

Teach for Qatar: Teachers' Challenges and Resources in Qatar's Government Schools

SAGE Open
 April-June 2022: 1–13
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 DOI: 10.1177/21582440221099523
journals.sagepub.com/home/sgo


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Abstract

Launched in 2014, Teach for Qatar (TFQ) is a local non-governmental organization under Teach For All (TFALL) that recruits and prepares graduates and professionals as teaching fellows in the Qatari government schools. This qualitative exploratory study used semi-structured interviews to identify TFQ Fellows' challenges they faced and the resources available during their teaching in Qatar's Government Schools. Findings indicate that these TFQ Fellows experienced similar challenges that TFALL participants face worldwide and regional, including unreal expectations, unexpected workloads, and unmotivated and unprepared students. It was reported that TFQ provides a comprehensive and valuable resource and support system that enabled these individuals to complete their 2-year commitment. The discussion offers additional insights into the TFQ program and how these findings might benefit teacher education programs and programs like TFQ.

Keywords

Teach For All, Teach for Qatar, alternative pathways to teaching, Qatar government schools

Introduction

Worldwide, education reform is littered with thoughts intended to produce fundamental change in education. Rizvi (2021) contends that some of these reforms are designed to address long-standing problems, others plan to improve teaching and learning quality, and others make teaching careers more attractive to a broader range of graduates. Based on the belief that teachers are singularly equipped and able to solve schools' and children's learning problems (Ravitch, 2013), programs providing alternative paths for quality graduates and professionals into teaching have grown in popularity. In the US, these programs account for 30% of the 26,000 teacher-preparation programs (Conn, Lovison & Hyunjung Mo, 2020). These include, for example, Teach for America, The New Teacher Project, the YES Prep charter network, and the Relay Graduate School of Education.

Beyond the US, Teach for All (TFALL) is an international program built on previous programs such as Teach For America (TFA) and Teach First in the UK (Rizvi, 2021). TFALL was established in 2007 and "serves as an umbrella network that provides strategic support to social entrepreneurs that work to implement in their own countries the education reform ideas and organizational model popularized by the U.S.-based nonprofit Teach For America" (Straubhaar & Friedrich, 2015, p. 1). TFALL has emerged as a global network in 61 countries on 6 continents countries working with independent locally-led, governed

partner organizations (Teach For All, 2022), with the aim of recruiting some of the brightest young people into the education profession (Rizvi, 2021).

Crawford-Garrett et al. (2021) suggest that TFALL aims to improve educational outcomes and achievement among marginalized populations by recruiting and providing an abbreviated preparation program and then placing teachers in schools serving historically marginalized populations. The expectation is that TFALL members will eventually transition into leadership positions in various sectors and utilize their experience within low-income schools to work for systemic change (Reddy, 2016).

For this study, Teach for Qatar (TFQ) began as a partner in 2014. TFQ is a local non-governmental organization established to meet the need for qualified teachers in Qatar and provide solutions for some of the challenges facing students in Qatar's Government School System (TFQ, 2019a). TFQ recruits and prepares well-qualified graduates and professionals (Fellows) with no previous teaching experience for 2 years in Qatar's government schools (Teach for Qatar, 2019c).

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While the research alternative pathways to teaching such as TFALL is growing internationally, there is little if any data about the TFQ program and no research that targets TFQ. The significance of this study is that it fills this research gap by examining TFQ. Specifically, this study aimed to investigate the experiences of TFQ Fellows during their teaching experience, studying the challenges they faced, and the resources available to support their teaching. These findings, such as the need for teacher support, are relevant to The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain) and can be helpful worldwide for teacher education programs.

Teach For Programs

Various criticisms and educational concerns are directed toward TFALL programs that are important to understand. These are discussed in what follows.

Inadequate Preparation

First and foremost, scholars have continued to argue that TFALL programs fail to adequately prepare their recruits for teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2011; Ravitch, 2013; Rizvi, 2021; Scott, 2015). Brewer and deMarrais (2015), who examined Teach for America's alumni experiences, reported a lack of preparation in knowledge and skills needed to be effective in the classroom. Gopalan (2013) contends that TFALL provides limited preparation for teaching and short durations of time engaging in classrooms. Furthermore, Nimer and Makkouk (2021) reported that for Teach For Lebanon (TFL), the summer training was administered by the Education Department at the American University in Beirut. However, the agreement was stopped since program coordinators thought that "the training offered did not focus enough on the ideological aspects of change and transformation and instead was exclusively dedicated to instruction in education and pedagogy" (p. 109).

Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) examined variation in teacher preparation and found that TFA recruits believed that they were significantly less prepared than teacher education graduates and overall "recruits who had taken other pathways into teaching felt less well prepared than teacher education program graduates overall" (p. 290). The question for all Teach for programs is, how well can these "teachers" be prepared to enter the classroom in this short time?

