

EXCHANGE STUDIES AT BOKU

EVALUATION OF INCOMING STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES

SUMMER SEMESTER 2023

This report summarizes the results of a survey conducted among incoming students who attended BOKU during the summer semester of 2023. At the conclusion of their stay, the students completed a questionnaire that asked them to highlight the aspects of their experience they liked and disliked, as well as areas they felt could be improved. A total of 90 questionnaires were returned.

1. About the sample

In a sample of 90 exchange students, 68% were female, 31% were male, and 1% identified as diverse. The majority of these students originated from France (28%), Italy (26%), Belgium (7%), Germany (6%), Norway (4%), Croatia (2%), Brazil (1%).

See all responses in Table 1.

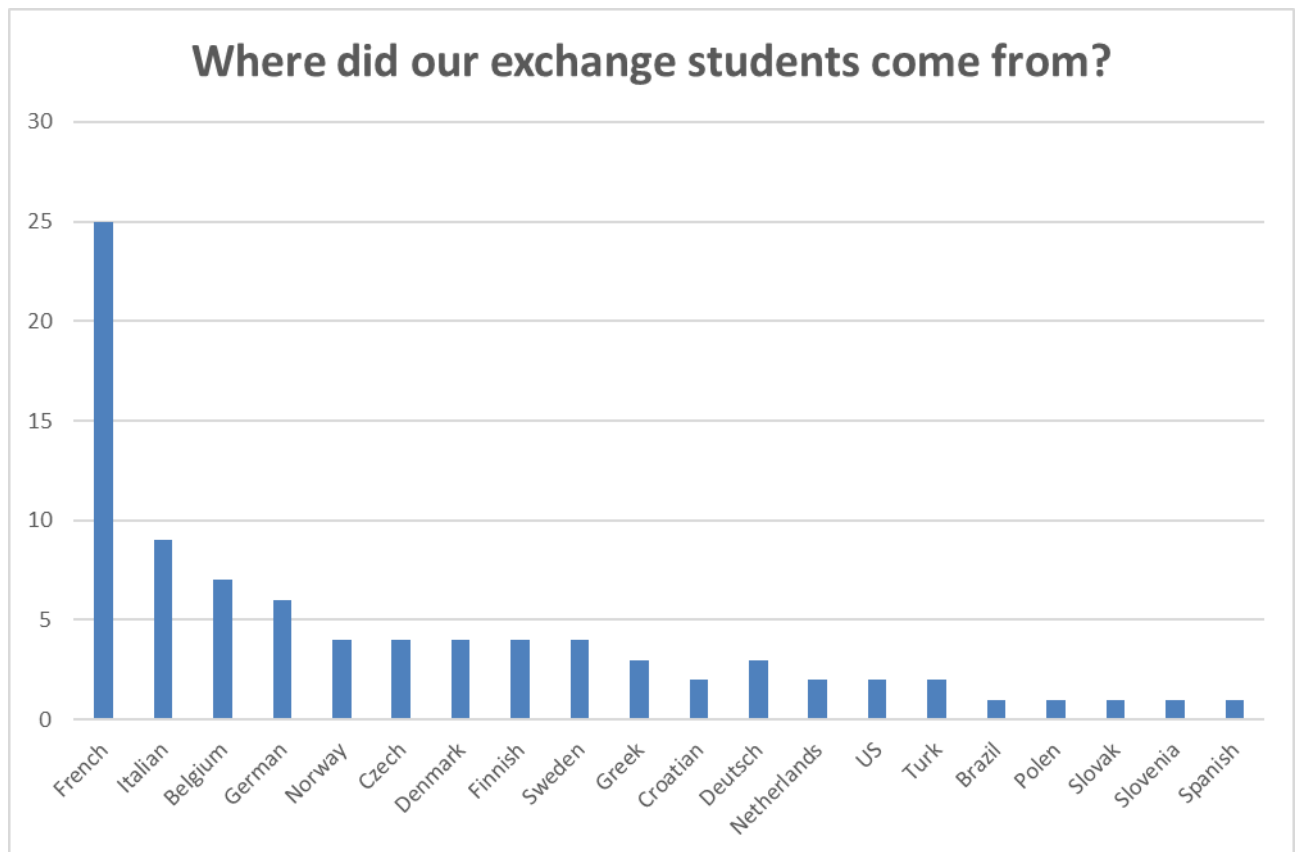


Figure 1. Exchange student's country of origin

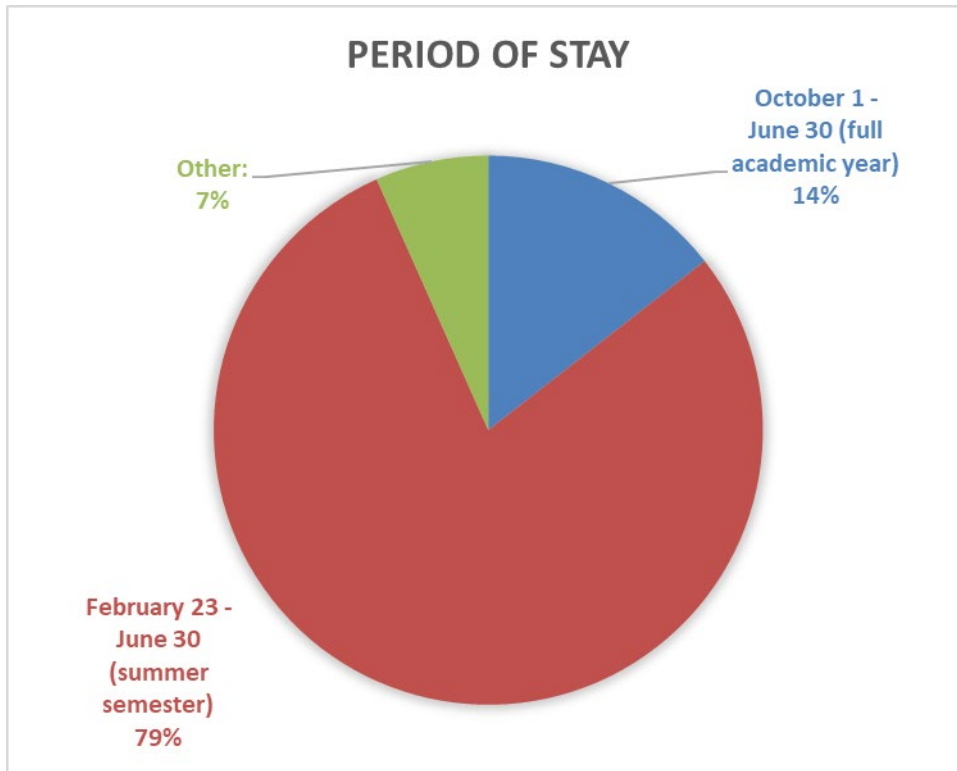


Figure 2. Period of stay

