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## Masters in english as a second language

Last updated :May 16, 2025 Discover the benefits of getting an online master's degree in ESL, including potential career paths, salary ranges, and program costs. Reviewed by Krystin McCauley Watkins, Ed.D. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the demand for English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers continues to grow. In the U.S., an estimated 5 million public school students were English learners in 2020, and the number continues to increase, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). With this in mind, there has never been a better time to pursue a career in this field. Whether you're already a teacher looking to advance your career or someone interested in entering the field of ESL, earning an online master's degree in the subject can provide you with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in this growing industry. In this article, we'll explore the benefits of earning this degree, the cost of programs, and potential salary ranges for graduates. Learn More About Our Partners We use trusted sources like Peterson's Data and the National Center for Education Statistics to inform the data for these schools. From our partners appear among these rankings and are indicated as such. To create this ranking, BestColleges sourced the most recent data available from the National Center for Education Statistics and the U.S. Department of Education College Scorecard. We then ranked each school according to the top variables college students selected in our College Choice and Admissions Survey. To learn more, check out our full rankings methodology or read the summary below. To qualify for our rankings lists, each school must be an accredited public or private, nonprofit institution. Each eligible school was then ranked based on a formula measuring: Affordability (30%) Student outcomes (30%) Reputation (20%) Diversity and social mobility (20%) In addition, we only included colleges with graduation rates in the top third of all online colleges. Los Angeles, CA4 yearCampus + Online\$60,446Avg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$60,446Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$46%Online EnrollmentView Details The University of Southern California serves more than 47,000 students each year on campus and online. Distance learners may pursue an online master of arts in teaching - teaching English to speakers of other languages. Through a curriculum that emphasizes culturally responsive instructional strategies, candidates are prepared to work as TESOL teachers in the U.S. and abroad. Coursework covers topics in applied linguistics for English language educators and social foundations of language education. Candidates also explore assessment and instruction for diverse language learners. This online master's in English language learning program allows students to augment their training by earning an English language development credential or a gifted education certificate. Applicants must possess a regionally accredited bachelor's degree and a minimum 3.0 GPA. Additional materials include a 250-word personal statement, a resume or CV, and 2-3 recommendation letters. They also need to pass a timed writing assessment. Avg. Undergrad Tuition, In-State\$60,446Avg. Undergrad Tuition, Out-of-state\$60,446AccreditationYesAvg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$60,446Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$60,446Los Angeles, CA4 yearCampus + OnlineAvg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$60,446Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$60,446Online Enrollment46%Avg. Undergrad Tuition, In-State\$60,446Avg. Undergrad Tuition, Out-of-state\$60,446AccreditationYesThe University of Southern California serves more than 47,000 students each year on campus and online. 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Grad Tuition, Out-of-state50%Online EnrollmentView Details Albizu University - Miami delivers an online master of science in TESOL with an exceptional student education concentration. By completing this 30-credit program, candidates learn to use interventions and methodologies that enhance language acquisition among students with limited to no English proficiency. Coursework is delivered through the Blackboard platform. The degree plan includes courses like cross-cultural communication and understanding, instructional strategies for learning disabilities, and applied linguistics. Candidates also examine best practices in ESOL testing and evaluation. To earn their online master's degree in English language learning, students must complete one full year of residency. Application requirements consist of a minimum 3.0 GPA and two recommendation letters. CAU grants up to six transfer credits for prior college coursework completed with a "B" grade or higher. Avg. Undergrad Tuition, In-State\$11,628Avg. Undergrad Tuition, Out-of-state\$11,628AccreditationYesAvg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$11,774Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$11,774Miami, FL4 yearCampus + OnlineAvg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$11,774Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$11,774Online Enrollment50%Avg. Undergrad Tuition, In-State\$11,628Avg. Undergrad Tuition, Out-of-state\$11,628AccreditationYesAlbizu University - Miami delivers an online master of science in TESOL with an exceptional student education concentration. By completing this 30-credit program, candidates learn to use interventions and methodologies that enhance language acquisition among students with limited to no English proficiency. Coursework is delivered through the Blackboard platform. The degree plan includes courses like cross-cultural communication and understanding, instructional strategies for learning disabilities, and applied linguistics. Candidates also examine best practices in ESOL testing and evaluation. 