

EXCHANGE STUDIES AT BOKU

EVALUATION OF INCOMING STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES

WINTER SEMESTER 2023/24

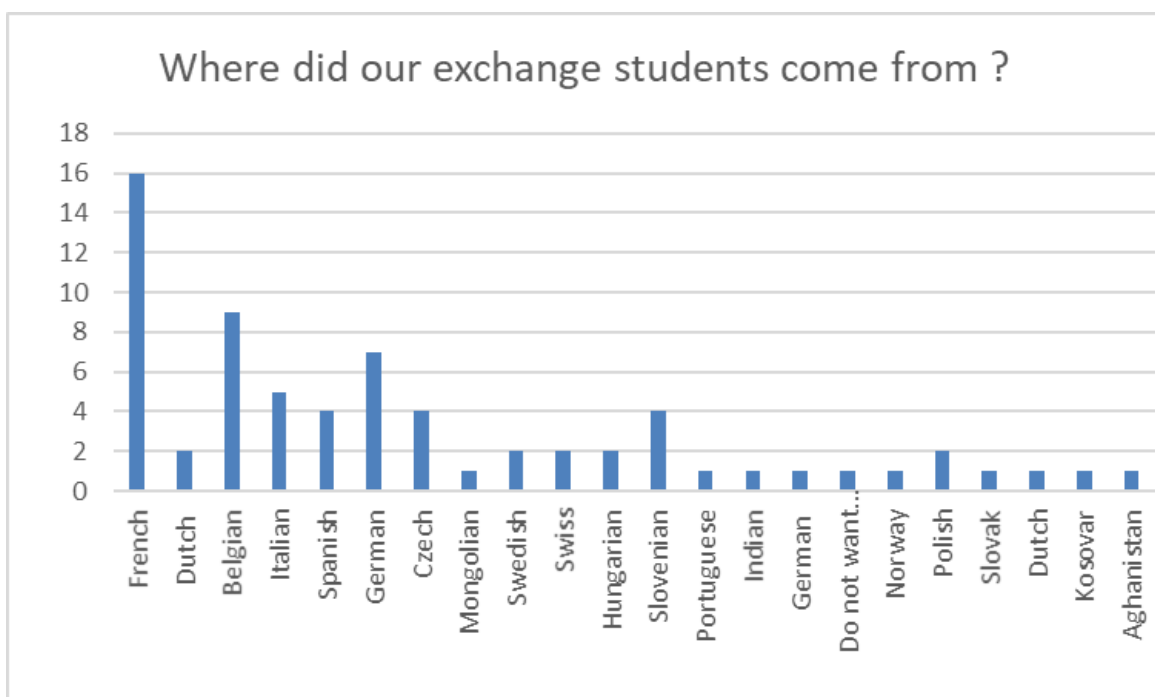
This report summarizes the results of a survey conducted among incoming students who attended BOKU during the winter semester of 2023/24. At the conclusion of their stay, the students completed a questionnaire that asked them to highlight the aspects of their experience they liked and disliked, as well as areas they felt could be improved. A total of 70 questionnaires were returned.

1. About the sample

In a sample of 70 exchange students, 76% were female, 24% were male, and 0% identified as diverse. The majority of these students originated from France (23%), Belgium (13%), Germany (10%), Italy (7%), Spain (6%), Czech Republic (6%), Slovenia (6%),

See all responses in Table 1.

Figure 1. Exchange student's country of origin



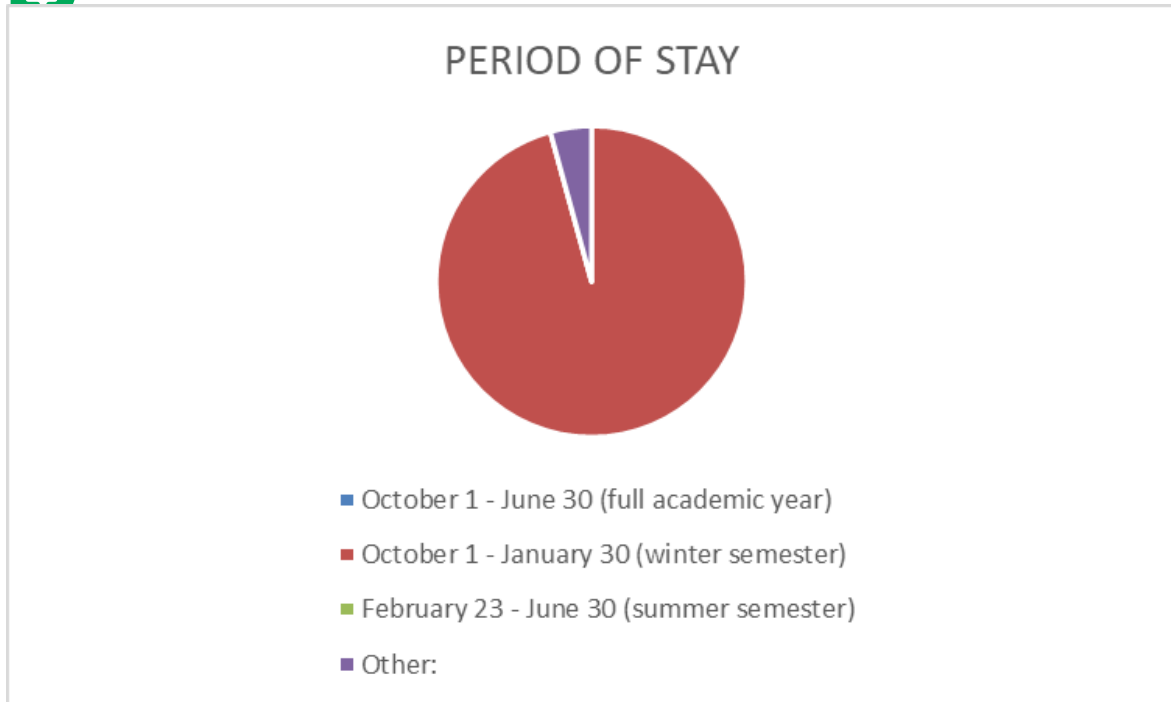


Figure 2. Period of stay

Of the exchange students, no one stayed in Vienna from October to June. 67 students stayed at BOKU from October till January. The remaining three students selected different durations: March till August, February till September...