Of the exchange students, 13 stayed in Vienna from October to June. 71 students stayed at BOKU from February till June. The remaining six students selected different durations: March till August, February till September

2. Most appreciated things at BOKU

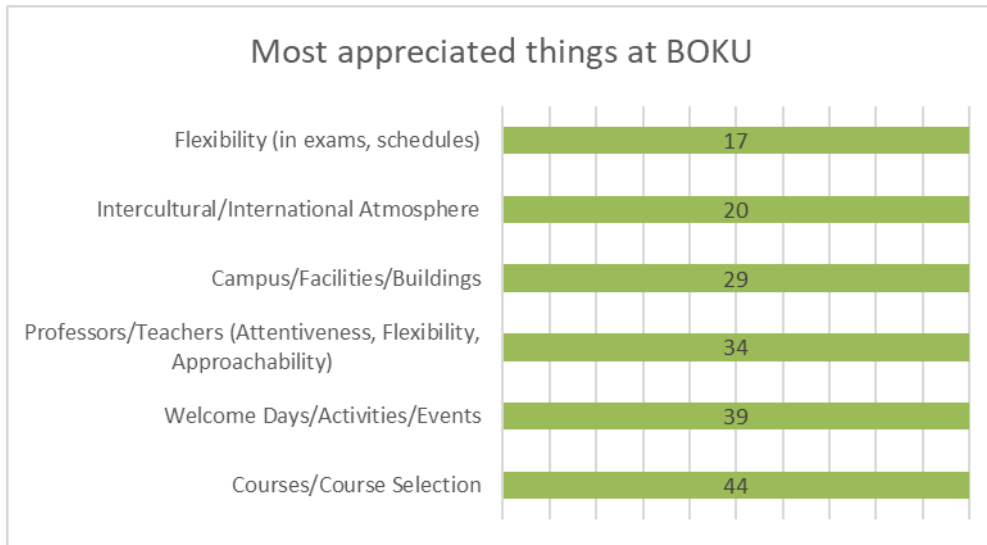


Figure 3. Things that students particularly appreciated during their stay at BOKU

The survey highlights that exchange students at BOKU had an overwhelmingly positive experience, with several aspects standing out as particularly valued. The most appreciated feature was the course selection process, which garnered 44 mentions, reflecting its significance in shaping the students' academic experience. The welcome days and associated activities were also highly praised, receiving 39 mentions, underscoring their role in helping students integrate smoothly. The attentiveness, flexibility, and approachability of professors were equally important, with 34 mentions, emphasizing the supportive academic environment at BOKU. Additionally, the campus facilities and buildings were well-received, with 29 mentions, highlighting the importance of a conducive physical environment for students.

