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'New tricks': the merits of a task-based approach to languages teaching and learning

Orff-Schulwerk: an alternative perspective on teaching in the languages classroom

Broad horizons: the impact of changing university course structures

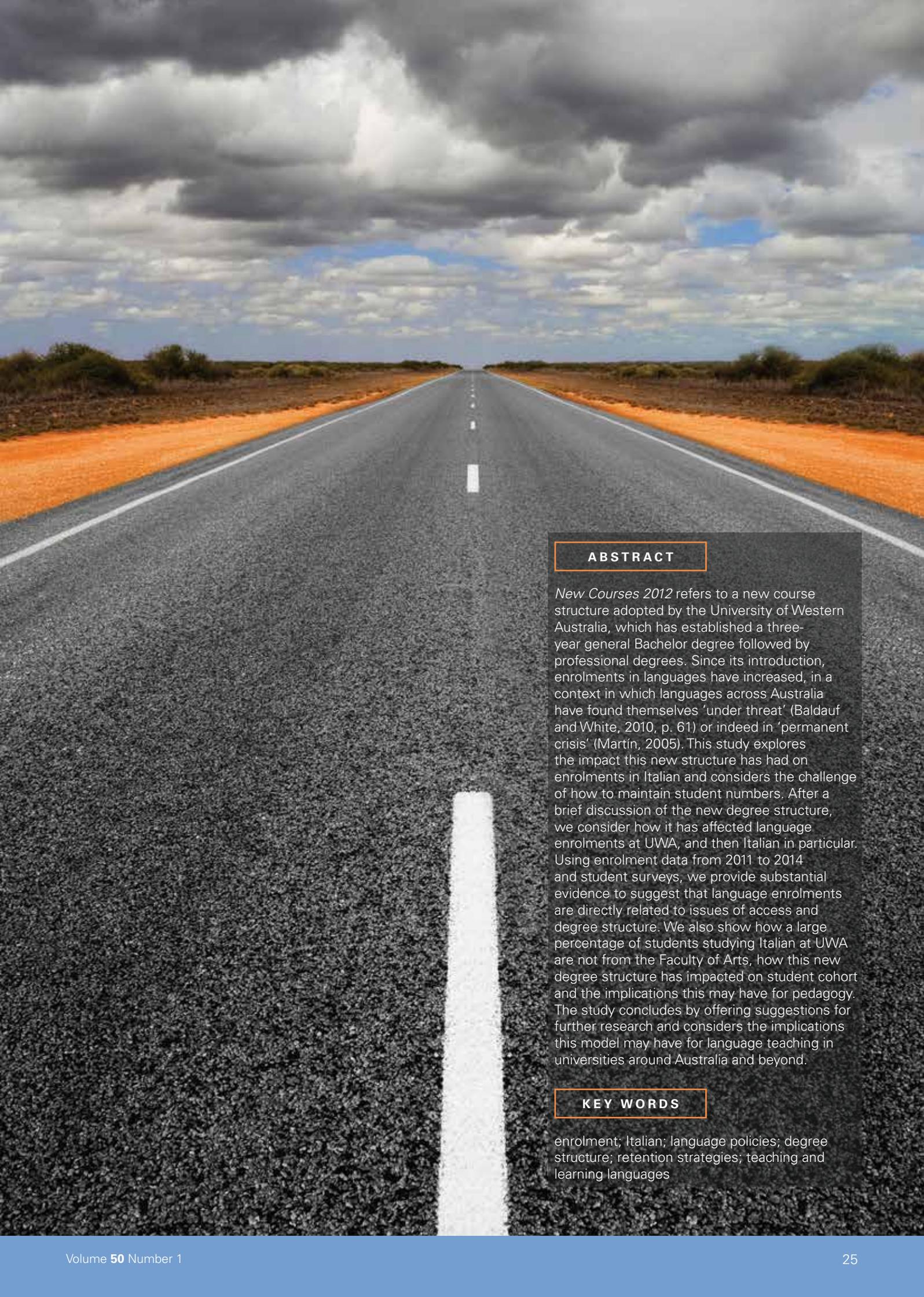


Broadening units to broadened horizons: The impact of *New Courses 2012* on enrolments in Italian at the University of Western Australia

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ABSTRACT

New Courses 2012 refers to a new course structure adopted by the University of Western Australia, which has established a three-year general Bachelor degree followed by professional degrees. Since its introduction, enrolments in languages have increased, in a context in which languages across Australia have found themselves 'under threat' (Baldauf and White, 2010, p. 61) or indeed in 'permanent crisis' (Martín, 2005). This study explores the impact this new structure has had on enrolments in Italian and considers the challenge of how to maintain student numbers. After a brief discussion of the new degree structure, we consider how it has affected language enrolments at UWA, and then Italian in particular. Using enrolment data from 2011 to 2014 and student surveys, we provide substantial evidence to suggest that language enrolments are directly related to issues of access and degree structure. We also show how a large percentage of students studying Italian at UWA are not from the Faculty of Arts, how this new degree structure has impacted on student cohort and the implications this may have for pedagogy. The study concludes by offering suggestions for further research and considers the implications this model may have for language teaching in universities around Australia and beyond.

KEY WORDS

enrolment; Italian; language policies; degree structure; retention strategies; teaching and learning languages

INTRODUCTION

Reforms to Australian universities in recent times have seen wide-ranging impacts on language departments. The introduction of the *Melbourne Curriculum* in 2008 (previously the 'Melbourne Model') and *New Courses* at the University of Western Australia (UWA) in 2012 introduced broad undergraduate degrees followed by specialised programs. These universities allow students greater degree flexibility and are a model of truly open access to languages. At The University of Melbourne, for example, Spanish increased by 250.5 per cent between 2006 and 2010, while Italian increased by 68.18 per cent (J. Hajek, personal communication, 12 May 2011). Looking at the increase in Spanish over three years, Lane (2012) reports that this language jumped by 539 per cent. The 2014 report of the Australian Academy of the Humanities entitled *Mapping the Humanities, Arts and*

Social Sciences in Australia offers a one-page 'Languages Snapshot', noting that between 2002-2011, 'a number of important structural initiatives have been taken to facilitate language study over this time', such as a Year 12 bonus for university entry, the introduction of the Diploma of Languages as well as the specific tagging or naming of degrees, e.g. BA (Languages)' (Hajek, 2014, p. 22). Nevertheless, the report makes clear that 'structural restrictions continue to limit access to language study, and current enrolments do not reflect true demand as a result' (p. 22). In a previous paper on language offerings in Australia between 2005 and 2011, Dunne and Pavlyshyn (2012a, p. 9) called for 'continued monitoring of the country's linguistic ecology' (cf. also Dunne and Pavlyshyn 2012b). As a response, Brown and Caruso (2014) and Caruso and Brown (2014) described the first impacts on what the degree restructure meant in terms of

language enrolments in Italian at UWA, and how new technologies can be adapted to meet the different demands of a changed student cohort.

