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International students enter German university: An empirical study of language proficiency and academic success

EALTA, Dublin, June 2019

Katrin Wisniewski, Jupp Möhring,
Wolfgang Lenhard & Jennifer Seeger

1 BACKGROUND

1 BACKGROUND

- increasing number of international students at German higher educational institutions (239,143 (in 2009); 340,305 (in 2016) DZHW/DAAD 2017: 3)
- dropout rates for international students high (BA: 41% vs 28%, Heublein et al. 2014)
- reasons unknown, but common assumptions:
  - new study culture,
  - a lack of social integration,
  - and insufficient language abilities (Heublein 2015; Heublein et al. 2017)

1 BACKGROUND

GERMAN LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS FOR UNIVERSITY ADMISSION (MOST INT. STUDENTS)

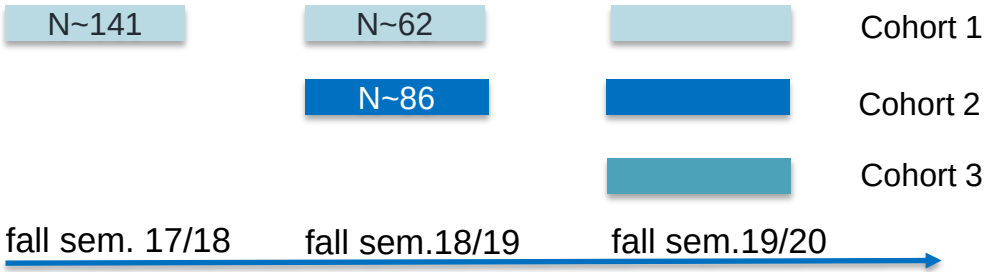
- university entrance language tests (RO-DT, KMK/HRLK 2004/2015 § 1.1),
  1. offered world-wide | language testing institutions: *TestDaF, Goethe-Zertifikat C2, telc C1 Hochschule*
  2. offered in Germany | universities or "Studienkollegs/foundation courses"): *DSH* & language part of the *FSP*
  3. offered at schools outside Germany | Central Agency for Schools Abroad (ZfA): *DSD II*
- level B2+/C1, relatively high (Carlsen 2018; Deygers et al. 2018; McNamara 2018)
- no post-admission compulsory further language training

SpraStu („**Spra**che und **Stu**dienerfolg bei Bildungsausländer/-innen“)

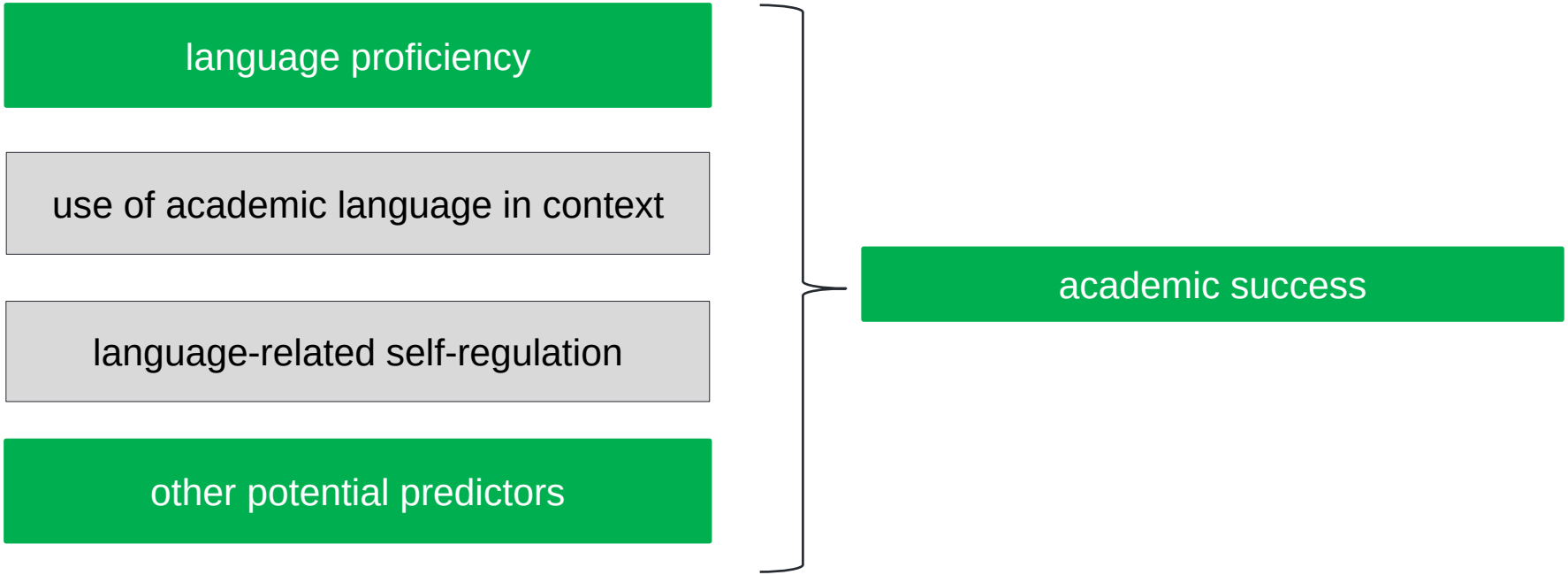
2 THE PROJECT

2 THE SPRASTU PROJECT AT A GLANCE

- 06/2017-10/2020
- Leipzig & Würzburg universities cooperation project
- longitudinal, 3 cohorts of international BA students („Bildungsausländer/-innen“)
- L1 control group



SPRASTU BUILDING BLOCKS



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How proficient are international students at the beginning of their studies?
2. How does German language proficiency develop in the first year at university? (mixed results in study abroad research, e.g., Yang 2016, Xu 2019)
3. Do students with lower language proficiency have different backgrounds?
4. Is German language proficiency related to academic success in the first semester?

3 PRELIMINARY RESULTS

OVERVIEW OF INSTRUMENTS

GERMAN LANGUAGE TESTS – CARRIED THROUGH ONCE PER YEAR

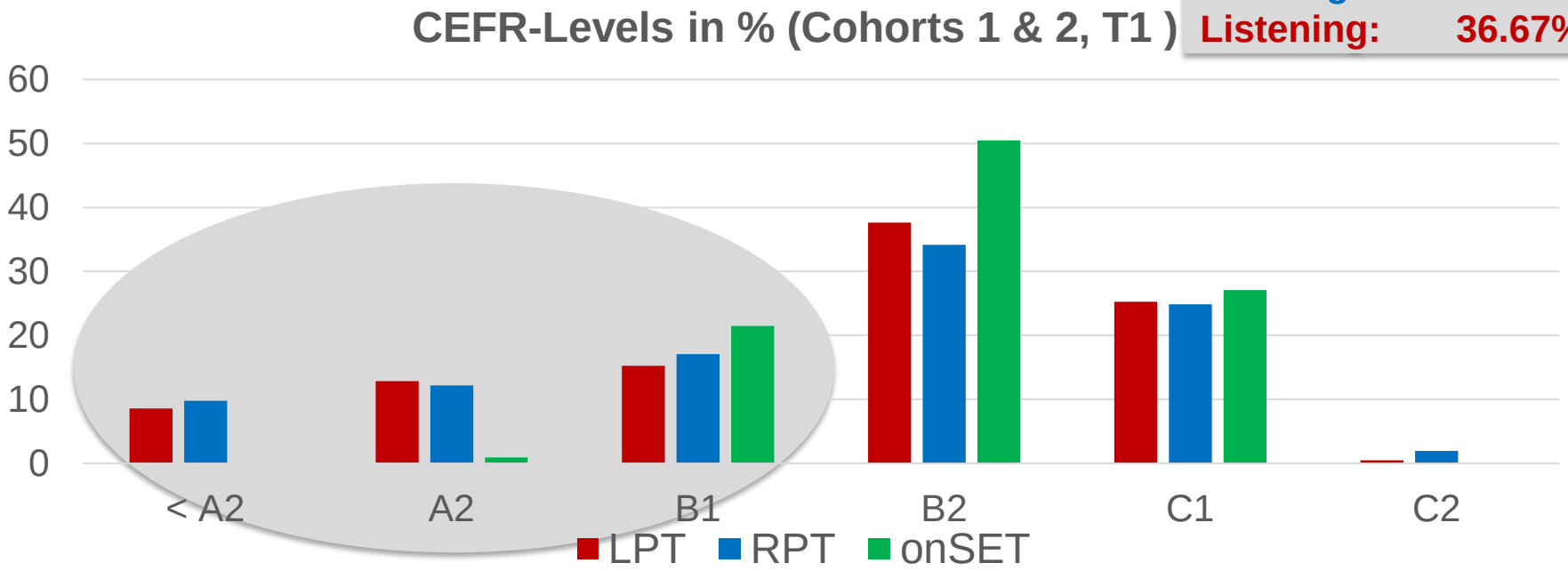
1. **onSET** (C-Test, CEFR-Levels A2–C1 *or higher* & raw scores, max. 40 min)
2. **Listening Proficiency Test** (MC-Test, CEFR-Levels A2–C2 & raw scores, max. 75 min)
3. **Reading Proficiency Test** (MC-Test, CEFR-Levels A2–C2 & raw scores, max. 75 min)
4. **TestDaF Writing Task** (TestDaF Levels TDN, max. 60 min)
5. **Receptive Vocabulary Levels Test** (Multiple Matching, frequency bands passed & raw scores, max. 25 min)
6. **Productive Vocabulary Levels Test** (Gap Completion, frequency bands passed & raw scores, max. 25 min)

RESULTS – INITIAL TESTING (T1)

CEFR-RELATED TESTS

ONSET: *N* = 214; LISTENING TEST: *N* = 210; READING TEST: *N* = 205

below B2
onSET: 22.43 %
Reading: 39.02%
Listening: 36.67%



RESULTS – INITIAL TESTING (T1)

