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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews participation patterns of migrants, refugees, and permanent residents with language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE), at Australian universities in general, and the University of Melbourne in particular. It critically examines the effectiveness of current measures designed to improve the opportunities and university experiences of LBOTE students. Finally, the educational outcomes of this target group are considered in an attempt to establish whether equity policies actually facilitate equality in the case of LBOTE university students and what indicators can be used to gauge the effects of these policies. The report has four main findings: (1) it is important not to treat LBOTE people as a single set when considering the disadvantages they may experience and to maintain disaggregated data on these groups; (2) academic difficulties are caused both by language barriers and culturally-dissonant learning styles as well as the specific social pressures faced by the target groups; (3) students have difficulty accessing specialist provisions due to an overall fragmentation of equity initiatives between institutions, and sometimes within them; and (4) there is a dearth of documentation on the outcomes experienced by the target groups. Findings show that obstacles posed by conflicts between LBOTE students' home and educational cultures and by having to develop proficiency in academic language skills and adapt to new learning styles are disadvantages to many of these students. Contains 35 references. (GLR)

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Equity or equality? students with language backgrounds other than English

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Abstract

This paper reviews participation patterns of migrants, refugees, and permanent residents with language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE), at Australian universities in general, and the University of Melbourne in particular. The study has four main findings: first, the crucial importance of not treating LBOTE people as a single set when considering the disadvantages they may experience, and the corresponding need for disaggregated data, (currently unavailable). Second, the academic difficulties posed by language barriers and culturally-dissonant learning styles, and the specific social pressures faced by the target groups. Third, the difficulties in student access to specialist provisions and an overall fragmentation of equity initiatives between institutions, and sometimes within them. Fourth, the dearth of documentation on the outcomes experienced by the target groups.

The paper acknowledges both the funding needed to redress present deficiencies and the difficulty of assessing the effectiveness of equity strategies. Nevertheless, any attempt to distinguish between equity initiatives and equality of outcomes of LBOTE university students requires the combined use of qualitative analysis of their experiences, and adequately refined quantitative data.

This paper is a revised version of one prepared in the Centre for the Study of Higher Education's Master of Education course on 'Higher education institutions and their functions'.

Providing disadvantaged members of society with an equal opportunity to study at tertiary level has been an issue that has generated varying degrees of controversy and action since the founding of the first Australian universities. Anderson (1990), tracing the history of access in Australian universities, notes the establishment of a reform group at the University of Sydney in 1865. The group aimed to democratise access to the university and to have a more utilitarian curriculum The idea of disadvantage was linked to socio-economic status and gender from the early years of Australian higher education until the end of World War II, when the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training scheme (CRTS) enabled ex-servicemen to gain places in universities. For Anderson, the growth in demand for university education in the 1950s, fuelled by the availability of the CRTS and the introduction of Commonwealth Scholarships and state government studentships, signalled the beginning of the end of the basis of open admission for qualified students, and the start of Australia's transition from an elite to a mass system of higher education.

According to Trow (1973), growth in attendance of tertiary institutions entails both a democratisation of higher education -- which ceases to be seen as a privilege, but rather is viewed as a right -- and a diversification of the student population. Thus the expansion of the 1950s, endorsed by the findings of the Murray Report (1956), continued through the 1960s until the mid-1970s. Throughout this period, the participation of aborigines, migrants and mature age students in higher education began to increase and become the subject of research. By 1973, the policy framed in the Karmel Report espoused a commitment to equity, diversity and participation in schools.

An overview of the literature on access and participation patterns in our universities reveals that throughout the history of university education in this country, emphasis on democratic access to institutions has largely obscured the need to examine the experiences and outcomes of tertiary students with diverse backgrounds. Anderson and Vervoorn (1983) report that the focus of research on higher education began to change during the 1950s. While most research since the 1930s had been characterised by a utilitarian preoccupation with student performance and university productivity, students' experiences related to such factors as their social backgrounds started to become an area of research in this period.

This paper aims to review the literature relating to disadvantages experienced by one highly diverse target group -- migrants, refugees and

permanent residents with language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) [1] -- in accessing and participating in university studies in Australia. The study moves on to critically examine the effectiveness of current measures designed to improve the opportunities and university experiences of people in this category. Finally, the educational outcomes of the target group will be considered in an attempt to establish whether equity policies actually facilitate equality in the case of LBOTE university students, and what indicators can be used to gauge the effects of these policies.

Two points of clarification at the outset: firstly, the use of the term 'LBOTE' in this paper does not include Aborigines, although it is clear that certain problems faced by this group in tertiary education overlap with those experienced by students from backgrounds where English is not spoken; and secondly, while the focus of this discussion is on universitites, lack of specific data often necessitates analysis of trends in higher education generally.

Access

Access has been variously described as popular, problematic (Parry in Fulton 1989) and pivotal. The notion is generally presented in terms of supply, that is the number of tertiary places available, and demand, meaning the number of qualified persons who might apply for these places. However, as Powles (1987) argues, access is a far more complex and wide-reaching concept involving many other factors. Similarly Parry quotes Trow: 'There are hardly any issues in higher education that cannot be approached through the perspective of access and in a way that has the advantage of showing the links and connections among different elements of the higher educational system' (Parry 1989: 8).

Powles notes that much access research has focused on barriers to participation. She cites for example the influence of socio-psychological, cultural, socio-economic and geographic factors. Studies by Anderson and Vervoorn (1983), Wilson & Wyn (1987), Williams (1987), Abbott-Chapman *et al.* (1991) examine these barriers, starting from the assumption that basic ability is evenly distributed throughout society. Anderson and Vervoorn,

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1 I have chosen to describe the target group of this study by the more neutral term 'language backgrounds other than English' in preference to the more commonly-used 'non-English-speaking background'.

Wilson and Wyn and many other researchers emphasise that the removal of structural barriers, by the provision of financial assistance for instance, will fail to ultimately democratise participation in higher education unless broader social changes occur. For Wilson and Wyn, it is the daily experience of power relationships which shapes people's lives and can have the effect of depressing their aspiration and achievement levels.

Selection becomes the critical factor on which access hinges. Selection procedures highlight the tensions that exist between the imbalance of demand and supply and between the different conceptions of social justice and of the educational and social functions of the university. Finally, selective admissions policies raise the issue of the university's autonomy and its dependence on central funding, and thus its need to be publicly accountable.

McInnis (1991) sets up a useful framework for analysing the major conceptions of social justice in access and equity policy. The utilitarian and egalitarian positions within the framework are classified according to their general definitions of justice, their primary objects in distributing justice, their criteria for determining how it should be distributed, and finally their conceptions of equality (*Figure 1*).

Figure 1: Framework for analysis of social justice value positions

	Conceptions of social justice	
	Utilitarian	**Egalitarian**
General principle	justice as welfare maximising general want-satisfaction	justice as fairness maximising benefits to least advantaged
Goal	economic	political
Criteria	deserts	needs
	individual	collective
	merit	disadvantage
Equality	equality of opportunity	equality of outcome

McInnis 1991: 40

Depending on the strength or weakness of positions taken by either egalitarians or utilitarians, this dichotomy becomes something more of a continuum, with equity concepts forming 'a muddy meeting ground' for the two sets of views (McInnis 1991: 52).

For those with an egalitalitarian orientation like Marginson (1986), the notion of equity involves different treatment of disadvantaged groups to suit their individual needs and so arrive at equality of outcomes. In the selection process, this might entail the consideration of evidence of disadvantage and other forms of information rather than predictions of performance; or it may take the form of positive discrimination like the imposition of quotas to ensure equal representation of groups in higher education institutions in proportion to their presence in the community.

A more utilitarian position is illustrated by Beswick (1987) who advocates the distribution of justice according to merit. His reasons for advocating a change in the social mix of the student population are fundamentally utilitarian: in order to ensure public support on the one hand, and because entrants from diverse backgrounds, like migrants, can enrich the university environment. Beswick contrasts the highly complex ethical, political and pragmatic nature of selection procedures with 'the aggressive assertion of the rights of individuals without regard to social consequences. The danger is that the subtleties, complexities and genuine difficulties of selection procedures will be lost sight of and that simple and sovereign solutions which can only do great damage will gain political support' (Beswick 1987: 30).

Unlike Marginson, Beswick supports the use of normative ranking based on aggregate Year 12 scores and quotes evidence of the reliability and validity of this predictive model. Nevertheless, he also proposes an interactive and liberal model based on the use of statistical predictions but adding other qualitative criteria such as work experience, evidence of socio-economic, linguistic/cultural and other such disadvantages. However, he raises many questions about the statistical measurement problems involved in trying to make such different types of information comparable.

For Hawke and Sweet, selection must essentially be fair and effective. Their position is integrative: 'systems have an obligation to ensure that students are equally provided with educational opportunities of a nature and quality suited to their individual needs, and an obligation to ensure that students enrol in courses in which they have a reasonable chance of success' (Hawke and Sweet 1983: 3).

Here the notion of equality of opportunity has a partly meritocratic bias; that is, only students who are likely to benefit from a course should be admitted to it. However, the educational needs of individuals must be taken into account if social and political equality of outcomes -- defined by Hawke and Sweet as access to the occupational world and thus to social mobility -- are to be achieved.

McInnis' discussion of contemporary social justice policy in Australian higher education shows how shifts in the concept of equity influenced the development and implementation of government policy through the 1980s. He notes that the CTEC report in 1984 aimed at raising the participation rates of disadvantaged groups by increasing access opportunity generally. To this end, the Higher Education Equity Program (HEEP) put pressure on institutions to review their selective admissions policies.