This study continues this earlier work. It is situated in a context of global pressures that are prompting a re-evaluation of higher education around the world, particularly in terms of content and delivery of tertiary courses. The new course structure at UWA is seen as forming part of this trend identified at universities both locally and internationally. For example, the Bologna Process introduced a three year general Bachelors degree followed by a two year Masters. In Australia, the *Melbourne Curriculum* also adopted a generalist undergraduate course structure leading to professional degrees.

The new UWA degree structure responded to this changing environment. Therefore, this study also forms part of a broader



discussion throughout the tertiary language sector in recent years on retention strategies (Nettelbeck et al., 2009) and on the need for the 'creation of processes to ensure that universities collect data in a readily accessible form on the Languages Other Than English (LOTE) experience of their students' (Nettelbeck et al. 2007, p. 6). As discussed below, the introduction of *New Courses* at UWA has led to unprecedented levels of enrolment in languages, providing substantial evidence that enrolments and participation are directly related to issues of access and degree structure. The removal of previous restrictions in rules governing degrees has meant that 'enrolments in languages have risen dramatically as a result, particularly at UWA, which has gone furthest in opening out language study to all students' (Hajek, 2014, p. 22).

The accompanying website to the new UWA degree structure explains that '[students]

have the time and flexibility to choose their career path and gain the skills and knowledge to succeed in an international workplace', meaning no decision has to be made on a narrow field of study straight from school. UWA's website on *New Courses* lists the following six features as the main characteristics of this new degree structure:

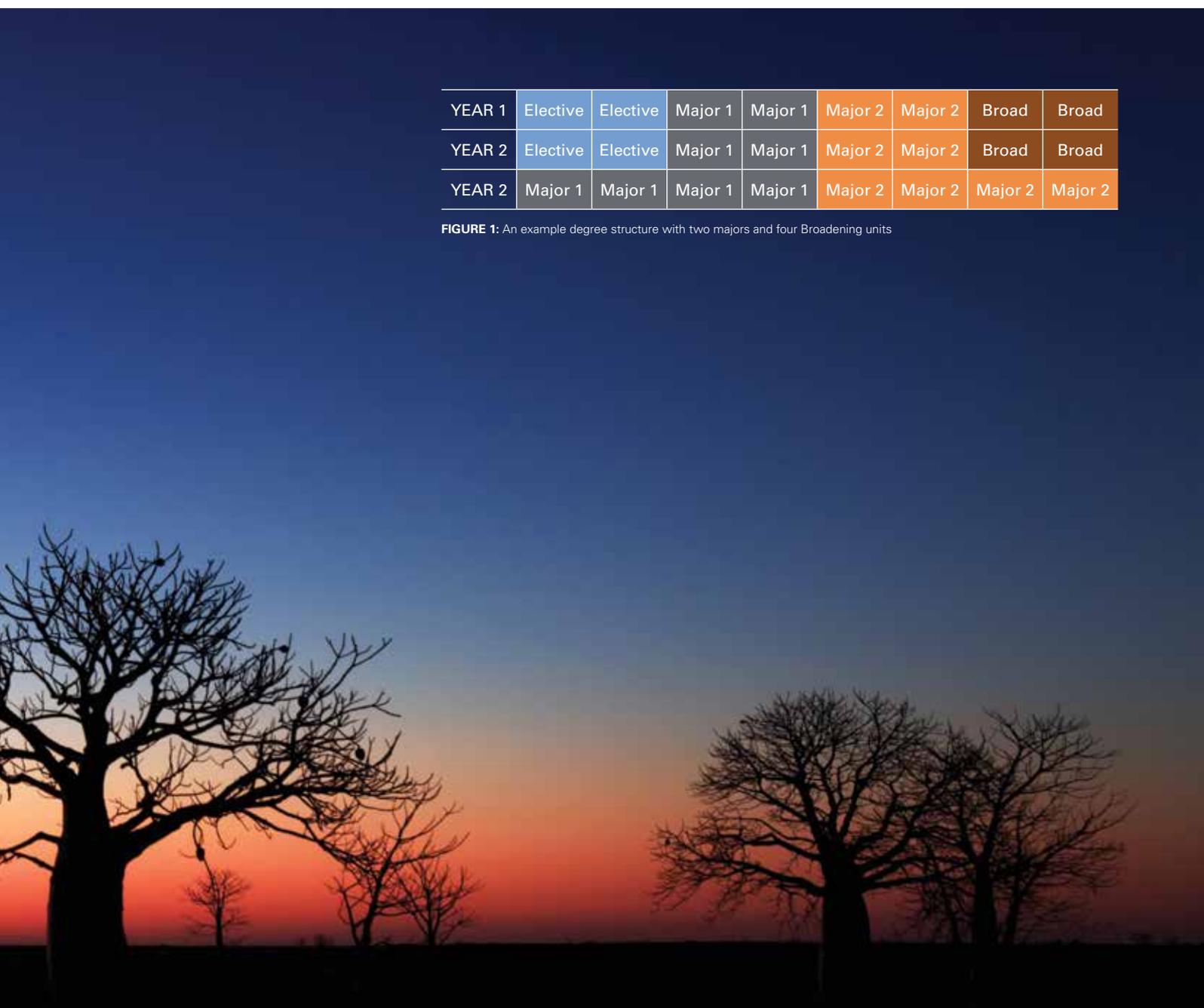
1. Broad education, in-depth knowledge
2. More choices, better choices
3. Highly developed communication and research skills
4. Community engagement
5. Opportunities to study abroad
6. Professional degrees at a postgraduate level

From over 150 undergraduate degrees under the previous model, five are now offered at UWA. These are the Bachelor

of Arts, Commerce, Design, Science and the exclusive Bachelor of Philosophy for students with high entrance scores. A major consists of completing eight semester-long units in a certain discipline (where 'units' are entire 'subjects' or 'courses', as they are called in other universities). The other subjects of the degree come in part from one's specific area of study, and in part from other areas. At the base of this model is the intention to offer students the opportunity of acquiring a broad general knowledge so that they can be better prepared for the workplace. In short, students take a wide range of subjects in first year and specialisation in successive years, as summarised in the slogan of the degree 'broad education, in-depth knowledge'. This degree structure is best seen in Figure 1 below, where a student has chosen to take two majors:

