



**Title of Report:** Online Professional Development at TESOL International Association

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## **1. Identify and describe the Professional Development Opportunity (PDO).**

TESOL International Association, a global education association headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, USA, offers a number of PDOs:

- Online certificate programs:
  - TESOL Core Certificate Program;
  - Principles and Practices of Online Teaching Certificate Program;
- Additional online teacher education programs:
  - Four- or six-week TESOL online courses on various ELT/ESL/EFL topics;
  - TESOL virtual seminars (90-minute live and recorded webcasts);
  - Twenty-one TESOL Interest Sections (communities of practice) have social networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities on the TESOL Community section of the TESOL website;
  - Periodic TESOL online discussions on the TESOL Community section of the website and through the TESOL Blog;
  - Networking via TESOL on Facebook and Twitter; and
  - TESOL has also had some two-week online workshops for the Leadership Development Certificate Program.

Continuing Education Units (CEUs) are provided for the certificate programs and online courses. The strength of TESOL's online education program is the diversity of formats and the opportunities for interaction it provides, including different kinds of online programs (seminars, courses, etc.), online communities of practices, and online resources (the TESOL Resource Center, etc.). All of these are used in various combinations with each program. TESOL focuses on on-going professional development for ELT educators worldwide.

TESOL has been offering online education programs for more than 10 years. TESOL utilizes over 30 instructors/presenters for its online courses and virtual seminars, supported by three full-time staff in TESOL's Education Programs Department.

## **2. Describe the target audience for the PDO.**

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The PDO is offered to English language teaching (ELT) educators worldwide, whether they are members of TESOL or not. Participants include ELT educators at all levels, K-12, adult, higher education, ESP, and workplace. They may be teachers in training, current teachers, teacher trainers, ELT administrators, and some mainstream teachers and administrators working with English language learners (ELLs).

Participants have a variety of ages and come from many different countries around the world. They choose TESOL's online offerings for a number of reasons:

- Participants have cost savings because travel is not needed.
- Participants worldwide can access resources and professional development (PD) from a US-based international association.
- The format is convenient for participants because asynchronous programs can be accessed when they fit their schedules:
  - Virtual seminars are short (90 minutes), having an easily accessed format with a live event that is also recorded for access if participants cannot attend the live event. They can also use the seminars at their local site for teacher training.
  - TESOL's online courses are asynchronous so that participants can do the work each day/week at the time that is convenient for them (four or six-week online courses are based on approximately 10 contact hours (one CEU) per week).

Currently over 2,200 participants are directly enrolled in TESOL's online courses and certificate programs, with over 12,000 participating in TESOL's online communities of practice.

### **3. Describe how you recruit students for your PDO.**

TESOL uses a number of different marketing tools:

- TESOL's website;
- direct e-mail;
- announcements in monthly PD and association newsletters;
- National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition list;
- help from TESOL affiliates via their e-lists;
- Interest Section (IS) e-lists;
- networking with other organizations;
- Facebook; and
- a yearly PD flyer mailed out and available at the convention.

These marketing tools do not have a cost (except for the PD flyer) to TESOL other than for the overhead of maintaining a website and maintaining a social networking platform (TESOL



Community) for the IS e-lists. These tools have been chosen because they reduce the cost of the online PD program.

#### **4. Describe the curriculum choices made.**

TESOL chose to offer PD online because of its cost savings, the convenience of the format, and the ability to reach a global audience of ELT professionals.

The overall oversight and guidance for TESOL's face-to-face PD and online PD offerings comes from TESOL's Professional Development Committee, a 16-member standing committee appointed by TESOL's president-elect. The committee has diverse expertise representing the TESOL field, including K-12, adult education, and higher education, in both ESL and EFL settings. A three-member staff, all with MA's in TESOL, provides management oversight and additional input and guidance. Additional member experts are tapped as needed through TESOL's interest sections, or people with individual expertise are identified, including individual course developers, reviewers, and/or instructors who design, develop, and/or teach content.