Teachers as Saviors

Another criticism of Teach For Programs (TFP) is that they construct teachers as "saviors." (Crawford-Garrett & Thomas, 2018; Horn, 2016; Kavanagh & Dunn, 2013; Price & McConney, 2013). As a savior, participants in TFP are constantly portrayed as the "best and brightest" graduates

(Blumenreich & Rogers, 2016; Vellanki, 2014) and "exceptionally brilliant" (Adhikary et al., 2018). The discourse of Teach For Programs is plagued with terms reflecting this savior mentality, including terms such as "change agents" (Hutchings et al., 2006; Kavanagh & Dunn, 2013), "missionaries" (Popkewitz, 1998; Thomas et al., 2021), "saviors" (Kavanagh & Dunn, 2013; Lam, 2020), and "superheroes" (Adhikary et al., 2018). TFP participants are viewed as better than those teachers already part of the failing education system. These high-quality individuals are capable of teaching at levels that enable students to surpass their challenging life environments (Kavanagh & Dunn, 2013; Price & McConney, 2013).

Anderson (2013) contends that TFALL's framing of teachers as heroic reduces the complexities of educational inequity and challenges into simple solutions that external forces can resolve. The fundamental belief is that teachers are the key to students' success (La Londe et al., 2015) and are singularly equipped and able to solve schools and children's learning problems (Ravitch, 2013) and to save students from ineffective teaching and a broken system that need reformed (Ellis et al., 2016). This limited understanding of teaching and learning centers on the pedagogy and the "technical" dimensions of teaching and learning, divorcing the complexities of schooling essential to understanding and navigating the social, economic, and institutional teaching contexts (Williams et al., 2012).

Challenges Facing Teach for participants

Thomas and Mockler (2018) reported that participants enrolled in Teacher for America face significantly more challenges than traditionally-trained teachers who complete additional coursework in educational theory and pedagogy and experience longer pre-service practicum experiences. These participants are more likely to "contend with more than just their 'roles' as teachers during their two-year commitments" (pp. 5, 6). There are various challenges that TFALL participants face during their experience in the classroom that is worth noting.

One of the most stressful aspects for teachers learning to navigate the classroom is the often-unexpected amount of work. Research has reported that TFALL participants often found the workload excessive (Lam et al., 2020; Moss et al., 2021; Southern, 2021; Thomas & Mockler, 2018). Schneider and Abs (2021), discussing participants in TFAustria and TFBulgaria, suggest it is essential to consider the aspects affecting new teachers' experiences in the field. At the start of their careers, beginning teachers struggle with many demands and expectations. It is not just the amount of teaching but also other common difficulties, including various additional professional duties (Fetherston & Lummis, 2012).

Another challenge for teachers is that they often face a disconnect or unmet expectations of what they thought the classroom would be like and the reality. The research reports

that beginning teachers held expectations that they were prepared to fulfill teaching requirements (DeRosa, 2016; DiCicco et al., 2014). Upon entering the classroom, they are confronted with profound gaps between expectations and their on-the-ground experiences. Scholars have used various terms such as “transition shock” (Corcoran, 1981), “praxis shock” (Veenman, 1984), and “reality shock” (Dicke et al., 2015) to describe this period and experience. Research indicates that Teach For participants such as Teach for America (Matsui, 2015), Teach for China (Y. M. Yin & Hughes, 2021), and Teach For New Zealand (Oldham, 2020) have experienced these unmet or unrealistic expectations.

Teacher Support and Reflection

Since novice teachers, those with less than 5 years in the profession, experience many psychological and physiological challenges as educators (Korte & Simonsen, 2018), these teachers must perceive the availability of support to meet their needs as educators (Caspersen & Raaen, 2013). This is essential for teachers beginning their careers to develop the capacity for autonomous action (Schneider & Abs, 2021). Research demonstrates that supporting teachers has a positive influence on maintaining their desire to teach and their effectiveness despite challenges (Gu & Day, 2013), increasing job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009), and improving instructional practice (Borko & Klingner, 2013). Gaikhorst et al. (2014) report that it is essential to establish well-matched support practices with teachers' experiences.

Caspersen and Raaen (2013) extensively discuss the support mechanisms of TFALL programs. They point out that one innovative element of all TFALL programs is the solid and permanent support mechanism and mentorship for Fellows throughout the 2-year teaching experience. For example, TFAustria Fellows have experienced trainers working with them during their entire 2 years. (Schneider & Abs, 2021). TFALL programs use the ongoing support and evaluation of Fellows to determine the kind of support needed. For example, Teach For Malaysia arranges directed weekend sessions with Fellows grounded on the needs reported by their mentors. TFALL Mexico and Peru provide 2-week improvement plans to support Fellows that need additional support. Finally, all Fellows have a mentor, and in Teach First in the United Kingdom, one participant can have up to three different mentors.

However, there are reported shortcomings in TFAll's in-service support. Research indicated a lack of support for teachers such as Teach For China (Lam, 2020), Teach For Argentina (Matozo & Saavedra, 2020), and Teach For America (Thomas & Mockler, 2018). More specifically, DiCamillo (2018) found that some Teach For America teachers lack support because of inexperienced TFA staff and in particular contexts such as teaching in a bilingual classroom where only one TFA staff spoke Spanish. Matsui (2015) reported that TFA provided limited support or

supervision. Often there was a lack of resources available to teachers, and the program did not support their growth as helping professionals.

