

EXCHANGE STUDIES AT BOKU
EVALUATION OF INCOMING STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES
SUMMER SEMESTER 2024

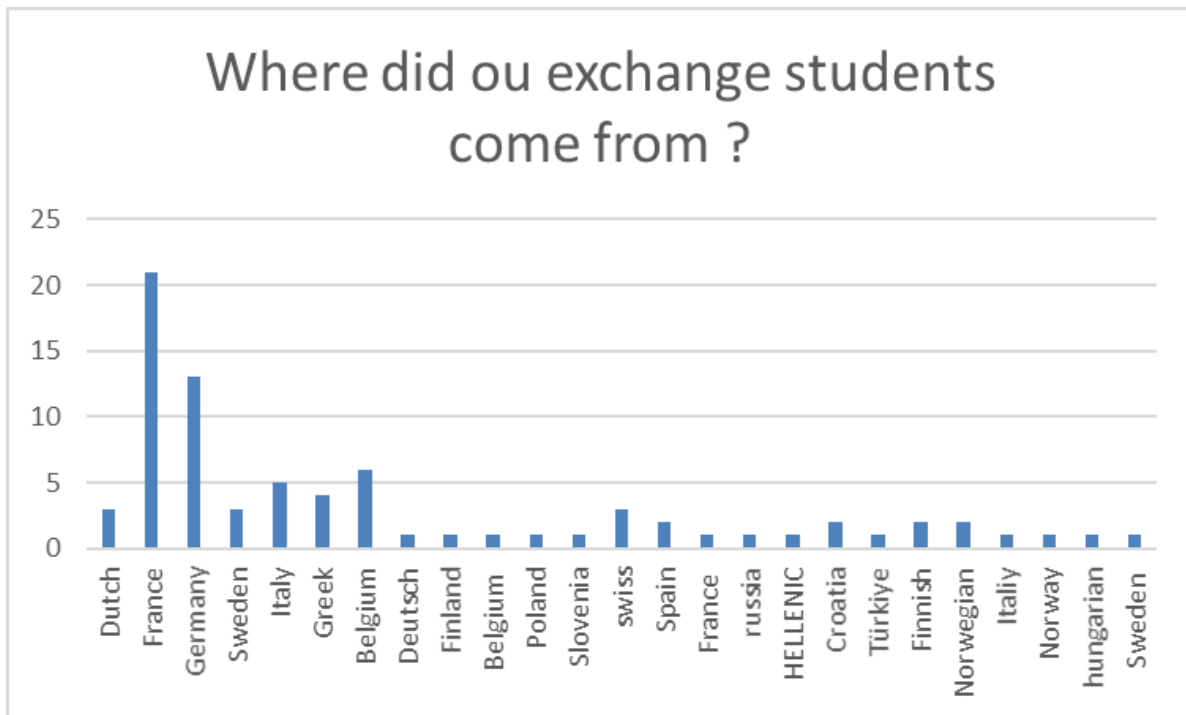
This report summarizes the results of a survey conducted among incoming students who attended BOKU during the summer semester of 2024. At the conclusion of their stay, the students completed a questionnaire that asked them to highlight the aspects of their experience they liked and disliked, as well as areas they felt could be improved. A total of 79 questionnaires were returned.

1. About the sample

In a sample of 79 exchange students, 67% were female, 33% were male, and 0% identified as diverse. The majority of these students originated from France (27%), Belgium (8%), Germany (16%), Italy (6%), Spain (3%), Switzerland (4%), Greece (5%).

See all responses in Table 1.

Figure 1. Exchange student's country of origin



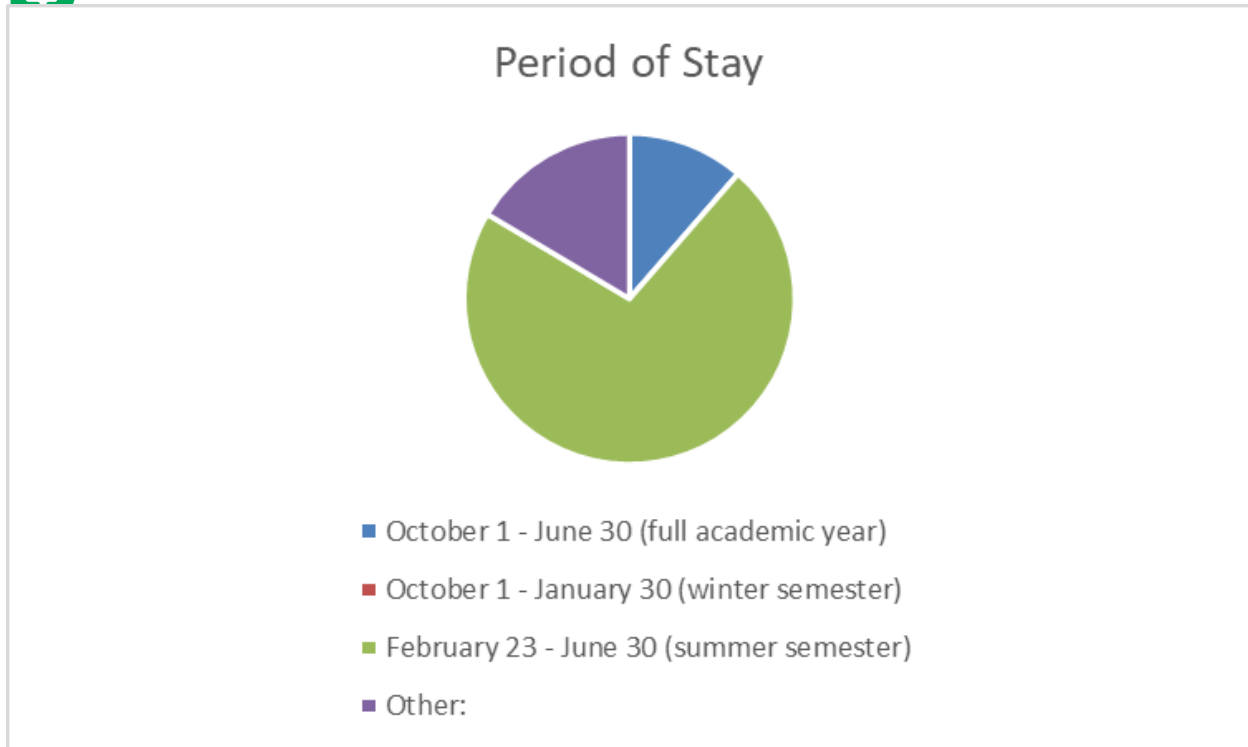


Figure 2. Period of stay

Of the exchange students, 9 stayed in Vienna from October to June. 57 students stayed at BOKU from February till June. The remaining 13 students selected different durations: March till August, February till September...