TESOL periodically conducts a major needs assessment survey of its members. In addition, TESOL has on-going feedback and input from various standing committees, the Board of Directors, interest sections, various individual experts in the field (both members and nonmembers), and the knowledge that it gathers from its affiliates, other leading ELT organizations and partners, and from TESOL staff in various departments. All TESOL online programs, from online courses to virtual seminars include participant evaluation forms. This feedback allows for continuous improvement of PD offerings.

Some online programs developed from face-to-face programs and/or other online programs, such as TESOL's Principles and Practices of Online Teaching Certificate Program, which originated from the work of various members of the CALL (computer-assisted language learning) IS.

The student-instructor ratio varies with the type of format used in the PDO. Webcasts have an unlimited attendance. TESOL has two types of online courses, both very interactive in terms of the instructor's role and peer-to-peer learning. One model has a 16-18 student maximum per course with a high level of hands-on, individualized instruction. Another, a cohort model, has 35-50 students normally with a lead instructor and an assistant, where the teacher is guiding and responding to individual students, but there are fewer expectations on the instructor to provide intensive individual teaching. The cohort is usually broken up into smaller communities to enhance interaction.

#### **5. Explain the PDO's over-arching goals and specific objectives.**

In accordance with [TESOL's mission](#), values, credo, strategic plan, and role and structure as a membership-based global education association, TESOL strives to provide a wide range of on-going professional development for ELT educators, PD that is relevant for a diverse, multi-layered global profession, including a balance of:



- (1) core, high-need (in-demand) topics relevant to a very large number of members worldwide;
- (2) high-impact topics that raise the visibility and impact of the field and the association;
- (3) niche topics that represent interesting, important, emerging, or growing trends or needs in different segments of the field; and
- (4) research-into-practice topics with a practical approach and implications, but research based.

**6. Describe the teaching and learning activities used in the PDO and what online applications are used to support these activities.**

Activities include:

- (1) readings with responses/comments;
- (2) viewing of recorded programs such as TESOL webcasts or convention sessions;
- (3) asynchronous peer-to-peer discussions;
- (4) individual projects and tasks;
- (5) group work;
- (6) student-created surveys; and
- (7) individualized teacher/student interactions and feedback.

Feedback is provided to questions or comments as part of peer-to-peer discussions. In addition, instructors provide individualized feedback to students on their work or in responses to their questions.

Due to the widely dispersed national and/or global audiences for all of TESOL's online programs, only webcasts are live events. These webcasts are also recorded so that participants can access the playback version if they are not available to view the live webcast. Live webcasts include some live chat among the participants and online interaction with the presenter. Because of the time zone differences, all TESOL online courses are asynchronous.

**7. Describe how the PDO helps students understand the local contexts in which they are studying so that they can work together with others in the global context of your online PDO.**

All TESOL online courses involve introduction/networking components for participants to share in depth about their local contexts. TESOL's communities of practice (interest sections) and individual courses are supported by a robust social networking platform that allows participants to share information about their backgrounds, update their profiles, and so on.



In order to provide the widest reach, TESOL strives to keep its virtual seminars relatively free of heavy bandwidth bells and whistles so that they are more easily accessible for participants who do not have high speed internet. To facilitate participation from countries with a low per capita income, TESOL provides a major discount to global members from countries with a per capita gross national product of less than US \$15,000.

TESOL has a non-discriminatory orientation and strives to ensure that there is no cultural bias in the content or delivery of its PD offerings. TESOL's governance, management, and oversight structure is transparent and online. Similarly, TESOL's mission, values, and credo are clearly stated online, with additional advocacy or position statements that are backed by actions at TESOL, such as TESOL's position statement against the discrimination of teachers who are non-native speakers of English. TESOL's standing committees that oversee PD and other programs have diverse global participation, experience, representation, and input, with the composition of each committee evaluated each year. While there is always room for improvement, given the complexities of TESOL's network and intercultural work in general, being more inclusive is an important, ongoing goal of the association.

**8. Describe how the PDO helps prepare students for the local contexts in which they will work.**

TESOL is aware that PD participants not only come from a variety of contexts but also will teach in different contexts in the future. Therefore, TESOL offers a variety of content topics relevant to diverse contexts, from topics addressing misperceptions about language issues and advocacy issues to programs targeting teachers with different levels of experience working in diverse contexts, from teaching young learners in EFL contexts to adult ESL in English-dominant settings.

