



# **Students' Opinions on the Use of English in University Education**

Preliminary Report of a Survey at Utrecht University  
(The Netherlands)

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# Utrecht University

- Utrecht, The Netherlands, Dutch speaking
- founded in 1636
- Shanghai ranking:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> in the Netherlands
  - 11<sup>th</sup> in Europe
  - 52<sup>nd</sup> in the world
- 30000 students
- 7500 staff members
- 7 faculties
- 45 undergraduate programmes (3 in English)
- 167 graduate programmes (83 in English)
- <http://www.uu.nl/EN/Pages/default.aspx>



# student research project

- MA course on language planning and policy
- case study of the language policy of Utrecht University
  - legal framework of language and university education in the Netherland
  - language policy and language charter of the university
  - how do the 7 faculties implement the policy
  - language of instruction of programmes and individual courses
  - difference between policy (according to the course guide) and practice (observations)
  - questionnaire among teachers
  - **questionnaire among students**



## main aims of the questionnaire

- insight in the frequency of the use of English as
  - course language
  - course materials
- student opinions on
  - the use of English as a course language
  - the university's language policy
- self-evaluation of English language skills of students
- evaluation of language skills of teachers
  - English of non-natives
  - Dutch of non-natives
- role of external factors
  - faculty / study programme
  - year of study
  - gender
  - study results (grade point average)



## method

- internet questionnaire
- 2 versions: Dutch and English
- invitation to participate sent by email to 13000 students who were registered as possible participants in study related research by the university
- lottery: 10 gift vouchers of 25 €
- severe system crash of the Dutch version 36 hours after the first invitations were sent (18 hours after the last)



## preliminary results

- work in progress
- focus on the Dutch version
  - by far the most popular one
  - English questionnaire: mainly foreign student of research MA or University College (programmes in English)
- general results
- not corrected for unequal distributions in sample
- there are significant differences between faculties, but they are small and they need further investigation