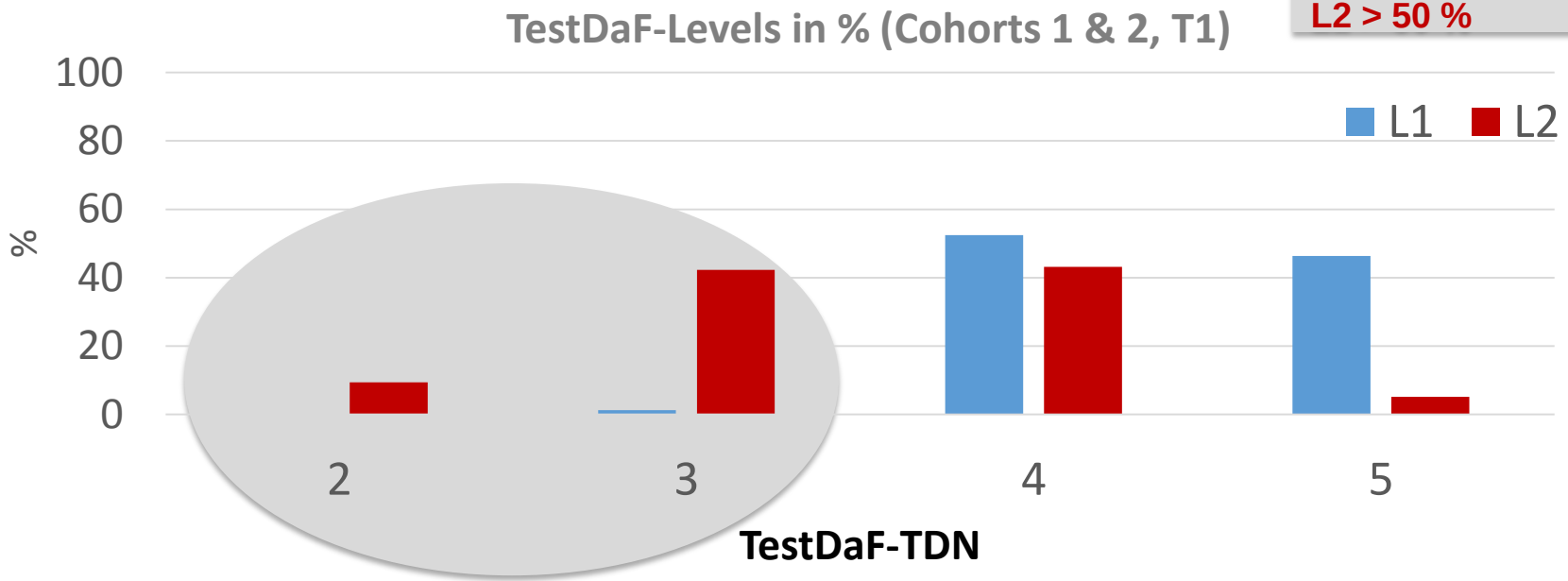
Europarat (Referenzrahmen für Sprachen)					
A Basic User Elementare Sprachverwendung		**B** Independent User Selbständige Sprachenverwendung		**C** Proficient User Kompetente Sprachverwendung	
A1 Breakthrough	**A2** Waystage	**B1** Threshold	**B2** Vantage	**C1** Effective	**C2** Mastery
		B1.1 B1.2	B2.1 B2.2	C1.1 C1.2	
TestDaF			TDN 3	TDN 4	TDN 5
ALTE	Stufe 1	Stufe 2	Stufe 3	Stufe 4	Stufe 5

TESTDAF WRITING TASK

COHORT 1 *N* = 144, L1: *N* = 14, L2: *N* = 130

COHORT 2 *N* = 151, L1: *N* = 68, L2: *N* = 83

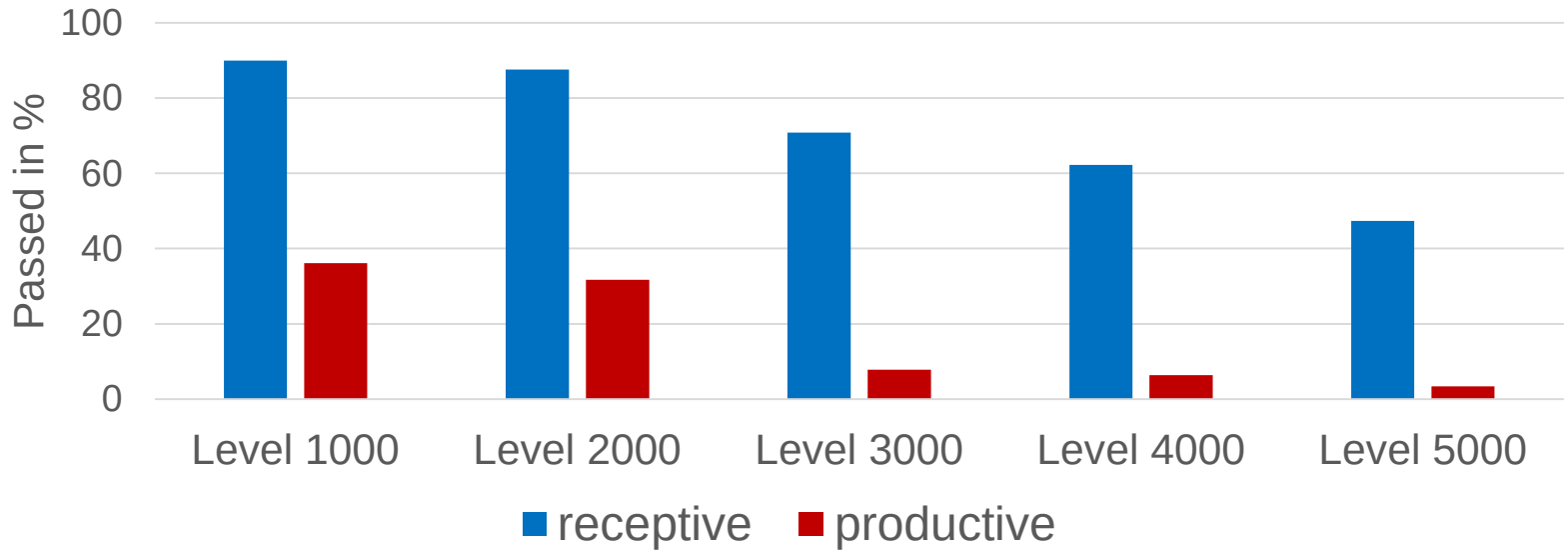
below TDN 4 (B2+)
L2 > 50 %



RESULTS – INITIAL TESTING (T1)

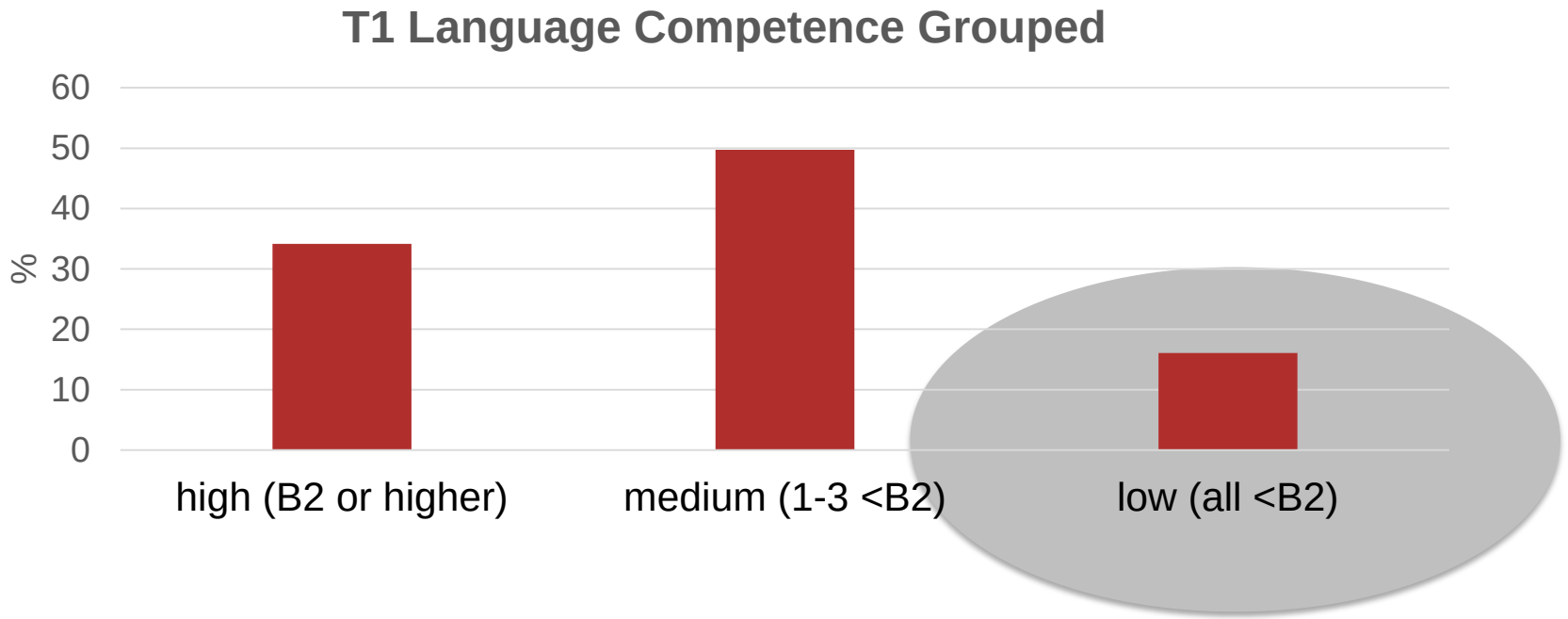
VOCABULARY LEVELS TESTS – LEVELS PASSED

RECEPTIVE: *N* = 209; PRODUCTIVE: *N* = 205



RESULTS – INITIAL TESTING (T1): "PROFICIENCY GROUPS"

CEFR-RATED TESTS (ONSET, RPT, LPT) + TESTDAF (TDN 4 ~ B2), *N* = 199



RQ2: DEVELOPMENT OF GERMAN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY INITIAL TESTING (T1) – 2ND TESTING (T2)

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	effect size d
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	**LPT (T1 - T2)**	-1,933	3,888	0,502	-2,938	-0,929	-3,852	59	0,000	0,508 (medium)
Pair 2	**VLT-rec (T1-T2)**	-7,417	12,563	1,622	-10,662	-4,171	-4,573	59	0,000	0,601 (medium)
Pair 3	**VLT-prod (T1-T2)**	-5,729	5,192	0,676	-7,082	-4,376	-8,475	58	0,000	1,107 (large)
Pair 4	**RPT (T1-T2)**	-0,932	4,258	0,554	-2,042	0,178	-1,682	58	0,098	0,223 (small)
Pair 5	**onSET (T1-T2)**	3,967	10,355	1,337	1,292	6,642	2,967	59	0,004	-0,382 (small)
Pair 6	**TestDaF (T1-T2)**						Z = -,186		0,853	0,049 (small)

Listening & Vocabulary: significant **improvement**
Reading & Writing: little/no **change**
onSET: significant **decline**

