Key Features of the Course

We look for academic excellence and value situated knowledge. Our goal is to create an intellectually rich community for advancement of research and scholarship.

The course is unique in its design, providing an opportunity for students with different research and professional backgrounds (e.g. modern foreign language, applied/educational linguistics, community/heritage language, English as a Second/Foreign/Additional Language) to share expertise and cross-fertilise ideas. The course has a strong emphasis on research training which culminates in the completion of two 6,000-6,500 word essays in the first two terms (MPhil only) and a 20,000 word thesis which will be submitted in mid July (for MPhil) or by the end of August (for PGCE/MEd). The thesis entails original empirical research conducted in one or more schools. Where appropriate, issues should be discussed from an international perspective and based on a comparative analysis of at least two different cultural contexts. Students are expected to draw on a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches which inform the development of a rigorous framework for data analysis.

As a common thread running throughout the course, students will be given individual supervisions as well as group-based support during the year. Each student has an opportunity to work with two supervisors with different expertise to complete the essays and dissertation.

Examples of recent thesis topics include:

- Social network and second language learning
- Primary pupils’ and teachers’ perceptions of CLIL
- Learner agency in L2 use in the study abroad context
- The complexity of motivation in heritage language learning
- Teacher and peer mediation in CMC collaborative learning tasks
- The effects of task-based learning on French language attainment
Module 2.

Pedagogical Context: Second Language Classroom Pedagogies across Cultures

In this module we analyse the concept of L2 pedagogy and review key pedagogical approaches that have been dominant in recent years, including Language Immersion, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Learning (TBL), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and processing instruction. We problematise some of the assumptions of these pedagogies and critically debate what constitutes an ‘appropriate pedagogy’. Other sub-themes in this module include Focus-on-Form Instruction, new technology in language learning, language teacher cognition and data-driven language learning.

Module 1.

Learning Context: Second Language Learning Theories across Disciplines

In this module we examine two broad strands of theoretical approaches of language learning. In the cognitive and psycholinguistic strand, we look at bilingual cognition, language processing, and cross-linguistic influence in SLA in various educational contexts. In the sociocultural and sociolinguistic strand, we examine issues such as language mediation and scaffolding in relation to language development as well as the theme of variation in relation to language use, identity and attitude. Other sub-themes examined in this module include learning strategy, motivation, the role of L1 in L2, interaction and corrective feedback.

The staff and students on the course are members of the Second Language Education Group in the faculty which hosts the following teaching and research activities:

- PhD/EdD in Second Language Education
- MPhil/MEd in Research in Second Language Education (RSLE)
- PGCE in Modern Foreign Languages (MFL)
- Cambridge Research in Community Language Education Network (CRiCLE-Net)
- Second Language Education Group Seminar Series (SLEG)
Module 4.

Research Context: Multiple Approaches to Researching Language, Learning and Education
In this module, we examine various approaches, methods and techniques that are often used to collect and analyse language-related data. This module complements the generic research methods strand and aims to consolidate students’ knowledge of research and facilitate the translation of such knowledge into empirical work. Hands-on sessions on statistical analysis, corpus analysis and discourse analysis are provided for the students to work with real data. Another aim of the module is to provide opportunities for the students to develop their professional skills and scholarly identity, through participating in research seminars, workshops and presentations.