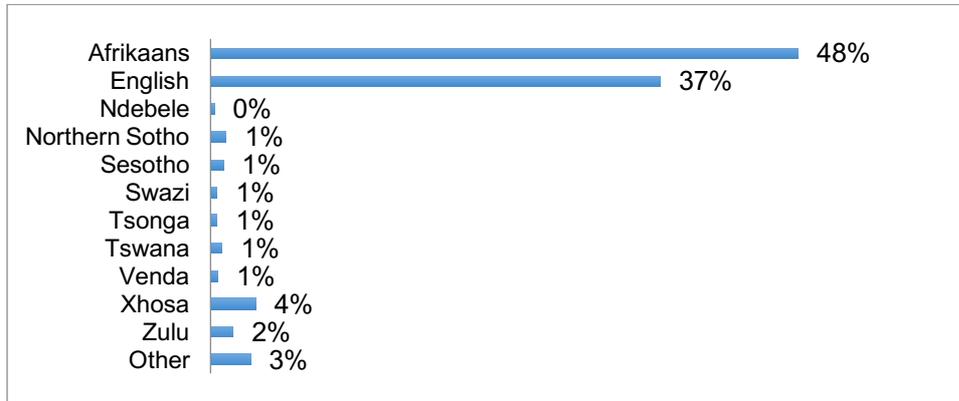


Figure 5: Response rate per home language (n=4 793)

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 (61%), tutorials (61%) and learning material (65%). About a quarter of all the respondents indicated a preference for Afrikaans-only lectures and tutorials, with the percentage dropping to 21% of the respondents, indicating a preference for Afrikaans-only learning material.

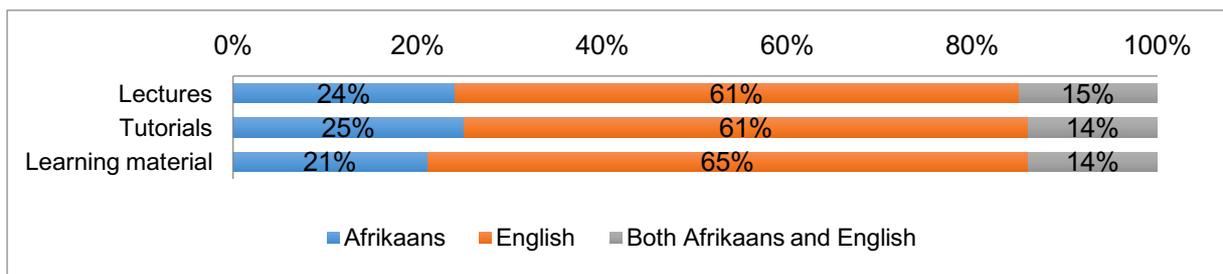


Figure 6: Response rate for language of preference

If the feedback pertaining to lectures in Figure 6 is disaggregated into the home language groups Afrikaans, English and Other, more than half of the Afrikaans home language respondents preferred lectures either in Afrikaans (26,5%) or both Afrikaans and English (24,8%), as may be seen in Figure 7. Nearly all the English and Other home language students preferred only English for lectures.

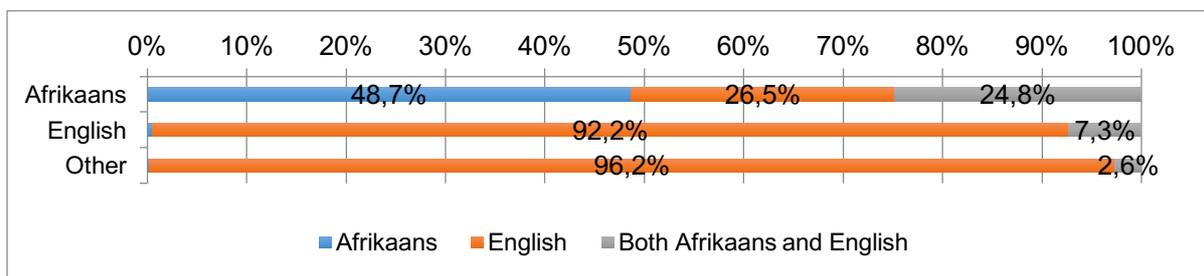


Figure 7: Lecture language preference of students per home language group

A similar shift in the Afrikaans home language group was discernible with regard to:

- tutorials, with 51,2% of the Afrikaans group indicating a preference for Afrikaans, 24,8% for English and 24% for both Afrikaans and English.
- learning material, with 42% of the Afrikaans group indicating a preference for Afrikaans, 32,7% for English and 25,3% for both Afrikaans and English.

