The Need for Context-specificity in Global Educational Policy Transfer by Non-state Actors: The Case of "Teach for All" to "Teach for India"

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Abstract

The revitalised role of non-state actors such as non-profit organisations and education reform movements in educational provision and delivery has contributed to the global circulation of uninformed transnational adaptation of ideas and practices around educational change. In adapting models in one place for emulation in another place, educational non-profits often lose sight of the local realities, thereby decontextualizing cultural differences and normalizing the language of generalization. Such is the case of the Teach for India (TFI), a non-governmental organization (NGO) working in marginalized districts of India to provide quality education to disadvantaged children through its alternative teacher credentialing program. TFI's theory of change and intervention approach revolves around the model of Teach for All (TFA), an international movement whose model and belief of equitable educational access and opportunity continues to spread on a global scale through transnational actors. Through an extensive literature review, this article analyses critically and discusses how the TFAll's Model is operationalised in India, through TFI that was established in 2009 to promote the universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) in India. While examining the underlying assumptions that inform the de-contextualisation of the globalised and philanthropy backed reform model, it analyses the key features of the intervention approach and presents

the critiques and limitations. Beyond contextualisation, the paper makes a case for the need for non-state actors to take into account significant sociocultural and political differences in voluntary transfer of reform ideas. While acknowledging the significance of policy mobilities in bringing entrepreneurial solutions to educational problems across continents, the article recommends that such transfer must be driven by perceived necessity within local contexts.
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1. Introduction and Background Information

Unarguably, the role of non-state actors such as NGOs in championing education reforms and driving educational quality for all through cost-effective and impact-driven programs have become greatly necessitated in various geographical and socio-economic contexts within the global educational discourse. According to Akyeampong (2004), NGOs have greatly enhanced global and national educational objectives in many countries where the government is incapable or failing in its obligation to provide basic education, particularly for highly disadvantaged populations who would otherwise not have access to education to complete primary education and achieve measurable learning outcomes. The concern, however, is that many international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and *Local Non-governmental Organizations (LNGO)* are circulating generic and de-contextualised interventions that do not reflect the specific local realities of the target beneficiaries and that of the contexts in which they are situated. With their inability to leverage contextual understanding for programme delivery, they end up with initiatives that produce short-term results which do not complement mainstream education efforts well and also lack sustainability. As McDonald (2012) confirms, the importation of educational initiatives across borders must incorporate contextualization and local ownership to ensure successful adoption towards promoting intended objectives. While the innovative approaches and models of International education NGOs such as Teach for All is key in delivering educational quality for the poor and underserved, it is of paramount importance to evaluate and understand how this can be adapted into conventional state education systems through partnerships, to enable Governments adapt to their operations and programmes to improve the access to and quality of education in poor and hard to reach communities (Rose, 2009).

Teach for India (TFI), one of many active NGOs in India has attracted attention for playing a crucial role in India's efforts to universalise primary education through an intervention model for improving access to basic education for disadvantaged children. The organisation has improved on the standard models of state schooling by changing the mix of inputs at the school level where state and non-state collaborations now exist with increasing participation of more corporate NGOs in shaping educational planning with municipal school bodies across India. (De Stefano and Moore, 2010). Conversely, due to its indirect role in the advancement of managerialistic ideas of school reforms which are considered neoliberal, questions have been raised on whether TFI's vision is truly transformative or rather, it has become a silent vehicle for vested interests of privatisation.

This paper describes and analyses the activities of Teach for India which was founded in 2009 with the mission to provide teachers to meet the educational needs of disadvantaged children across the various rural districts of India. The analysis begins with a keen overview of the Indian Education Context,

establishing the foundation for understanding the exclusion scenario for disadvantaged children. It then moves to a quick exploration of the Teach for All approach as situated within global context and then, a specific review of Teach for India follows, highlighting its way of working as well as areas of strength. From that point, the discussion proceeds by critically evaluating how TFI delivers its intervention with critiques of its implementation strategies. The core argument of the paper is that while a working partnership between TFI and the Indian government holds great potential to ensure educational opportunities for disadvantaged children, the organization needs to re-evaluate its intervention approach to suit local realities of its beneficiaries and be conscious of the socio-cultural and political economy of education within the Indian society.