As a result, many Australian universities set up special admissions schemes to facilitate access for disadvantaged students. In Victorian universities, for example, there are two standard categories of applicant: N (normal) applicants, who are current year school leavers selected on the basis of their VCE scores, and E-type (exceptional) applicants who have completed an equivalent secondary qualification in Victoria, interstate or overseas. Later year students who gain admission to universities on the basis of tertiary studies commenced or completed elsewhere may be classified as E-types, or in some cases, may apply directly to the faculty they wish to enter. The majority of places are offered by faculties to N applicants, with E-types being offered the remaining places required to fill the quota. In contrast, special admissions schemes admit applicants who are identified as having the potential ability to successfully complete a course of study, but who are assessed on factors in addition to or other than their matriculation results, which may be below the normal cut-off score requirement.

The institutions received no extra recurrent funding to cover special provisions for these under-represented groups although they could apply for additional funds to set up specific projects for this purpose. McInnis follows the shift from this egalitarian position with a view to equality of outcomes, to the more utilitarian values illustrated in the 1987 CTEC recommendations and later clearly embodied in Dawkins' higher education policy statement (the 'White Paper' 1988).

The 'White Paper' linked growth and efficiency with access and equity, and gave institutions the task of setting goals and strategies to improve the access and participation of different groups in their student population or catchment area. These directives were translated in the *A fair chance for all* (1990) policy statement.

The most elaborated and coherent piece of equity planning undertaken by an Australian government in the higher education context, *A fair chance for all* leans more heavily towards a utilitarian approach to social justice. The policy focuses, not just on access and on giving people from all groups in Australian society the chance 'to participate successfully in higher education', but is also underscored by the idea that 'disadvantaged groups form a large and diverse pool of under-used resources' and that their potential needs to be developed if this country is to strengthen its economic base (*A fair chance for all* 1990: 2, 7). Moreover, although it outlines strategies to improve the participation and the outcomes of disadvantaged groups who are not well represented in the student population, it puts the onus on institutions to implement these strategies without providing them with additional resources for achieving these aims.

The discussion paper identified six such disadvantaged groups and recognised that some people might experience multiple barriers to participation:

- people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds
- Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders
- women
- people from language backgrounds other than English
- people with disabilities; and
- people from rural and isolated areas

Numerical targets were set for Aborigines, women and the disabled, while objectives were specified for other groups.

West calls the policy 'a daring piece of social engineering and central planning' (West 1990: 9) but nevertheless notes, like many others, that there is no simple causal link between a particular policy and success or failure in achieving access objectives. Moreover, he comments on the danger of institutions receiving financial penalties or rewards depending on the outcomes of their equity strategies. Others have aimed similar criticism at the expectation placed by the federal government on higher education institutions to expand their services in a climate of shrinking resources.

At least two of the groups identified as disadvantaged by the *A fair chance for all* policy, namely women and people from some language backgrounds other than English, are in fact over-represented in tertiary education in proportion to their size as groups in their age grade. In 1990 for example, women made up to 53.6% of all students enrolled in higher education (*Table 1*).

Table 1: Australian higher education students by country of birth: some key statistics 1990 a

Country of birth	*N° of students*	*Proportion of total students (%)*	*Proportion of female students (%)*	*Proportion of students aged under 25 (%)*	*Proportion in population (%)* b
Australia	355695	80.43	54.5	65.2	72.54
ES countries c					
UK& Ireland	24985	5.65	53.0	37.3	8.46
New Zealand	5826	1.32	55.3	45.4	2.09
South Africa	2381	0.54	52.2	66.7	0.34
USA	2229	0.50	55.1	53.3	0.37
Canada	1457	0.33	55.3	60.2	0.17
Total ES countries	36878	8.34	53.5	42.4	11.42
NES countries d					
Vietnam	5432	1.23	37.3	71.5	0.86
Malaysia & Brunei	4899	1.11	46.7	63.3	0.57
Hong Kong & Macau	4248	0.96	44.9	64.8	0.40
Germany	2159	0.49	55.5	38.5	0.91
Yugoslavia	1440	0.33	50.8	61.2	1.33
Netherlands	1274	0.29	51.3	26.5	0.71
Italy	1241	0.28	50.4	36.3	1.93
Lebanon	974	0.22	35.7	70.8	0.57
Greece	927	0.21	47.9	51.6	1.18
Other NES countries	27063	6.12	48.6	56.4	7.57
Total NES countries	49657	11.23	47.1	57.7	16.04
TOTAL	442230	100.0	53.6	62.4	100.00

a Countries listed separately in this table have either significant student numbers or represent a significant proportion of the population.

b Persons born in each country as a proportion of the 17- 64 year-old population in Australia, 1990

c Major English-speaking (ES) countries as defined by the ABS

d Non-English-speaking (NES) countries - all countries other than ES countries

Department of Employment, Education and Training 1991

Because the DEET data collected information by birthplace rather than by language spoken at home, LBOTE higher education students were shown to be under-represented (11.23%) by comparison to their LBOTE age group (16.04%). The lack of disaggregated data on Australian-born second generation migrants, many of whom come from unskilled family backgrounds where English is not spoken, skews this information significantly. According to the 1990 DEET enrolment data, the most current available, 14% of students spoke a language other than English at home. A survey of student re-enrolments conducted by Powles and McIndoe (1990) at the University of Melbourne also revealed that approximately 17% of the sample (8,157 students) were Australian-born with one or both parents born in countries where languages other than English are spoken. This gives some indication of the importance of distinguishing students from this second-generation group when monitoring access of LBOTE people to higher education.

Previous studies (Anderson and Vervoorn 1983; Burke and Davis 1986; Power *et al.* 1985, 1986, 1987; Williams 1987) have concluded that, overall, LBOTE groups do not suffer great disadvantage in accessing higher education and university studies in particular. With the exception of Williams, they point out that some groups are under-represented. Anderson and Vervoorn (1983) citing research by Taft *et al.* (1971) report that levels of participation of migrant groups, even when over-represented, were significantly different from their level of aspiration. Anderson and Vervoorn attribute this disparity to language difficulties and socio-economic factors.

1990 DEET data in *Table 1* confirms that while first generation Asian migrants (from Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei) are over-represented in higher education as a whole, people born in Yugoslavia, Italy, Lebanon and Greece are especially under-represented by comparison to their ethnic age grade. The percentage of female students from all LBOTE countries was generally slightly lower than that of their male counterparts (47.1%), but considerably lower in the case of Vietnamese and Lebanese students.

Information about entrants under special admission schemes also indicates that it is more difficult for some LBOTE groups to access the higher education to which they aspire. An applicant with a language background other than English, especially if he/she comes from a school with poor facilities, would be eligible for such a scheme. Special admissions entrants however, constitute a very small proportion of the total number of

university admissions - only 2.5% at the University of Melbourne in 1993, for example, according to the university's *Equity plan update for the 1994 - 1996 triennium* (1993) - although faculties are allowed to enrol up to 10% of their total first year enrolments through this scheme. Over 1,800 people applied for admission under the Special Admission Scheme (SAS) in 1993, but only 226 were admitted (University of Melbourne 1993: 18).

Meekosha, Jakubowicz and Rice (1991) report on an evaluation of the scheme by Scholfield in 1988. That year, LBOTE applicants constituted one third of the total number of SAS applicants. Those who were successful were refugee students from Cambodia, Vietnam and Timor (10% of SAS places) and Middle Eastern ethnic groups. The numbers contrast with those of their fellows in the general quota (1% for South-east Asian students) where the majority of Asian students come from Hong Kong and Malaysia (Meekosha *et al.* 1991: 27).

A survey of existing literature was conducted to establish whether those LBOTE people who gained access to a tertiary institution were restricted in their choice of subjects by language barriers. According to 1990 DEET enrolment data, LBOTE students were prominent in Business, Science, Arts, Engineering and Health (Medicine and Dentistry) courses (*Table 2*). They were well represented in Law and Architecture, but under-represented in Education.

Table 2: Australian higher education students by country of birth and field of study (%), 1990

Field of study	*Australia*	*Country of birth* *ES country*	*NES country*	*Total*
Agriculture	2.0	1.2	0.6	1.8
Architecture	2.1	2.1	2.3	2.1
Arts	23.2	29.2	18.9	23.2
Business	20.7	18.5	21.6	20.6
Education	17.4	14.5	8.3	16.2
Engineering	6.4	5.0	12.3	6.9
Health	11.4	12.3	12.0	11.6
Law	3.1	3.4	3.4	3.1
Science	12.8	12.9	12.9	13.7
Veterinary Science	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.3
Non-award	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.6
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Department of Employment, Education and Training 1991

Inglis *et al.* (1992) used 1989 DEET enrolment data to analyse LBOTE tertiary enrolments by language spoken, by field of study and by gender. They found signficant variations in enrolment patterns -- for example,

- more recently-arrived ethnic groups like Vietnamese and Arabic speakers were concentrated in Engineering, Maths and Computer Science courses while migrant groups with longer residence in Australia were more likely to be enrolled in the high status professional areas of Medicine and Dentistry
- students of Chinese origin generally showed strong preferences for studies in Law, Medicine, Dentistry and Engineering
- a broad range of ethnic groups were enrolled in Arts courses
- LBOTE women tended to be in a more restricted and traditional range of courses (Arts, Education and Health).

