

Covid-19 International Student Well-being Study (C19 ISWS)

Data from Wageningen University & Research

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The EU student well-being survey

The corona outbreak has a strong negative impact on the (mental) health and well-being of the population. People experienced more anxiety, stress, anger, fear and depressive symptoms at the start of the outbreak of corona compared to before the outbreak (Torales, O'Higgins, Castaldelli-Maia, & Ventriglio, 2020). The Trimbos Institute for Mental Health (2020) showed that these adverse mental health problems were experienced by one third of the Dutch population.

For students the corona outbreak implied rapid changes in their personal lives as well as their student life. In Wageningen, on-campus classes were cancelled and replaced by online alternatives. For many students the outbreak created uncertainty whether they could finish their study in time. In addition, due to social distancing measures many students moved back to their parental homes or lived more isolated in their student homes. These changes are likely to impact their mental health and well-being

In order to examine the (mental) health and well-being of students across Europe, the University of Antwerp developed a digital survey¹. The survey assessed students' living conditions (physical and financial) and lifestyle behaviours (physical activity, alcohol consumption and tobacco use) before and after the outbreak of corona. In addition, students' mental health and well-being were assessed by using the CES-D 8 scale (Radloff, 1977) and resilience was measured by using the Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008). Finally, in the survey students were asked to evaluate the measures taken by governments and universities in response to the corona outbreak. The overall aim of the survey is to identify how the corona outbreak relates to students' mental health and well-being, hypothesizing that national and university-level measures significantly impact on the well-being of university students

Wageningen University participated in this survey, together with universities and other educational institutes from 26 different countries (see Appendix A for participating countries) including many European countries, Canada, United States and South-Africa. This report shows the preliminary results² of this survey for students of Wageningen University.

Characteristics of the WUR student sample

In total, 1484 students completed the survey that was distributed amongst both Bachelor and Master students in May 2020. In total, 700 bachelor students (47.2%) and 784 master students (52.8%) completed the survey. The survey was completed by 280 international students and 1204 students were Dutch. Two-thirds (n=989) of the participants were female with a median age of 22 (SD=2.80).

Figure 1 shows the main place of living before and during the corona outbreak. Whereas before the corona outbreak almost 90% of the students lived in a student home, during the corona outbreak this was reduced to 50%. The percentage of students living with their parents increased from 8.2% to 45% during the Corona outbreak.

Of all the students, 184 students (12.3%) reported to have corona confirmed by a test or to have serious suspicion of being infected by corona. Fourteen percent of the students indicates to be seriously worried about getting infected and twelve percent is also worried that they get severely ill from a corona infection.

¹ This study is part of the COVID-19 International Student Well-Being Study (C19 ISWS). C19 ISWS is the result of a study design, study protocol and questionnaire developed by a team of the University of Antwerp, Belgium.

² This report contains preliminary results. In-depth analysis of the data are currently taking place, including significance testing of differences between Dutch and international students. In addition, the data presented in this report need to be compared to data from the general Dutch population and to data from student populations of other universities to enhance interpretation of the findings.