2. Contextual Overview of Education Provision in India

Education in India is a joint responsibility of the central and state governments, and educational rights are conservatively enshrined within the Constitution (GoI, 1949). Upon independence in 1947, India made a constitutional commitment to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years, a salient feature of the national policy, which earmarked the universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) as a national priority (Government of India, (GOI), 2015). The Constitution of India, adopted by the Constituent Assembly on 26 November 1949, which came into force on 26 January 1950 and as last amended in 2006, enshrines the right to education, the "Universalisation of Elementary Education" in Article 21A (Chandra Pandey, 2012). Across several constitutional, national and policy statements, the Indian state recognises the vital link between education and totality of the national development process and therefore creates a sense of urgency in the need for the state to ensure the universalisation of education provision, enrolment, retention, participation and achievement, especially for children between the age group of 6-14.   The importance of the universalization of Elementary Education in India has been emphatically spelt out in several national conventions including in the National Policy of Education (1986), Programme of Action (1992), Unnikirshnan Judgement (1993) and the Education Ministers' Resolve 1998). The reform and restructuring of the Indian educational system have overtime continued to attract attention as an important area of national and state intervention and in 2009, in an attempt to reach India's constitutional goal of universal elementary education, the Indian Parliament enacted The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) Act. The RTE Act, which further guarantees universalisation of quality education at the elementary level in the country, remains the most important development in the Universalisation of Elementary Education in India. Subsequently, this 'right to education' legislation has seen a chequered history in evolving from a directive principle to a fundamental right with both the national government and state governments placing it at the centre stage of public attention (*EFA National Review*, 2015). Its passage has since laid the basis for several constitutional reforms targeted at addressing equity and quality in the UEE implementation drive. According to (GOI, 2015), all states and union territories of India have incorporated the act into the state legislative framework and adopted the norms prepared by the Government of India. Perhaps the adoption of the National Education Policy in 1986 and the Jomtien Declaration in 1990 repositioned the pace of strengthening infrastructure and delivery of public elementary education. The National Government of

India became the prime mover in the design and implementation of several initiatives geared at advancing the goal of universalizing education across India, invested heavily in massive infrastructural projects and teacher recruitment drives with long-term sector plans backed up with substantial financial commitments (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2008). Subsequently, there was a tremendous increase in the accessibility of schools and this led to a corresponding rise in the number of children participating in school, an evidential justification for the large-scale mobilisation that resulted from massive state investments aid by multilateral and bilateral donors (Govinda, 2009).   Despite significant progress in enrolment at the elementary stage over a long period as driven through the UEE with widespread operationalization of the RTE Act, in principle, nationally set objectives for education in India remains far from realization due to inadequate teaching provision.

With a rapidly growing population that outstripped the capacity at which schools educate children owing to limited supply of adequate and qualified teachers, India's mission to make UEE a reality became a struggle, a situation fueled by under-planning and over-ambition (Burnett, 2017). Sayed et al. (2007) note that there were substantive policy shifts in the 1990s that targeted the massive allocation of resources to districts with the educationally excluded children from socially, economically and culturally disadvantaged groups with the aim of ensuring equity within the UEE grand plan. But despite the huge traction received by the UEE across the 2000s, Govinda and Biswal (2006) suggest that state planners failed to pay attention to the agency of achieving greater equity in provision and thus neglected targeted reforms to cater for the educational needs of those from marginalized groups excluded from the school system. Recent statistics from ASER (2016) indicates that while participation levels in schools have increased across the board, the opportunity gap between the general population and marginalized social groups and minority communities continues to widen. Marginalization and infringement of children's right and access to elementary education in India are largely determined by the stratifications and social inequalities that permeate the Indian Society (Talukdar & Sharma, 2015). Historically, segregated provision and tribal discrimination have continually influenced educational exclusion, leaving certain groups unable to afford the cost of and access quality elementary education. These include underprivileged children from remote, rural and hard to reach communities, children with special needs and those from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other minority groups. National statistics from the India EFA 2015 National Review reveals significant gaps in the enrolment and retention rates especially for children from SC, ST, and Muslim communities against other privileged groups. With India's population of out-of-school children and those not completing primary schooling put at 35 million (UIS, 2016), it is clear the major educational development priority for India is not simply providing inputs and infrastructure, but identifying who and where the excluded groups are, and devising strategies to ensure meaningful access and provide quality basic education for them. This explains the motivation behind how the networked and heterarchical governance of Teach for All seeks to respond and address educational equity in India through its monocultural strategies of teacher reform. Achieving this is dependent on the Teach for India (TFI) outfit who will provide learning opportunities for educationally disadvantaged children by mobilizing elite graduates and professionals as para-teachers to teach in marginalized districts of India.