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Courses include instructional systems development, linguistics for ESOL/bilingual educators, and research designs in education. Students also examine the grammar of American English. UMBC offers fall, spring, and summer entry dates, and accepts applications on a rolling basis. Applicants need a minimum 3.0 GPA and must submit a statement of purpose and three recommendation letters. Avg. Undergrad Tuition, In-State\$9,056Avg. Undergrad Tuition, Out-of-state\$25,820AccreditationYesAvg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$12,582Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$21,618Baltimore, MD4 yearCampus + OnlineAvg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$12,582Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$21,618Online Enrollment78%Avg. Undergrad Tuition, In-State\$9,056Avg. Undergrad Tuition, Out-of-state\$25,820AccreditationYesThe University of Maryland - Baltimore County is a renowned public research institution that enrolls about 13,600 students each year. Graduate candidates may enroll in an online master of arts in TESOL program. 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Required courses include phonetics, phonology, and language teaching; second language acquisition; and forms and functions of English grammar. Candidates round out degree work with a teaching portfolio presentation and a comprehensive exam. This online master's in English language learning program boasts a high success rate, with 90% of students finding employment after graduation. Applicants must submit a personal statement, a writing sample, and three recommendation letters. UNI does not require GRE scores. The university offers a variety of financial aid, including graduate assistantships and scholarships. Avg. Undergrad Tuition, In-State\$8,111Avg. Undergrad Tuition, Out-of-state\$19,265AccreditationYesAvg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$9,691Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$20,774Cedar Falls, IA4 yearCampus + OnlineAvg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$9,691Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$20,774Online Enrollment54%Avg. Undergrad Tuition, In-State\$8,111Avg. Undergrad Tuition, Out-of-state\$19,265AccreditationYesBased in Cedar Falls, the University of Northern Iowa delivers more than 50 career-focused graduate programs. The catalog includes an online master of arts in TESOL/Spanish that totals 33 credits. This non-thesis program prepares graduates to teach English and Spanish to speakers of other languages in academic and professional settings. Required courses include phonetics, phonology, and language teaching; second language acquisition; and forms and functions of English grammar. Candidates round out degree work with a teaching portfolio presentation and a comprehensive exam. This online master's in English language learning program boasts a high success rate, with 90% of students finding employment after graduation. Applicants must submit a personal statement, a writing sample, and three recommendation letters. UNI does not require GRE scores. The university offers a variety of financial aid, including graduate assistantships and scholarships. Saint Louis, MO4 yearCampus + Online\$13,500Avg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$13,500Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state61%Online EnrollmentView Details Webster University maintains its flagship campus in Saint Louis, Missouri, and enrolls over 11,400 students annually. Graduate candidates may enroll in an online master of arts in TESOL program to develop the theoretical knowledge and instructional skills needed to teach non-native speakers. The 33-credit curriculum covers core topics like language and culture, principles and practices of language testing, and material development in language classrooms. Students take advanced classes in either an ESL/EFL or a K-12 English language learner emphasis. The former track allows candidates to earn a Missouri ELL certification by taking an additional 21 credits of coursework. All master's in English language learning candidates engage in practicum training. Webster offers full admission to applicants with at least a 2.5 GPA. Candidates with a GPA of 2.0-2.49 may enroll on a provisional basis. Azusa, CA4 yearCampus + Online\$9,691Avg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$16,571Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state34%Online EnrollmentView Details Azusa Pacific University offers more than 150 undergraduate and graduate degrees, many of which students can earn remotely. Program options include an online master of arts in TESOL designed for aspiring and experienced educators. Through an innovative curriculum, candidates develop crucial theoretical foundations and prepare for diverse teaching environments and scenarios. Coursework includes second language acquisition, intercultural communications, and language program design. Candidates also learn to teach English grammar and pronunciation to students of all ages and backgrounds. Similar to other master's in English language learning programs, the APU track culminates with a comprehensive portfolio presentation. Distance learners can enroll in the fall or spring. Applicants need a regionally accredited bachelor's degree and a minimum 3.0 GPA. They must also submit a statement of purpose, a resume or statement of experience, and two recommendation letters. Avg. Undergrad Tuition, In-State\$40,830Avg. Undergrad Tuition, Out-of-state\$40,830AccreditationYesAvg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$16,571Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$16,571Azusa, CA4 yearCampus + OnlineAvg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$16,571Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$16,571Online Enrollment34%Avg. Undergrad Tuition, In-State\$40,830Avg. Undergrad Tuition, Out-of-state\$40,830AccreditationYesAzusa Pacific University offers more than 150 undergraduate and graduate degrees, many of which students can earn remotely. 