

Position Statement on Terminal Degree for Teaching English as a Second, Foreign, or Additional Language

A terminal degree is the generally accepted highest academic degree in a discipline or field of study. In many academic fields, especially those in which a person is engaged in the work of academic research, an earned academic (or research) doctorate such as a Ph.D. is considered the terminal degree.

In addition to terminal degrees, many fields of study, especially those linked to a specific profession, make a distinction between a first professional degree and an advanced professional degree. The first professional degree is an academic degree (such as a Master's, or in some cases the Bachelor's) designed to prepare the holder for a particular career or profession in practice-oriented areas of the discipline that do not expect or require research. The advanced professional degree (such as a Ph.D.) provides further training in a specialized area of the discipline, and is viewed as the academic credential for scholarly research and academic activity.

The field of TESOL is a unique, multifaceted academic discipline and profession, encompassing aspects of theoretical and applied linguistics, second language acquisition, sociolinguistics, language pedagogy and methodology, literacy development, curriculum and materials developments, assessment, and cross-cultural communication. As such, identifying a single, specific academic credential as the terminal degree for the entire field is not possible, as the level of a terminal degree depends upon the nature of one's employment, whether it is research-oriented or practice-oriented, as noted above.

Given the variety of undergraduate and graduate programs in TESOL, and the diversity of educational systems worldwide, a Bachelor's degree in TESOL (or related area), TESL/TESOL/TEFL certificate or diploma, or Master's degree in TESOL (or related area) may all be considered as first professional degrees for the TESOL field. It is TESOL's position that a Master's degree in TESOL (or related area) can be considered the terminal degree for teaching positions in English as a second, foreign, or additional language.

*Approved by the Board of Directors
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