



Universität für Bodenkultur Wien
University of Natural Resources
and Life Sciences, Vienna

Exchange Studies at BOKU

Evaluation of incoming student questionnaires, summer semester 2015

This paper is a report on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students, who spent the 2015 summer semester at BOKU. At the end of their stay, the students were given a questionnaire asking them what they liked and disliked about their stay and what they felt could be improved upon. 96 questionnaires were returned.

1. The most appreciated things at BOKU

The aspects of BOKU appreciated the most by students were the wide variety of courses, the social events organised for incoming students – such as the Welcome Days and the weekly Stammtisch – and the teaching staff. The positive, welcoming atmosphere at the university was commented on 28 times by students, who also appreciated the opportunities they had to meet new people from all over the world, as well as the facilities available at each campus. The organisation, friendliness and helpfulness of the support staff, including the team at ZIB, was another area frequently mentioned in the questionnaire. Several students cited the user-friendly nature and clear structure of online systems such as BOKUonline and Mobility Online as positive parts of their stay. 6 also praised the Buddy system, finding it helpful to get them settled into life both at BOKU and in Vienna. See all responses in Table 1.

Table 1. What students appreciated most at BOKU

	Responses	Number of times mentioned
1	Courses	66
2	Social events (incl. Welcome Days, Stammtisch)	39
3	Teaching staff	35
4	Atmosphere (open-minded, positive)	28
5	Opportunity to meet new people	21
6	Facilities	19
7	Support staff (incl. ZIB team)	18
8	Organisation	15
9	Location	14
10	Online systems (BOKUonline & Mobility Online)	10
11	Buddy system	6
12	Cleanliness	6
13	Language courses	5
14	TUWI and Student Union	2
15	International newsletter	2

2. Things that BOKU could do better for international students

Although many students praised the range of courses on offer at BOKU, the most commonly-mentioned area for improvement was the organisation of these courses. Many students felt that course registration should open earlier, as on arrival at BOKU they found that classes were already fully booked or there was a long waiting list for spaces. Some students also had difficulties in creating their schedules due to clashes between classes and would have liked



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more information before their arrival about how the registration process worked. The second most commonly mentioned topic was administration – some students felt they had too much paperwork to fill out and that the registration process was overly complicated or confusing. Students also mentioned that they would have appreciated more help in finding accommodation (especially with providers other than the OeAD), as well as information about events taking place at BOKU, course deadlines and the language courses on offer. All responses can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. What students felt could be improved upon at BOKU

	Responses	Number of times mentioned
1	Course organisation	38
2	Administration (registration process, documents to fill out)	20
3	Information (events, deadlines, accommodation, language courses)	17
4	Not enough social events	15
5	Exam period	13
6	Facilities	13
7	Accommodation	10
8	Number of courses in English	9
9	Buddy system	9
10	More language courses	8
11	Online systems	7
12	Opening hours at ZIB	4
13	Teaching material	2
14	ECTS credit system	1

3. Motivation, information and events

3.1 Activities at BOKU

77% of respondents participated in a regular course programme during their stay at BOKU. 14% worked on a thesis or research project and 9% carried out an internship. Students were hosted by the following institutions:

- Department of Biotechnology
- Department of Food Science and Technology
- Department of Landscape, Spatial and Infrastructure Sciences
- Department of Water, Atmosphere and Environment
- Division of Viticulture and Pomology
- Institute of Biologically Inspired Materials
- Institute of Hydraulics and Rural Water Management
- Institute of Soil Research
- Institute of Waste Management
- Institute of Zoology

3.2 Reasons for coming to BOKU

The main factors that motivated students to come to BOKU were to experience a different environment, meet new people and improve their language proficiency. Academic and cultural reasons also proved important for students. (See Figure 1)