3. Things that could have been done better in international students' opinion

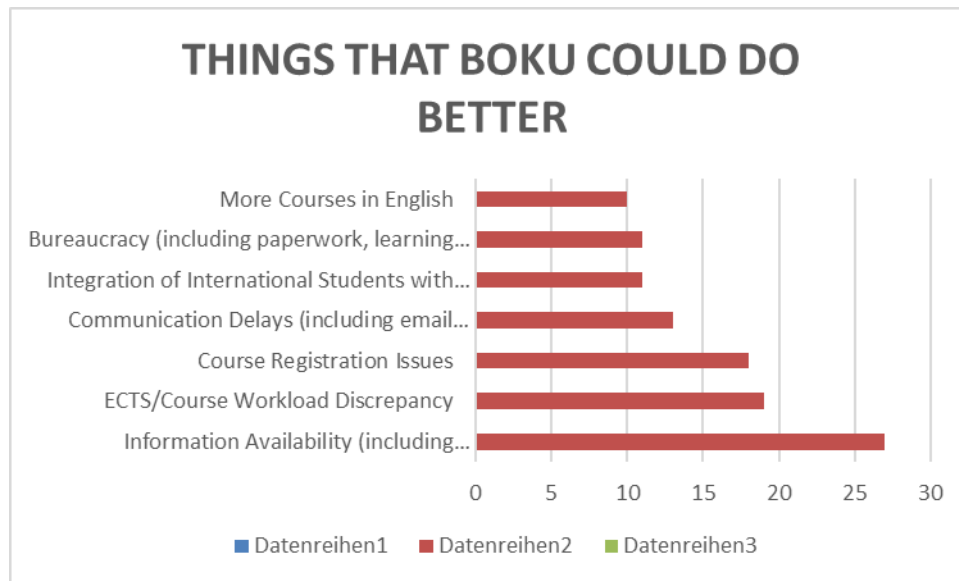


Figure 4. Things which BOKU could do better for international students

While the majority of students enjoyed their experience at BOKU, several areas were highlighted where improvements could be made. A significant number—27 students—pointed out challenges related to information availability, particularly concerning language barriers, unclear course descriptions, and inconsistent email communications. Additionally, 19 students expressed concerns about discrepancies between ECTS credits and course workload, feeling that the effort required was not always adequately reflected in the credits awarded. Course registration issues were a problem for 18 students, who found the process confusing and difficult to navigate.

Communication delays, including slow email responses and unclear office hours, were mentioned by 13 students, indicating a need for more efficient communication channels. Integration of international students with local students was another area of concern for 11 students, who felt that more could be done to create connections between these groups. Bureaucracy, particularly related to paperwork and learning agreements, was noted by 11 students as an area needing streamlining. Finally, 10 students suggested that offering more courses in English would greatly enhance the experience for international students.

4. Motivation, information and events

4.1 Activities at BOKU

90% of students engaged in regular coursework, while ten percent pursued internships to complement their academic pursuits.

4.2. Reasons for coming to BOKU

Students chose to attend BOKU for a variety of reasons, with the most significant being the desire for a change of environment, which 64% of respondents rated as highly important. Cultural experiences

and the opportunity to improve language proficiency were also major factors, each cited by 42% of students as important motivations. Academic reasons influenced 35% of the respondents, while 13% indicated that their decision was driven by career plans.

All responses are shown in table 5.