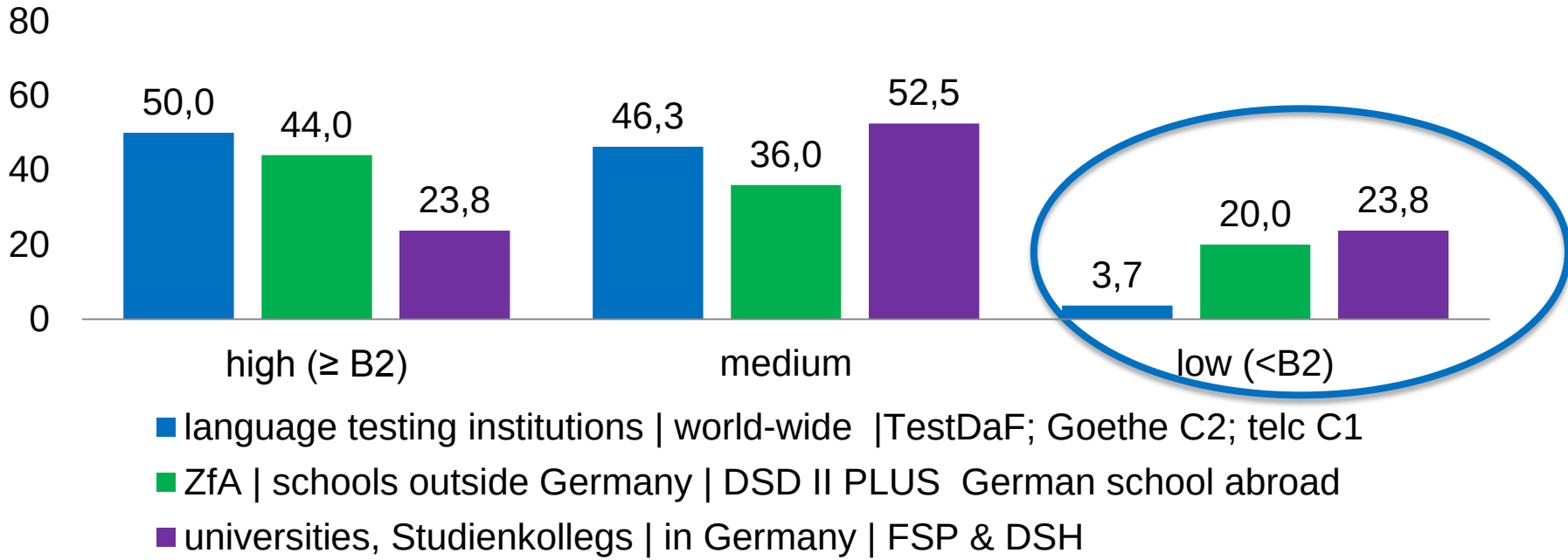
RQ3: STUDENTS‘ BACKGROUND & LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY (GROUPS)

SELECTED RESULTS FOR COHORT 1&2, *N*=223

- **age of onset** (starting earlier is better) (F (2, 164)=12,526, p=,000, η^2=,135)
- **motivation for learning German** (advantage „habitual“) (F(2, 198)=6.494, p=.002, η^2=.062 (medium))
- **migratory background** (disadvantage refugees) (Fisher (2, 198)=21.49, p=.000, Cramér V=.329)
- **L1** (disadvantage South Asian languages & Arabian) (χ^2 (6, 143)=34.617, p=,000, Cramér V=.510)
- **study subject** (disadvantage engineering) (χ^2 (8, 176)=23.407, p=.003, Cramér V=.258)
- **university entrance language test** (disadvantage “university-specific“ UELTs) (Fisher (4, 180)=17.344, p=.002, V=.219)

UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE LANGUAGE TESTS & PROFICIENCY GROUPS (%)

COHORT 1 & 2, T1, N=195



RQ4: LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY & ACADEMIC SUCCESS

BACKGROUND

- problematic: language proficiency is a necessary, but no sufficient condition for academic success (Bridgeman et al. 2015: 308; Cho et al. 2012: 424)
- „academic success“ is a complex construct (Heublein et al. 2010; Yorks et al. 2015; Kuh et al. 2006)
- studies often find small correlations (UALT & GPA) Graham 1987 (overview); TOEFL: Al-Musawi and Al-Ansari 1999; Ayers & Peters 1977; Ayers & Quattlebaum 1992; Neal 1998; Van Nelson, Nelson, and Malone 2004; Vinke & Jochems 1993; IELTS: Davies 2008

RQ4: LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY & ACADEMIC SUCCESS

INSTRUMENT

- Questionnaire (after each semester)
  - **higher education research constructs** (e.g., *study motivation, finances, academic self-concept, social and academic integration, living conditions* …)
  - **language-related constructs** (e.g., *language contact, willingness to communicate, language mindsets, subjective development of academic and general language proficiency* …)

RQ4: LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY & ACADEMIC SUCCESS

RESULTS FOR COHORT 1 - N=66, COHORT 1, SEMESTER 1 (!)

- students with lower language proficiency achieve fewer credit points ($F(2, 62)=16.34$, $p=.000$, $\eta^2=.35$)
- language proficiency predicts credit points:

  stepwise regression analysis (credit points = dependent variable):
  - model 1: language proficiency, **$R^2=.385$**
  - model 2: + living & study conditions, $R^2=.502$ ($\Delta F(3, 22)=1.85$, $p=.168$)
  - model 3: + individual factors (*demotivation, academic self-concept*), **$R^2=.740$** ($\Delta F(2, 20)=8.90$, $p < .001$)

DISCUSSION / CONCLUSION

Constraints:

- results are *preliminary* and to be treated with much caution
- more complex statistics (e.g., SEM) to be run for full datasets when available

From a **higher education policy** perspective…:

- compulsory, curriculum-embedded further language training during studies
  (like Dömling & Pasternack 2015; Fandrych 2015: 117ff.; Fandrych 2016: 10; Geis 2017; SVR 2015, 2017 and many others suggest)

From a **language testing** perspective…:

- comparability of UALTs?

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

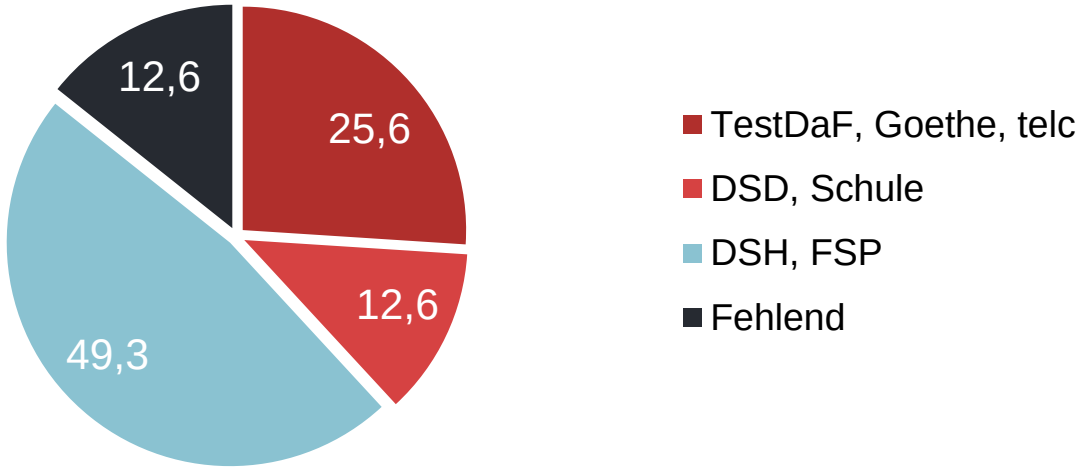
Katrin Wisniewski & Jupp Möhring
Leipzig University, Herder Institute
Beethovenstr. 15, 04107 Leipzig

katrin.wisniewski@uni-leipzig.de
http://home.uni-leipzig.de/sprastu

UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE LANGUAGE TESTS IN SPRASTU

COHORT 1 AND 2, N=223

UALT types (CH1 &CH2, *N*=223)



GERMAN PART OF THE FSP

„FESTSTELLUNGSPRÜFUNG“ DER STUDIENKOLLEGS (PREPARATORY COLLEGES)

T1_Neu: Drei-Gruppen-Variable Sprachkompetenzen

		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	hoch (mdsts. B2)	15	29,4	31,3	31,3
	mittel (1- 3 Tests <B2)	28	54,9	58,3	89,6
	niedrig (alle <B2)	5	9,8	10,4	100,0
	Gesamt	48	94,1	100,0	
Fehlend	999	3	5,9		
Gesamt		51	100,0		

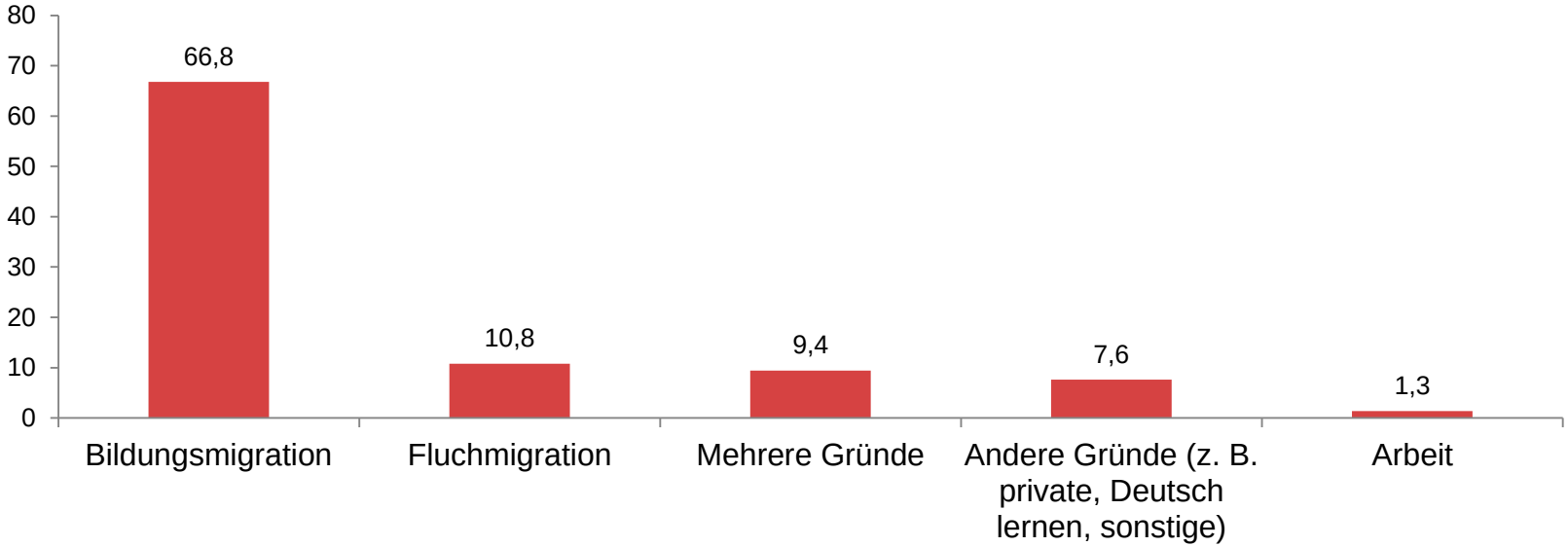
„DEUTSCHE SPRACHPRÜFUNG FÜR DEN HOCHSCHULZUGANG“ (DSH)

T1_Neu: Drei-Gruppen-Variable Sprachkompetenzen

		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	hoch (mdsts. B2)	9	15,3	17,0	17,0
	mittel (1- 3 Tests <B2)	25	42,4	47,2	64,2
	niedrig (alle <B2)	19	32,2	35,8	100,0
	Gesamt	53	89,8	100,0	
Fehlend	999	6	10,2		
Gesamt		59	100,0		

