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To cite this article: Matthew A. M. Thomas & Ren-Hao Xu (2023) The Emergence and Policy (mis)Alignment of Teach For Taiwan, Journal of Education Policy, 38:4, 686-709, DOI: 10.1080/02680939.2022.2095036

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2022.2095036>



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Published online: 11 Jul 2022.



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The Emergence and Policy (mis)Alignment of Teach For Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Teach For All (TFAll) is global network of programs based on Teach For America. Since 2007, TFAll has spread to more than 60 countries and had a considerable impact on educational policy across educational jurisdictions. Scant research, however, has examined ‘shadow’ programs based on this model but unaffiliated with TFAll, such as Teach For Taiwan (TFT). This paper engages in a critical policy analysis of TFT and examines both its emergence and (mis) alignment with educational policy. Our analysis first highlights the inspiration and support TFT has drawn from TFAll and its affiliate programs, despite its unofficial status. The paper then examines how TFT is aligned strategically with recent policy shifts toward deregulation in Taiwanese education. We also find that TFT is misaligned with key educational structures, including the national salary scale for teachers and teacher education system, resulting in a new category of transient teachers who are uniquely positioned in the teaching roles they assume but largely unable to continue teaching beyond TFT. We argue that more attention within education policy studies should focus on the impacts of (un)official TFAll programs – particularly given their disproportionate power and positioning to effect global educational change – and their (mis) alignments with national systems.

ARTICLE HISTORY



Received 2 November 2021
Accepted 19 June 2022

KEYWORDS

Teach For Taiwan; Teach For All; Teach For America; education policy; critical policy studies; teacher education; Taiwan

Introduction

Based largely on Teach For America (TFA), programs associated with the Teach For All (TFAll) network now exist in more than 60 countries around the world. From Pakistan to Panama to Portugal to the Philippines, each TFAll program ‘recruits and develops promising future leaders to teach in their nations’ under-resourced schools and communities’ for two years (TFAll, 2021a). While affiliate programs vary somewhat in their approach and are branded by TFAll (2021a) as ‘independent, locally led and governed partner organizations’, these affiliates consistently adopt the structures, missions, and ideological commitments of the TFAll network, which aims to alter educational landscapes around the world, ostensibly toward enhanced educational opportunity (Thomas, Rauschenberger, and Crawford-Garrett 2021).

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This paper explores and analyses the emergence of a program based on TFAI – Teach For Taiwan (TFT; trans. 為台灣而教)¹ – which similarly seeks to transform the education system in Taiwan. TFT is distinct, however, in that it exists largely in the shadows of TFAI, as TFT is not an official network affiliate. This paper therefore helps fill the sizeable research gap on ‘shadow’ programs that are based largely on TFA, Teach First UK,² and other TFAI programs, but not members of the TFAI network (e.g. Teach First Norway; see Nesje 2021). Moreover, we investigate how programs such as TFT, while technically unaffiliated, emerge and benefit from linkages to national TFAI programs (e.g. TFA, Teach For Australia) as well as the larger parent TFAI network itself. This access to support and knowledge-sharing has been vital to the travelling policy of the TFA model, and to the concomitant establishment of TFT.

Taiwan is both a geographically understudied and unique national context in which to examine an alternative teacher education program. Its highly centralised/regulated educational system and recent demographic shifts distinguish it from many other jurisdictions where TFAI programs have taken root. The second analytical focus of the paper, then, is the enactment and alignment of TFT within extant educational structures. We examine how TFT is both strategically aligned with recent policy shifts and simultaneously situated uncomfortably within the broader educational system. We further argue its emergence has added a new category of transient teachers in Taiwan who experience distinct conditions and are largely precluded by existing policies from continuing to teach in public schools in the long term. We view this policy misalignment as problematic but also emblematic of the emphasis among TFAI organisations toward strategically positioning their alumni to effect systemic change in the future, wherein the ultimate goal is not recruiting, preparing, and placing teachers for prolonged teaching careers. Finally, and more broadly, the paper contributes to policy sociology research on travelling policies and how they touch down in particular ways across different national contexts (Adhikary and Lingard 2018; Ellis et al. 2016; Gulson et al. 2017; Lam 2020; Ozga and Jones 2006).

In what follows, we briefly explore the roles of TFAI affiliate programs in education policymaking and reform as well as the theoretical and methodological approaches that guided this study. We then examine the emergence of TFT, highlighting some of the policy influences and actors contributing to its creation and development, as well as its connections to the TFAI network and constellation of national programs. The next section briefly describes the educational system and policy landscape in Taiwan before examining the (mis)alignment of TFT within it. The paper concludes by offering further insights into the roles of (un)official TFAI programs in global education policy and the ways in which TFT is situated within and ostensibly works to affect educational policy in Taiwan.

The influences of Teach For All programs on policies and processes

A nascent but growing body of research has examined the various ways in which TFAI programs affect (and effect) education policy. Within the US, research has examined TFA’s alignment with the charter school movement (Kretchmar 2014; Kretchmar, Sondel, and Ferrare 2014; Lefebvre and Thomas 2017); influence on hiring policies and practices within school districts (Brewer et al. 2016); framing for politicians and

policymakers (Schneider 2014); and involvement in the deregulation of teacher education (Kretchmar, Sondel, and Ferrare 2018). TFA has also launched a number of recent initiatives with more explicit aims of strategically positioning alumni to effect systemic change across all levels – from local school boards to educational leadership to political offices (Blumenreich and Rogers 2021; Jacobsen and Linkow 2014; Jacobsen, White, and Reckhow 2016). Key examples include the ‘Capitol Hill Fellows’ program, which enables TFA alumni to gain legislative experience, and ‘Leadership For Educational Equity’, a spin-off organisation intended to support the political campaigns of alumni (see Kretchmar, Sondel, and Ferrare 2019; La Londe, Brewer, and Lubiencki 2015; Trujillo, Scott, and Rivera 2017).

Beyond the US, Teach First UK’s influence on education policy has received the most scholarly attention, while research elsewhere is still emerging (see Brewer, deMarrais, and McFaden 2020; Elliott 2021; Southern 2021; Straubhaar and Friedrich 2015). Bailey (2013), for instance, highlighted a 2012 conference conducted by Teach First UK, where those in attendance were ‘interpolated as individual, “exceptional” and responsible “leaders”, and as key agents in policy, educational reform and the tackling of social problems – those “innovators and change-makers”’ (p. 824). Rauschenberger (2016) and Olmedo, Bailey, and Ball (2013) similarly focused on the policy networks, assemblages, and processes through which Teach First UK has emerged and gained influence. Several researchers have further explored how TFAll organisations have impacted education policy in Bangladesh (Adhikary and Lingard 2018, 2021; Adhikary, Lingard, and Hardy 2021), India (Ball 2016; Subramanian 2018, 2020), and Spain (Saura 2018, 2021). Collectively these studies emphasise the significant impacts – intended or otherwise – TFAll programs can have on education systems.

