



Teachers of English to Speakers
of Other Languages, Inc.
A Global Education Association

Joint Statement on the Teacher English Fluency Initiative in Arizona



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According to recent media reports, the Arizona Department of Education has mandated that teachers whose spoken English it deems to be heavily accented or ungrammatical must be removed from classes for students still learning English. It is reported the intent of this initiative is to ensure that students with limited English have teachers who speak the language flawlessly.

For decades the field of English language teaching has suffered from the myth that one only needs to be a native English speaker in order to teach the English language. The myth further implicates that native English speakers make better English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers than nonnative English speakers because native English speakers are perceived to speak “unaccented” English and understand and use idiomatic expressions fluently. The distinction between native and nonnative speakers of English presents an oversimplified, either/or classification system that is not only misleading, but also ignores the formal education, linguistic expertise, teaching experience, and professional preparation of educators in the field of English language teaching.

TESOL has long opposed discrimination against nonnative English speakers in the field of English language teaching. All English language educators should be proficient in English regardless of their native languages, but English language proficiency should be viewed as only one criterion in evaluating a teacher’s qualifications. English language proficiency, teaching experience, and professionalism should be assessed along a continuum of professional preparation; pedagogical skills, teaching experience, and professional preparation should be given as much weight as language proficiency.

TESOL and its Arizona affiliate AZ-TESOL have great concerns about this teacher English fluency evaluation initiative and its impact upon English language learners. Nonnative English-speaking educators should not be singled out because of their native language, nor evaluated based on arbitrary standards of language fluency. All educators should be evaluated in a transparent manner along the same criteria based on clearly articulated and valid standards. The *TESOL-NCATE Standards for P–12 Teacher Preparation Programs*, which provide standards and rubrics designed to help teacher education programs identify evidence of teacher performance, can be useful resources for institutions.

With the recent state legislation targeting undocumented immigrants in Arizona (SB 1070) and other legislation banning ethnic studies in Arizona (HB 2281), TESOL and AZ-TESOL are deeply troubled by what appears to be an environment of fear and xenophobia being fostered by lawmakers in the state without consideration of the consequences upon student learning and achievement. This impacts all educators and students, including U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents who speak a language other than English. The right of undocumented students to a K–12 public education has long been protected under U.S. law. TESOL and Arizona TESOL strongly urge lawmakers and education officials in Arizona to ensure that the education of all Arizona schoolchildren is not harmed by these developments, and that the right of all educators to be treated fairly and equally is protected.