2. Most appreciated things at BOKU

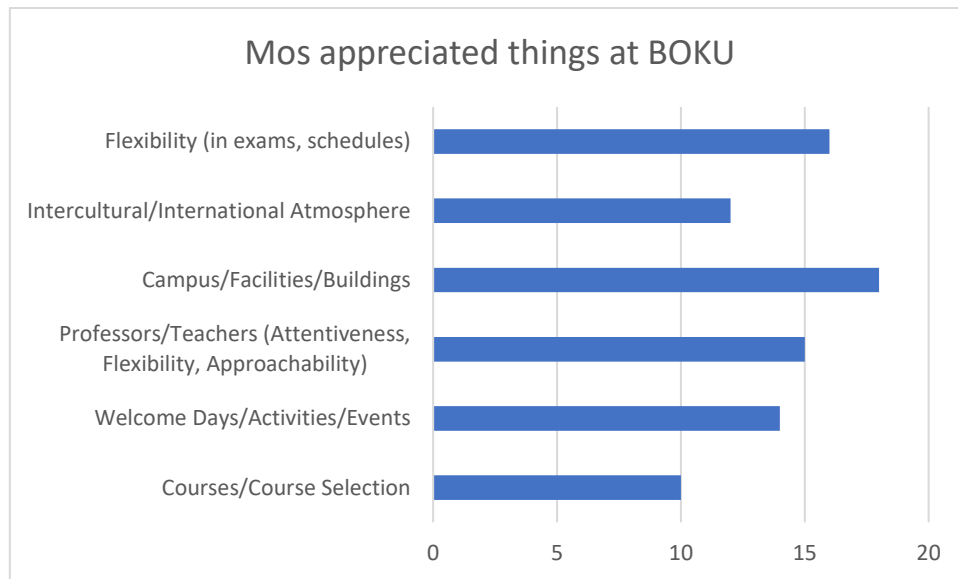


Figure 3. Things that students particularly appreciated during their stay at BOKU

The survey reveals that exchange students at BOKU had a highly positive experience, with several key aspects being particularly appreciated. The most frequently mentioned feature was the campus, facilities, and buildings, reflecting the students' admiration for the university's physical environment. The flexibility in exams and schedules was also highly valued, showcasing the importance of adaptability in academic planning. Professors' attentiveness, flexibility, and approachability were another standout aspect, highlighting the supportive and welcoming academic atmosphere. Welcome days, activities, and events were praised by 14 respondents, emphasizing their role in fostering social connections and integration. The intercultural and international atmosphere was also a significant factor, underlining the diverse and inclusive environment at BOKU. Lastly, the variety and selection of courses were appreciated by 10 respondents, reflecting the academic opportunities available to exchange students.

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

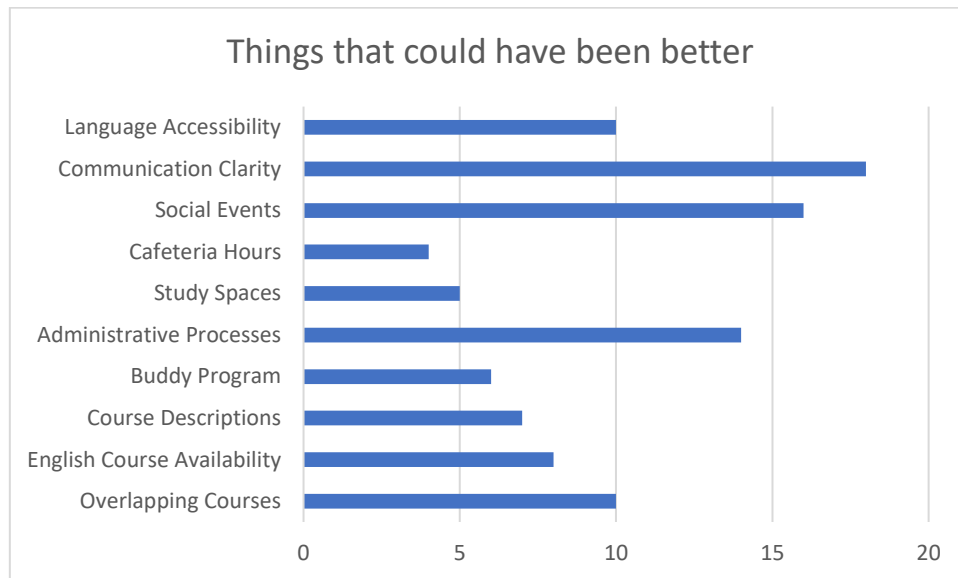


Figure 4. Things which BOKU could do better for international students

The survey highlights several areas where exchange students at BOKU believe improvements could be made to enhance their experience. The most frequently mentioned issue was course organization and selection, reflecting challenges such as overlapping schedules, unclear course descriptions, and limited availability of English courses. Communication and information clarity was another significant concern, emphasizing the need for clearer guidance on administrative processes, course requirements, and campus navigation.

Social activities and integration were also highlighted, suggesting a desire for more events throughout the semester, better inclusion of non-Erasmus students, and improvements to the buddy program. Administrative processes received 14 mentions, with students pointing out inefficiencies such as in-person registration and excessive paperwork. Facilities and resources were mentioned, with students requesting extended cafeteria hours, more study spaces, and better access to course materials. Lastly, language and cultural accessibility were noted, with students asking for more English-language resources, translated materials, and greater inclusion in German-language events.

