

# ACTION AGENDA

for the Future of the  
TESOL Profession



The demand for English language instruction has grown dramatically as English has become the global language of commerce, diplomacy, entertainment, technology, advertising, and tourism. Most countries have adopted policies to encourage English language learning in schools, and universities in many countries offer classes or entire programs in English. As a result, TESOL educators around the world have seen English learner populations grow and change dramatically at all educational levels.

**D**espite the skyrocketing demand for experienced and knowledgeable English language educators, many TESOL professionals are not invited to participate in the decision-making that drives policy, high-stakes assessments, materials development, research, and practice—all of which directly affect their learners. For decades, non-TESOL professionals have been able to manipulate the profession's direction. Occasionally, and thankfully, TESOL professionals have been able to advocate for improvements to English language instruction and lead innovation. All too often, however, they have remained on the margins, left to implement policies and use textbooks, curricula, and assessments that others, from outside of the classroom, have assigned or designed.

So, how can TESOL professionals take the lead when advocating for new and innovative policies? How should TESOL professionals be empowered to initiate and sustain innovation and foster positive change? What role can stakeholders in the TESOL profession play in shaping the future of English language education? What does this high demand for English language skills and instruction mean for the TESOL profession? And how should this demand and changes in learner populations be addressed?

Recognizing the need to answer these questions and map out a clear direction for the profession, TESOL International Association spearheaded the **Summit on the Future of the TESOL Profession** in 2017. In development for nearly 2 years, the summit helped shape a strategic conversation intended to set a course for the future of the TESOL profession, and develop a vision for the TESOL profession to embrace over the next several decades.

The ideas, recommendations, conclusions, and outcomes conceived at the summit have been synthesized into this strategic action agenda, which is intended to serve as a guiding framework for the TESOL profession at the local, regional, national, and international levels. It consists of five priorities and related action steps that TESOL professionals and stakeholders can implement globally to strengthen local initiatives for English language policies, practices, research, and instruction. We invite all stakeholders (policymakers, professional organizations, teacher preparation faculty, materials and assessment writers, administrators, teachers, and all others engaged in English language teaching) to identify and pursue the priorities and actions most relevant to them and their sphere of influence. By acting on this agenda, we can collectively ensure that the profession continues to meet the needs of the ever-changing, ever-growing global population of English language learners for decades to come.

TESOL International Association calls on the broad, diverse community of TESOL professionals and stakeholders to implement this action agenda globally, in all contexts, so that English language instruction, research, policy, and materials will

- ▶ **reflect** the knowledge and expertise of the TESOL profession,
- ▶ **enhance** English language instruction and improve language skills for learners, and
- ▶ **empower** TESOL professionals and the English learners they serve.

We can only accomplish this  
if all stakeholders work together  
toward common goals.

# PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS

## **PRIORITY 1: STRENGTHEN THE STATUS AND VISIBILITY OF THE PROFESSION**

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English language instruction is in high demand worldwide, yet the value and expertise of the TESOL profession are often unnoticed and undervalued. The expert insights of TESOL professionals are needed to provide positive direction to the development and implementation of innovative policies and practices.

As outcomes of successfully pursuing this priority, policymakers, stakeholders, and the general public will have an increased appreciation for the TESOL professions; misperceptions surrounding language policy, practice, and research will be dispelled; and a community dedicated to professional collaboration will lift up the legitimacy of the profession.

To be successful in meeting this priority, we must increase accessibility to professional teacher associations, strengthen partnerships with not-for-profit and nongovernmental organizations, and establish a more visible public presence, especially on social media.

### **ACTION STEPS**

- ▶ **Involve TESOL professionals** and incorporate their knowledge, experience, and expertise in policy development and implementation at local and national levels.
- ▶ **Collaborate with other organizations** and professional associations to build professional capacity, increase stakeholder outreach, and cultivate change.
- ▶ **Facilitate online and face-to-face opportunities** for educators to establish practices that challenge norms, share ideas for innovative policies, and empower one another as valued members of their communities.
- ▶ **Commit to policies** that recognize, support, and value the unique knowledge and expertise of TESOL professionals.
- ▶ **Disseminate TESOL professional knowledge** and resources to stakeholders who influence the profession.
- ▶ **Improve TESOL professionals' technological and digital media skills** required to leverage the visibility of the profession through social media.

## **PRIORITY 2: REDESIGN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMS TO FOSTER GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT**

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The quality of English language education varies from place to place, largely according to differences in resources and access to quality TESOL preparation and professional development. Acknowledging and respecting different languages and cultural traditions around the world is a valuable element of global engagement. Linguistic diversity also serves as a key resource for English language education. High-quality language education recognizes that language is a flexible tool

for communication that is shaped by specific purposes and contexts and that language learning is an extension of the linguistic diversity that learners bring to the classroom.

As an outcome of successfully pursuing this priority, the positive value of multilingualism in English language teaching will be increased while simultaneously fostering global engagement.

To be successful in meeting this priority, we must support professional development programs that embrace adapted curricula, materials, and assessments, and we must support teacher preparation programs that leverage the diverse, multilingual experiences that English language learners bring to the classroom.