Yet the influence of TFAll extends beyond the 60+ countries included officially in its network. Several unaffiliated shadow programs also exist that seek similarly to improve teaching/learning and influence educational policies in their respective countries. Teach First Norway is one example. It was made possible through a collaboration between municipal educational authorities, the higher education sector, and a private energy company (Equinor/Statoil). This arrangement, Nesje (2021) posits, represents a unique policy and programmatic innovation within Norwegian higher education as well as ‘a new way of organising teacher education’ (p. 66). While Teach First Norway is unaffiliated with TFAll, it has sent recruits to the Teach First UK Summer Institute for training (Ellis et al. 2016; Nesje (2021)). This suggests that the relationships between official and unofficial TFAll programs and the broader TFAll network are perhaps more complicated and involved than any particular (un)official designation might indicate. As such, more research is necessary to understand these relationships and how specific shadow programs such as Teach For Taiwan work within the education systems and policy contexts they increasingly seek to change.

Critical policy sociology: toward an analysis of Teach For Taiwan

In our analysis, we draw on scholarship from critical policy sociology to explain the emergence and (mis)alignment of TFT. Coined initially by Ozga (1987) in response to growing instrumentalism and an arguably uncritical approach to policy analysis (see also, Ozga 2021), critical policy sociology has emerged as a robust field committed to the

dissection and deconstruction of policy texts, discourses, and processes (see also Ball 1993; Molla 2021; Savage et al. 2021). Ozga (2021) builds on her previous work (Lingard and Ozga 2007; Ozga 1987) to focus attention on the dual emphases within critical policy sociology on both the politics of educational policy and educational policy as politics:

The politics of education policy refers to the context of power, social structures and relationships and discourses around education in national and global contexts.

Policy as politics focuses on how state policy in its design and attempted delivery involves politics, through interests, conflicts, power and control – so that politics is an essential element of policy. (p. 298)

This theoretical framing is particularly relevant for this paper, as various structures, discourses, and relational networks have led to the emergence and evolution of TFT in Taiwan.

On a global level, TFAll has emerged as a policy-assemblage-powerhouse with deep ties to corporations, philanthropies, supra-national organisations, and prestigious academic institutions. It is a policy network or collection of prominent actors that both constitutes and works within a heterarchical form of diffused governance (see also Adhikary and Lingard 2018; Ball and Junneman, 2012; Olmedo, Bailey, and Ball 2013). These actors, including those on the TFAll Board of Directors, possess particular forms of expertise (e.g. banking) as well as the ability to raise capital from corporate and philanthropic entities such as Google, Deutsche Post DHL, and the Bezos Family Foundation, among others (La Londe, Brewer, and Lubienski 2015). Moreover, the TFAll network also yields considerable power through its ability to create and disseminate poignant narratives that compel constituent audiences – governments, policymakers, donors, and teacher recruits – to buy into the solutions it offers. Writing about TFAll, Ahmann (2015) eloquently notes how ‘the symbolic figure of the redemptive reformer resists the restrictions of setting’ (p. 17).³

Within Taiwan, TFT paints a similar picture and uses both stories and statistics to highlight how economic, social, and geographical dimensions limit the capabilities of students. TFT therefore represents the problem (see Bacchi 2009) as one where ‘a child’s socioeconomic background predetermines their life options’ and ‘high teacher turnover in disadvantaged schools affects quality teaching’ (TFT, 2018b, 4). These two problematics are positioned as solvable through the two-pronged TFT theory of change, which involves placing avowedly high-quality ‘talent’ in remote schools for two years – ‘we invest in the most effective education intervention: better teachers’ (TFT, 2018b, 13) – then empowering them to affect policy and societal change at higher levels.⁴ While the ‘policy as politics’ context in Taiwan is somewhat unique (as elaborated below), TFT’s theory of change is nearly identical to those of TFAll affiliate programs, and reflects the global mobility of the TFAll model and broader ideology (see Lefebvre, Pradhan, and Thomas forthcoming).

Indeed, researchers have highlighted how TFAll represents a globally ‘travelling policy’ that ‘touches down’ (Adhikary and Lingard 2018; Ellis et al. 2016), or if still circling, may soon be ‘knocking on your door’ (Price and McConney 2013). Here TFAll is not necessarily a specific, singular policy; rather, it exists as an amorphous policy network and conduit for the flow of particular reform ideas and educational policies (e.g. alternative routes to teaching) that both enable TFAll programs to operate in varied national systems and are simultaneously represented discursively and symbolically by TFAll. This

perspective is consistent with the turn in policy studies away from largely linear, static, and bounded conceptualisations to more cyclical, dynamic, and spatialised perspectives (e.g. Lingard and Sellar 2013; Peck and Theodore 2010; Ball 2012; Gulson et al. 2017; Lewis 2021), which often perceive theory and method as deeply intertwined. Thus, we further draw on critical policy sociology here to ‘follow the policy’ (Peck and Theodore 2012), which Lewis (2021) summarises as ‘where one follows (virtually or in-person) the people, places and processes through which policy is made and moves’ (p. 325). This approach is particularly helpful in understanding how globalised policies – as both texts and discourses (Ball 1993) – promoted by TFAI interact with a national context such as Taiwan.

Our initial starting point, then, was the global spread of TFAI and the emergence and fit of TFT within the Taiwanese educational system. Although we were deeply familiar with the research on TFAI and some of its national affiliates (e.g. Australia, Bangladesh, India, New Zealand, USA, UK), a review of the literature revealed no known peer-reviewed publications in either English or Traditional Chinese focused on Teach For Taiwan. Despite this relative research ‘blank spot’ (Wagner 2010) in the literature, we were eager to better understand TFT’s relationship to the umbrella TFAI network and congruence with a more highly centralised education system.

We therefore drew on digital and network ethnography (Ball and Junemann 2012; Ball 2016; Hogan 2016; Varis 2016) – wherein researchers examine educational policies, online documents, multimedia contents, and networks to better understand how policy assemblages form and function – to first explore the emergence of TFT and its connections, if any, to aspects of the TFAI system. As such, we collected and reviewed materials published in English, Traditional Chinese, and Taiwanese Mandarin, including official TFT annual reports (8), TFT impact summaries (3), TFT blogs and website pages (11), digital publications from TFAI programs that mention TFT (4), and related online news articles, updates, speaker bios, videos, and podcasts highlighting TFT or its staff (9).⁵ While we were unable to conduct interviews due to issues of research access and ethics, collectively these multiple data points provided ample and vital insights into TFT’s historical evolution.

