

Abstract

Title: Can Service Teaching Affect One's Career Trajectory? Evidence from Teach for India

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Introduction

This study seeks to answer the following: What are the impacts of youth service programs like Teach for India on its young adult participants? Specifically, we ask if participating in Teach for India affects participant-teachers' career pathways post-TFI? For example, are these young professionals more likely to then pursue careers in education or public service? Are they more likely to work in low-income communities or for an organization with a social mission? And are they more likely to aspire to have a long-term career in education? In the US, Mo and Conn (2018) found that participating in TFA engenders large shifts in attitudes and beliefs that reflect the worldview of disadvantaged communities, and these shifts appeared to translate into different career trajectories.ⁱ Further, Fryer and Dobbie (2015) found that one year after their service, alumni of TFA were 43.3 percentage points more likely to work in the field of education generally.ⁱⁱ Hence, we ask if alumni of TFI follow this same trajectory up to four years post-treatment. Moreover, does TFI service affect what individuals prioritize and value when considering different career options?

Background

Teach for India (TFI) is the Indian adaptation of Teach for America (TFA). Like TFA, TFI recruits recent college graduates and highly motivated young professionals to teach for two years in low-income communities. The mission of TFI is two-pronged: (1) improve educational outcomes and opportunities for low-income students and (2) develop a critical mass of individuals who remain involved in the field of education and who will remain committed to educational equity as alumni. *This research focuses on the second objective and asks whether a program such as TFI has a long-term systemic impact by influencing the values and future careers of those that participate in the program.* In the US, [proposal authors] (2018) found that participating in TFA engenders large shifts in attitudes and beliefs that reflect the worldview of disadvantaged communities, and these shifts appeared to translate into different career trajectories.ⁱⁱⁱ Further, Fryer and Dobbie (2015) found that one year after their service, alumni of TFA were 43.3 percentage points more likely to work in the field of education generally.^{iv} Hence, we ask if alumni of TFI follow this same trajectory up to four years post-treatment. Moreover, does TFI service affect what individuals prioritize and value when considering different career options?

Setting

TFI participants are located in low-performing schools across the country, but are located in predominately urban areas: TFI launched in 2009 with a small cadre of fellows in Pune and Mumbai, and has since expanded to eight cities across India. At the start of the 2016-17 school year, TFI teachers had taught 38,000 students at more than 300 schools.

Subjects

To be eligible to join TFI, a candidate must hold a bachelor's degree, speak English proficiently,

and be either an Indian citizen or a foreign national of Indian origin. Importantly, TFI does not target those who have ambitions to be career teachers. In other words, applicants and admits of the program did not major in education, and TFI is not considered a teacher preparation program. Participants must also pass a rigorous selection process. As English-speaking college graduates, TFI fellows represent a privileged class. Though not socioeconomically diverse, fellows are geographically diverse and represent all regions of India. A small number of fellows per cohort are foreign nationals with Indian origins.

Program

TFI places their participants in the lowest performing schools in the country for a period of two years. In contrast to the relatively privileged upbringing of the majority of TFI participants, TFI officially seek “partnership with communities where there is a disparity in educational opportunity along lines of race and class.”

Data Collection

Our national web-based survey of all applicants to TFI was administered to collect predicted, explanatory, mediator, and moderator metrics. We targeted all TFI applicants to the 2009-2014 cohorts with a valid email address. The survey data contains a series of questions on applicant demographics and background information, as well as measures regarding employment outcomes and aspirations. We surveyed first and second year teachers, alumni, and those applicants who were not admitted. This data was merged with TFI’s admissions data. Our study sample size is approximately 3,185.

Research Design

We used propensity score matching (PSM) techniques to construct a comparison group among non-participants that was as similar as possible to TFI participants on measured characteristics (including demographics as well as other background variables). Balance diagnostics were completed to support the validity of the PSM approach. In order to improve the precision of the results, a regression adjusted model using these matched pairs is employed to estimate β_1 , the average impact of participating in TFI on the outcome of interest:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 TFI_i + \mathbf{X}_i \psi + \varepsilon_i$$
$$\varepsilon_i \sim N(0, v_i)$$

where Y_i is the outcome of interest for individual i (e.g., whether or not the individual is employed in the field of education); “TFI” is a dummy variable that is equal to 1 if a student participated in TFI and equal to 0 otherwise; \mathbf{X}_i represents a vector of applicant-specific background variables (including those upon which the propensity score was based), and ε_i represents the error term, which is assumed to be normally distributed with variance v_i and mean 0. We matched on the following variables: age, gender, Indian citizenship, home country, urbanicity, member of a scheduled caste or tribe, maternal education, paternal education, religion, social class/income, skin tone, and admissions score. After matching on the propensity score, we checked for sufficient “overlap” across participant and non-participant groups at each level of the propensity score, as well as for statistical balance on observable variables between these two groups.

Preliminary Results

Preliminary findings from this study indicate that indeed, participating in TFI has an important and large effect on the career pathways and values of former fellows, and shifts the priorities of those who did not initially plan to pursue a career in education to work on issues of education inequality. Overall, participants are approximately 26 percentage points ($p < 0.01$) more likely to work in a socially-inclined service-oriented sector later in life than comparable non-fellows, and are approximately 55 percentage points ($p < 0.01$) more likely to be working in the field of education itself, broadly defined. Conversely, participants are no more likely to work in the fields of health or government, and are in fact 38 percentage points less likely to work in the “private, for profit” sector ($p < 0.01$). Further, former TFI participants are approximately 32 percentage points ($p < 0.01$) more likely to be engaged in an activity related to serving low-income communities. In addition, TFI participation is linked with a 50-percentage point ($p < 0.01$) increase in the likelihood of holding a job that focuses on addressing a social cause (e.g., family welfare, human rights, civic issues etc.). Finally, when asked about their “ideal future job,” TFI participants are 14 percentage points ($p = 0.03$) more likely to propose career titles within the field of education. Note that these are the “Average Treatment on the Treated” (ATT) results, as are typically presented with PSM methodologies (matching performed with all demographic variables). “Average Treatment Effect” (ATE) results and OLS results (in which the sample was limited to only admitted students with the treatment variable becoming matriculant status) are comparable; findings are robust to inclusion of the admissions score.

Conclusion

The effects of participating in such a teaching corps in India are large. For example, after finishing the program, participants are over 40 percentage points more likely to pursue careers in education generally and are similarly more likely to be driven by a social cause in their work. Our findings have broad implications for our understanding of the potential of national service programs to transform participants’ career trajectories, as well as affect an individual’s sense of purpose within their chosen occupation.

ⁱ Mo, C. H. and Conn, K. M. (2018). When Do the Advantaged See the Disadvantages of Others? A Quasi-Experimental Study of National Service. *American Political Science Review*, 1-21. doi:10.1017/S0003055418000412

ⁱⁱ Fryer, Roland J & Dobbie, W. (2015). The Impact of Voluntary Youth Service on Future Outcomes: Evidence from Teach For America. B. E. *Journal of Economic Analysis and Policy, Advances Tier*;15 (3) :1031.