2. Most appreciated things at BOKU

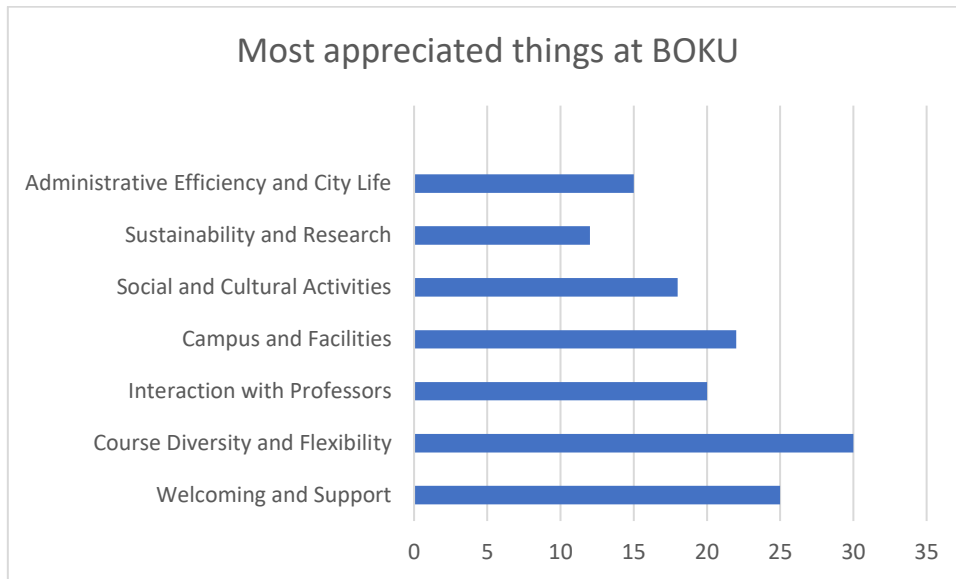


Figure 3. Things that students particularly appreciated during their stay at BOKU

The survey highlights the experiences of students at BOKU, emphasizing several key aspects that contribute to their satisfaction. The most frequently mentioned points include the welcoming and supportive environment, with initiatives like the buddy system and well-organized welcome days. Students also appreciated the diverse and flexible course offerings, the close interaction with approachable professors, and the beautiful campus facilities, particularly the proximity to Türkenschanzpark. Social and cultural activities, such as excursions and Stammtisch events, were also highly valued, alongside BOKU's commitment to sustainability and research. Additionally, the administrative efficiency and the vibrant city life in Vienna further enhanced their overall experience. These insights reflect the university's strong focus on creating an inclusive, engaging, and academically enriching environment for its students.

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

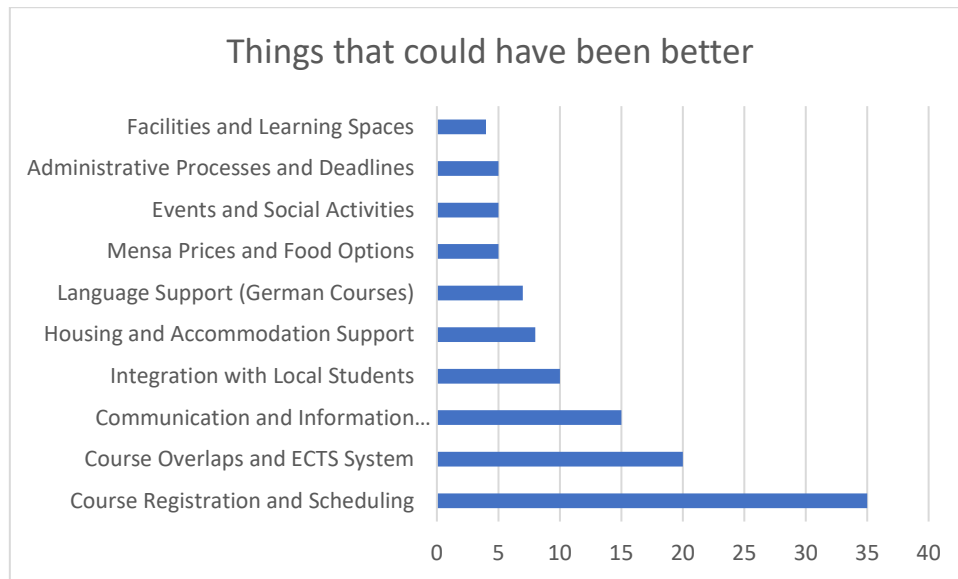


Figure 4. Things which BOKU could do better for international students

The survey highlights several areas where students felt improvements could be made to enhance their experience at BOKU. The most frequently mentioned issue was related to course registration and scheduling, with students expressing frustration over limited access to courses, overlapping schedules, and the inability to register before arriving on campus. Many also noted challenges with the ECTS system, citing the need to take numerous small-credit courses, which led to scheduling conflicts and increased workload. Communication and information accessibility were also common concerns, with students requesting clearer guidance on course systems, earlier exam dates, and more English-language resources. Additionally, some students felt there was a lack of integration with local students, suggesting more intercultural activities or events to foster connections. Other areas for improvement included housing and accommodation support, affordable Mensa prices, and expanded language support, such as free or more accessible German courses. While students appreciated the efforts made during the welcome week, some suggested more consistent social activities throughout the semester. Overall, the feedback provides valuable insights into areas where BOKU can refine its systems and services to better support its diverse student body..