As our analysis progressed, we also become increasingly interested in the unique contextualisation of TFT within the extant policy landscape, and the sociological impact of TFT within that system. Thus, we next commenced analysis of the policy structures and frameworks that support (or constrain) the operations of TFT and, importantly, how its (mis)alignment might contribute to future policy shifts. To frame this central component of our work, we drew extensively on relevant Taiwanese laws and regulations (5) as well as official reports from the Taiwan government (9) about K-12 and teacher education at national and municipal levels. These key documents were written in Traditional Chinese and analysed by Xu (Author 2). In total, 14 policy documents and 35 digital documents/audio-visual sources were analysed in our examination of TFT, which we present in the following section.

The emergence of Teach For Taiwan

Drawing on recent emphases within critical policy sociology on the flows and influences of prominent policy actors, we begin our analysis of TFT by examining some of its key leaders and influences as they travelled from one context to the next. We then question the (un)official status of TFT vis-à-vis the TFA network and highlight how TFT actors circulate within the insularity and exclusivity of TFA.

Learning from America

Teach For Taiwan was established in 2013 by An-Ting Liu (劉安婷). Born in Taiwan, she became a popular success story after gaining acceptance to National Taiwan University – Taiwan’s highest ranked institution – and 10 competitive universities in the United States, including Princeton where she studied international relations (TEDxTaipei, 2013). It was here that Liu learned of fellow Princeton alumna, Wendy Kopp, who conceptualised Teach For America in 1989 and would become one of the most influential policy actors in the US and beyond (see Thomas and Baxendale, forthcoming). Following graduation in 2012, Liu worked for a year with a management consulting firm in New York City before returning to Taiwan to launch TFT (Lin 2013). Inspired by TFA and her own experiences volunteering abroad, Liu felt compelled to help ‘solve’ educational inequality in Taiwan, particularly the insufficient supply of trained teachers in remote and disadvantaged areas (TFT, 2014). Yet she was also aware of mounting criticism of TFA, or at least local perceptions. Liu noted, ‘the recruit comes from Harvard, and he’s got prestigious training, and he thinks he knows what the community needs . . . Maybe he does know, but he needs to get to know the community before he can help them’ (Lin 2013). She therefore worked to develop ‘dozens of case studies on the Teach for America program that have gone wrong,’ to help better tailor TFA for the Taiwanese context (Lin 2013).

This commitment to adaptation and improvement notwithstanding, the TFT program largely replicates both programmatic and discursive aspects of TFA and affiliate programs within the TFA network. For example, according to TFT materials, it first recruits ‘high-potential, mission-driven individuals to commit to a full-time teaching fellowship in educationally disadvantaged primary schools for two years’ (TFT, 2018b, 9). TFT then prepares its teachers – known as Fellows⁶ – through a condensed five-week ‘Summer Intensive’ training period; while drawing on *Teaching as Leadership* (領導力教學; see also, Farr 2010; Lam 2020), a core TFA text, as a guiding framework (see TFAus, 2019). It also utilises a ‘two-part theory of change’ where Fellows are supposed to have an impact in classrooms during their two-year commitments and then ‘further deepen their scope of influence through their leadership in different sectors’ as members of the TFT alumni network (TFT, 2018b, 8). These core elements of TFT originated in the work of TFA and are nearly identical across the TFA network.

Local growth and global connections

Following its inception in 2013, TFT worked with the Taitung and Tainan local governments to place 9 Fellows as its first cohort (TFT, 2013, 12–15). The number of Fellows has increased slowly over time, with the largest cohort of 56 Fellows placed in 2021. In total,

Table 1. Growth of Teach For Taiwan, 2014–2021.

YEAR	Number of New TFT Fellows	Number of Schools (Total)	Number of Local Governments	Cooperating Local Governments
2014	9	8	2	Taitung, Tainan
2015	20	21	4	Taitung, Pingtung, Tainan, Yunlin
2016	29	27	4	Hualien, Pingtung, Tainan, Yunlin
2017	37	45	4	Hualien, Pingtung, Tainan, Yunlin
2018	29	49	5	Hualien, Pingtung, Tainan, Yunlin, Nantou
2019	49	60	6	Hualien, Pingtung, Tainan, Yunlin, Chiayi, Changhua
2020	39	68	5	Hualien, Pingtung, Tainan, Yunlin, Nantou
2021	56	75	7	Hualien, Pingtung, Tainan, Yunlin, Changhua, Chiayi, Miaoli

Source: TFT Annual Reports (2013, 2014, 2018a, 2022)

Note: The number of TFT Fellows reported in annual reports seems to vary depending on whether the accounting includes those who joined and commenced the two-year TFT fellowship or those who completed it.

more than 260 Fellows have been involved in the program since its launch. Meanwhile, the number of cooperating local governments has also expanded from two to five, with several new additions (and removals) over the years (see Table 1).

As alluded to above, at present TFT is not an official affiliate of TFAll, though it has been involved with the umbrella network since its origin. An article published close to its launch noted that ‘if final negotiations go well next month, Teach for Taiwan will become the newest affiliate of Teach for All, the international organisation that includes Teach for America’ (Lin 2013). This obviously did not happen, but representatives from TFAll did visit TFT in 2014 (TFT, 2018a). TFT has also participated in several of TFAll’s Global Conferences, including in Mexico in 2014 and in Colombia in 2017 (TFT, 2018a). These annual events are key features of the TFAll policy network assemblage: they bring together various actors and TFAll program representatives to share insights and gain inspiration from keynote speakers such as Malala Yousafzai and Andreas Schleicher, who directs education at the OECD and has served on the TFAll Board of Directors.⁷ Thus, and true to form, TFT ‘is keen on applying best global practices to our local cause’ and has formed partner relationships with several TFAll program affiliates, including Teach for Australia, Teach For Malaysia, and Teach For India, the latter of which TFT ‘owes a particular dept’ for ‘how we foster our working ethos’ (TFT, 2018b, 14).

In addition to Liu’s linkages to Princeton/TFA and TFT’s connections to TFAll and its national programs, the second CEO of TFT was an alumnus of Teach For Australia. Stanley Wang was a member of the 2012 Teach For Australia cohort in the state of Victoria and first met TFT founder An-Ting Liu in 2014 after he offered her his support (TFAus, 2019; Junrong, 2020). He was soon commissioned to write TFT’s first training program and later appointed as its Chief Strategy Officer for 12 months before serving as CEO from 2019–2020 (TFAus, 2018, 2019). Prior to assuming leadership, Wang also attended the 2018 TFAll Global Conference and then ‘visited nearly 10 [TFAll] network partners’ (Wang 2018). As such, the connections to the TFAll network – while unofficial and lurking in the shadows – are substantive and quite remarkable.

