

# White Paper on Discrimination in Education

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As TESOL International Association prepares for the TESOL 2024 International Convention & Expo in Tampa, Florida, United States, TESOL members and leaders want to reinforce the critical role of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA) in our field. TESOL has a long-established commitment to DEIA, as illustrated not only in previous position statements but also in the scholarship and best practices it promotes and publishes. Nevertheless, legislation, practices, and policies that limit or restrict equitable opportunities in and access to education continue to serve as barriers to quality English language education for students in many parts of the world. Moreover, given the multiple factors that can make TESOL members, English language teaching (ELT) professionals, and multilingual learners of English (MLEs) vulnerable to discrimination and marginalization, it is important to acknowledge and address these factors comprehensively. By taking a firm stance against discriminatory and inequitable educational practices and policies, and to provide a path forward by pledging further expansion of DEIA practices, TESOL seeks to reaffirm its commitment to DEIA, both now and into the future.

TESOL has worked proactively to foster increased access to high-quality educational opportunities, promote teaching practices that support students of all backgrounds, and publish scholarship that incorporates varied perspectives within the field. The organization's support for DEIA is firmly rooted in the recognition that discrimination continues to be a persistent issue in education around the globe. TESOL recognizes that its members (and the students they serve), who reside in more than 160 countries, face discrimination along a number of different dimensions, including age, appearance, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, geographic location, language background, national origin, political views, race, religion and belief, and sexual orientation. These sources of discriminatory practices frequently converge, overlap, and intersect, creating additional adversities

for people from historically marginalized and minoritized groups. And, though TESOL maintains its commitment to antiracist and anti-discrimination policies and practices, recent discriminatory legislative measures and political movements that have gained traction in multiple regions across the world underscore the need for greater support for DEIA from organizations such as ours.

In 2023 alone, at least 40 bills have been introduced in 22 different U.S. states that negatively target DEIA initiatives within public colleges and universities (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2023). These measures are aimed at prohibiting the promotion, endorsement, or funding of inclusive initiatives related to race, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, color, religion, ethnicity, and national origin. Public K-12 education in the United States has been affected by similar legislative measures that seek to prohibit courses and instructional materials associated with the promotion of DEIA and related concepts, limit recognition of gender identities in schools, and exclude MLEs from dual-language programs, among other restrictions. This legislative thrust is already impacting a wide range of initiatives, from the funding of offices dedicated to DEIA and support services for marginalized students to the removal of diversity statements as part of hiring and promotion practices.

Similar discriminatory legislation, practices, and policies can be found in many parts of the world. As reported by UNESCO (2020) in its Global Education Monitoring report, “while 68% of countries have a definition of inclusive education, only 57% of them cover multiple marginalized groups” (p. 14). The report further discloses that laws in 25% of countries in the world encode practices that produce various types of segregation in education, thereby perpetuating the stereotyping, discrimination, and alienation of specific groups. The United Nations’s (2015) fourth Sustainable Development Goal is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (p. 14); it is incumbent, then, upon organizations like TESOL to take a proactive stance in support of DEIA initiatives globally.

TESOL recognizes that discriminatory practices in education affect not only students but also ELT professionals. Research carried out by the Diverse Voices Task Force, established to enhance DEIA within TESOL, revealed important findings in this regard (TESOL International Association, 2021). As detailed in its 2021 report, various types of discrimination were identified by respondents across TESOL-related spaces. Of the almost 1,000 TESOL members surveyed in the TESOL Climate, Diversity, and Inclusivity Survey (p. 12), 19.1% acknowledged having been singled out unfairly based on their social

identity, and 17.2% reported witnessing negative remarks or comments related to social identity. According to the survey, a percentage of respondents reported having felt silenced or excluded because of a variety of factors: professional position (13.2%), socioeconomic status (11.8%), political views (7.6%), age (6.5%), race (5.8%), language (4.1%), gender (3.6%), and/or sexual orientation (3.1%).

Previous public statements put forward by TESOL have established the organization's stance on [Racial Justice and Inequality](#) (2020) and its position on [Immigration Policy](#) (2017), [Immigration Reform](#) (2006), [Bullying, Harassment, and Hate Crimes](#) (2009), [Deaf Learners](#) (2009), [Learners with Special Needs](#) (2007), [Nonnative Speakers of English in the Field of TESOL](#) (2006), [Opposing Discrimination](#) (2001), and [English-only Legislation](#) (2005).