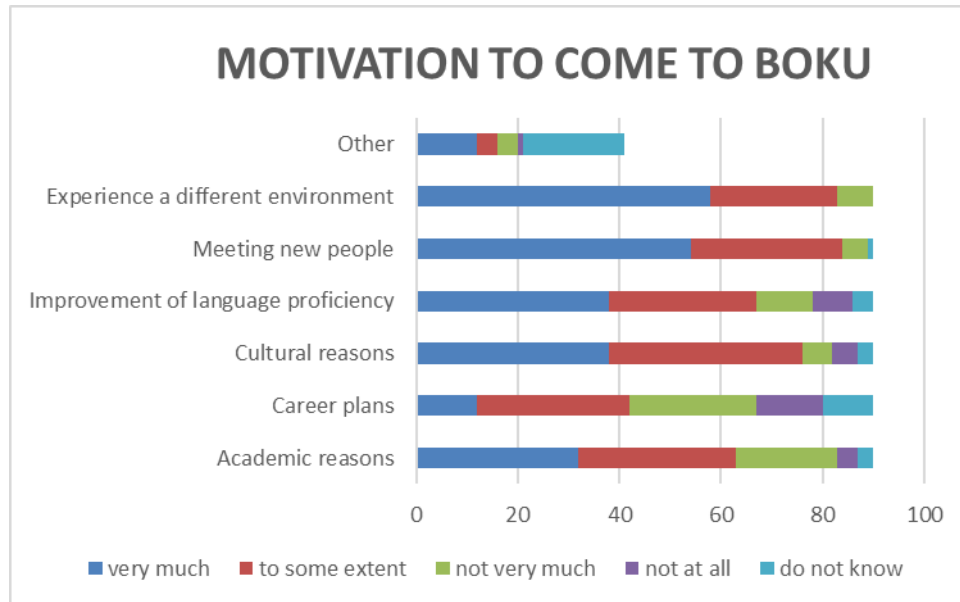


Figure 5. Motivation to come to BOKU

4.3. Information before the stay

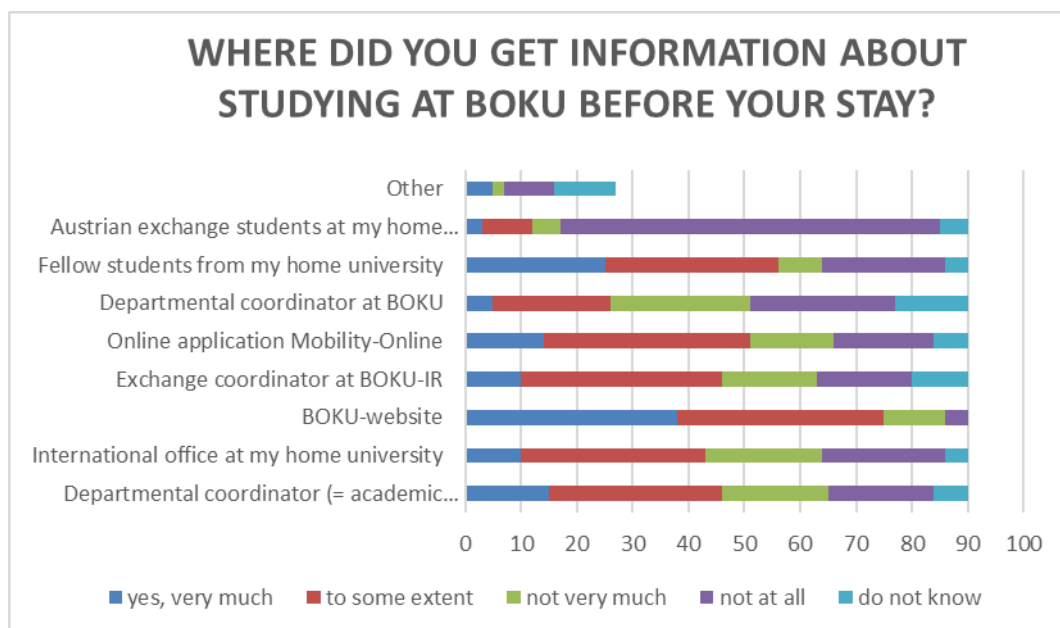


Figure 6. Sources of information used by students before their stay

The primary source of information for students about studying at BOKU was the university's website, with approximately 42% of respondents identifying it as their main resource. Other significant sources included:

- Fellow students from their home university (27%)
- Departmental coordinator (academic exchange coordinator) at their home university (16%)
- Online application Mobility-Online (15%)