Despite these initial strong connections, TFT has been excluded from attaining official TFAll status. Wang recently expressed disappointment that TFT was unable to attend the 2019 TFAll Global Conference and referenced ‘the solidarity felt amongst other non-

official programs' (Cheng 2019). TFT's non-official status is consistent with classifications from TFAll staff (personal communication, 2 April 2020) that suggest some unaffiliated programs may align with TFAll's Unifying Principles and Core Values (see TFAll, 2021a, 2021b), but lie outside the UN member state designation used by TFAll to determine network inclusion.⁸ In these instances, it seems TFAll aims to share insights and innovations with representatives of non-affiliate programs, but not grant them official status. These programs, in our conceptualisation, largely take the same image and shape as official programs but are not constituted as the 'real' thing, and therefore operate as shadows. Nonetheless, it is evident that through the work and connections of its most prominent policy actors, TFT has both deep roots in the original model (Teach For America) and strong ties with its global manifestations through TFAll.

With these transnational relationships and inspirations in mind, we were eager to examine how TFT was aligned with the Taiwanese educational context, which varies considerably from many countries where TFAll programs operate. The next section therefore outlines the historical policy context in which TFT has been inserted and explores 'policy as politics' in Taiwan. In particular, we draw inspiration from Ozga's (2021) exhortation about the importance of history in critical policy sociology as well as Olmedo et al.'s (2013) contention that 'careful attention needs to be paid to the wider social and deeper historical contexts within which [TFAll] engages' (Olmedo, Bailey, and Ball 2013, 509).⁹

Policy context: Taiwan, teaching, and teacher education

In Taiwan, the educational governance system consists of a central governmental agency – the Ministry of Education – and 22 local Departments of Education. Although these local authorities share educational governance, the Ministry wields considerably more power and in general the system is highly centralised. This power balance carries through the entire education system – which comprises primary, junior high, and senior high school levels – and across both public and private sectors. Recent statistics show the vast majority of students attend public schools at primary (96.5%) and junior high (86.1%) levels, though public enrolment drops at the senior high level (63.3%) (MOE, 2020b). Since the 2000s, Taiwan has been one of the top-performing countries on the OECD (2018) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA); however, it has also had the widest equity gap in student performance across different school entry cohorts and residential areas (Huang 2017). In particular, and in tandem with a decreasing birth rate, a shortage of 'certified teachers' in disadvantaged schools has emerged, experienced most acutely in more rural and remote locations (Huang 2015; Wang and Chen 2007). To address both demographic changes and teacher shortages, Taiwan's educational policies have evolved over time and created the space and conditions for a new venture like TFT to emerge, albeit in a somewhat misaligned fashion.

The evolution of teacher education policies and types of teachers

Passed in 1979, the Normal Education Act (師範教育法) established a centralised teacher education system in Taiwan with two primary features: 1) selected higher education institutions (HEIs) held a relative monopoly over teacher education; and 2)

all students in these HEIs were supported financially by the government (Hsieh 2005; MOE, 2012; Wu 2003). Only 13 government-approved HEIs were qualified to train pre-service teachers (Wu 2003). The pre-service teachers enrolled in these privileged institutions were exempted from tuition fees and received monthly stipends from the government, which then placed them in public schools upon completion of their bachelor's degrees. This planned system aimed to promote social mobility and ensure public schools in both urban and remote areas were supplied with certified teachers (Wu 2003). At the same time, it was undoubtedly a politically motivated effort to control schooling and teacher education in an era of authoritarian rule.

Following the abolition of Martial Law in 1987, the tightly controlled teacher education system was reformed, and the Normal Education Act replaced by the Teacher Education Act (TEA; 師資培育法) in 1994 (Ministry of Education [MOE] 2012). The TEA established the system that largely exists today, and marked a drastic policy shift by reforming the two core features outlined above: teacher training institutions, and the teacher certification system (Hsieh 2016; MOE, 2019b; Yen 2019). At the institutional level, the government deregulated the supply side: teacher training programs could now be offered at any accredited university, not just the 13 HEIs within the 'traditional' sector (i.e. normal or educational universities). At the individual level, pre-service teachers enrolled in teacher education programs no longer received a stipend from the government, nor were they guaranteed teaching positions in schools; instead, they were required to complete a series of requirements, outlined below. In general, the introduction of the TEA shifted the system from a largely nationalised to a semi-marketised model (Shu 2016), wherein institutions were competing for the enrolment of pre-service teachers, who were then competing for certified teaching positions.

Various reforms ushered in by the TEA as well as the Teachers' Act 1995 (TA; 教師法) also altered the types of teachers in the teaching profession, with considerable implications for educational policy (MOE, 2019a; Yen 2019). To become a 'certified teacher' (合格教師) at the primary level, pre-service teachers must now: a) complete at least 46 teacher education units/credits from an accredited HEI; b) pass the national teacher certification exam; and c) complete a one-semester internship (MOE, 2019b). Internships are typically organised by HEIs and comprise a full-time practicum experience with practice teaching, carrying out administrative duties, and conducting research and study activities in a collaborating public school. If these three conditions are met, a pre-service teacher is considered a certified teacher (see Figure 1).

Certified teachers were further stratified by the TEA into different types of teachers with distinct working conditions. Most certified teachers want to become full-time teachers in public schools, where two designations exist: tenure-track teachers (正式教師) and certified substitute teachers (CSTs, 合格代理教師). Tenure-track teachers constitute the pinnacle of the teaching profession in Taiwan, as their positions are largely guaranteed by the legal framework and their salaries increase annually with seniority. CSTs, however, generally receive less respect, job security, and salary, even though their workload may not differ significantly from that of tenure-track teachers. Moreover, CSTs receive considerably smaller contributions to their annual bonus and teacher pension scheme. It is not surprising, therefore, that most certified teachers aim and compete to become tenure-track teachers.