These insights suggest that while students generally had a positive experience, addressing these areas could further enhance the exchange program at BOKU.

In addition to that, several students mentioned the Mensa (cafeteria) as an area for improvement. They suggested extending the opening hours to better accommodate students with late schedules and making the food more affordable, particularly for international students. There were comments about improving the variety of food options and ensuring better accessibility during peak times. Clearer information about Mensa services and locations was also noted as a potential enhancement. These adjustments could make the Mensa more student-friendly and better suited to the needs of the international community.

4. Motivation, information and events

4.1 Activities at BOKU

93% of students engaged in regular coursework, while 3 percent pursued internships to complement their academic pursuits and 4 percent worked on a thesis or research project.

4.2. Reasons for coming to BOKU

The main motivation for coming to BOKU is to experience a different environment (69%), followed by improving language skills (47%) and meeting new people (43%). While academic reasons are also important (49%), career plans are less convincing, with 33% rating them negatively. The high uncertainty in the “Other” category (19%) suggests additional personal reasons. Overall, students are mainly driven by personal and cultural enrichment.

All responses are shown in table 5.

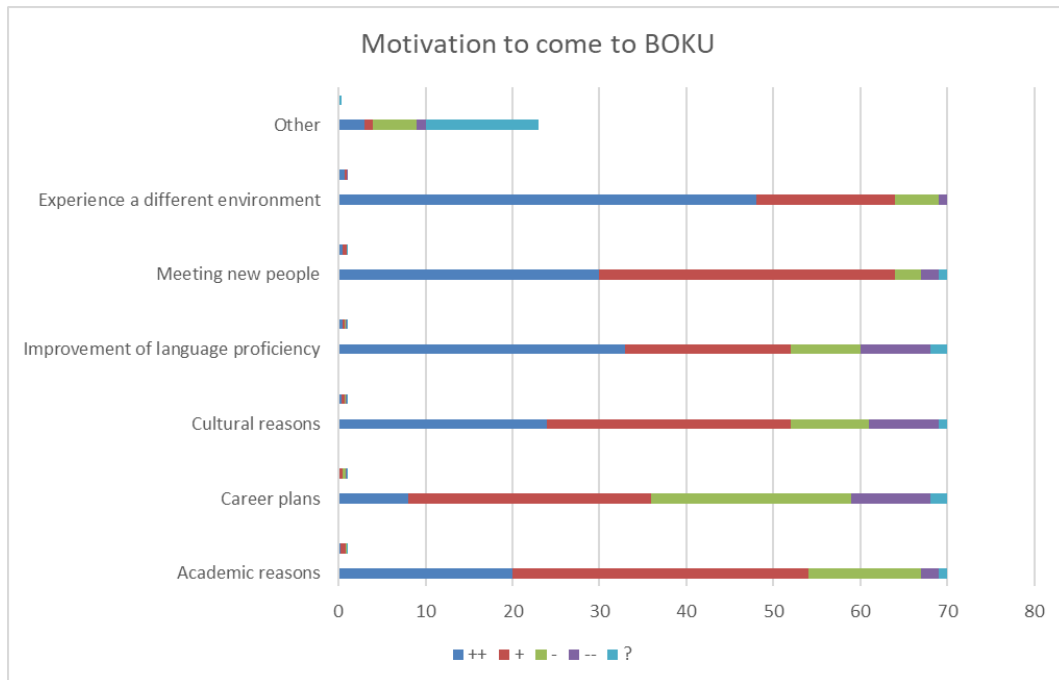


Figure 5. Motivation to come to BOKU

4.3. Information before the stay

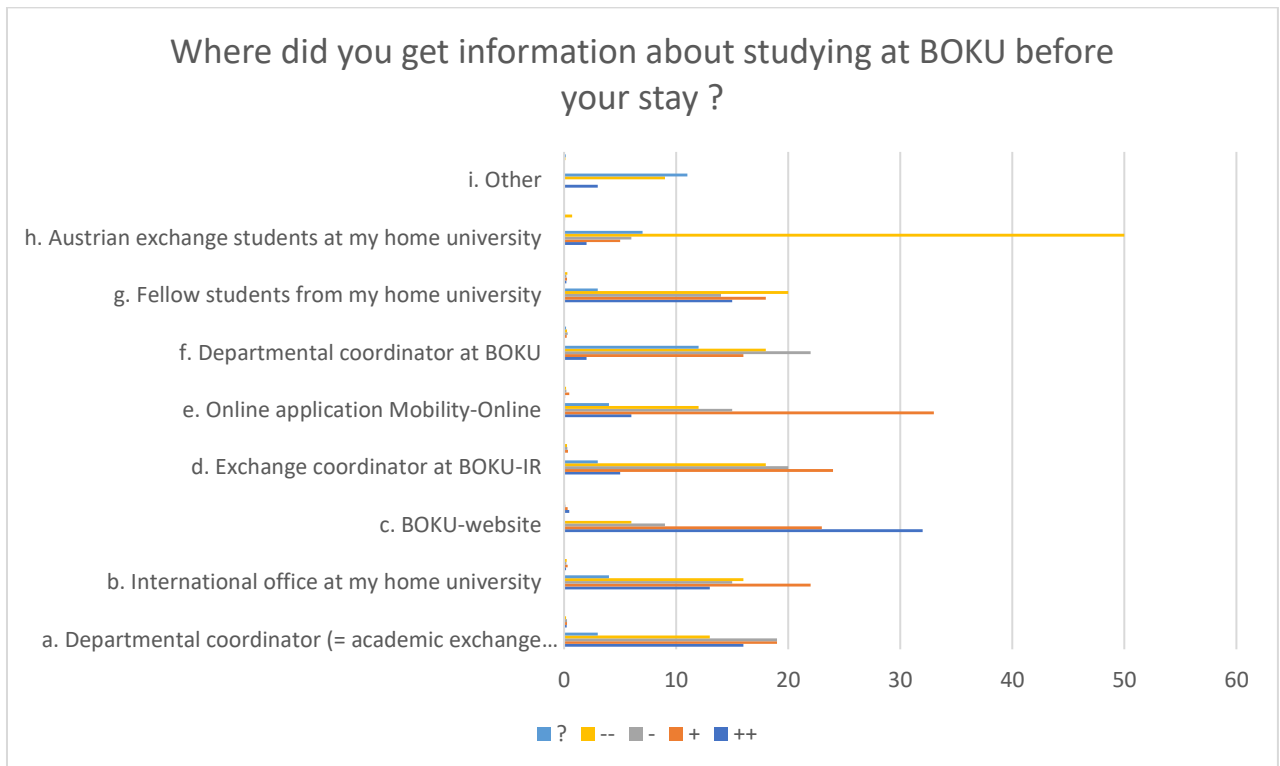


Figure 6. Sources of information used by students before their stay

The data shows that the BOKU website and the Mobility-Online application are the most helpful resources, with 79% and 56% positive ratings respectively. In contrast, Austrian exchange students and departmental coordinators at BOKU received the most negative feedback, with 71% and 26% rating them “- -”. Overall, digital tools were more useful than personal support, especially from the host institution.

4.4. Information from BOKU

