

# TESL Ontario 2025 Report

By Stephanie Kinzie, Canada

## Abstract

This report summarizes key findings of TESL Ontario's 2025 member survey. As in past surveys, a representative sample of TESL Ontario members shared data about their personal and professional situations as well as perspectives on services for members. Respondents reported employment in a broad spectrum of roles both in Canada and abroad, and they used TESL Ontario's PD offerings and affiliate Chapters to connect and engage in professionalization. Finding and maintaining stable employment was a key concern due to recent changes in immigration policy and ongoing concerns with funding. Opportunities for TESL Ontario to support members include increasing advocacy efforts; providing access to research, employment, and professional resources; and pursuing a wider range of member benefits.

## TESL Ontario 2025 Report Article

Since 1972, TESL Ontario has represented ESL instructors in Ontario, collaborating with them to ensure that English language teaching and learning in the province is engaging and evolving in positive ways for both students and teachers. Continuing the work from 2012 and 2021, TESL Ontario has again surveyed its members to gain insight regarding the current conditions of ESL instruction in Ontario and identify key issues and concerns members are facing. As in previous years, this information will be used to fine-tune existing services and resources and to create new ones that respond to emerging professional needs. An ongoing hope is that the findings will also permit TESL Ontario to engage with municipal, provincial, and federal government agencies and inform policies and initiatives that affect ESL instruction in the province, particularly given the challenges facing the Canadian ESL industry in 2025 and beyond.



## Method and design

The development and content of the survey drew inspiration from previous years (Kinzie, 2022; Valeo, 2013). A 32-question survey was distributed through the TESL Ontario membership email list to build a portrait of current membership, working environment, professional development needs, engagement with TESL Ontario's online resources, and ways in which TESL Ontario can continue to advocate for its members. Respondents answered multiple-choice and open-ended questions about demographics and employment, professional development experiences and online communities, experiences with TESL Ontario's member services and certification processes, and suggestions regarding steps TESL Ontario can take to address key challenges faced by TESL instructors and students. 344 members, or about 8% of the organization's 4500+ members, responded to the survey.

For reporting purposes, numbers were rounded up or down to the nearest whole percentage (e.g. 34.49% to 34%, 35.50% to 36%).

## Key Findings

### I. Demographics and employment

Questions 1–15 requested information about member demographics, employment, and professional designations. Between 285–344 responses (83–100% of total respondents) were received for this first group of questions.

#### ***Age, TESL Ontario membership, employment status, and remuneration***

Nearly half of the respondents (49%) were aged between 45–64 years. 21% were 44 years old or under, and 17% were over 65 years of age. 55% have been TESL Ontario members for 10+ years, and almost equal numbers have been members for 4–9 years (23%) and 1–3 years (22%). 56% have been employed in English language education for 15 years or longer, 14% for 11–15 years, 19% for 4–10 years, and 12% for fewer than 3 years. Of those currently employed, 36% held one full-time role, a notable decrease from the 43% reported in the 2021 member survey (Kinzie, 2022). 16% held one part-time role, and 14% held two or more part-time roles. Equal proportions (12%) held contract/temporary positions or were not employed at the time of the survey. Respondents who chose “Other” reported positions including supply teacher, self-employed tutor, a mix of part- and full-time or contract roles, or retired. Although 77% of respondents held positions, 45% were actively seeking employment in the field. Most respondents reported low-to mid-range income levels, with 21% of respondents earning between \$30,000–\$49,999 annually and 27% of respondents



earning between \$50,000–\$74,999 annually. 18% earned less than \$30,000 annually, and 19% earned over \$75,000 annually. Additional comments revealed various respondents with annual income levels below \$15,000; some of these included students or unemployed members earning no income at all.

### ***Current careers and training***

English language education was the current career for 75% of respondents, and a second or subsequent career for 13%. 3% of respondents were not currently working in language training, and 10% reported other career paths such as language assessor, instructional designer, or private instructor. Several respondents in this “Other” category reported that teaching language was only one aspect of their professional roles or that they taught English in addition to other subjects. 286 respondents had completed a TESL/TESOL certificate or diploma program, with an additional 183 respondents reporting the completion of other relevant training (e.g. OCT-recognized AQ ESL courses, or Canadian or international language teaching degrees or diplomas).