4.4. Information from BOKU

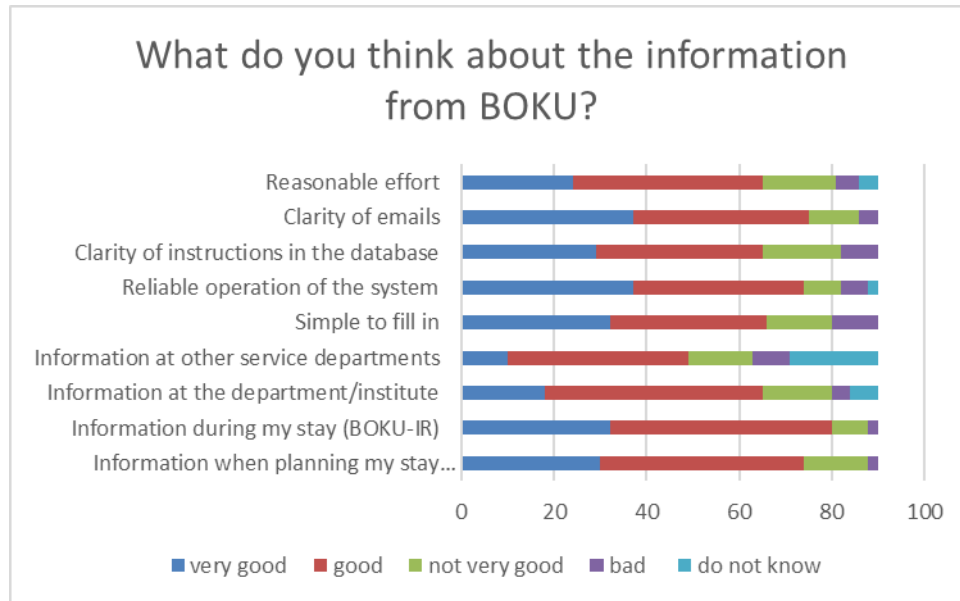


Figure 7. Evaluation of information from BOKU

Many students felt that BOKU made a commendable effort in providing information, as reflected in the high "very good" ratings. The clarity of emails was generally well-received, but some students indicated that there is room for improvement. Instructions in the database were also rated positively, although a few students found them lacking. The system's reliability received favorable ratings overall, though some dissatisfaction was noted. Most students found the forms and processes easy to complete, but there were mixed responses regarding the information provided by other service departments, indicating inconsistency.

4.5. Application Process – Mobility Online

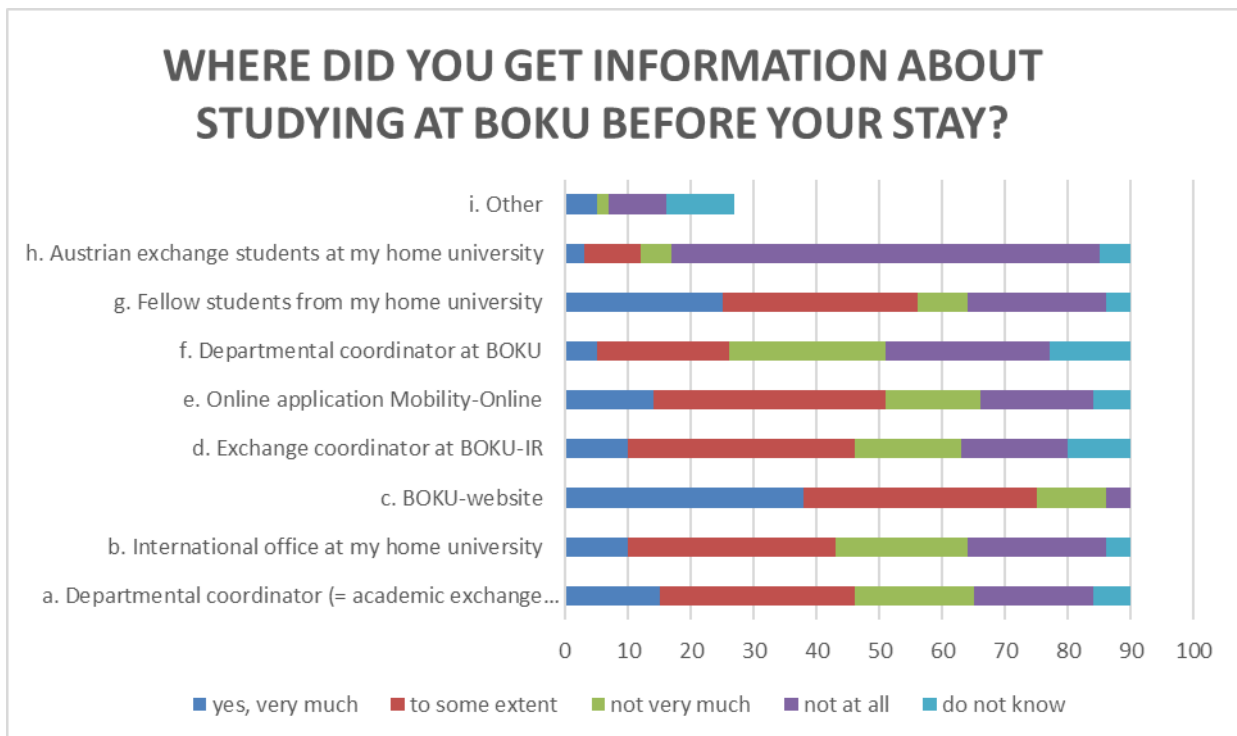


Figure 8. Evaluation of Mobility Online

Departmental coordinators at students' home universities were among the most relied-upon sources, with a significant number of students indicating that they found this resource very helpful. Only a small portion of students found it less useful or didn't use it at all. Likewise, the international office at students' home universities was a valuable resource for many. The responses were fairly balanced between those who found it very helpful and those who found it useful to some extent, with only a few indicating minimal or no use.

When it came to the exchange coordinator at BOKU-IR, students' reliance was again quite high, with many finding this resource very useful or somewhat useful, though there were still a few who did not find it helpful.