YEAR 1	Elective	Elective	Major 1	Major 1	Major 2	Major 2	Broad	Broad
YEAR 2	Elective	Elective	Major 1	Major 1	Major 2	Major 2	Broad	Broad
YEAR 2	Major 1	Major 1	Major 1	Major 1	Major 2	Major 2	Major 2	Major 2

FIGURE 1: An example degree structure with two majors and four Broadening units



One important change to the degree structure is that students are required to take *Broadening units*. Essentially, students must enrol in at least four units over the course of their degree that are from a Faculty different from their own. There is no maximum to the number of Broadening units a student can include, subject to them meeting the rules of their course. For example, a student studying a Bachelor of Commerce may take four units from the Faculty of Arts. One way of satisfying the Broadening requirement is to take a language, which is suggested for students in the Handbook. In contrast to the Melbourne Curriculum, UWA allows students from the Faculty of Arts to choose a language as a Broadening unit, which results in some further flexibility to satisfy the requirement.

The predictions of language academics at UWA were that languages would be an attractive choice for students. This was for three reasons. The first was that students would probably have had some exposure to a language in high school, and so taking an extra course in a language would seem a preferable option to other Broadening units. Secondly, for students enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts (BA), enrolling in a language unit can count as their Broadening unit even though it is still within their own Faculty. This would favour students wishing to pursue interests in their BA. Thirdly, the increase in enrolments for languages had been observed after the introduction of the Melbourne Curriculum in 2008 and after consultation with colleagues from that university, it was reasonable to assume that similar increases would occur at UWA as well.

Having presented the new UWA degree structure, it is now possible to describe the aims of our investigation and how the findings are discussed. Our main objective was to document and interpret the impact of *New Courses* on enrolments in Italian. As explained in more detail below, the focus of our investigation was the group of students enrolled in first and second year Italian units. Level 1 enrolments allowed us to identify trends over a number of years, whereas Level 2 enrolments offered insights into students' retention.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows: first we explain how the data was gathered (Data and methodology); then we present and discuss the results (Findings), considering both the general pattern of language enrolments at UWA and the impact of *New Courses* on Italian. Finally we draw some conclusions.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data presented in this paper are derived from two different sources. Part of the information comes from figures on enrolments available to UWA staff members or retrieved from UWA databases. Such figures refer to the period 2011-2014 and will be referred to as 'UWA figures' in the tables. Some of this information is comprehensive of all students enrolled in a certain discipline at a given time. The rationale for gathering

this type of data was to identify trends in enrolments and retention.

In addition to these official figures we present data from a student survey designed and administered in 2013 to look more specifically into certain aspects of students' choices, and specifically for Italian. The data from the survey are based only on a sample of students of Italian. In order to obtain an adequate sample of students who had enrolled in Italian since the introduction of the new degree structure, we chose to investigate three 'streams' of language learners enrolled in first- and second-year courses. One reason for choosing these three groups was to see whether there were different characteristics between students who had studied Italian at high-school, post-WACE (Western Australian Certificate of Education) at Year 12, and those who were *ab initio* students. Data referring to Level 2 students were required to investigate the issue of retention. The year level and number of surveys we collected is shown below in Table 1:

THE INTRODUCTION OF NEW COURSES AT UWA SAW ENROLMENTS INCREASE DRAMATICALLY FOR ALL SEVEN MODERN LANGUAGES TAUGHT IN THE FACULTY OF ARTS: CHINESE, FRENCH, GERMAN, INDONESIAN, ITALIAN, JAPANESE AND KOREAN.

Table 1: Target groups and number of surveys collected

Year level	Entry type	Surveys collected	Total enrolled in the course
First year	post-WACE	59	60
Second year	<i>ab initio</i>	37	50
Second year	post-WACE	31	34

The survey was distributed to the students at the start of the semester in May 2013 and comprised the eight items listed below:

1. I enrolled in a Bachelor of (Arts / Commerce / Design / Science / Philosophy)
2. I would like to major in ...
3. I am thinking of taking Italian as a second major (yes / no)
4. I took ITALxx03 as a Broadening Unit (yes / no)
5. I obtained the Bonus for Languages (yes / no)
6. The Bonus for Languages helped me be admitted to the degree of my choice (yes / no)
7. I will continue with the next unit of Italian in second semester (yes / no)
8. I think learning a language is important for my education and my future career (yes / no)

The rationale for gathering this type of data was: 1) to get a picture of the students' background (i.e. degree in which they were enrolled); and 2) to see whether students had indeed taken Italian as a Broadening unit and whether they planned to major in it already from their first or second year of study. We also wanted to know whether

students had planned to continue studying Italian, and whether they were thinking of taking it as a second major. Students who take a second language at secondary schools in Western Australia are also credited with an extra 10 per cent as a language bonus to their entrance score at UWA, and so we also wanted to find out whether this language bonus helped them in making their decision to study Italian and come to UWA. Finally, we wanted to investigate the students' attitudes towards the importance of learning Italian and the teaching of culture.

Before exploring what impact the introduction of *New Courses* has had on Italian at UWA, based on both enrolment figures and the results of our survey, we present the overall trends for all seven modern languages taught at UWA. We then address enrolments, retention and student cohort specifically for Italian.

FINDINGS

Languages and New Courses: overall trends

The introduction of *New Courses* at UWA saw enrolments increase dramatically for all seven modern languages taught in the Faculty of Arts: Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese and Korean. This information was gathered as data of enrolments in first-year first semester units came through after the introduction of the new degree structure in 2012, and was confirmed in 2013 and 2014. As can be seen in Figure 2 below, in some cases, levels of enrolment in first-year language units doubled from 2011 to 2014.

Enrolments in all languages increased significantly from 2011 to 2012. In 2012 French outstripped by far other languages offered at UWA with more than 450 students enrolled in their first-year *ab initio* course. With regard to Italian, enrolments almost doubled from just over 100 in 2011 to 200 in 2012. The slight dip in 2013 and

2014 for French and Italian (and German for 2014) could be explained in terms of a change introduced in 2013: in order to increase further flexibility in the sequence of the units, administrators made it possible for students of the *ab initio* stream to start studying their chosen language in second semester, with the possibility of completing the first year requirements during the following summer. From 2013 the first unit of the *ab initio* stream for Italian, French and German began being offered also in second semester, contributing to the redistribution of the enrolments over the two semesters. The next graph (Figure 3) illustrates the total enrolments in all languages from 2011 to 2014.