### ***TESL Ontario membership and professional certification***

86% of respondents were certified TESL Ontario members, most commonly holding the OCELT/ICTEAL certification (270 respondents). 12 respondents held CTESOL certification, 32 held TESL Trainer certification, and 4 held PTCT Instructor certification. 50% of respondents regularly used their certification as a professional designation in emails, online profiles, or on business cards. 63% of respondents required OCELT certification for their employment role, and 74% reported that the certification had helped them secure employment. Only 17% reported that the OCELT certification helped them secure promotions or salary increases; 60% reported that it was not helpful, and 23% were not certain of the certification’s impact in this aspect. Additional comments included a mix of positive and constructive feedback about current certification options. Positive feedback indicated that the OCELT designation adds credibility to holders’ professional status and provides a necessary set of checks, balances, and standards for the language teaching profession. A small number of constructive comments noted that the annual cost of certification is high and keeps rising, that it does not enhance earning potential, and that many K-12 educational employers still require language teachers to be certified by the Ontario College of Teachers regardless of OCELT certification. Suggestions included providing more options to indicate specializations (e.g. language assessment) and a lower-cost option for retirees or those not currently working in the field but who do not want their certification to lapse. For this member subset, TESL Ontario’s Standard Membership is available; information is shared publicly on TESL Ontario’s website and with current members through renewal communications.



## II. Member resources, engagement, and research

Questions 16–28 requested information about members’ use of TESL Ontario’s professional resources and benefits, and engagement with and impact of research on members’ work. Between 72–323 responses (21–94% of total respondents) were received for this second group of questions.

### *Resources and engagement*

The most popular, frequently accessed resources are the TESL Ontario Webinar Series (18% monthly, 25% once or twice per year), the TESL Ontario Annual Conference (1% monthly, 38% once or twice per year), CONTACT Magazine (15% monthly, 18% once or twice per year), and the TESL Blog (14% monthly, 18% once or twice per year). These resources provided members with opportunities for professional development and networking as well as practical information to enhance professional practices. The least-accessed resources were also the least-visible: Insurance Provider Partner Discounts, Retail Partner Discounts, Event & Attraction Discounts, and Health & Wellness Discounts (never accessed or unknown by 78%–89% of respondents). Additional comments indicated that members would value more favourable insurance discounts; grocery, gas, and travel benefits; discounts for classroom resources (e.g. books, conferencing and education apps), and expanded networking opportunities focused on mentorship and sharing everyday classroom experiences.

The TESL Ontario website continues to be a key resource for members, who visit the TESL Ontario website to renew memberships (88%), learn about upcoming webinars and PD opportunities (68%), access membership certificates (52%), and review the job board (37%). The most popular events of the past year were TESL Ontario Webinars, attended by 79% of respondents, the TESL Ontario Annual Conference, attended by 35% of respondents, and Virtual Chapter Events, attended by 18% of respondents. Participation was also seen in In-Person Chapter Events, In-Person PD Sessions, and Mentorship Sessions (21% of respondents). 32% of respondents regularly or occasionally attended Chapter Events whereas 54% did not; scheduling conflicts and lack of time were cited as common reasons for not attending or for attending less frequently than in the past. For future Chapter Events, members are interested in practical sessions with teaching tips for a variety of teaching contexts, panel-type discussions with other stakeholders in the ESL profession, networking and job search opportunities, and sessions that address technology, teacher wellbeing, and social issues that impact learning environments. Respondents suggested that half-day or weekend sessions might make these opportunities more widely accessible. The popularity of virtual events speaks to their convenience for members, yet in-person opportunities are still valued.



### ***Research***

Respondents reported that research has an impact on them principally through publications in relevant journals (37%) and through research carried out on their own to help their work (36%). However, only 5% of respondents reported that they were paid to carry out research as part of their professional duties, and 47% reported that research was not part of their work. TESL Ontario could promote research engagement by providing access to research through the organization's website (67%) and/or a venue to share informal and formal research (79%). There was also a notable interest in receiving instruction and mentoring in research methods (42%) and in connecting with other members as research partners (38%). Members' comments suggested that, similarly to Chapter Events, time constraints prevented many from engaging in, or with, research. Research that could be applied in the classroom to encourage new or improved practices, or presented to the general public and to funding organizations to inform and support language programs, was considered most relevant.