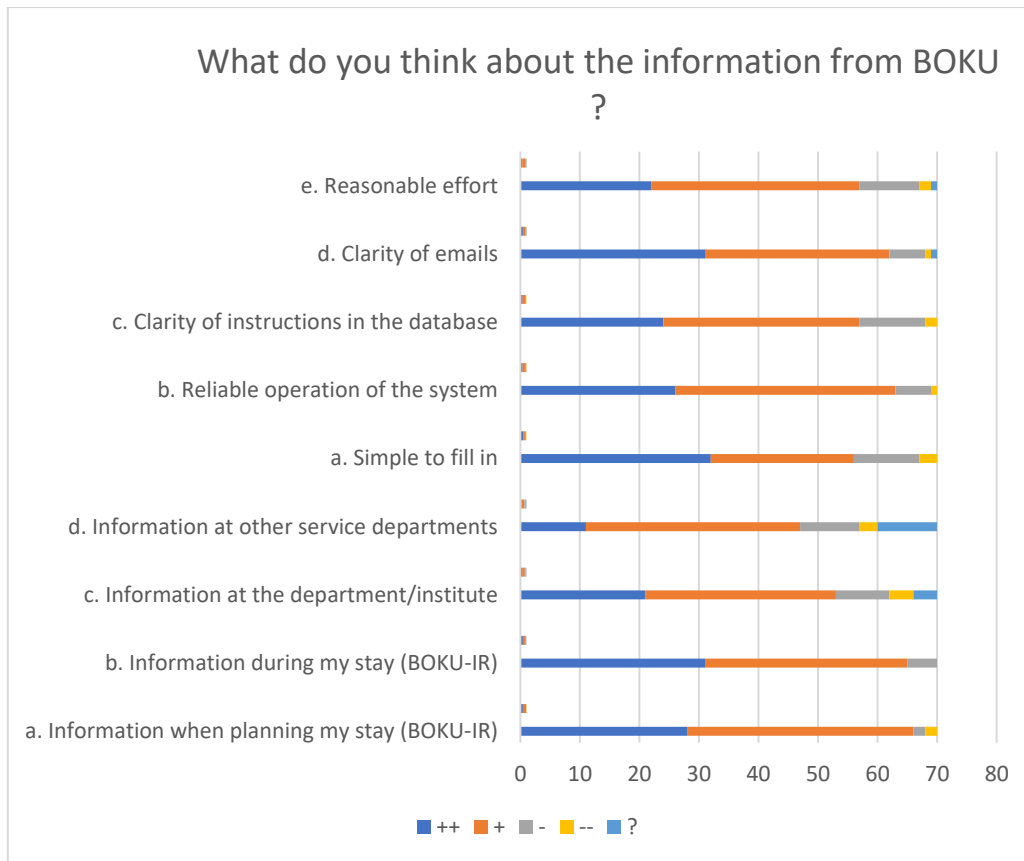


Figure 7. Evaluation of information from BOKU

Most students found the step-by-step structure of Mobility Online helpful and clear, but many reported issues with timing, lack of flexibility, and technical limitations. Several users mentioned that the system feels outdated and would benefit from modernization. Some faced difficulties due to missing or delayed documents from their home university, especially PDFs of the learning agreement, which blocked progress.

There were also concerns about confusing responsibilities, inflexible form structure, and the inability to edit certain sections. Traineeship students reported that the system does not suit their needs well. Technical issues such as needing to use multiple accounts and slow email responses were also mentioned.

A recurring suggestion was the centralization of information between universities to avoid repeated data entry and allow more flexible workflow, especially when waiting for certain documents.

4.5. Application Process – Mobility Online

The feedback on the Mobility Online system highlights both strengths and areas for improvement. Many students appreciated the step-by-step organization, finding it generally clear and structured. However, several challenges were noted. A recurring issue was the linear workflow, which required completing each step in sequence, often delaying progress when certain documents or approvals were pending. Some students also found it confusing to determine deadlines or identify the responsible individuals for specific sections. Technical problems, such as outdated design, small font sizes, and limited edit options, were also mentioned, along with difficulties in integrating information from home universities, especially when systems were not aligned. Additionally, students expressed frustration with having to repeatedly input similar information and suggested centralizing data between universities to streamline the process. While the system is functional, improvements in flexibility, user interface, and coordination between institutions could significantly enhance the user experience.