From 2011 to 2014 the increase as a percentage is as follows: Chinese 84 per cent, French 55 per cent, German 100 per cent, Indonesian 26 per cent, Italian 94 per cent, Japanese 108 per cent, Korean 483 per cent. In general, therefore, the effects of *New Courses* after its introduction in 2012 have been clearly positive for languages. These increases in enrolments are due not only to higher numbers of students choosing a language as a Broadening unit but also to more students who continue with languages.

The popularity of languages can also be seen when we consider the percentage of non-BA students who took two Level 1 units (i.e. Semester 1 and Semester 2) in Arts in 2012.

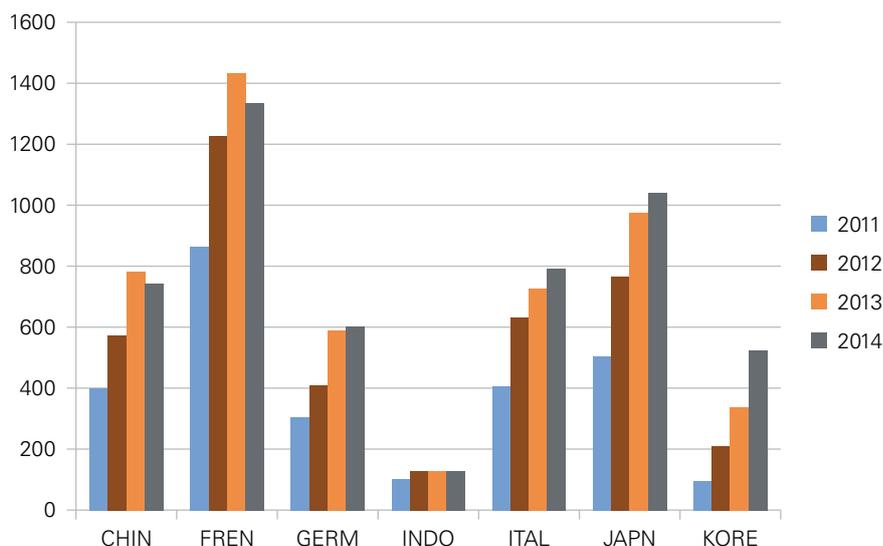


FIGURE 3: Total enrolments in all languages from 2011 to 2014 (UWA figures)

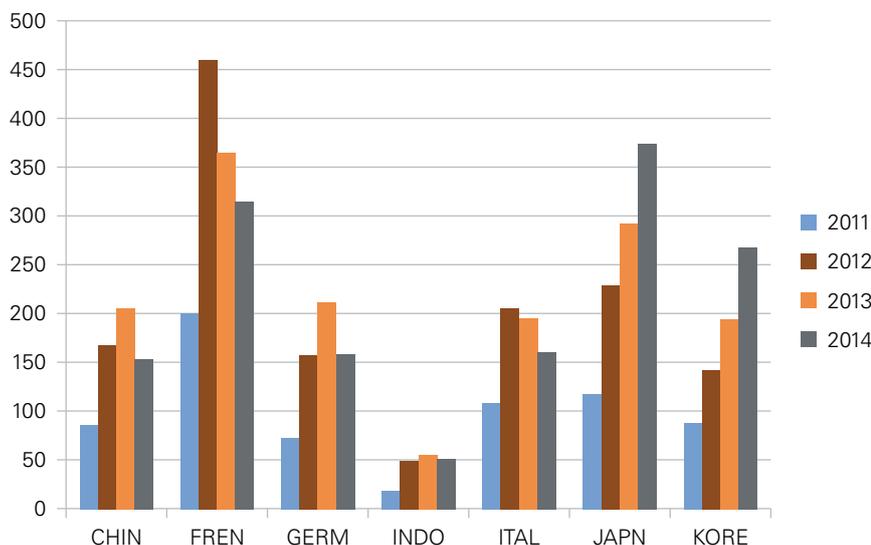


FIGURE 2: *Ab initio* enrolments in first semester, first-year language units from 2011 to 2014 (UWA figures)



