

TESL Ontario 2021 member survey report

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Abstract

This report summarizes key findings of TESL Ontario's 2021 member survey, in which TESL Ontario members shared information about themselves, their work, and their views on member services and benefits. Members were employed in a variety of positions and contexts in Canada and internationally and engaged in ongoing professionalization through TESL Ontario's wide variety of PD offerings. Members reported difficulties in finding stable employment and managing the switch to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Future directions for TESL Ontario include providing support to meet online/remote teaching and learning needs, additional employment resources, and member advocacy.

For 50 years, TESL Ontario has represented ESL instructors in Ontario and worked alongside them to provide resources and training to improve language learning for students and teachers in diverse learning and teaching contexts. As it did in 2012, in 2021, TESL Ontario decided to survey its members with the goal of understanding the current conditions of ESL instruction in Ontario and ascertaining the key issues and concerns members are facing. This information will be used to modify existing services and resources and to create new ones that respond to members' professional needs. It is also hoped that the findings will allow TESL Ontario to engage with various levels of government and inform policies and initiatives that affect ESL instruction in the province.

Method and design

The development and content of the survey was, in many ways, similar in design to that of 2012 (see Valeo, 2013). Instead of one survey as in 2012, quarterly surveys were distributed through the TESL Ontario



membership email list. Survey 1 collected demographic and employment information to provide a snapshot of the current membership. Survey 2 collected information about members' professional development experiences and online communities; the goal was to understand members' engagement with TESL Ontario's various online platforms, improve communication within the community, and assess members' PD needs and wants. Survey 3 concerned members' experiences with TESL Ontario's certification processes and member services with a view to improving both. Survey 4 requested information regarding steps TESL Ontario can take to address key challenges faced by TESL instructors and students. Response rates ranged from 7%-20% of the organization's 4500+ members. All 12 affiliate chapters were represented in the survey data.

Key findings

Survey 1

Survey 1 requested information about demographics and employment. 938 members, or about 20% of TESL Ontario's membership, responded. Of these, the vast majority (80%) held certified memberships, although volunteers, students, and retirees were also represented. As they did in 2012, 83% of respondents identified as female, and the majority of respondents (58%) fell within the 41-60 age bracket. 48% had been TESL Ontario members for 10+ years, whereas 36% had fewer than 5 years of membership. 87% had completed a TESL/TESOL certificate/diploma program, an increase of 5% since 2012, and nearly 47% held a graduate degree, an increase of 6% since 2012.

In a small increase from 2012, 43% reported working full-time in the TESL field, 22% were working part-time, and the remaining 34% held contract, volunteer, or other positions. Of these same respondents, 64% reported holding one paid position; 26% reported holding 2-3 positions. School boards, colleges, and community agencies were respondents' top three employers. The majority of respondents worked in LINC or funded adult ESL programs, and many also worked in ELS/OSLT/elementary or secondary ESL, for private institutions, or were self-employed. Pre-pandemic, the most common position held by respondents was that of language instructor in an in-person program (49%); 29% were language instructors in online or blended programs. Respondents actively searching for work at the time of the survey mentioned finding relevant job postings, high levels of competition, and limited positions as significant barriers to success.

As in all fields of employment, the pandemic continues to have a global impact on TESL/TESOL instruction. For 55% of respondents, the pandemic has meant a transition from in-person to online teaching. Only 7% were already teaching online or in a blended program, pointing to the prevalence of in-person instruction in the field and to the high level of disruption occasioned by the transition to online learning. Respondents



who continued to work during the pandemic reported an increased workload due to greater demands for unpaid preparation, student support, and training. Many respondents also mentioned decreased hours, lost jobs, and fewer employment opportunities since the pandemic began.

Survey 2

Survey 2 requested information about professional development and online communities. 753 members, or about 16% of TESL Ontario's membership, responded. The TESL Ontario website was a practical resource for members, who visited it primarily for membership renewal, PD and conference information, and employment purposes. Social media use continued to be low, although members who engaged with TESL Ontario through its various platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube) were satisfied with their experiences. Visitors to the TESL Ontario blog appreciated the variety of content and topics but would like to see more posts providing practical strategies for in-person and online teaching; mental health and work-life balance strategies; employment and interview tips; links to other provincial TESL organizations; and non-LINC resources. The majority of respondents used or planned to use the Directory of Best Practices. Suggestions for additional Directory resources included: benchmarked PBLA and CLB materials, information for non-TESL-certified program administrators, and more content for adult immigrant learners. TESL Ontario Webinars, both live and recorded, were a popular and satisfactory resource for 74% of respondents. The most popular types of PD events were training sessions, presentations, and demonstration sessions, pointing to the practical nature of TESOL and the need for usable pedagogical and classroom strategies.

