



**German as a Foreign Language in Australia
and New Zealand: a comparative overview**

Diana Feick, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, Tristan Lay, University of
Sydney & Mareike Schmidt, University of Auckland

ISSN 1470 – 9570

German as a Foreign Language in Australia and New Zealand: a comparative overview

Diana Feick, Tristan Lay, Mareike Schmidt

This article provides a short historical overview of German immigration and education in Australia and New Zealand and compares the two countries' current language education developments and their impacts on the teaching and learning of German in secondary and higher education. It especially examines the last decade, focusing on enrolment trends, strategies to support student retention, and the impact of national language policies. Using two exemplar cases from the University of Sydney and Waipapa Taumata Rau The University of Auckland, the article discusses current curriculum initiatives and evaluates one of them, a blended-learning beginner course, through learning analytics of student achievement.

1. Introduction

The teaching and learning of German as a Foreign Language in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand offers a valuable comparative perspective within the wider field of Languages Other Than English (LOTE) education. Although the two countries differ in geography and cultural context, they face similar questions when supporting German within the diverse linguistic environment of Australasia.

In both contexts German is valued as a language that opens access to cultural knowledge, intellectual exchange and international study, as well as career pathways. At the same time programs often struggle with enrolment numbers and long-term student retention. One contributing factor is the persistent monolingual orientation found in many Anglophone societies, which can limit interest in additional languages. Distance from German-speaking countries also plays a role, as does the policy focus on Asian languages driven by economic ties and the regional emphasis on Asia literacy.

The second chapter provides a short overview of the status of German in Australasia, encompassing both its historical and current developments. In the third part of this study, the role of German language instruction within the educational frameworks of both countries is discussed. For that we focus on the German education system in secondary schools (3.1) and higher education (3.2), by presenting a selection of institutional developments and pedagogical innovations. In addition, the role of stakeholders of German foreign cultural and educational policy in the region is examined, along with their

support strategies for German (part 4). In the following presentation of two cases for curricular innovations, the University of Sydney is selected to demonstrate the potential of work-integrated learning and German for specific purposes. As the second case The University of Auckland Waipapa Taumata Rau is the setting for a discussion on the implementation of a blended learning approach, with a subsequent evaluation of its efficacy conducted through the utilisation of learning analytics for beginner-level achievements. The article concludes with a discussion of the challenges that still lie ahead and the opportunities for the future of German education in Australasia.

2. German in Australasia: Status and Developments

Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, as longstanding immigration societies in Oceania, have a history of German language presence spanning over 180 years. This history is further shaped by German colonial involvement in the Pacific (1884–1914), including areas such as present-day Papua New Guinea, parts of Micronesia, and Samoa (McBryde 1993).

During the 19th and 20th centuries, European immigration brought German-speaking settlers to both Australia and New Zealand. These migration flows not only shaped demographic developments but also contributed to the ethnolinguistic and cultural diversity of both settler societies across multiple generations. Importantly, the maintenance of German language and cultural practices was supported by structured group settlement patterns, particularly in rural and semi-rural regions. In Australia, early Lutheran migration from 1838 onwards unfolded through organised chains of settlement, when groups of Old Lutherans fleeing religious persecution established clustered communities such as Klemzig, Hahndorf, Lobethal, and settlements in the Barossa Valley and surrounding areas. These locally concentrated networks enabled the continued use of German in religious life, education, and everyday communication and also facilitated subsequent internal mobility within Australia (Tampke 2006).¹ In New Zealand, comparable settlement configurations, including the German-Bohemian village of Puhoi, remain of scholarly interest for studies of historical language contact and community formation (Heimrath 2021; Wildfeuer 2021). Collectively, these group-based settlement

¹ See also the historical overview provided by the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand: <https://www.lca.org.au/our-history/> (22.05.2026).

structures played a key role in sustaining German as a community language beyond the initial migration phase.

In South Australia, in particular, early German migration is well documented: in 1838, nearly 600 Lutherans emigrated in organised groups to practice their faith freely, establishing enduring cultural and linguistic communities. In New Zealand, German immigrants constituted the largest European group after the British (Bade 1993), further contributing to early multilingual contact zones within settler society.

Against this historical background, the present article examines the contemporary status of German in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand within a rapidly changing educational and sociolinguistic environment. While parts of the historical and sociolinguistic overview build on earlier work on German in Australasia (Lay & Feick 2024), the present contribution expands and updates that discussion in several respects. In contrast to the earlier overview-oriented chapter, this article incorporates the most recent enrolment and census data available up to 2025, including longitudinal statistics from the StADaF working group and the German Federal Foreign Office. It also places stronger emphasis on recent developments in higher education and language policy in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly in relation to declining enrolments, institutional restructuring, and increasing competition from strategically promoted Asian languages. Furthermore, the article extends beyond the scope of the handbook contribution through a case study of blended learning, digitalisation, student engagement, and beginner-level achievement in German language teaching at the University of Auckland (UoA) during and after the COVID-19 period. In doing so, it contributes new empirical insights into ongoing transformations in tertiary German language education in the Australasian context.

In contemporary multi-ethnic Australasia, German is gradually losing prominence. Besides a strong willingness for linguistic assimilation among German-speaking migrants and their descendants (Rietze 2026), this decline can be partly attributed to what Clyne (2005) describes as an Anglophone “monolingual mindset”. This term refers to a socially and institutionally embedded orientation in which English is not only the dominant national language but is also taken as the default norm for communication in public, educational, and professional domains. Within this framework, multilingualism is often positioned as supplementary rather than constitutive of public life, which in turn limits the visibility, value, and intergenerational transmission of community languages such as

German. This broader orientation is not unique to Australasia but is also evident in other traditionally Anglophone Commonwealth contexts, where both social and individual interest in additional language acquisition remains relatively weak (Lanvers et al. 2021). While foreign language learning is generally regarded positively in principle, many Australians and New Zealanders nevertheless perceive English as sufficient for both everyday and international communication. This perception is further reinforced by the assumption that national needs for foreign language competence can be adequately met through newly arrived migrants with multilingual repertoires, rather than through sustained investment in language education among the broader population.