As with lectures, there were no discernible shifts in the English and Other home language groups.

Section B: Language in your learning environment

Students were given 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
3. **Only one language** of presentation (Afrikaans or English)

Q5: Did your lecturers make an arrangement with you about the use of language in class?

Figure 8 shows that 75% of the respondents indicated that language arrangements were made in most or all of their modules.

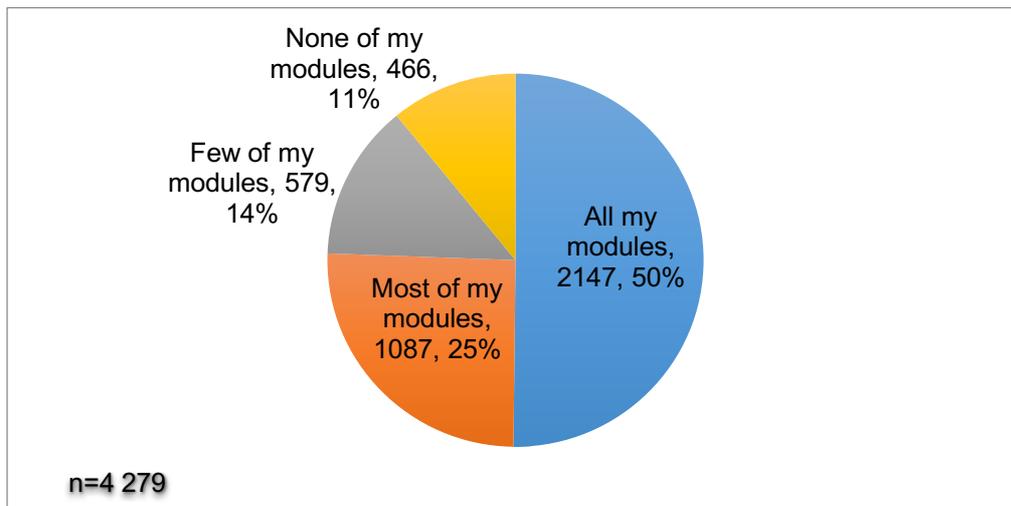


Figure 8: Response rate for language arrangements

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 a module was presented by means of a specific option.

Q6: Are any of your modules taught in parallel medium?

More than half of the respondents indicated that some of their modules were taught in parallel medium.

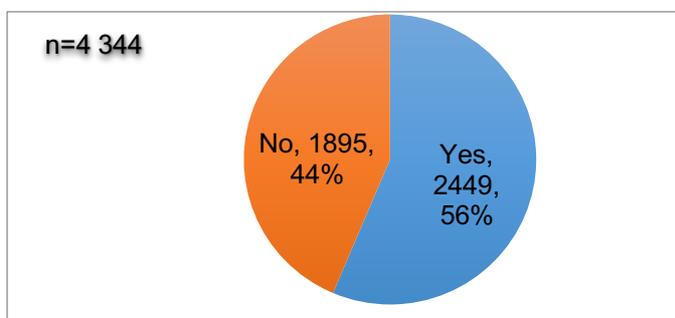


Figure 9: Percentage of respondents whose modules were taught in parallel medium

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 asked whether the language arrangement was implemented, as communicated. The majority of the respondents indicated that the

parallel medium option was implemented, as communicated, in all or most of their modules (Figure 10).

Q6a: Was the language arrangement (parallel medium) implemented, as communicated?