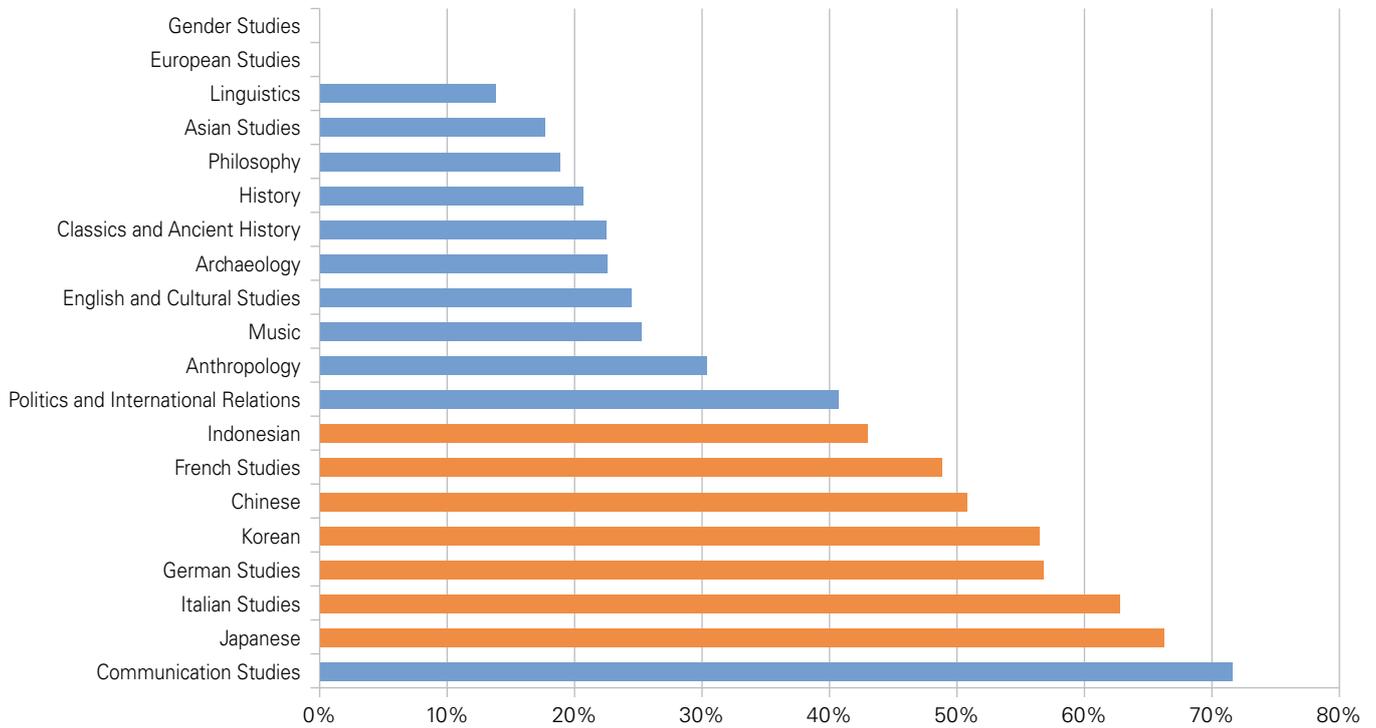


FIGURE 4: Percentage of non-BA students taking two Level 1 units in Arts in 2012 (UWA figures)

In Figure 4 above, the seven modern languages offered at UWA have been highlighted in orange. Of the 20 disciplines represented above, languages are a clear preference for students not enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts. Only Communication Studies had a higher percentage of enrolment than any language.

The next graph (Figure 5) shows that the presence of non-BA students in languages courses continues up to third-year level.

This is a significant result, as it suggests that many non-BA students continue with the study of a language even after having satisfied the requirement of the four Broadening units. It also implies that these students may be eligible for a second major in the language. For Italian the presence of non-BA students in level 3 units accounts for more than 40 per cent. As we discuss below, the different student cohorts we are now attracting have significant implications for our teaching.

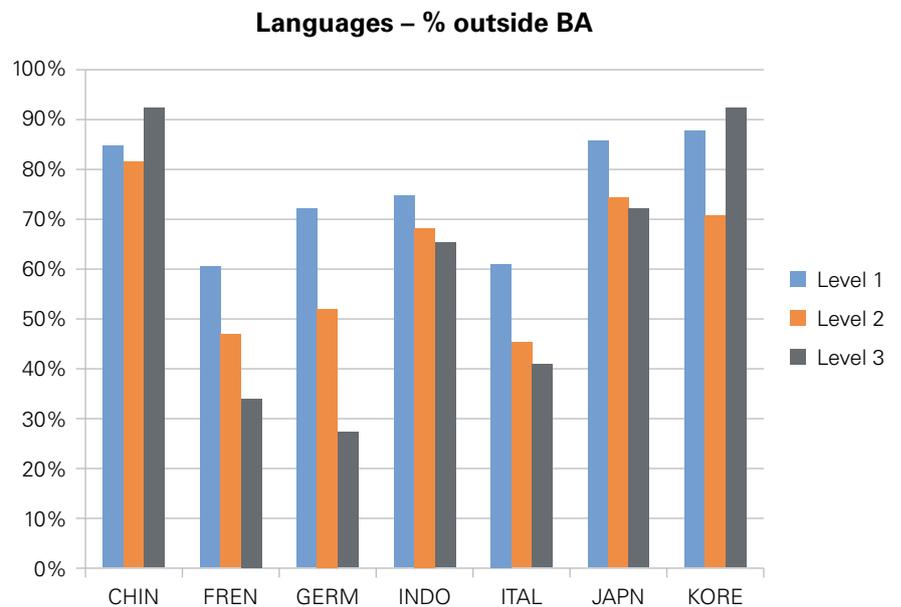


FIGURE 5: Enrolments in languages from non-BA degrees, 2014, sem. 1 (UWA figures)

The impact of New Courses on Italian

With regard to Italian, there have been significant increases in enrolments over the past three years. Figure 6 below shows the increase in the overall enrolments at all levels in Italian from 2011 to 2014.

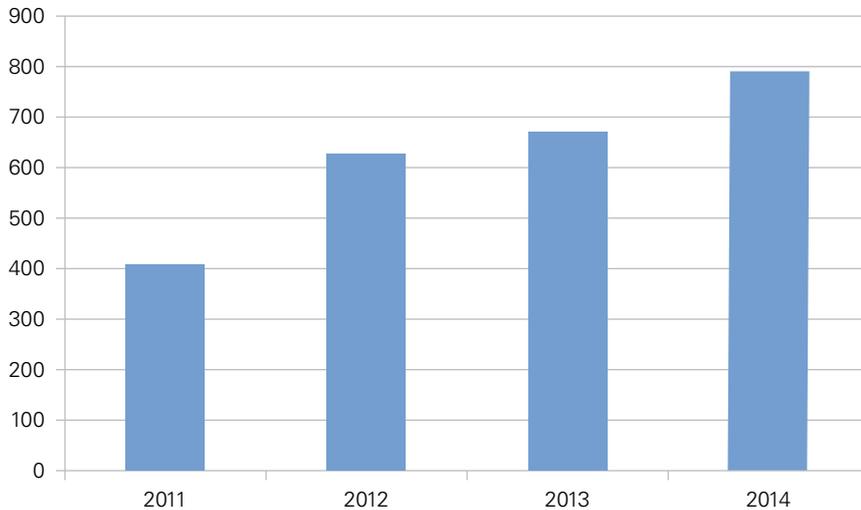


FIGURE 6: Increases in total Italian enrolments from 2011 to 2014 (UWA figures)

We can see clearly that the biggest increase is from 2011 to 2012 as a result of *New Courses*, and it is reasonable to assume that many of the enrolments for 2012 come from first-year students. For 2013 and 2014 on the other hand the figures include many new enrolments of first-year students as well as enrolments of students who continue into upper levels. In 2014 enrolments in Italian at third year level only were up 116 per cent from the previous year.

Figure 7 shows how enrolments have increased for two first-year courses and two second-year courses.