Building on this orientation, educational reforms in schools and universities have further contributed to the weakening of LOTE (Languages Other Than English), a curriculum term used in Australia and New Zealand for school and university programs in additional languages beyond English (East 2021; Mason & Hajek 2021; Schmidt 2015). Simultaneously, there is an increasing prevalence of Asian, Arabic, Indian, and Pacific languages within family contexts, which also affects the status of German as a first language (L1). According to the current 2021 Australian census, 70,237 individuals reported speaking German as a heritage language within their families. This reflects a decrease of 9,115 speakers compared to the previous 2016 census, which recorded 79,352 speakers. Although the decline in German speakers between 2011 (80,371) and 2016 (79,352) was minimal, by 2016 German had already dropped out of the top ten most spoken languages at home in Australia.

Importantly, these Census figures capture self-reported language use in the home and should be interpreted as an indicator of household language practices rather than monolingualism or overall individual language competence. Changes over time may reflect a combination of intergenerational language shift within established German-speaking communities as well as broader changes in Australia's migration-driven linguistic diversity. These figures therefore indicate a gradual but steady shift in the relative presence of German in the domestic linguistic landscape, rather than a straightforward linear decline in speaker competence, with English increasingly functioning as the dominant language of intergenerational transmission in German-Australian households (Hunt & Davis 2019).

A similar downward trend is observed in Aotearoa, where German ranked 4th among non-official languages in the 1996 census, and dropped to 11th in 2023. Despite this

relative decline, German remains among the most widely spoken non-official languages, with a steady increase in absolute speaker numbers between 1996 and 2018 (Buckingham 2021). Most recently, these numbers decreased slightly from 41,844 (2018) to 40,092 (self-reported) German speakers (Census 2023²). In addition to education policies, regional and economic interests play a significant role in shaping language learning in the Pacific region, especially given the powerful presence of Greater China (mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Singapore). The Asian trade market, and particularly the bilateral trade relations between Australia/New Zealand and the People's Republic of China, are of immense importance. Consequently, LOTE education must be viewed through the lens of geopolitical, university policy, socio-economic, and immigration-related factors.

The current trend in language policy, particularly with the promotion of *Asia Literate Schooling in the Asian Century* (Halse 2015), officially supported by government initiatives such as the *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*³ (Ministry of Education 2012), has heightened awareness of the need for Asia literacy as a core competency. This policy shift has intensified competition between German and East Asian languages like Mandarin, Japanese, and Korean, with major financial support from national governments. These languages benefit from highly organised diaspora communities in major cities, making their native tongues more visible in public spaces, student associations, and even Australian/New Zealand popular culture (Chik et al. 2019). Learners of many Asian languages have the added motivational advantage of being able to engage with their peers, form tandem partnerships, and enhance their skills through social interaction. In contrast, German often lacks such motivation, with its speakers in Australia and New Zealand demonstrating a relatively weaker group identity and public visibility (Bönisch-Brednich 2002; Hunt & Davis 2019; Wohlfahrt 2017). As a result, German speakers and communities appear less prominent in public life, offering fewer contact opportunities for potential LOTE learners.

² Census 2023: <https://figure.nz/chart/wEZovDx96Qdumctk>

³ A *White Paper* is an official government policy document outlining strategic priorities, policy directions, and proposed actions on matters of national significance. Published by the Australian Government in 2012, the *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* articulated a national framework for strengthening Australia's engagement with Asia, particularly through education, Asian language learning, intercultural capability, and regional cooperation. Although subsequent policy initiatives have further developed these priorities, the document remains a key reference point in discussions of Asia literacy and international education in Australia.

An additional factor in this context is the relative ease and lower cost of traveling to nearby Asian countries. In contrast, in Australia and New Zealand, the use of German as a LOTE is almost exclusively confined to institutional settings, such as educational institutions or companies with German connections. However, in the digital age, media and technological alternatives have emerged to support language immersion. For instance, the Australian public broadcaster Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) offers extensive German-language content through its SBS German section. These resources facilitate not only deeper engagement with the German language, culture, and history but also provide opportunities for (online) communication with German speakers (Feick & Knorr 2021; Feick & Zeyer 2025; Ludewig & Kawakita 2022). Despite these resources, synchronous communication in German remains challenging, as time zone differences between the hemispheres and varying school and university holiday schedules hinder real-time interaction.

In Australia and New Zealand, LOTE are typically categorised into distinct groups, though some overlap in terminology exists:

Strategic languages: These are languages considered to be of national importance for tourism and trade, primarily from European or Asian cultural regions, with a strong strategic orientation. Key examples include Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, and Indonesian.

Academic or international languages: Languages from the European cultural sphere, such as French, Spanish, Italian and German, are categorised as educational languages with a more academic focus.

Community/heritage languages: These are languages spoken primarily within families and communities, further divided into Indigenous languages (e.g., Australian Indigenous languages, Te Reo Māori) and immigrant origin languages (e.g., Cantonese, Vietnamese).

Given the definitional ambiguity, the German language can be classified as both an academic/international language and a community/heritage language, depending on the context and specific language policy objectives. As such, German holds relevance in the region not only as a foreign language but also as a heritage language (Rietze 2026).

As a community language, it is occasionally supported by German-specific schools (only in Australia, e.g., The School for the German Language in Adelaide), German-speaking playgroups and toddler groups, as well as local clubs and cultural centers (e.g., German Club, German-Austrian Society, Swiss Club NSW). However, in formal education, the

distinction between German as a heritage language and as a foreign language is often blurred, especially in Aotearoa. Due to a lack of targeted programmes, individuals with German as a heritage language are placed in foreign language courses, such as those offered by Te Kura, an online distance school in Aotearoa.