### ***Suggestions for improvement***

Many respondents' comments indicated satisfaction with TESL Ontario's current member services. Suggestions for improved member and certification services centered around lower membership and event fees, increased support for job searching and networking, more focus on EAP/post-secondary and private teaching contexts, and additional PLAR pathways for prospective members. Online information about different certifications and courses could be updated and reorganized for clarity, and the certification requirements themselves, particularly regarding language proficiency and extra-provincial and international educational experience, could be reassessed and streamlined to facilitate certification.

## **III. Advocacy and key concerns**

Questions 29–32 solicited feedback regarding TESL Ontario's member advocacy work and the key concerns facing our membership. Between 220–288 responses (64–84% of total respondents) were received for this final group of questions. Comments in response to other sections of the survey also revealed significant interest in TESL Ontario providing greater advocacy for members.

### ***Representation and grassroots campaigns***

67% of respondents felt that TESL Ontario represents the interests and concerns of their sector very well or somewhat well. 23% were neutral, and 14% considered representation to be somewhat or very poor. 61% were very likely or somewhat likely to participate in grassroots campaigns if organized by TESL Ontario;



collaboration with other language education organizations (64%) and public awareness initiatives (61%) were the most popular options, followed closely by letter-writing campaigns (51%) and social media awareness campaigns (51%). 39% were neutral about or unlikely to consider participating in such campaigns.

### ***Most pressing concerns***

Job stability, adequate pay, and professional recognition continue to be ongoing concerns for TESL Ontario's members. In the 2021 survey, these concerns were principally related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which temporarily limited in-person teaching and contributed to the reduction or closure of many ESL programs and providers. In 2025, respondents identified government cutbacks to immigration, student visas, and funding as the most significant contributors to precarity. With CLB5+ classes no longer funded, lengthy waiting lists and limited classrooms are making LINC a less feasible option for students and decreasing the available positions for teachers. Contracts in post-secondary/EAP programs are limited in both number and hours. Remuneration is often based on classroom contact time only, requiring teachers to put in hours of unpaid labour to prepare lessons and grade assessments. OCELT certification alone is not recognized by provincial K–12 school boards, which cuts off another potential employment pathway. Respondents commented that the available positions, pay, and level of job security are not commensurate with the amount of education and certification required to teach adult language learners in Ontario. The increasing presence of AI and growth of remote learning environments were also viewed by many as largely detrimental to the development of language and social skills essential both in and out of the classroom.

## **Conclusion**

### *What have we learned?*

As in previous years, stability in membership can be seen through the 55% of respondents who have been TESL Ontario members for 10+ years and the 70% who have been involved in English language education for 10+ years. Despite this longevity, the decrease in the number of respondents with full-time roles points to the disconnect between experience and job stability. For the majority of respondents, language teaching was their primary and only profession, but changes to funding and immigration were identified as factors that are significantly decreasing the viability of language teaching as a career. TESL Ontario certification was identified as essential to securing employment, yet it was considered to be of limited value in securing promotions or salary increases. Respondents largely appreciated the resources and services currently provided by TESL Ontario and were open to more opportunities to connect with other members, engage in and with research, and to participate in grassroots campaigns to promote the language teaching profession in Ontario.



Opportunities were identified for TESL Ontario to consider how to increase members' access to, and engagement with, their local Chapters, relevant research, and membership options. The visibility of current benefits and services outside of the organization could be increased, and new partnerships could be pursued. Advocacy with funders and government stakeholders is an area in which TESL Ontario can continue its work; additional consultation with members may help refine current efforts and encourage those who are uncertain about or unengaged in grassroots campaigns to become involved.

As always, the inherent limitations of survey methodology must be considered. Predetermined values for responses restricted the range and variety of responses for some questions which, although beneficial for consistency and coherence, limited the nuances and details that respondents could provide. The opportunity to provide additional comments was made available as much as possible, yet the need to summarize these responses means that members may not see all of the details included in their comments. Responses were collected from a small proportion of the overall membership base, and thus members may not see reflected in this report concerns and needs that are relevant to them.

### **Next steps**

Despite these limitations, the survey has provided an updated overview of TESL Ontario's membership as well as insights into members' working conditions, perceptions of TESL Ontario's services, and key concerns and needs. TESL Ontario is grateful to those members who were able to respond to the survey and share their experiences and suggestions and welcomes additional feedback at any time so that it can continue to understand and represent its members as fully as possible.



### Author Bio

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