Research Methods in Instructed SLA

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Wednesday 5:30-8:00 pm  Location: Anderson LL-I
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Course description and aims

This course provides an introduction to the field of instructed second language acquisition research. It examines methods for conducting different types of research into second language learning and teaching in the classroom. Students will be familiarized with a variety of research tools for collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data. The course also aims to enable students to evaluate existing studies of second language classroom research, design their own, and carry out research in an instructed SLA setting.

At the end of the course, students should be able to:
- Describe the key research issues and questions that have been investigated by classroom SLA researchers
- Describe and critically analyze frameworks for investigating interaction in the second language classroom
- Contrast qualitative and quantitative approaches to classroom research
- Carry out critical evaluations of empirical research into instructed second language acquisition
- Prepare a detailed research plan to investigate some aspect of instructed second language acquisition

Required text


Recommended texts


All other required readings will be made available on Blackboard and/or a hard copy will be provided in class.

**Course requirements and grade evaluation**

1. Attendance and class discussion participation 10%
2. Article presentation and lead-in discussion 20% (2 x 10%)
3. Critique papers 30% (2 x 15%)
4. Research design proposal and presentation 40% (30% + 10%)

**Grading Scale**

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94%-100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90%-93%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>86%-89%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80%-85%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>75%-79%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70%-74%</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>below 70%</td>
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**Course content**

Seven topics will be covered in the class. They are:
1. Introducing SLA research
2. Researching the second language classroom
3. Common data collection methodologies
4. Data analysis
5. Researching interaction in the L2 classroom
6. Researching task-based language teaching
7. Researching individual difference factors in the classroom

The course outline along with weekly reading assignments will be distributed in class on the first day of class.

**Attendance and class discussion participation**

Your active participation (both on- and off-line) is key to the course success. Perfect attendance for this course is expected. If more than two classes are missed, except in extraordinary circumstances, satisfactory completion of course will not be attained. Each unexcused absence will result in a half grade reduction of your final grade.

**Article presentation**

Each student will be assigned to present two published journal articles to class on two different occasions. The articles should investigate some aspects of second language classroom research and the presenter should provide a critical analysis of the empirical study conducted in the article. The presenter should also provide the rest of the class with
an organized, concise, and easy-to-follow handout that highlights the major points of the presentation as well as provide a citation of the article(s) presented. The handout (and presentation slides, if any) must be submitted to the instructor.

The presentation should position the article’s research question(s) within the context of previous research on the topic. Also, the study’s methodology and results should be summarized. The implication of the findings should be critically examined and situated in relation to the other readings and methodological issues discussed in class.

During the presentation, you should include 2-3 questions that the rest of the class can discuss in pairs or small groups. Please try to determine the most important aspects of the research/debate and be selective about what you share with the class so that you can stay within a time limit of 15 minutes for the presentation, 10 minutes for the small-group discussions, and 5 minutes for debriefing/Q&A afterwards.

An article presentation schedule will be arranged during the first session. These articles to be presented are pre-class required reading for all.

All paper assignments must be typed, double-spaced, paginated, 1-inch margins, 12-point, Times New Roman with your full name shown in the header. All in-text citations and references should follow the APA style.


For electronic submissions, use the following naming convention when saving your file attachment: ‘TESL560’ ‘Assignment name’ ‘First name’ ‘Last name’ (e.g. TESL560 Critique1 Jane Doe or TESL560 Final Jane Doe).

Critique paper

Students will be assigned two empirical studies for which they should write a 3 to 5 page critical evaluation. The critique paper should identify appropriate criteria for evaluating the study based on background reading relating to the type of research involved in the study. Examples of evaluative criteria include:

- Worthwhileness of the research question
- Comprehensiveness of relevant literature
- Design of the study
- Analysis of the results
- Discussion of the results
- Conclusions drawn
Research proposal

Your final paper should be a 12 to 15 page proposal for an empirical study of some aspect of second language classroom learning. Your proposal should include the following:

- a statement of the research problem (i.e. what the research problem is and why you have chosen to investigate it)
- a review of relevant literature including an indication of how your proposed study complements research to date
- the research questions and, for theoretically driven studies, you may provide research hypotheses
- the methodology for the research, including an account of:
  - participants
  - overall design
  - instruments to be used to collect data
  - procedures to be followed in using these instruments
- an account of how the data you have collected will be analyzed to provide answers to the research question(s)
- a brief statement of the theoretical and practical relevance of the research

Academic Policies

1. **Attendance and participation**: Please note that part of your grade will be based on class participation and attendance.

2. **Late Work**: In fairness to students who complete their assignments in a timely manner, late work will not be accepted, except under exigent circumstances brought to my attention. In the case of your final paper, any late submission will result in a half final grade reduction penalty.

3. **Academic Integrity**: As students and scholars, we are held to the University’s Academic Integrity Code. Academic dishonesty and plagiarism (passing off someone else’s words, ideas, or work as your own; copying and pasting from the internet; writing papers without properly citing sources, etc.) will not be tolerated under any circumstances. I am required to report cases of academic dishonesty to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), whose policy is to fail students for the course. For more information, please refer to this site: [http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/index.htm](http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/index.htm).

4. **Library Support**: For assistance with conducting searches in the library databases, doing a research-based study, or familiarizing yourself with APA style, you are encouraged to contact or make an appointment with Alex Hodges, TESOL librarian faculty, at ext. 3845 or email at hodges@american.edu. Also, AU’s library offers a variety of on-line tutorials designed to help you with your course projects. For more information on how to get research help, refer to this site:
5. **The Writing Center**: This center sponsored by CAS offers free, one-on-one coaching for all AU students at any stage of their writing process. Writing consultants focus on supporting the writer rather than producing a product: they do not prepare papers for students; they prepare students for papers. Students are encouraged to call for an appointment (ext. 2991). Sessions begin on the hour and usually last about 45 minutes at Battelle-Tompkins 228. You must have a writing assignment sheet with you at the time of your appointment. Please note that the writing consultants at the Center are NOT editors or proofreaders. For more information, refer to the site: [http://www.american.edu/cas/lit/writingcenter.cfm](http://www.american.edu/cas/lit/writingcenter.cfm).

6. **Academic Support Center**: This center offers study skills workshops, individual instruction, tutor referrals, and services for students with learning disabilities. For more information concerning these services, please contact the ASC at ext. 3360 (Mary Graydon, Center Room 201)