3. German Language Instruction within Educational Frameworks

Building on the broader sociolinguistic and policy context outlined above, the following section examines formal educational structures and empirical enrolment data to show how these macro-level developments are reflected in institutional patterns of German language learning.

The most recent data gathered every five years by the ‘StADaF’ (Ständige Arbeitsgruppe Deutsch als Fremdsprache 2006) working group in collaboration with the German Federal Foreign Office reveal a downward trend in the number of German language learners across the region (see Table 1). Kretzenbacher (2011) cautions that such global data should be interpreted with care, as they may contain biases. Nevertheless, the overall downward trend in German language learning remains evident.

Australia	GFL-Learners Total	GFL-Learners School	GFL-Learners University
2025	72,083	70,123	1,960
2020	100,210	95,500	2,500
2015	105,599	100,500	2,949
2010	107,000	98,000	3,000
2005	150,300	142,300	3,000
2000	148,455	142,300	3,655
New Zealand	GFL-Learners Total	GFL-Learners School	GFL-Learners University
2025	2,636	2,250	386
2020	4,907	3,111	849
2015	15,101	13,935	684
2010	15,680	14,915	695
2005	19,214	18,206	858
2000	15,899	14,634	945

Table 1: Number of German Learners in Australia and New Zealand (2000–2025). Own representation based on data from the Federal Foreign Office, Netzwerk Deutsch, and StADaF.

In Australia, the number of students studying German saw a significant decline, dropping by 43,300 between 2005 and 2010, and by 28,127 between 2020 and 2025. Over the ten-year period from 2015 to 2025, the numbers continued to fall sharply, with a decrease of 30,377 in schools and 989 at universities. In contrast, German enrolments in New Zealand schools were stable for two decades but have recently fallen by 10,824 students. This has significantly intensified the overall downward trend in New Zealand's German language learners. The underlying causes of these developments will be explored in the following three subchapters, focusing on the German language in the education sector.

3.1 German in Schools: Implications for Teaching and Learning

In both Australia and New Zealand, the acquisition of German language skills primarily occurs at the secondary school level (see Table 1). In addition to the partially government funded 'German Schools Abroad' located in Australia (Sydney, Melbourne), which offer the German Language Diploma (CEFR: B1–C1), public and private schools in both countries also provide German as a LOTE as part of their curriculum. The German secondary school qualification generally corresponds to an intermediate proficiency level, comparable to B1.

The language policies, institutional frameworks, and geographical distance to target-language countries in Australia and New Zealand differ significantly from the European context. In Europe, multilingualism is actively promoted by key authorities through various initiatives (e.g., European Language Portfolio, European Day of Languages). Foreign language education is widely integrated into national curricula, as seen in Germany with compulsory and comprehensive foreign language instruction starting in primary school.

In contrast, LOTE education in Australia and New Zealand is less regulated by government policies, meaning it is not as firmly embedded in curricula or syllabuses. Australia's federal structure, along with the autonomy of its states and territories, results in considerable variation in foreign language regulations, support, and implementation across public, private and Catholic schools. Similarly, in Aotearoa, while the national education policy is guided by the New Zealand Curriculum (2007), second language acquisition is not mandatory for achieving a secondary school qualification. The curriculum requires that schools offer a LOTE in Years 7–10, but student participation remains optional (East 2021). Furthermore, Te Reo Māori holds a unique status as a

national language, with cross-curricular promotion included in the New Zealand Curriculum.

While curricular and pedagogical guidelines, specific examination regulations, and competency standards for teaching German exist (Lay 2015: 87; Ministry of Education 2002, 2012), LOTE offerings in Australia and New Zealand remain neither comprehensive nor compulsory. In some cases, mandatory LOTE lessons can be strategically avoided (cf. East 2021; Jäger & Jasney 2007: 477). Cross-national consensus suggests that when LOTE learning occurs, it is often confined to a brief period – sometimes as short as a quarter of the school year – depending on the availability of expertise, resources, and interest among school leadership and key decision-makers such as school boards, Parents Representative Councils (PRC) and students (Ward & East 2016: 46).

The successful provision of German in schools can be attributed to supportive attitudes toward the German language at management and advisory levels, as well as the dedication of individual teachers. These teachers face the ongoing challenge of engaging and retaining students, who may opt out of the subject at the end of each school year. As a result, many educators adopt a so-called “Einzelkämpfermentalität” (“one warrior mentality”) (Smala 2014) particularly in reference to CLIL teachers, working to enhance the appeal of language learning and position German as an attractive alternative to other subjects or LOTE within the school curriculum.

Innovative approaches include the implementation of digital media (cf. Erlam et al. 2021), cross-language and interdisciplinary teaching methods (e.g., Content and Language Integrated Learning, CLIL) (Smala 2014), student exchange programmes, study trips, and task- or project-based learning. In this context, the PASCH initiative ‘Schools: Partners for the Future’ of the German Federal Foreign Office, which operates in both countries, serves as a vital instrument for supporting schools, teachers, and learners.

3.2 German in Higher Education: Selected Institutional Developments and Pedagogical Innovations

In the tertiary education sector, German can be studied as an elective, major or minor in Bachelor’s, Honors, or Master of Arts programmes, as well as through doctoral programmes in both Australia and New Zealand. German Studies, traditionally focused on literary studies, has a history of more than 150 years, marked by various historical and

political challenges (Oettli 2005; Schmidt 2015). McGuiness-King (2004) described German Studies as a “subject under pressure” due to the neoliberal shift in the education system, and this pressure has only intensified over the past 20 years. As a result of market-driven efficiency models, entire German Studies departments have been closed or reduced to a core offering of language courses and degree-relevant content courses, and teaching staff at remaining institutions has been significantly reduced. This has also led to substantial curricular reductions, with many departments/disciplines requiring *ab initio* students to complete GFL courses and interdisciplinary subjects from “collective fields” (McGuiness-King 2004: 30) such as European Studies, Intercultural Communication, or Comparative Literature, thereby shifting away from core German Studies content.

