

**Position Statement on Native Language Support  
in the Acquisition of English as a Second Language (ESL)**

Effective education for English as a second or other language (ESOL) students includes the maintenance and promotion of ESOL students' native languages in school and community contexts. Both the academic achievement and the school completion of ESOL learners are significantly enhanced when these students are able to use their native languages to learn in school. In fact, full proficiency in the native language (including literacy) facilitates second language development.

To have quality programs and to serve ESOL students appropriately on their way to mastery of English, instruction must take into account the different entry-level abilities in English that ESOL learners have. Some learners come to school with oral and written skills; others do not. Some ESOL students also come to the task of learning English and learning content through English already literate in their native languages. These learners know what it means to be literate--they know that they can use written forms of language to learn more about the world, to convey information and receive information from others, to establish and maintain relationships with others, and to explore the perspectives of others. Literacy in the native language correlates positively with the acquisition of literacy in a second language.

Because, by definition, ESOL students know and use at least one other language, they have acquired an intuitive understanding of the general structural and functional characteristics of language. They bring this knowledge to the task of second language learning. In addition, academic instruction that includes the use of ESOL students' native languages, especially if they are literate in that language, promotes learners' academic achievement while they are acquiring the English needed to benefit fully from instruction through English. Native language literacy abilities can assist ESOL students in English-medium classrooms to construct meaning from academic materials and experiences in English. And, in learning a new language, students also learn more about their native tongue. This means that for ESOL learners the most effective environments for second language teaching and learning are those that promote ESOL students' native language and literacy development as a foundation for English language and academic development.

In other words, native-language literacy skills—whether in English or another language—are necessary for successful second-language development.

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*Approved by the TESOL Board of Directors  
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