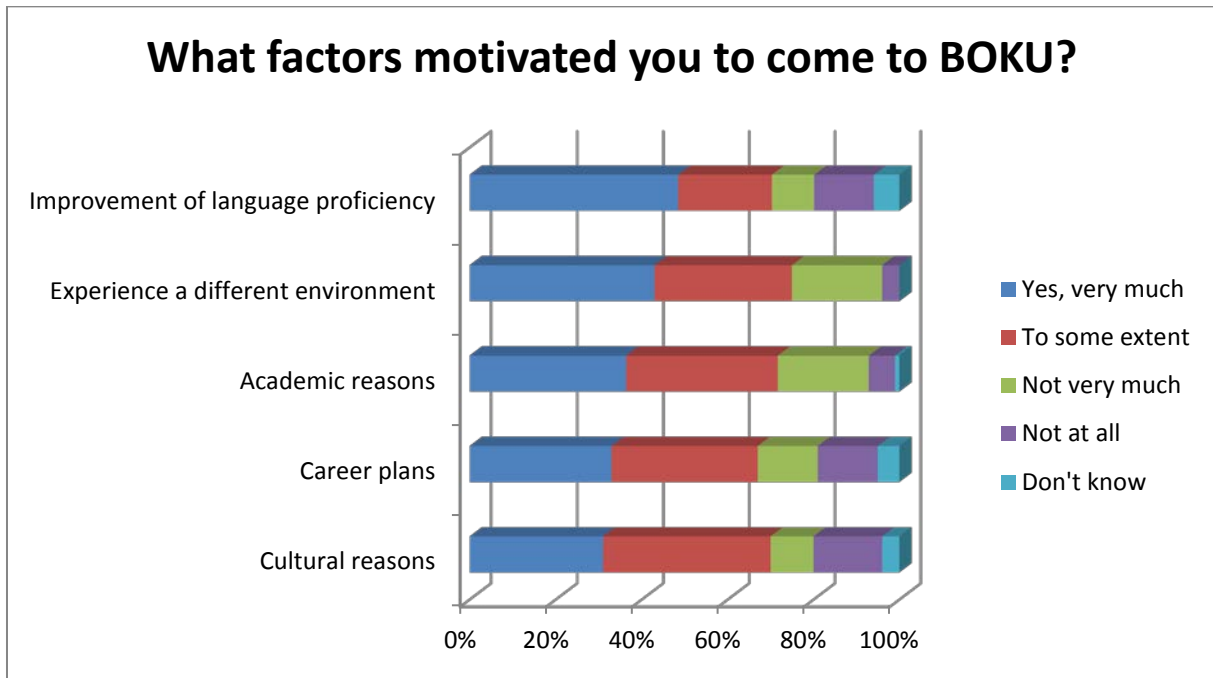


Figure 1. Reasons why international students chose to study at BOKU

The specialised subjects offered at BOKU were also seen as a draw for several students. Others said they chose the university because of its proximity to their home country, or because they had visited Vienna before and loved the city. For one student, the opportunity to bring their dog with them to university was a major motivational factor!

3.3 Information before the stay

The BOKU website was the most popular source of information for students before they arrived at the university, and was used by 70% of students. Fellow students and departmental coordinators at their home university were also used as major sources of information (see Figure 2).