To improve economic viability, German departments have implemented various strategies. These include offering language diplomas and certificates, integrating language courses into interdisciplinary programmes like International and Global Studies, opening German courses to students from other disciplines, replacing German as the language of instruction, offering language courses as electives, and incorporating e-learning elements into language instruction (Alm 2008; Feick & Knorr 2021).

One approach that has gained particular relevance in several institutional settings is the offering of in-country study units for students across the university. In the Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand contexts, such initiatives have been developed at selected universities in partnership with German institutions, and they form part of a broader spectrum of study-abroad and mobility programmes in the region.

While the University of Sydney’s OLES2139 Experience Germany programme (in collaboration with Humboldt University of Berlin and Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich), which hosted 495 participants between 2018 and 2024, is used here as an illustrative example, similar models of in-country or immersion-based learning can be found across other institutions in the Asia-Pacific region.

Cultural immersion is another cornerstone of these programmes, significantly enhancing intercultural communication skills. Students learn to navigate cultural differences, understand social norms and engage in meaningful exchanges with people from diverse backgrounds. Through a combination of structured tutorials and spontaneous interactions with locals, they gain a deeper understanding of communication nuances, which is essential for fostering cross-cultural understanding and preventing misunderstandings. The programme’s holistic structure – combining pre-departure classes (online modules),

intensive overseas study in Berlin and Munich, and post-programme reflection (project report) – promotes not only language proficiency but also intercultural competence and critical thinking about cultural diversity.

These experiences enrich students' academic and personal growth, while also equipping them with valuable skills for their future professional careers. As such, the inclusion of in-country study within university curricula supports both academic and professional development, preparing students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

However, the ongoing reduction in German course offerings has resulted in a lack of options beyond the B2 proficiency level. To ensure graduation from German programmes in New Zealand with the required level of mastery, inter-university collaboration is crucial. The University of Canterbury in Christchurch, for example, provides advanced language courses in a hybrid format, enabling enrolment and spatial inclusion of students from the UoA.

With the decline of available courses and with contact hours being reduced, innovative methods and alternative teaching formats are being implemented. These aim not only to enhance student engagement and motivation, but also to foster a deeper social connection to the target language and culture. Consequently, project-based and task-based approaches are adopted to increase the appeal of German Studies and to support students in developing the skills necessary for autonomous language learning.

An important aspect of sustaining numbers in German programmes in Aotearoa is close collaboration with high schools offering GFL. Outreach talks, direct engagement with career advisers as well as German teachers, and events like, for example, the annual oral competitions (followed by a prestigious prize-giving ceremony at UoA) offer valuable opportunities to connect with students and their families.

4. DAAD and Goethe-Institut: Support Strategies and Best Practices

The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) has provided consistent support during these restructuring processes, contributing both personnel and expertise to university teaching and curriculum development through its diverse programmes (e.g., DAAD Lectureship Programme, Language Assistance Programme, 'Ortslektorenprogramm' etc.). Additionally, DAAD scholarship programmes offer

valuable opportunities for students to integrate study stays in Germany, such as through ‘University Winter Courses for Foreign Students’.

At the UoA, courses completed during a study stay in Germany are credited toward the New Zealand degree. In this context, the DAAD Winter Course is regarded as a key component of the German programme, enabling Stage 3 language acquisition requirements to be completed outside the local curriculum.

As a quango⁴ and a registered not-for-profit organisation dedicated to promoting the German language and culture abroad, the *Goethe-Institut* is a key partner in Australia and Aotearoa. The institute offers a wide range of language courses at all levels for various age groups, along with officially recognised exams from A1 to C2 levels, at its locations in Sydney, Melbourne, Auckland, and Wellington. In Sydney, for example, courses are available specifically for children with German-speaking backgrounds. The Goethe-Institut is also actively involved in the PASCH and BKD (Bildungskooperation Deutsch⁵) initiatives, providing essential didactic-methodological support, material and concept development, as well as further training for GFL practitioners. This is especially significant in a region where most educators lack formal GFL training in their tertiary education. The institute bridges this gap by delivering didactic expertise, as German language courses are structurally decoupled from undergraduate and postgraduate teacher training programmes. The focus of the Goethe-Institut’s work is on areas such as German for children and adults, and German within a CLIL approach, often embedding themes through projects, camps, or competitions within or outside of the classroom.

In terms of teacher training, the Goethe-Institut follows key didactic and methodological principles, including competency-based learning, learner orientation, action-based learning, learner activation, interaction orientation, promoting learner autonomy, intercultural competence, task-based learning, multilingual approaches, and the integration of digital media. Additionally, the institute plays a vital role in fostering teacher networks by organising regular regional and national German teacher conferences (for further details, see Lay 2015: 98–101).

⁴ Quango (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation) refers to an organisation that operates independently of direct government control while being publicly funded and performing public functions on behalf of the state.

⁵ The BKD collaborates with various partners in Australia and New Zealand, including German teacher associations, educational authorities, institutions, and key stakeholders. The primary goal is to promote German language education locally.

Private language schools, course providers, and community centers/colleges complement German courses within adult education. Additionally, in Australia and New Zealand, Goethe Societies are independent, non-profit community organizations dedicated to promoting the German language and fostering an interest in German culture, literature, and history. While they share a name and work closely with the official Goethe-Institut, they are distinct entities run largely by local volunteers, academics, and expats.