4.6. Welcome Days

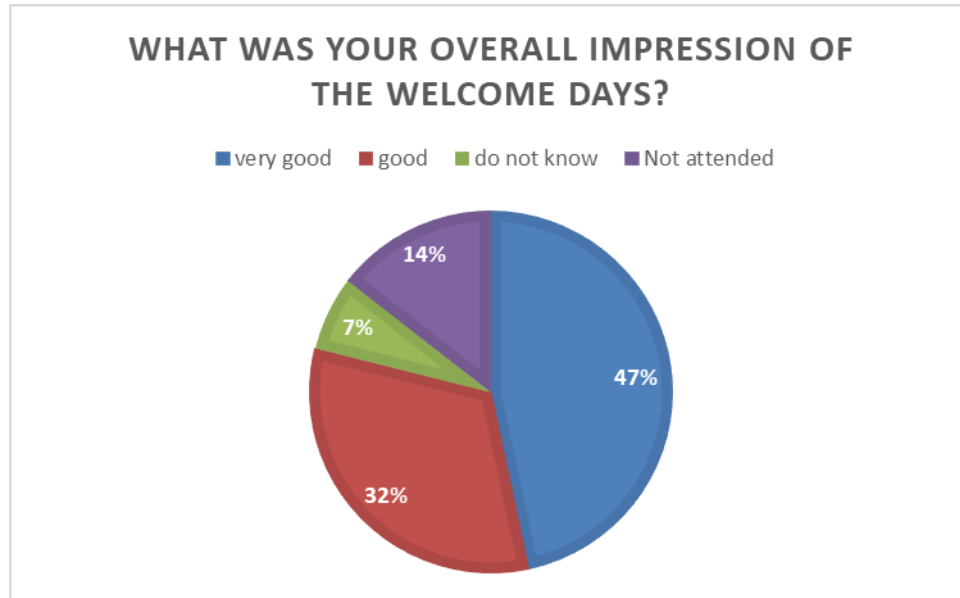


Figure 9. General impression of Welcome Days

Figure nine illustrates the overall impressions of participants regarding the Welcome Days event. A majority, 47%, rated the event as "very good," indicating a high level of satisfaction among attendees. Additionally, 32% of participants found the event "good," showing that a significant portion was satisfied, though not as highly impressed. A small fraction, 7%, indicated that they "do not know" their impression of the event. Finally, 14% of participants did not attend the event and therefore did not provide an impression. Overall, the chart reflects that the majority of participants had a positive experience, with 88% rating it as either "very good" or "good."

4.7. BOKU Info Session

The BOKUonline info session was a key part of the Welcome Days activities, aimed at helping students navigate their course registration and understand the structure of BOKU's academic environment. Out of the 90 students who responded to the survey, 59 attended the session. An impressive 86% of these attendees found the session to be beneficial, particularly appreciating the detailed guidance on course registration and the insights provided about individual professors and departments.

However, 34% of students chose not to attend the session. The primary reasons for their absence included a belief that the information would be redundant, as they already had access to similar resources at their home universities, and the need to prioritize their bachelor's thesis, which left them with no spare time.

Despite these reasons, some students expressed regret over missing the session, acknowledging that it could have made the beginning of the semester smoother. Similarly, those who skipped the Welcome Days cited time constraints but later wished they had participated, recognizing the value of these events in meeting new people and easing into the semester.

4.8. Buddy system

BOKU has introduced a Buddy System designed to help exchange students integrate with their Austrian classmates. This initiative supports new students by guiding them through administrative processes and offering insights into life in Vienna. In a survey conducted during the summer semester of 2023, 65 out of 90 respondents reported having a buddy. Of these 65 students, 79% indicated that their buddies were instrumental in helping them navigate their initial steps upon arrival, making their transition to BOKU and life in Vienna much smoother.

4.9. BOKU-IR newsletter

The survey revealed that 38% of students regularly read the BOKU-IR newsletter, with only 2% having never read it. While the newsletter is generally well-received, with 31% of respondents finding it very helpful and 33% considering it somewhat helpful, some students suggested that it could be improved by promoting a wider variety of events. These enhancements could increase its value as a resource for the student community.

4.10. Facebook Group *ESN BOKU Incomings and WhatsApp group*

The survey indicated that 78% of exchange students joined the official ESN BOKU Facebook group, with 61% of them finding it helpful.

4.11. Weekly Stammtisch and other activities

According to the survey, 28% of respondents never attended the weekly “Stammtisch,” while 17% attended regularly.

When asked for suggestions to make the “Stammtisch” more attractive, some students responded with the following ideas:

- Some students suggested starting the events earlier in the evening, as late hours were inconvenient, particularly for those living far from BOKU or unfamiliar with the city.
- There were recommendations to introduce themes, such as dress codes, games, or music, to make the Stammtisch more engaging. A few students also suggested varying the locations and incorporating more diverse and fun bars, including those that are reasonably priced and popular with locals.
- A few students expressed concern that the events might be too centered around alcohol, suggesting that this could be balanced to include more activities that don't revolve around drinking.