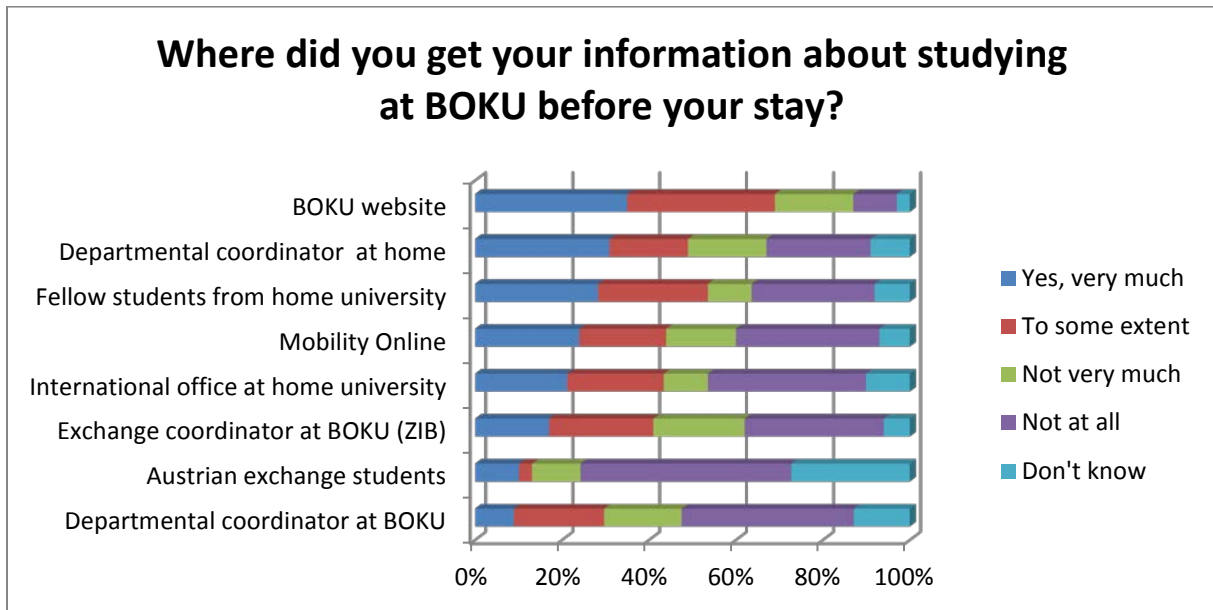


Figure 2. Sources of information used by students before their stay

One student gained information at BOKU from their brother, who had previously also done an exchange semester at the university.

3.4 Information from BOKU

Almost 80% of respondents thought the information they received from the Center for International Relations both when planning and during their stay was either very good or good. 59% reacted positively to the information they received from their department or institute and 41% expressed positive opinions on the information from other service departments. All responses can be seen in Figure 3.

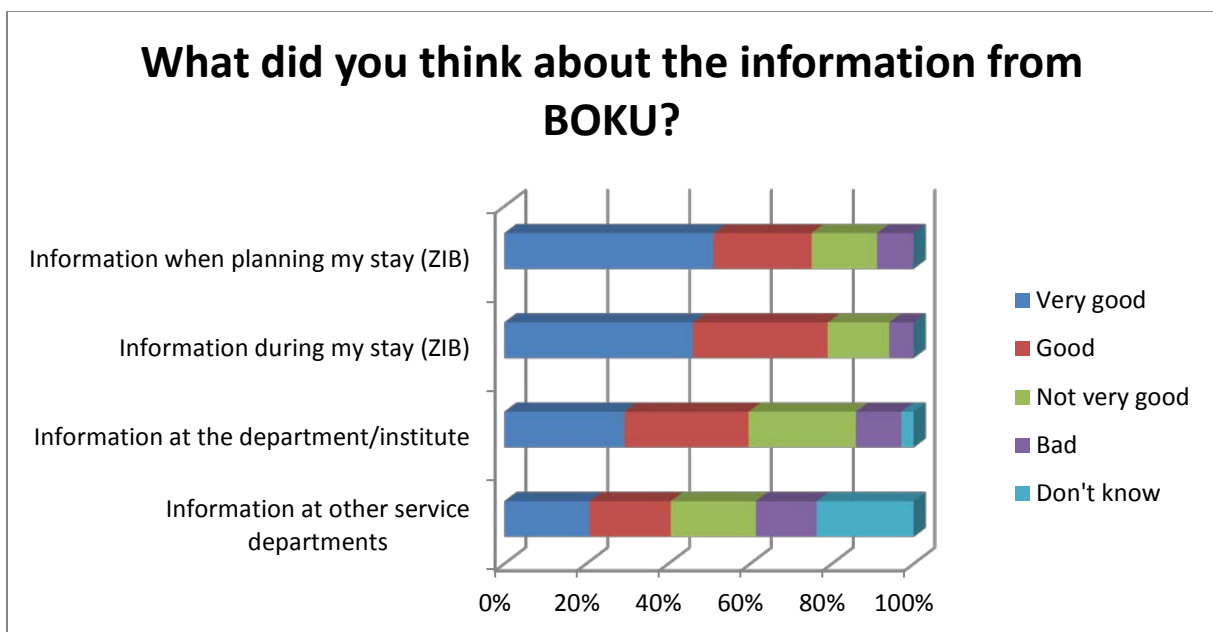


Figure 3. Evaluation of information from BOKU

3.5 Mobility Online

Opinions on Mobility Online were largely positive. 80% of students were pleased with the reliable operation of the system and 73% found it simple to fill in. Many students also found the instructions in the database and the emails they received to be clear and easy to understand. All responses can be found in Figure 4.