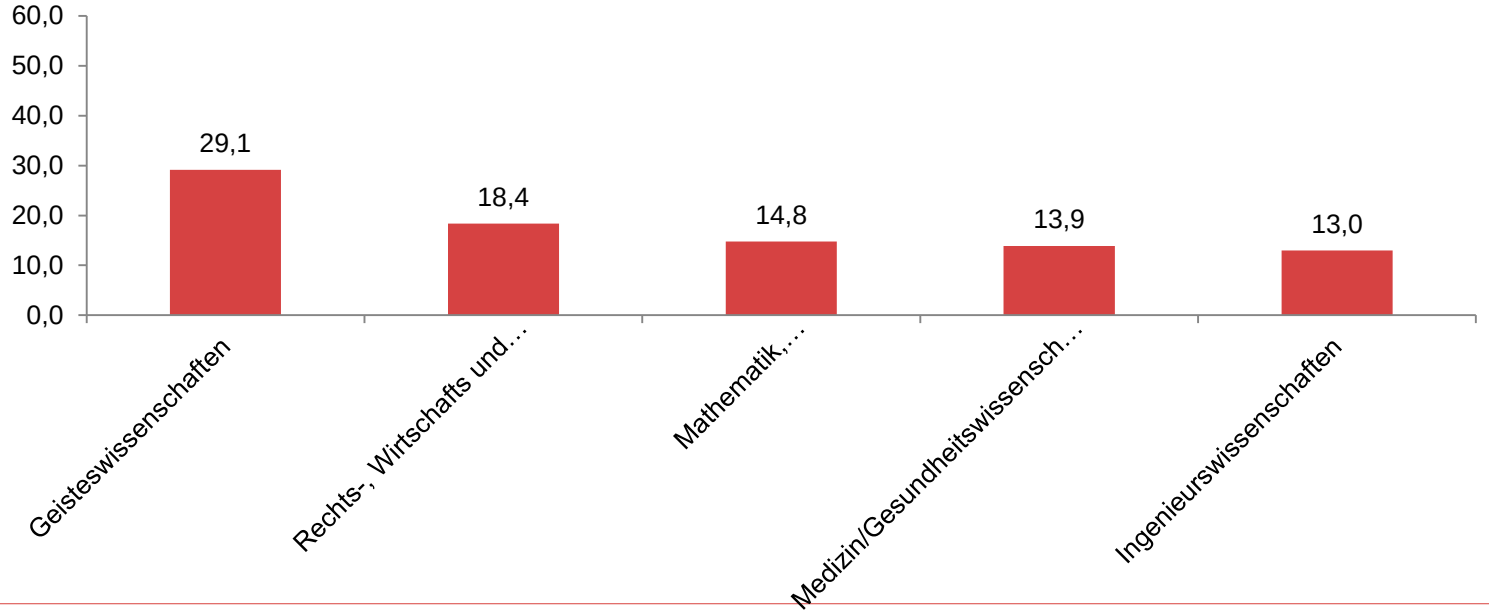
MIGRATORY BACKGROUND (%)

N=223, KH1 & KH2



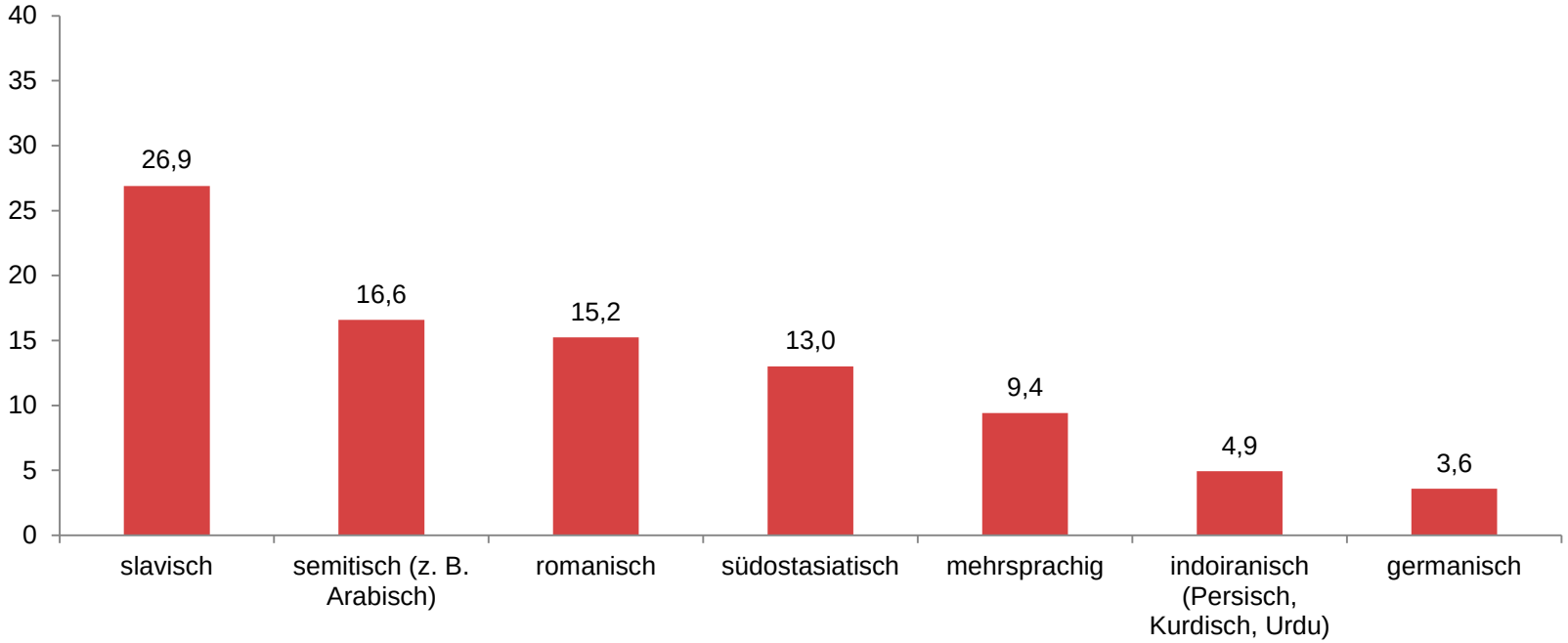
STUDY SUBJECTS (%)

N=223, KH1 & KH2



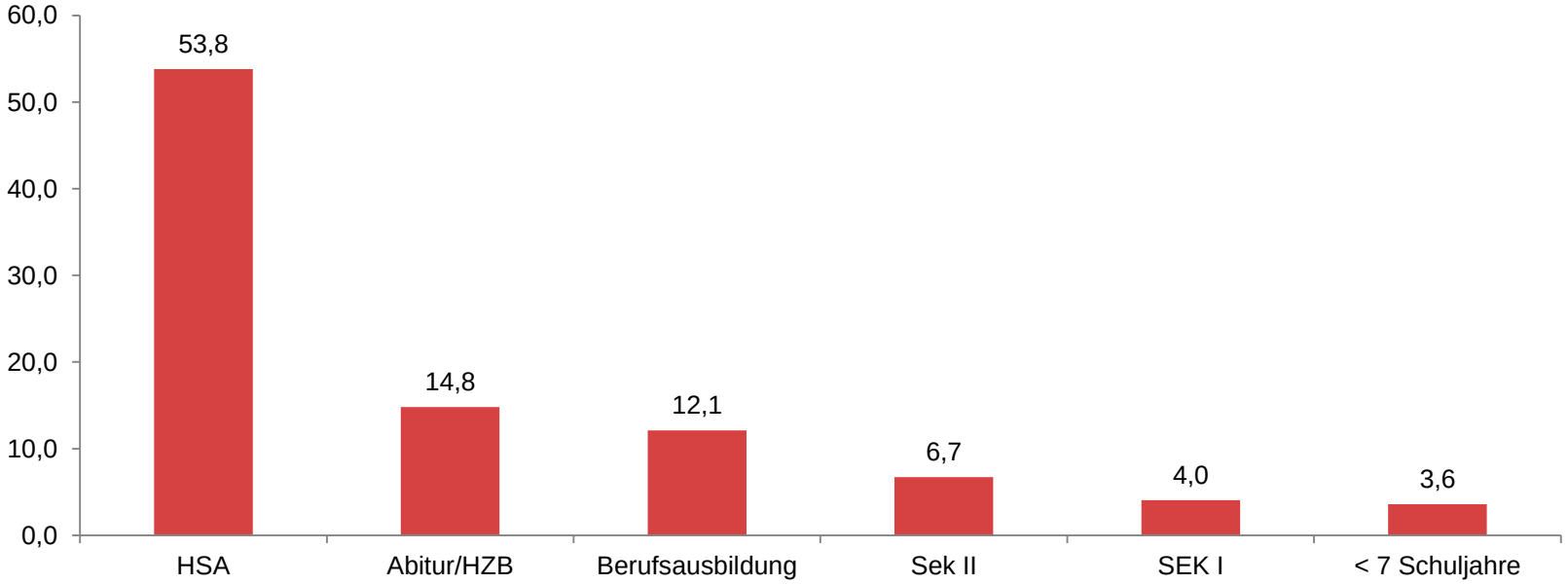
L1 (%)

N=223, KH1 & KH2



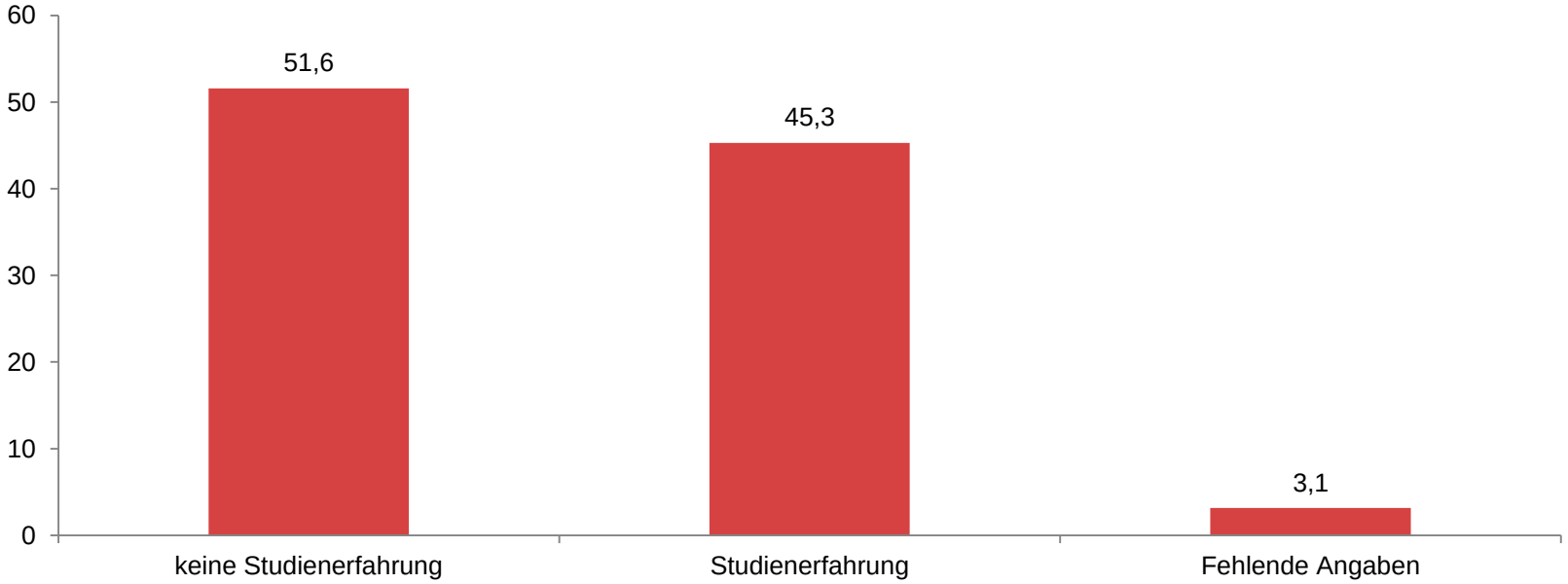
EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND (MOTHER) %