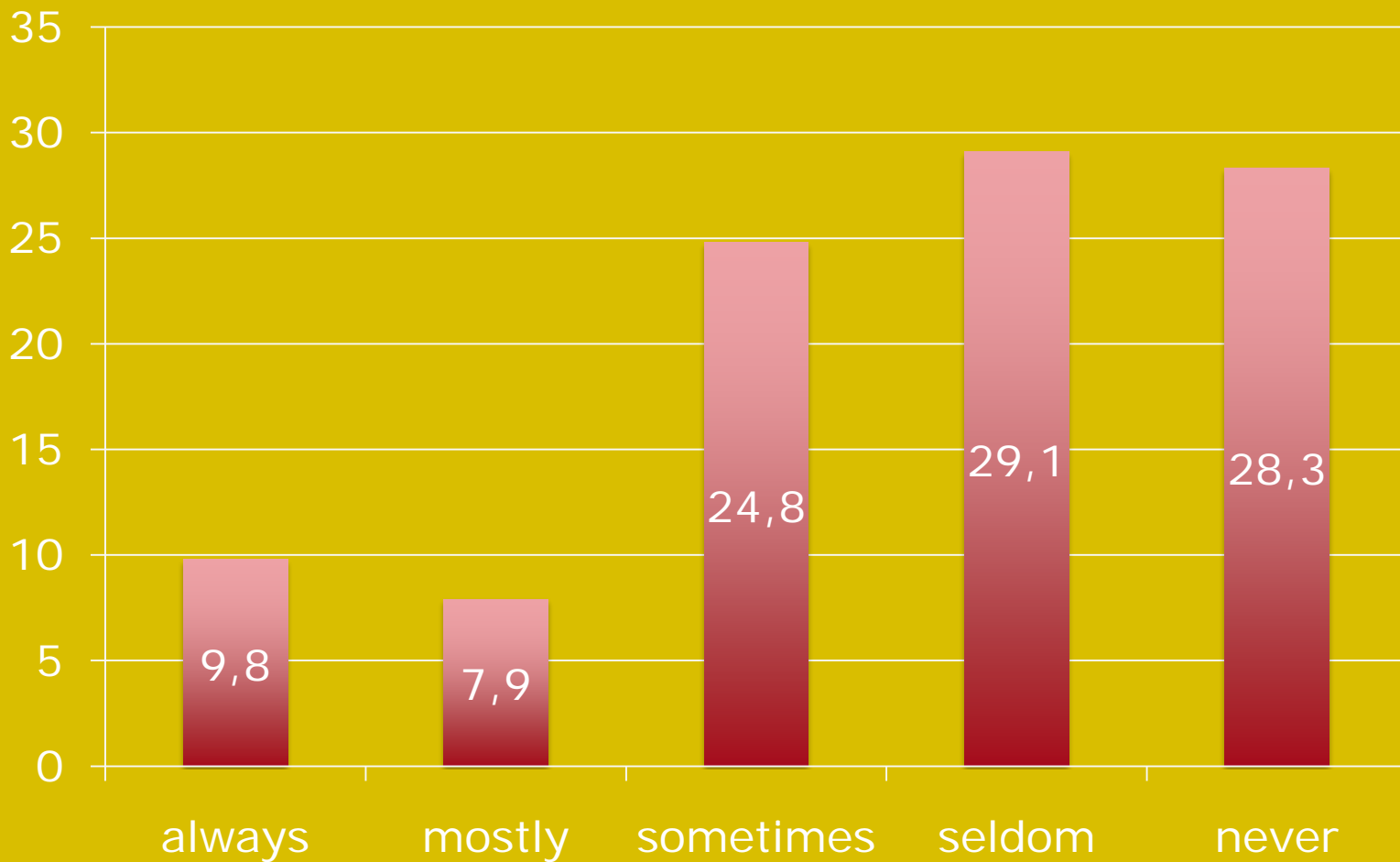


# participants

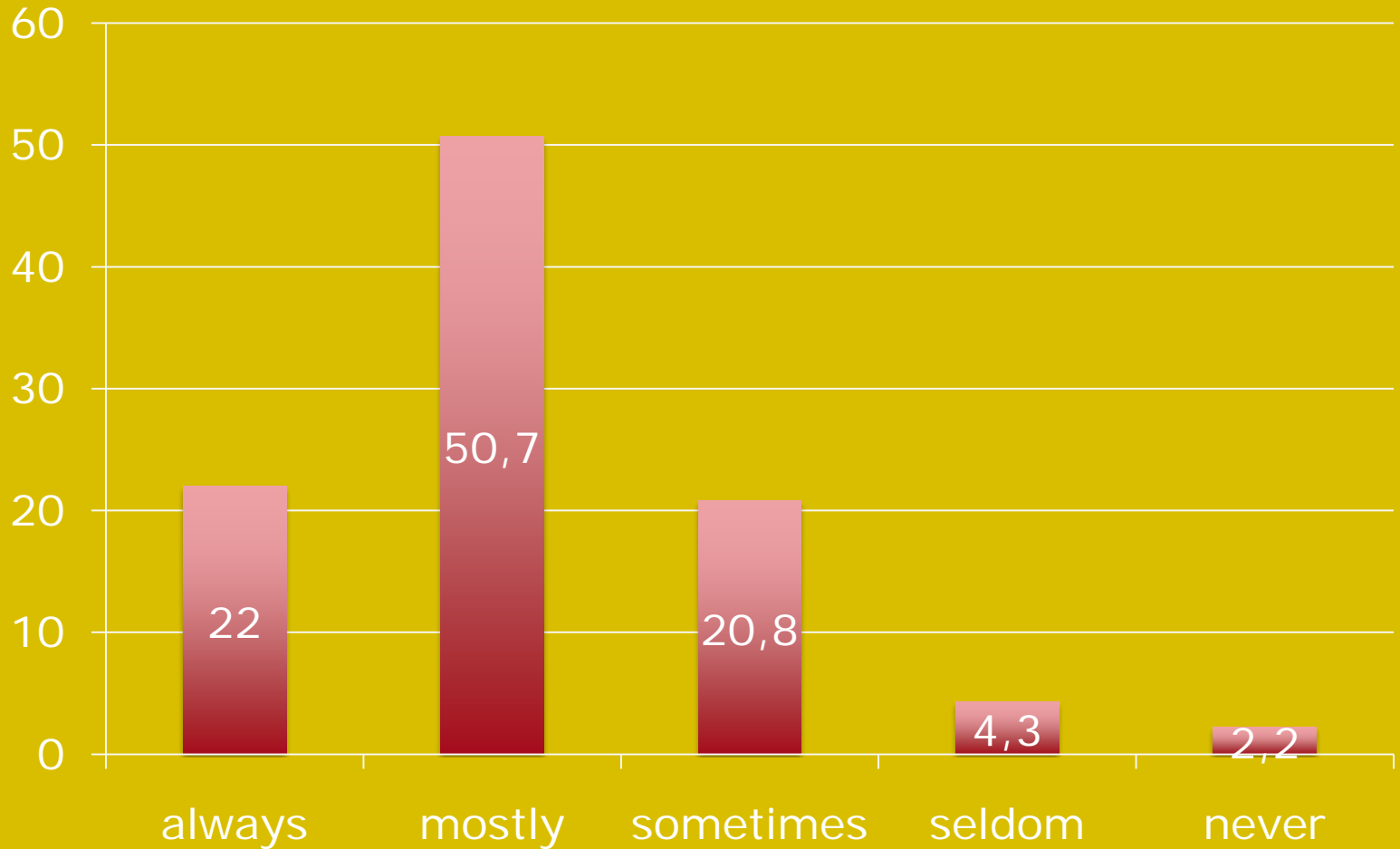
Faculty	N	%
Humanities	548	25.3
Law, Economics and Governance	231	10.7
Geosciences	200	9.3
Social and Behavioural Sciences	393	18.2
Science	380	17.6
Medicine	244	11.3
Veterinary Medicine	166	7.7