5. Language for Specific Purposes and Work-Integrated Learning

The abolishment of mandatory foreign language qualifications for university entrance at Australian universities has led to a steady increase in beginner-level GFL courses since the 1970s (cf. Schmidt 2012; 2015; 2019). At leading research-intensive universities in Australia and New Zealand, students can continue LOTE learning from secondary school without significant disruption. However, most students begin their German studies at the beginner level. This shift has positioned the study of German literature and linguistics as secondary, and the disproportionate number of beginners has had structural implications for the curriculum, especially in the area of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP).

As study programmes have opened to students from other faculties, the cohort has become increasingly diversified, and the bachelor's programmes are now broadly designed. This diversification allows students to take units outside their faculty (e.g., general education courses⁶), which has resulted in a predominance of beginners. Despite this diversification, expanding language support for students from disciplines like business, medicine, music, and engineering remains limited. Many institutions cannot offer courses in LSP alongside general language courses at elementary and intermediate levels due to low student numbers and financial constraints. For instance, the University of Sydney last offered the unit GRMN2637 Business German in 2013 due to a lack of demand.

Schmidt's (2011) study on motivation for learning German in Australia confirms that interest in LSP courses is a secondary factor in choosing German, although there is a higher correlation among business and engineering students. Courses focusing on academic writing in the humanities and social sciences, which could support the

⁶ A General Education course at UoA enables students to take two stage 1 papers outside of their main field of study. In 2026, this will be replaced by a cluster of fixed different courses that do not support single languages.

development of academic German, remain exceptions. The trend has been toward offering ‘cultural/content units’ in English, particularly in programmes where German majors are required to take such courses. These courses, often open to students from other disciplines (e.g., philosophy, psychology, media studies), aim to increase enrolment while maintaining academic depth. However, some institutions, such as the UoA (cf. Feick 2023), have adopted a CLIL approach in one course, integrating German into subject-specific learning, though these initiatives remain rare and temporary.

The increasing trend toward interdisciplinarity in undergraduate programmes raises concerns, especially where it undermines German as a language of instruction (cf. Lay 2020: 888–891). Nonetheless, despite budget cuts and financial pressures, some institutions have managed to integrate LSP courses or incorporate specialised communication skills into the curriculum.

In the current search for innovative ways to sustain and attract students to German (Studies) programmes, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) has become a central focus for combining subject-specific and language-specific learning. In the Australian-New Zealand context, where graduate employability has become a key indicator of institutional excellence, the promotion of employability and specialist language knowledge is gaining importance. Institutions are now, besides offering ‘Career Days’ at which representatives from various professional fields give insights and can function as role models, exploring ways to integrate WIL with technical language learning through credited internships in companies and institutions with German connections, along with structured work-integrated learning experiences.

Collaboration with regional cultural institutions, such as the Goethe-Institut Australia/New Zealand, SBS, museums, and the State Library of New South Wales, allows students to apply LSP knowledge in authentic work environments. Tasks range from translating archival material and specialist texts to creating film subtitles and conducting interviews with company founders. Intercultural communication, increasingly important since the 1990s, plays a crucial role in these activities.

In addition to university programmes, the Goethe-Institut Australia offers LSP courses for companies, including Business German, Cultural Coaching, and Technical and Special Business German (see Goethe-Institut homepage), further contributing to career-oriented foreign language learning.

Overall, these developments in LSP and WIL highlight a broader structural shift in German Studies towards employability-oriented, interdisciplinary, and practice-based learning. At the same time, they also reveal a tension between language-specialist training and the predominance of beginner cohorts, which increasingly shape curriculum design and teaching formats.

This tension becomes particularly visible in the next section, where the effects of these structural conditions are further examined in relation to digitalisation and blended learning approaches, as well as their impact on student engagement and learning outcomes.

6. Blended Learning and Beginner-Level Achievement

The ad-hoc shift to online teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 accelerated the digitalisation of language teaching at UoA. Additionally, between 2020 and 2022, members of the teaching body as well as international students were located outside New Zealand (and Australia) and consequently enforced rethinking delivery formats in German language acquisition courses (cf. Feick & Schmidt 2024). As a response to declining enrolments, a blended learning format (BL) was introduced in 1/2022. It included the use of learning videos and online materials for asynchronous learning, alongside a reduction in contact hours from four to three per week. The face-to-face time was dedicated to practice using German in various scenarios. Staff implemented a flipped classroom and blended learning approach by creating learning videos to introduce new vocabulary and to explain grammar concepts of each textbook unit. Students were supposed to watch these videos and familiarize themselves with the PowerPoint presentation provided additionally, before coming to class.

The following statistics show student enrolments at UoA's German beginner's courses over the period of five years. The enrolment data was obtained from the Learning Management System Canvas and grades were provided by one of the authors who also was the coordinator of these courses. Table 2 shows obtained grade ranges, the average grade and the participation rate of the oral test of each course. It helps to illustrate impacts of the implementation of a flipped classroom and blended learning format, and its possible consequences on learning success.

Semester and year	Enrolments	Gen Ed in %	Grade-A range in %	Grade-B range in %	Grade-C range in %	Not pass in %	Average grade in %	No participation oral test in %
1, 2020	63	56	77.8	12.7	4.8	4.7	80	14.3
1, 2021	104	62	46	33	10	17	75	25
2, 2021	81	70	37	34.6	17.2	10.1	70	21
1, 2022	71	41	45.2	26	12.3	17.5	71	25.4
2, 2022	89	65	47.2	19.1	12.4	21.3	68	22.5
1, 2023	92	58	49.5	21.7	13.3	15.5	74	10.9
1, 2024	82	65	30.6	31.8	18.8	19	73	18.3
2, 2024	104	60	39.1	26.7	19.1	4.8	69	18.3
1, 2025	65	63	47.7	18.6	20	14	71	17
2, 2025	61	69	47.5	27.9	11.5	13.1	72	13

Table 2: Student enrolments and performance in a German 101 at the UoA. Note: Modes of teaching: transparent=hybrid; blue=online; gray=on campus blended-learning and three contact hours.