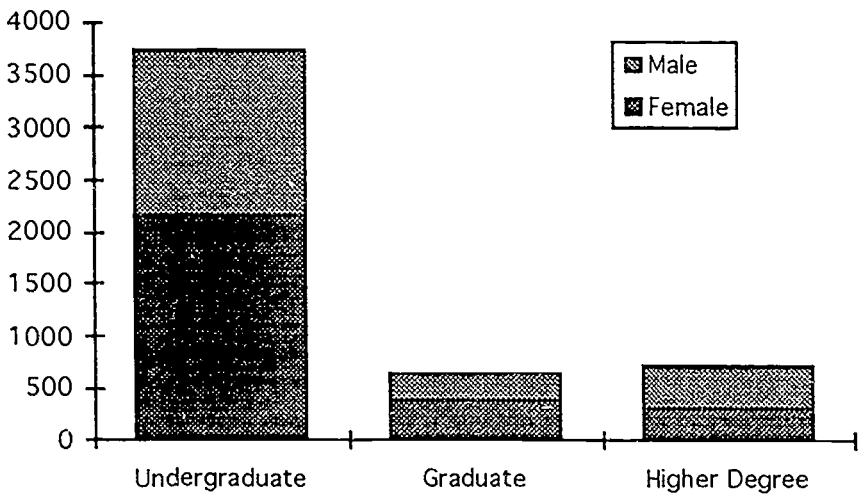
According to 1993 University of Melbourne enrolment data, to LBOTE permanent residents constituted 18% of commencing students, and 19% of all student enrolments (*Table* 4).

Table 4: Commencing and total students at the University of Melbourne (Parkville and Kew campuses) by resident status and language background at 31 March, 1993

Resident status/ language background	Commencing students		Total students	
	N°	% of all commencing students	N°	% of all students
Permanent residents	8375	93	24956	94.5
Language background other than English (LBOTE)	1637	18	5121	19
English speaking background (ESB)	6738	75	19835	75
International students	594	7	1462	5.5
LBOTE	434	5	1284	4.8
ESB	160	2	178	.7
Total	8969	100	26418	100
Total LBOTE students	2071	23	6405	24.2

While the data does not correlate enrolments by field of study and by ethnic group, it shows similarities with 1990 national LBOTE enrolment patterns (*Table 2*). *Figure 2* represents the proportion of all LBOTE permanent residents enrolled at the University of Melbourne by level of course, as at 31 March, 1993.

Figure 2 LBOTE permanent resident undergraduate and higher degree students by level of course (University of Melbourne, 31 March 1993)



Figures 3 and *4* represent a breakdown of LBOTE permanent resident undergraduate and higher degree (Ph D and Masters) students and by their field of study.

Figure 3 LBOTE permanent resident undergraduate students by field of study (University of Melbourne, 31 March 1993)

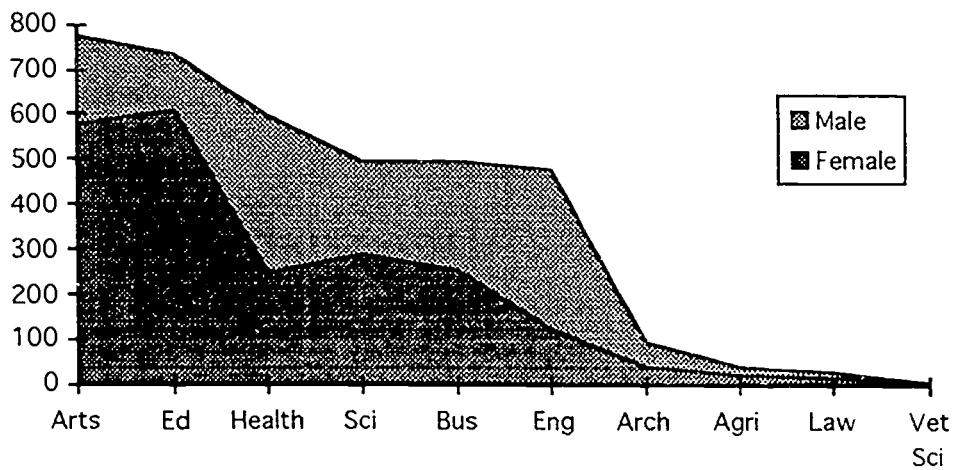
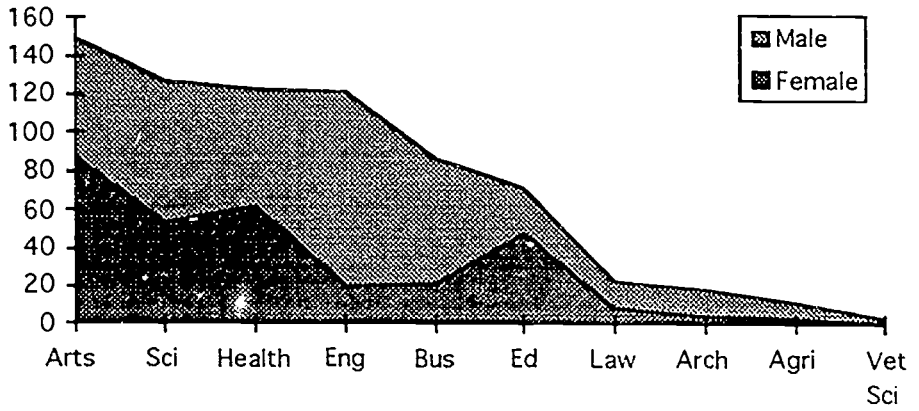


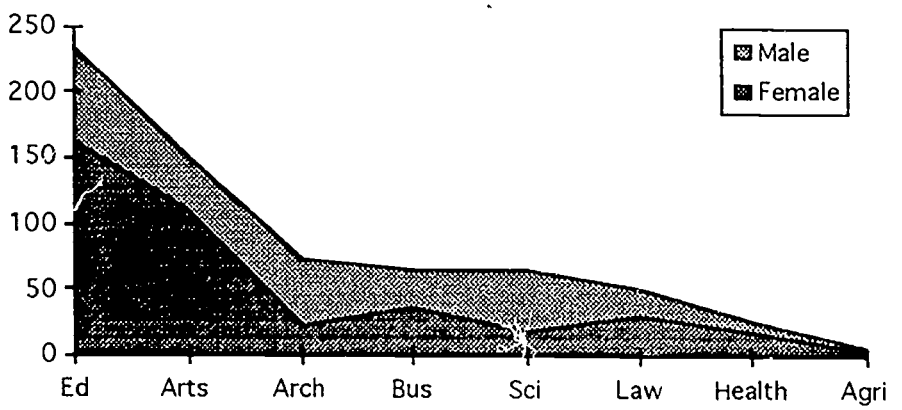
Figure 4 LBOTE permanent resident higher degree students by field of study (University of Melbourne, 31 March 1993)



It can be seen from each figure that enrolments were strongest in Arts, Science, Health, Engineering, Business and Economics and Education, with women making up a very high 58% of undergraduate, and 42 % of higher degree enrolments. The female enrolments were concentrated in a somewhat wider range of fields (Arts, Science, Health and Education) than indicated in the Inglis study.

In contrast, graduate LBOTE permanent resident enrolment patterns (*Figure 5)* differ from those shown in *Figures 3* and *4* by the significantly higher representation of this group in Education, Architecture and Law.

Figure 5 Graduate LBOTE permanent resident enrolments by field of study (University of Melbourne, 31 March 1993)



The Inglis report concluded that in terms of types of enrolments, there is no *prima facie* evidence to show that LBOTE entrants are disadvantaged. However, the authors conceded that high enrolments of more recently-arrived ethnic groups in courses which are less linguistically-demanding may result from lack of confidence in English as well as from community perceptions of desirable occupations.

The linguistic hypothesis appears to concur with data collected by the English as a Second Language (ESL) Program at the University of Melbourne, which shows students' results on the 1993 University Diagnostic ESL Test according to their field of study. Most of the 385 students tested were enrolled in Arts, Engineering, Education, Science, Commerce, Agriculture and Architecture. A slightly higher number of international students (48%) than permanent residents (43%) sat the test, with international and migrant staff making up the rest of the population tested. The students' results on each of the listening, reading and writing sub-tests were graded into 3 categories: those considered to have a satisfactory level of competence to handle academic tasks; those requiring some assistance with academic language skills; and those considered to require more intensive training in English for Academic Purposes (EAP).

Results on the writing sub-test particularly seem to support the theory that students with lower language proficiency levels tend to be attracted to less linguistically-intensive fields of study. *Table 3* highlights the differences in levels of writing skill among LBOTE permanent residents tested, according to the faculty in which they were enrolled. The results include those of undergraduates, postgraduates and staff.

Table 3: Results of LBOTE permanent residents tested on writing sub-test (University of Melbourne Diagnostic ESL Test) by faculty, 1993

Faculty	N° tested	% in satisfactory category	% in intensive assistance category	No data (%)
Law	7	57	14	-
Arts	45	35	20	7
Education	23	26	22	22
Medicine	7	28	43	-
Commerce	17	23.5	41	6
Architecture	10	20	-	10
Engineering	26	8	34	-
Science	24	8	46	8

The figures presented in this table indicate an overall tendency for numbers of students with satisfactory skill levels to decrease and those requiring intensive assistance to increase, corresponding with enrolment in less linguistically-demanding fields of study.