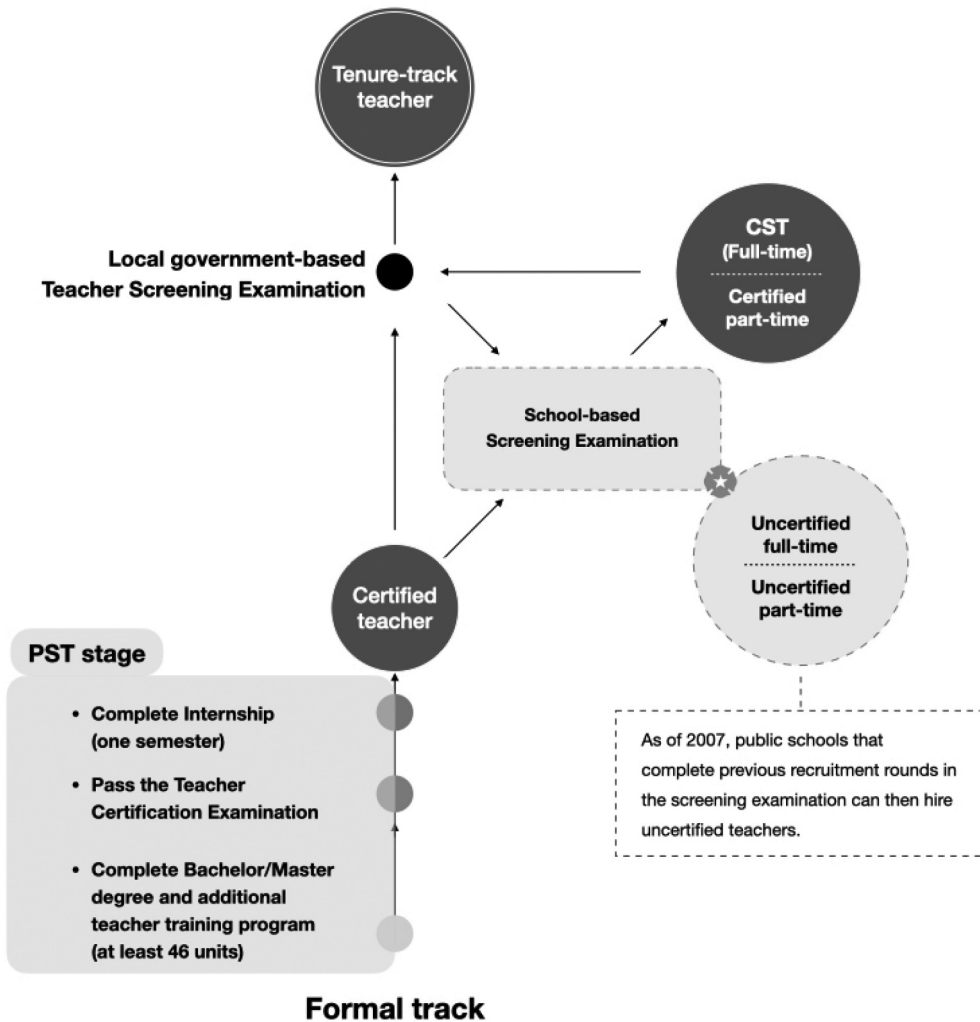


Figure 1. Requirements for Becoming a Certified Teacher in Taiwan. Source: Adapted from MOE (2019b)

In addition to tenure-track teachers and CSTs, there has historically been a small cohort of certified part-time teachers (合格代課教師) who only teach specific courses or provide temporary support within schools. They are paid hourly and are not covered by the teacher pension. While CSTs have considerably better working conditions than part-time teachers, they share similar vulnerability in an unstable job market, and due to policy regulations both part-time teachers and CSTs typically need to find another school or position every three years.¹⁰ Given their inability to remain at a particular school for an extended period of time – and with concomitant employment commitments – we use the term ‘transient teacher’ to describe the category of teachers which includes CSTs and part-time teachers.¹¹ In sum, nearly all certified teachers seek tenure-track positions due

to the comparatively better working conditions, but these positions are increasingly rare – especially in rural and remote locales – due to the declining population and the government’s policy responses (Lin 2003).

TFT and policy (mis)alignment

In this section we analyse the policy (mis)alignment of TFT in relation to both the historic changes initiated by Taiwan’s Teacher Education Act of 1994 and the current educational climate as characterised by significant demographic shifts and increased fiscal pressures. These conditions have enabled TFT to operate within Taiwan, but the broader teacher education system have excluded TFT from the formal teacher education track, and largely limit TFT Fellows’ career choices. Thus, and from a critical policy analysis perspective, TFT paradoxically represents clear policy alignment with recent global movements toward deregulation and a more casualised workforce. It, however, also demonstrates significant misalignment with local teaching and teacher education structures.

Policy alignment: demography and the rise of transient teachers

In Taiwan, a declining national population has led to demographic shifts in the schooling sector as well as increased financial constraints for educational administrators and policymakers. Significant changes to the teaching profession have manifested as a result, with both central and local governments slashing tenure-track teacher positions in recent years; since 1999, more than five per cent of tenure-track positions have been eliminated (MOE, 2020c, p. vii); these cuts are most acute in rural and remote schools. Simultaneously, CSTs and part-time teachers as transient teachers have been hired in greater numbers. These less expensive teachers have become a convenient and useful policy tool for governments (local and national) to use in both reducing their budgets whilst still meeting teaching demands. The percentage of CSTs in the teaching profession has risen by nearly 11% nationwide in recent years (MOE, 2018b, 169), and the total percentage of CSTs is 17% in remote areas, significantly higher than the national average (Legislative Yuan 2017).

In the mid-2000s, the government further eased restrictions wherein even individuals who were not certified were able to be hired as teachers, reflecting a marked change to the hierarchical and highly structured system. According to Article 3 of the new regulation (MOE, 2007), teacher recruitment in a public school consists of three rounds, prioritised based on qualifications: 1) fully certified teachers, 2) candidates who have completed a teacher training program but are yet to pass the certification examination, and 3) anyone with a bachelor’s degree. Thus, and for the first time ever, a new category of teachers – uncertified teachers (unCSTs), in either part-time or full-time capacity – were allowed to join the system.

This deregulation enabled TFT to insert its (largely exogenous) model and send Fellows into partner primary schools. Similar to most TFAAll programs, in its design TFT mainly targets and recruits graduates of non-education fields to join its program. Indeed, as reported by TFT, the vast majority of TFT Fellows (approximately 80%) have

not attended pre-service teacher education programs (TFT, 2013). Prior to the changes outlined in Article 3 above, these uncertified TFT Fellows would have been ineligible to teach in public schools.

In this sense, then, TFT reflects an opportunistic alignment with the current system, wherein the deregulation that commenced in 1994 and was advanced further in 2007 enabled just enough space for TFT to emerge. TFT capitalised on this pivotal opportunity and worked strategically to create a new type of 'transient teacher' within the hierarchical structure of the teaching profession. In particular, TFT Fellows are framed and positioned as 'trained' teachers from 'elite' and 'prestigious' backgrounds, and therefore presumptively and superficially 'better' than teachers with no training; though in reality most Fellows' only preparation is completion of the condensed Summer Intensive program (TFT, 2013). Thus, the majority (80%) of TFT Fellows who have not completed a teacher education program sit in the unique space between teachers who have and have not completed a formal teacher education program. As at present, however, there are no teaching positions specifically designated for TFT Fellows, so they are able to be placed in either full-time or part-time teaching positions, a circumstance we explore further below, if the school has completed recruitment rounds one and two, but still has not found any certified teachers or uncertified teachers who have completed teacher education program.