Concerning reflection and teaching, Baum and King (2006) suggest that for teachers, good decision-making is founded on developing a sense of self-awareness in pre-service teachers. This includes developing skills “to examine and identify the personal characteristics, beliefs, and attitudes that make them who they are and influence the way they think about teaching and learning; thus, influencing their decision-making process” (Baum & King, 2006, p. 217). One of the essential elements of TFALL's model is providing opportunities for participants to reflect on their teaching experiences starting from the first day of preparation (Cumsille & Fiszbein, 2015).

Southern (2021) reports that Teach First, the UK's version of Teach For All, values were reflected in many strategies for overcoming challenges offered by the rest of the group. This included reflection, honesty, and taking responsibility (p. 188). Abs et al. (2019) queried TFALL Fellows and traditionally trained beginning teachers about the different types of learning opportunities they had received. Findings demonstrated that in Bulgaria, Fellows received more learning opportunities through reflection with the Teach For Bulgaria instructors than the traditionally trained novice teachers. Austrian Fellows all reported at least one learning occasion of the type of reflection with the instructor, while traditionally-trained beginning teachers reported significantly fewer learning opportunities of this type.

Education in Qatar

In 2003, Qatar ventured on a massive, decentralized K-12 charter-school type of education reform to address the nation's rapidly changing needs (Romanowski & Du, 2020). AlKhater (2016) posits several concerns that sparked the need for education reform. These include keeping pace with Qatar's quickly developing economic landscape and the globalized world. Also, there was an interest in the needs of the growing population, including expatriate children whose families work in Qatar. Furthermore, students were not prepared to meet employers' expectations and could not compete for top university programs at home or abroad.

Titled *Education for a New Era*, the reform was based on a comprehensive examination of Qatar's education system conducted by the RAND Corporation. Nasser (2017) reports that RAND's analysis “identified the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system and pointed to two main reform priorities: improving the education system's essential elements through the standards-based system and devising a system-changing plan to address the system's overall inadequacies” (p. 3; for a comprehensive overview of Qatar's educational reform, see Nasser, 2017).

The reform provided a new government-funded school structure heavily reliant on a decentralized system that

embraced four pillars necessary for a decentralized system: autonomy, variety, choice, and accountability (Romanowski & Du, 2020). The reform resulted in a substantial shift in teachers' roles toward more non-traditional classroom practices (Zellman et al., 2009). Nasser (2017) suggests that teachers could control their teaching, lesson plans, classroom resources, curriculum development, and variety in their instructional approaches. This new role confused since most teachers lacked the expertise and skills needed to adapt to the shift (Nasser 2017; Zellman et al. 2009).

Over the years, the reforms were deemed ineffective. MacLeod and Abou-El-Kheir (2017) provide statistics demonstrating that students did not perform better on standardized tests before the reforms and that Qatar remains close to the bottom of education rankings for the developing world as evidence of the reform's failure. Said and Friesen (2013) cite the significant decline, over the past 15 years, in students studying mathematics and science at secondary and tertiary levels and the declining interest in mathematics and science. Mustafawi and Shaaban (2019) report that the reform effort demonstrated that only 8% to 20% of the students mastered Mathematics, Sciences, English, and Arabic learning outcomes. Finally, a fundamental reason for the reform's ineffectiveness was the decision to use English as the language of instruction in mathematics, science, and technology in the K-12 system (Mustafawi & Shaaban, 2019). In 2012, the MEHE reinstated Arabic as the language of instruction in grades K-12.

All of the above led to the steady re-centralization of government control of schools (Abou-El-Kheir 2017; Nolan 2012; Romanowski & Du, 2020). Overall, there was a lack of community confidence in the reform efforts, causing more control over schools and teachers by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE).

Regarding teachers in Qatar, the Planning and Statistics Authority (2019) reports that during the academic year 2017/2018, there were 13,000 primary school teachers (17% Qataris and 83% non-Qataris), 5,000 preparatory teachers (13% Qataris and 87% non-Qataris), and 5,000 secondary teachers (9% Qataris and 91% non-Qataris). The majority of foreign teachers result from Qatar's widespread economic growth combined with Qatari's small population that makes up only 12% of the 2.7 million residents living in Qatar (NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 2018). Qatar must rely on expatriate teachers because of the teacher shortage in government schools (Abu-Shawish, 2016).

When it comes to teacher education, the College of Education (CED) at Qatar University is the leading provider of teachers to Qatar's government schools (Nasser, 2017). The CED uses a US model of teacher education that includes extensive educational coursework, field experiences, and a semester of student teaching. The CED offers 4-year primary, secondary, special, physical, and art education (College of Education, 2021). In addition, the CED also provides 1-year teaching diploma programs in primary education,

secondary education, special education, and physical education for students who have already earned a relevant bachelor's degree.

Background: Teach for Qatar

TFQ is the 32nd member of the Teach for All Network (Teach for Qatar, 2019c) and uses its model with independent and local partner organizations to expand educational opportunities by recruiting and developing graduates and professionals. TFQ's mission is "to develop quality education in Qatar by empowering young talent to become transformational leaders in the classroom, school, and community" (Teach for Qatar, 2019c). TFALL initially promoted itself mainly to solve teacher shortages in low-income school districts (Rauschenberger, 2021). For example, Teach First in the UK was established to train teachers for the UK shortage subjects (Elliot, 2021). Both Austria and Bulgaria face several difficulties in making the supply of teachers meet the demand for teachers turning to TFALL as a solution (Schneider & Abs, 2021). Following that concern, because of the shortage of local teachers and students' low motivation in Qatar's government schools, TFQ aims to actively recruit top local graduates and professionals to promote the value of teaching and reinvest into schools.