4.6. Welcome Days

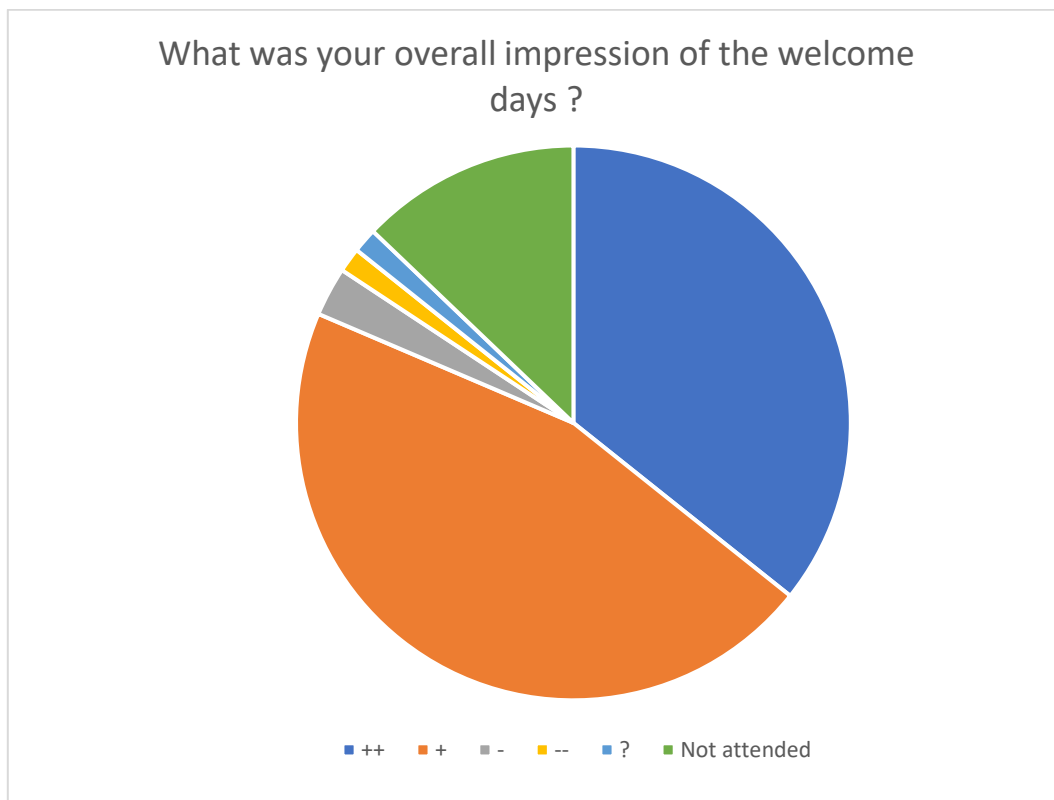


Figure 8. General impression of Welcome Days

4.7. BOKU Info Session

The Welcome Days at BOKU were very well received by students, who appreciated the friendly atmosphere, the variety of activities, and the opportunity to meet new people. Events like the wine hike, the Heuriger evening, and campus or city tours stood out as highlights, offering fun and informal ways to connect with others and discover the university and Vienna. Many students felt genuinely welcomed and noted that the events encouraged interaction without feeling forced.

However, some areas for improvement were noted. Several students were frustrated by the limited number of places for certain activities, making it difficult to participate in events of interest. The organization of the first "Bread and Wine" event was also mentioned as confusing, with unclear instructions and missing group leaders. Students suggested clearer communication, more structured group activities, and continuing social events beyond the first week to support long-term friendships. Some also called for more interaction with Austrian students and for using English consistently in international settings.

Overall, the Welcome Days created a positive and supportive start to student life at BOKU. With improved planning, increased accessibility, and follow-up events during the semester, the experience could become even more inclusive and impactful.

4.8. Buddy system

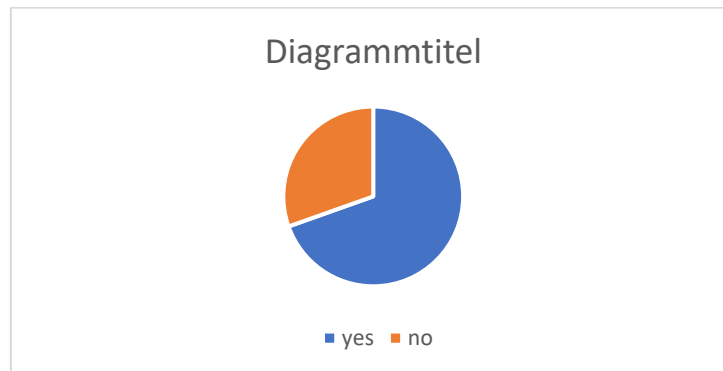


Figure 9. Buddy

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 program successfully paired 69% of students with a buddy, leaving 30% without one. Among those who did not have a buddy, the main reasons included a lack of clear information—many students believed that simply ticking a box on the application was sufficient or were unaware of the application process. Additionally, some students experienced system-related issues, such as not being assigned a buddy despite requesting one or receiving no response from their assigned buddy.

For those who were paired with a buddy, many expressed dissatisfaction with their experience, primarily due to a lack of communication and support. Common issues included buddies not responding to messages, being unavailable, or not meeting in person. Some buddies were on vacation or too busy, leaving students feeling unsupported or like a burden. Others noted that their buddies did not provide

helpful tips or initiate meetups, which led to disappointment. Despite these challenges, many students managed to adapt and find support elsewhere, but they emphasized that being a buddy requires commitment and a genuine willingness to help. While the program is well-received and valued, there is a clear need for improved communication, more proactive follow-up, and a stronger commitment from buddies to ensure all students can benefit fully.