For schools and policymakers, these TFT Fellows as a new type of transient teacher present a clear and attractive option for meeting the increasing demand for teachers in disadvantaged and under resourced schools, especially in rural and remote locales. For TFT as an ambitious organisation, this demand for Fellows aligns perfectly with broader programmatic goals for expansion and scaling, a common theme among TFAI programs and similar edu-preneurial entities (e.g. Adhikary, Lingard, and Hardy 2021; Lefebvre, Pradhan, and Thomas *forthcoming*; La Londe et al; Olmedo, Bailey, and Ball 2013; Saura 2021).

Policy misalignment: salaries and sustained careers in classrooms

This alignment notwithstanding, TFT simultaneously reflects a misalignment of the global TFAI model within the context assembled by legislation in Taiwan (e.g. TEA, TA, and teacher appointment regulations). First, TFT Fellows are placed in either part-time or full-time positions; their salaries vary accordingly, and are paid by public, governmental funds. However, TFT expects its Fellows to work full-time, regardless of whether they are officially placed in part-time or full-time positions, likely in the hopes of advancing their mission. Left alone, this could result in TFT Fellows working the same number of hours but getting paid drastically different salaries. This could create significant challenges in recruiting future TFT Fellows (i.e. no one would want a part-time salary) as well as unfavourable competition among current Fellows for preferred positions.

TFT correctly realised this misalignment and opted to top up the salaries of Fellows working in part-time positions (see TFT, 2013). This decision/action highlights the policy misalignment of TFT within the Taiwanese system; more importantly, it shows the financial ability and sociopolitical power of TFT to work in a manner that circumvents the extant salary scale within the education system and policy framework. With additional funding from corporate, philanthropic, and other sources, TFT is able to ignore state-based salary structures, and school-based teacher supply/demand forces, for its own

benefit. Moreover, the sociological impact of this decision is likely felt most deeply by non-TFT part-time teachers in schools, who do not have the luxury of having their salaries topped up by an external organisation, having their part-time positions in essence being made full-time. It may also increase competition and precarity among part-time teachers, who now must compete with TFT Fellows (who cost the same but may do double the work).

Second, the majority of TFT Fellows are not well-positioned to continue working as classroom teachers in Taiwan, unlike many other contexts where TFAI teachers become certified within or alongside the program (e.g. Australia, England, USA). The TEA and TA policies dictate that ongoing work in public schools is restricted to tenure-track teachers (who are fully certified through the formal teacher education track and have passed and been selected through the local government-based teacher screening examinations). In other words, the policy environment essentially *disallows* alternatively-trained teachers like TFT Fellows from permanently replacing tenure-track teachers (see Figure 2).

Thus, after completing their two years of service through Teach For Taiwan, most TFT Fellows have limited options if they want to continue working as a teacher. Due to the regulations, they are not able to stay at their current school past a third year, even if that school needs additional teachers and goes through all recruitment rounds. Potentially the

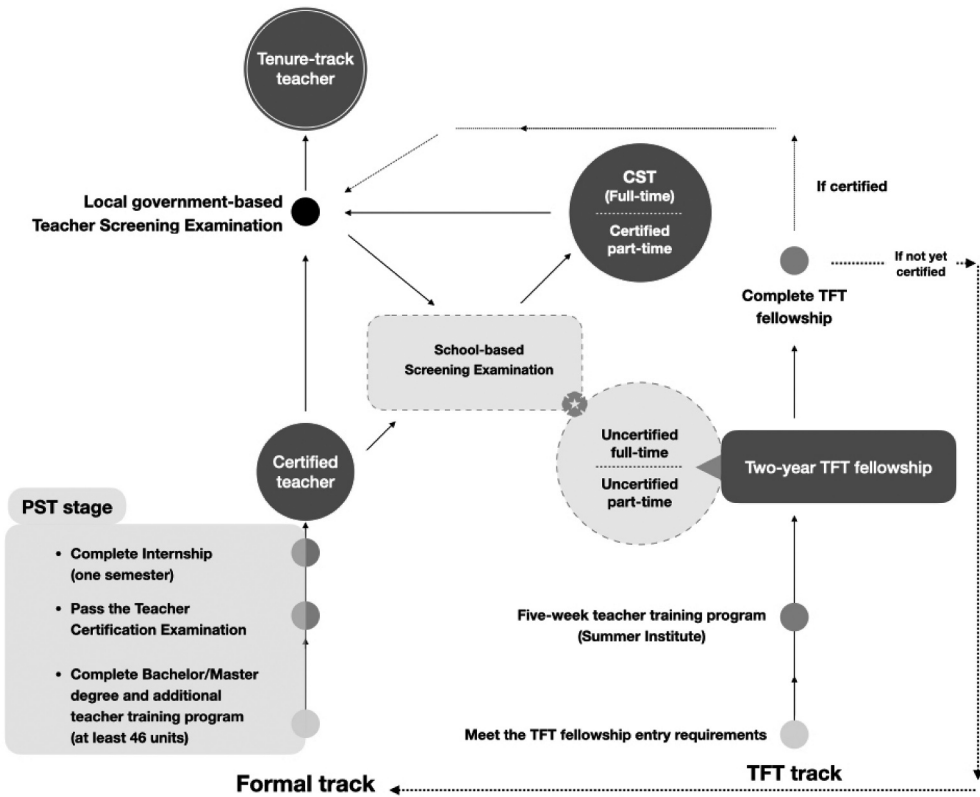


Figure 2. Career Trajectory for TFTA Fellows.

80% of uncertified TFT Fellows could be hired as teachers at *other* schools that have gone through all three recruitment rounds, but this is contingent on a school receiving no applications from certified teachers. There are also professional costs for these teachers, such as the challenges involved in starting afresh and building relationships with staff and students at a new school, as well as the potential personal costs of relocating to assume a position at a school in a new geographic location.

TFT Fellows could opt to teach in private schools – which are less regulated by the government – but as discussed above there are very few private primary schools in Taiwan. Moreover, this engagement outside the public sector would arguably contradict the educational equity mission espoused by TFT, as the small number of private primary schools in Taiwan generally enrol elite students from high socioeconomic families and communities. Thus, for the 80% of Fellows who have not completed a teacher education program, pursuing a stable and ongoing career in public school teaching (i.e. without changing schools every three years), would require them to meet all the requirements outlined in the formal teacher education track. TFT Fellows would need to start afresh as a pre-service teacher and complete course units, meet degree requirements, pass the certification examination, and more (see [Figure 2](#)). This pathway is technically plausible, though highly laborious, challenging, and convoluted.