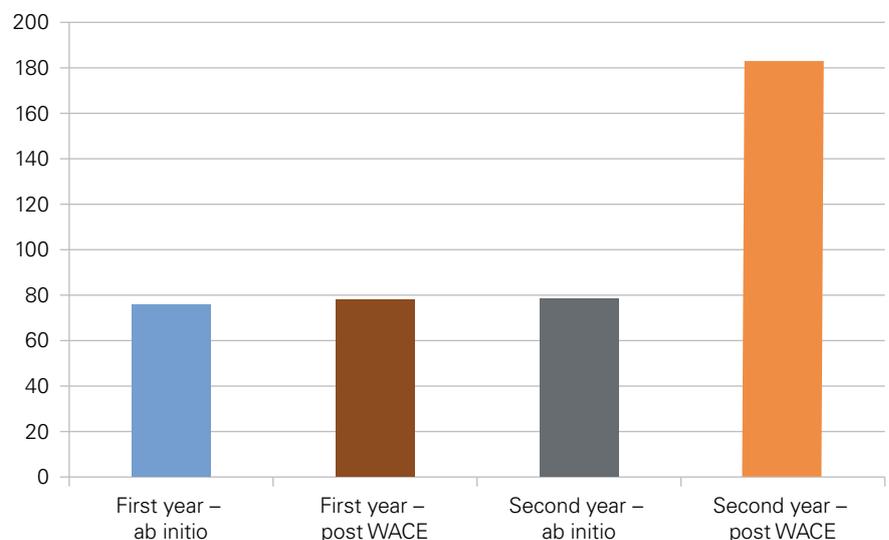


FIGURE 7: Percentage of increase in Italian enrolments from 2011 to 2013 semester 1

The two first-year courses are Italian Beginners (*ab initio* students) and first-year post-WACE. The first-year *ab initio* stream, first-year post-WACE stream and second year *ab initio* stream have all increased by over 70 per cent from 2011 to 2013 and, in the second-year post-WACE stream, the increase has been over 180 per cent. This increase must be due to the introduction of *New Courses* and the requirement for students to take a Broadening unit. The increase in the second year enrolments leads to another crucial question: whether students continuing with Italian go on to complete a major in Italian. The figures from 2014 suggest that a significant number do so as discussed later.

With regard to retention rate, all courses have remained relatively high. Students enrolled in an *ab initio* course who continue with Italian in their second year of study in 2013 have a retention rate of 50 per cent, slightly down from 2011 to 2012. It is important to remember that since the introduction of *New Courses*, a large component of students are from a non-BA degree. Given this changing demographic, the retention rate of 50 per cent appears remarkable. In other words, this rate could have been expected to be maintained with the pre-*New Courses* student cohort. But even with a wide proportion of non-BA students, the retention rate remained at a relatively stable level. This may point to the preference for language study over other subject areas, since the post-*New Courses* cohort have decided to re-enrol in second year units of Italian, continuing with their first-year preference, rather than switching to other subjects from different disciplines and faculties. Citing similar studies by Nettelbeck et al. (2009) and Martin and Jansen (2012), Schmidt (2012, p. 232) notes that when retention rates are low, they 'cannot be linked to student dissatisfaction with their language course', but most likely to obstacles inherent to a rigid degree structure.

For those who studied Italian at secondary school, then completed first-year Italian at UWA, the retention rate from first to second year in 2013 is 75 per cent. This is six per cent higher than the previous year. The retention rate is even higher in 2014, when it reached 78 per cent, as shown below in Figure 8.

Since *New Courses* the retention rate for the post-WACE stream has improved progressively. It is difficult to establish if this is a trend. However, it is legitimate to speculate that many of the students who continue into second year are those who

chose Italian as a Broadening unit in their first year and wish to continue with the same discipline in the following year.

It is clear from the data presented so far that there is considerable evidence that university enrolments in Italian (and languages in general) are directly related to access opportunities. Italian has reached unprecedented levels of enrolment that can only be explained in terms of wider access to study choice, made possible by *Broadening units*. Retention has therefore been impacted positively by the structural changes introduced in 2012.

UNIVERSITY ENROLMENTS IN ITALIAN (AND LANGUAGES IN GENERAL) ARE DIRECTLY RELATED TO ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES. ITALIAN HAS REACHED UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS OF ENROLMENT THAT CAN ONLY BE EXPLAINED IN TERMS OF WIDER ACCESS TO STUDY CHOICE.

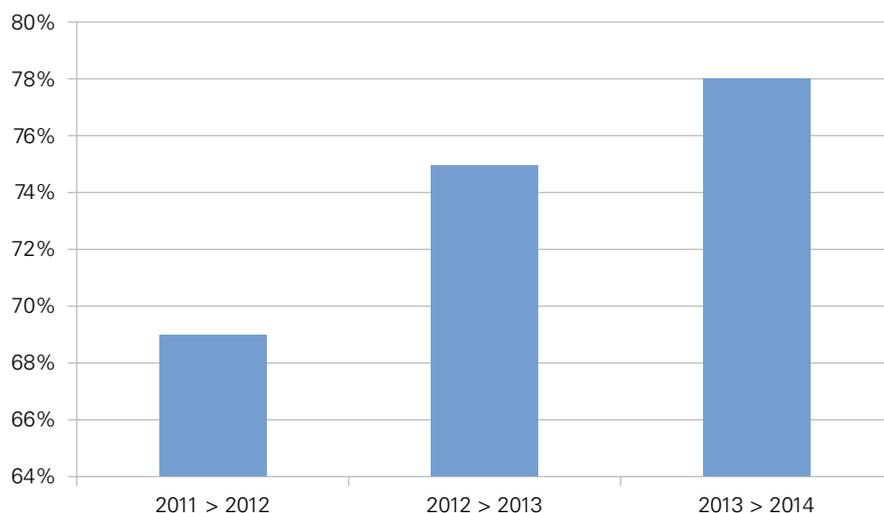


FIGURE 8: Retention rates from first year to second year, post-WACE (UWA figures)

Student cohort and the implication for pedagogy

Another significant impact of *New Courses* on enrolments in Italian is the changed composition of our student cohort, as we anticipated above (cf. Figure 4 and Figure 5). While in the past students of Italian were typically enrolled in a BA degree, now they come from a range of degrees. Of the non-BA students, those from the Bachelor of Science represent the majority. Figure 9 below shows the percentage of students enrolled in a Bachelor of Science as a proportion of total enrolments in Italian since *New Courses*.

In 2012, the percentage of students studying Italian who were enrolled in the BSc was 52 per cent, before dropping to 40 per cent in 2013 and rising to 49 per cent in 2014.

In the Italian *ab initio* stream, students enrolled in a Bachelor of Science represent the largest non-BA group, but there is still a majority of BA students in the first-year post-WACE stream. When we group all the responses together for those enrolled in a non-Arts degree and contrast them against those in Arts, the distinction between first and second-year enrolments becomes more obvious.