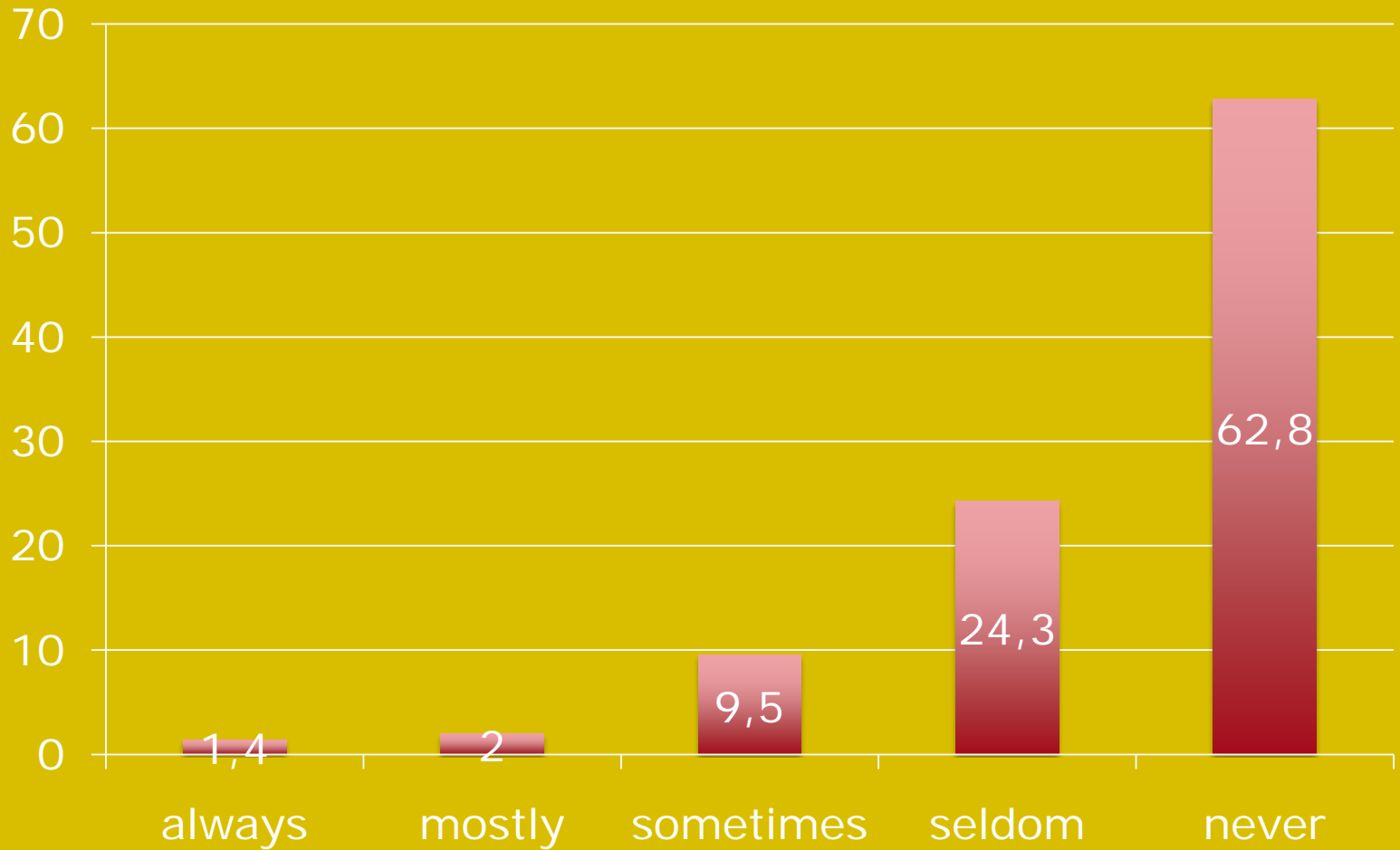
# I am taught in English (n=2145)