3. Analysis of the adaptation of the Teach for All Model in India

In critically analyzing the contributions and pitfalls of Teach for India, it is imperative such critique is built on its characterization as an offshoot of Teach for All which operates as a global network of 48 independent, locally led and partner-funded NGOs. These initiatives share a unifying mission to expand educational opportunity around the world by providing teachers to meet the educational needs of disadvantaged children in resource-constrained and marginalised communities. The organisation bears an institutional ideology of "educational leadership" that recognizes effective leadership as a key to resolving the global crisis of education inequity. In that sense, its grand overarching intervention approach dwells on a rubric called Teaching for Leadership, which links leadership theory to teaching practice (Thomas, 2007). This helps frame a notion that motivated teachers, with excellent teaching qualities, are foundational for lifetime leadership and education advocacy at the local and policy levels (TFAll, 2007). In 2009, TFI, the largest of all TFAll's network partners was birthed as a public-private partnership (PPP) in under-resourced municipal schools in Mumbai and Pune, two of India's most populated cities, where the ostracization of street children, SC and ST is conspicuously evident (Subramanian, 2018). As described by the founder, Shaheen Mistri, her interest to address certain inefficiencies in the Indian education system was further solidified when she encountered first-hand how the vast social and economic disparities in Mumbai creates educational exclusion (Blumenreich and Gupta, 2015). Her initial plan of providing after-school support for underprivileged children from low-income communities through Akanksha Foundation led to an expansion that led to the establishment of TFI. This buttresses the standpoint that the expansion of TFAll's theory of change and implementation on a global scale across various local contexts, including India is influenced by the responsiveness of civil society actors to the heightened need to address educational disparities and expand educational opportunities for all, especially for disadvantaged children (TFAll, 2011).

Conceived with an overarching goal of addressing educational disparities, TFAll's theory of change is situated within the ideologies of equality, accountability and measurable impact (Londe, Brewer& Lubeinski, 2015) and this is inextricably linked to Section 12 of the RTE act which identity with children from socially and economically disadvantaged groups (Chandra Pandey, 2012). The cultural and conceptual adoption of TFAll's model in India is framed around the ideology that education is emancipatory for the poor, a "problem solving" narrative which is justified by the rapid population surge, the highly divisive nature of state against non-state education provision and subsequent marginal exclusion of the disadvantaged from educational opportunities (Subramanian, 2018). Therefore, with over 96% of all children in the ages of 4-16 years enrolled as at the end of 2011 not learning, the emergence of the TFI program into the Indian educational landscape was situated within the vision of delivering improved learning outcomes and universalizing the equitable access to quality education (Chandra Pandey, 2012). To achieve this, the objective was to deliver systemic change through effective and adequate teachers' recruitment by providing an average figure of 1000 new teachers per year in at least eight major cities by 2016 (ibid, 2012). To this end, TFI recruited, trained and placed 87 fellows to teach 3000 children in 34 schools across Mumbai and Pune in its first year of operation (Fabel, 2011). This tally has since increased to over 1200 fellows in 350 schools across 7 major cities of India in its 9 years of operations (Teach for India [TFI], 2017).