4.12. Improvements that can be made to information and planning

When filling out the questionnaire, students were asked how BOKU could improve the information provided and make the planning process and initial steps easier for exchange students. They suggested that BOKU could offer more assistance with finding accommodation, as this was a significant concern for many. Additionally, they noted that some sections of the BOKU website do not have a complete English option; while titles might translate, much of the content remains in German. Students recommended that BOKU ensure full English accessibility across the site. Another suggestion was to send a comprehensive email containing direct links to essential topics, such as housing and public transportation, making it easier for students to access relevant information quickly. Despite these suggestions, many students felt that most of the information provided was clear, and they were able to support each other when needed.

5. INFRASTRUCTURE AT BOKU

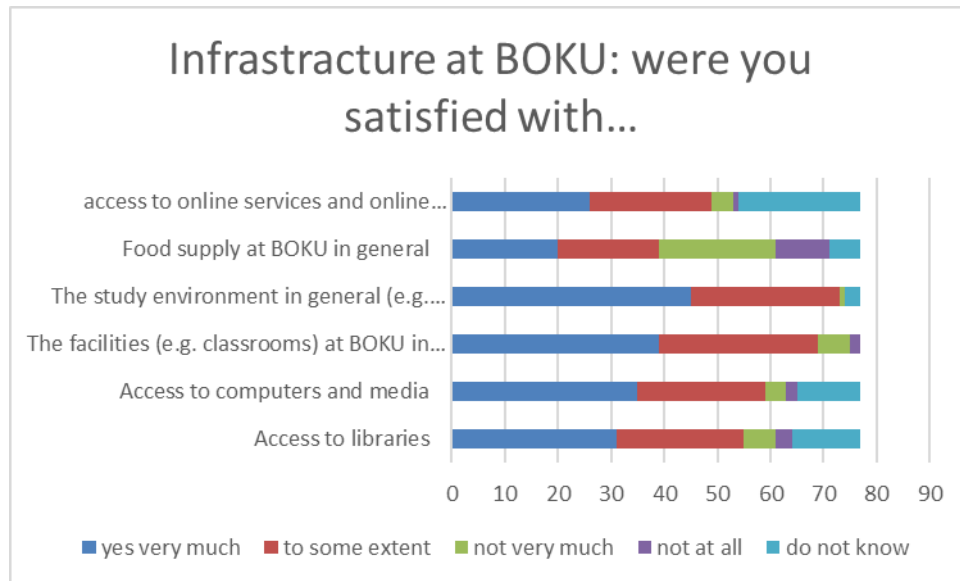


Figure 10. Students' satisfaction with infrastructure at BOKU

6. LANGUAGES

6.1. Language Problem

Students were also asked to comment on any language difficulties they had faced, as most were not native German speakers. Out of 90 respondents, 36 reported that they had never encountered any problematic language experiences. However, 49 students admitted to occasionally facing language barriers, while only 5 students complained about regularly encountering language problem.

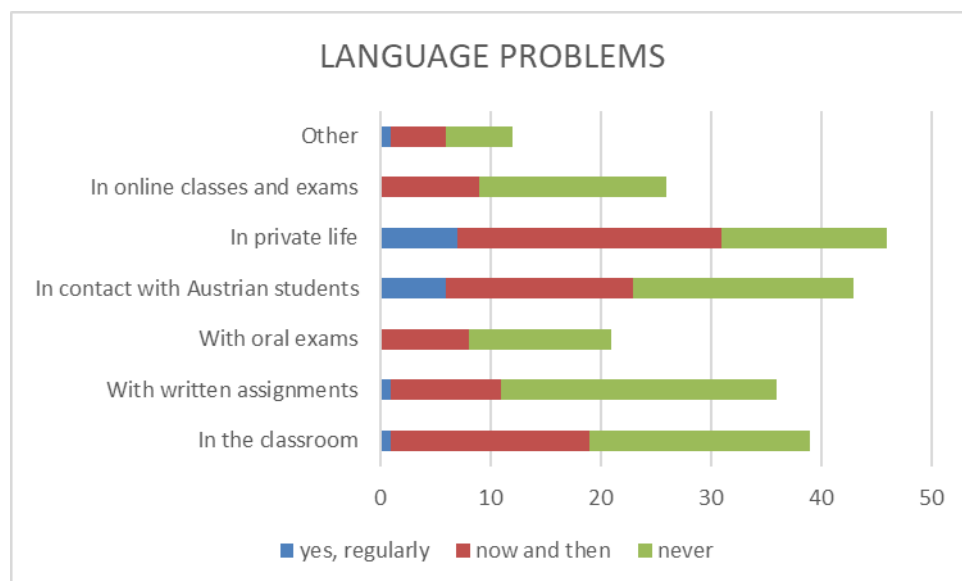


Figure 11. Occurrence of language problems.

