

Report of Experiences — Innsbruck

My participation in the IMPACCT exchange programme and my semester abroad at Leopold-Franzens University in Innsbruck were an incredibly enriching experience. In order to reflect on this experience, I would like to look at various aspects separately.

1. The IMPACCT Project

In the course of the project, there were various measures to prepare for, accompany and follow up on the semester abroad.

For example, I attended the practical course *The Intercultural Dimension in the Didactics of Islamic Religious Education* as preparation. Although the focus of the practical course was more on Islamic religion and did not correspond directly to my subject of ethics, I was able to take away valuable knowledge. Dealing with Islam broadened my horizons and will be useful to me as a prospective ethics teacher in a multicultural society. The intensive study of Austria and the textbook analyses were particularly helpful. These tasks gave me cultural insights and valuable knowledge for my future teaching. Overall, the seminars were very useful for my professional and intercultural preparation as well as for my future professional practice as a teacher.

In the intercultural training, I learnt a lot about potential problems that can arise during a semester abroad or when dealing with a different culture. It was emphasised that such challenges are normal, which gave me a sense of security and understanding. Although I did not experience a real culture shock in Austria due to its cultural similarity to Germany, this training was still very valuable. It helped me to better understand the perspective of people coming into a new culture. These insights are particularly important for my future everyday life as a teacher, as I can now better understand how pupils

who come to Germany from other cultures feel. My semester abroad not only prepared me for my future career as a teacher in terms of my subject, but also interculturally and emotionally.

The counselling sessions during my stay in Innsbruck provided me with important support. The opportunity to talk to the permanent staff and address challenges directly gave me a lot of confidence. Uncertainties, problems and organisational issues could be clarified directly.

The final talks after my return enabled me to reflect on my experiences and prepare me for my return to everyday life as a student in Germany. They also gave me the opportunity to critically scrutinise and evaluate my personal and academic development during my stay.

Overall, I found the measures used in the IMPACCT project very useful. They offered comprehensive support from preparation to follow-up and ensure that a student's experience abroad not only remains a personal experience but is also academically and culturally rooted. I can definitely see the advantages of the project context compared to students whose experience abroad did not take place as part of such a project. While others may be left to their own devices, I was always able to count on support thanks to the structured guidance. The IMPACCT programme gave me not only organisational but also emotional security, which undoubtedly made my stay in Innsbruck more enjoyable and successful. In addition, the targeted preparation and continuous support enabled me to experience my time abroad in a more intensive and reflective way.

2. My Expectations

I went into my semester abroad in Innsbruck with great expectations. I hoped to gain new experiences both academically and culturally and to broaden my perspectives. I was particularly keen on familiarising myself with the Austrian education system and discovering new teaching methods for my future career as a teacher. I also expected to strengthen my intercultural skills and immerse myself in everyday life and culture in Austria. Looking back, I can say that many of these expectations were fulfilled. Academically, I gained valuable insights into the Austrian educational landscape, especially

by analysing textbooks and having direct contact with students and teachers on site. These experiences have broadened my understanding of different approaches in the teaching profession and will support me in my future career as a teacher.

Culturally, I quickly settled into Innsbruck. Austria's cultural similarities to Germany made it easier for me to get started, but at the same time I was also able to discover differences that honed my intercultural skills. One area in which my expectations were not fully met was the more intensive exchange with the local population I had hoped for. This could be due to the fact that Innsbruck is a very international city and that I especially met other exchange students. Nevertheless, I gained valuable insights into the Austrian way of life through my contact with locals.

Overall, I can say that my semester abroad in Innsbruck largely fulfilled my expectations and offered me new perspectives and valuable experiences in many respects.

3. Comparison of the Universities

During my semester abroad at Leopold-Franzens University in Innsbruck, I noticed some similarities but also interesting differences to the teacher training programme at JLU. These experiences have shown me what I particularly appreciate about the teacher training programme at JLU and where there is room for improvement.

In many areas, the teacher training programmes at both universities are similar. Both at JLU and in Innsbruck, the courses mainly consist of seminars and lectures, which are similarly structured. The requirements in the seminars, such as presentations, homework and discussions, are comparable. The examination formats in the lectures, especially written examinations, are also common in both systems.