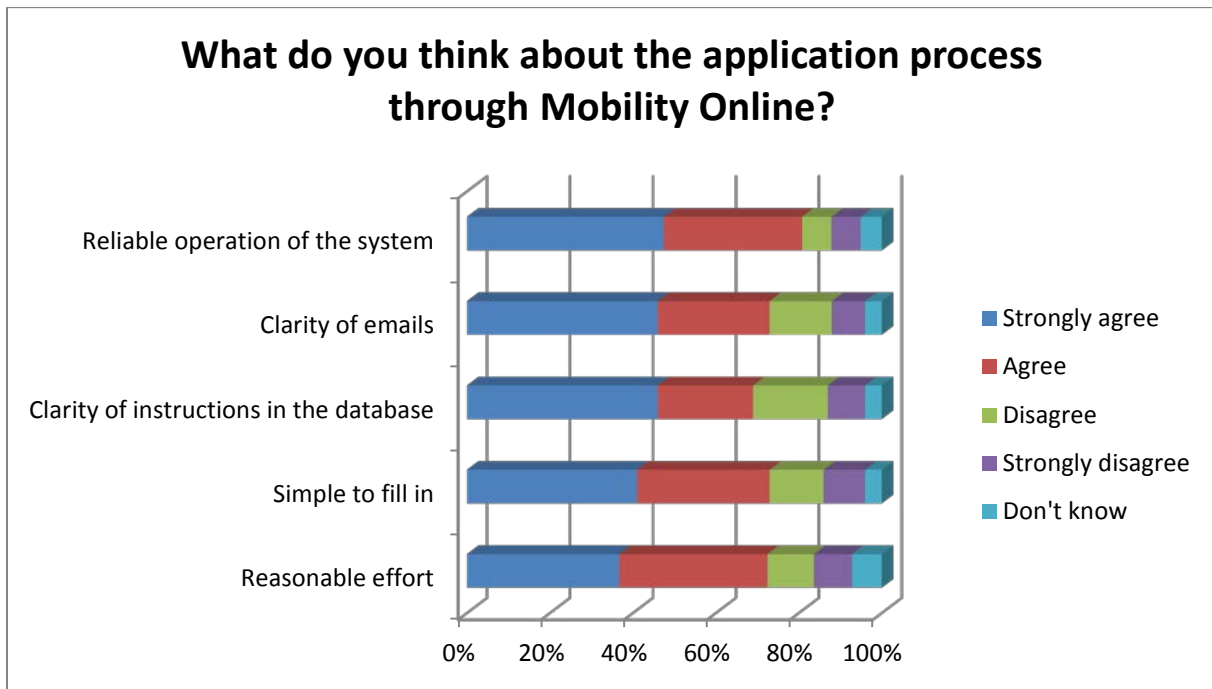


Figure 4. Evaluation of Mobility Online

Students were also given the opportunity to leave comments on how the system could be improved, the most popular of which was to reduce the number of documents required during the application process.

3.6 Welcome Days

70% of respondents attended the Welcome Days, and 78% of these students came away with either a good or very good impression.

Students were also asked to provide comments on their experiences at the Welcome Days. Many praised the Heurigen party, as well as the info sessions, tours of the campus and city, and the opportunity to make new friends. Several also commented that they were pleased to meet the ZIB team, especially Ulrike Piringer. When asked how they thought the Welcome Days could be improved, some students commented that there was too much repetition of information they had already either received by email or had found out from the website. Others also suggested that groups be mixed up more so that students have more opportunity to mingle and meet new people.

3.7 BOKUonline info session

73% of respondents attended the BOKUonline info session, and 80% of them found it helpful. Students appreciated the detailed explanations of the system, the information given about how



to navigate the site, register for courses and exams and search for lectures, and the chance to ask questions.

For the 23% of respondents who didn't attend the session, the main reasons for their absence were that they felt they knew the information already, they were not in Vienna for the start of the semester, or they were in classes at that time.

3.8 Buddy system

All exchange students had the opportunity to be assigned a Buddy, an Austrian student who could help them with their arrival in Vienna and to get them settled into life at BOKU. 79% of respondents had a Buddy. Out of those who did not, two people had asked for a Buddy but not received one; others applied too late or felt they did not need one.

44% felt their Buddies helped them to get used to social life in Vienna, and 39% credited them with assisting with the first steps after arrival in Austria. 38% said their Buddies helped them to get used to academic life at BOKU (see Figure 5).

For those who were unsatisfied with their Buddies, the main problem was a lack of time or coordination when they arrived at BOKU – several students commented that their Buddy was on holiday when they arrived or too busy during the semester with their own work to help out or meet up. 6 respondents said they never met their Buddy.