This information highlights the critical need to use refined categories when grouping people to include or exclude them from entry to a course. Warren Piper (1983) comments on the need to choose relevant factors in selection. For example, a relevant category would be the inclusion of women in a medical course, since they would be able to relate to female clients in a way that men cannot. In other cases however, an applicant's 'femaleness' may not be the primary factor that should be used to determine her suitability.

Similarly, both of the most recent studies of LBOTE tertiary students (Meekosha *et al.* 1991, and Inglis, Sullivan and Sendlak 1992) warn of the need to use disaggregated data when considering the access and participation of LBOTE groups. Like West (1990), Meekosha *et al.* see the generalisation of the concept of a single grouping of people with language backgrounds other than English 'as a central problem in both the conceptualisation of the dimensions of ethnic disadvantage, and in the development of effective policies to remedy the situation' (Meekosha *et al.* 1991: 7). Relevant factors in the enrolment and participation of LBOTE students in tertiary education include: socio-economic background, birthplace, mother tongue, language

spoken at home, age, gender, length of residence, motivation level, academic performance, location and quality of secondary schooling, and previous tertiary qualifications.

To its credit, *A fair chance for all* (1990) recognised distinctions that exist between particular groups. For example the discussion paper acknowledged:

- the over-representation of some migrant groups (Asians, Greeks and East Europeans particularly) and the under-representation of others from Middle Eastern, Italian, Maltese and Yugoslav backgrounds;
- the 'real disadvantage' of first generation migrants by comparison with those of the second generation within the same ethnic groups;
- the need to improve the participation of some LBOTE groups by both gender and discipline;
- the disadvantages experienced by recently-arrived migrants whose overseas qualifications are not recognised locally and who need to upgrade their qualifications.

Participation

From this study of existing research, it can be ascertained that LBOTE groups as a whole do not suffer disadvantage in accessing higher education. However when considered individually, disparities in participation levels become apparent. Thus, for example, LBOTE permanent residents made up a substantial proportion (19%) of all students enrolled at the University of Melbourne in 1993. Yet, analysis of total permanent resident enrolments by language spoken at home reveals similar findings to those of *A fair chance for all*: students from Chinese speaking backgrounds, and those who spoke Greek at home constituted 25% and 17% of all permanent residents respectively. By contrast, only 3% of students were from Middle Eastern backgrounds and .6% from homes where Maltese was spoken. Students with Serbian/Croatian and other Yugoslav language backgrounds made up 3% and those who spoke Turkish at home represented 1%. Those of Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian ethnicity made up 6.6%, .3% and .1% of all LBOTE permanent resident enrolments. Female enrolments outnumbered or were equivalent to those of males in the majority of cases.

Enrolments from Sinhalese, Bengali, Tamil, Teo Chiew and Tetum (Timorese) language backgrounds were exceptions to this rule.

It would appear that amongst under-represented ethnic groups, socio-economic circumstances -- particularly gender and factors such as interrupted schooling backgrounds or lack of parental support -- may exert a negative influence on access well before people from these groups are ready to enter tertiary education.

This paper will now examine the extent to which these diverse factors may disadvantage the participation and success of LBOTE tertiary students. A study by Holton and Salagaras (1988) was commissioned by the Office for Multicultural Affairs for the same purpose. Its specific brief was to consider ways of removing disadvantages experienced by LBOTE groups as part of a 'broader conception of multiculturalism in education' (Holton and Salagaras 1988: 3).

A major finding of the study concerned the dearth of relevant information available and thus the limitations of existing research, and the need for the collection of disaggregated data to be undertaken from the point of enrolment onwards. Holton and Salagaras suggested that problems experienced by LBOTE students participating in higher education were likely to be more acute than the difficulties involved in their gaining access to a tertiary institution. The principal difficulties reported were specifically related to the need for students to negotiate academic language and culture, and the lack of adequate EAP and study skills training provisions to assist them. According to the authors, the difficulties were reflected in the withdrawal and failure rates and low grades of the target group. They also identified ethno-centric attitudes among academic staff as a contributing factor to students' problems.

Holton and Salagaras concluded that while they favoured the implementation of general universalistic schemes to address disadvantage and inequity, their study had gathered sufficient evidence of inequalities experienced by LBOTE higher education students to warrant the adoption of ethno-specific, and even gender- and class-specific policies. Indeed, the final section of the paper provides a detailed outline of a new 'multiculturalism in tertiary education' policy initiative, as well as of a number of options for its implementation.

Characteristics of LBOTE tertiary students

In order to identify the issues which face LBOTE immigrant and ethnic university students, it is necessary to look more closely at some of the characteristics which distinguish students in some sub-groups from those in others. Meekosha *et al.* differentiate between six sub-groups with several types of resident status (Meekosha *et al.* 1991: 8). The present study has further refined some of these categories and identified an additional sub-group, while recognising that the presence of all groupings must vary from one institution to another.

A Students who are **permanent residents** may be:

1 Australian-born school leavers from low socio-economic backgrounds where parents hold manual or unskilled occupations and may speak a language other than English at home.

2 Australian-born students who received some primary schooling here, but matriculated and sometimes commenced or completed undergraduate studies in their parents' country of origin (Greece in most cases).

3 long-term residents who have completed their secondary schooling in Australia and whose home backgrounds are similar to those in category A1.

4 Australian-born and long-term migrant school leavers with higher socio-economic status backgrounds. Their parents may hold professional qualifications and English is likely to be the language spoken at home.

5 locally resident, recently-arrived refugees from South-east Asia (Cambodia, Vietnam, Timor), Central and South America, and more recently, Ethiopia. These students have often had interrupted schooling histories and they may have completed their secondary education in Australia.

6 long-term residents who are later-year entrants undertaking further study or retraining, and who gain entry on the basis of their non-English medium tertiary qualifications.

B **Newly-arrived migrants** include:

1 older students whose non-English medium tertiary qualifications are not recognised and who enrol in first or later

year undergraduate courses and/or in graduate programs like the Diploma of Education or the Bachelor of Social Work.

2 older students with qualifications from their country of origin seeking further education and who enrol in postgraduate degrees. (Alternatively, they may choose to retrain and enrol in undergraduate courses). Included in this grouping are a considerable number of Chinese students who were in Australia at the time of the Beijing massacre and who have since sought refugee status.

3 school leavers with overseas secondary qualifications enrolling in undergraduate studies.

C Students in the final major grouping, those with **overseas resident status**, may be:

1 full-fee paying undergraduates who completed their English or non-English medium education in their home country (Hong Kong, Malaysia and Taiwan notably).

2 full-fee paying undergraduates who have matriculated from an Australian secondary school or have achieved the equivalent level of study (through a Foundation Year course, for example). Increasing numbers of international students from the countries listed in category C1 enter universities this way.

3 sponsored students, the majority of whom are postgraduates on AIDAB or Equity and Merit, John Crawford and Australian Development Corporation scholarship schemes. These students constituted 18% of all commencing international students at the Parkville and Kew campuses of the University of Melbourne in 1993 and were mainly from Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, Africa, the Philippines and India. Those with non-English medium educational backgrounds typically completed undergraduate studies and then attended an intensive language course before coming to Australia.

4 a steadily increasing number of exchange students, mostly from Japan and Korea, with overseas secondary or tertiary qualifications and who enrol in first or later year undergraduate courses, and sometimes in postgraduate studies.

It should be added that the university experiences of these highly diversified groups may well be further influenced according to their gender, ethnic and cultural background and language spoken.

Given the aims of this paper, the participation of LBOTE international students in Australian universities will not be studied specifically. It is nonetheless worth noting that they constitute a sizeable proportion of the tertiary student population (almost 5% of 8969 commencing students at the University of Melbourne in 1993 - *Table 4*) and that they also require specialised assistance from university service providers.

The discussion which follows will concentrate on the experiences of students who are recently-arrived permanent residents, migrants and refugees, as well as those of medium-term residents, since the linguistic and cultural differences faced by these sub-groups are likely to be intensified by the relative shortness of their exposure to the English language and to Australian/western society. Unfortunately, none of the avaliable data enables LBOTE groups to be categorised as specifically as has been done above. As a result, particular characteristics of various groupings, like length of residence, may have to be inferred on the basis of data on language background.

Most research which has attempted to identify the nature and extent of problems faced by LBOTE students has been based on the observations of staff involved in support services or in gathering data for policy-making purposes. Not surprisingly, given the current economic climate and the utilitarian directives of higher education policy in the post-Dawkins era, almost all surveys of these students' perceptions of their university experiences have focused on the participation of international students (Samuelowicz 1987; Ballard 1987; Steadman and Dagwell 1990). Even less is known of the way academic staff view the learning experiences of local and/or international LBOTE students. Samuelowicz' study (1987) and Ballard and Clanchy's work (1988, 1991) are the exceptions to this rule. Studies on the problems of overseas students are nevertheless useful, because certain of their experiences correspond to some degree with those of permanent residents in categories A 2 and 5 above as well as with those in the newly-arrived migrant/refugee categories.

Students' perceptions

To date, the most comprehensive survey of the university experiences of first and second generation LBOTE students was conducted at Sydney University in 1990 (Inglis *et al.* 1992), although the University of Melbourne survey of re-enrolling students (Powles and McIndoe 1990) also reveals some pertinent information. The survey of 738 Sydney students included both English-speaking background (ESB) and LBOTE respondents in different year levels of Law, Engineering, Economics, Arts and Science courses. The survey sought firstly to determine the students' ethnic backgrounds and relate this information to their university experiences. In particular, the questionnaire attempted to identify the factors which might have affected the respondents' participation, continuation and academic achievement at university. The second aim of the study was to measure the students' knowledge and use of, and their level of satisfaction with university support services, as well as their involvement in student support groups.