4. Motivation, information and events

4.1 Activities at BOKU

84% of students engaged in regular coursework, while 5 percent pursued internships to complement their academic pursuits and 11 percent worked on a thesis or research project.

4.2. Reasons for coming to BOKU

Studying in Vienna seems to be a popular choice for a lot of reasons. The biggest motivators are the chance to experience a new environment (98% positive) and meet new people (87% positive), which makes sense because Vienna is such a vibrant and central city in Europe. Cultural reasons (83% positive) and academic opportunities (86% positive) are also really important, especially with unique programs at BOKU like sustainability and environmental biotechnology. Some people also mentioned personal reasons, like being close to a partner or recommendations from their home university. Overall, it seems like Vienna offers a great mix of culture, academics, and opportunities to explore, which is why so many students are drawn to it.

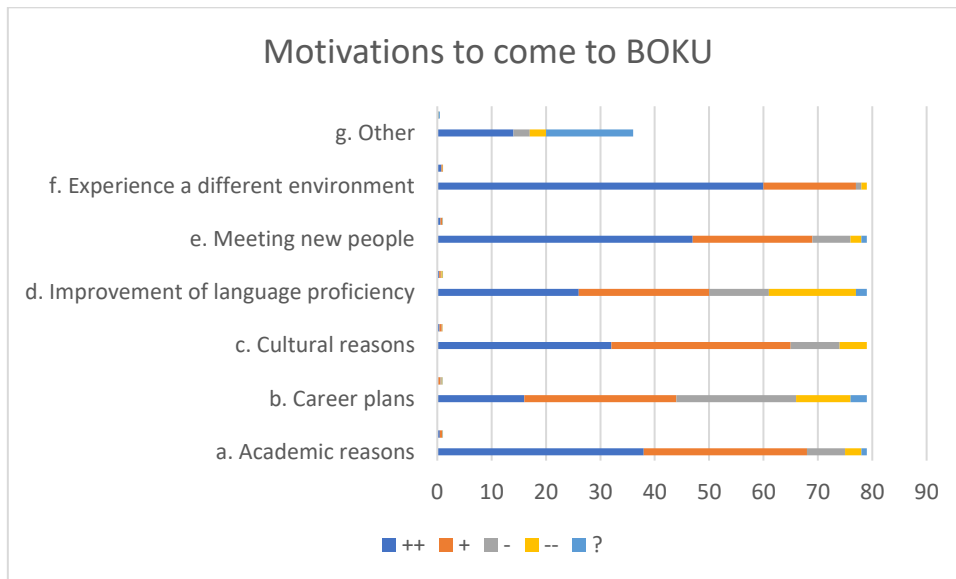


Figure 5. Motivation to come to BOKU

4.3. Information before the stay

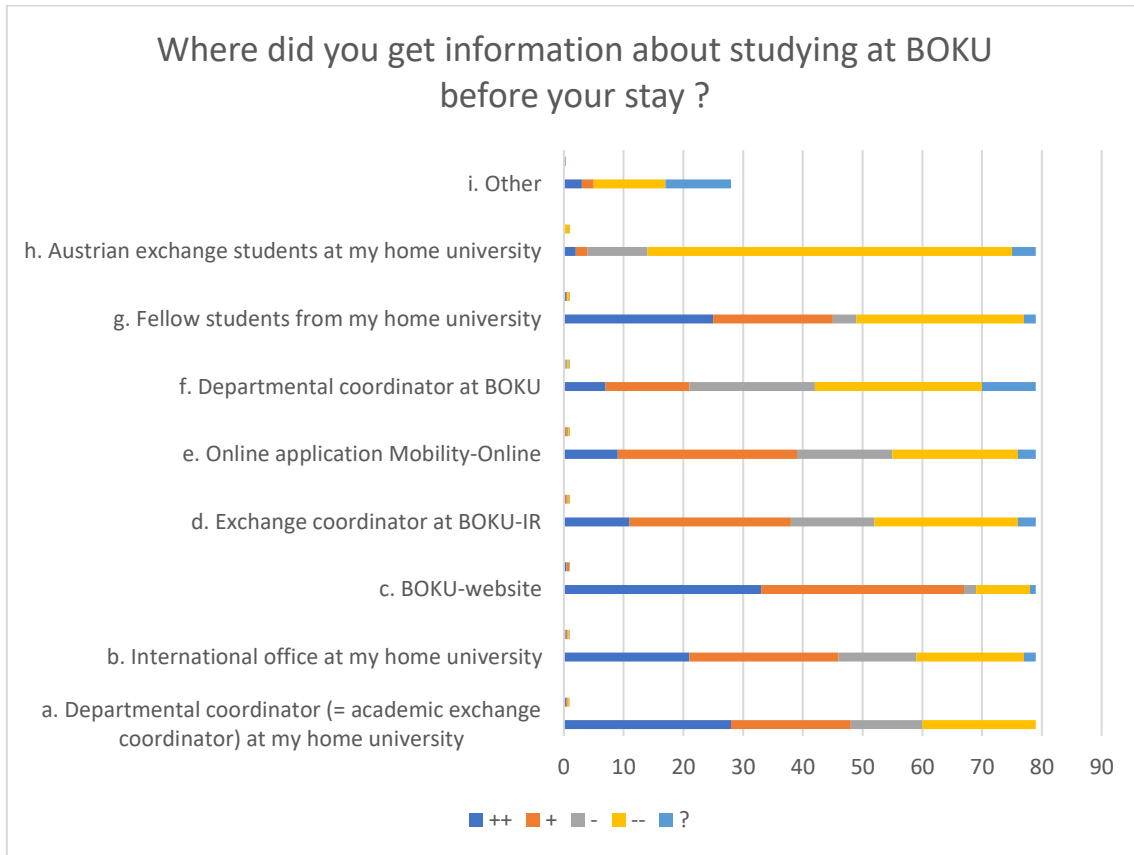


Figure 6. Sources of information used by students before their stay

The data shows that the BOKU website is the most reliable source of information, with 85% of respondents rating it positively, making it the top resource for prospective students. The departmental coordinator and international office at the home university also received relatively high positive ratings though both had notable negative feedback as well. Other sources, such as the exchange coordinator at BOKU-IR and the Mobility-Online application system, had mixed reviews, with nearly equal positive and negative ratings. The departmental coordinator at BOKU and Austrian exchange students at the home university were rated poorly, with 62% and 77% negative ratings, respectively, indicating they were not effective sources of information. Overall, the BOKU website and home university support were the most helpful resources for students preparing to study at BOKU.