N=223, KH1 & KH2



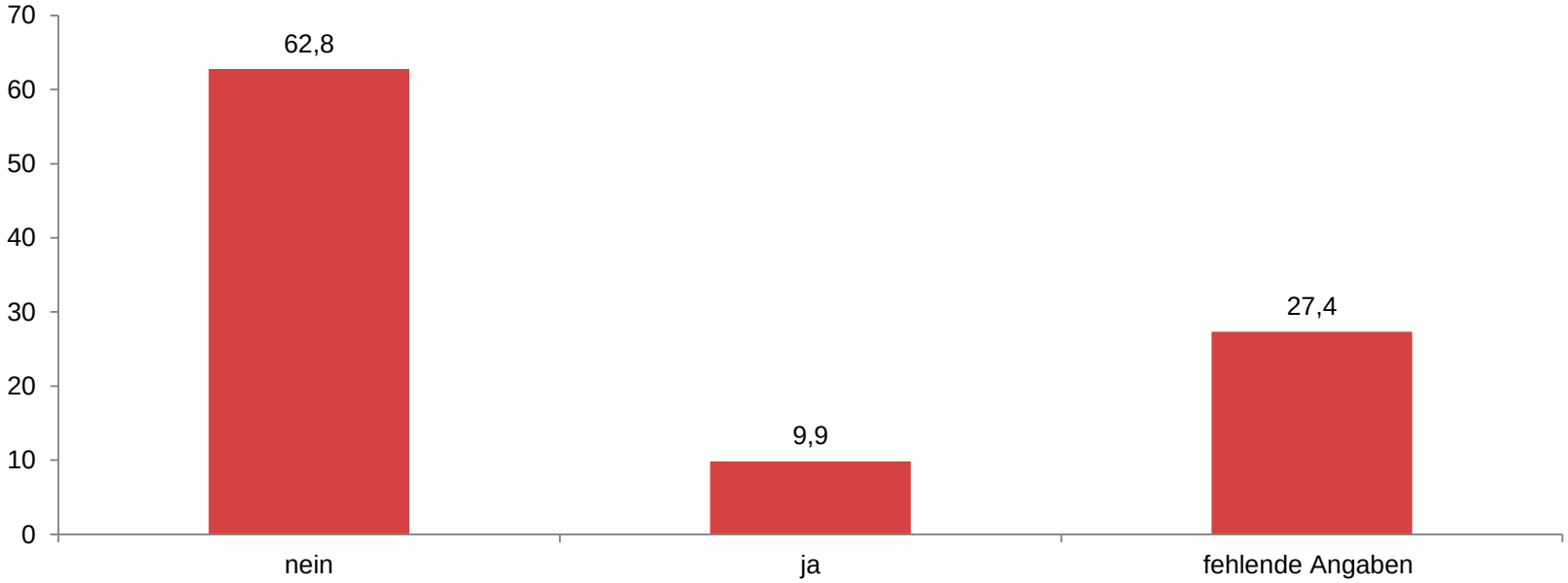
STUDY EXPERIENCE (%)

N=223, KH1 & KH2



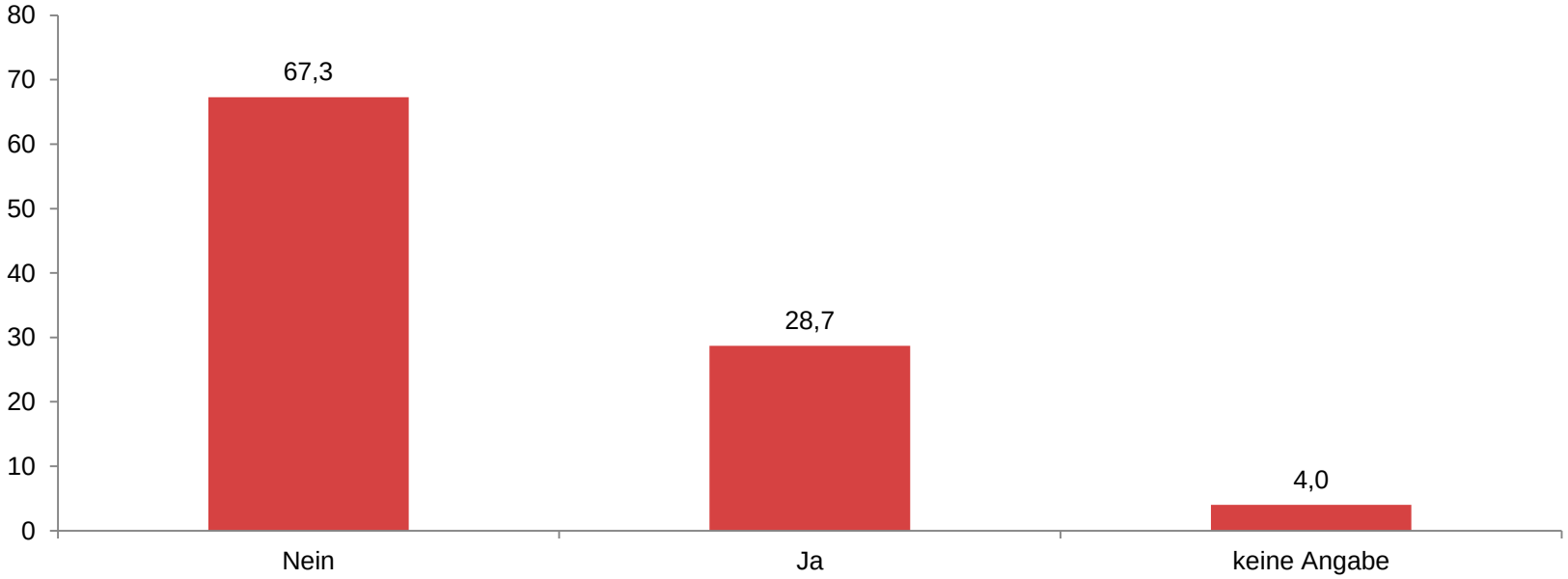
STUDY EXPERIENCE IN GERMANY (%)

N=223, KH1 & KH2



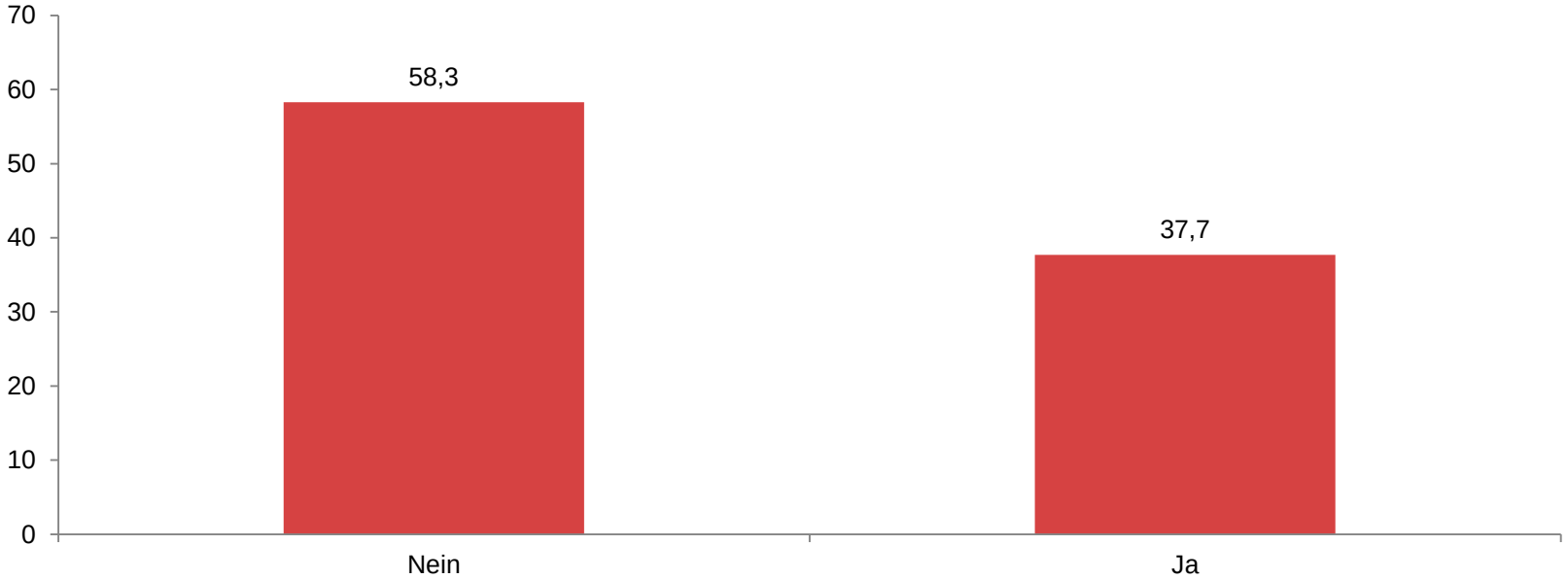
ATTENDANCE OF PREPARATORY COLLEGE (%)

N=223, KH1 & KH2



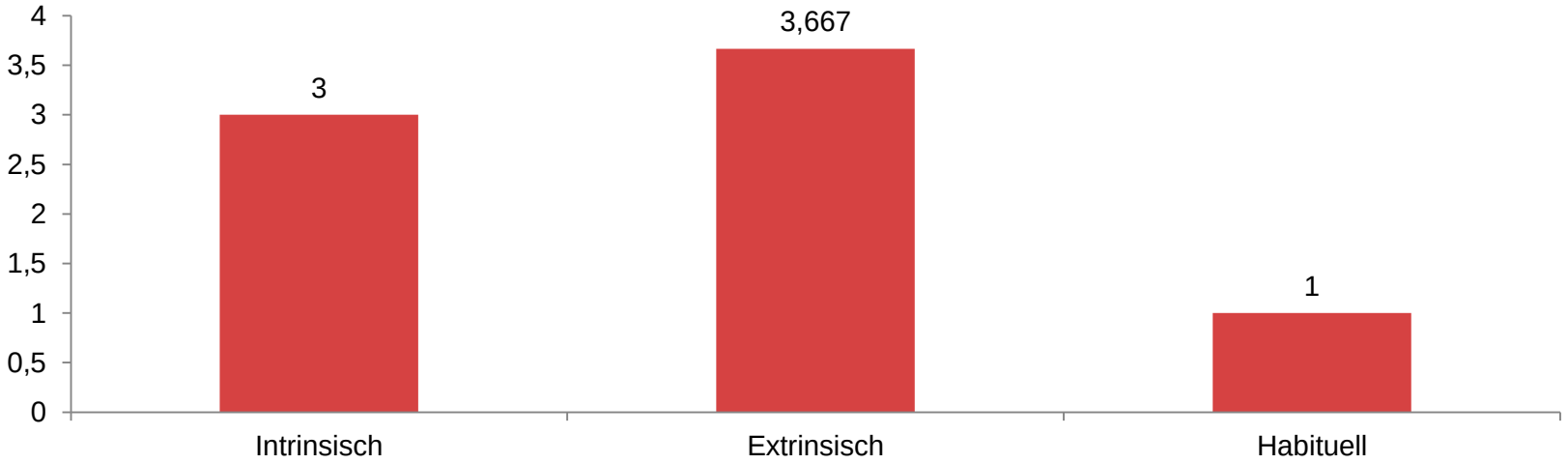
LANGUAGE COURSE BEFORE TAKING UP STUDIES (%)