The most interesting results of the survey, for the purposes of this study concern the students' perceptions of factors influencing tertiary studies and factors affecting the participation of LBOTE students in higher education.

In their analysis of the survey, Inglis *et al.* report that one-third of the sample had considered discontinuation, largely because of dissatisfaction with the course or because of poor results. These responses held generally, regardless of the students' faculty, year of study, gender or receipt of AUSTUDY. For LBOTE students as a whole, poor results and course dissatisfaction were less important than they were for ESB students (*Table 5*). For some more recently-arrived groups, like those of Middle Eastern origin, these factors would appear to have been influential. However, given the very small size of this sub-sample (n= 3), it is not possible to draw conclusions from their responses. Overall, and by individual language grouping too, the LBOTE students' ratings of workload were significantly higher than those of their English-speaking counterparts, and were given far more importance than any other reason they might have had for considering discontinuation.

Table 5: Reasons for withdrawal by student language background, 1990 survey

Language	*Financial* %	*Family and social problems* %	*Poor results* %	*Negative aspects of course* %	*Workload* %	*Dissatis-faction* %	*Other* %	*Total reasons* N
English	10.0	6.8	21.7	21.3	9.5	10.9	19.9	221
Chinese	4.8	4.8	19.1	19.1	38.1	14.2	-	21
Western European	-	-	30.0	10.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	10
Southern European	42.9	7.1	7.1	7.1	14.3	14.3	7.1	14
Eastern European	12.5	12.5	-	25.0	37.5	-	12.5	8
Other Asian	-	20.0	20.0	20.0	-	20.0	20.0	5
Middle Eastern	-	-	33.3	33.3	-	-	33.3	3
Other	20.0	20.0	-	20.0	20.0	20.0	-	5
Greek	5.4	5.4	16.2	18.9	21.6	16.2	16.2	37
Italian	22.2	11.1	11.1	11.1	11.1	22.2	11.1	9
Total non-English speaking background	11.6	7.14	15.2	17.0	22.3	15.2	11.6	112
TOTAL	10.5	6.9	19.5	19.8	13.8	12.3	17.1	333

Source: Student Survey Data

Inglis *et al.* 1992: 133

The researchers tentatively attribute this result to the fact that difficulties with English could well have meant that these students took longer to do course readings and to complete assignments. Likewise, the Powles and McIndoe study indicated that course-related problems were more serious for non-native English speakers (including international students) than for native speakers. According to the Inglis report, LBOTE respondents were more likely to be in receipt of AUSTUDY than their ESB fellows, yet generally attributed less importance to financial difficultes as a factor which might affect continuation. This fact is taken by the researchers as an indication of the motivation of the LBOTE respondents and of the degree of both parental support and pressure for them to succeed.

Conversely, in their responses to questions about factors affecting their academic attainment, LBOTE participants, especially those from southern European, South-east Asian and Middle Eastern groups, were more likely than ESB students to report being affected 'a lot' by financial problems (*Table 6*). This concurred with the fact that more LBOTE students in the sample received AUSTUDY, particularly those from Middle Eastern (73%), South-east Asian (48%), Eastern European (43%), Italian (42%) and Greek (36%) backgrounds (Inglis *et al.* 1992: 90).

Furthermore, family-related responsibilities and difficulties were the most noteworthy problem area affecting academic attainment identified by LBOTE respondents generally and by language grouping as well. They frequently reported generational differences and a lack of understanding by parents of their workload requirements or of the cultural adjustments to be made in adapting to university life. Somewhat surprisingly, given the frequently documented effects of gender in the participation in higher education of all women, whether from English-speaking or other language backgrounds, the sample did not indicate any major differences depending on the gender of the respondent.

Associated areas of greater difficulty for LBOTE students than for their ESB counterparts, were problems with facilities for study at home and with having to commute long distances to university. These factors probably contributed to the high rating of family difficulties, since a large proportion of the LBOTE respondents lived at home with their parents.

Table 6: Factors influencing tertiary studies 'a lot' by first language, 1990 survey

Factor	*English* col. %	*Chinese* col. %	*Greek* col. %	*Italian* col. %	*Other S. European* col. %	*W. European* col. %	*E. European* col. %	*Other Asian* col. %	*Middle Eastern* col. %	*Other* col. %	*Total NES* col. %	*Total N*
Low income	13.1	13.6	13.0	15.8	27.8	28.6	8.3	25.0	20.0	-	16.6	693
Employment	17.4	13.6	7.3	21.2	38.9	30.8	16.7	26.3	9.1	14.3	17.2	693
Family	12 3	25.0	22.2	22.2	33.3	23.0	23.1	23.8	18.2	37.5	24.5	694
Ethnicity	0.4	9.1	9.6	-	23.5	7.1	8.5	15.0	9.1	-	9.6	689
Language	0.2	14.0	3.8	5.3	-	7.1	16.7	15.0	-	-	7.6	689
Sex discrimination	0.8	2.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.5	694
Childcare	0.8	-	1.9	-	-	-	7.7	-	-	12.5	1.5	691
Discontinued education	2.0	2.3	3.7	11.8	5.6	-	-	5.9	-	12.5	4.1	684
Distance to travel	11.63	14.3	7.4	15.8	41.2	21.4	8.3	23.8	9.1	12.5	15.7	692
Subject restrictions	6.1	20.5	11.1	15.8	-	14.3	8.3	10.0	9.1	25.0	13.1	692
Facilities at Uni.	5.7	22.7	7.4	5.3	5.6	-	8.3	10.0	9.1	-	10.1	691
Home facilities	4.3	9.3	3.8	15.8	5.9	14.3	8.3	23.8	20.0	-	10.2	689
Racial discrimination	0.2	4.5	1.9	-	-	-	-	5.0	-	-	2.0	691
Accommodation problems	3.8	4.5	5.6	-	-	7.1	-	4.8	-	-	2.0	695
Lack of skills	4.2	9.3	1.9	15.8	5.6	7.1	-	15.0	-	-	6.6	693
Inadequate preparation	6.1	9.1	5.6	5.3	5.6	-	-	9.5	9.1	12.5	6.5	695
Library	5.5	11.6	1.9	10.5	5.6	-	8.3	4.8	18.2	-	6.6	693
Physical disability	1.4	4.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.0	695
Ill health	1.4	9.1	1.9	10.5	-	7.1	-	-	-	-	4.0	693
No. examples of 'A lot'	56.0	47.7	57.4	42.1	33.3	28.6	46.2	33.3	36.4	37.5	44.6	52.7
No. examples of 'A little'	16.5	18.2	18.5	15.8	5.6	-	16.7	4.5	9.1	12.5	13.4	15.6
TOTAL No.	*518*	*45*	*60*	*19*	20	*15*	*14*	22	*11*	*9*	*215*	733

Source: Student Survey Data

Inglis *et al.* 1992: 135

The second main area of disparity between the ratings of LBOTE and ESB respondents was that of language, and for most language groups, that of lack of skills and of adequate preparation for tertiary study. Reports of language difficulties were particularly marked in the case of East European (16.7%), South-east Asian (15%) and Chinese students (14%), although Australian-born Greek and Italian students also reported experiencing problems in this area. Language was therefore seen to be a predominant factor affecting the attainment of representatives of almost all groupings of LBOTE students identified above. Based on the evidence of the second generation migrants in the sample, length of time in Australia lessens its effects, but does not eliminate the problem. Similarly, one-third of the LBOTE respondents in the University of Melbourne survey (Powles and McIndoe 1990) reported varying degrees of difficulty with language, which in turn affected their perceptions of their workloads. It should be mentioned, however, that Australian-born and longer-term residents from category A4 (high socio-economic/professional home backgrounds with English as the likely medium of domestic communication) are probably an exception to this situation.

The last section of the survey to be considered here relates to the students' perceptions of what might most affect the participation of LBOTE university students. As only a small number of respondents, mainly ESB students, completed this section, the reliability of some of the results, though interesting, must be questioned. *Table 7* shows that over 31% of native English-speaking students identified language as the principal difficulty for LBOTE students, and that while this was also a very significant factor for all LBOTE language groups, it was surpassed on an overall and sometimes individual level by isolation (42%). Cultural differences equally received a higher rating by LBOTE students generally and in individual language groups by comparison to their ESB peers. It is interesting to note that in the Steadman and Dagwell survey of international students in Queensland tertiary institutions, social and cultural factors were also highly rated as factors influencing and affecting academic study (Steadman and Dagwell 1990: 62).

Table 7: Factors affecting tertiary participation by LBOTE students, 1990 survey

Language	*No problems* %	*Disadvantage/ discrimination* %	*Cultural differences* %	*Language problems* %	*Isolation* %	*Other* %	*Total* N
English	7.1	14.9	11.0	31.5	8.7	26.8	127
Chinese	-	6.7	20.0	20.0	26.7	26.7	15
Greek	-	-	14.3	57.1	-	28.6	7
Italian	-	20.0	40.0	20.0	-	20.0	5
Other Southern European	-	16.7	16.7	-	-	66.7	6
Western European	-	-	-	-	-	100.00	1
Eastern European	50.1	-	-	50.0	-	-	2
Other Asian	-	20.0	-	20.0	20.0	40.0	
Middle Eastern	-	-	-	-	100.0	-	2
Other	50.0	-	-	-	50.0	-	2
Total non-English speaking	4.4	8.9	15.6	22.2	42.2	31.1	45
Total	6.4	13.4	12.2	29.1	4.7	27.9	172
Total Number	11	23	21	50	19	48	172

Source: Student Survey Data

Inglis *et al.* 1992: 136

The final observation to be made by Inglis *et al.* is that although LBOTE students as a whole did not rate discrimination as a significant factor, South-east Asian and Italian students placed considerable importance on this factor as one which affected their university studies. But once again, the paucity of responses in this section of the survey makes it difficult to draw any conclusions with certainty.