Looking into enrolment numbers, after a decline in 2020 (pre-pandemic average: 120 enrolments per semester), enrolment numbers reached a high of 104 in the first semester of 2021, and figures stabilised over the ensuing 3.5-year period despite the effects of the pandemic. A later peak in semester 2 of 2024 (104 enrolments) was followed by a pronounced decline: in 2025, numbers dropped significantly to 65 in semester 1 and 61 in semester 2. This is likely the result of a change in policies introduced in early 2025 regarding the eligibility of General Education papers (as discussed earlier, see footnotes). The anticipated discontinuation of General Education offerings in the near future may have transformative consequences for the continuation of the German programme in its current form.

Regarding student success, the first semester of 2020 stands out as an anomaly with exceptionally high performance (78% A-grades) likely due to emergency pandemic grading policies and the sudden shift to online teaching and learning. Excluding this outlier, a shift seems apparent with the introduction of the BL approach in 2022; as a possible consequence the proportion of C-grades and failure rates began to rise gradually, with C-grades peaking in 02/2024 and 01/2025. Interestingly, despite a dip in 1/2024, A-grades also gradually rise since the implementation of BL. This suggests a polarisation of outcomes. This polarisation is evidenced by a decline from a mid-range (B-grades) of 33% and 35% in the semesters prior to the implementation of BL, to a significant drop to an average of 25% over the course of the subsequent seven semesters taught in a BL format.

Consistent with expectations, higher oral test participation tends to align with higher average grades. Oral test participation, a key indicator of student engagement in the course, was lowest following the introduction of BL in 2022 but has stabilised over the past 1.5 years. It is reasonable to assume that students with better performance during the semester are more likely to attend the oral test at the end of the semester as they might be more confident in their oral proficiency. Furthermore, the reduction from four to three contact hours, combined with the shift towards BL, likely contributed to the spike in oral test non-participation. The reduction in student-lecturer interaction might have lessened students' sense of accountability and lowered their confidence in speaking. This might have led a larger portion of the cohort to opt out of the oral test entirely. However, further research is necessary.

The introduction of BL therefore shows mixed results: even though class participation is not mandatory, all tutors and lecturers having taught the course in the listed semesters took record of students' attendance on an unofficial basis. There are signs of improvement in engagement over time and in declining rates of oral test non-participation since 2023 but this has not translated consistently into higher grades or overall student success. On the one hand, a clear connection between student success, student engagement and the implementation of the reduced-contact BL format does not seem apparent. On the other hand, declines in grades and in engagement may stem from multiple factors. While BL formats accommodate the evolving needs of today's student population, such as balancing part-time employment, care responsibilities, and commuting challenges, they may also contribute to the observed decline in engagement or enrolment. Moreover, during the peak pandemic semesters, online delivery coincided with lower grades and reduced oral test participation. With restrictions eased in 2022, both metrics improved. While BL supports recovery and aligns with contemporary teaching practices, it should not lead to a reduction of contact hours and consequently compromise relational learning, which remains essential for fostering students' engagement and participation.

7. Future trends: addressing challenges and exploring opportunities

In Australia and New Zealand, the status of German as LOTE is shaped by ongoing changes, oscillating between tradition, innovation, and regression. These developments are closely tied to geopolitical and socio-economic factors, which significantly influence both countries. Despite the high status of Europe – and German-speaking countries – as

key political, economic and strategic partners, this is scarcely reflected in language policies. The dominance of global English reinforces a “monolingual mindset”, often overlooking the multilingual realities of these immigration nations. Neither Australia nor New Zealand has yet developed a national language policy that formally recognises and promotes linguistic diversity. In this context, German as an international language is given greater importance in formal education than as a heritage language outside the classroom, suggesting potential for stronger integration between these two areas to enhance visibility and promotion of German.

In formal education, access to German learning opportunities is predicted to expand due to the increased digitalisation of language teaching, brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Both countries continue to be key locations for implementing and researching innovative approaches to digital media and spatial inclusion through it in schools and universities (e.g., Alm 2021; Feick 2022; Feick & Knorr 2021; Feick & Schmidt 2024). The integration of virtual elements in face-to-face teaching and the rise of self-directed learning phases are likely to gain importance. However, there is considerable need for development in the area of German for Specific Purposes, where the gradual expansion of digital learning offerings in universities and cultural institutions remains a pressing concern. Importantly, there is a lack of scientifically based quality standards for digital language teaching, particularly in the university context. Developing such standards is essential to counterbalance the market-oriented focus on efficiency in tertiary education. Efforts to reduce or waive tuition fees – such as Australia’s reductions for foreign languages – are positive steps. However, sustainable progress requires increased support for both foreign and heritage language instruction at the school level.

Alongside intermediary organisations from German-speaking countries, German teacher associations play a crucial role in advancing the teaching of German. These associations, active both nationally and regionally, operate at the intersection of language policy and educational institutions. A key area of potential growth lies in fostering the development of young talent through national initiatives to train GFL teachers. This will ensure a sustainable and continuous supply of qualified educators within state education systems. The training and professional development of teachers for the school sector is particularly critical, as German is predominantly taught at the school level in Australasia.

In conclusion, teaching and learning German in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand presents a range of challenges but also opens up new opportunities for empirically

informed advancements in pedagogy and curriculum development which should be leveraged for future growth.