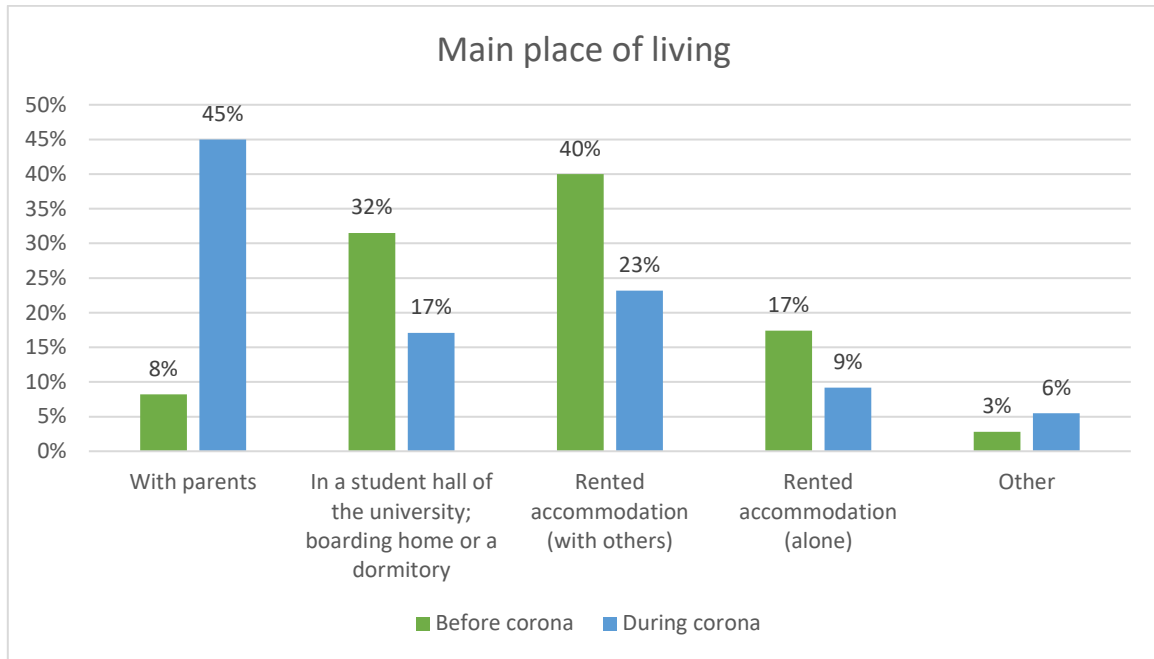


Figure 1. Overview of main place of living before and during the corona outbreak (n=1484).

Students (see Figure 2) reported to have sufficient financial resources before the crisis (89.7%) which reduced during the corona outbreak (73.3%). The percentage of students reporting to have insufficient financial resources to cover monthly costs increased from 3.7% before the outbreak to 13.9% during the outbreak.

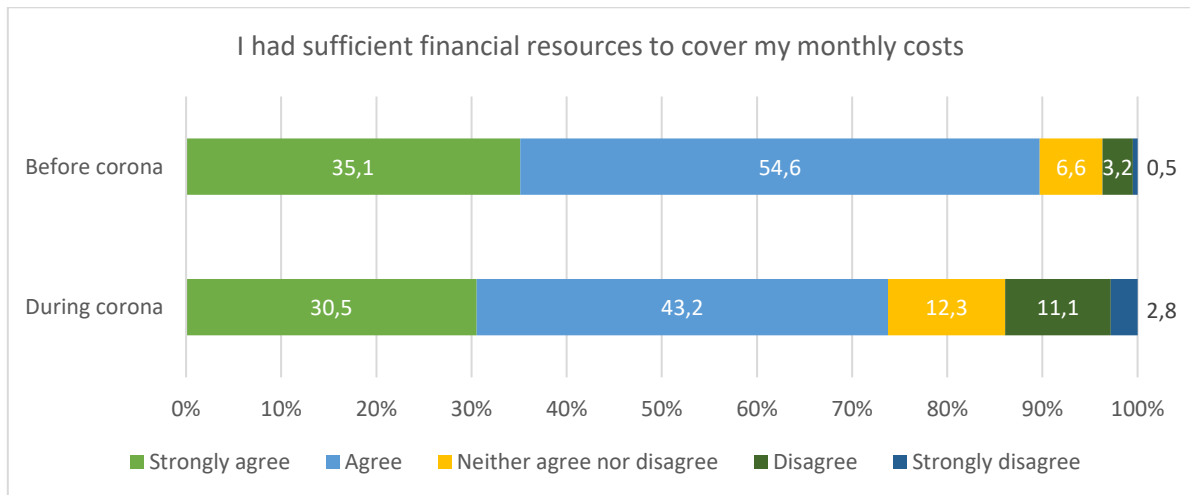


Figure 2. Overview of financial pressure experienced by WUR students (n=1484)

Lifestyle behaviours

Students reported to engage less often in moderate physical activity as well as vigorous physical activity during the corona outbreak compared to before (see Figure 3). A decrease in alcohol consumption and tobacco use could be observed during the corona outbreak. Cannabis use remained similar before and during the corona outbreak (not shown below).

