Case Study

Teach for India
Providing quality education for the underprivileged

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**Executive Summary**

In India, majority of children attend government schools where there is a lack of not just infrastructural facilities but well trained and motivated teachers. The high absenteeism rate of teachers, increased drop-out rates and understaffed government schools impact the overall educational scenario. Moreover, given these concerns, the government school going children lag behind their private school counterpart; unable to stand on an equal footing with their peers. While these issues are highlighted by the government and development organisations, there is an urgent need to introduce reform to strengthen the service delivery in public education system in India.

Against this background, in 2009, the Teach for India (TFI) organisation, initiated a nationwide fellowship program for college graduates and young professionals with a belief to bring long-term reforms in education sector. The programme aims to empower the talented youth to improve the quality of education by addressing the capacity issues in low income government and private schools by placing college graduates and professionals to teach in these under-resourced schools for two years.

The fellowship provides resources and training, and encourages chosen fellows to employ innovative teaching techniques while attempting to devise ways of addressing some of the gaps inherent in the government education system.

In this manner, in the short run, TFI creates a pool of dedicated teachers who work diligently to impart quality education to underprivileged children and in the process become sensitive to the problems that plague India’s education system and learn to develop appropriate solutions. In the long-run, TFI hopes to utilize this sensitivity, to build a powerful and ever-growing network of alumni who will continue to work towards creating equality in educational opportunities through various avenues.

**Methodology**

Working with the objective of identifying best practices in governance in India for the purpose of further replication, the Governance Knowledge Centre (GKC) research team conducts research to locate initiatives that contribute towards the betterment of public service delivery. The GKC team conducted extensive secondary research using credible web sources to establish the suitability of Teach For India (TFI) as a best practice. This research reflected the manner in which TFI is harnessing the potential of young minds to address the problem of inequity in educational opportunities and in turn building the leadership abilities of the youth.
Having recognised TFI as a best practice, the next step was to identify the key stakeholders and interview them to gain a deeper insight into the operation and impact of the initiative. This document has been compiled by putting together the information collected through secondary research as well as the insights gathered through an interview with the City Director of Teach for India in New Delhi and an interaction with TFI Fellows and students from Nigam Pratibha Vidhyalaya, Kothi Kale Khan, Mehrauli, New Delhi.

Efforts have been made to provide objective information in the document. However, since only the implementers of the project were interviewed, there is a possibility of the percolation of subjective bias.

**Background**

In India, the government is the major provider of primary education - more than three quarters of all primary school students in India attend government schools. The government funded primary schools provide free education to children up to 14 years of age. Alongside the government schools, there are private schools that are being attended by increasing number of students that can afford the expensive education. One of the major causes of the shift towards private education is the perception of better quality education. Research indicates that government schools not only lack proper infrastructure, the high rate of teacher absenteeism, skewed teacher to child ratio decreases the quality of education. Poor resource capacity impacts the quality of education.

While the government is attempting to address some of the problems related to infrastructural shortages and student drop outs through schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Midday Meal Programme, it is vital to concentrate on teachers, and the techniques and tools they utilise. As such, reforming and reinvigorating teachers’ attitudes and empowering them with effective tools can significantly transform the nature, scope and means of education imparted in government schools, making it efficient and impactful. This will help to bridge the vast educational differences between government and privately run schools.

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In order to bring long-term education reform, the Teach for India (TFI) Fellowship is experimenting with an innovative model that places highly motivated and qualified young professionals in low-income government schools and some private schools alongside regular teaching staff. These graduates and professionals referred to as TFI Fellows commit two-years to teach full-time in under-resourced schools. The Fellowship provides resources and training, and encourages Fellows to employ innovative teaching techniques while attempting to devise ways of addressing some of the gaps inherent in the government education system.

**Teach For India**

TFI is modelled on the lines of the very successful Teach For America Programme that was launched successfully in America more than twenty years ago, and have mentored the initiation of the Teach For India.

After a favourable feasibility study conducted by McKinsey and Company to test the recruitment potential, willingness of government schools to allow the fellows to teach as well as the availability of financial support, the first batch of TFI fellows was placed in underprivileged schools in Mumbai and Pune in 2009. In 2011, TFI added Delhi to its list of placement cities.

In the short run, TFI aims to create a pool of dedicated teachers who work diligently to impart quality education to underprivileged children, in the process become sensitive to the problems that plague India’s education system and learn to develop appropriate solutions. In the long-run, TFI hopes to utilize this sensitivity, to build a powerful and ever-growing network of alumni who will continue to work towards creating equality in educational opportunities through various avenues.