N=216, KH1 & KH2



MOTIVATION FOR LEARNING GERMAN (MEDIAN)

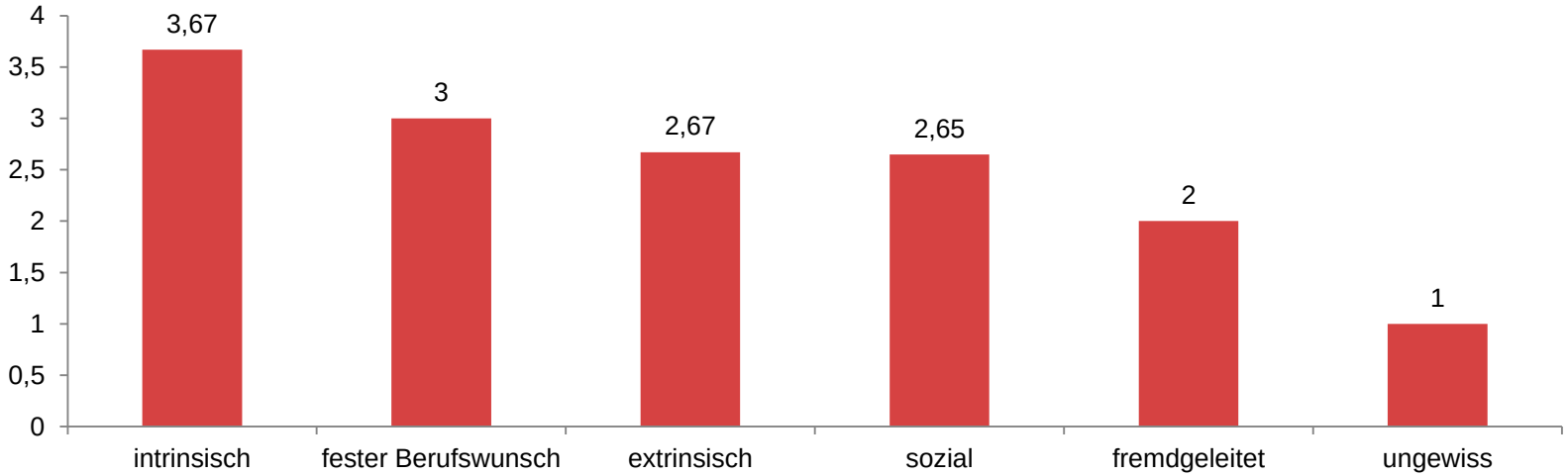
N=214, KH1 & KH2



1= not at all true; 4 = totally true

MOTIVATION FOR CHOOSING A STUDY SUBJECT

N=214, KH1 & KH2



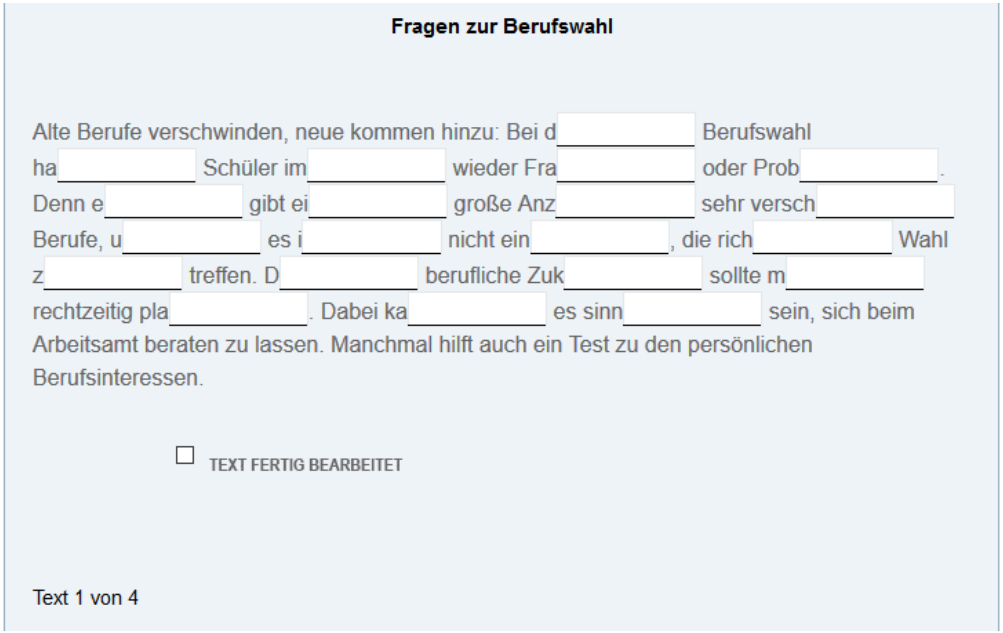
1= not at all true; 4 = totally true

REGRESSION

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Reading	,433	,493	,394
Writing	,254	,135	,331
Everyday life challenges		,189	,111
Institutional study conditions		,293	,353
Subject-related challenges		,137	,037
Demotivation			,006
Academic self-concept			-,516
R^2	**,385**	**,509**	**,740**
n	61	28	28

GERMAN LANGUAGE TESTS

ONSET



Fragen zur Berufswahl

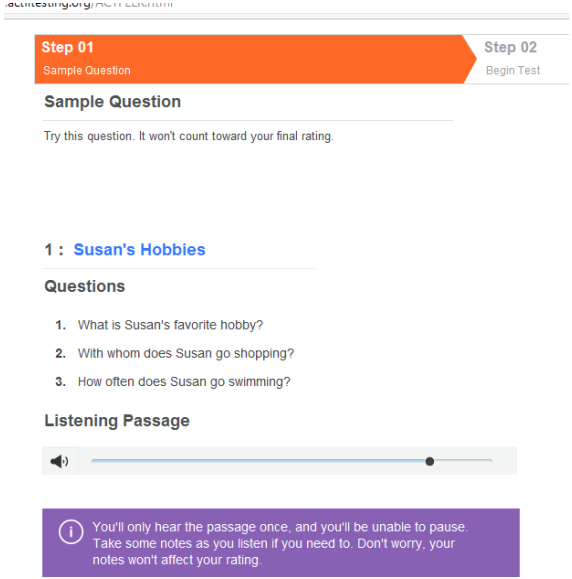
Alte Berufe verschwinden, neue kommen hinzu: Bei d_____ Berufswahl ha_____ Schüler im_____ wieder Fra_____ oder Prob_____. Denn e_____ gibt ei_____ große Anz_____ sehr versch_____ Berufe, u_____ es i_____ nicht ein_____, die rich_____ Wahl z_____ treffen. D_____ berufliche Zuk_____ sollte m_____ rechtzeitig pla_____. Dabei ka_____ es sinn_____ sein, sich beim Arbeitsamt beraten zu lassen. Manchmal hilft auch ein Test zu den persönlichen Berufsinteressen.

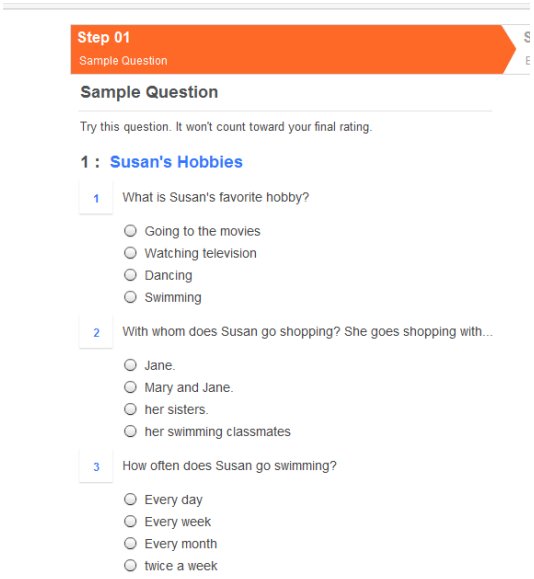
☐ TEXT FERTIG BEARBEITET

Text 1 von 4

GERMAN LANGUAGE TESTS

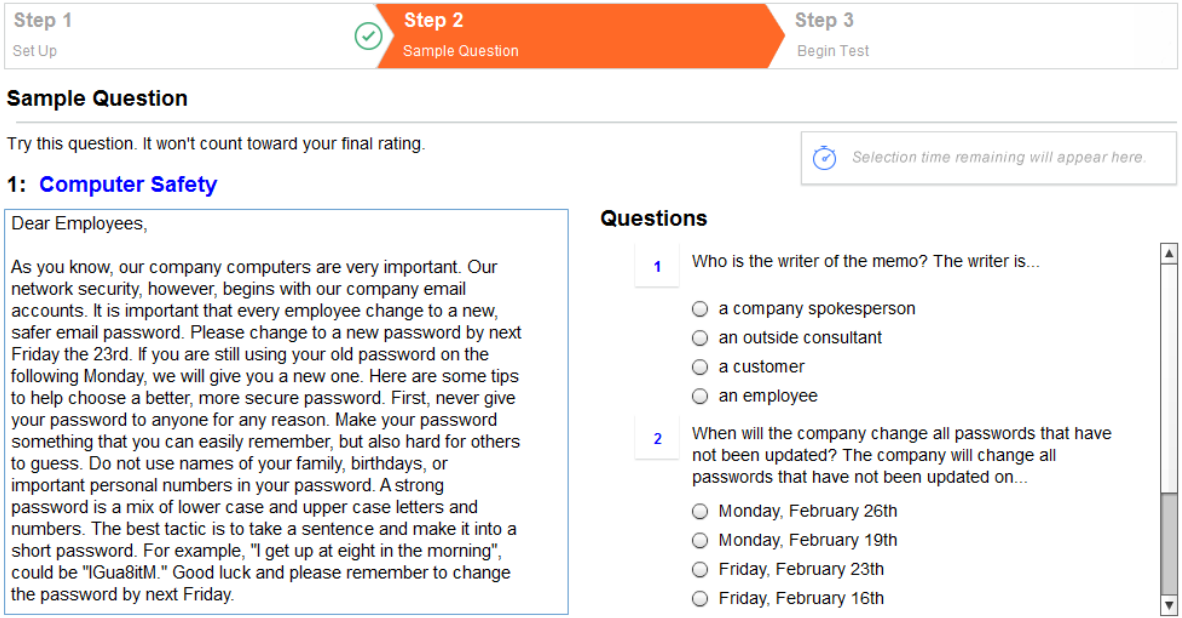
ACTFL LISTENING PROFICIENCY TEST





GERMAN LANGUAGE TESTS

ACTFL READING PROFICIENCY TEST



GERMAN LANGUAGE TESTS

TESTDAF WRITING TASK

Schriftlicher Ausdruck

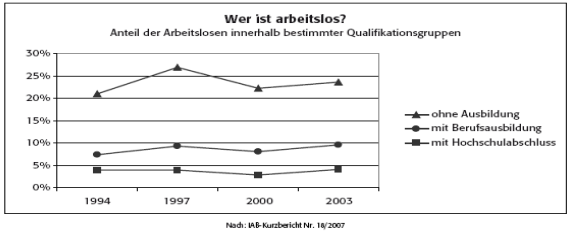
Modellsatz 04	Schriftlicher Ausdruck
Thema	60 Min.