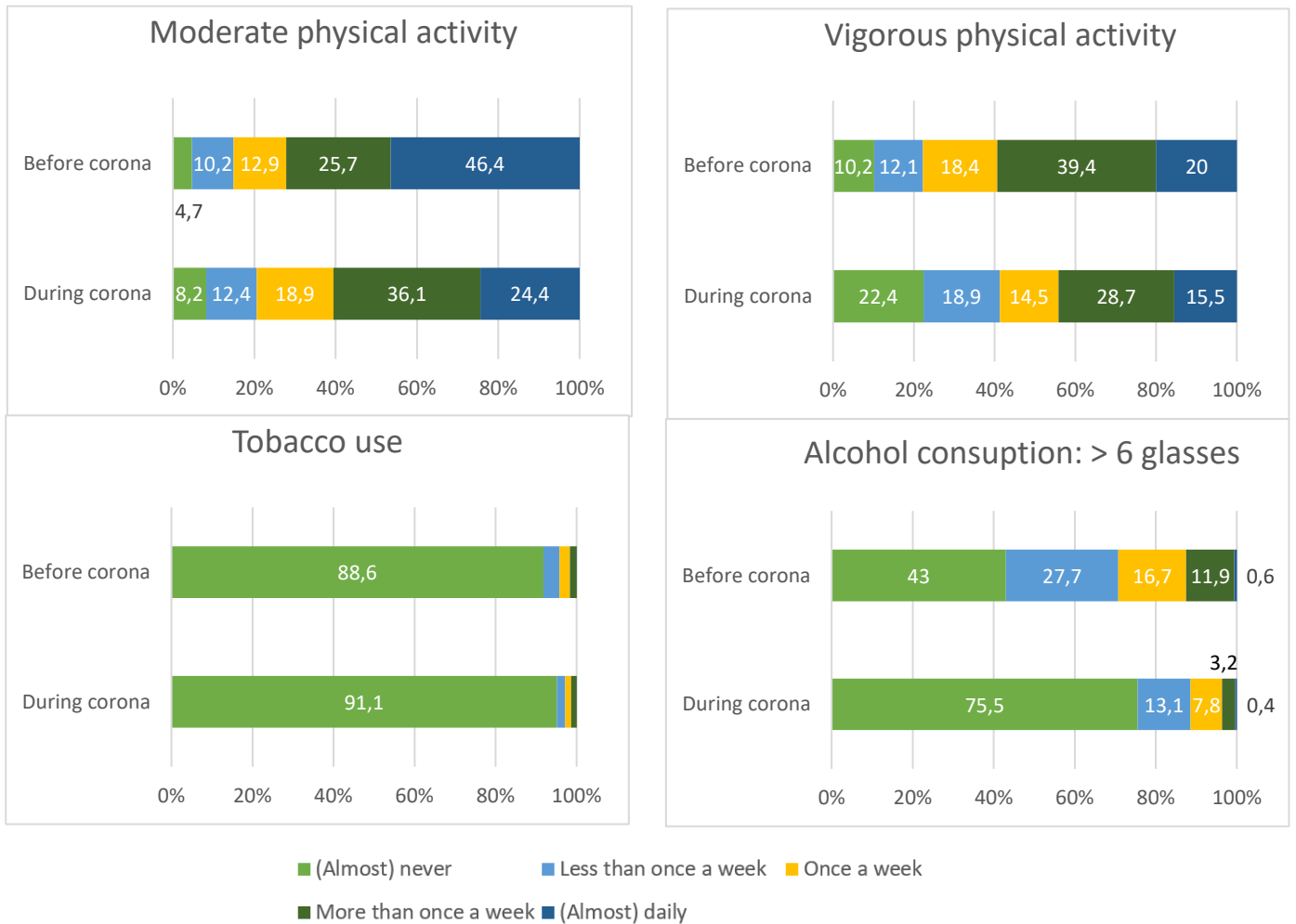


Figure 3. Overview of lifestyle behaviours before and during the corona outbreak (n=1540)

Mental health and well-being

Figure 4 represents the mental health of students during the corona outbreak as assessed by the CES-D 8 scale. In general students reported to feel happy most of the time, but also felt they lacked companionship and had a hard time to get going during the outbreak.

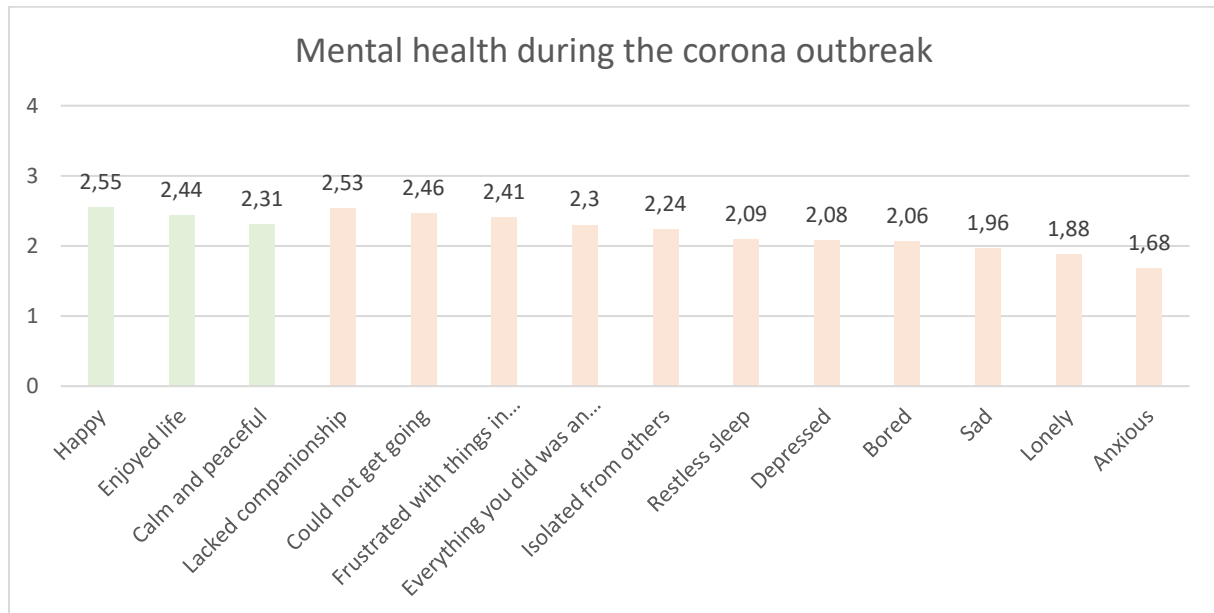


Figure 4. Overview of mental health indicators during the corona outbreak (n=1484)

Note. Green bars represent positive mental health scores; Orange bars represent negative mental health scores. Meaning of the scores: 1=(almost) none of the time; 2=some of the time; 3=most of the time; 4=(almost) all of the time.

Significant differences³ in mental health could be found between male and female students. Male students reported more often to feel calm and peaceful, isolated from others, and bored than female students. Female students reported more often to experience restless sleep, to experience everything as an effort, to feel sad and to feel anxious than male students.