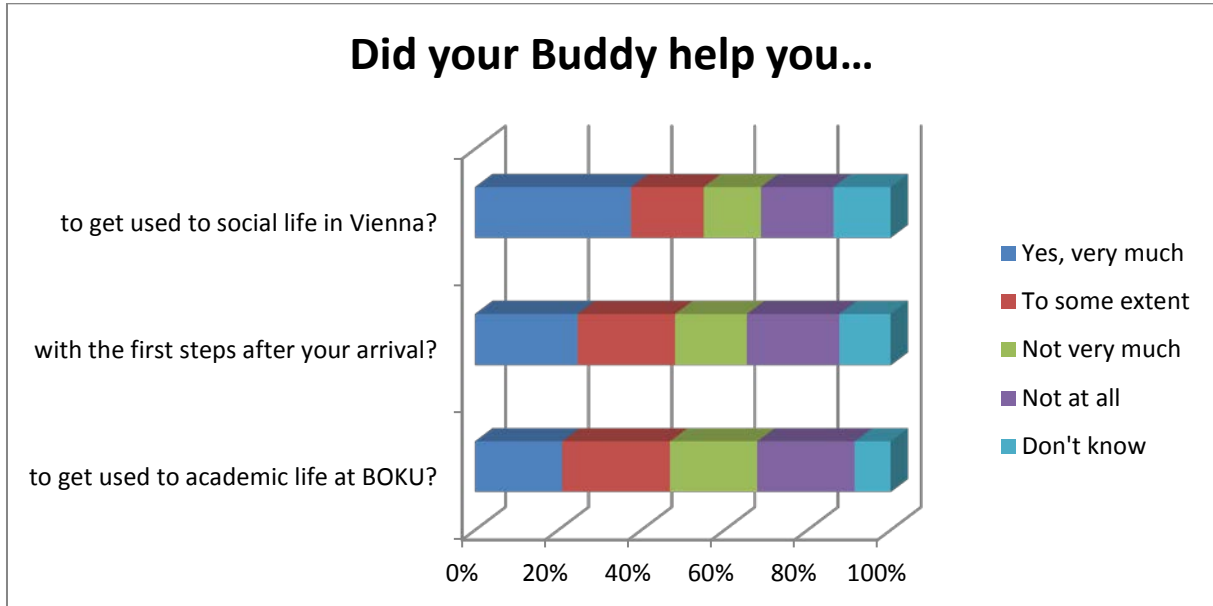


Figure 5. Student satisfaction with the support they received from their Buddy

3.9 International Newsletter sent by ZIB (Lisa/Heidi)

47% of those who answered the questionnaire said they read the weekly International Newsletter regularly. 63% found the information included to be useful. When asked what other things they would like to read about in the newsletter, students suggested:

- A larger variety of suggestions about where to go at the weekend
- Tips on how to integrate better and make friends with Austrian students at BOKU



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- More information about university-wide activities like projects, seminars and special lectures.

3.10 Stammtisch

61% of respondents attended the weekly Stammtisch either regularly or now and then. The most common suggestions for ways to make the event more attractive were either to change the location regularly – perhaps going outside when the weather was nice, or to choose a non-smoking or larger bar. Several students also suggested that groups be mixed regularly or games be held to make it more interactive and allow everyone to get to know each other.

3.11 Other events

The Wilkommens-Heuriger (Viennese Wine Bar) was attended by 57% of respondents, and 18 students went to the Apfelstrudel event.

3.12 Improvements to information and planning for exchange students

When filling out the questionnaire, students were also asked what BOKU could do to improve the information and make the planning and first steps easier for exchange students. The most common suggestion was to simplify BOKUonline and reduce the number of administrative steps and amount of paperwork required. Other students said they would have liked more information on the different accommodation options available, and more social events or activities to get to know the city better. Another popular suggestion was to provide more information about important dates and deadlines at BOKU. Students also said they would have liked to know more about registering in Vienna, as well as about public transport.

4. Infrastructure at BOKU

77% of students were very satisfied or satisfied to some extent with the access to computers and media. 68% were pleased with the study environment in general (which included social events, student clubs and sports facilities) and 66% were satisfied at least to some extent with the facilities, such as classrooms, at BOKU in general. The area with which students were least satisfied was the food supply (see Figure 6), and many of those who commented said they found the food on offer at the various BOKU campuses to be too limited, too expensive or not good enough. 4 students also felt that the library opening hours were not long enough and would have liked it to be open later or at the weekends.