**Objective**

- To create excellence in education in India by eliminating educational inequity
- To provide quality education to underprivileged children
- To create a pool of young leaders in the pursuance of educational excellence
Programme Design

Key Stakeholders

- TFI is a part of a global network “Teach For All” which works towards expanding educational opportunities in about 22 countries. The “Teach For All” network provides TFI with technical guidance and support to achieve the aim on educational equality in India.
- TFI was founded by Shaheen Mistri, CEO, Akanksha Foundation which started in 1989 and works to provide underprivileged children with quality education.
- Funding for TFI comes from Michael and Susan Dell foundation
- TFI is supported by various companies that allow professionals to take a two year leave to work as fellows and also by various colleges which allow TFI to carry out recruitment activities among their students.
- TFI engages with the government to seek permission to allow its Fellows to teach in government schools.

Programme Design

Teach for India is an independent programme that is responsible for hiring, training and deploying the young talent in appropriate schools.

Recruitment of Fellows

The first step is to recruit fellows, and two varied approaches are followed to identify right candidates – first method is to directly hire interested students through college placements and second, gives interested students and professionals within the age limit of 20 to 35 to apply online through the TFI website http://www.teachforindia.org/. The online applications are accepted four times between August and March. Applications go through a rigorous multi stage selection process where individuals are evaluated for academic excellence, demonstrated leadership, a commitment to the community, critical thinking and perseverance. The selection procedure consists of the following three stages:

- Completion of an online application form, which is then reviewed by the TFI team
- On the basis of the review in the first stage, a telephonic interview is conducted for some candidates, while others are directly called for the third stage
- Assessment day, where candidates selected after stage one and two spend an entire day in-person with TFI selectors and other applicants. At the Assessment Centre, the candidate’s suitability for the fellowship is tested through several activities.
Once selected, the candidates are asked to present their supporting documents and then wait for their training to begin. Having such a highly selective recruitment procedure, ensures that TFI hires individuals sincerely committed to the goal of creating educational opportunity for all.

Training of Fellows
Before their formal training begins, Fellows are provided with reading materials and videos of classroom teaching which helps to familiarize them with the roles and responsibilities of a teacher and the concepts, strategies and challenges of teaching.

The Fellowship formally begins with a five-week training Institute in Pune that helps selected Fellows understand curriculum, create long-term lesson plans, present content to students in a clear and engaging way and assess student progress. The training focuses on developing in Fellows a theoretical understanding of the frameworks of teaching and specific instructional techniques needed to teach English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. Fellows are also given practical training, where they are required to teach primary school students for four out of the five weeks of training. During these four weeks they set some goals for students and are expected to achieve those goals by the end of the training.

Each Fellow is given a mentor in the form of a Programme Manager whose primary responsibility is to guide Fellows in achieving their goals and to become effective teachers and leaders. These Managers mentor the Fellow for the course of the entire fellowship.

Deployment in Schools
Post Training Fellows are placed in low income government and private schools where they work as full time teachers for two years. Fellows teach all major subjects — including English, Mathematics, History and Science — with the exception of regional languages to students of 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th standards. English is used as the medium of instruction. TFI fellows adopt...
unique and engaging tools to teach their students, strengthen their learning, monitor their behaviour and track their progress. Each fellow uses his/her discretion and creativity to design such tools. Some of these tools can be seen in the pictures below.

During the two-year programme, fellows gain an understanding of the whole system. They frequently interact with other teachers in the school as well as the parents of the children by organising community visits. This sensitises them to the community environment and attitude towards education and helps them plan their strategies accordingly. Apart from the teaching, fellows learn about the challenges, barriers and obstacles to student achievement. In their 2nd year, fellows are required to do a community project which works to remove major barriers to student learning. This school-wide project will seek to address one major obstacle to learning in...
that particular school. By designing, implementing and managing a small-scale project within
the school, Fellows build upon their leadership and management skills.

Fellows are given a certain stipend for the duration of the fellowship and are compensated up
to a predetermined amount, for certain expenses, such as internet, schools supplies, etc.

Post fellowship
The fellows benefit from the ground experience gained and many continue to stay involved
even post their two year period. Post the TFI Fellowship, it is hoped that Fellows will work
from within and across different sectors to advocate equity in education. This may be through
involvement in corporate foundations to encourage funding, through working in the
government to influence policies towards education equity or through working in other social
organizations involved in getting better education for the underprivileged. This is a key
component of Teach for India’s approach – to build a strong network of alumni so they could
continue to effect change in whatever roles they play later in life.

For this purpose, TFI provides information to Fellows about potential career tracks which can
help them learn about how to effect educational change from any sector. During the second
year of their Fellowship, Fellows pursue an Action Curriculum which consists of 4 optional
courses:

- Social Entrepreneurship
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Government and Political Advocacy
- Education and School Leadership

Each course includes both theoretical and practical components, comprising of a two-day
intensive interactive session with expert speakers, and independent readings. Leadership
Forums are also regularly scheduled to give Fellows an opportunity to interact with notable
leaders in all fields.