4.4. Information from BOKU

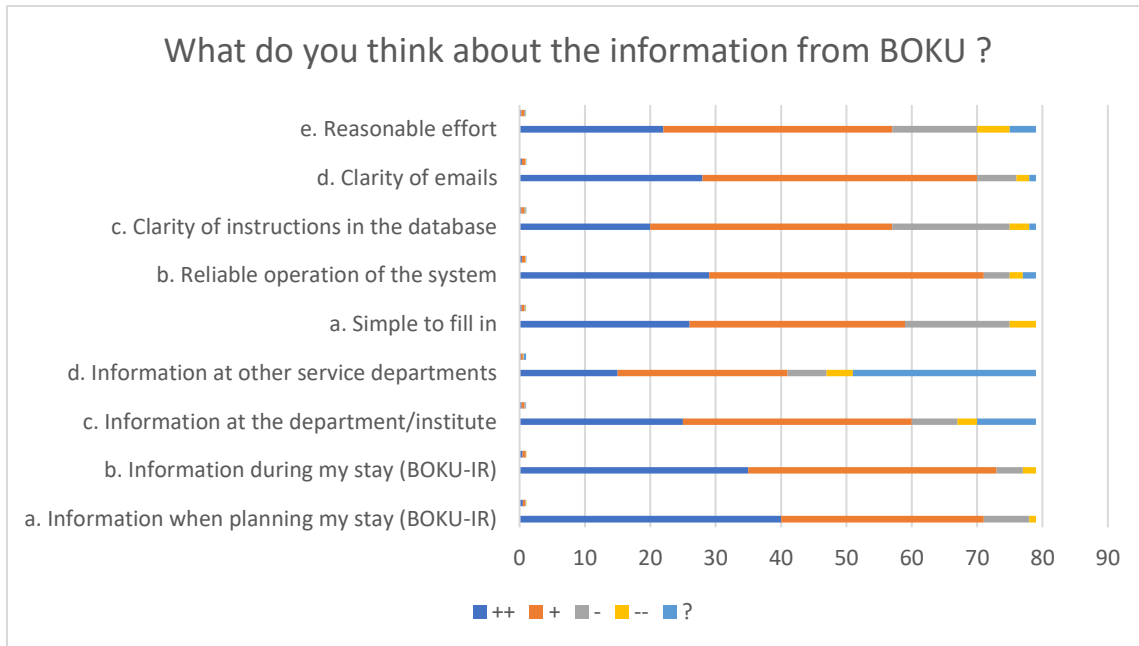


Figure 7. Evaluation of information from BOKU

The key takeaway from this data is that students generally found the information and support from BOKU-IR during the planning and stay phases to be effective, with over 90% positive ratings. However, feedback under "other" and responses about the Mobility-Online system highlighted areas for improvement. While some students praised the system for being simple and efficient, others pointed out recurring issues such as confusion caused by separate systems for home and host universities, unclear instructions, and outdated or inconsistent information. Suggestions included unlocking all steps in the process from the start, improving the clarity of emails and instructions, and ensuring better coordination between institutions to avoid redundant or conflicting requirements. Additionally, information from other service departments received more mixed feedback, and while the Welcome Days were well-received with 81% positive ratings, efforts could be made to increase participation. Simplifying processes, enhancing communication, and improving coordination are essential steps to address these concerns and improve the overall student experience.

4.5. Application Process – Mobility Online

The feedback on the Mobility Online procedure reveals a mix of positive and negative experiences. Many students found the system easy to use, efficient, and well-structured, with some highlighting that it made uploading documents straightforward. However, several recurring issues were identified. A common concern was the complexity of navigating two separate systems for the home and

most universities, which often led to confusion and redundant steps. Some students suggested simplifying the process by unifying the systems or improving coordination between institutions. Others pointed out that certain instructions were unclear or inconsistent, with some steps being locked until later stages, making it harder to prepare in advance. Technical issues, such as the system defaulting to German or difficulties with document uploads, were also mentioned. Additionally, students expressed a need for clearer and more detailed emails to guide them through the process. Overall, while the system is functional for many, there is significant room for improvement in terms of clarity, consistency, and user-friendliness.

