

Position Statement on Independent Short-Term TESL/TEFL Certificate Programs

Given the diversity of global contexts in which English language teaching takes place, many starting in the field and profession of English as a second, foreign, or additional language teaching pursue an entry-level credential through short-term TESL/TEFL (or TESOL or EAL) certificate programs. A short-term TESL/TEFL certificate program typically is a full-time intensive program or a series of part-time online courses running 4–6 weeks or longer. Although accredited post-secondary institutions may offer credit-bearing TESL/TEFL certificate programs, independent TESL/TEFL certificate programs are typically neither accredited nor affiliated with an accredited postsecondary institution.

Independent short-term TESL/TEFL certificate programs differ from other academic programs in that they are typically non-degree-granting programs that award a certificate only to those participants who achieve the learning goals of the program. Completion of a short-term TESL/TEFL certificate program should not be confused or equated with teacher certification, which refers to the credentialing process that must be completed in order to teach in certain settings, such as public schools in the United States.

TESOL recommends that an independent short-term TESL/TEFL certificate program be taught by qualified and experienced teacher educators in the field of English language teaching. Such programs must offer a balance of theory and practice regarding pedagogy and methodology in second language acquisition, including aspects of linguistics, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, the structure of English, methodology of teaching and assessing English, literacy development, curriculum and materials development, assessment, and cross-cultural communication. In addition, such programs must offer a minimum of at least 100 instructional hours plus supervised practice teaching and classroom observation components. Similarly, online professional development components of independent short-term TESL/TEFL certificate programs should be taught by qualified teacher educators who are also experienced and effective online instructors.

Institutions or organizations sponsoring or managing independent short-term TESL/TEFL programs should provide organizational transparency and demonstrate continuous quality control and improvement in areas such as program development, planning, instruction, administration, assessment, and evaluation tied to stated learner outcomes. Any claims of accreditation or adherence to particular standards by an independent short-term TESL/TEFL program should be backed up with clear documentation. In addition, appropriate explanation, definitions, and/or disclaimers should be provided related to the nature of the certificate provided.

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Although a short-term TESL/TEFL certificate may be considered as a first professional credential for the TESOL field, and may be an acceptable minimum qualification to teach in certain settings, it alone is not a sufficient qualification to teach in many institutions. Many positions in the field require a longer-term graduate degree, such as a Master's degree. Candidates should check with potential employers directly regarding required teaching credentials.

Approved by the Board of Directors

June 2003

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