The entry requirements include an earned bachelor's degree (total GP of 3.0 or above), possess no experience as a teacher or hold a degree in education, have a valid Qatari residence permit, and an understanding of both the English and Arabic languages (Teach for Qatar, 2019a). The application process is very competitive. For example, in 2018 to 2019, 1,600 applications were received for the program, and that year's cohort recorded an average acceptance rate of 4% (TFQ, personal communication).

If accepted, each Fellow participates in a 7-week Summer Institute where they "are equipped with the skills and knowledge they require to embark on a teaching journey that will impact at least 60 students a year" (Teach for Qatar, 2019b). Some of the summer institute sessions are titled "educational theory and pedagogical training, practical teaching and learning sessions, team-building exercises, classroom teaching modeling with professional teachers and other Fellows, and personalized coaching" (Teach for Qatar, 2019b).

Upon completing the Summer Institute, Fellows are placed in schools, teaching between 12 and 18 hours per week which is the typical teaching load for Qatari nationals and non-national teachers in Qatar's government schools. All Fellows are considered full-time teachers employed by the MEHE expected to abide by their school's policies and procedures. TFQ provides each Fellow support and regular visits by their Program Manager, who serves as a guide for their teaching development.

Unlike many Teach for Programs that recruit graduates from elite backgrounds and place them in under-resourced schools, TFQ seeks to address some of Qatar's educational

challenges, such as a shortage of local teachers and low student motivation and engagement in the government school classrooms (TFQ, 2021). TFQ differs from many TFALL programs in that TFQ Fellows are not working in under-resourced schools teaching marginalized groups. The MEHE places Fellows based on the needs of a particular school. For example, a school lacking a science teacher may have a TFQ Fellow placed in their school to meet that need. Based on this information, these 12 Teaching Fellows were assigned to various schools throughout Qatar. As of the 2018 to 2019 school year, TFQ Fellows enter classrooms composed of 54% Qatari and 46% Non-Qatari students from different Arab and non-Arab countries (Qatar Development Bank, 2020).

Furthermore, TFQ Fellows have various educational experiences as students. Some were educated in Qatar government or private schools, and others educated in their home country and came to Qatar to teach. These students have experienced K-12 education from various perspectives, with one common denominator being their successful educational experiences. Nevertheless, for TFQ Fellows who have no or limited experience with low-motivated students and students from diverse nations, TFQ Fellow must navigate many educational challenges.

After year 1 of teaching, Fellows return to join the next cohort for their Summer Institute, known as Returner's Institute. They reconnect with their cohort and interact with the new cohort attending their Summer Institute. The Returner's Institute provides the opportunity for each Fellow to reflect upon their first-year experience to develop new skills and refine those skills acquired in year 1 to improve their impact on students in year 2.

Several additional elements of the program should be mentioned to provide a complete understanding. The employment positions of all Qatari nationals accepted at TFQ are reserved until the completion of their contract with TFQ, where they can then resume work. Like other TFALL programs, there is no expectation that TFQ Fellows will only complete 2 years. Each can decide upon the completion of their 2-year commitment. Plus, there are indications that many Teach For candidates depart teaching after a fairly brief time (Rice et al., 2015). Data for TFQ retention was unavailable.

Also, depending on the company, some receive the same salary from the company during their time with TFQ, and they are paid a monthly stipend (4,000 Qatar Riyals or 1,095 USD) from TFQ for their first 2 years of teaching. This is not the case with non-nationals. Non-Qataris must leave their current job and receive the same monthly salary as non-Qatari teachers in government schools (roughly 9,200 or 2,520 USD depending on factors, i.e., teaching experience). The difference in the wages of Qatari nationals and non-national teachers is significant but retrieving the precise information is difficult. However, Non-Qataris do receive the same monthly stipend from TFQ.

Research Methodology

Scharp and Thomas (2019) contend that researchers in the social sciences should consider how their own experiences and positions interpret people's lived experiences. Therefore, it is important to note our positionality in this research study. Romanowski is what Banks (1998) considers an "external insider," a non-Arabic speaking full professor in a College of Education socialized in the US and teaching and researching in Qatar for 14 years. As an external insider, Romanowski is perceived by community members as an "adopted insider" where unique experiences provide an understanding of the community's values, perspectives, and knowledge where the study is taken place. His high school teaching experience in the US, extensive teacher education background, and knowledge of and experiences in government schools provide insight into teachers' challenges in Qatar. At times, Romanowski draws on his experiences to inform the work of this article.

Qadhi is what Banks (1998) terms an "indigenous-insider," an Arabic-speaking Qatari citizen and assistant professor in a College of Education in Qatar for 3 years. As Banks suggests, as an indigenous insider, she understands and supports the "unique values, perspectives, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge of his or her indigenous community and culture and is perceived by people within the community as a legitimate community member who can speak with authority about it" (p. 8). Furthermore, previously held positions in Qatar provided her with significant experiences in government schools, with the MEHE and colleagues who were Fellows in TFQ that informed this study. As with Romanowski, Qadhi draws on her experiences to inform this research. To minimize the impact of these experiences, the researchers regularly reflected and discussed the topic and issues we investigated.