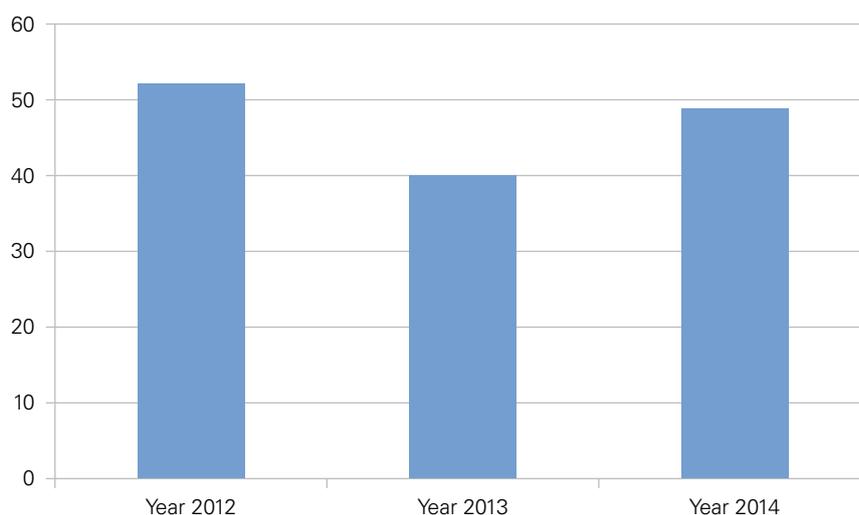


FIGURE 9: Enrolments in BSc as a proportion of total enrolments in Italian from 2012 to 2014 (UWA figures)

The data from our survey shed further light on Italian. The next figure shows the proportion of BA vs. non-BA students from our sample of post-WACE and second year students.

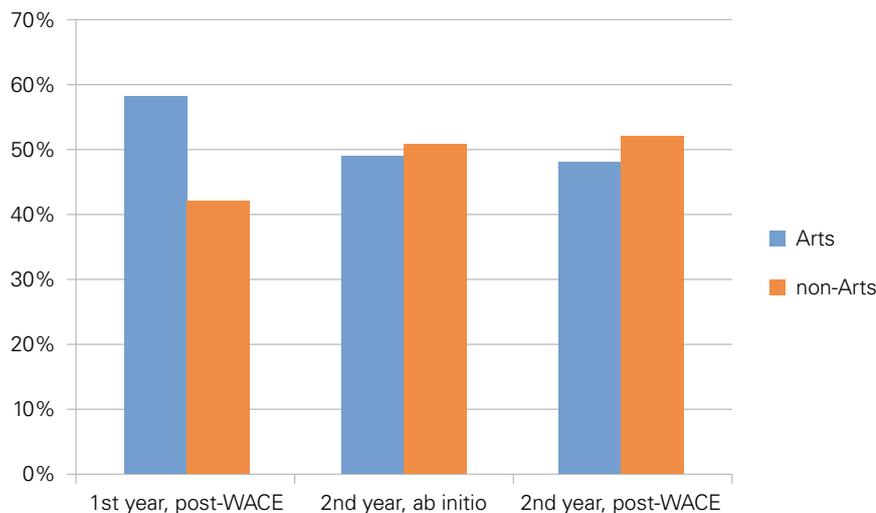


FIGURE 10: Students enrolled in a BA vs. non-BA degree (2013 Survey)

OUR FIRST-YEAR PROGRAMMES WERE RE-DESIGNED AND A DECISION WAS TAKEN TO MAKE GREATER USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING TO APPEAL TO THOSE STUDENTS WHO MAY HAVE A PROBLEM-SOLVING ORIENTATION IN THEIR LEARNING STYLES OR LITTLE BACKGROUND IN HUMANITIES SUBJECTS.

In the second-year courses, students enrolled in a non-Arts degree slightly outnumber those from Arts. This change in the make-up of our student cohort ultimately impacted on pedagogy and prompted a reflection on curriculum. As a response to this new reality, certain changes were adopted regarding the method of delivery of course content. For example, our first-year programmes were re-designed and a decision was taken to make greater use of technology in language learning, to appeal to all students regardless of their academic background or learning style. In order to incorporate greater use of technology at UWA, we introduced into our post-WACE unit a group project involving iMovie to dub films from English to Italian (see Caruso and Brown, 2014), hoping to appeal particularly to those students who may have a ‘problem-solving’ orientation in their learning styles and who may have little background in humanities subjects.

For example, our first-year programmes were re-designed and a decision was taken to make greater use of technology in language learning to appeal to those students who may have a problem-solving orientation in their learning styles or little background in humanities subjects. While we are not arguing that all Science students are ‘analytical thinkers’ and Arts students are not, our experience suggests that there are differences in learning styles between the two cohorts, and that they can be partly explained in terms of the students’ study background and learning experiences. In order to incorporate greater use of technology at UWA, we introduced into our post-WACE unit a group project involving iMovie to dub films

from English to Italian (see Caruso and Brown, 2014).

Further use was made of online discussion boards and external language learning websites for students as well. Additional rationale for this decision was provided by similar innovations documented by Occhipinti (2008), as well as Brussino and Gunn’s (2008) study of language learners and Italian internet media, contributing to the growing body of evidence that use of technology promotes ‘effective learning and development of effective learning strategies’ (p. 17).

This change in the student cohort raised other questions: would students from other disciplines prefer to learn Italian by discussing topics that related more directly to their chosen area of specialisation, rather than traditional topics such as literature or Italian history? And is language acquisition their major motivation for enrolling in Italian? This question was previously raised by Schmidt (2012) in her discussion on student diversity in German Studies. She concluded that ‘although nowadays language students are enrolled in the whole spectrum of degrees available, they nevertheless share common motives and expectations with regard to their language study’ (2012, p. 232). Schmidt also found that this diversity has resulted in languages being studied for only a few semesters, i.e. language study was not the focus of the degree for many students. While more research is needed to provide an answer to the questions above, we decided to revise our *ab-initio* first-year curriculum. This consisted of introducing five lectures during the semester with a focus on cultural content into a curriculum that had previously been designed only for language acquisition. These lectures therefore represented a departure from language being the unique focus of our first-year course, in an effort to appeal to a broader cohort of students. The topics chosen for the lectures varied from Italian-Australian economic relations, to contemporary Italian cinema, to Italy-China contact.

These modifications were made to adapt to those students who were likely to have a different learning background from students enrolled in an Arts degree, although not necessarily so. At the same time, new questions arose. We were cautious, for example, not to place too much emphasis on topics or learning strategies related solely to the scientific domain. This was felt to be particularly important since the principal idea behind making students take a Broadening unit was to enable them to acquire skills and learning methodologies outside of their chosen area of specialisation. The complementary nature of this part of their degree, it is hoped, will encourage students to take more units in Italian and possibly a major.