References

- Alm, Antonie (2008) Integrating Emerging Technologies in the Foreign Language Classroom: A Case Study. *International Journal of Pedagogies & Learning* 4(4), 44–60. <https://doi.org/10.5172/ijpl.4.4.44>
- Alm, Antonie (2021) Language learning with Netflix: From extensive to intra-formal learning. *Eurocall Review* 29 (1), 81–92.
- Auswärtiges Amt (ed.) (2016) *Netzwerk Deutsch: Datenerhebung 2015*. https://www.daad.de/medien/der-daad/unsere-aufgaben/deutsche-sprache/pdfs/daad_germanistik_netzwerk-deutsch_datenerhebung_2015.pdf
- Auswärtiges Amt (ed.) (2020) *Deutsch als Fremdsprache weltweit: Datenerhebung 2020*. https://www.goethe.de/resources/files/pdf328/bro_deutsch-als-fremdsprache-weltweit.-datenerhebung-2020.pdf
- Bade, James N. (1993) Introduction. In James N. Bade (ed.) *The German Connection. New Zealand and German-speaking Europe in the Nineteenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 37–39.
- Buckingham, Louisa (2021) Heritage Language Maintenance in New Zealand. In: Ursula Lanvers; Amy S. Thompson; Martin East (eds.) *Language Learning in Anglophone Countries*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 289–307. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56654-8_15
- Bönisch-Brednich, Brigitte (2002) *Keeping a low profile: an oral history of German immigration to New Zealand*. Wellington: Victoria University Press.
- Chik, Alice; Benson, Phil; Moloney, Robyn (eds.) (2019) *Multilingual Sydney*. London: Routledge.
- Clyne, Michael (2005) *Australia's Language Potential*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.
- DAAD; DZHW (eds.) (2020) *Wissenschaft weltoffen 2020. Daten und Fakten zur Internationalität von Studium und Forschung in Deutschland und weltweit* [Report]. Bielefeld: DAAD & DZHW. https://www.wissenschaft-weltoffen.de/content/uploads/2021/09/wiwe_2020_verlinkt.pdf
- East, Martin (2021) Language Learning in New Zealand's Schools: Enticing Opportunities and Enduring Constraints. In: Ursula Lanvers; Amy S. Thompson; Martin East (eds.) *Language Learning in Anglophone Countries*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 19–36.
- Erlam, Rosemary; Philp, Jenefer; Feick, Diana (2021) Digital media in the language classroom. In: Rosemary Erlam; Jenefer Philp; Diana Feick (eds.) *Teaching languages to adolescent learners: from theory to practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Feick, Diana (2022) Zwischen Ortsunabhängigkeit und Lernortspezifik: Zur digitalen Öffnung des DaF-Unterrichts durch mobiles Sprachenlernen. In: Diana Feick; Jutta Rymarczyk (eds.) *Fremdsprachenlernen im virtuellen Raum*. Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 45–74.

- Feick, Diana (2023) Den berufsspezifischen Perspektivwechsel anbahnen: Ein Kurskonzept zur DaF-Lehrendenausbildung im neuseeländischen Kontext. *KONTEXTE – Internationales Journal für die Professionalisierung von DaF-Lehrenden weltweit* (1), 21–40. <https://doi.org/10.24403/jp.1297019>
- Feick, Diana; Knorr, Petra (2021) Developing Multilingual Awareness Through German-English Online Collaboration. In: Ursula Lanvers; Amy S. Thompson; Martin East (eds.) *Language Learning in Anglophone Countries*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 331–358.
- Feick, Diana; Schmidt, Mareike (2024) Geographical and Spatial Inclusion in Language Teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *SiSAL Journal – Studies in Self-Access Learning* 15 (3), 345–366.
- Feick, Diana; Zeyer, Tamara (2025) Datengeleitete Selbstwahrnehmung der Studierendenkooperation im virtuellen Austausch. *ZIAF* 5 (1), 243–270.
- Halse, Christine (ed.) (2015) *Asia Literate Schooling in the Asian Century*. New York: Routledge.
- Heimrath, Ralf (2021) “I zial äitza twenty four”: Nordbairisch trifft Englisch in Neuseeland. In: Csaba Földes (ed.) *Kontaktvarietäten des Deutschen im Ausland*. Tübingen: Narr, 163–180.
- Hunt, Jaime; Davis, Sacha (2019) Social and historical factors contributing to language shift among German heritage-language migrants in Australia: An overview. *Linguistik online* 100 (7), 159–180.
- Jäger, Andreas; Jasny, Sabine (2007) Zur Lage der Germanistik in Australien. *Informationen Deutsch als Fremdsprache* 34 (5), 472–486.
- Kretzenbacher, Heinz L. (2011) German Studies in Australia: A Statistical Overview, 1995–2010. *German as a Foreign Language* 2/2011, 40–54. <http://gfl-journal.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/20110205-kretzenbacher.pdf>
- Lanvers, Ursula (2021) 7. UK Language Policy Quo vadis? Language Learning in the UK post Brexit. In: Clare Cunningham; Christopher J. Hall (eds.) *Vulnerabilities, Challenges and Risks in Applied Linguistics*. Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 97–110. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788928243-008>
- Lay, Tristan; Feick, Diana (2024) Deutsch als Fach- und Fremdsprache in Australien und Neuseeland. In: Michael Szurawitzki; Patrick Wolf-Farré (eds.) *Handbuch Deutsch als Fach- und Fremdsprache. Ein aktuelles Handbuch zeitgenössischer Forschung*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 987–1002. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110690279-060>
- Lay, Tristan (2015) Die deutsche Sprache in Australien: eine aktuelle Bestandsaufnahme. *Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik* 47 (2), 85–108.
- Lay, Tristan (2020) Australien: Curriculare Umstrukturierungszwänge im Studiengang Germanic Studies an der University of Sydney. *Zeitschrift für Interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht* 25 (1), 886–891. <https://tujournals.ulb.tu-darmstadt.de/index.php/zif/issue/view/78>
- Liddicoat, Anthony J. (2020) The Position of Languages in the University Curriculum: Australia and the UK. In: Jean Fornasiero; Sarah M. A. Reed; Rob Amery; Eric Bouvet; Kayoko Enomoto; Hui Ling Xu (eds.) *Intersections in Language Planning and Policy: Establishing Connections in Languages and Cultures*. Heidelberg: Springer, 115–135.