One major difference was the grading system. At Leopold-Franzens University, students are graded on a scale of 1 to 5, in contrast to the 1–15 points at JLU. I was particularly positively surprised by the easier communication via e-mail with the lecturers in Innsbruck. Replies were often quicker, which made the exchange easier. You were also given the opportunity to take part

in seminars online if you were ill. This meant I was able to take part in lessons without being physically present and avoid absences. What confused me about the university and the courses on offer to begin with was that there are courses that are offered at the other institution, the University of Teacher Education Tyrol. However, the latter cooperates with the University of Innsbruck, and it is possible to take a course offered at this university without any problems.

Despite these differences, I really appreciate the teacher training programme at JLU. The solid structure of the seminars and lectures as well as the familiar examination formats offer reliable orientation within the programme. However, based on my experience abroad, I would like to see more flexibility in attending courses at JLU, similar to what was the case in Innsbruck. The option of attending online when you are ill could also be introduced at JLU. In addition, faster and more straightforward communication with lecturers, as I experienced in Innsbruck, could improve the support and exchange at JLU. Overall, the semester abroad broadened my view of the teacher training programme and showed me how important it is to keep what is tried and tested, but also to be open to change in order to make the programme even more effective and accessible.

4. Intercultural Classroom

The IMPACCT project aims to prepare student teachers specifically for the heterogeneous classroom. Thanks to my semester abroad in Innsbruck, I now feel much better prepared in this respect, although I didn't have any extreme intercultural experiences myself. The cultural similarities between Austria and Germany ensured that there were no major cultural shocks. Nevertheless, I was able to experience a lot of heterogeneity through my exchange with international students and thus learn to understand them better.

My encounters with students from different countries were particularly valuable. I became close friends with a fellow student from Israel and made a friend from France and another from Italy. These diverse contacts helped me to better recognise the challenges and opportunities of a multicultural environment. Even though the differences between the cultures were sometimes subtle, they heightened my awareness of how important it is to develop an awareness

of cultural differences and to take them into account in pedagogical practice.

Through these experiences, I now feel better prepared to teach in a classroom with students from different cultural backgrounds. I have learnt how important it is to consider different perspectives and create an atmosphere in which all students feel understood and valued. My semester abroad made me even more aware of the importance of diversity in the classroom and prepared me both professionally and personally to successfully integrate this heterogeneity into my future teaching career.

5. Criticism

Looking back, I can see one point that could be optimised as part of the IMPACCT project: The content preparation could have been a little more tailored to the different specialisms of the participants. Although I was able to take a lot away from the focus on Islamic religion, it would have been helpful if the selection of topics had been broader in order to better support my specialisation in ethics. Overall, however, the experience was very enriching, and the intercultural aspects also gave me valuable insights for my future career.

6. Experiences

During my semester abroad in Innsbruck, I came into contact with the history, language, religion and culture of Austria in many different ways.

My involvement with the history surrounding the Bergisel and the battles that took place there was particularly formative. The historical significance of this place, combined with the Tyrolean fight for freedom, has deepened my understanding of regional history. I also realised the connection to Walter von der Vogelweide, an important medieval poet, through the Walterpark in Innsbruck.

Austria is strongly characterised by Catholic tradition, which is clearly evident in its everyday life and architecture. I also had my first intensive contact with Islamic students in my seminars, which broadened my horizons. A seminar on Islamic art was particularly

exciting, in which I learnt a lot about Islamic calligraphy and the art of writing—topics that I had hardly come into contact with before.

I noticed some differences in the language, especially Austrian terms for German words. For example, cream is called “Sahne” in Germany and “Obers” in Austria. The Austrian desire to differentiate themselves linguistically from Germany was also interesting to experience and gave me a better understanding of Austria’s regional identity.

7. Review

I am convinced that my semester abroad has made an extremely positive contribution to my future professional life.

Studying at Leopold-Franzens University in Innsbruck has broadened my knowledge considerably, especially through my intensive study of the Austrian education system and its specific teaching methods. Analysing textbooks and gaining insights into local teaching practice have provided me with valuable perspectives for my future teaching.

The intercultural experience and my exchange with international students have strengthened my ability to adapt and be sensitive to different cultural backgrounds. These skills are particularly important for teaching in a diverse classroom as they will help me to respond to the different needs and perspectives of my future students.

The practical experience of interacting with students from different countries and participating in projects and seminars together has improved my teamwork and communication skills. These international contacts have also given me a better understanding of the challenges that students from different cultural contexts can experience.

Overall, my semester abroad enriched my professional and personal development and prepared me comprehensively for the demands of the teaching profession.