Furthermore, like teacher education faculty, we are aware of the possible influence on participants. Teach For Programs offering alternative teacher preparation programs are often pitted against conventional teacher education programs with more comprehensive and extended preparation (Lefebvre & Thomas, 2019). This can be a source of tension since both professors represent teacher education programs.

Research Methods and Design

This research is a qualitative exploratory study. Exploratory research is an approach used to investigate a phenomenon that has not been previously examined (R. K. Yin, 2003). In such cases, a qualitative approach is appropriate since it is exploratory and provides understanding into real-life occurrences (Sullivan, 2001). This approach was used to gain familiarity with QTF, Fellows the challenges, and resources. Since this study is exploratory, semi-structured interviews are an appropriate tool for gathering responses to discover teachers' narratives and uncover new insights and meanings

Table 1. Participants.

Participant	Gender	Nationality	Prior education/career	Contract status TFQ
TF1	Female	Non-Qatari	Sciences	Alumni ^a
TF2	Female	Non-Qatari	Medical Science	Year 2
TF3	Female	Non-Qatari	Business	Alumni ^b
TF4	Female	Non-Qatari	Pharmacy	Alumni ^b
TF5	Female	Non-Qatari	Sciences	Year 2
TF6	Male	Qatari	Engineering	Alumni ^a
TF7	Female	Qatari	Arts and Sciences	Alumni
TF8	Female	Qatari	Arts and Sciences	Alumni
TF9	Female	Non-Qatari	Engineering	Year 1
TF10	Female	Non-Qatari	Sciences	Alumni ^a
TF11	Female	Non-Qatari	Arts and Sciences	Year 1
TF12	Male	Qatari	Engineering	Alumni

to explain the occurrence from the respondents' perspectives (Cohen et al., 2007).

Semi-structured in-depth interviews are commonly used in qualitative research since these allow for flexibility and follow-up questions, probes, and comments to explore better a participant's thoughts and beliefs about a particular experience (Dejonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Semi-structured interviews were used to examine the challenges, resources available, and experiences of TFQ Fellows, who have completed their 2-year contract with Teach for Qatar, Fellows who have extended their 2-year contract, and those currently in their 2-year contract. The research questions for the study are as follows:

1. What are the job challenges facing TFQ teachers in government schools?
2. What are the resources available for TFQ teachers in government schools?
3. How can these findings be used to improve courses in initial teacher education certification degree programs?

Participants were selected using the snowball sampling methodology. Table 1 illustrates participants' gender, Qatari or non-Qatari, prior area of study, and their contract status with TFQ. Participants are referred to as teaching Fellows and a number, for example, TF1 (see Table 1), to ensure confidentiality.

The study used an interview guide directed by the research questions. The guide was piloted with three students who earned a degree in traditional teacher education programs, are currently enrolled in graduate education programs, and are teachers in Qatar's government schools. Researchers probed informants for more detailed responses and to solicit examples. Eight interviews were conducted in English, audio-recorded, and transcribed for analysis. Each interview lasted approximately 25 to 45 minutes. Four interviews were conducted in Arabic, translated, and transcribed into English.

This study was approved by Qatar University IRB 1199-EA/19.

Data Analysis

This study conducted semi-structured interviews to gain insights into TFQ Fellows as they described their teaching experiences. The interviews were structured around the research questions centering on challenges and resources. The transcripts were read first for clarity and understanding. The data analysis was conducted utilizing the research questions to examine the TFQ Fellows' realities and their classroom experiences. Through inductive analysis, various themes emerged from the data. The information was categorized according to themes that illustrate the challenges faced by TFQ Fellows and the available resources to address these challenges. Pertinent examples and quotes were identified and added to relevant categories. All interviews were transcribed. Those interviews conducted in Arabic were translated into English and then transcribed. The final goal was to accurately account for the TFQ teachers' perspectives regarding their challenges and resources while teaching Qatar's government schools' job demands and resources.

Findings

These findings present insight into TFQ Fellows' challenges as they entered their assigned school and classroom. The results describe the clash between their expectations and the reality of classroom teaching, the trials of day-to-day tasks such as heavy than expected workloads, low student motivation, and the undertaking of balancing home and professional responsibilities. In addition, TFQ Fellows reported a powerful support system to provide by TFQ and a component of their TFQ training that included self-reflection, self-awareness, and goal setting that was deemed beneficial. The results are presented in sections reported based on the research questions. The data collected provides insight into several

individuals under contract with TFQ, some who have completed their 2-year commitment and alumni who currently work with TFQ in some capacity.