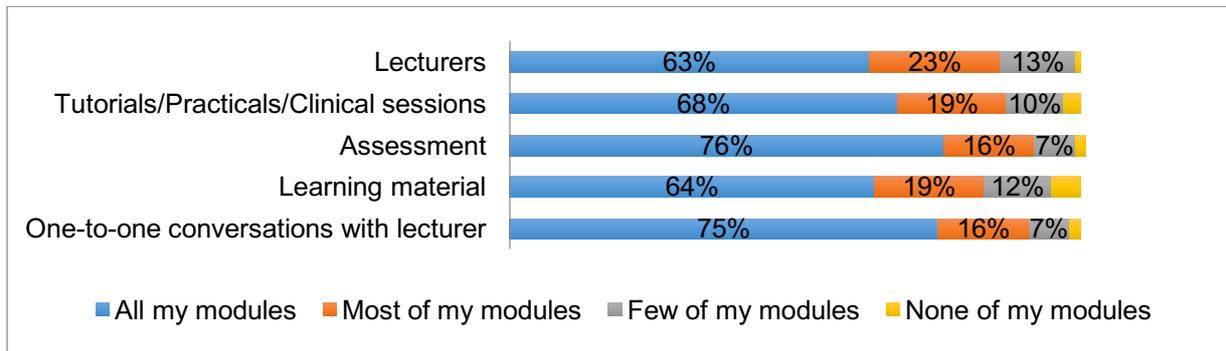


Figure 10: Percentage of respondents indicating that parallel medium was implemented, as communicated

Q7: Are any of your modules presented with the language arrangement that both Afrikaans and English are used in the same class group?

More than half of the respondents indicated that some of their modules were presented in both Afrikaans and English during the same class session.

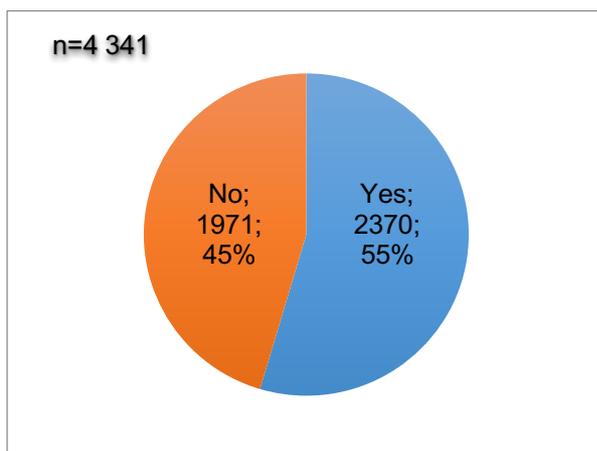


Figure 11: Percentage of respondents indicating that both Afrikaans and English were used in the same class session

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 asked whether the language arrangement was implemented, as communicated. It is clear from Figure 12 that the majority of the respondents felt that this option was implemented, as communicated, in all or the majority of their modules, but that this option had not been implemented very well, according to the respondents attending the lectures. It was indicated by 30% of the respondents that it is implemented in few or none of their modules in the lectures.

Q7a: The language arrangements were implemented, as communicated

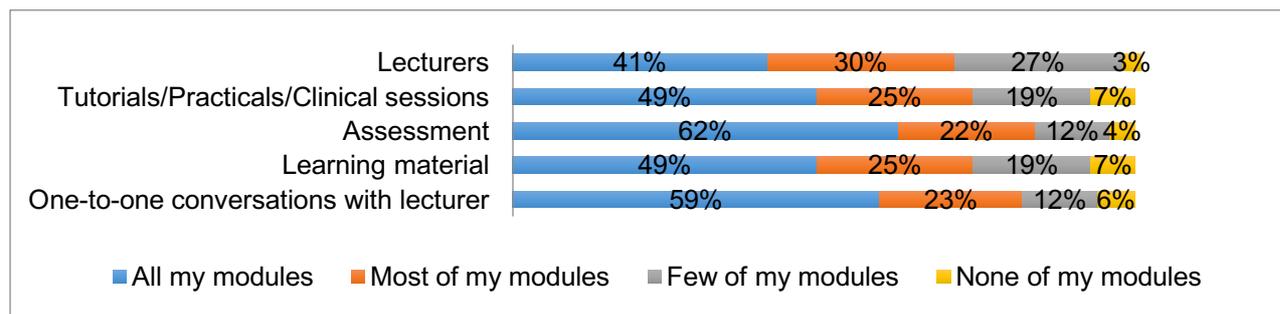


Figure 12: Percentage of respondents indicating that teaching in Afrikaans and English in the same class was implemented, as communicated

Q8: Are any of your modules presented in just one language (Afrikaans or English)?