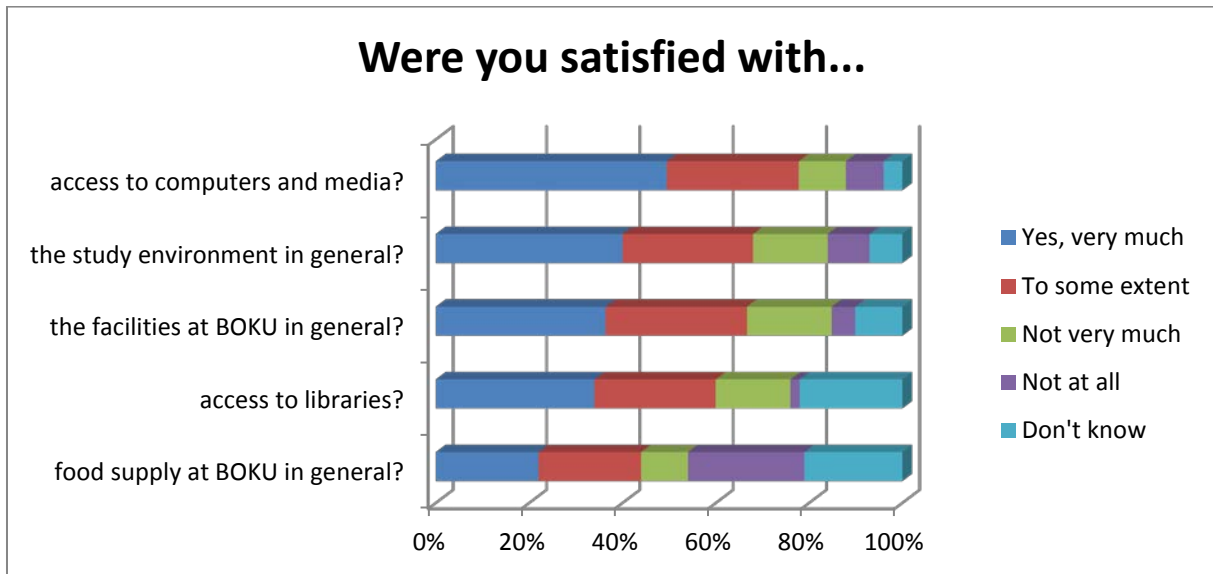


Figure 6. Student satisfaction with the facilities at BOKU

5. Languages

5.1 Language problems

10% of students experienced language problems regularly, 52% now and then, and 38% never had any difficulties.

Of the 62% of students who did have language problems, the majority occurred in the classroom or the student's private life. Some students also mentioned difficulties at the hospital or when trying to understand different German dialects. See Figure 7 for all responses.

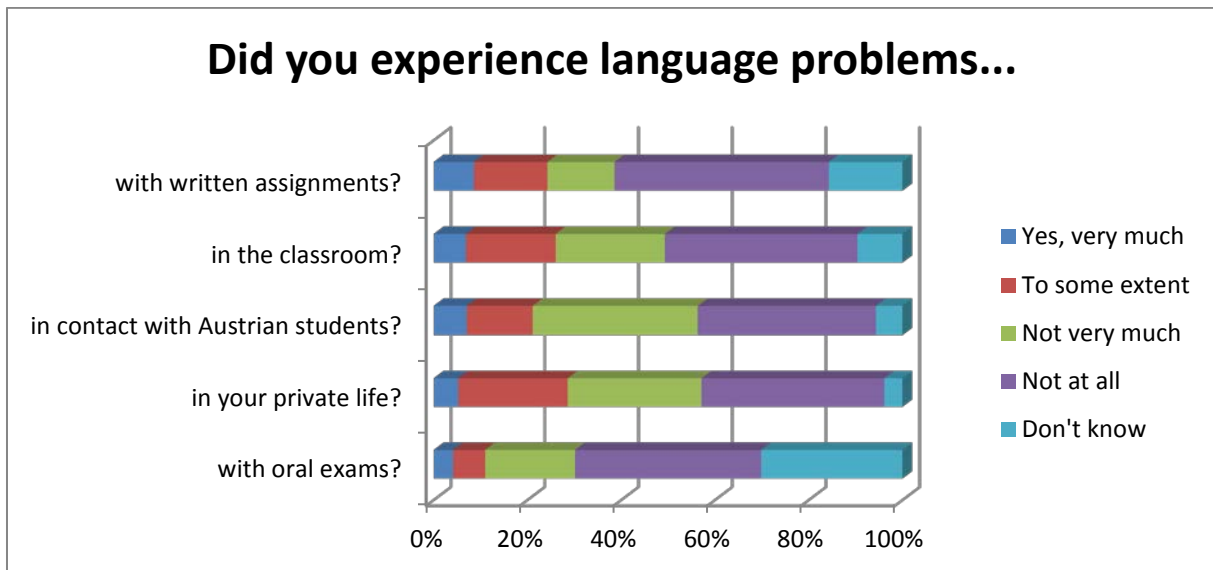


Figure 7. Where students experienced language problems

5.2 German language courses



12% of respondents took part in an intensive German course before the semester, 22% during the semester and 17% participated in the Tandem programme. One student also took a German course at the VHS (die Wiener Volkshochschulen).

