2012 TESOL International Association Professional Development Needs Survey

Key Trends in Primary and Secondary EFL

TESOL International Association conducted surveys of TESOL members and nonmembers in January and February 2012 to learn more about the professional development needs of specific groups within the English language teaching field. The surveys included both quantitative and qualitative questions.

Key trends from the survey on primary and secondary EFL are provided below, along with the insights of various member experts who participated in additional qualitative data collection.

Respondents to the primary and secondary EFL survey

This survey was sent to TESOL members and nonmembers in EFL countries worldwide who had primary and secondary EFL selected in their TESOL profile. In addition, the survey was also sent to the leaders of TESOL affiliates in EFL countries, asking them to share the survey with those working in primary and secondary education.

- Of the 215 respondents, the vast majority were members of TESOL International Association (72%). A significant number were members of state, provincial, or regional professional groups or associations for English teachers or of the TESOL International Association affiliates in their area.

- Respondents were from 77 EFL countries, most (77%) of whom work in urban areas and in only one school (62%), but a significant number (39%) work in two or more schools.

- Most of the participants have taught in the primary or secondary school EFL area for more than 6 years (72%), with only 10% having 2 years of experience or less.

- The respondents have education relevant to their field: 59% have a bachelor’s degree, 34% in TESOL or applied linguistics, 25% in some other subject, while 43% have a master’s degree and 9% have a doctoral degree in TESOL or applied linguistics.

Key trends and concerns

Teacher training and professional development

- One of the key concerns is the small number of properly trained EFL teachers.
The emerging issue in EFL in secondary education is the lack of trained teachers [...] (Mawa Samb).

[T]he real issues I can highlight are several: very weak initial teacher training programs, where teachers graduate without speaking the language properly, nor knowing how to teach it because they had a very superficial methodology component. So students in primary and secondary schools are taught grammar rules and grammar formulae with a few examples in the local language. (Mary Jane Abrahams)

Universities don’t have updated programs or professors to deal with pre and/or in-service teacher development [...].) (Mary Jane Abrahams)

• Thus, there is a need for additional professional development.

I do believe we need more workshops, symposiums and trainings to cope with that dramatic situation because the more we go, the more we are having untrained teachers who proliferate in the system. (Mawa Samb)

• Several topics for future professional development opportunities were identified: effective use of technology in teaching; strategies and techniques for working with diverse learners; understanding of EFL assessment issues; teaching theories and research (for those doing teacher training); teaching reading to non-literate students (or nonreaders); understanding of practices and strategies for planning and implementing instruction; and strategies and techniques for working with content-area teachers and administrators.

• Webinars, in-person workshops, books, e-books, online courses, and online workshops are preferred ways of accessing professional development. Here is a sample comment:

Webinars are great, especially for us, teachers in Latin America, with little or no chances of attending training abroad. In-person teacher exchanges, workshops, and any other personal contact with specialists and other teachers are of course really powerful...
• Several factors affect the quality of teaching in EFL contexts such as not enough teachers properly trained in EFL; low salaries; or lack of funding or support for teacher professional development. See Figure 1 for more factors that impact the quality of teaching in EFL contexts.

![Figure 1: Factors Impacting the Quality of EFL Teaching](image)

**Teaching context**

• Among the challenges EFL professionals face are mixed-ability classes; time allotted to EFL in the school curriculum; lack of resources; teacher training and professional development; high-stakes exams and district or ministry of education requirements; teachers’ English language ability; English-only communication in the classroom; and motivating and engaging students. Here are some sample comments from respondents:

  *We only have 4 hours a week [of EFL in our school curriculum] so we do not have enough time to practice the oral part. Nevertheless, we try to make conversation practice as often as we can.*

  *Most students are not motivated, in part because they study a lot of subjects. The curriculum is too long and boring, so we only prepare students for the exams/accuracy, not for using English outside school.*

• Grammar-based teaching versus communicative-based teaching. Here are two sample comments:
The other thing is as we deal with communicative teaching, many teachers find the easy way that is to deal with reading comprehensions and grammar all year long without any lesson plan (just following the textbook lesson). (Mawa Samb)

[...]very weak initial teacher training programs [...]. So students in primary and secondary schools are taught grammar rules and grammar formulae with a few examples in the local language.

TESOL wishes to thank the following TESOL members for taking time to share their insights: Mary Jane Abrahams, Director, Pedagogía en Inglés, Facultad de Educación, Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Santiago, Chile; and Mawa Samb, Trainer and Pedagogic Advisor at CRFPE (in-service and preservice unit at the Ministry of Education), Dakar, Senegal.