There is one additional option, however, and it is a significant one from a policy sociology and mobility perspective. Upon completion of their two-year TFT commitment, Fellows could remain in or apply for a teacher position in the very limited number of ‘experimental schools’ that exist. Made possible by new policies in 2014 – just after the launch of TFT – these public schools have greater autonomy in curriculum, student admission, and most importantly, teacher recruitment (see MOE, [2018a](#)). Local governments have recently transitioned these experimental schools’ governance from public to private, leading the way for transnational and corporatized versions. As Tseng, Hsieh, and Jung-Cheng Chen ([2021](#)) note, ‘influenced by the initiative of privatized public school, one private foundation [in Taiwan] introduced the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) from the U.S.’ (p. 66) and helped establish three KIPP-inspired experimental primary schools in 2017.¹² These schools have come to be known as ‘KIPP Inspired Schools in Taiwan’ (KIST), and there are now nine nationwide, six of which provide primary education (ChengZhiEdu [2022](#)). Given the established connections between TFA and the charter school movement (Kretchmar [2014](#); Kretchmar, Sondel, and Ferrare [2014](#); Lefebvre and Thomas [2017](#)), it is not surprising that TFT has worked similarly to collaborate with KIST schools and send its Fellows and alumni to work in this small number of privatized public schools. In this instance, we posit that TFT is aligned instrumentally with KIST schools and the broader experiential school movement, which largely seeks to provide alternative forms of primary education with less government oversight. At present, however, the sheer number of teaching positions at these KIST schools will not meet TFT’s demand or, more importantly, have a sustained impact on the education system. In this sense, then, TFT is again uncomfortably positioned to work beyond the formal education system to pursue its aims.

Discussion

The Teach For Taiwan story originates with a remarkable individual in possession of considerable social and symbolic capital who was inspired by TFA to join ‘the movement’ and initiate a localised version of TFAll. This narrative is not unique to Taiwan, as similar examples are evident in multiple contexts around the world (Thomas, Rauschenberger, and Crawford-Garrett 2021). Teach For China, for example, was founded by a Princeton student who visited China and felt ‘overwhelmed by a sense of responsibility’ to improve its education (Lam 2020, 35). Elsewhere, the Harvard Kennedy School – known to educate ‘lots of Teach For America and Teach First alumni’ – served as a key meeting point for the founder of Teach For Australia and staff ‘involved in setting up’ Enseña Chile (Windsor 2014, 27). Similarly, An-Ting Liu leveraged her experiences and connections in the US to gain an understanding of TFA and its attendant discourses and programmatic features prior to launching TFT.

Both collectively and individually, these social entrepreneurs operate as key policy actors by engaging agents within and beyond their national contexts to raise capital, mobilise political support, build their brand, and ultimately, to position themselves and their organisations as key nodes in a (particular) movement for educational change. Our analysis above shows how linkages across the TFAll network and its partners serve as an invaluable form of knowledge sharing, therefore enhancing the possibility for policies and innovations to flow, mutate, and be reconstituted in new environments. This cross-pollination of policy actors within the TFAll network is highlighted by Adhikary and Lingard (2018), who traced the trajectories of numerous TFA alumni and staff members working for Teach For Bangladesh, finding that the ‘nature of knowledge flow is mostly Teach-for-network based’ (p. 194). Indeed, TFAll as a growing global network operates in many ways as a closed circuit of shared expertise, connections, and social/cultural capital.

One distinguishing feature of TFT, however, is its unofficial status within the TFAll network. A novel finding from this study is the remarkable likeness TFT bears – discursively and programmatically – to other programs within the TFAll network as well as how it has benefited immensely from other national programs within TFAll that maintain *official* status, and from the umbrella network itself. This raises critical questions about which programs are included or excluded from the TFAll network, and why. In addition to Teach First Norway, described above, a small handful of other programs have been operating in an unaffiliated manner, or have wavered in their association with TFAll over time. For example, TEACH South Africa was once championed as the first TFAll program in Africa, but is no longer affiliated (see Elliott 2020, 2021), and Ensina! Brasil was launched officially, then suspended, then relaunched (Straubhaar 2020). Other programs like Teach For Canada bear some resemblance in terms of their brand and focus on educational equity, but differ in important ways: Teach For Canada only recruits and places teachers who already have bachelor’s degrees *in education* or who have completed another certification program. It appears adherence to TFAll’s Unifying Principles is a central barometer for inclusion or exclusion (personal communication, TFAll staff), in addition to the UN designation employed to avoid potentially sensitive political matters (e.g. Taiwan, Hong Kong).

Overall, these insights suggest the growing influences of TFAI extend well beyond the 60+ countries where official network partners are operating to countries where ‘associated but unaffiliated’ shadow programs, like TFT, exist. Scant research has examined the relationships between these programs and TFAI, leaving many questions unanswered about the (unofficial) effects of the policy assemblage or ‘network of networks’ that is TFAI (Lam 2020, 24). More broadly, further research on programs that are clearly inspired by the TFA/TFAI movement – regardless of their relationship to the network – is warranted. Even programs lying considerably outside the official (and shadow) TFAI network may be influenced by its growing power and global presence. Examining these impacts would further highlight TFAI’s roles in the politics of educational policy, especially in relation to teachers and teacher education.

Recreating Taiwanese teachers and effecting lasting change

In the Taiwanese case, the impact of TFT is already being felt. Capitalising on a pivotal window of opportunity characterised by both the changing national demographics and increasing deregulation of the teaching profession, TFT successfully inserted itself into the educational policy structure. For schools facing shortages of certified teachers, TFT Fellows likely present as better options than candidates without any teacher education. This policy alignment helped produce a new type of transient teacher in the school system: teachers who are uncertified but positioned by TFT as trained teachers from elite and prestigious backgrounds, ready to effect educational change in underperforming and under-resourced schools.

Our analysis also demonstrates, however, that TFT is an uncomfortable fit within the Taiwanese education system. TFT needed to adapt its programming in complex ways to continue – and ideally expand – its operations, using both part-time and full-time teaching positions as placements for TFT Fellows. With stark salary differences, TFT ‘topped up’ the salaries of some Fellows, a circumstance quite different than the US and Australia, for instance, where TFAI teachers are paid entirely by school districts and departments.¹³ The effects of this change in Taiwan are relatively unknown, though one might assume that many uncertified teachers (especially in part-time roles) are not excited about additional competition for precious teaching positions. In the case of Teach For China, Lam (2020) found that ‘fellows did not supplement the existing teaching force, but rather supplanted existing local teachers’ (p. 68). More research is necessary to know whether similar effects have been experienced in Taiwan.