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Grad Tuition, Out-of-state30%Online EnrollmentView Details Located in Searcy, Arkansas, Harding University offers an online master of education in elementary education with a TESL specialization. This 35-credit program prepares candidates with advanced knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy, and allows them to work for schools, government agencies, and private companies. Distance education is delivered through the Canvas platform. The curriculum includes classes like human growth/development, education in an urban setting, and school law and policy. Students also explore the instructional applications of technology. They complete the program by taking a comprehensive exam. This online master's in English language learning program requires applicants to have a valid teaching license. They also need a minimum 2.75 GPA and adequate GRE/MAT/PLT scores. Additional admission materials include three recommendation letters. Avg. Undergrad Tuition, In-State\$21,690Avg. Undergrad Tuition, Out-of-state\$21,690AccreditationYesAvg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$10,540Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$10,540Searcy, AR4 yearCampus + OnlineAvg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$10,540Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$10,540Online Enrollment30%Avg. Undergrad Tuition, In-State\$21,690Avg. Undergrad Tuition, Out-of-state\$21,690AccreditationYesLocated in Searcy, Arkansas, Harding University offers an online master of education in elementary education with a TESL specialization. This 35-credit program prepares candidates with advanced knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy, and allows them to work for schools, government agencies, and private companies. Distance education is delivered through the Canvas platform. The curriculum includes classes like human growth/development, education in an urban setting, and school law and policy. Students also explore the instructional applications of technology. They complete the program by taking a comprehensive exam. This online master's in English language learning program requires applicants to have a valid teaching license. They also need a minimum 2.75 GPA and adequate GRE/MAT/PLT scores. Additional admission materials include three recommendation letters. Seward, NE4 yearCampus + Online\$8,650Avg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$8,650Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$8,650Online Enrollment28%Avg. Undergrad Tuition, In-State\$35,600Avg. Undergrad Tuition, Out-of-state\$35,600AccreditationYesConcordia University - Nebraska delivers 17 fully remote academic programs through Blackboard. Graduate offerings include an online master of education in TESOL accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. Through accelerated eight-week courses, candidates may earn their degree in as few as 18 months. The curriculum covers topics in research-based educational practices; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and theories and second language acquisition. Students also examine English linguistics, with focus on the elements applicable to language teaching and learning. They gain hands-on experience by completing a 45-hour practicum. This online master's in English language learning program does not require standardized test scores. Applicants must submit a 500-750 word personal statement that details their professional background and career objectives. Concordia allows graduate students to fulfill 25% of their degree requirements with transfer credits. Avg. Undergrad Tuition, In-State\$35,600Avg. Undergrad Tuition, Out-of-state\$35,600AccreditationYesAvg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$8,650Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$8,650Seward, NE4 yearCampus + OnlineAvg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$8,650Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$8,650Online Enrollment28%Avg. Undergrad Tuition, In-State\$35,600Avg. Undergrad Tuition, Out-of-state\$35,600AccreditationYesConcordia University - Nebraska delivers 17 fully remote academic programs through Blackboard. 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Grad Tuition, Out-of-state28%Online EnrollmentView Details Newman University enrolls 3,400 students across 50 academic programs, including an online master of science in education with a concentration in ESOL curriculum and instruction. Distance learners can graduate in under two years by taking accelerated eight-week courses through Canvas. The master's in English language learning curriculum totals 33 credits and includes coursework like cultural diversity, advanced instructional methods, and applied linguistics. Students also explore leadership theories and coaching techniques. They develop hands-on skills by completing an intensive practicum experience. Applicants need an active Kansas teaching license. They must also have a regionally accredited bachelor's degree earned with a minimum 3.0 GPA. Admission materials consist of two professional recommendations and a 300-word writing sample explaining their personal education philosophy. La Mirada, CA4 yearCampus + Online\$12,006Avg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$12,006Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state50%Online EnrollmentView Details Based in La Mirada, California, Biola University serves more than 6,000 students annually. Through the Cook School of Intercultural Studies, graduate candidates can earn an online master of arts in TESOL in four semesters if enrolled full-time, and 6-8 semesters if pursuing their credentials part-time. The school also delivers an accelerated 12-month track for learners with a relevant bachelor's degree. Required coursework comprises structure of English, materials preparation and evaluation, and language testing and assessment. Students develop hands-on skill through practicum training and personalize the degree plan by choosing three electives. This online master's in English language learning program culminates with a professional portfolio presentation. Biola offers fall, spring, and summer entry dates. Admission requirements include a profession of Christian