

Research Methods

Labsite Student Study

The progress of ESOL students is followed for up to five years. Students are interviewed in their homes in their native languages. Interviewers conduct periodic oral and written language assessments. The labsite student study will be able to describe individual long-term learning outcomes.

Audio-Video Corpus

Digital audio and video recording of all the ESOL classes in the lab school makes it possible to conduct in-depth classroom research on second language acquisition and pedagogy. Along with the accompanying transcriptions and classroom coding, the digital recordings will be available for corpus analysis for many years. Material drawn from these annotated classroom recordings will be used in professional development materials.

Random Assignment

Students at each ESOL level are assigned to one of two classes offered at the same time and at the same location. This random assignment allows for comparison of experimental and control groups/classrooms. In this way, research in the lab school can demonstrate the relative effectiveness of different instructional approaches and curricula.

Contact Information

The Adult ESOL Lab School is based at Portland State University, in the Department of Applied Linguistics. If you would like more information, please call (503) 725-8772, email <labschool@pdx.edu>, or visit <http://www.labschool.pdx.edu>

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The Adult ESOL Labsite is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Dept. of Education, through the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). The mission of NCSALL is to pursue basic and applied research in the field of adult basic education; build partnerships between researchers and practitioners; disseminate research and best practices to practitioners, scholars and policymakers; and work with the field to develop a comprehensive research agenda. For more information about NCSALL, please contact:

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A National Labsite for Adult ESOL

English for
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NCSALL

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy



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The Lab School: A National Lab site for Adult ESOL

The lab school is a national state-of-the-art research center engaged in classroom-based research and professional development in adult ESOL.

Adult ESOL programs serve recent immigrants and others who may not currently be involved in academic programs but who need to improve their English skills. The Lab School is designed to strengthen programs serving adult ESOL learners across the country through systematic research and experimentation within the context of an existing ESL program.

The design of this lab school is modeled after the "lab schools" found in K-12 education, in which an elementary or secondary school operates in partnership with a nearby university engaged in teacher preparation and educational research. Such lab schools serve as settings where high quality education, teacher preparation, educational research and program innovation and development take place.

The lab school at Portland State University (PSU) establishes a special setting where university-based researchers, teacher trainers and adult ESOL service providers cooperate to conduct needed research.

Goals of the Lab School

- To conduct high-quality research on second language acquisition and education.
- To carry out systematic innovation and experimentation through research-driven enhancements to existing practice.
- To strengthen professional development systems for adult ESOL teachers by connecting the lab school closely to local preservice and inservice training and by disseminating research and professional development materials.

Structure of the Lab School

The lab school is a partnership between PSU and Portland Community College (PCC). PCC is the largest provider of ESOL services in the Portland metropolitan area. It offers adult ESOL services in many locations, one of which is a dedicated location on the PSU campus. The lab school ESOL courses are part of ongoing adult ESOL courses and are taught by regular PCC practitioners. The lab school serves ESOL students from diverse backgrounds. Students interested in taking ESOL classes at the lab school need to register for PCC ESOL classes. For more information about taking classes, please call (503) 788-6111.

PSU is home to an MA in TESOL and a TESL Certificate program in the department of Applied Linguistics. Applied Linguistics faculty members engage in teacher training and research in the context of the lab school. They are involved in systematic experimentation and innovation and professional development activities as they work to improve instructional practices in adult second language instruction.

In the lab school, ESOL practitioners model effective instruction, mentor preservice teachers, participate in ongoing research, and engage in local and national dissemination of the lab school research findings.

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Research Strands

Classroom Practices

There are many practices that are believed to be particularly effective in ESOL classrooms, but whose superiority has not been empirically demonstrated. Many of these will be investigated in the lab school. The areas of particular interest are: the most effective type of curriculum; the best role for grammar instruction; the effectiveness of various grouping strategies; the most appropriate uses of technology in the classroom; and the validity and utility of various kinds of assessment activities.

Second Language Acquisition

There have been many calls for longitudinal research in second language acquisition. The lab school provides an opportunity to conduct such research. Among the areas for research are: the relationship between first language literacy and second language acquisition; the role of student interaction in language development; the roles that age, experience and learning style play in second language acquisition; and the predictable stages of language development in learners.

ESL Program Retention

Typical research in adult education programs involves only those adults who are able to persist in their studies. Missing is the study of those adults who are not able to persist. The lab school research will be able to address the issues involved in ESL program retention including: the reasons that some students persist while others do not; aspects of ESL programs that promote retention; life events that influence attendance; and life events that promote second language acquisition.