4.9. BOKU-IR newsletter

The BOKU-IR newsletter was read regularly by 41% of respondents, occasionally by 39%, and never by 20%. Regarding its usefulness, 71% found the information helpful (++ or +), while 14% found it less useful (-), and 14% were unsure (?). Suggestions for improvement included adding information about places to eat, while some respondents noted they did not receive the emails or preferred other forms of communication. Overall, the newsletter was generally well-received, but there is room for improvement in both content and delivery.

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

The Facebook group "ESN BOKU Incomings" was joined by 64% of respondents, while 36% did not participate. Among those who joined, only 35% found the information useful (++ or +), while 32% found it less useful (- or --), and 34% were unsure (?). Comments highlighted issues such as low activity in the group and a preference for alternative platforms like WhatsApp, which some found more effective. Overall, while the group was moderately used, its impact and engagement could be improved.

4.11. Weekly *Stammtisch* and other activities

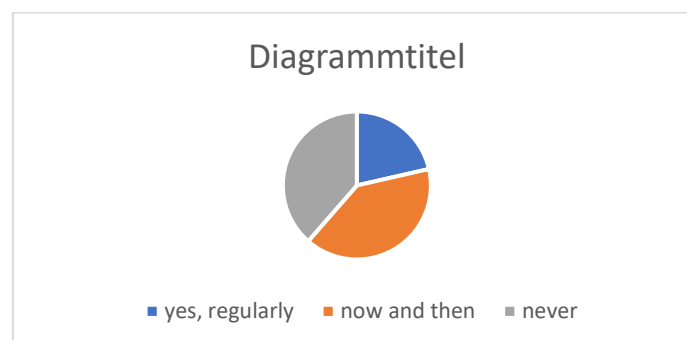


Figure 10. *Stammtisch*

The weekly "Stammtisch" was attended regularly by 21% of respondents, occasionally by 40%, and never by 39%. While many participants appreciated the concept and found it enjoyable, several suggestions were made to improve its appeal. A recurring theme was the desire for variety in locations, as holding the event frequently at Tüwi became monotonous for some. Many participants preferred exploring different bars around Vienna, which also provided an opportunity to discover new places. Additionally, organized activities, such as quizzes, games, or karaoke, were highlighted as effective ways to increase engagement and attract more attendees.

Some respondents suggested starting the event earlier or holding it on a different day of the week to accommodate those with heavy workloads or late schedules. Others proposed adding small incentives, such as food, cheaper beverages, or semester-long games, to encourage regular attendance. A few participants noted that clearer and earlier announcements about the event could help improve turnout. While the "Stammtisch" was generally well-received, these suggestions indicate that more variety, better timing, and interactive activities could make it even more engaging and inclusive for both international and Austrian students.

4.12. Improvements that can be made to information and planning

Exchange students provided various suggestions to improve the information and ease the planning process at BOKU. Many praised the university for doing a great job in making them feel welcomed and providing clear information. However, some areas for improvement were highlighted. Several students suggested creating a WhatsApp group and sharing the link during the information session to facilitate communication and event organization. Others recommended consolidating scattered information into a single, easily accessible guide and providing more detailed guidance on the course selection process, which was described as stressful.

Some respondents proposed offering the option to enroll in courses before arrival and improving communication through social media and email, such as sending major event updates directly to student inboxes. A few students emphasized the value of insights from former exchange students or better matchmaking for those without an informative buddy. Additionally, ideas like hosting a Stammtisch during Welcome Days, planning events outside of class hours, and organizing activities throughout the year (not just at the beginning) were suggested to enhance integration and social interaction.

Overall, while most students felt the information provided was sufficient and well-handled, these suggestions highlight opportunities to streamline communication, improve the course selection process, and foster a stronger sense of community among exchange students.

5. INFRASTRUCTURE AT BOKU

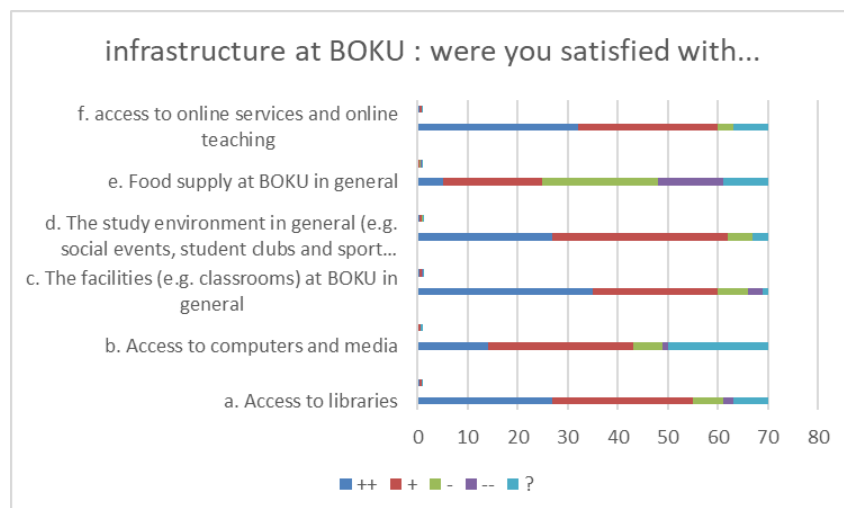


Figure 11. Students' satisfaction with infrastructure at BOKU

Students highlighted several areas for improvement regarding BOKU's facilities and services. A common concern was the high cost of food at the Mensa, which many found expensive compared to their home universities. Limited study spaces were another issue, with students noting that libraries were often full, closed on weekends, or had strict rules. Some suggested opening seminar rooms or computer labs for study purposes and extending library hours, especially during exam periods. Additionally, the lack of accessible and comfortable study spots at Muthgasse was criticized, with some describing the building as uninviting.