Inglis *et al.* concluded that for many university students, ethnicity was an important feature of their daily lives, and one which rendered them distinct from their Australian peers. Yet the diversity between types of LBOTE students meant that they did not identify themselves within any larger LBOTE student grouping. It would seem that the feeling of distinctiveness on the one hand, and lack of a sense of commonality with other LBOTE students on the other, may explain the high reportage of isolation in the survey. Given the purpose of this paper however, the most important finding of the Sydney survey was that language and teaching structures at the university were the main areas of cultural dissonance, and thus of difficulty for the LBOTE survey respondents.

Staff perceptions

Inglis' conclusions about linguistic and cultural difficulties faced by LBOTE students are consistent with those documented by university support and academic staff. Samuelowicz (1987) reviewed literature on this subject by Ballard (1982, 1984), Bock (1982), Gassin (1982) and Bradley and Bradley (1984). While staff views about the problems experienced by these students clearly vary, anecdotal evidence indicates a frequent lack of understanding of the prolonged nature of second language acquisition, and an underlying misconception that academic language skill training is a remedial activity.

Linguistic and cultural learning problems of LBOTE students

While arguing that the nexus between language and culture is interdependent and inextricable, this paper will nevertheless attempt to focus in isolation on several associated areas likely to be problematic for LBOTE students in Australian universities.

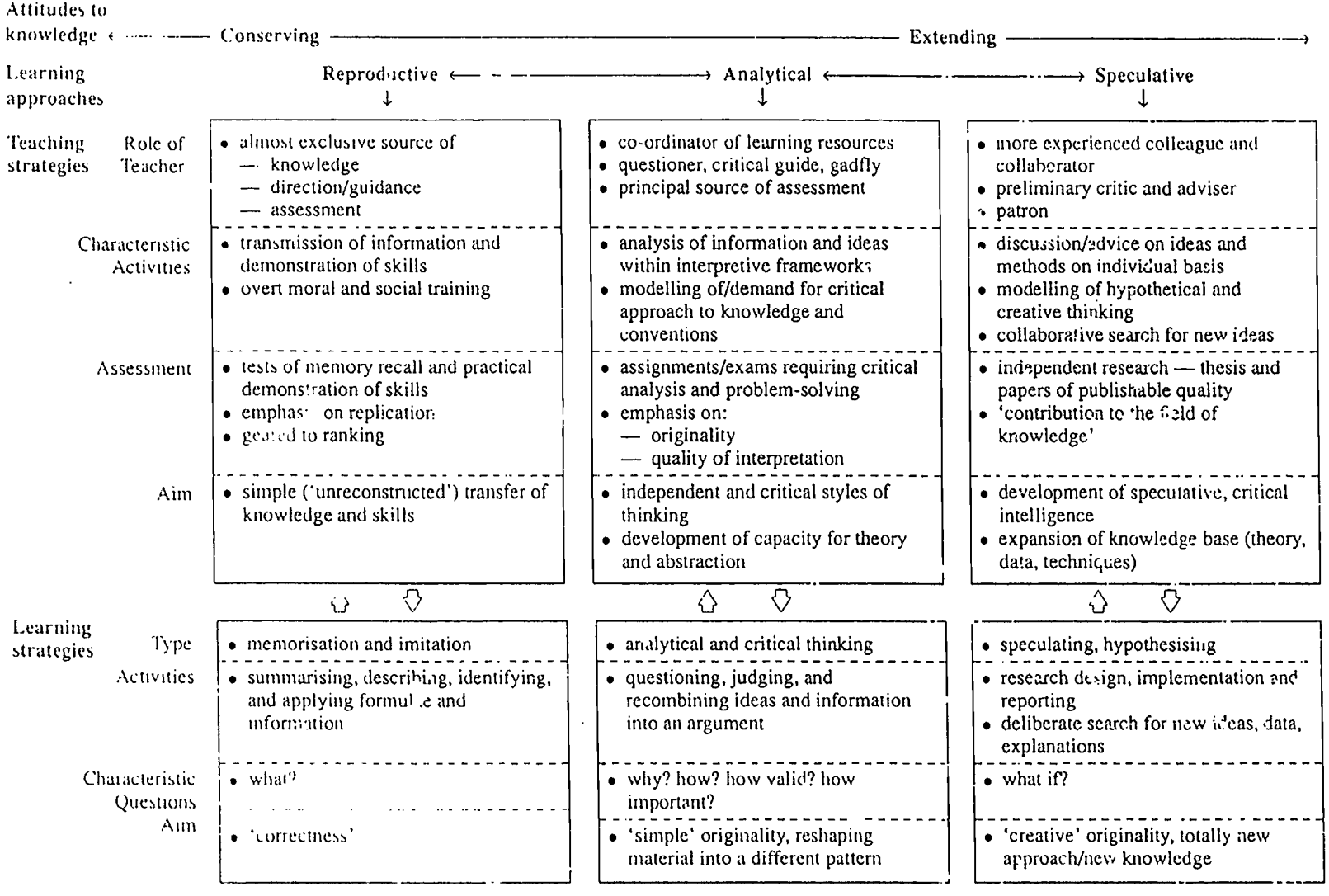
The transition to different social and educational cultures

Regardless of their language background, all school leavers entering higher education, and universities in particular, must make the transition between the social and educational sub-cultures of school and university. One aspect of this shift is the adjustment from the learning styles that characterise secondary school and those required for tertiary study. The framework elaborated by Ballard and Clanchy (1991) to show the influence of cultural attitudes to knowledge on teaching and learning strategies provides a useful illustration of the potential stages of development in students' learning styles throughout their educational careers (*Figure 6*). Attitudes to knowledge and thus the way they influence teaching and learning styles operate to differing degrees within cultures as well as between them.

If attitudes to knowledge are conceived of as being on a continuum ranging from conserving to extending, and if learning approaches of Australian primary and secondary school students are compared to those more typically expected of university students, then it is possible to conclude that the younger the student, the more predominantly he/she will be involved in reproductive learning styles. While reproductive learning activities may sometimes be required of tertiary students - particularly those enrolled in the early years of undergraduate courses in the physical sciences, for example - analytical and speculative modes of learning are far more important at this level. It could equally be asserted that in Australia the development of a student's ability to analyse and think critically takes place mainly during his/her secondary schooling. However, it is important to qualify these conclusions, especially since the application of 'discovery' and critical literacy techniques in primary education, and because of the importance placed on encouraging students to think laterally from late primary school upwards.

The development of independent, critical and speculative thinking skills is one of the foremost aims of a university education. The tasks used to assess mastery of these learning strategies require a sophisticated and specialised knowledge of language forms and usage. The acculturation involved in this learning process is more or less challenging for all university entrants.

Figure 6: Influence of cultural attitudes to knowledge on teaching and learning strategies



Ballard and Clanchy 1991: 130

For many LBOTE students, the problems associated with this transition to tertiary study are intensified by difficulties in achieving fluency in academic language skills. In the case of newly-arrived students or those with interrupted schooling histories, like those from Cambodia, Vietnam and Lebanon, language difficulties are underpinned by cultural variations in styles of thinking and attitudes to learning, and often by gaps in the students' conceptual frameworks as well.

Between cultures, differences in approaches to learning are obviously more prominent than they are within cultures. Ballard (1987) has conducted in-depth research on the disparity between learning styles in traditional Asian countries and those more characteristic of western education. She concludes that conserving attitudes to knowledge and to authority are prevalent at all levels of education in these societies, so that even at postgraduate level, tertiary students may still be involved in reproducing facts rather than in analysing, questioning and hypothesising. In these cultures, knowledge is seen as fixed rather than as being open to question, criticism or extension. Teachers and books, as the repositories of knowledge, carry great authority. In tertiary education, lectures are the major form for the transmission of knowledge, a feature which is reinforced by the inadequacy of library resources.

These differences affect LBOTE tertiary students in Australia with varying degrees of intensity depending on factors like their length of residence here, their home language and culture and their levels of language proficiency and academic achievement.

International secondary and tertiary students proceeding directly to university study in Australia are affected most accutely, as they experience a dual academic and social culture shock. However recently-arrived refugees and first and second generation migrants -- such as those in categories **A** 2 and 5 and **B** 1, 2 and 3 -- who enter university on the basis of other than English medium secondary or tertiary qualifications, also find adaptation to the academic and cultural demands of tertiary study very stressful for similar reasons. Being posed questions rather than being presented with answers and being asked to synthesise and analyse and to distinguish between facts and opinions is very challenging to the reproducing *modus operandi* of these students.

Students in these categories who come from cultures with high degrees of power distance face additional difficulties in relating to their lecturers and supervisors. Because of their deferential attitudes to authority,

Asian students notably have trouble communicating with academic staff, whether it be in asking for explanations or alerting staff to the fact that they are floundering. Students from some countries like Thailand, for example, have difficulty in making eye contact with, and generally relating informally to their teachers, as this behaviour is not acceptable in their society. The students' behaviour can in turn be misunderstood by Australian lecturers and tutors.