Challenges Faced by TFQ Fellows

TFQ Fellows' expectations. One of the challenges facing TFQ Fellows is their expectations about multiple aspects of teaching. Regarding TFQ Fellows' expectations about teaching before entering the classroom, the dominant theme that resonated is often heard from first-year teachers. That is, the TFQ training they receive does not transfer to classroom realities. For example, one Fellow stated, "we had big dreams and goals. . . we will change the world. My expectations were high, but when I faced reality, I had to change my perspective" (TF6). He continued by stating, "when we joined the schools and entered the classroom, we realize how far the theory and training are from the reality. . . no one can explain the challenges in the preparatory schools except the teachers." Another Fellow echoed this viewpoint, stating

I thought that all the girls in the class would love me and listen to me so I could teach and give the knowledge that I have. But when I entered the class the first time, I was shocked. In Teach for Qatar, they told us there are many challenges we will face in the classroom, but it was different in the actual classroom (TF4).

This Fellow's (TF4) shock was caused by an unexpected lack of respect demonstrated by students' lack of respect toward her as a teacher. She also expected the students to possess at least grade-level knowledge but was surprised that this was not always the case. Finally, she was shocked that students were not motivated to learn and did not listen to her as a teacher.

One Fellow mentioned that the disconnect between expectations and reality was based on her own experiences in education (in another country), where she experienced students' desire and motivation to learn. However, after entering the Qatari government schools, she realizes the difference between her own experiences and expectations and those she now faces. She stated the students here have "all the facilities needed to learn, but the students do not want to listen and learn. They do not care. They always say what is the benefit behind learning. Why are we studying this?" (TF3).

Teachers' beliefs influence their perceptions and behavior in the classroom. It was clear that all Fellows' idealistic expectations were unrealistic. Fellows underestimated the difficulty that accompanies improving the academic performance of low-achieving students. Several expressed the idea that they would make a difference in students' lives, which often meant "getting students who dislike school and learning to begin to learn" (TF10).

More often, Fellows thought that they would be effective at motivating students. Since all of the Fellows were

academically motivated, they underestimated the challenges they would face motivating students. One Fellow (TF7) stated,

my expectations about students were different. . . I thought these students would be motivated to learn, not all, but most of them. This was not the situation, and many just do not care about learning and education.

Finally, other areas such as organizing class activities, addressing individual student differences, handling the workload, and classroom management were underestimated by the TFQ Fellows. These unrealistic or inaccurate expectations forced Fellows to rethink and manage their expectations based on the new knowledge gained from classroom experiences.

Several TFQ Fellows mentioned adapting or rethinking their teaching, students, and learning views. For example, one Fellow stated, "I stopped looking at the big image and focused on what I can do inside the class" (TF6). Another pointed out that she did not achieve her expectations during the first year because she had to adapt to an unexpected environment. One Fellow stated, "like any job at first, you face [unexpected] problems, and you will feel that you cannot get over it, and maybe you will think about quitting, but they [TFQ] trained us for these situations and how to address this issue" (TF1).

Challenges facing TFQ Fellows. The first challenge faced by all participants was the unexpected and often unnecessary workload and the lack of time and pressure to complete them. One Fellow stated, "the workload is huge for the teachers, and the unnecessary paperwork is huge. . . the paperwork and what it documents is a waste of time, and this is a big problem that can disappoint the teacher and take time away from them doing their best" (TF6). Regarding the workload and demands for teachers in the government schools, TF9 stated that the work required "more than teaching, we do so many other things than teaching . . . things for the department, other activities, in the morning, during the break, we have to do everything. . . the problem is this work takes away from teaching students, and there is no time to do all this work."

Second, all participants listed students as challenges. For example, TF4, 6, and 7 discussed student challenges as a lack of preparation. These two Fellows discussed their surprise that students in grades 7 and 8 lacked the essential reading and writing skills. TF7 stated that "the students' quality is low, so you work with students the best you can." The concern was that several students reached preparatory school (Middle School) without reading and lacking the necessary math skills.

Others (TF2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12) describe student challenges in the context of attitudes and behaviors describing students as "unmotivated" and "naughty students." Regarding

students' attitudes toward learning, TF10 stated that "students would say to me, a teacher I do not like this subject, I am bored, why do we need this. . . they are not involved at all and would say they are not trying or that they do not care." TF4 stated, "the challenge of attracting the students and grabbing their attention to the lesson. I tried many strategies with them and faced some difficulties." TF6 stated that "understating the teenagers' way of thinking in that environment was the biggest challenge." "There is a lack of motivation with many students. . . this makes teaching very difficult and frustrating" (TF12). Two Fellows (TF 6, 9) linked these problems to the student's home life and cultural issues, such as an increased divorce rate. Accordingly, these issues "affect the students and makes it more difficult to apply all the teaching theories. . . it is tough dealing with them [students]" (TF9).

Resources and Support

All participants agreed that TFQ prepared them as best as possible before entering the classroom. However, one Fellow was critical of the preparation stating that "they [TFQ] tried, all the workshops are not the reality; it was seven weeks of wasting my time . . . you will only use 5% of the strategies they teach you. There are more important things they could teach us like stress management" (TFQ).

Eleven of the Fellows suggested that TFQ's program provided significant support during their time as teachers. The most often cited aspect of TFQ support was the program manager. Participants described the program manager's support as significant to their teaching, administrative work, and continuation. The program managers "visited classes, gave feedback, provide methods as to how to control the class." (TF1). TF3 stated, "I am not lying, but I can communicate with the manager 24 hours." One Fellow (TF4) described the program manager's support stating

that the program manager was constantly communicating with us, so she knew the challenges we were facing in the schools. She was available all the time. She informs us that if we encountered a problem in class, to tell her, she would provide us with a solution. We were well-supported if anything happened, they helped us to solve it.