6. Accommodation

6.1 Accommodation type

Over half of students stayed in student residences – 35% in those managed by the OeAD and 26% in those they had organised themselves. 39% lived in private accommodation such as a shared flat.

70% of respondents were satisfied with their accommodation; the main problem for those who were not was the expensive rent and/or deposit. Some students also felt their accommodation was located too far from the city centre, and others had problems with their roommates.

6.2 Important factors in choosing accommodation

The two most important factors for students when choosing their accommodation were price and condition, with 87% and 86% of students rating them a priority respectively. Proximity to the university and to the city centre was also important for over half of the respondents. Students did not seem to be as concerned about who they were living with when choosing their accommodation –22% rated living with other foreign students as “very important”, and only 17% said living with Austrian students was a top priority. All responses can be found in Figure 8.

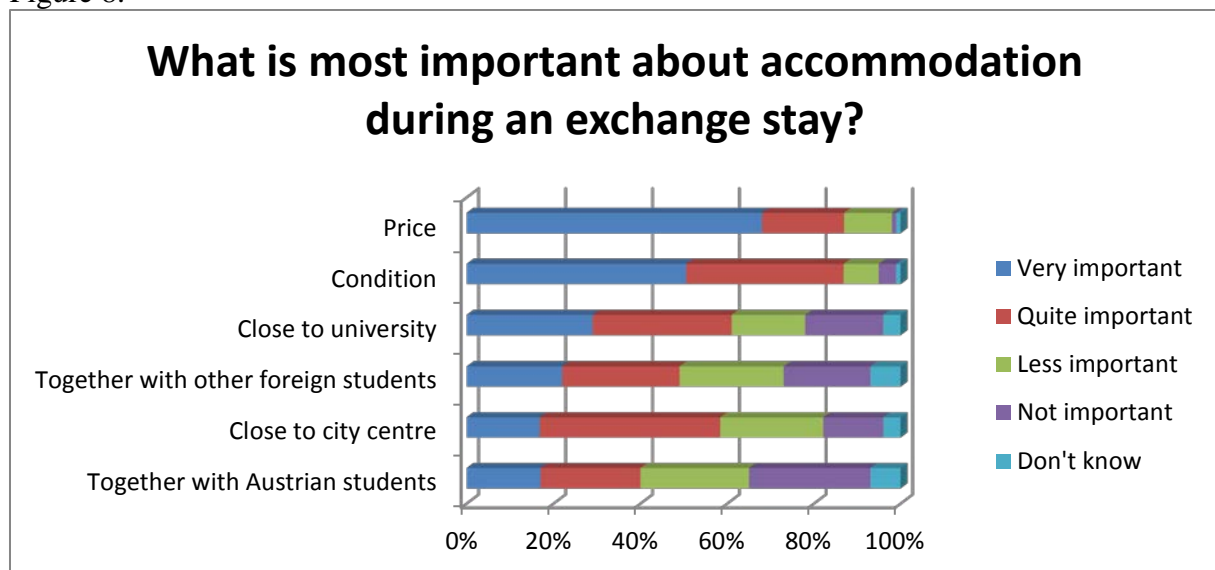


Figure 8. Most important factors for students when choosing their accommodation

7. Academic and personal outcomes

7.1 Outcome of the stay at BOKU

83% of the students judged the outcome of their stay at BOKU as good or very good. 95% felt their personal outcome was also good or very good.

7.2 Extension of stay at BOKU



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78% of respondents said they would like to return to Austria to do an internship or to work. 56% wanted to return to BOKU for further studies, 55% wanted to extend their stay at BOKU and 46% said they would like to return to another Austrian institution for further studies (see Figure 9).