4.6. Welcome Days

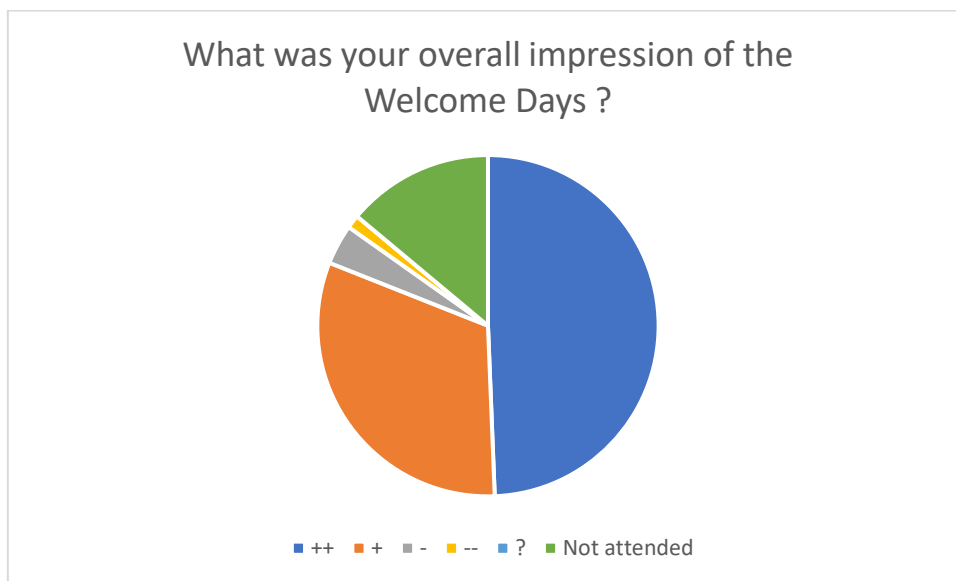


Figure 8. General impression of Welcome Days

4.7. BOKU Info Session

The Welcome Days at BOKU were largely successful, with 81% of participants rating their experience as positive or very positive. Students particularly appreciated the opportunity to meet new people and form connections with fellow international students. Activities such as the Heuriger event, campus tours, and group games were frequently highlighted as highlights of the program. The Heuriger, in particular, stood out as a favorite, offering a cultural introduction to Austrian traditions through food and wine while fostering a relaxed and social atmosphere. Many participants also valued the well-organized structure of the events, which provided a mix of social, cultural, and practical activities to help them settle into their new environment. Additionally, the sessions that provided guidance on administrative tasks, such as registration and housing, were seen as especially helpful for easing the transition to life in Vienna.

Despite the overall positive feedback, participants identified several areas for improvement. Some activities, such as speed friending and human bingo, were criticized for being too loud or chaotic, making it difficult to have meaningful interactions. Suggestions included organizing smaller group activities, extending

interaction times, and creating more opportunities to mix with others. Timing was another concern, as some events conflicted with students' administrative responsibilities during the first week. Additionally, several participants noted that some information sessions were repetitive, as they had already received the same details via email or the university website. There were also logistical challenges, such as inefficiencies in the registration and payment process for events like the Heuriger, and a desire for more inclusivity, with some participants suggesting that all sessions be conducted in English to accommodate non-German speakers.

Overall, the Welcome Days were seen as a valuable and enjoyable introduction to BOKU, providing students with opportunities to build friendships, explore the campus, and gain essential information about their new environment. While the program was well-organized and effective in many ways, addressing the feedback on activity design, scheduling, and logistical issues could further enhance the experience for future participants.

4.8. Buddy system

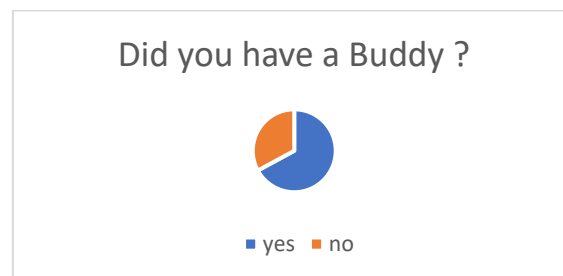


Figure 9. Buddy

BOKU's Buddy System is designed to help exchange students integrate with their Austrian classmates by guiding them through administrative processes and offering insights into life in Vienna. The Buddy System at BOKU was utilized by approximately 67% of participants, while 33% opted not to have a buddy. Those who chose not to participate often cited reasons such as feeling confident in managing their arrival independently, already having sufficient information from other sources, or not perceiving the need for additional support. Some students mentioned that they were already familiar with the language or culture, had friends at BOKU, or simply did not know about the Buddy System before arriving. A few participants expressed regret for not having a buddy, recognizing it as a missed opportunity to connect with Austrian students and gain deeper cultural insights.

For those who had a buddy, experiences were mixed. Many participants appreciated the support they received, particularly before their arrival, with some describing their buddies as helpful, reliable, and friendly. Buddies were noted to assist with practical matters, such as navigating the university and settling into life in Vienna. However, some participants reported limited interaction with their buddies, citing issues such as lack of communication, mismatched expectations, or logistical challenges (e.g., buddies being unavailable or not in Vienna at the time of arrival). In some cases, buddies were perceived as more of a resource for emergencies rather than an active guide for social or academic integration.

In terms of specific areas of support, the Buddy System was most effective in helping students with their first steps after arrival, with 36.2% of participants rating this aspect positively (++ or +). However, its effectiveness in helping students adapt to academic life at BOKU (29.1% positive) and social life in Vienna (27.8% positive) was slightly lower. Suggestions for improvement included ensuring better communication between buddies and students, providing clearer

expectations for the role of buddies, and encouraging more interaction to foster stronger connections. Overall, while the Buddy System was a valuable resource for many, there is room to enhance its consistency and impact.

4.9. BOKU-IR newsletter

The newsletter sent by BOKU-IR was generally well-received, with 68.35% of participants finding it useful or very useful. However, only 32.91% of respondents read it regularly, while 45.57% read it occasionally, and 21.52% never engaged with it. Participants appreciated the information provided but suggested improvements, such as ensuring the newsletter is available in English (if it was not already) and including clearer deadlines for administrative tasks like grade recognition and certificates of stay. Overall, the newsletter was seen as a helpful resource, but its reach and impact could be enhanced by addressing these suggestions and encouraging more consistent readership.

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

The Facebook group "ESN BOKU Incomings" had a lower perceived impact, with only 36.71% of participants finding it useful or very useful. While 58.23% of respondents joined the group, many noted that it was not very active, and some preferred WhatsApp for communication. Participants also mentioned that the information on Facebook was not always synchronized with other platforms, such as Instagram, which created inconsistencies. To improve its effectiveness, the Facebook group could benefit from more frequent updates, better coordination with other platforms, and a clearer focus on providing relevant and timely information.