faith. The university accepts up to nine transfer credits. Avg. Undergrad Tuition, In-State\$44,382Avg. Undergrad Tuition, Out-of-state\$44,382AccreditationYesAvg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$12,006Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$12,006La Mirada, CA4 yearCampus + OnlineAvg. Grad Tuition, In-State\$12,006Avg. Grad Tuition, Out-of-state\$12,006Online Enrollment50%Avg. Undergrad Tuition, In-State\$44,382Avg. Undergrad Tuition, Out-of-state\$44,382AccreditationYesBased in La Mirada, California, Biola University serves more than 6,000 students annually. Through the Cook School of Intercultural Studies, graduate candidates can earn an online master of arts in TESOL in four semesters if enrolled full-time, and 6-8 semesters if pursuing their credentials part-time. The school also delivers an accelerated 12-month track for learners with a relevant bachelor's degree. Required coursework comprises structure of English, materials preparation and evaluation, and language testing and assessment. Students develop hands-on skill through practicum training and personalize the degree plan by choosing three electives. This online master's in English language learning program culminates with a professional portfolio presentation. Biola offers fall, spring, and summer entry dates. Admission requirements include a profession of Christian faith. The university accepts up to nine transfer credits. Flexibility: Online programs are designed to accommodate the schedules of busy working professionals and those with family responsibilities. You can typically access course materials and complete assignments at your own pace, making it easier to balance your studies with other commitments. Career Advancement: An advanced degree in ESL can boost your teaching salary and help you meet state-mandated teaching qualifications. This can lead to more job opportunities and potential promotions. In fact, data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) shows that those with master's degrees earned over \$200 more each week than those with a bachelor's degree in 2022. Leadership Opportunities: A master's degree in ESL not only prepares you to teach but also to assume leadership roles in your school or district. You could become an instructional coordinator, curriculum developer, or even an academic advisor. Cost-Effectiveness: Typically, online programs are more affordable than their traditional counterparts. Enrolling in an online course can save you money on housing and commuting fees. Plus, online programs offer more flexibility, so you can work while earning your degree. The cost of an online master's degree in ESL can vary significantly based on several factors, including the specific school and program. The following table displays the average annual cost of tuition and fees at different kinds of institutions. Average Annual Tuition and Fees for Online ESL Master's ProgramsInstitution TypeAverage Annual Tuition and Fees (2021-2022)Public Schools\$12,596Private Schools\$28,017Source: NCESWith an online master's in ESL, you can choose from various careers — both in and out of the classroom. You can find roles at K-12 and postsecondary settings or at nonprofits, working with underserved communities. You can even work in government agencies, working both domestically and internationally. Popular positions for ESL graduates include: Adult education teacherAcademic advisorCorporate trainerInstructional designerCurriculum leaderESL textbook editorELL program managerAccording to the BLS, the jobs for ESL teachers are projected to decline over the next decade. So broadening your horizons by gaining experience outside the classroom might help your chances of securing a job after graduation. Meanwhile, the BLS projects jobs for corporate trainers, instructional designers, and academic advisors to grow in the coming years. It's no secret that teachers don't choose their profession to become rich. However, that doesn't mean you can't make a fair salary with a master's in ESL. The following table displays the average annual salaries for workers with different types of master's degrees. Average Annual Salaries for Master's in ESL Program GraduatesDegreeAverage Annual Salary (2024)MAT in ESL\$50,000M.Ed. in ESL\$55,000MA in ESL\$60,000Source: PayscaleOnline master's programs in ESL are respected. These courses of study offer rigorous curricula similar to in-person programs and can lead to career advancement opportunities. They provide flexibility for working professionals and can help them meet state requirements, potentially increasing salary. The best way to ensure a program is reputable is to check its accreditation status. Typically, a program must be accredited for students to transfer credits and qualify for federal financial aid. Earning an online master's in ESL can be valuable, enhancing your teaching opportunities and salary prospects. Online ESL master's programs afford students flexibility and cover rigorous content similar to on-campus programs. However, weigh the costs and consider if a master's aligns with your career goals, as it's not always required to teach ESL. Earning a master's in ESL online usually takes 2-3 years for full-time students, depending on the program's credit requirements, which range anywhere from 30-40 credits. Note: The insights on this page — excluding school descriptions — were reviewed by an independent third party compensated for their time by BestColleges. Page last reviewed April 15, 2024. The TESL degree is internationally recognized as the terminal degree in the field of Teaching English as a Second Language. Learn from faculty who have extensive teaching experience in K-12 and adult education contexts in the United States, Latin America, Asia, and Europe. UTSA's creative and talented instructors possess expertise in the courses they teach and are internationally recognized scholars who maintain active research agendas in the field. When students join the TESL program at UTSA, they become part of a network of current, former, and future K-12 teachers and adult educators from the United States and around the world.