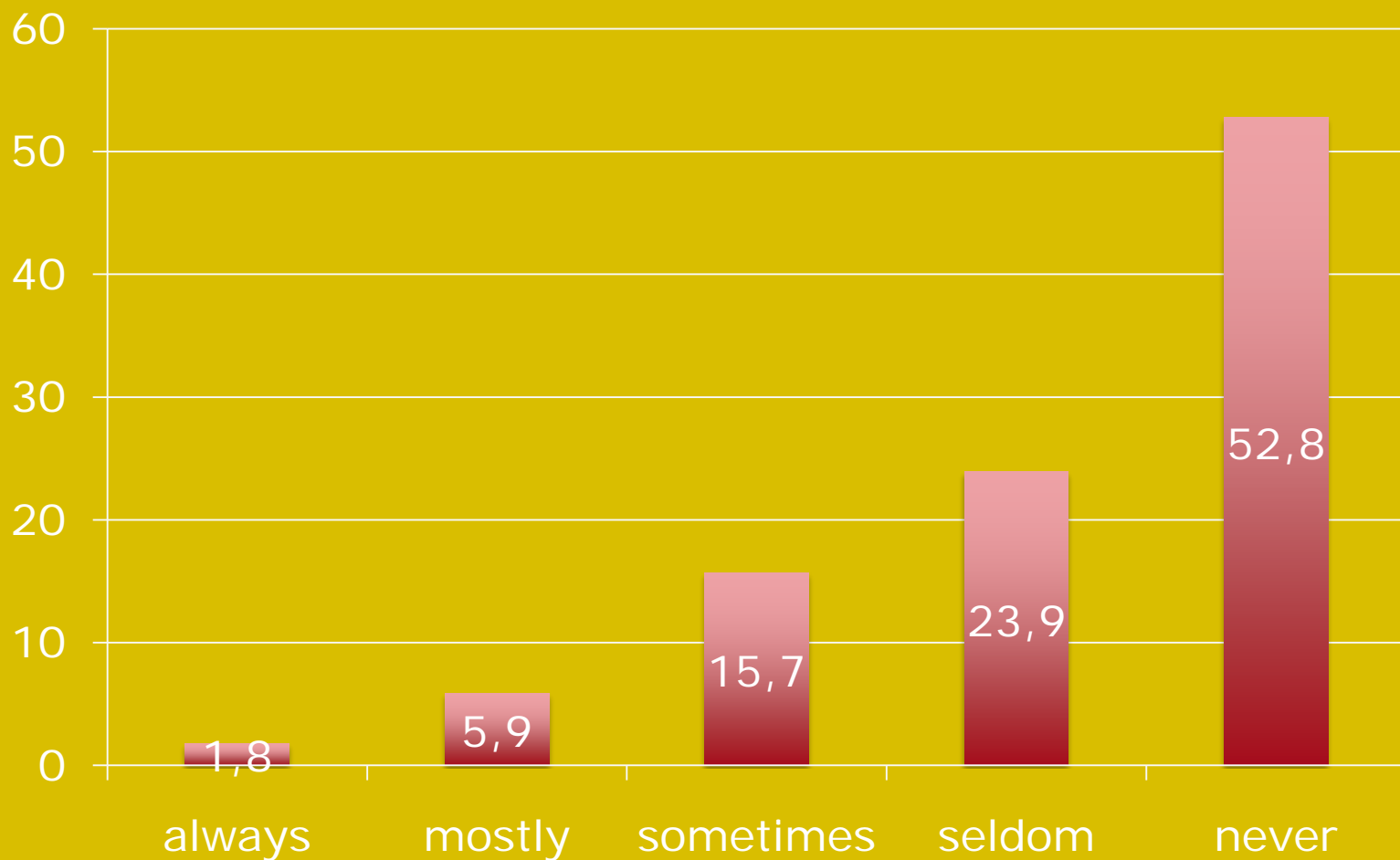
# Course in Dutch, materials in English (n=2072)