4.11. Weekly *Stammtisch* and other activities

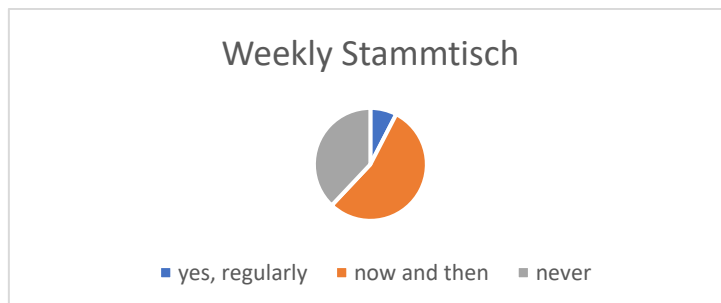


Figure 10. *Stammtisch*

The weekly "Stammtisch" was attended by participants with varying frequency, with 7.6% attending regularly, 54.4% attending occasionally, and 37.9% never attending. While many participants appreciated the concept and enjoyed the events they attended, several suggestions were made to make the *Stammtisch* more attractive. A recurring theme was the need for more interactive activities, such as games, pub quizzes, karaoke, or themed nights (e.g., international cuisine or cultural exchange). Some participants also suggested changing the day of the week, as Mondays were inconvenient for many due to post-weekend fatigue or scheduling conflicts. Other feedback focused on logistical improvements. Participants recommended hosting the *Stammtisch* in more central locations, as the campus was less accessible in the evenings due to limited public transportation. Additionally, some noted that the cost of attending events at bars could be prohibitive and suggested venues where participants could bring their own food and drinks. Communication was another area for improvement, with some participants mentioning that announcements were sometimes posted late or inconsistently across platforms.

Overall, while the Stammtisch was seen as a valuable social opportunity, incorporating these suggestions could help increase participation and engagement.

4.12. Improvements that can be made to information and planning

Participants provided a range of suggestions for improving the information and planning process for exchange students at BOKU. A recurring theme was the need for clearer and earlier communication about course registration. Many students expressed frustration with courses being full upon arrival and suggested opening registration earlier or reserving spots for exchange students. Additionally, participants recommended providing detailed information about potential scheduling conflicts, the importance of arriving early to secure courses, and the possibility of contacting professors directly to join courses. Some also highlighted the need for better understanding of different educational systems, as issues with course equivalencies and learning agreements caused challenges for a few students. On a positive note, many participants praised the existing resources, such as the checklists for pre-arrival, during the stay, and departure, which were described as clear, concise, and helpful for organizing tasks. Several students felt that the planning and support provided by BOKU were already sufficient, with some noting that they felt well-accompanied during their first steps. Suggestions for further improvement included sending the checklists at appropriate times, providing more guidance on course selection, and ensuring that all relevant information is communicated well in advance.

5. INFRASTRUCTURE AT BOKU

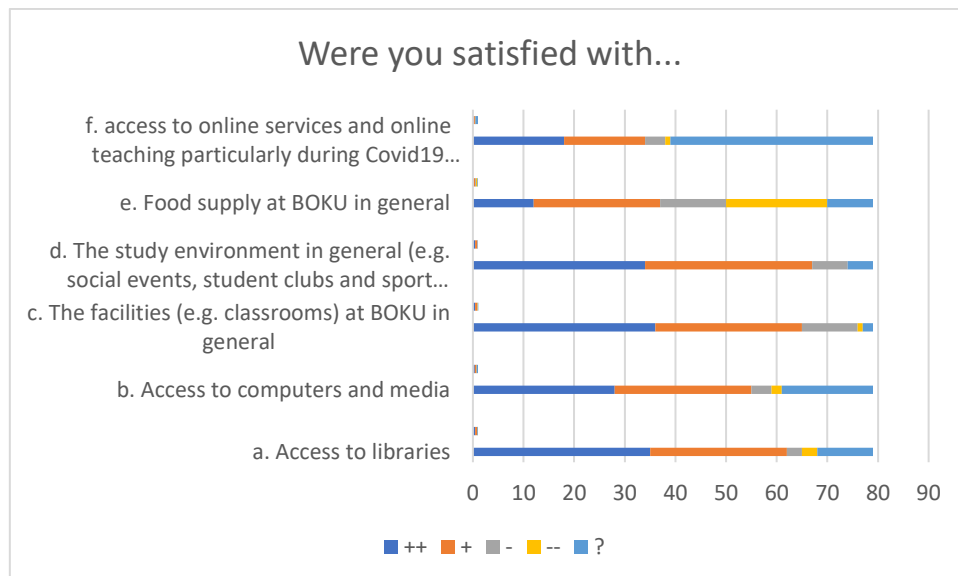


Figure 11. Students' satisfaction with infrastructure at BOKU

Overall, BOKU's facilities and services received positive feedback, with participants appreciating the libraries, classrooms, and study environment, as well as social spaces like Tüwi. However, several areas for improvement were highlighted. Libraries were praised for their atmosphere but criticized for overcrowding, limited opening

hours, and poor air quality in some locations. Access to computers was a challenge, with students suggesting an online system to check room availability and more accessible facilities for running specialized software. Classrooms were generally well-rated, though participants noted a lack of outlets and casual study spaces for group work. The study environment was valued, but non-German speakers found it less accessible, and social events needed better advertising. Food supply was a major concern, with the Mensa criticized for being expensive and offering small portions, while the lack of a Mensa at Muthgasse was a drawback.

6. LANGUAGES

6.1. Language Problem

Language problems were experienced by some students at BOKU, with 6.3% reporting regular issues and 41.8% encountering them occasionally, while 51.9% reported no problems. The most significant challenges arose in specific academic contexts, such as oral exams (32.9% rated as "very problematic"), written assignments (31.6%), and online classes (29.1%), where students struggled with language barriers. In the classroom, 22.8% found language to be a major issue, often due to presentation slides or course materials being partially in German, even in English-taught courses. Excursions and guest lectures were also highlighted as problematic, with some professors or guides switching to German despite the course being advertised in English. Outside of academics, language barriers were less pronounced but still present, with 20.3% experiencing difficulties in private life and 24% in interactions with Austrian students. Additionally, some students noted that certain emails and information, such as details about sports activities or excursions, were only provided in German.