Most of the respondents had the experience of modules being presented in just one language (Figure 13).

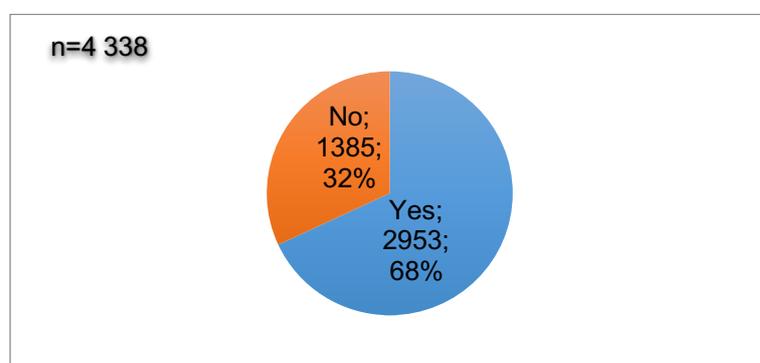


Figure 13: Percentage of respondents indicating that the one-language option was implemented, as communicated

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 asked whether the language arrangement had been implemented, as communicated. 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). Nevertheless, as with the parallel medium option, the majority indicated that the one-language option was implemented in all or most of the modules, as communicated (Figure 14).

Q8a: The one-language language arrangement was implemented, as communicated.

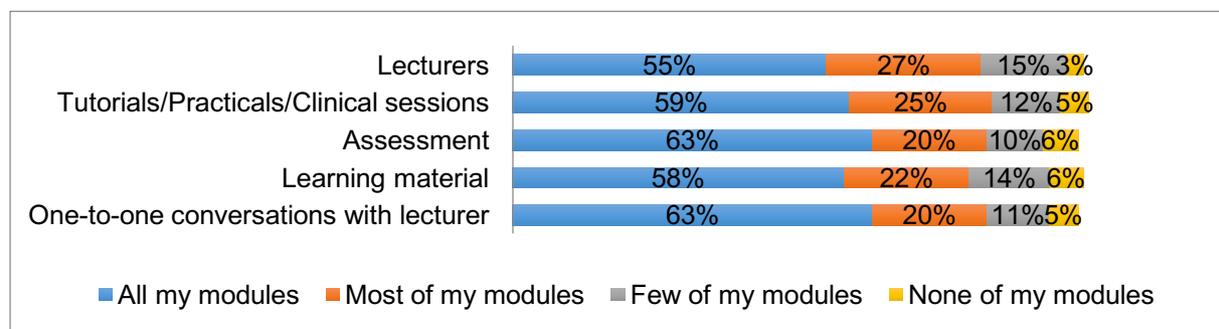


Figure 14: Percentage of respondents indicating that the one-language option (Afrikaans or English) was implemented, as communicated

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

Q9: Where do you live?

Half of the respondents indicated that they lived in a residence.

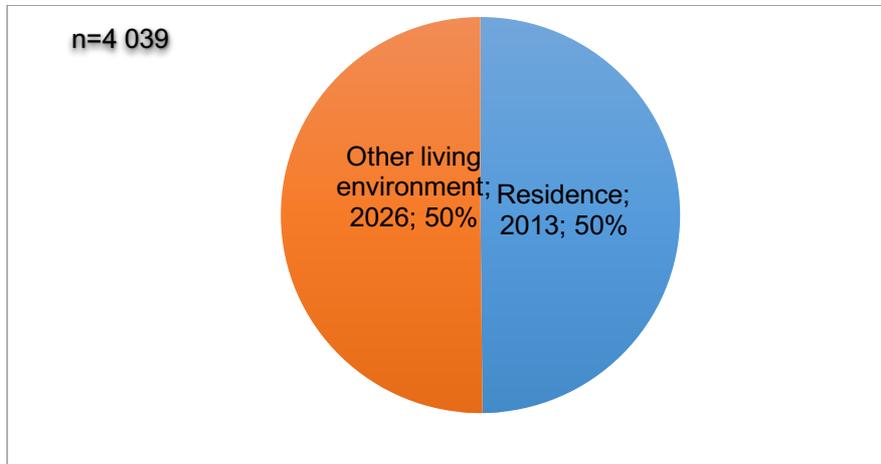


Figure 15: Percentage of respondents in residential or other living environment

Q10: What is your practical language of preference for the:

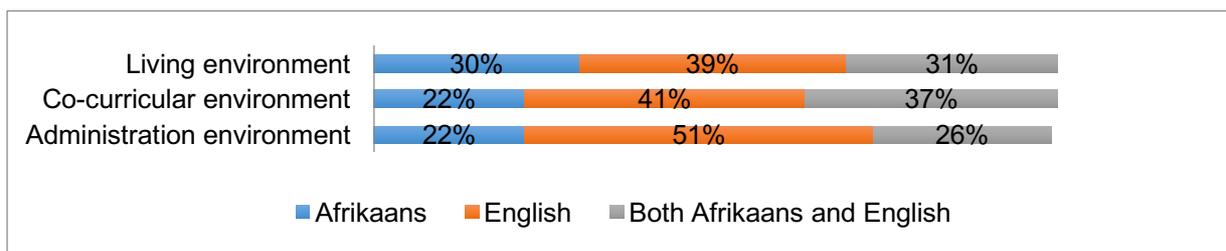


Figure 16: Practical language of preference in various environments

It is noteworthy that the preference for Afrikaans was higher in the living environment than in the learning environment (cf Figure 6). 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 6).

It is clear from figures 17 and 18 that the overwhelming majority of the respondents felt that they could express themselves in their language of preference in all three environments (more than 80% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed), and that they felt included when there was communication in all three environments (again, more than 80% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed).

Q11: I feel comfortable that I may express myself in my language of preference in:

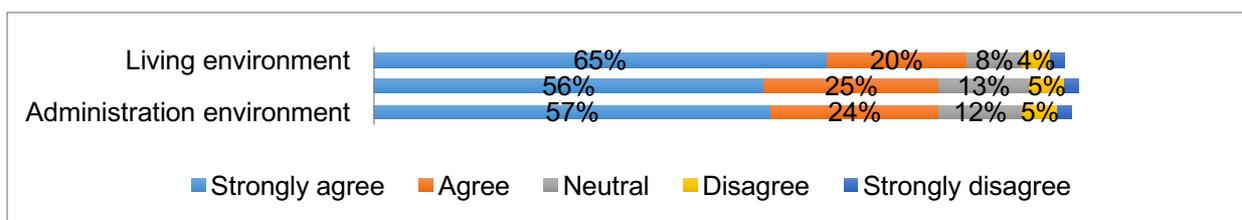


Figure 17: Students' comfort levels regarding expressing themselves in their language of preference

Q12: I feel included when there is communication in the:

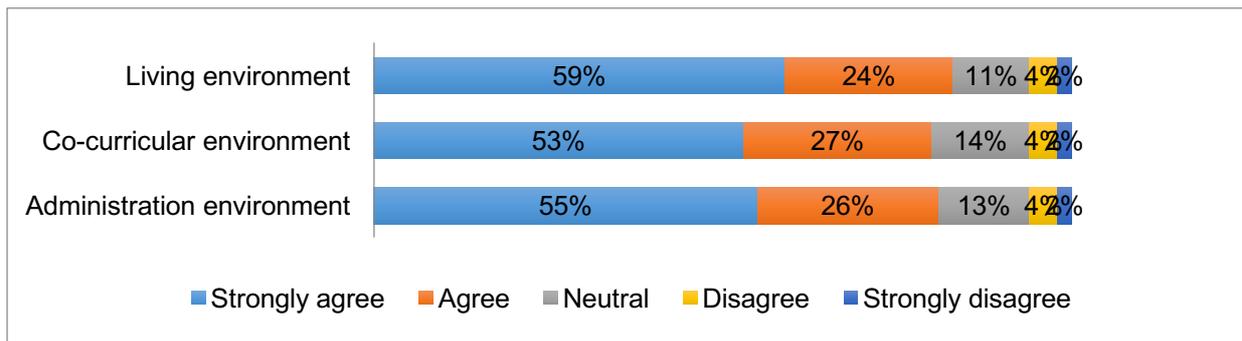


Figure 18: Students’ sense of inclusion when communication takes place

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.