TFQ Fellows (TF4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12) expressed another resource we describe as self-support and self-learning. When asked about how he dealt with challenges and job support, one Fellow (TF6) talked about using books, articles, and YouTube videos as resources to solve challenges and improve teaching. When struggling with students' behavior, TF6 stated that he "read a book to understand students' thinking and this helped me accept and understand their behavior. . . I did not change the behavior, but I learned to live with this, which made teaching better." TF10 described her use of problem-solving classroom, saying, "I did a lot of reading,

using Google, I search first-year teachers, and I read a lot and begin to see teachers throughout the world are having the same problems. . . that made me relax a bit more." Another TFQ Fellow (TF3) stated, "they [TFQ] were giving me all the support needed, last year when I was calling them and saying I am feeling upset. . . [TFQ] called me and gave support, and now I don't call many times like last year because I am using the problem-solving skills they taught me, and I solve my problems alone." Several TFQ Fellows mentioned some skills included in their TFQ preparation helped solve problems.

Several Fellows suggested that they sought out colleagues, both other TFQ Fellows and teachers in the government schools, for support. One Fellow stated, "I go to my colleagues because they know what I need—we all face the same problems" (TF8). TF10 noted that she "had several very strong teachers in classroom management, and I asked them and observed their classes and then made adjustments in my class." Concerning some of the similar problems facing teachers, it was suggested by two Fellows that the TFQ organization would act and address common problems of a particular cohort. One participant stated that if a common problem surfaced with the cohort of TFQ Fellows, "TFQ provided a session dealing with how to face the particular issue." This is done during the once-a-month professional development session.

Finally, two points raised in these interviews are worth addressing. First, there were nine Fellows (TF1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, and 11) that pointed out that TFQ training moved beyond teaching and included a component where Fellows had opportunities to learn about themselves, self-reflection, or self-awareness and goal setting and this was highly influential on their staying and completing the TFQ program. Several said that when they faced problems or conflicts concerning their expectations, the TFQ program manager would help them focus on what they learned about themselves and how to face these issues. TF1 described that she was frustrated and felt she was not influencing her students and wanted to quit. The manager reminded her of the targets and goals she set during TFQ training and the skills she gained to engage in self-reflection and self-awareness, and they discussed that influence takes time. She stated, "the manager got a mirror and showed me the things that I was forgetting." F4 stated, "one of the programs is called self-management, but it covers more about us. It makes us self-aware. Every one of us has a program manager that helped us to know more about ourselves, and it continued throughout the two years."

Discussion

This study provides insight into the challenges faced and resources needed by TFQ Fellows who are currently teaching, have taught in Qatar's government schools, or are still affiliated with TFQ. The TFQ Fellows faced many challenges

similar to other Teach For participants worldwide. Nevertheless, these findings provide insights into TFQ and possible suggestions for teacher preparation.

First, TFQ Fellows possessed unrealistic teaching expectations about what teaching would be like facing a clash between expectations and teaching realities. They grappled with profound gaps between expectations and their on-the-ground experiences. This finding aligns with research findings reported in other TF programs such as Teach for America (Matsui, 2015), Teach for China (Y. M. Yin & Hughes, 2020), Teach for New Zealand (Oldham, 2020). This is not isolated to TFQ participants since early-career teachers often face an inconsistency between their expectations about teaching and unrealistic expectations of themselves as teachers and what is realistic to achieve in the classroom (Delamarter, 2015; Morrison, 2013). They often believe that teaching will be less problematic for them than their peers.

These expectations are based on a biased viewpoint that considers the essential qualities of successful teachers “are the ones they perceive as their own. They think that they will not face classroom teachers’ problems, and the vast majority predicts they will be better teachers than their peers” (Pajares, 1992, p. 323). This seemed to be the case for many Fellows before entering the classroom. Remember that TFQ Fellows have been successful in their academic endeavors and were recruited as “exceptionally talented leaders.” This, coupled with their prior, positive school experiences and learning, could be the source of unrealistic optimism. More importantly, this optimism fuels the idea of teachers as saviors who can transform students’ learning experience resulting in success similar to TFQ Fellows’ experiences. One Fellow earlier stated that she thought students would love her, listen, and learn. However, TFQ Fellows swiftly learn that students’ heroic “saving” is not that simple as they face low student motivation.

TFQ Fellows reported a low motivation of students, which is supported by findings in various TFALL programs (Hung & Smith, 2012; Y. M. Yin & Dooley, 2021).

However, most TFQ Fellows indicated their belief in a “deficit model” to explain low motivation. That is, an understanding of low motivation that focuses on the individual and what individuals lack rather than the structural issues in an education system that influence students’ low motivation (Nimer & Makkouk, 2021). Nimer and Makkouk (2021) state that Teach For Lebanon “explains that communities are poor because students in these communities lack good learning experiences and work ethics to succeed: TFL provides Fellows who fill this need” (p. 104). Two TFQ Fellows linked low motivation to “students’ home life and cultural issues, such as an increased divorce rate.” However, their concern was not the structural issues rather the difficulty in applying teaching theories. More importantly, this belief in recruiting teachers to solve the complex problems of education diverts attention from the more pressing issues resulting from the failure to fund public schools adequately and deliver

the resources to sufficiently support teachers and administrators (Rizvi, 2021).