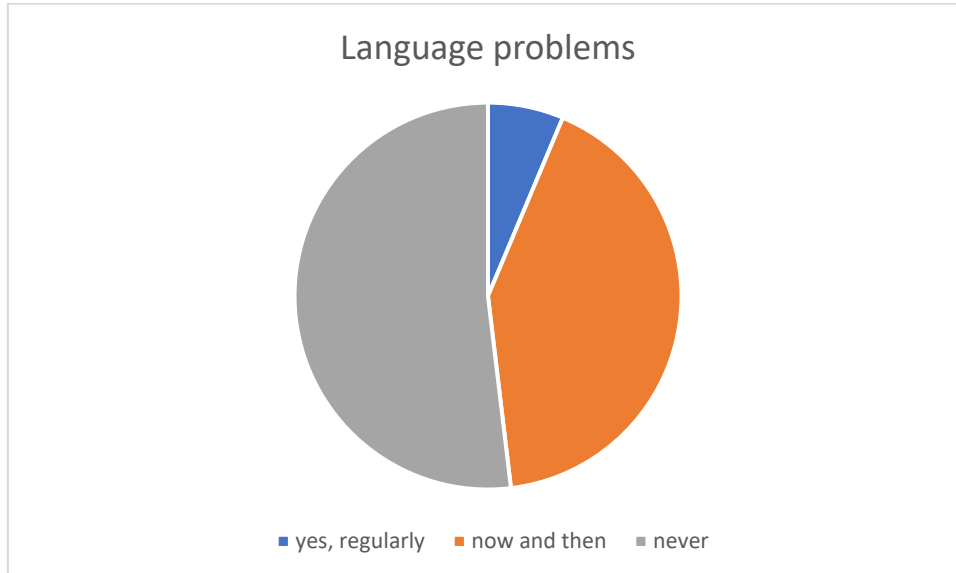


Figure 12. Occurrence of language problems.

6.2. German language course

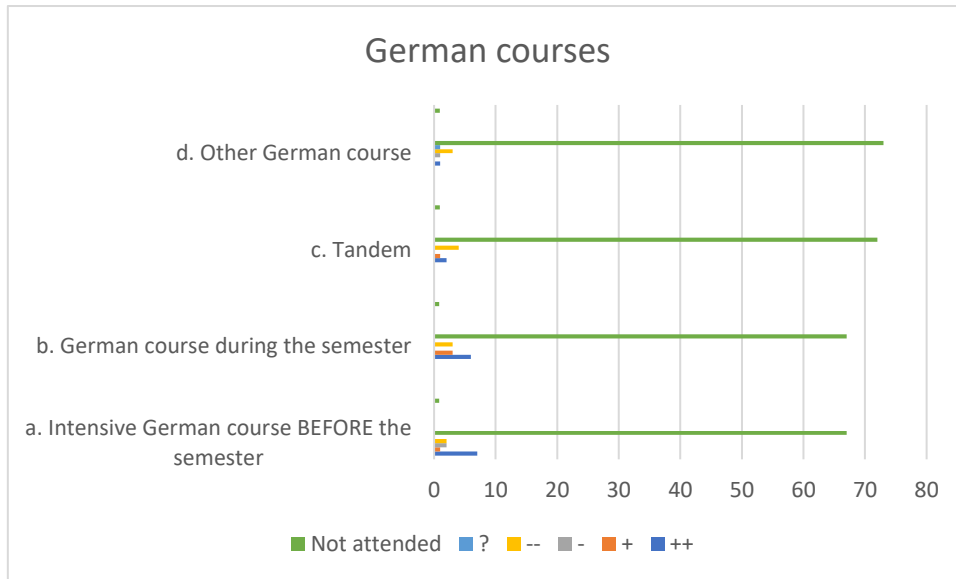


Figure 13. German courses attendance

Participation in German language courses at BOKU was relatively low, with the majority of students not attending any of the offered options.

7. ACCOMODATION

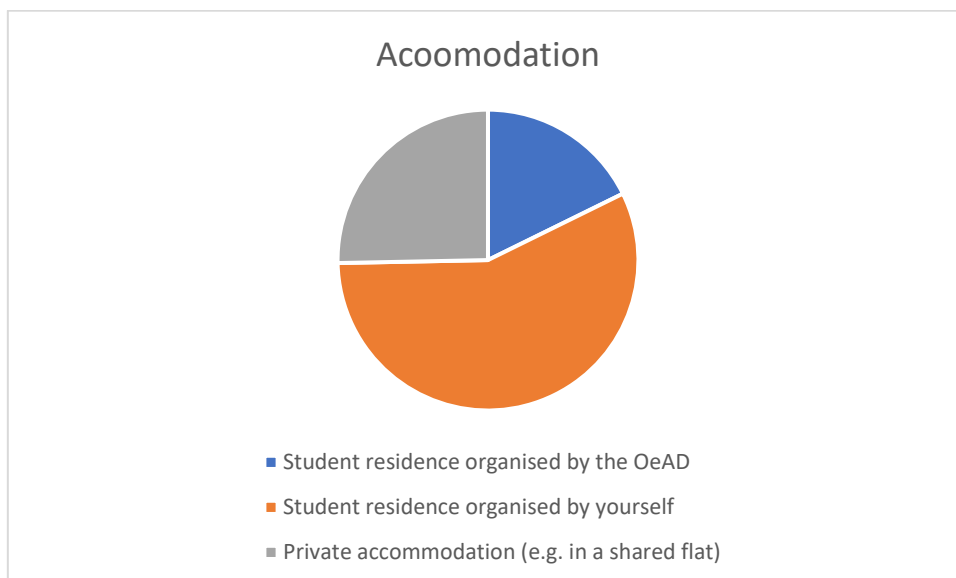


Figure 14. Chosen accommodation

7.1. Satisfaction with accommodation

Accommodation experiences among students varied widely, with some finding suitable housing while others faced significant challenges. Many students noted difficulties in securing accommodation, particularly those arriving for shorter stays, as most rental agreements required a full semester commitment. Some students, like those who applied late or received their admission letters close to the semester start, struggled to find affordable and convenient options. A few

participants suggested that starting the registration process earlier or providing a provisional registration letter could help alleviate these issues. Additionally, concerns about scams during the housing search were raised, with a recommendation for a secure, university-linked platform to verify accommodation offers.