Significant differences in mental health could also be observed between bachelor and master students. Bachelor students reported more often to find it difficult to get going, to experience everything as an effort, to feel isolated from others, and to feel depressed than master students. Master students reported more often to feel anxious than bachelor students.

For the entire student sample, resilience was measured using the Brief Resilience Scale. The average resilience score across all students was 3.08 (SD=0.77) which is relatively similar compared to an average resilience score of 3.44 reported in a healthy sample of Dutch employees before the corona outbreak (Zimmerman, 2016). A significant difference for resilience could be observed between male and female students with male students scoring significantly higher resilience than female students, which denotes that male students were in general more resilient than female students.

³ Independent t-test were performed to test for significant differences between male and female students, and between bachelor and master students. Test values for these test are not included in the report. Independent t-tests to compare data from Dutch and international students are currently being conducted.

Evaluation of university measures

Figure 5 shows how students evaluated the measures taken by the university in response to the corona outbreak. In general, students reported to be sufficiently informed about implemented changes (79.1%), and to be satisfied with the protective measures that were taken by the university (74.6%). However, 62.8% of the students reported to know less about what was expected from them in their courses during the corona break, and more than half of the students reported significant stress due to the changes in teaching methods (50.4%). Furthermore, 33.8% of the students reported that the quality of education has decreased since the corona outbreak, and 39% of the students reported to be concerned about not successfully completing the academic year due to the corona outbreak.

Significant differences in the evaluation of university measures could be distinguished between male and female students. Female students reported more often to experience an increased university workload since the corona outbreak, and reported more satisfaction with the protective measures that were taken by the university, than male students. Male students reported more often that they experienced a decrease in the quality of education since the corona outbreak compared to female students.

Significant differences in the evaluation of university measures could also be found between bachelor and master students. Bachelor students reported more often to experience an increased university workload since the corona outbreak, to know less about what is expected from them in their courses during the corona outbreak, and to experience significant stress due to the change in teaching methods, than master students.