Studium oder Berufsausbildung?

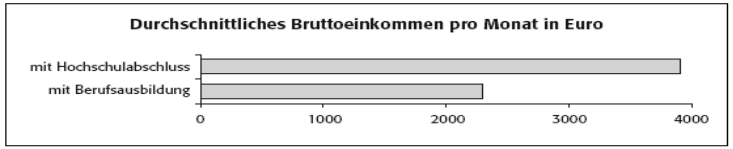
Vor dieser Frage stehen junge Erwachsene nach dem Schulabschluss. Ist eine praktische Berufsausbildung, z. B. eine Handwerkslehre, und damit eine baldige Erwerbstätigkeit besser für die Zukunft? Oder bietet ein Hochschulstudium die besseren Zukunftsaussichten, auch wenn viele Studierende erst mit Ende 20 ihr Studium beenden und deshalb erst relativ spät Geld verdienen können? Bei dieser Entscheidung sollten verschiedene Faktoren, z. B. das Problem der Arbeitslosigkeit oder die Verdienstmöglichkeiten, berücksichtigt werden.

Modellsatz 03	Schriftlicher Ausdruck
Schreiben Sie einen Text zum folgenden Thema	

Studium oder Berufsausbildung?



Nach: IAB-Kurzbericht Nr. 18/2007



Nach: BMBF, Reihe Bildungsreform, Band 9, Tabelle 125, 2004

Beschreiben und vergleichen Sie,

- wie sich der Anteil der Arbeitslosen je nach Qualifikationsgrad von 1994 bis 2003 entwickelt hat und
- wie sich die Einkommensverhältnisse je nach Ausbildungsniveau unterscheiden.

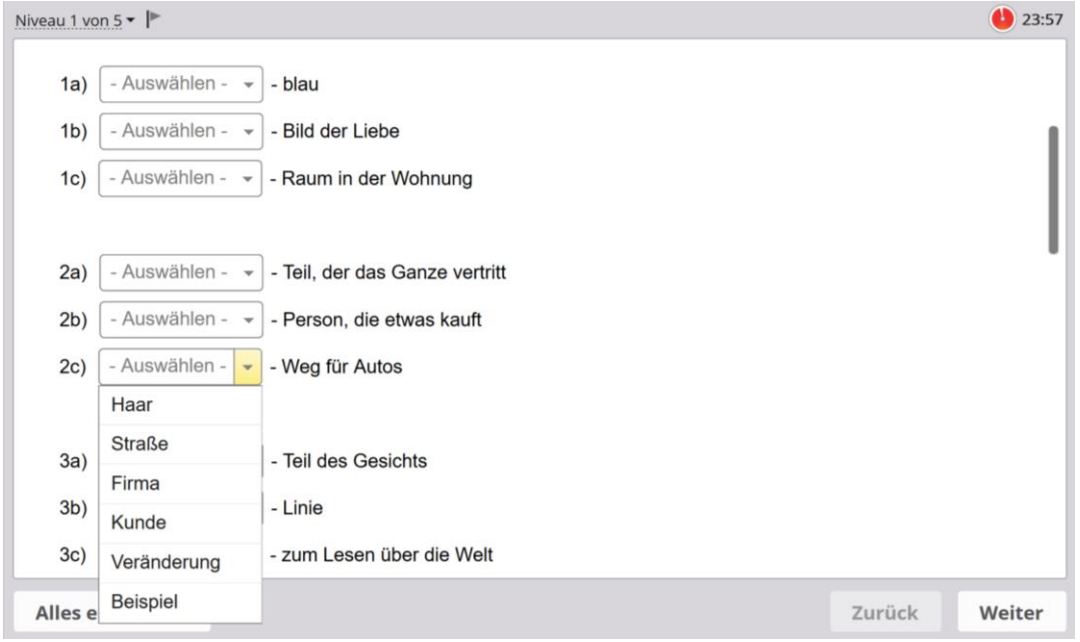
Lohnt sich ein Hochschulstudium? Hierzu wird folgende Meinung vertreten:

Ein Hochschulstudium lohnt sich nicht, denn es dauert viele Jahre und kostet zu viel Geld.

- Nehmen Sie Stellung zu dieser Aussage und begründen Sie Ihre Stellungnahme.
- Wägen Sie dabei die Vorteile und die Nachteile eines Hochschulstudiums ab.
- Gehen Sie auch auf die Situation in Ihrem Heimatland ein.