On the positive side, several students reported good experiences with specific housing providers, such as OeAD residences, Viennabase19, and Akademikerhilfe, while others found shared flats (WGs) through social contacts. However, shared flats were noted to be harder to secure for non-German speakers and often required significant effort to arrange. While dormitories like OeAD were appreciated for their convenience, some students found them isolating or encountered issues with noise and cleanliness.

7.2. Important factors in choosing accommodation

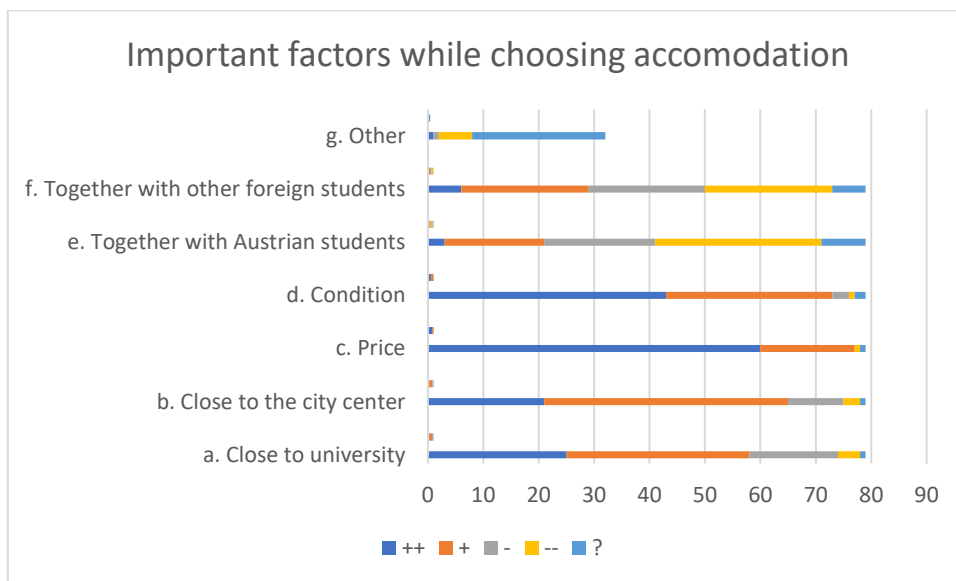


Figure 15. Factors while choosing accommodation

8. ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL OUTCOME

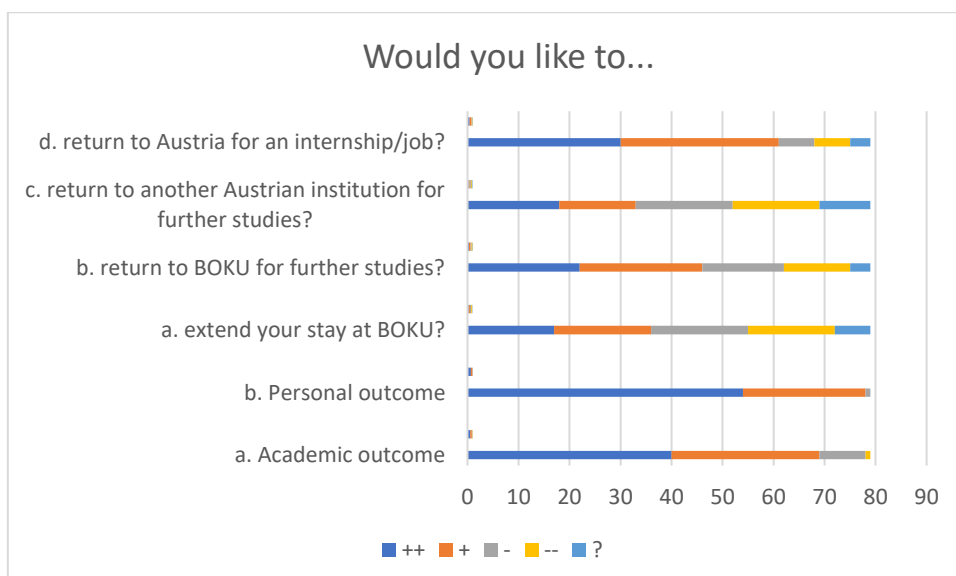


Figure 16. Academic and personal outcome

The analysis of responses reveals a generally positive perception of both academic and personal outcomes, with the majority of participants rating these aspects highly. However, opinions are more divided when it comes to extending their stay at BOKU or returning for further studies, either at BOKU or another Austrian institution, with a notable portion of respondents expressing mixed or negative views. In contrast, there is strong interest in returning to Austria for professional opportunities, such as internships or jobs, as this category received the most positive responses overall. This suggests that while academic and personal experiences are valued, professional prospects in Austria are particularly appealing to respondents.

8.1. Situations requiring special attention

The responses to the question about experiencing situations requiring special attention during study abroad are varied but predominantly indicate that most participants did not face significant challenges. Many simply responded with "no" or "not really," suggesting that their experiences were generally smooth. However, a few participants highlighted specific issues, such as difficulties with tutoring, language barriers, and challenges with course structures. Some noted that German slides in English-taught courses and overlapping schedules made studying more difficult for exchange students. Others mentioned a lack of structured guidance from professors and challenges in adapting to the course selection process. Despite these concerns, one respondent acknowledged that such challenges, like language barriers, are part of the broader experience of studying abroad. Overall, while most participants did not encounter major issues, a minority pointed out areas where improvements could enhance the experience for future students.

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

The responses to the question about recommendations for BOKU-IR or BOKU to better support exchange students are generally positive, with many participants expressing satisfaction with the current support system. Several respondents mentioned that they felt well-supported and had no additional suggestions, with some specifically praising the welcome week as being very helpful. However, a few recommendations were provided, such as offering cheaper or free sports activities, organizing more social events to mix international and Austrian students (e.g., parties, excursions, or trips), and improving the website's usability. Other suggestions included connecting exchange students with peers who have already taken certain courses for advice and study sessions, as well as evaluating tutors to ensure quality teaching. Overall, while most participants were satisfied, these suggestions highlight areas where BOKU could further enhance the exchange student experience.

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

No question about COVID-19