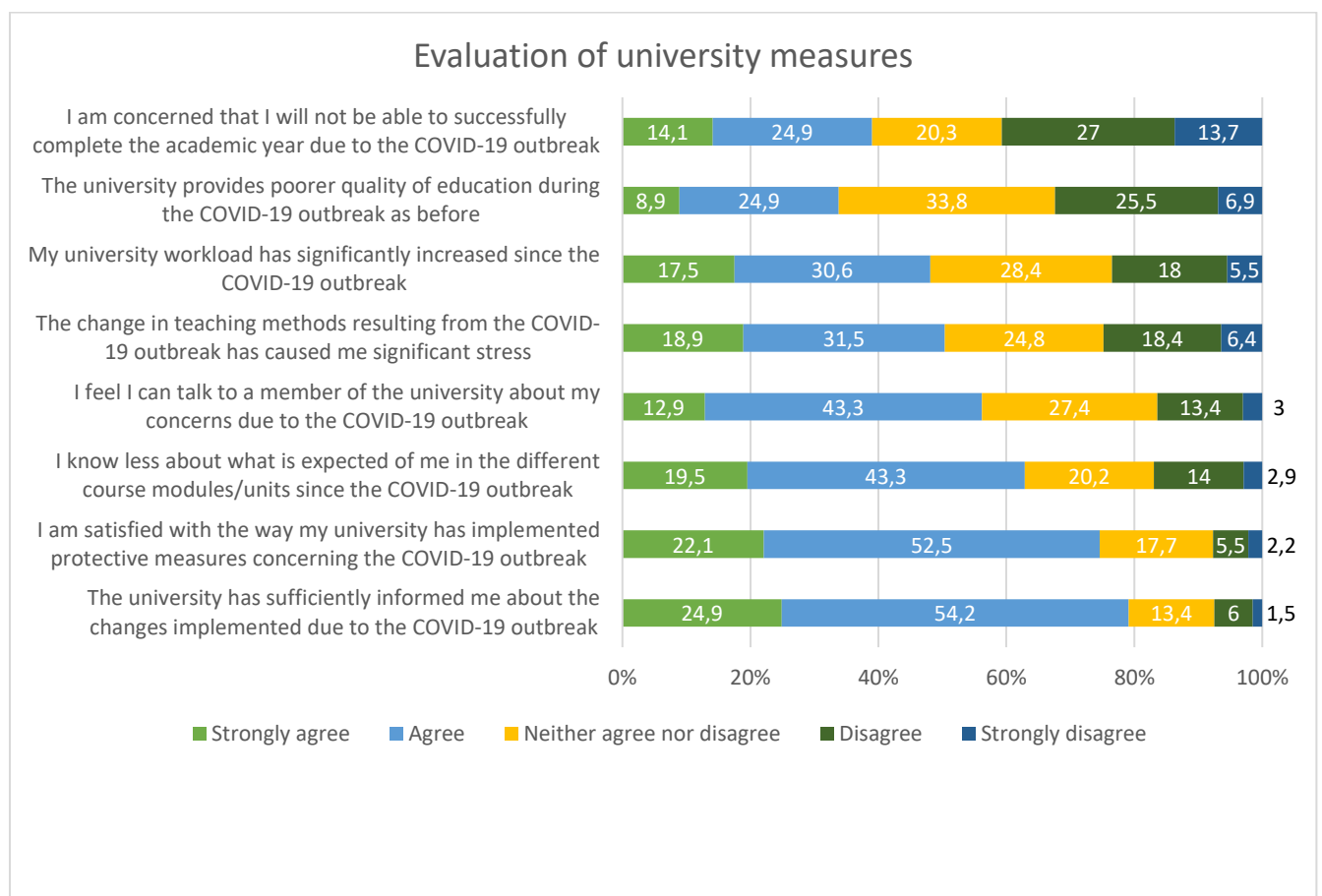


Figure 5. Overview of the evaluation of university measures by WUR students (n=1476)

Evaluation of education and teaching

Figure 6 shows how students evaluate education and teaching at the university during the corona outbreak. In general, students reported that teachers make students feel safe to ask questions (71%), that teachers were committed to their students (67.2%), and that they were receptive for suggestions and feedback (68.1%). About half of the students reported that the available IT facilities and the virtual learning environment were (66.7%) contributing to their learning process. However, less than half of the students (48.8%) agreed that there were sufficient supporting facilities within the university.

Reflecting on their own performance, 68.1% of the students reported to participate in all study activities and 14.6% reported not to participate in all the study activities during the corona outbreak. Even though, 57.7% of the students feels being in touch with fellow students helps in performing well, only 44.2% reported feeling committed to fellow students.