# Course in English, materials in Dutch (n=1764)



# In courses taught in English, attention is paid to the improvement of my English language skills (n=1702)



## Shift in course language

Course language	YES	NO	n
English -> Dutch	10.8	89.2	2065
Dutch -> English due to student	17.6	82.4	2085
Dutch -> English due to teacher	28.7	71.3	2088
I did not take a course because it was in English	7.4	92.6	2098



# Language skills of the students

I am able to follow classes in English.

entirely disagree      entirely agree

I am able to give a presentation in English.

entirely disagree      entirely agree

I am good at reading an English article in my field of study.

entirely disagree      entirely agree

I am good at writing a paper in English.

entirely disagree      entirely agree

I get better results for classes taught in English.

entirely disagree      entirely agree

I am able to follow a class in Dutch.

entirely disagree      entirely agree

I am able to give a presentation in Dutch.

entirely disagree      entirely agree

I am good at reading a Dutch article in my field of study.

entirely disagree      entirely agree

I am good at writing a paper in Dutch.

entirely disagree      entirely agree

# Language skills of the students

skill	English	Dutch	difference
follow classes	4.27	4.82	.55
give presentation	3.26	4.46	1.20
read scientific paper	4.30	4.72	.42
write a paper	3.39	4.48	1.09

Better grades courses in English: 2.50



# Language skills of the teacher

The proficiency level of English of the teacher, who is not a native speaker of English, is good enough to teach in English.

entirely disagree      entirely agree

\* The proficiency level of English of the teacher, who is not a native speaker of English, is good enough to make powerpoints written in English.

entirely disagree      entirely agree

\* The proficiency level of Dutch of the teacher, who is not a native speaker of Dutch, is good enough to teach in Dutch.

entirely disagree      entirely agree

\* The proficiency level of Dutch of the teacher, who is not a native speaker of Dutch, is good enough to make powerpoints in Dutch.

entirely disagree      entirely agree



# Language skills of the teacher

English of non-natives good enough to teach	3.24
English of non-natives good enough to make powerpoints	3.92
Dutch of non-natives good enough to teach	3.24
Dutch of non-natives good enough to make powerpoints	3.54



## other results opinions

- Most students do not agree with the statement that all BA (1.78) and MA (1.61) teaching should be in Dutch
- consider academic skills in Dutch (4.18) more important than good proficiency in English (3.93) for their future career
- English is generally not seen as a threat for Dutch (2.04), but some students really see it as a threat
- Use of English at university is generally not seen as a good preparation for an international career (2.99,  $sd=1.44$  -> mixed feelings)
- Mixed feelings about all courses in Dutch in a Dutch language programme
- If course language is English, most students think that exams could be taken in Dutch (4.29)



## Conclusions

- majority of teaching (in BA programme) in Dutch, but large amount of the course materials (text books, papers) are in English
- +70% is confronted with teaching in English
- English language skills are a problem for Dutch students, especially the productive ones
- currently almost no support for the development of their English language skills
- some concerns about Dutch and English language skills of teachers who are non-native speakers
- exams in native language