Most often, language problems were perceived in the classroom and in interactions with Austrian students.

6.2. German language course

Students had the opportunity to enrol in German language courses both before and during the semester. According to the survey, 14 students participated in an intensive German course prior to the start of the semester, while 11 students chose to take a German course during the semester at BOKU. Additionally, students could engage in the Tandem scheme, which allows them to both teach and learn from another student in a different language. Of the respondents, 10 students took advantage of this scheme. The majority of students who participated in any of these language courses reported high levels of satisfaction with their experiences.

7. ACCOMODATION

Among the survey respondents, the most common type of housing was private accommodation (e.g., in a shared flat), chosen by 35 students, which represents 45% of the respondents. The second most common type was student residences organized by the students themselves, selected by 16 students (20%). Additionally, 12 students (18%) opted for student residences organized by the OeAD.

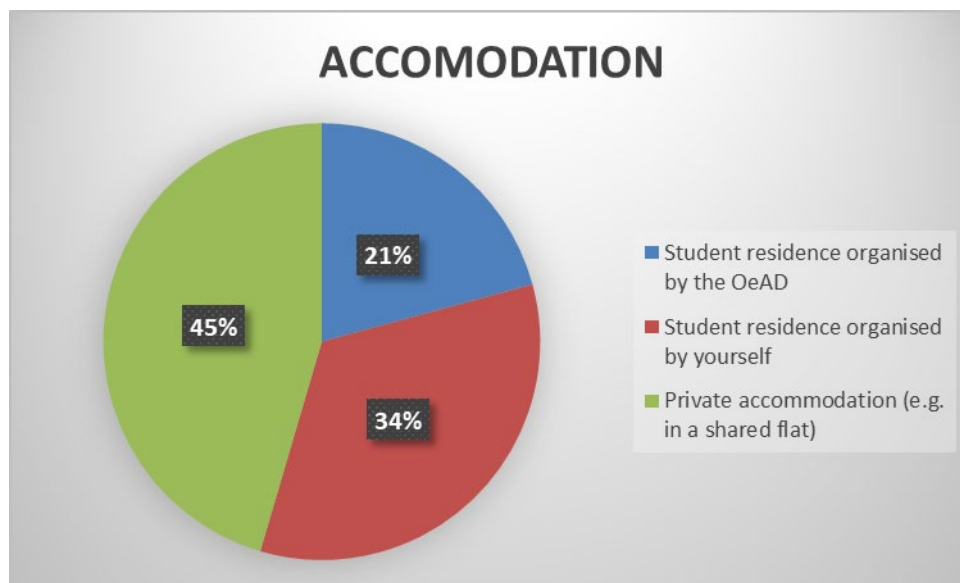


Figure 15. Chosen accommodation

7.1. Satisfaction with accommodation

Out of the respondents, 11 reported satisfaction with OeAD accommodation, while 7 expressed contentment with residences they chose themselves. The majority of students, 30 of them, also valued their private accommodation.

7.2. Important factors in choosing accommodation

When asked to list important factors in choosing accommodation, students revealed that price was their biggest consideration, with 54% of respondents declaring it as the most decisive factor. Following closely behind, 35% considered the condition of the property, while 36% prioritized proximity to the university. Additionally, 15% valued proximity to the city center. The least important factor for exchange students in this survey when it came to choosing accommodation was the possibility to live together with Austrian students, with only 7% considering it significant.

8. ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL OUTCOME

Students were also asked to evaluate both the academic and personal outcomes of their stay at BOKU. Respondents gave a largely positive response to both questions, with 46 students expressing satisfaction with the personal outcome and 56 students expressing satisfaction with the academic outcome of their stay.

8.1. Situations requiring special attention

The majority of students did not encounter any problems during their time at BOKU. However, some found themselves in situations requiring special attention. These included instances where teachers would speak German until right before the (English) lecture started, making it challenging to obtain information about the course.

8.2. Recommendations for BOKU-IR or BOKU to support exchange students

The following responses were suggested:

- Provide more information on events in Vienna
- Improve the availability of ZIB staff
- Ask professors to provide more detailed course descriptions

8.3. Experience of changes due to COVID-19 pandemic; recommendations for BOKU and BOKU-IR

This semester, without Covid-19 restrictions, was generally well-received by students. Many appreciated the possibility of bi-modal learning offered by some teachers. Students typically prefer in-person lectures and seminars, but find online courses and recorded lectures helpful for managing travel, appointments, and work. A hybrid system is suggested to balance academic and personal life. Several students mentioned that they experienced no significant changes or disruptions, and found their stay normal and pleasant.