Similarly the expectations of academic staff and those of the newly-arrived LBOTE postgraduates they are to supervise may be very much at odds depending on the students' cultural backgrounds. These postgraduates, like undergraduates in the same categories, may be unaware of the standards of academic work required and of those modes of behaviour which are expected and acceptable in the Australian tradition. Ballard (1987) cites plagiarism as a prime example of this mismatch in cultural expectations.

More generally, LBOTE students in the categories outlined above lack knowledge of the institutions and traditions that shape contemporary western, and more specifically Australian, society and culture. The knowledge forms an important part of the 'hidden curriculum' of tertiary education courses.

A further difficulty that overseas and recently-arrived secondary and tertiary-qualified residents and migrants may experience relates to specific gaps in their academic knowledge. For example, East European doctors retraining in Australia usually need to broaden their medical knowledge base, since in their countries specialisation occurs early within medical courses.

Long-term residents with non-English medium qualifications who return to study may well experience difficulties in adapting to cultural differences in learning styles and to the university culture generally, although, depending on their ethnic origin and gender, these difficulties will probably be mitigated by the length of time they have lived in Australia. A frequent example is that of retraining teachers who pass the theoretical components of their course, but fail their teaching practicum because they are unable to manage the classroom in a way which is culturally appropriate and comprehensible to Australian school children. The problems of these students are invariably attributed to language, particularly if the student has a strong accent when speaking English. The real issue, however, is often a culturally-based difference in the trainees'

conception of the teacher as an authority figure. Hence they have difficulties with classroom management and in applying interactive teaching theories.

Even students in category A 1 (Australian-born students of predominantly Greek and Italian origin) find themselves in a conflict of cultures. Values and attitudes -- to authority, in particular -- that are integral to the anglo-centric curriculum are often at odds with traditional values espoused by their families. Examples of this type have largely involved women. Universities, as West says, are bastions of male, middle class, Anglo-Saxon culture. He identifies the experience of working class students, Aborigines, LBOTE students and women studying in non-traditional areas like Engineering as being more difficult than that of more 'typical' beneficiaries of university education in Australia. In the words of West, students from more diverse backgrounds 'are being inducted into a different culture. Possibly that is desirable, but it is a painful process' (West 1990: 9),

Language

The difficulty involved in making this cultural adaptation is compounded by language problems in the case of students for whom English is a second language (Aborigines and ethnic minorities) and to some degree for students from working class backgrounds where restricted language codes and lower educational levels are the norm.

In order to perform tasks associated with academic study, a high level of fluency is required in all four language macro skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Moreover, students must perform these tasks in formal or less formal registers. For example, they must be able to distinguish between the language used with peers outside class, registers appropriate for participation in informal discussions in tutorial and seminar settings and those required for making a formal oral presentation or writing an assignment. Taking salient notes in lectures requires confident listening comprehension skills, an understanding of the cultural/subject context of the lecture and proficient note-taking skills.

Writing essays, reports and assignments which address the task, and are written clearly and accurately in the appropriate genre requires efficient reading skills and the use of higher order skills to synthesise, analyse and critically evaluate materials. Ballard and Clanchy (1988) point out that within academic culture there is a sub-culture specific to each discipline, and

that competent academic writing implies learning the appropriate genre for each area of study. These tasks, while challenging for all university students, pose particular obstacles for students identifed above.

Many linguists have studied the relationship between language and thought. Theories developed to explain this relationship form a continuum, with thought seen as being wholly determined by language at one extreme (the Whorfian hypothesis) and largely an independent process at the other (as presented by Chomsky, for example). Contemporary linguists, would argue that the answer lies at some point between the two extremes. Research into the problems associated with mastering academic writing also suggests that to some degree we do in fact 'dissect nature along the lines laid down by our native language.' (Whorf 1940, in Hudson 1980: 104)

Research conducted by Kaplan (1966) and Clyne (1980) illustrates the influence of language and culture on the writing process and on the organisation of ideas. Kaplan argued that it cannot be assumed that students are able to write an adequate essay in a second language because they are able to perform the same task in their mother tongue. His analysis of students' writing revealed four culturally distinct expository writing patterns. The chief characterstics of these patterns are linearity (English), linearity with some divergence (Romance languages), parallellism (Arabic) and circularity (Asian languages).

Kaplan's theory has generated much discussion and some criticism for its seemingly simplistic view. His critics have argued, for example, that expository writing in English does not always follow a strictly linear approach. Nevertheless, his work provides a valuable approach to understanding the difficulties that recently-arrived LBOTE students commonly face in Australian tertiary studies.

Exams are an obvious example of disadvantage for LBOTE students who are likely to have language difficulties. Writing long exam answers, especially in linguistically-demanding disciplines like Law and the social sciences, is a highly pressurised activity requiring more skill than assignment writing. In some institutions, such as the Australian National University (ANU), students identified as having a language disadvantage are allowed additional reading and/or writing time in exam situations. The failure of the Law Faculty at the University of Melbourne to convince the Academic Board to grant additional time to these students in 1991 is an

indication of the strength with which attitudinal barriers operate at the most senior levels of the academic hierarchy.

Longer-term overseas-born permanent residents who have completed their secondary schooling in Australia would appear to be affected by the challenges of university study to the same extent as ESB Australian-born school leavers. However, for those whose home language background is not English, or is a very restricted code of English, achieving reasonable proficiency in academic writing skills can be a slow and difficult process. Second language acquisition research (Cummins 1981) has shown that academic achievement in the case of a bilingual person is influenced by the level of conceptual development in that person's first language. Thus LBOTE students whose schooling was interrupted and who may not have a sophisticated level of literacy in their mother tongue, typically struggle to negotiate academic language. Even second generation Australians of Greek and Italian origin have difficulties in this respect, as their writing tends to be a transcription of their spoken language and is thus inappropriate.

More recent research in the United States by Collier (1989) indicates that it may take immigrant ESL students between five and ten years to reach academic parity with native speakers, depending on such variables as the student's age of entry, amount and quality of his/her first language (L1) acquisition and education in L1, and type of language and general education received in the host country.

The types of problems likely to be experienced by LBOTE students may to some extent be predicted by the basis on which they are admitted to the university, and for long-term residents in category A3 and recently-arrived migrants and refugees, by their level of English proficiency on entry. Thus permanent residents in categories A1 and 3 are probably N-type entrants whose language competence has been deemed to have been assessed by their VCE ESL scores, or in the case of Australian-born students and those resident in Australia for over seven years, by their VCE English scores. On the other hand, students in categories A 5 and A6, as well as all newly-arrived migrants in category B would be E-types admitted on the basis of their overseas qualifications, and not required to sit any test of their English language skills.

Data collected by the ESL Program at the University of Melbourne in 1992 suggested that Year 12 ESL results were not a reliable predictor of a student's ability to handle academic writing tasks or to have mastered fundamental language structures. Students with scores as high as 70% in

ESL performed at levels below the minimum threshold level on academic English diagnostic tests routinely administered to enrolling students. These students began their academic careers at a disadvantage. Of even greater concern are the E-type later year entrants who are not formally tested prior to admission and who are severely disdvantaged by their weak language skills. Permanent residents and migrants in this category represent a significant proportion of the students enrolled in the ESL Program each year.

Equity strategies directed at LBOTE university students

The study by the University of Wollongong team (Meekosha *et al.* 1991) reviewed measures taken by five universities to improve the participation of the diverse groups of students placed under the LBOTE umbrella. The study found that the measures used by the institutions ranged from 'minimal to marginal' (Meekosha *et al.* 1991: 54). Apart from special admissions schemes described earlier, all but one university surveyed provided specialist English language support for permanent resident, migrant and international students. Other provisions such as study skills, counselling, health, housing, legal/financial aid and careers and appointments services were available to all university students.

Equity plans attest to the expenditure of recurrent funding resources on generalist and specific service provisions for disadvantaged students. The Wollongong research team criticised the federal government's failure to allocate specific funding to equity projects. Staff in language support centres for example are often employed under a different award to academic staff (the University of Melbourne is an exception to this rule) and work on short-term contracts. The precarious funding situation has important implications for the development of expertise within programs and thus for the effectiveness with which they operate.

Research into service provisions for LBOTE students has focused on three main issues: the students' knowledge and use of the services and the level of user satisfaction. Meekosha *et al.* praised the quality of some of the language services they reviewed but noted that although they played a crucial role, the access of the target groups to these provisions was still a matter of concern.

One of the major tasks of a language support provider is to widely publicise the availability of services in a way which will attract potential

users rather than to leave them feeling marginalised or in need of 'remedial' support. Second generation migrants are particularly reluctant to seek assistance because it carries these associations. Language centres need to promote their services effectively throughout the student and staff populations of the university, as well as to key bodies in the university catchment area (VCE co-ordinators in secondary schools, Adult Migrant Education Program providers and TAFE colleges).

The survey of Sydney University students conducted by Inglis *et al.* (1992) mentioned above indicated that while ESB students had a better knowledge of services than did their LBOTE counterparts, more recently-arrived migrant and refugee groups tended to make better use of academic support services. Even so, only 40% of LBOTE students overall were familiar with the language support centre, and again, of the results available, South-east Asian language groups were the highest users of this service.

Although there was no breakdown by language group in the Powles/McIndoe survey of students' knowledge and use of student services at the University of Melbourne (1990), the data shows that a comparatively small number of respondents (30%) knew of services offered by the language centre. As the language centre includes facilities for foreign language learning as well as an ESL unit, it is not possible to specify to which services the respondents were referring. While 17% of the sample identified themselves as having a language background other than English, only 6% of students used the services of the language centre.