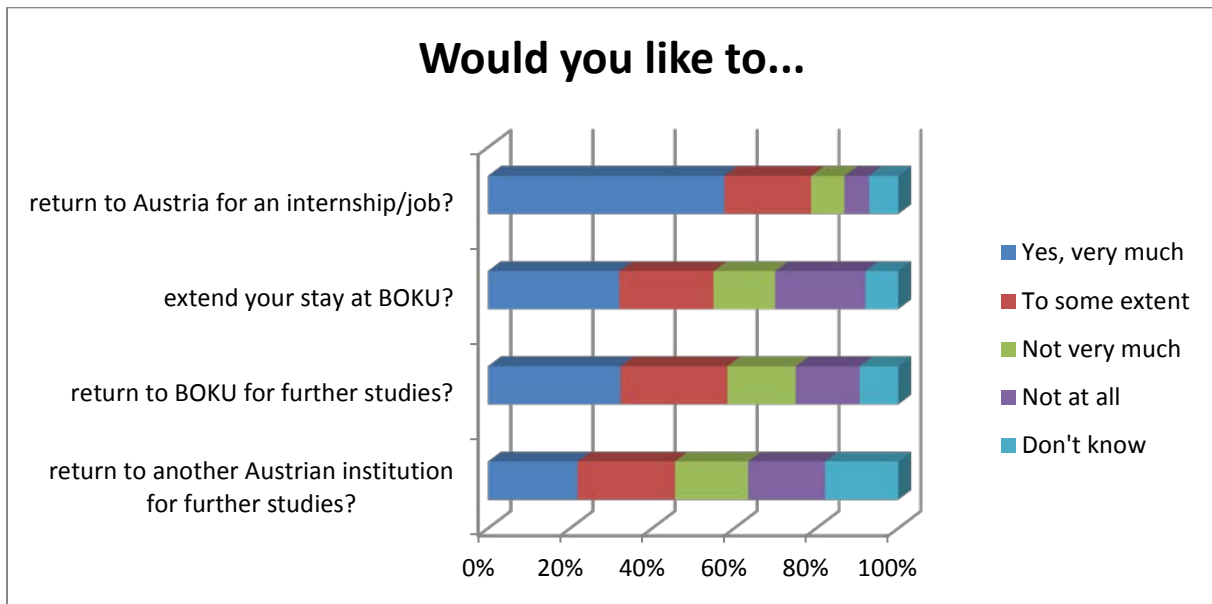


Figure 9. Students' future plans in Austria

7.3 Situations requiring special attention

Several students said they needed special attention when trying to build a course schedule – some struggled to work out how the courses worked and how to reach the required number of ECTS. One student mentioned they had problems with their dormitory and the OeAD, suggesting that BOKU explore and promote alternative accommodation providers.

7.4 Recommendations for ZIB or BOKU to support exchange students

The following responses were suggested:

- Provide more sporting opportunities both university-wide and specifically for exchange students
- Hold a get-together at the beginning of the semester for exchange students and their Buddies to allow them to get to know each other
- Make information about class dates and times available earlier
- Make sure all students are aware of BOKU Learn (one student discovered it by accident when a lecturer mentioned it)
- Give students a short guide on computer terminology in German (such as 'cut', 'copy' and 'paste')
- Provide international master programme students with their own contact person, as the international office is normally very busy with Erasmus+ students
- Use the same ECTS system as other universities in the European Union
- Do more Vienna-based activities to allow students to get to know the city
- Make students aware that they are usually responsible for excursion costs, as they may not be used to this



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- Hold an official ceremony at the end of the semester to reflect on the students' stay abroad

One student said: "Keep your good mood and your super organisation and that will stay very good!"

8. Background information

25% of the respondents were male and 75% female. 58% spent the summer semester at BOKU, 25% stayed for the whole academic year and 17% had alternative arrival and departure dates.

<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Answers</u>	<u>%</u>
French	16	17%
German	11	11%
Polish	10	10%
Italian	9	9%
Czech	6	6%
Croatian	5	5%
Portuguese	4	4%
Swedish	4	4%
Finnish	3	3%
Hungarian	3	3%
Romanian	3	3%
American	2	2%
Australian	2	2%
Greek	2	2%
Slovakian	2	2%
Slovenian	2	2%
Spanish	2	2%
Belgian	1	1%
Chinese	1	1%
Danish	1	1%
Dutch	1	1%
Mexican	1	1%
Norwegian	1	1%
Swiss	1	1%
Tunisian	1	1%
<i>Didn't want to say</i>	2	2%
SUM	96	