Impact

Addressing educational inequity

Starting with 87 Fellows teaching in 35 schools in Mumbai and Pune in 2009, today 250 TFI
Fellows are teaching across 130 schools in Mumbai, Pune and Delhi. TFI is reaching out to
about 12,000 students in under-resourced schools, providing them an opportunity to be
exposed to a quality of education which they have so far been devoid of. The use of interactive
and creative tools, is gradually increasing participation and interest levels of students being taught by TFI Fellows. TFI’s experience over the past two years shows an increase in students’ confidence levels, willingness to learn as well as an improvement in their grasping potential. The students approach and their parent’s attitude and support towards their education are being positively altered as a result of the Fellows interactions with them.

TFI’s specialized approach of paying individual attention to students helps in identifying each student’s strengths and weaknesses and makes it possible to provide additional assistance to students who may require it. This helps in creating a holistic and uniform learning environment, with the emphasis being on putting all students on a level playing field. Also, students who display extraordinary potential are encouraged and supported to participate in interschool activities and other such platforms, which gives them an opportunity to realize their potential.

Through such consistent efforts, TFI fellows are creating a positive learning culture in under resourced schools and attempting to enhance the educational quality imparted in these schools.

**Modifying the public education system**

TFI Fellows are placed within an existing educational structure where they are expected to begin with small steps. The presence of young, vibrant Fellows in the school brings a fresh outlook towards addressing educational concerns. The approach and tools that the fellows use, their dedication and continuous striving towards achieving educational excellence influences other teachers to learn from them and also familiarizes the Fellows with real bottlenecks. Knowledge and experience sharing between Fellows and existing teachers helps in creating a motivating environment, where both sides can learn from each other.
TFI engages with stakeholders from the government from time to time to seek permission to engage with government schools and utilizes this opportunity to advocate for educational reform and push forward its ideas and tools for achieving educational equity and improving the quality of education in government schools. Familiarity with the government, interacting with other organizations and experts in the domain of advocating educational reforms provides TFI with avenues to build partnerships which in the long run can be instrumental in furthering its educational reform agenda.

Kaveri Hannah Bhat and Rukmini Das have joined TFI as Fellows this year (2011). While Kaveri is a designer by profession, Rukmini was working in the field of marketing. Both Bhat and Das chose to leave their respective fields and join the TFI movement. They did so because they had heard about their peers becoming agents of educational change and were keen to do some inspiring work themselves.

Today it has been more than six months that they are working as Fellows in Nigam Pratibha Vidhyalaya, Kothi Kale Khan, Mehrauli, New Delhi teaching students of grade two and three. For both Bhat and Das, the TFI fellowship is shaping up to be a life changing experience. They are both handling a set of children with diverse set of abilities, interacting with existing faculty, parents and coming face to face with challenges in imparting quality education. They strongly feel that addressing the daily challenges in the classroom is strengthening their management, communication and negotiation skills, preparing them for a career in any field. The Fellowship is building in them a desire to work in the education sector and create larger impact.

They have both been trained and the similarity in their approach is evident in their interaction with the children. However, both of them bring a uniqueness of their own based on their skill sets and past working experiences. This is reflected in the varied tracking and class management tools they utilize. This is where the uniqueness of TFI lies. It is acting as a platform for bringing together individuals interested in reforming the Indian education system, equipping them with appropriate tools and guidance but at the same time giving them the freedom to utilize their inherent skills. In this manner, it is constantly pushing its Fellows to innovate in the classroom and keeping the students motivated and interested in learning. For each Fellow, his/her classroom is a lab for innovative experimentation.
Creation of a pool of young leaders

TFI uses the model of “Teaching as Leadership” (TAL), which is premised on the belief that excellent teachers employ the same skills as excellent leaders in any field. The TAL model requires teachers to display efficient planning, execution and management skills. Spending two years in the classroom in an unstructured environment helps Fellows build on these skills and increases their problem-solving, organization, communication abilities and resourcefulness. In this manner, Fellows become extraordinary leaders who help their students make significant academic gains in the short run and become capable of advocating for education reform in the long run.

By putting Fellows through the experience of overcoming immense challenges and developing widely applicable leadership skills, the TFI Fellowship opens a door of possibilities for the Fellows in sectors ranging from the government to the corporate and third sectors.

Challenges in Implementation

Like most of the new initiatives, TFI also struggled initially in attracting fellows, seeking permission to teach in public schools and placing the Fellows in an existing environment and fitting in with the already present faculty. One key challenge is the differential abilities of students from the same class. While some students can read and understand English, many others in the same standard are not well versed even in the alphabets. This presents a tremendous challenge for the Fellow. This is being addressed through the different tracking tools that Fellows use which helps them pay special attention to students who are lagging behind and plan their lessons accordingly.