Other feedback included the inconvenience of locked computer rooms, the early closure of the canteen during exam weeks, and a desire for more affordable sports courses. Students also expressed a need for clearer information about social events and student clubs to enhance their experience. Overall, while students appreciated certain aspects of BOKU, addressing these concerns could significantly improve their academic and social environment.

6. LANGUAGES

6.1. Language Problem

Overall, 53% said they never had language problems, 44% said they had them sometimes, and only 3% said they had them often. More precisely, Students said that language problems were biggest in online classes and exams, with 37% having major difficulties and 7% feeling unsure. They also found oral exams hard, with 30% reporting big problems. On the other hand, students had fewer issues in private life and when talking to Austrian students, where most said they had no problems or only small ones. This shows that while language problems are not very common overall, some situations, like online learning and speaking in exams, are harder for some students.

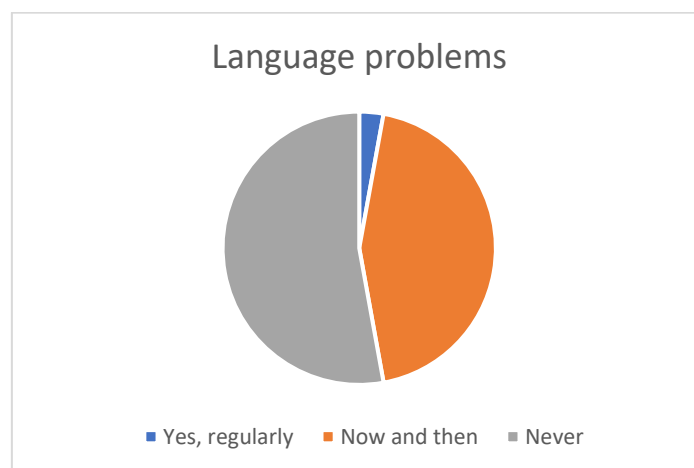


Figure 12. Occurrence of language problems.

6.2. German language course

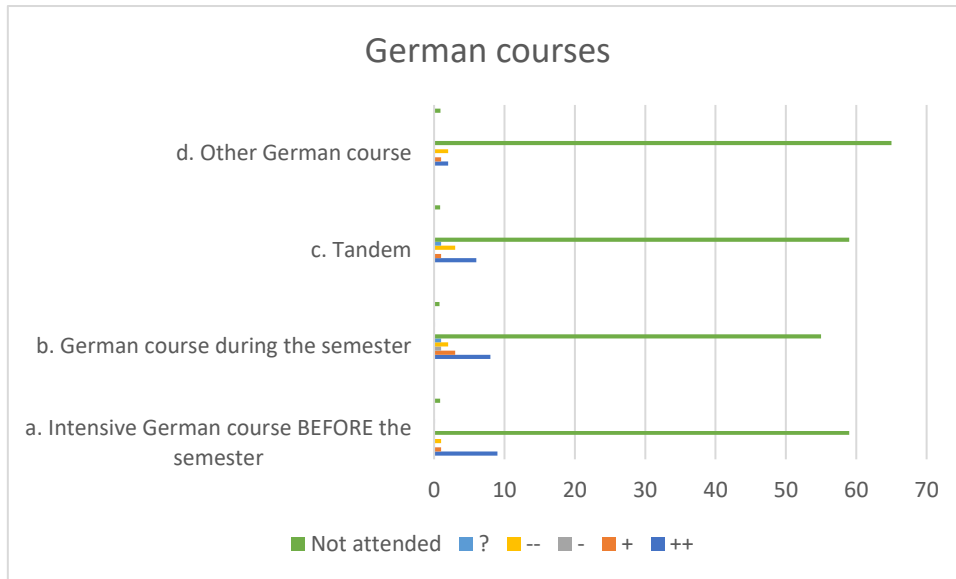


Figure 13. German courses attendance

Students had the opportunity to participate in various German language learning activities. According to the survey, 11 students attended an intensive German course before the semester, while 15 students took a German course during the semester. Additionally, 11 students participated in the Tandem program, which allows them to practice languages with a partner. A smaller number, 5 students, attended other types of German courses. However, the majority of respondents did not participate in any of these activities, with 59 students skipping the intensive course, 55 skipping the semester course, 59 not joining the Tandem program, and 65 not attending other German courses. Among those who participated, most reported positive experiences, especially with the intensive and semester courses.