An additional finding could be labeled as “self-support and self-learning,” which explains how TFQ Fellows coped with challenges. Self-learning requires individuals to engage in reflection. It was evident that TFQ Fellows developed reflection skills in their preparation and used reflection throughout their 2-year teaching experience. The finding aligns with other research reports that TFALL preparation provides ample opportunities for Fellows to reflect (Abs et al., 2019; Cumsille & Fiszbein, 2015; Southern 2021). TFQ Fellows reported that one aspect of their preparation was developing and using self-awareness. This was supported and developed with the assistance of their supervisor throughout their teaching experience. Teaching Fellows used these skills and knowledge to adjust their expectations and address challenges. While it overstates matters to imply that self-awareness and self-learning solve all TFQ Fellows problems, Reiss (2002) suggests that self-awareness is the ultimate enabler.

For example, TFQ Fellows indicated that they engaged in self-learning and solved some problems using their problem-solving skills. Several mentioned that TFQ preparation included particular skills helpful in dealing with challenges in schools and classrooms. Program managers and Fellows effectively used it to address expectations and challenges throughout their teaching. Teaching requires problem-solving, handling unanticipated situations and new problems, and implementing constructive solutions and change. Many TFQ Fellows reported using YouTube and other resources to solve challenges and problems. There was no indication that TFQ preparation did anything to change or alter TFQ Fellow’s expectations. However, TFQ created an awareness in the Fellows about their expectations, goals, and challenges and provided support when they faced their unrealistic views of teaching, which was reported as effective. The self-awareness and self-learning elements of TFQ’s program align with Orgoványi-Gajdos’s (2016) contention that teaching is a practical activity that requires efficient problem-solving skills that are fundamental for teachers to possess.

An important finding in this research is that TFQ Fellows received extensive and valuable support during their teaching experience, which played a significant role in completing their 2-year commitment. All but one Fellow mentioned that the dominant support was from their program manager, who provided constant and quality support throughout the teaching experience. Constantine et al. (2009) found that ninety-two percent of “alternative route to certification” teachers were assigned a program-based mentor during their first year of teaching upon completing the program that provides direct support to adapt to their new teaching responsibilities. These supervisors provided similar support as those with TFQ, including a range of services such as assistance with lesson planning, classroom observations and feedback on

performance, and providing advice or even emotional support (Constantine et al. 2009).

TFQ's support of their Fellows with program supervisors aligns with other programs that provide alternative paths to teaching. Hung and Smith (2012) reported that first-year alternatively certified teachers indicated the importance of support to cope with many challenges facing first-year teachers. Other TFALL programs discussed how participants' received support (Crawford-Garrett et al., 2021; Moss et al., 2021; Subramanian, 2020). The support needed and received by TFQ Fellow is consistent with research that indicates that support for novice teachers is vital for retention and to perform effectively during challenges (Chaaban & Du, 2017; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). Teachers mentoring and support in their first years of teaching is beyond teacher education programs. This responsibility lies with the school administration. Keep in mind that this extensive support is not universal in TFALL programs. Some TFALL programs reported that there was not sufficient support for participants (Lam et al., 2020; Matsui, 2015).

Conclusion

No studies have focused on the challenges that TFQ Fellows faced and the resources available to cope with these challenges during their 2-year teaching experience. As a result, findings demonstrated that the mentoring and support mechanisms integrated into the TFQ programs proved invaluable for Fellows. Furthermore, there are several implications for teacher education programs and TFQ. It would be worthwhile for teacher educators to examine how this support is structured and implemented and then consider how appropriate elements of this support can be used in the student teaching component of teacher education. Also, examining the aspects of reflection, self-awareness, and self-learning in the TFALL/TFQ programs has the potential for teacher education changes.

There was evidence that TFQ Fellows used a "deficit model" to explain low motivation. TFQ Fellows seem to lack knowledge of the foundations of education that provide a rich picture of the structural and systemic issues that impact education, teachers, students, and learning. TFALL and TFQ programs should consider incorporating a critical understanding of schools and the contextual factors to their programs so that Fellows can develop a more complex understanding of schooling that moves beyond blaming students.

Future Research and Limitations

This study has several limitations, such as the small sample size and interviews as the only data collection tool. Nevertheless, this research begins to address the gaps in research about TFQ by examining TFQ Fellows. The findings offer promptings for researchers interested in examining alternative pathways into teaching. There are no published

statistics that the researchers are aware of regarding the attrition or retention rates of TFQ and specific reasons for staying or leaving the teaching profession. Research can begin to explore this area. Studies that address TFQ issues such as the program's cost and impact, the effectiveness of the Fellows' and program performance, the effect on student learning, issues regarding Fellow preparation, principals' satisfaction with the program's teachers, and related issues are essential. There is a need for empirical studies that compare traditionally certified teachers' performance with that of TFQ Fellows. Nevertheless, these findings can provide insights that TFQ, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and government school administrators can use to improve teaching and learning.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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