

Position Statement on English as a Global Language

For the past several decades, English has grown into the primary language for international communication. As a result of complex economic, cultural, and technological forces, such as the growth of international trade and the Internet, the English language is now used worldwide, with a geographic spread unique among all world languages.

English has become a “lingua franca,” or common language, in many regions throughout the world. In the European Union, for example, English is recognized as common working language and a language of contact, and is similarly used as such in many areas in Southeast Asia. As a result, the vast majority of those using English worldwide are themselves nonnative speakers. This has had a profound effect on both the ways English language teaching (ELT) is practiced and the language itself.

The English language has developed into multiple varieties throughout the world, known as “world Englishes.” These include the standard Englishes spoken in Anglophone countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, as well local varieties in regions of the world such as India, Africa, and the Caribbean. The concept of world Englishes itself is rooted in the social and functional realities of language users in a particular context. Such versatility of the language also allows nonnative speakers to use their own local words and expressions in their discourse, thus combining communication and culture within these world Englishes.

Given the broad geographic spread of English, and the variety of world Englishes being spoken globally, English is seen less and less as a “foreign” language, and more as an additional language. In other words, learning English is no longer viewed as something optional, but essential. English has become the most widely taught language in the world, and numerous countries have instituted English as a required subject for all students, often starting at very young ages. With English being taught globally for very diverse purposes, a singular or monolithic approach to the modeling of English is no longer tenable.

As a global professional association, TESOL values individual language rights, collaboration in a global community, and respect for diversity and multiculturalism. In accordance with its *Position Statement on Language Varieties* (1996), TESOL encourages the recognition and appreciation of all varieties of English, including dialects, creoles, and world Englishes. In terms of language teaching, TESOL does not advocate one standard or variety of English over another. Rather, TESOL urges English language teachers to make informed decisions at local, regional, and/or national levels, taking into account the purposes and contexts of use that are most relevant to their learners.

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Resources

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*Approved by the Board of Directors
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