- Ludewig, Alexandra; Kawakita, Atsushi (2022) Online oder In-Country? Interkulturelles Lernen auf Deutsch in Japan und Australien. *Lektorenrundbrief* 56, 60–67.
- Maitz, Péter (2016) Unserdeutsch (Rabaul Creole German): Eine vergessene koloniale Varietät des Deutschen im melanesischen Pazifik. In: Alexandra N. Lenz (ed.) *German Abroad – Perspektiven der Variationslinguistik, Sprachkontakt- und Mehrsprachigkeitsforschung*. Wien: V&R unipress, 221–240.
- Mason, Shannon; Hajek, John (2021) Language Education in Australian Primary Schools: Policy, Practice, Perceptions. In: Ulrike Lanvers; Amy S. Thompson; Martin East (eds.) *Language Learning in Anglophone Countries*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 135–153. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56654-8_8
- McBryde, Michael (1993) German Possessions in the Tropical South Pacific. In: James N. Bade (ed.) *The German Connection. New Zealand and German-speaking Europe in the Nineteenth Century*. Auckland, N.Z.: Oxford University Press, 5–14.
- McGuinness-King, Kristina (2004) Die Situation von Deutsch als Fremdsprache und Germanistik in Neuseeland: Ein Fach unter Druck. *Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik* 2004 (1), 23–38.
- Ministry of Education (2002) German in the New Zealand Curriculum. <https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz>
- Ministry of Education (2012) German. <https://seniorsecondary.tki.org.nz/Learning-languages/German>
- Molla, Tebeje; Harvey, Andrew; Sellar, Sam (2019) Access to languages other than English in Australian universities: an educational pipeline of privilege. *Higher Education Research & Development* 38 (2), 307–323.
- Netzwerk Deutsch (ed.) (2010) Statistische Erhebungen 2010: Die deutsche Sprache in der Welt. QS2M.
- Oettli, Peter (2005) Germanistik in Neuseeland. In: James N. Bade (ed.) *Im Schatten zweier Kriege. Deutsche und Österreicher in Neuseeland im 20. Jahrhundert*. Bremen: Edition Temmen, 374–388.
- Rietze, Julia (2026) *Identities, emotions, and investments in language biographies of heritage speakers of German in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Auckland: The University of Auckland. <https://hdl.handle.net/2292/74673>
- Schmidt, Gabriele (2011) *Motives for studying German in Australia: Re-examining the Profile and Motivation of German Studies Students in Australian Universities*. Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang.
- Schmidt, Gabriele (2012) The diversity of German Studies students in Australian universities. In: John Hajek; Colin Nettelbeck; Anya Woods (eds.) *Inaugural LCNAU Colloquium. Languages & Cultures*. Sydney: Network for Australian Universities, 221–234.
- Schmidt, Gabriele (2015) German Studies an australischen Universitäten. *Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik* 47 (2), 109–122.
- Schmidt, Gabriele (2019) Förderung der deutschen Sprache in Australien. In: Ulrich Ammon; Gabriele Schmidt (eds.) *Förderung der deutschen Sprache weltweit: Vorschläge, Ansätze und Konzepte*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 851–863.
- Slater, Niall; Peasgood, Alice; Mullan, Joel (2016) *Learning analytics in higher education: A review of UK and international practice*. London: JISC. <https://www.joelmullan.com/wp-content/uploads/go-x/u/f6e2f937-1fb7-47bd-a5e0-7fb3c4d42c21/Full-Report-Learning-Analytics-in-Higher-Education.pdf>

- Smala, Simone (2014) Sole fighter mentality: stakeholder agency in CLIL programmes in Queensland. *The Language Learning Journal* 42 (2), 195–208.
- Ständige Arbeitsgruppe Deutsch als Fremdsprache (ed.) (2006) *Deutsch als Fremdsprache weltweit. Datenerhebung 2005*. Freising: Sellier.
- Tampke, Jürgen (2006) *The Germans in Australia*. Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Ward, Deborah; East, Martin (2016) Is language learning languishing? Stakeholders' perspectives on the provision of secondary school foreign language programmes in New Zealand. *The New Zealand Language Teacher* 42, 44–62.
- Wildfeuer, Alfred (2021) *German Bohemians in New Zealand. A Bavarian speaking community in the Pacific*. Augsburg: Universität Augsburg.
<https://d-nb.info/122784056X/34>
- Wohlfahrt, Irmengard (2017) *Intergenerational Consequences of Lifestyle Migration: German-speaking Immigrants in New Zealand*. Singapore: Springer.

Biographical Information

Jun.-Prof. Dr. Diana Feick holds a Tenure Track Professorship for German as a Foreign and Second Language with focus on empirical classroom research at the Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena. Her research areas are digital media and AI, virtual exchange, classroom interaction, multimodality in virtual learning spaces, and content and language integrated learning of German in higher education.

Dr. Tristan Lay is Chair of German Studies and Director of the Diploma of Language Studies at the University of Sydney. His research spans German as a Foreign Language, Applied and Educational Linguistics, and multilingual acquisition, with expertise in image- and film-based teaching, visual arts in language education, and cross-cultural learning.

Mareike Schmidt is a Professional Teaching Fellow at the University of Auckland and the DAAD Representative in Aotearoa New Zealand. She teaches German across all language levels, focusing on digital pedagogy and project-oriented learning. A former DAAD lecturer in China and Poland, her expertise includes podcasting in higher education and international academic relationship management.

Keywords

German language education; Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand; Curriculum innovation; Student engagement and retention; Blended and digital learning