One of the findings of the Sydney study was that LBOTE respondents were on the whole less satisfied with the provision of student services than were ESB students (*Table 8*). The study did not draw any conclusions about these results, although discussions with support staff led the researchers to believe that the deference to authority demonstrated by some ethnic groups prevented them from fully accessing the services available.

I would propose, however, that explanations for these results may lie in problems that LBOTE students experience in attempting to take advantage of equity-based services like language support programs, which can in fact have a critical role in their education.

Table 8: Positive assessment by users of student service by first language, 1990 survey*

Student service	*English* col. %	*Chinese* col. %	*Greek* col. %	*Italian* col.%	*Other S. European* col. %	*W. European* col.%	*E. European* col. %	*Other Asian* col. %	*Middle Eastern* col. %	*Other* col. %	*Total NESB* col. %	*Total NESB* N	*Total All* N
Open day	86.4	78.6	92.0	85.7	85.8	100.0	100.0	66.7	100.0	100.0	84.8	99	350
Orientation program	88.3	70.0	85.7	70.0	90.0	100.0	100.0	85.7	100.0	100.0	82.6	109	391
Bridging courses	77.0	100.0	0.0	66.6	NA	NA	0.0	100.0	NA	100.0	62.5	8	21
Library orientation	63.5	80.0	92.3	66.6	88.9	80.0	85.7	100.0	100.0	100.0	85.9	71	302
Mathematics Learning Centre	85.4	80.0	100.0	50.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	NA	100.0	92.3	26	74
English for migrants and overseas students	50.0	50.0	NA	NA	NA	0.0	0.0	100.0	NA	NA	66.7	6	8
Tutorial assistance	87.5	100.0	NA	100.0	NA	100.0	50.0	75.0	NA	NA	87.5	16	48
Learning assistance	100.0	NA	NA	NA	100.0	NA	100.0	NA	100.0	NA	100.0	3	11
Counselling services	82.2	66.6	100.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	50.0	0.0	100.0	64.3	14	59
Health care	95.8	100.0	100.0	80.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	66.6	100.0	100.0	92.0	25	142
Childcare	50.0	NA	100.0	50.0	NA	100.0	NA	0.0	NA	NA	60.0	5	7
Student Loans	96.9	100.0	100.0	66.6	NA	100.0	100.0	100.0	NA	100.0	90.0	10	34
Housing Office	86.7	100.0	100.0	0.0	NA	100.0	NA	100.0	NA	50.0	77.8	9	39
Employment Service	69.7	81.3	71.5	40.0	100.0	66.7	100.0	62.5	100.0	50.0	72.0	50	182
Services for the disabled	100.0	NA	100.0	0.0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	33.3	3	5
Student Union information service	92.5	83.3	100.0	71.4	87.5	75.0	75.0	83.3	100.0	100.0	87.7	73	260
Discrimination adviser	50.0	NA	NA	100.0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	100.0	1	3
Contact	91.5	100.0	75.0	66.7	100.0	100.0	100.0	66.7	NA	100.0	87.0	23	105
SRC	81.4	85.7	93.4	57.2	100.0	100.0	75.0	83.3	100.0	100.0	85.7	56	196
Access	98.1	40.0	75.0	0.0	NA	100.0	100.0	66.7	NA	100.0	64.7	17	69
Student Centre	89.2	100.0	86.1	100.0	100.0	85.8	80.0	93.8	100.0	83.4	92.9	141	428

Source: Student Survey Data

Inglis *et al.* 1992: 140

* The percentage of students positively assessing each service is based on those using that service.

Language acquisition takes time. So many factors are at play in the language learning process that it is impossible to quantify how long one individual might require by comparison to another. Although most support programs schedule courses during lunchtimes and non-teaching periods, because of the demands of their academic studies, many students are unable to maximise their use of the language assistance available. A relatively recent and positive development in a number of Australian universities has been the provision of award subjects in ESL. To date, ten Australian universities (Melbourne, Monash, the Victorian University of Technology, Deakin, ANU, NSW, the Sydney University of Technology, Flinders, Macquarie and Bond) currently offer ESL as part of a degree.

Even so, some students who require this level of assistance are unable to access a credit-bearing ESL course if it does not fit their academic course structure or timetable, or if their faculty does not recognise the subject for accreditation. Nonetheless, there is growing support for change in this direction within higher education institutions throughout Australia, with language teachers working to overcome traditional barriers to the mainstreaming of ESL provisions.

One way of ensuring that disadvantaged students are able to effectively access services that are both necessary and available to them is to make course arrangements more flexible, especially in first year studies, so that LBOTE students lacking confidence in English might undertake only 50 - 75% of their set course load. This arrangement could be beneficial to many ESB students who entered an institution with low or borderline cut-off scores as well. It would also cushion the acculturation process that is such a prominent feature of the first year experience of tertiary students. Nevertheless, under the present AUSTUDY regulations, such a solution would only be feasible if language support was accredited towards degrees, meaning that students were in fact enrolled in a full course load.

A major obstacle for LBOTE university students disadvantaged by their language skills and cultural background are the misconceptions of academic staff about what is involved in becoming proficient in a second language. A very common perception, described earlier, is that students who need language assistance are receiving remedial tuition. Staff who have themselves attempted to learn a foreign language for academic purposes might comprehend that these LBOTE students are involved in a process of acquiring skills at a very sophisticated level of usage.

Clearly targeted staff development activities need to be implemented throughout universities both to increase awareness of the difficulties faced by those students identified here as being most disadvantaged, and equally, to support staff in dealing with these issues. Such training has the potential to influence teaching styles and the inclusion in the curriculum of material that is sensitive and bears relevance to diverse groups within the student population. Changes of this nature can only improve the quality of teaching for all students.

Outcomes

This overview has shown that for both social and academic reasons LBOTE students may experience university studies very differently to their ESB peers. Obstacles posed by conflicts between their home and educational cultures and by having to develop proficiency in academic language skills and adapt to new learning styles disadvantage many of these students, especially those whose length of residence in Australia is in the short to medium (up to seven years) range.

A literature search failed to locate virtually any studies documenting the outcomes of LBOTE students in higher education - i.e. their pass and failure rates, throughput to postgraduate studies, graduation and even employment rates - which might support the findings of this paper. The Report by the Senate Standing Committee on Employment Education and Training, *Priorities for reform in higher education* (1990) cites evidence from a South Australian study on the high drop-out rates of first year LBOTE tertiary students.

This seems to confirm information gathered by the ESL Program at the University of Melbourne concerning migrants and students admitted to undergraduate courses on the basis of their overseas qualifications, as well as about medium-term residents and recently-arrived migrants and refugees who complete their secondary schooling here and gain entry to university courses with low cut-off scores. Program staff have noted a tendency for students in these groups to defer or fail their first year of study. Alternatively, students in these categories tend to achieve lower results in their first two years of university study, a fact which disadvantages them when they apply to study at honours level or to enrol in higher degrees. However, a detailed longitudinal study would need to be designed and

implemented in order to obtain information about the number, resident status or language background of students who are affected in this way.

The problem of unavailable data plagues the whole area of research into access and equity issues in higher education. It is difficult to support anecdotal evidence of disadvantage without quantitative and qualitative data. Otherwise one may place too much emphasis on the problems of diverse minorities at the risk of failing to see their place in the context of the total student population; and the fundamental dilemma for higher education in times of expansion is, it would seem, to maintain a balance between quality and equality for all.

Current university equity initiatives are highly fragmented. Different or similar strategies aimed at the same target group may be adopted by various service providers within the same institution, with one provider unaware of initiatives being taken by the other. In the case of the ill-defined LBOTE student 'group', support services staff may have very different conceptions of what constitute the major disadvantages to participation for these students. Fragmentation within universities (and other higher education institutions) is multiplied nation-wide. In this sense, the University of Wollongong report (Meekosha *et al.* 1991) represents a light in the darkness in which so many support services in this country are operating.

The directives in *A fair chance for all* also made institutions accountable for the monitoring and evaluation of their equity programs and strategies. The funding implications that the overall assessment of access and equity strategies would involve become apparent from the present examination of the great diversity of factors which need to be considered in the case of just 'one' category of disdvantaged students.

However, in addition to funding problems, assessing the effectiveness of equity strategies poses difficulties for higher education institutions. The question of how to measure the achievements of institutions in relation to the social justice goals they set themselves has still not been answered. In the Linke Report (1991) which evaluated performance indicators in higher education, there was a conspicuous lack of indicators to measure social justice and equity initiatives.

Quantification of student admissions and resource allocations to equity targets is not sufficient. Nor are measures of progress, graduation and employment rates of specifically disadvantaged students in relation to their peers, although this information is still necessary. Quantitative

measures have to be combined with a qualitative analysis of the socio-economic, academic and cultural university experiences of these students and how they react to the services provided for them. According to Abbott-Chapman *et al.* (1991), it is not disadvantage alone, but the combination of economic and academic disadvantage which is a strong predictor of students who may drop out.

The findings of this overview would seem to indicate that for many recently-arrived students coming from language backgrounds other than English, the dual effect of cultural and linguistic barriers to participation needs to be taken seriously within both the structure and the content of academic courses if access to higher education is to be for them an open door rather than a 'revolving' door.[2]

2 Term used by Abbott-Chapman *et al.* (1991: xviii)

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