TESOL's commitment to DEIA is not merely a statement of philosophy; it is grounded in best practices for ELT professionals, as demonstrated by [The 6 Principles for Exemplary Teaching of English Learners](#)<sup>®</sup> (TESOL International Association, 2018). The principles recognize students' linguistic, cultural, and geographic backgrounds as resources for learning, underscoring the need for understanding, acknowledgment, and promotion of DEIA in educational settings. To ensure MLEs have equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities, the principles establish that instructional materials and curricula should celebrate and champion the diversity of MLEs and their lived experiences as well as emphasize the importance of supporting students' social-emotional needs, in addition to their academic and language needs.

TESOL's commitment to DEIA is not limited to the support of individual members, ELT professionals, and MLEs but also affirms the importance of scholarly engagement that incorporates DEIA in research and academic scholarship. TESOL supports the publication of articles, chapters, and full-length works through *TESOL Quarterly*, *TESOL Journal*, *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*, and works published through TESOL Press that foster and advance the profession.

Research findings published in TESOL-sponsored publications have shown a range of contexts in which discrimination can manifest and has been clearly identified. These publications include discussion and research on a wide range of topics that fit under the umbrella of DEIA, including **disability** (Gobert, 2018; Jemison & Reed, 2018; Kangas, 2021; Migliarini & Stinson, 2021; Phuong et al., 2021), **gender** (Appleby, 2013; Davis & Skilton-Sylvester, 2004; Lin et al., 2004; Song, 2019; Tannen, 2012), **LGBTQ+** (Appleby, 2013; Ariza & Brown,

2020; Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2022; Moore, 2020; Nelson, 1992, 1999; Paiz & Zhu, 2018; Tran-Thanh, 2020; Winkle, 2016), **non-native English speakers in TESOL** (Amin, 1997; Aneja, 2016; Bayyurt, 2018; Brady, 2018; Brady & Kamhi-Stein, 2018; Braine & Selvi, 2018; Cook, 1999; Curtis, 2018; Frazier, 2018; Jain, 2018; Kang, 2015; Lazaraton, 2003; Levis et al., 2016; Liu, 1999, 2018; Llurda, 2018; Mahboob, 2018; Park, 2012; Puspawati, 2014; Ruecker & Ives, 2015; Selvi, 2014, 2018; Swearingen, 2019; Tang, 1997; Zacharias, 2019), **race and ethnicity** (Amin, 1997; Anya, 2018; Appleby, 2013; Chan & Coney, 2020; Charles, 2019; Curtis, 2018; Guerrettaz & Zahler, 2017; Kubota, 2012; Kubota & Lin, 2006; Lin et al., 2004; Rich & Troudi, 2006; Roy, 2017; Savski, 2021; Wong et al., 2018), and **religion** (Edge, 2003; Karmani, 2003; Purgason, 2004; Rich & Troudi, 2006; Yaghi & Ryan, 2022). See the Appendix for a table with hyperlinks to the above-cited works. TESOL members are invited to engage in these and other scholarly publications on DEIA to help inform their research and classroom practices.

TESOL will continue to engage with members of the TESOL community to ensure that DEIA remains central to our work and scholarship in ELT. Presently, TESOL is making a commitment to do the following:

- Provide welcoming spaces at TESOL events and engagements, including the annual TESOL International Convention & Expo, that affirm and respect the identities of all attendees, as evidenced in the TESOL Code of Conduct ([www.tesol.org/code-of-conduct/](http://www.tesol.org/code-of-conduct/)).
- Work with legal advocates to address safety concerns of attendees at the 2024 TESOL Convention and beyond.
- Support and encourage identity-based Communities of Practice that affirm and support the identities of TESOL members and ELT practitioners.
- Increase advocacy efforts in support of DEIA for ELT professionals and MLEs (e.g., the annual TESOL Advocacy and Policy Summit).
- Publish content through TESOL Press centered on how DEIA can be demonstrated in practice.
- Support research initiatives focused on DEIA.
- Develop curricula and instructional materials that support and promote DEIA.

In principle and in practice, TESOL values and seeks diverse and inclusive participation within the field of ELT and requires the same level of

commitment to DEIA from its global partners and sponsors. TESOL promotes equitable representation, engagement, and access to professional opportunities for ELT professionals and access to high-quality education for all MLEs. TESOL is committed to being a welcoming organization. This commitment is reflected in our leadership, membership, sponsors, global partners, resources, and staff and by ensuring an inclusive environment at all levels of the organization.

The following TESOL members convened in the development of this White Paper:

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## **References & Appendix**