### **ACTION STEPS**

- ▶ **Engage in practices that recognize multilingualism** as an asset to English language teaching that positively influences language outcomes, innovation, and practice.
- ▶ **Enhance intercultural communication** and the development of global engagement in English language education programs.
- ▶ **Expand** the capability, accessibility, and skill sets of educators to use technology in professional and student learning.
- ▶ **Establish practices** that ensure TESOL professionals understand contemporary ideas and theories regarding language, pedagogy, and the roles of English as a world language, allowing for informed instructional decisions and practices.
- ▶ **Encourage educators** at all levels of experience to reflect critically on established practices and to enact change when needed.

## **PRIORITY 3: MOBILIZE LEADERS TO CONFRONT AND EMBRACE THE CHALLENGES AND COMPLEXITIES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING**

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TESOL educators, who have professional credentials and qualifications so that they can be effective teachers, should be able to address the variety of social, cultural, and political issues that impact their teaching and their students. It is critical to the profession that educators leverage their expertise, experiences, and knowledge to become the leading voices in English language teaching policy and education reform efforts around the world. TESOL professionals must champion their importance, affirm their value, and fulfill their role in educating every generation of English speakers.

As an outcome of successfully pursuing this priority, TESOL professionals will become engaged in advocating for and developing better policies, which will lead to improved learning opportunities and outcomes for their students.

To be successful in meeting this priority, we must ensure that educators have support to develop leadership, communication, and advocacy skills.

## ACTION STEPS

- ▶ **Provide opportunities** for English language educators to demonstrate their expertise.
- ▶ **Design teacher preparation and professional development programs** that empower and encourage English language teachers to advocate for positive change.
- ▶ **Create diverse career paths** that enrich the profession.
- ▶ **Promote professional growth opportunities** to all educators throughout their careers.
- ▶ **Commit to policies** that directly address the social justice, equity, and human diversity issues that affect learners' access to a high-quality English language education.
- ▶ **Support efforts** to make TESOL professional preparation programs more proactive in responding to the changing uses of English and varying configurations of professional teacher education.

## PRIORITY 4: EXPAND CAPACITY FOR INCLUSIVE AND COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH

Practice and policy must be research based, meaning that research should inform practice and policy as much as policy and practice should inform research. This premise suggests that TESOL professionals and policymakers create opportunities to collaborate on research, collect meaningful information, measure results, and implement change.

As an outcome of successfully pursuing this priority, TESOL professionals and researchers will ask relevant and pertinent questions that will lead to improved instruction, assessment, and learner outcomes.

To be successful in meeting this priority, we must provide research opportunities for educators and opportunities for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to discuss common trends and collaborate on the issues they agree must be addressed to advance the profession.

## ACTION STEPS

- ▶ **Widely disseminate the findings** of robust research to reach all sectors of the TESOL community, especially when those findings offer conclusive answers to relevant questions.
- ▶ **Leverage evidence-based solutions** to inform policy-making and professional practices.
- ▶ **Encourage inquiry** on the impact of global and future trends on practice and the profession.

A result of the 2017 Summit on the Future of the TESOL Profession, the *Action Agenda for the Future of the TESOL Profession* details the challenges that face the profession while providing thoughtful solutions to ensure the advancement and sustainability of the TESOL profession for many years to come.

Read the full *Action Agenda for the Future of the TESOL Profession* by visiting [www.tesol.org/actionagenda](http://www.tesol.org/actionagenda)

- ▶ **Facilitate collaborative research** that is inclusive of local needs and different ways of learning.
- ▶ **Provide TESOL professionals and stakeholders with resources and opportunities** to propose and collaborate on research questions, collect information, investigate issues, and effect change.

## PRIORITY 5: CULTIVATE A CULTURE OF INNOVATION THAT IS RESPONSIVE TO GLOBAL TRENDS

TESOL professionals must be aware of the global political, economic, social, intercultural, legal, and digital megatrends that affect English language education and address these trends both in and outside of the classroom. TESOL professionals understand how teaching English can impact broader concerns. Though English language proficiency can offer a gateway to success on an individual level, limited access to language education can exacerbate, rather than alleviate, global inequity. Those without access to education programs are at a severe disadvantage when compared with those who are able to access and afford quality English language instruction. This inequality is especially prevalent in conflict zones, places disrupted by political instability, and under-resourced areas around the world.

As an outcome of successfully pursuing this priority, TESOL professionals will remain globally connected and engaged, anticipate the many changes that impact English language education, and be able to address potential setbacks before they occur.

To be successful in meeting this priority, we must expand global connectivity among TESOL professionals, create partnerships among government and nongovernmental organizations, and anticipate the many changes that impact English language education through collaborative problem-solving.

## ACTION STEPS

- ▶ **Identify and disseminate information** on appropriate practices to leverage limited resources.
- ▶ **Enhance multimedia critical literacy skills and capabilities** in all teacher education and English language education programs.
- ▶ **Ensure that policies provide equitable access** to high-quality English language instruction opportunities, curricula, and materials.
- ▶ **Consider and discuss changes** that could impact English language education so that challenges may be anticipated and transformed into opportunities for learner success.

To learn more about TESOL International Association visit [www.tesol.org](http://www.tesol.org)

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