Since, it is only this year that its first batch of Fellows have completed their fellowship, the challenges in maintaining an alumni network will now come to the forefront and TFI’s ability to leverage this network for creating educational equity will be tested.

Recommendations

TFI’s current approach of recruiting young motivated people to address gaps inherent in India’s educational system is a new way of trying to induce changes in the public education system along with developing leadership abilities in a person for his/her individual growth. This approach can be further strengthened by trying to build the capacities of existing teachers/faculty by training them like the TFI Fellows. In this manner existing teachers attitudes and skills can be enhanced which can vastly enlarge the impact scope of TFI.
TFI can think of doing so by partnering with the government and conducting training workshops and sessions for government school teachers. Ultimately the long term aim of creating educational equity by improving the quality of education in government schools can be achieved only when all teachers in the government education system are well equipped and skilled to impart quality education.

Conclusion

In 2012, TFI plans to place its Fellows in schools in Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Chennai and Hyderabad, aiming to impact 65,000 children. TFI presents an excellent example of taking small steps towards achieving a larger goal. Its model of teaching as leadership presents great potential for creating opportunities for all children to attain access to an excellent education by creating and using a pool of young sensitised people as agents of change.

References


Appendix A – Interview Questionnaire

City Director, TFI, New Delhi

Background

1. Teach For India (TFI) begins on the premise that there are certain inefficiencies in the Indian education system particularly in the government run schools. What specific changes does TFI seek to introduce in the government education system to address these gaps?

2. TFI works with municipal and low income private schools. How did TFI convince these schools to allow TFI fellows to teach their students? Did TFI face any resistance? If yes, how was it overcome?

3. How does TFI motivate the youth to believe in its vision and work in government schools while they can instead opt for teaching in private schools with better work conditions?

Programme Design

4. The key stakeholders in the project are Akanksha Foundation, Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, municipal and private schools and several private companies and colleges?

5. Can you explain the roles and responsibilities of each of one of the above stakeholders?

6. Are there any other stakeholders? If yes, who are they and what are their roles?

7. Can you explain the recruitment process of TFI Fellows? On what criterions are the applications scrutinized? How does TFI differentiate between an individuals commitment for creating educational equity from his/her desire to do the fellowship merely for personal career growth.

8. What kind of training is given to fellows prior to their deployment for two years to schools? Who is responsible for imparting this training?

9. What is the process of identifying appropriate schools for the TFI fellows?

10. What is the fellow-student ratio in each class? What is unique about the curriculum, way and tools utilized by the TFI fellows in a classroom? Can you elaborate on the community project that is required of every fellow during the second year of the fellowship?

11. How is the work of TFI fellows monitored? Is there any sort of mechanism to receive students’ feedback?

12. What kind of engagement do TFI fellows have with the existing faculty in schools? Is there any sort of formal knowledge sharing between fellows and teachers?
13. TFI gradually hopes to build an alumni network of passed out fellows. This is very crucial for achieving TFI’s long term goal of creating equity in educational opportunities. How does TFI seek to build and maintain such an alumni network? Please elaborate.

14. Can you explain the financial model for the TFI programme? What do the operating costs include? Where does TFI secure its funding from?

Impact

15. This year (2011) the first batch of TFI Fellows finishes its Fellowship. What would you say has been the impact created on:
   - Students
   - Teaching environment in schools where the fellows taught
   - On TFI Fellows

Challenges

16. What are the major challenges faced during the designing and operations of TFI? How were they overcome?

Enhancements

17. Starting in Mumbai, TFI is now expanding to major cities across the country. There are plans to start the initiative in Hyderabad and Chennai too. When will it be initiated? Are there plans to include other states?

18. Does TFI carry out any advocacy efforts in order to promote its model of educational change among government authorities so that ultimately a government programme on similar lines can be launched which will have the potential to reach larger audiences and change the quality of education imparted in government schools?

19. What are the other major enhancements planned for the future?

20. What do you think are the most crucial factors that are necessary for the success of an initiative like TFI?

Data

- Can you provide us with the following data:
- Number of TFI Fellows till date (year wise break-up)
- Number of schools where Fellows teach (break-up of government and private schools)
- Number of students reached out to
- Contact details of other stakeholders
- Pictures

Fellows

1. Why did you join TFI? How has your experience been so far?
2. What are the major challenges you have encountered during your fellowship? How did you overcome them?

3. Do you feel you have created an impact on the lives of students in your class?

4. Has the TFI experience inspired you to pursue a long term career in the education sector aiming to reform it?

5. Do you have any complaints and suggestions?

Regular Teachers

1. Do you interact with TFI Fellows? Do you think they have altered the teaching environment in the school?

2. Have you received any sort of feedback from students? If yes, how have students reacted to the presence of TFI teachers in the school?

3. Have the fellows inspired you in any way?