7. ACCOMODATION

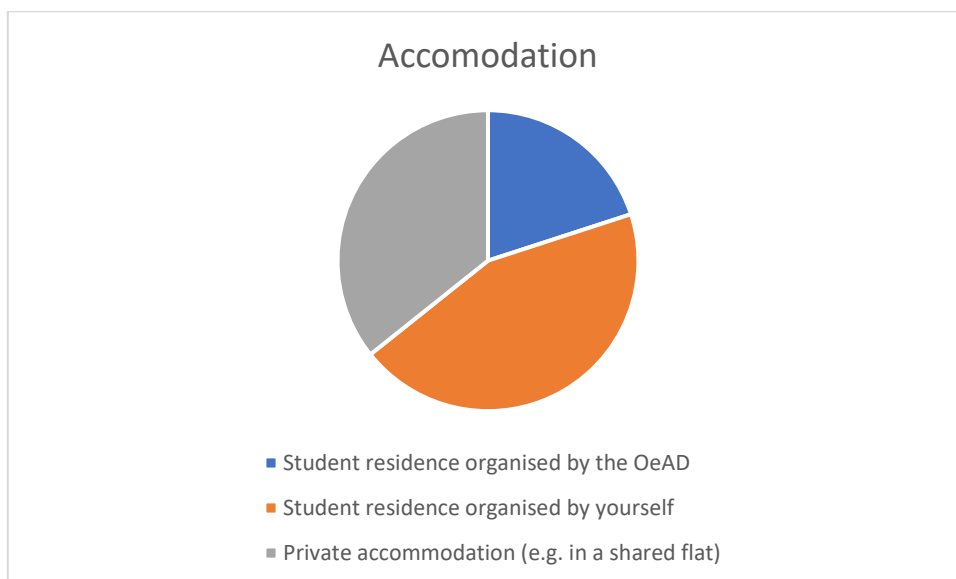


Figure 14. Chosen accommodation

7.1. Satisfaction with accommodation

Students had mixed experiences with accommodation. While private accommodation had the highest satisfaction (26% very satisfied), only 3% of students in OeAD-organized residences reported the same. Some students shared frustrations, such as high costs, lack of transparency from OeAD about extra fees, and stress from finding housing late. Others suggested using platforms like WG-Gesucht for cheaper options or creating groups to connect students leaving flats with those searching. Overall, accommodation was a challenge for many, with unexpected costs and limited support.

7.2. Important factors in choosing accommodation

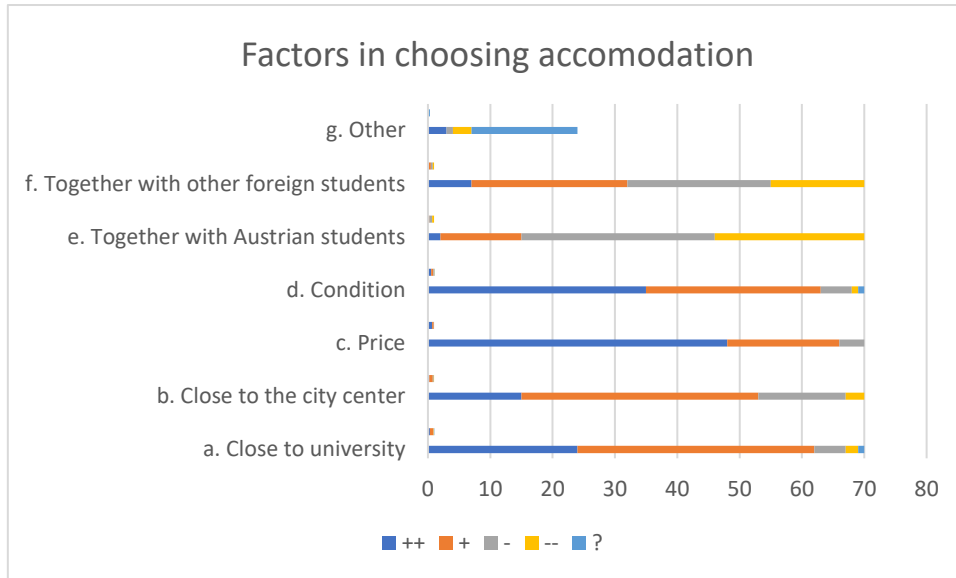


Figure 15. Factors in choosing accommodation

The responses indicate high satisfaction with aspects such as proximity to the university, price, and the condition of accommodations or facilities, which were rated positively by the majority of participants. Proximity to the city center received more mixed feedback, with some expressing dissatisfaction. Interaction with Austrian students was a notable area of concern, as it received predominantly negative ratings, while experiences with other foreign students were mixed. The "Other" category showed no clear trends, reflecting diverse or unclear experiences. Overall, while certain logistical aspects were well-received, social integration, particularly with Austrian students, emerged as an area needing improvement.

8. ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL OUTCOME

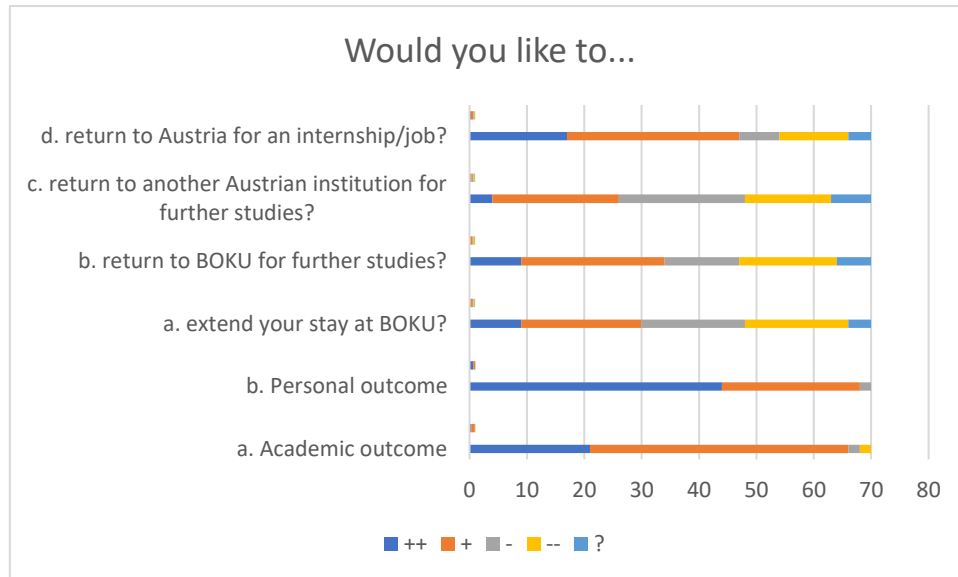


Figure 16. Academic and personal outcome

8.1. Situations requiring special attention

Students shared mixed experiences during their time at BOKU. While many appreciated the interactive teaching and cultural activities like the Stammtisch, others reported serious issues, including racism, discrimination, and a lack of mental health support. Course overlaps and the stress of organizing schedules were also common concerns.

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

Recommendations included better psychological support, clearer course organization, more cultural activities throughout the semester, and improved communication. Addressing these issues could significantly enhance the experience for future exchange students.

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

No question about COVID-19