The virtual 2020 TESL Ontario conference was attended by 35% of respondents. 55% received some financial support to attend the conference, and 54% would not attend the conference without such support. The cost and/or length of the conference may have prevented a number of respondents from attending. Post-pandemic, many members would prefer a two-day hybrid conference with 3-4 daily sessions. Affiliate chapter events, attended periodically by more than half the respondents, were popular because they provided convenient and meaningful opportunities to connect with local peers. Many members were pleased with the scope and variety of TESL Ontario's PD offerings, but a pressing need for PD providing strategies for career advancement/employment and online/remote teaching was indicated.

Survey 3

Survey 3 requested feedback regarding certification and member services. 477 members, or about 10% of TESL Ontario's membership, responded. Respondents found the OCELT certification process easy to understand and navigate, and reported that certification offered professional recognition and credibility,



membership in a professional community, employment opportunities, and portable proof of knowledge and skills. Respondents were, however, largely unfamiliar with other TESL Ontario certifications (ICTEAL, CTESOL, TESL Trainer, PTCT Instructor). To improve certification services, respondents mentioned streamlining the documentation requirements, improving and expanding online submission capabilities, and creating partnerships with TESL training institutions to communicate clearly expectations for certification.

The most-accessed TESL Ontario member services were PD sessions, the annual conference, and the various TESL Ontario publications. Existing non-PD benefits, particularly retail and insurance deals, were highly appreciated, and members would like to see the range and variety of non-PD benefits expanded to include tech and software subsidies and travel benefits. A Mentoring Program was begun in Fall 2021; it has proven popular and, in the future, respondents would like to participate in regularly-scheduled, one-on-one or small group mentoring that provides support/professional advice, networking opportunities, career development assistance for new and in-service teachers, and best practices information. Likewise, the existing TESL Ontario Job Board is a valued resource that has much potential for expansion. A new Career Centre/Portal should offer distinct features from existing job sites like LinkedIn, however, and should include links to external job postings, continuing education opportunities, résumé and cover letter help, and sector-specific job search tips.

Many suggestions for new or improved member services were provided. Some have already been mentioned; other popular options included: creating more inclusive opportunities for smaller affiliate chapters/locations; promoting member research and providing access to reputable publications; more frequent social media use; more efficient and communication regarding TESL Ontario information and services; and advocacy.

Survey 4

Survey 4 requested feedback regarding challenges facing our TESL community and the related support members would like to receive from TESL Ontario. 316 participants, or about 7% of TESL Ontario's membership, responded. The linguistic challenges faced by today's ELLs are often superseded by personal, familial, technological, and social challenges that limit learning, employment, and integration to Canadian society. Respondents indicated that they lacked resources to address these issues and would benefit from the provision of PD and ready-to-use instructional resources to capacitate instructors and improve learners' experiences both inside and outside the classroom. A great deal of interest was shown in creating community and workplace links to help instructors and students learn about and access social and professional support and to help learners transition into the Canadian workforce. Members' responses indicated a willingness to



learn and adapt to the changing landscape of ESL instruction. The desire for usable, ready resources reflects the underlying pragmatism of TESL instruction, yet it also points to the heavy (and often unpaid) workload of planning and creating resources for diverse learners.

Conclusion

What have we learned?

Although the total number of TESL Ontario members has increased over the past ten years, the 2021 data point to a remarkable stability within TESL Ontario's membership. Most members still identify as female, and most are within the 41-60 year age category. Slightly more members held full-time employment at the time of the survey than in 2012, and slightly more held more than the minimum required educational level for TESL Ontario certification. Social media use continues to be low, yet members do want and appreciate timely information from TESL Ontario regarding professional development opportunities, resources, and other professionally-relevant news. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the urgent need for training and resources that will help ESL instructors function effectively in online, hybrid, and in-person modalities. Many of the other concerns shared by members—difficulties finding appropriate resources, lack of real-world connections for students, and challenging and often unfair working conditions—are not new, and point to areas where TESL Ontario could productively focus its attention and resources.

Survey methodology carries with it inherent limitations. Although opportunities to provide additional comments were included throughout the four surveys, many of the questions were formatted as sets of predetermined values, which limited the range and variety of possible responses. Respondents' comments indicated various ways in which future surveys could more accurately reflect the lived professional realities of TESL Ontario's members. Although input was solicited from the entire TESL Ontario member base, participant numbers were unequal across the four surveys, and members may not see themselves fully reflected in the findings.

Next steps

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the four surveys have provided an updated overview of TESL Ontario's membership as well as insights into members' working conditions, key concerns and needs, and future goals. TESL Ontario thanks those members who took time to share their thoughts and suggestions through the set of surveys, and invites all members to reach out at any time with further suggestions, concerns, and ideas for the future.



References

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Author Bio



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