Choice of major and unit type

Our investigation shows that *New Courses* has also impacted on the number of students who have decided to major in Italian, and the type of units they would like



to study. Italian is preferred as a second major rather than a first. From our survey data, in all three groups, only a minority of students said they would like to major in Italian, less than 20 per cent. In this regard, the promotion of Italian as a Broadening unit could suggest that it is ideally taken as a major alongside another principal subject of specialisation. This argument would be valid for all languages, not just for Italian, since all eight languages of UWA are promoted as being one way of fulfilling the Broadening requirement. On the other hand, the promotion of languages and of Italian outside the Faculty of Arts opens up the exposure of language learning to a wider variety and higher number of students, meaning that Italian has become more popular as a second major than a first in our sample, as can be seen in Figure 11 below.

These results seem to confirm that overall students are interested in obtaining a full picture of what Italy has to offer and the culture surrounding the language they have already learned, supporting the need for pedagogies that view language and culture as inseparable and promote intercultural competence. The more language study that students are exposed to, the more cultural interest they acquire for Italy as a whole, and the more equipped they are to be global citizens. In this regard, it is essential that course descriptions available on university websites are kept up to date, and aim to provide as much detail as possible regarding the unit's content and the intercultural competence that students will acquire during the course. In this regard, Schüpbach and Hajek (2012, p. 101) note that 'the use of the internet to profile language programs in Australian universities is not being maximised yet, despite the undeniable importance of the web for global visibility'.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has shown that there have been a number of impacts on enrolments in Italian since the introduction of *New Courses*. These relate mainly to students' participation in the Italian program and the changed students' cohort. In general, it appears that all these impacts have been positive.

With regard to participation there has been an overall increase in enrolments, with more students of Italian continuing into second and third year. Broadening units are attracting students to all languages, not just to Italian, and not just in their first year. Many students are taking second- and third-year Italian as a Broadening unit as well. The intake of students across the three levels has changed. There is a very large group of non-BA students at first-year level, and many of these continue to third-year level. Many non-BA students now take Italian as a second major, suggesting that Italian appears to be becoming more attractive as a second major rather than as a first. This change in student cohort prompted members of staff to redesign parts of the curriculum at first-year level, in order to appeal to a broader range of students' backgrounds and therefore encourage them to continue with their language study in second year. With regard to retention, the percentage is higher in the post-WACE stream. Also encouraging is the strong interest students have in wanting to study units focussed entirely on culture.

With regard to curriculum and pedagogy, the changed cohort of students has implications for the way in which classes are taught and the content that is taught. At the same time it has raised questions that are applicable to Italian departments around Australia as well. For example, should we adapt our teaching to suit the varied motivations and learning approaches of our students given they come from such diverse faculties and learning areas? And should our language classes contain a larger 'cultural' component or a shift in orientation to intercultural competence? Moore, Rizzi and Ristaino have recently observed 'it is regrettable that little or no recent literature exists on

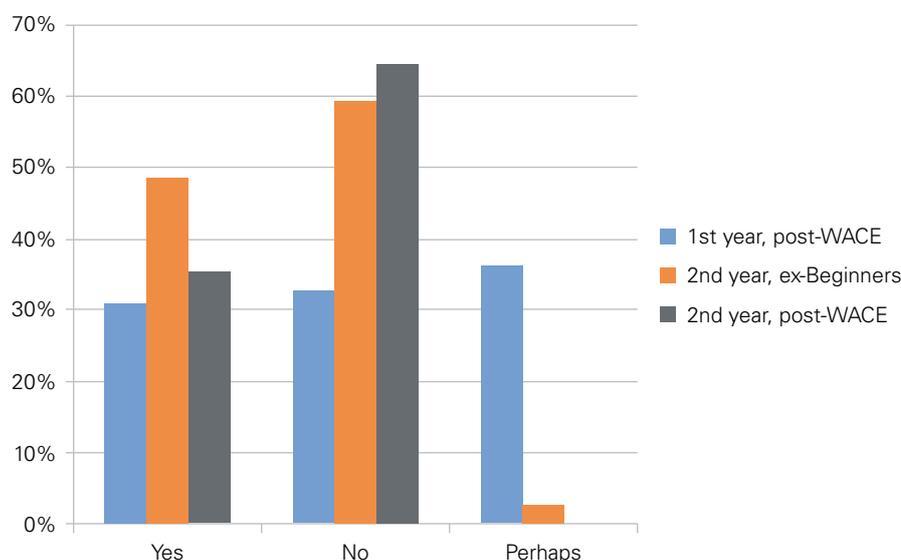


FIGURE 11: Percentage of students considering Italian as a second major (2013 Survey)

In the second-year *ab initio* stream, the percentage of students who responded that they are thinking of taking Italian as a second major is close to 50 per cent. Furthermore, 35 per cent of students in the first-year post-WACE stream said that they are also considering Italian as a potential major. This argument is supported by students responding to a question about their potential interest in taking units just on Italian language or culture. For *ab initio* students in their second year, 70 per cent of students said they would take a unit solely on Italian culture, and this figure rose to 84 per cent for the post-WACE stream. Nevertheless, there is clearly a subset of respondents who are interested purely in language acquisition units, and for second-year *ab initio* students, this was almost one third. In short, the increased number of students taking Italian as a Broadening unit is potentially leading to a new kind of non-specialist cohort who may decide to major in Italian while being interested primarily in language acquisition.

the integration of culture and language in Italian *ab initio* programs' (2012, p. 94). Their comments point to the importance of further research into how language and culture can be successfully combined (cf. Absalom 2013). In light of the increase in student diversity as shown in our results above, these questions take on new meaning and require different solutions to previous years, when almost all students came from Arts. In particular, how do we address the question of the integration of language and culture in the light of increased student diversity, and what can we do to ensure our course offerings appeal to a broad range of students' backgrounds, interests and specialisations?

The developments that resulted from the introduction of the new degree structure at UWA have significant implications for the future of Italian in WA. The introduction of Broadening Units in all Bachelor degrees removed the restrictive course regulations that had been the major obstacle to students outside the Faculty of Arts who would have wanted to take a language. The increase in language enrolments at UWA does not only demonstrate that Australian students are indeed interested in learning a language but it provides strong evidence that the study of a language at university is directly related to issues of access and degree structure. Remove the barrier and languages will flourish.

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