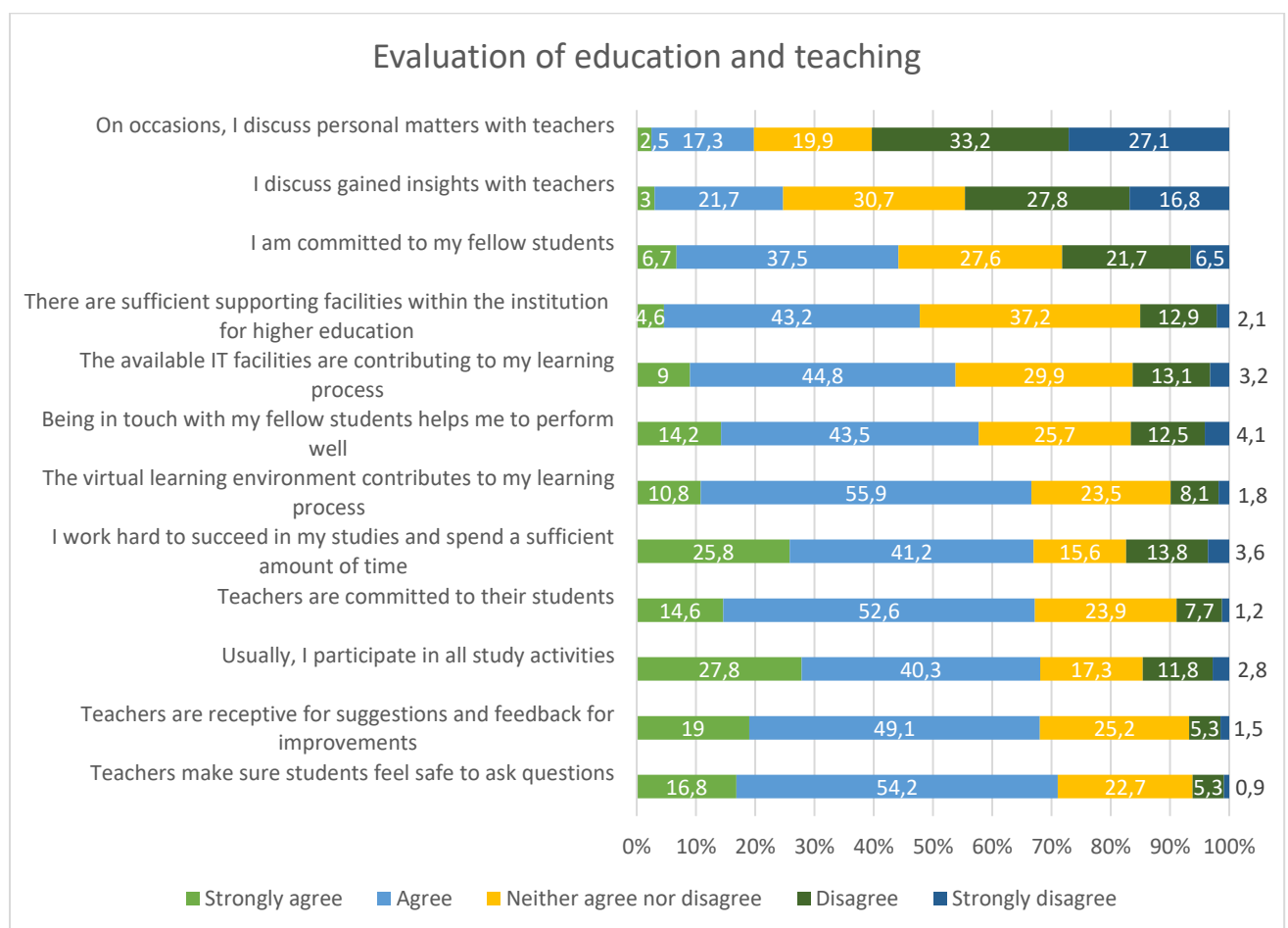


Figure 6. Overview of the evaluation of education and training during the corona outbreak by WUR students (n=1484)

Differences in evaluation of education and teaching at the university during the corona outbreak could be identified between male and female students. Female students reported more often that there were sufficient supporting facilities, that they work hard to succeed in their studies and usually participate in all study activities, and that the virtual learning environment contributes to their learning process, as compared to male students. Male students reported more often to discuss gained insights and personal matters with teachers than female students.

Differences in evaluation of education and training from the university during the corona outbreak could also be identified between bachelor and master students. Bachelor students reported more often that there are sufficient supporting facilities, and that the virtual learning environment contributes to their learning process. Master students reported more often that they discuss gained insights and personal matters with teachers, and that they usually participate in all study activities.

References

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Appendix A. Overview of participating countries

Country
Belgium
Canada
Cyprus
Czech
Denmark
Finland
France
Germany
Greece
Hungary
Iceland
Israel
Italy
Norway
Portugal
Romania
Russia
Slovakia
South Africa
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
The Netherlands
Turkey
United Kingdom
USA