**9. Explain the characteristics of the teacher educator(s) working in the PDO.**

With very rare exceptions, TESOL online education presenters and instructors have a minimum MA-TESOL or equivalent and many years of experience in the field; those who do not have the MA-TESOL have very extensive, high-level ELT experience.

Previous experience teaching online is highly desired and valued, but it is not always required. TESOL staff often train or coach online course instructors on how to use the online course platform. Online instructors are sometimes given the opportunity to take free training through TESOL's Principles and Practices of Online Teaching Certificate Program. TESOL provides orientation, training, and technical support for virtual seminar presenters and interest section leaders, helping them guide their specific communities in the Community section of TESOL's website. TESOL also monitors its e-lists for their levels of interaction.

TESOL often uses assistant instructors or co-instructors, or gives a future instructor a chance to shadow an online course to see how experienced instructors conduct it.

**10. Describe the non-teaching support staff in the PDO.**



TESOL has three full-time staff in the Education Programs Department. In addition, TESOL's online course platform provider can provide technology-related support. TESOL staff support instructors, provide customer service, and manage courses and seminars. They also help design and guide topic selection, working with TESOL's Professional Development Committee, other TESOL departments, and other TESOL-elected leaders.

### **11. Explain the learning assessments used in the PDO.**

TESOL's online courses are pass/fail. They give CEUs, not letter grades. Instructors evaluate the students and report outcomes to TESOL. All online courses have weekly tasks/benchmarks that students must achieve, involving various elements including students' involvement in peer-to-peer online discussions.

### **12. Explain the mechanisms used to evaluate the PDO.**

TESOL strives to ensure quality programs through diverse mechanisms. All instructors are highly qualified in the field and are required to submit CVs to TESOL to be considered as instructors. The TESOL staff overseeing the PDOs all have MA-TESOL degrees (and other advanced degrees in education-related fields, current or in progress) and diverse national and global teaching and education program management experience. Oversight is provided by diverse experts in the field through TESOL's Professional Development Committee, with additional oversight from TESOL's Board of Directors. TESOL also outlines the roles and expectations to/with instructors through the course developer and instructor agreements, including issues around copyright and expectations of instructors in terms of facilitating student engagement.

Although TESOL's educational programs are not accredited at this time, it works with a US university that issues CEUs for TESOL online courses and certificate programs. TESOL is a legally incorporated 501c3 not-for-profit association, with a transparent leadership and governance structure and processes.

All students receive a course evaluation form. These course evaluations are reviewed by instructors, staff, and TESOL's Professional Development Committee.

### **13. Discuss the challenges involved in offering this PDO online.**

Many students in TESOL's online courses are participating in their first online course. For some, there is a steep learning curve, despite our best efforts to orientate them to online work and the expectations of the course. Most students quickly adapt and very much enjoy and benefit from the interactive nature of TESOL's online programs. Many TESOL instructors are doing their first online programming through TESOL, so they require several stages and layers of orientation, ranging from initial information and tips for presenters to one-on-one coaching and training over the phone to last minute reminders about what to do to start up the online course.

As discussed above, synchronous tools are not appropriate because participants live all over the world and in different time zones. Therefore, all TESOL online courses and community



groups are asynchronous, while the webcasts are both live and recorded. The TESOL Resource Center and TESOL's 21 communities of practice provide resource libraries and opportunities for on-going, peer-to-peer knowledge sharing by participants.

**14. Describe the successes of the PDO and explain how they are documented.**

TESOL's online education programs receive high evaluations from participants. Instructors who do not meet standards for sufficient interaction with and between students, or who have inadequate evaluations are not invited back.

TESOL is continually approached by prominent organizations wanting to partner with us in some capacity related to our online education programs, including the US State Department, some universities, and other non-government organizations. TESOL is now offering a customized version of its TESOL Core Certificate Program for the US Peace Corps, as a result of their request to partner with TESOL.