Critical questions about the transferability and adaptability of the TFAI model – especially within more centralised and regulated contexts (see Lam 2020) – also deserve further research attention. An-Ting’s hope in first studying the effects of TFA before designing a program in Taiwan suggests a keen desire to carefully adapt TFAI programming to the local environment. Yet as Gulson et al. (2017) suggest, the ‘mutually recursive processes of policy translation, involving people and places, help to constitute new conditions of possibility for local policy enactment, while these policies, at the same time, are reconstituted by these very same conditions’ (p. 227). TFT has indeed manifested in a manner somewhat different from other TFAI programs, but it is similarly implicated in controversial policy processes. We therefore continue to question the

enacted application of the TFAll model across contexts, particularly if or when teacher payment, teacher education, and other policies must be reformed just to enable the continued operation or alignment of TFAll programs.

A further misalignment with the Taiwanese system is both problematic and emblematic of the underlying logic of TFAll programs. The existing system does not easily enable TFT Fellows to continue their work in public schools. While at face value this misalignment is concerning given the resultant turnover of TFT Fellows in public schools, the core business and emphasis of TFAll arguably lies in training and preparing change agents, not developing career teachers:

TFT's innovative solution represents not only an immediate solution to the lack of quality teachers in disadvantaged schools, but also a long-term investment in the country's brightest future leaders who will take on the challenging charge of driving change in the education eco-system. (TFT, 2018b, 13)

Indeed, the politics of educational policy related to TFAll highlights how its programs seek to strategically position alumni in powerful places where their impact can be magnified beyond the 'mere' classroom. These efforts have been well documented in contexts such as Bangladesh (Adhikary, Lingard, and Hardy 2021), Spain (Saura 2021), and the US (Blumenreich and Rogers 2021; Jacobsen and Linkow 2014; Jacobsen, White, and Reckhow 2016; Singer and Brewer 2021), but in others where civil society is less robust and political systems more tightly controlled, such as China, the ability for systemic change may be somewhat tempered (Lam 2020).

The question remains, then, whether TFT can effect lasting change beyond the examples cited above. Like TFAll programs, TFT has sought to strategically build its relational network of policymakers, legislators, and key educational stakeholders as a means to help advance its agenda and reform educational processes. Noting it has a 'strong foundation of trust and goodwill with the players in the existing system', TFT purports to have 'actively engaged with existing teachers, policy-makers and scholars in localizing and launching the program, allowing us to scale our impact even beyond the organization' (TFT, 2018, 13). This impact is yet to be fully realised, but the insertion of TFT Fellows in public schools serves as an example of the type of permanent change likely to be pursued: accumulated political pressure may be utilised to help legitimise TFT as a fully accredited teacher education program, a phenomenon akin to the deregulation of teacher education in the US (Kretchmar, Sondel, and Ferrare 2018), where TFA has successfully lobbied to become its own certifying organisation in some states. At present, however, TFT remains both instrumentally aligned and uncomfortably misaligned with the existing system. Time will tell how much further change will result from the actions of TFT, its staff, and the growing network of TFT alumni; we view this area as an important context in which to explore the politics of education policy and policy as politics in the future.

Conclusion

As an ever-expanding network of programs, Teach For All's influence on national educational systems and policies must be continuously re-examined. Through a detailed critical policy analysis of Teach For Taiwan, this paper shows how shadow

programs associated but unaffiliated with TFAI nonetheless draw inspiration and support from the TFAI network and its official programs in other countries. In addition, the emergence of TFT within the Taiwanese policy context highlighted areas of alignment and misalignment. TFT carefully inserted itself following recent changes to teacher recruitment and hiring policies, evidence of clear policy alignment with national movements toward deregulation and the creation of a new type of transient teacher. TFT also reflects policy misalignment through the kinds of teaching positions assumed by TFT Fellows as well as the salaries paid to them. Moreover, most TFT participants would face an extremely complex and timely path to becoming fully certified as a teacher, should they wish to remain in the profession long term. Our analysis raises several critical questions about TFT's role in affecting/effecting educational policies in the years to come as well as the unique ways in which educational policies flow and mutate across contexts.

Notes

1. We have included English translations for key Traditional Chinese phrases and concepts from government and TFT materials. Google Translate was used to create preliminary English translations, which were then reviewed and edited by Xu, who is fluent in both English and Traditional Chinese.
2. See Rauschenberger (2021) for more on TFA's influence on Teach First UK, launched in 2002.
3. See also Friedrich, Walter, and Colmenares (2015) on the discursive use of 'data' in framing TFAI's approach, and Ellis et al. (2016) on its rhetorical strategies.
4. Modelled loosely on the U.S. Peace Corps, National Teacher Corps, and related volunteer programs, TFA has required only a two-year teaching commitment since its inception. TFAI programs similarly require only two years of teaching to complete the program.
5. Notably, a search of 'Teach For Taiwan' on the Teach For All website returns zero results as of 10 June 2022.
6. See Crawford-Garrett and Thomas (2018) for more on the discursive framing of the work and titles of TFAI teachers.
7. See Ahmann (2015) for insights on Malala Yousafzai and the role of storytelling within TFAI as well as Friedrich, Walter, and Colmenares (2015) on tweets from TFAI CEOs during conferences.
8. This UN designation may explain the status of Teach For Hong Kong, too, which has noted explicitly that it is 'not affiliated, connected or associated with Teach For All, Inc', even as the programs bear strong resemblance and discursive similarity via the TFA manta of *One Day*: 'All children in Hong Kong should have equal opportunity to access quality education and realize their potential' (Teach For Hong Kong 2019; see also Kopp 2001). The most recent TFT Annual Report (2022) relatedly features 'One day, all children' – written in English – on its cover, while the document itself is in Traditional Chinese.
9. See also Lingard (2021) on the necessity of addressing the temporal in education policy sociology.
10. Due to teacher appointment regulations (see Ministry of Education [MOE] 2007), CST and part-time teacher positions are reviewed annually and cannot be extended more than two additional academic years within the same school (MOE, 2020a). Only tenure-track teachers can work continuously and consistently in a single public school.
11. While a few scholars have used the phrase 'nomadic teachers' to describe this population (流浪教師; see Chung and Huan, 2012), we prefer 'transient teacher' due to its arguably less pejorative connotation and closer conceptual connection to those relocating specifically for work (i.e. transients), in both English and Traditional Chinese (短暫的).

12. KIPP is the largest network of public charter schools in the US. Founded in 1994 by two former TFA teachers, KIPP schools generally operate in low-income communities, connect closely to TFA in both ideology and staffing, and feature a 'no excuses' teaching approach (see Kretchmar, Sondel, and Ferrare 2014).
13. See Brewer et al., 2016 on the hiring of TFA teachers.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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