Q13: Do you know where to report your dissatisfaction with language-related issues?

22% of the respondents indicated that they knew where to report their dissatisfaction with language-related issues (Figure 19).

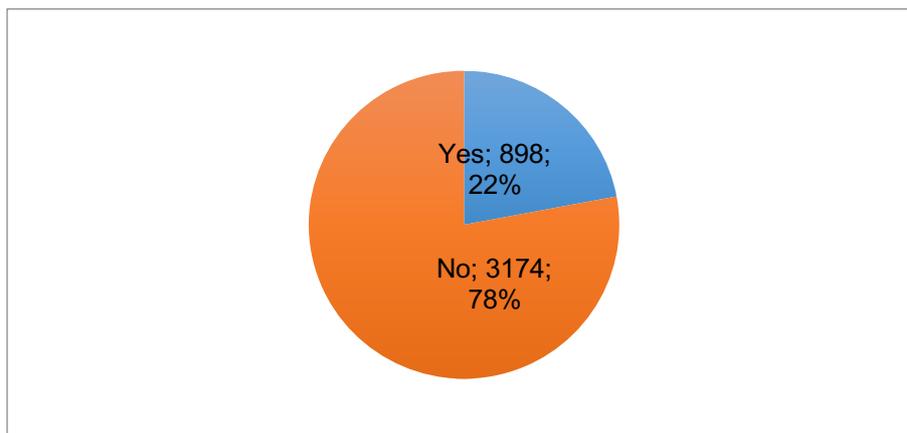


Figure 19: Percentage of respondents knowing where to report dissatisfaction with language-related matters

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 20–23). Given the responses to questions 11 and 12, it was not surprising that the need to report dissatisfaction was the lowest in the living, co-curricular and administration environments.

Q14: Dissatisfaction in the learning environment:

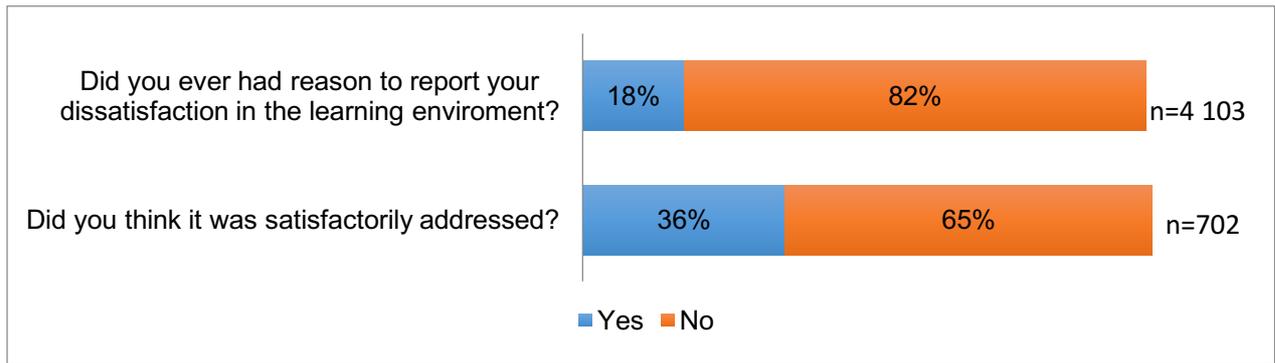


Figure 20: Dissatisfaction in the learning environment

Q15: Dissatisfaction in the living environment:

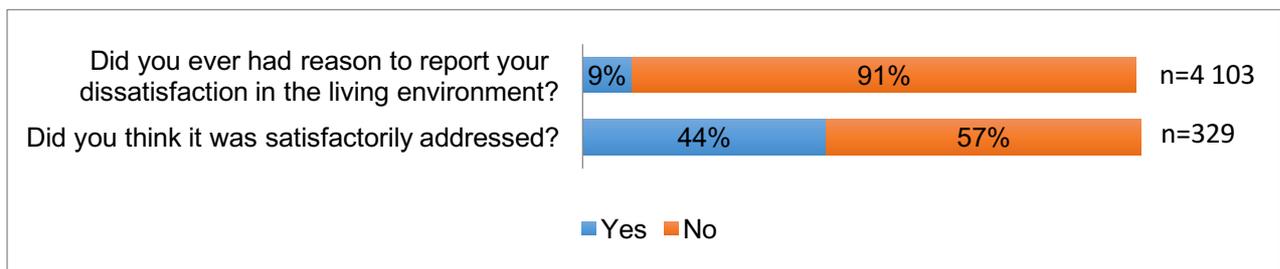


Figure 21: Dissatisfaction in the living environment

Q16: Dissatisfaction in the co-curricular environment (e.g. sport clubs and societies):