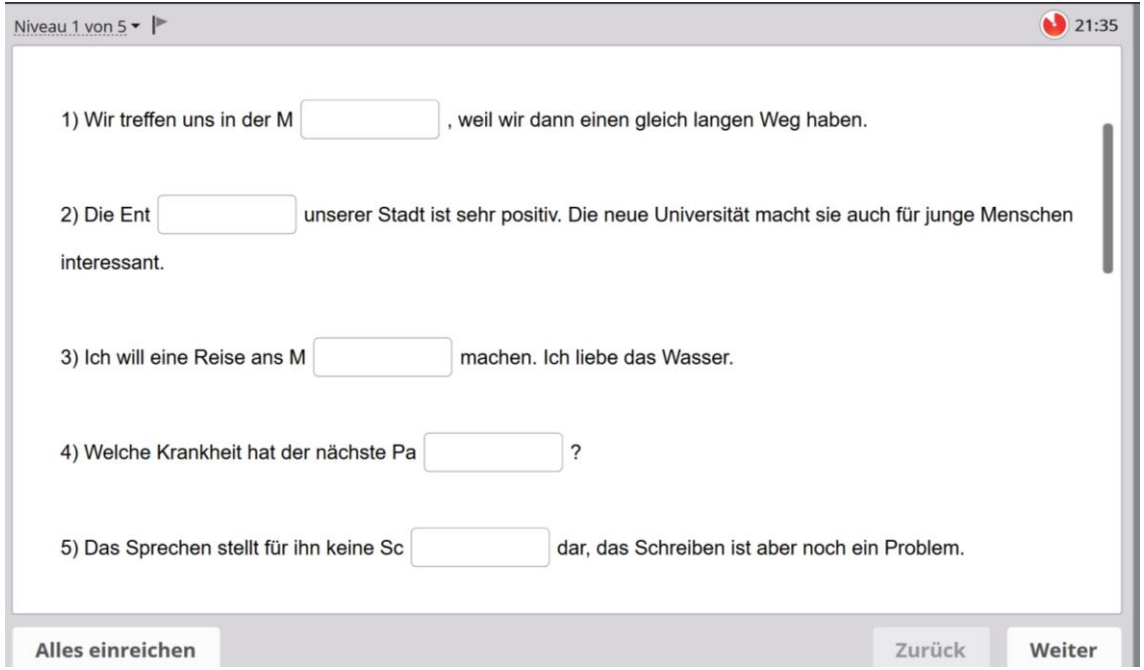
GERMAN LANGUAGE TESTS

VLT - RECEPTIVE



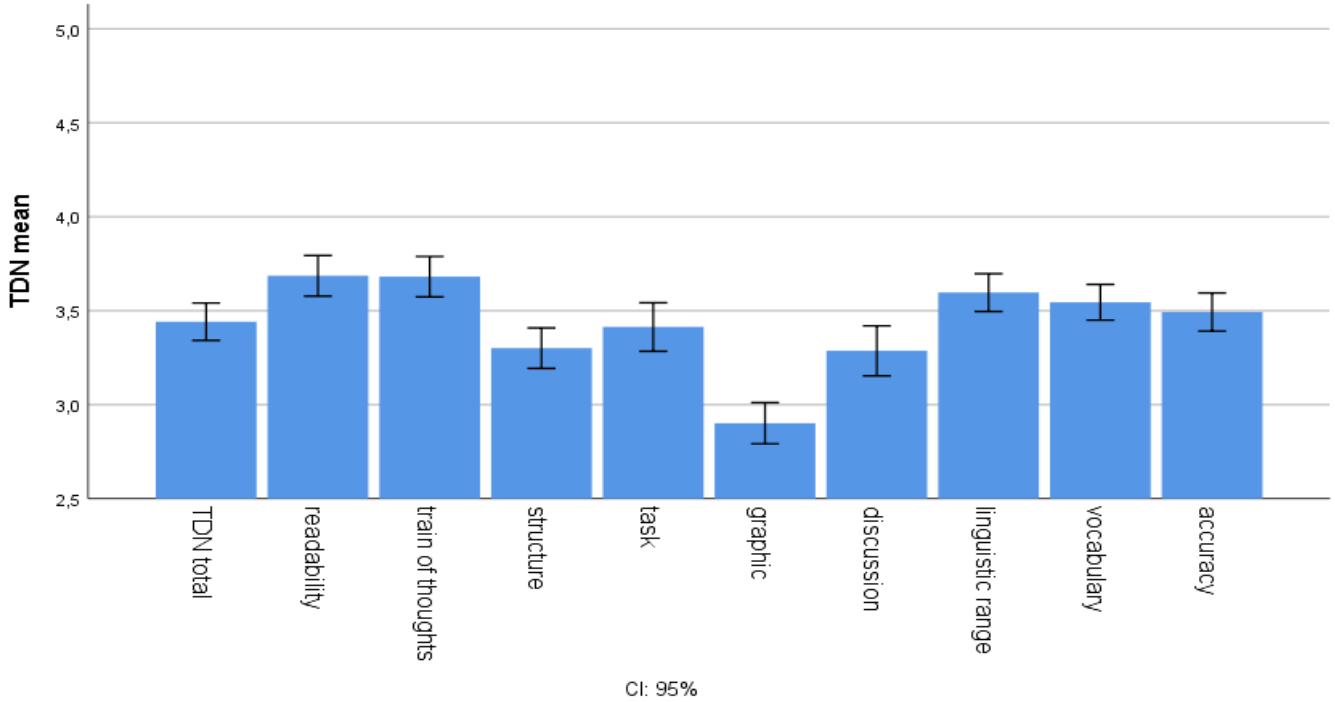
GERMAN LANGUAGE TESTS

VLT - PRODUCTIVE



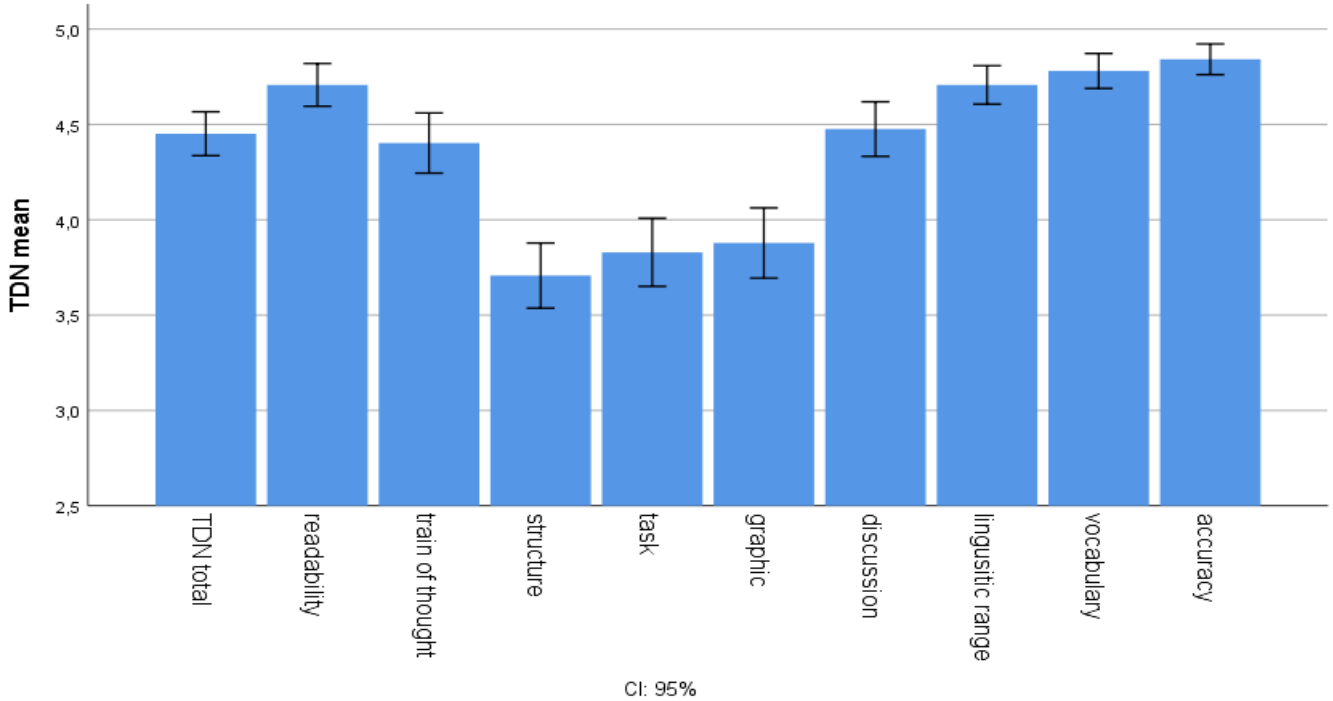
RESULTS – INITIAL TESTING (T1)

TESTDAF WRITING TASK – **DETAILED RESULTS** L2 (*N* = 213)



RESULTS – INITIAL TESTING (T1)

TESTDAF WRITING TASK – **DETAILED RESULTS** L1 (*N* = 82)



RESULTS – INITIAL TESTING (T1)

CORRELATIONS

		onSET	LPT	RPT	VLT-rec	VLT-prod
onSET	Pearson Correlation	1	,705**	,719**	,549**	,822**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000
	N	214	201	200	200	200
LPT	Pearson Correlation	,705**	1	,784**	,619**	,781**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000		0,000	0,000	0,000
	N	201	210	201	207	201
RPT	Pearson Correlation	,719**	,784**	1	,597**	,798**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000		0,000	0,000
	N	200	201	205	199	205
VLT-rec	Pearson Correlation	,549**	,619**	,597**	1	,631**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000	0,000		0,000
	N	200	207	199	209	199
VLT-prod	Pearson Correlation	,822**	,781**	,798**	,631**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	
	N	200	201	205	199	205

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

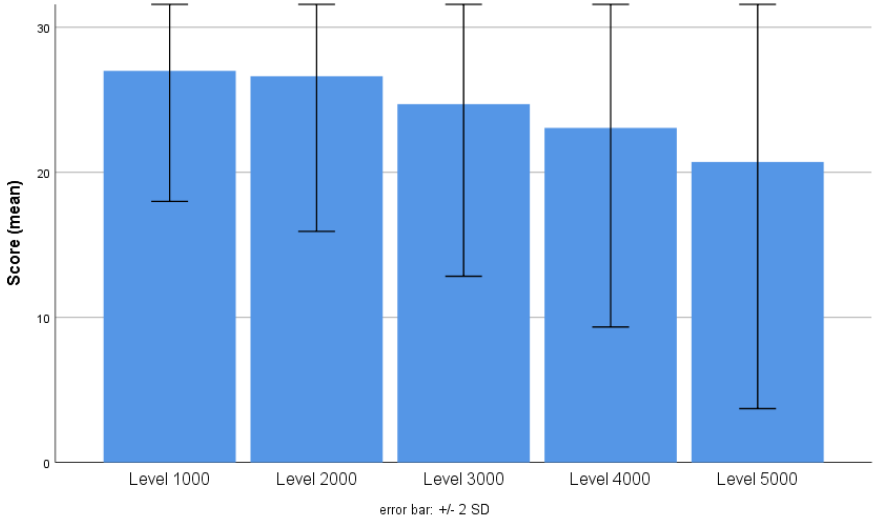
			onSET	LPT	RPT	VLT-rec	VLT-prod
Spearman's rho	TestDaF	Correlation Coefficient	,569**	,434**	,529**	,425**	,536**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000
		N	211	203	202	202	202

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

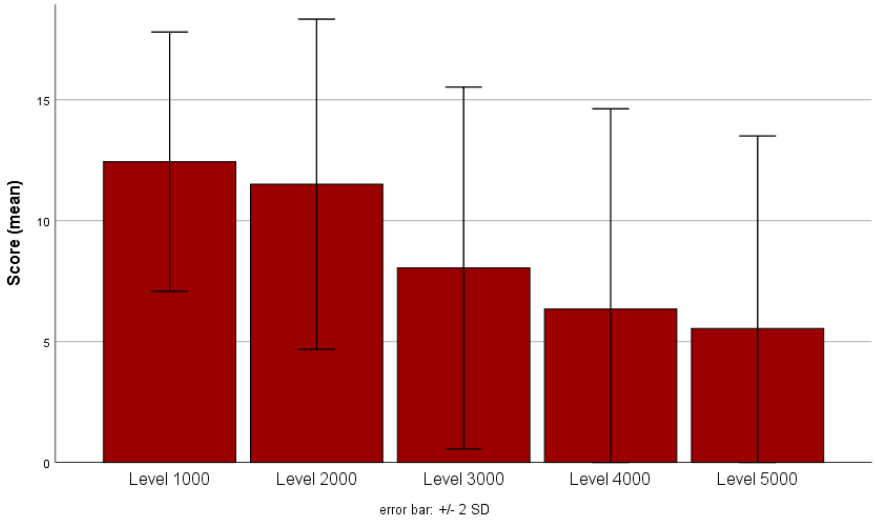
RESULTS – INITIAL TESTING (T1)

VOCABULARY LEVELS TESTS – SCORE

RECEPTIVE: *N* = 209 (MAX SCORE = 30)



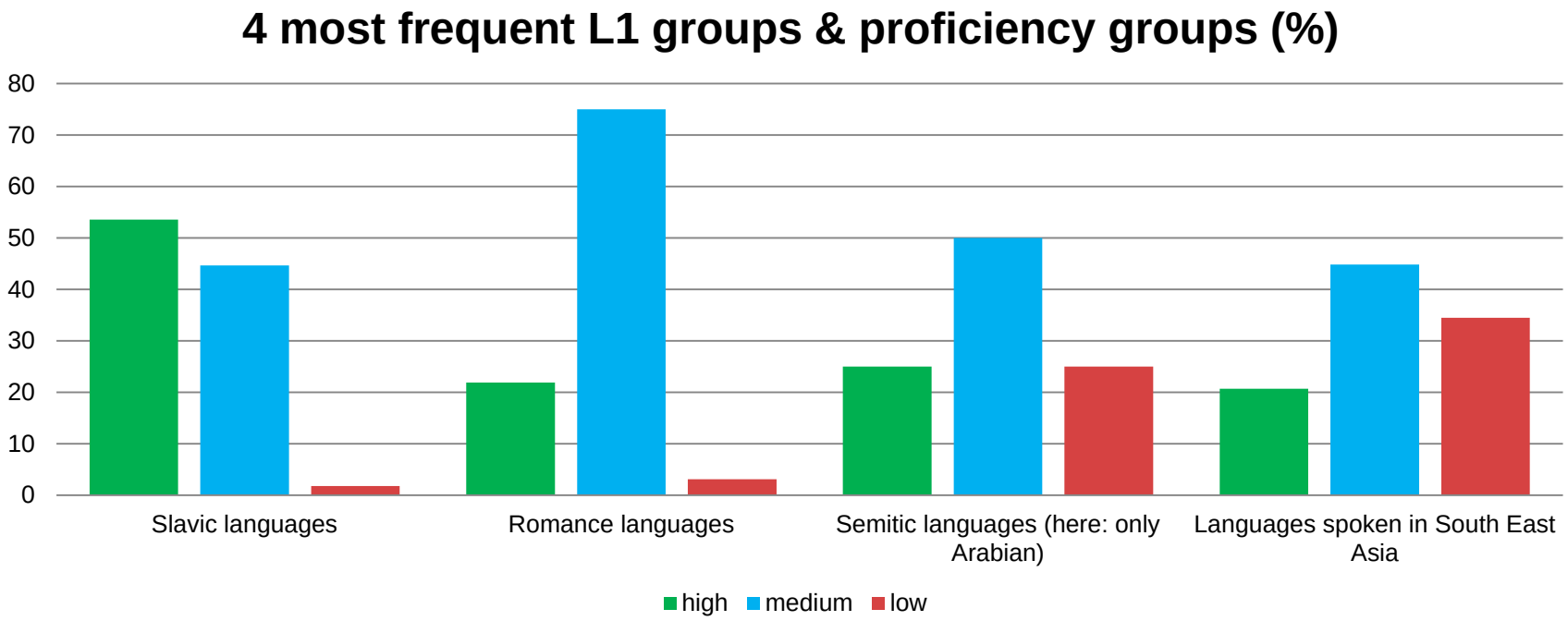
PRODUCTIVE: *N* = 205 (MAX SCORE = 18)



RQ3: STUDENTS‘ BACKGROUND & LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

- Instrument: **questionnaire**
  - predictors of academic success common in **higher education research** (e.g., *educational background*, *socio-economic status, study motivation* …)
  - **language-related** aspects (e.g., *language learning biography, university entrance language test taken, motivation for learning German* …)

L1 & LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY GROUPS (N=133)



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