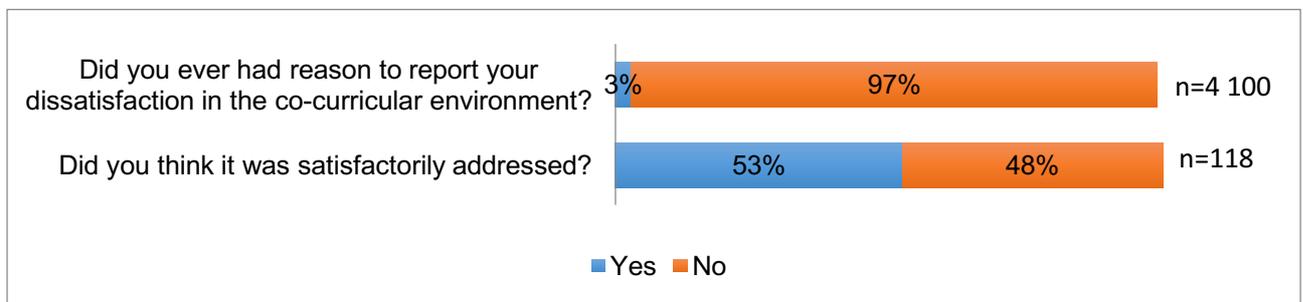


Figure 22: Dissatisfaction in the co-curricular environment

Q17: Dissatisfaction in the administrative environment:

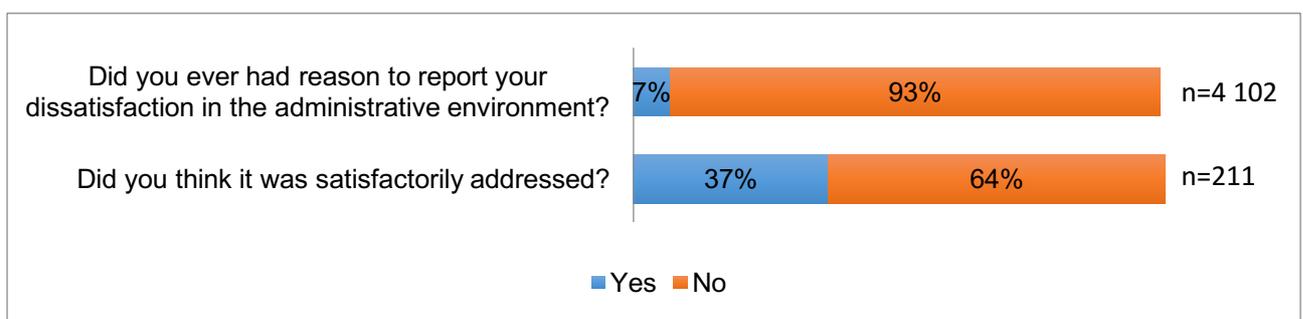


Figure 23: Dissatisfaction in the administrative environment

Concluding remarks

This brief report provides an analysis of the responses to the survey sent out in March 2017, during the 5th week of classes after the implementation of the new SU Language Policy. All undergraduate students were polled for their perceptions with regard to the implementation of the new Language Policy. The survey had an excellent response rate and students from all faculties responded. 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 (75%) indicated that the lecturers did clarify the arrangement about the use of language in class.
- the language arrangements were implemented, as communicated, especially in the parallel medium and single language options, although there is also a very high level of satisfaction with the implementation of the both English and Afrikaans option.

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%) 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. Only 18% of the respondents indicated that they had a reason to report dissatisfaction in the learning environment, 9% in the living environment, 3% in the co-curricular environment and 7% in the administrative environment. In most cases the reported issues seemed to be satisfactorily addressed.