The scope of the transformational impact TFI hopes to create with its Fellows over time within failing municipal education systems transcend beyond the classroom (Subramanian, 2018). In the short term, Fellows will serve as dedicated teachers in under-resourced government and low-cost private schools across low-income communities to drive significant educational attainment for disadvantaged children. Fundamentally, it is expected that these fellows will form a transformational leadership force of alumni whose experiences and insights of service will inform their willingness to effect systemic, long term changes for educational quality in the context of India's RTE Act (TFI, 2013). As Chrisina, Robison and Spilka (2016) note, the intensity of the experience of being grounded in the inequities faced by their students and communities is expected to inspire a sense of injustice in these Fellows and, subsequently, the development of a personal calling to address the underlying problems of educational inequity. The TFAll's programmatic approach which is replicated by TFI stems from the assumption that high-performing college graduates and brilliant corporate professionals can remarkably improve their students' learning outcomes and close the achievement gap between the rich and poor (Straubhaar & Friedrich, 2015). Conversely, this assumption is strongly contested within the contemporary global educational landscape on whether the TFAll's model is truly effective in delivering high academic achievement (Friedrich, 2015). As a counter-evidence, TFI claims that students in TFI classrooms are "at a skill-level about 2–4 years above their current grade levels," and in 2010–2011, the majority of these students gained more than a year of growth in many subject areas (TFI, 2017). While Heilig and Jeg (2010) argue that students taught by TFI fellows produce lower test scores as compared to those taught by locally trained teachers, several evaluative studies suggest positive results on student test scores at both primary (Decker, Mayer& Glazerman, 2004) and secondary levels (Clark et al., 2013). Despite the inefficacy of student achievement as a sole criterion in measuring its effectiveness or impact, TFI still upholds its belief in measurable impact and continues to evaluate its beneficiaries through standardised tests. The program has become so achievement-driven that it has lost sight of its primary aim of delivering quality learning that addresses teaching quality and achievement gaps, yet it continues to expand to more district schools reaching more disadvantaged children. Beyond students' academic achievement, TFI needs to focus on other indicators such as teacher performance and stakeholders' satisfaction to evaluate the impact of its intervention model.

4. Policy Transfer Limitations: A Critique of "Teach for All" to "Teach for India

The adoption of the Teach for All model, no doubt, has led to the creation and activities of Teach for India has brought about a measurable level of significant educational change. To start with, TFAll's leadership development drive in education has advanced educational progress, both locally and globally. The organization has successfully mobilised over 65,000 para- teachers, produced 40,000 alumni and reached an approximate figure of 6 million students - typically those from the most disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, as seen in India and with other network partners across the world (TFAll, 2017). In spite of this excellent impact record and the resulting recognition as one of the most successful movements in global education (Exley, 2014), TFAll has received huge criticism in recent times over a number of converging issues that points to the flaws in its policy transfer model.

4.1 Circulation of A Decontextualized Intervention Approach

Evidence shows that the TFAll Model explicitly enables the circulation of a generic decontextualized intervention approach across diverse and dissimilar historical, economic and cultural contexts. Specifically, its lack of reference to certain peculiarities and uniqueness of the Indian society like the local purposes of education, multilingualism, cultural values and philosophical ideas embedded within the Indian culture demonstrates the pitfalls of several INGOs that seek to address local education challenges and yet disregards the significance of context-specificity. For example, the emphasis on strong English-speaking abilities as a key recruitment criterion for potential TFI Fellows, in a country that possesses vast linguistic diversity, reflects a crucial component that weakens the broad vision of the organisation. According to Vellanki (2014), the selection of English-speaking fellows by TFI to become English-speaking teachers in Indian government schools where the local and regional languages of communication are the medium of instruction is a case of linguistic imperialism that creates disjuncture with the local context of India's multilingualism. This contravenes the "Three-language Formula" which governs the existing policy on the language of instruction in Indian schools that was adopted by the Education Commission in 1961 which aims to integrate English, Hindi and two other Indian languages into mainstream schools (Blumenriech and Gupta, 2015). Moreover, this reproduces a systemic form of marginalisation as Fellows are specifically trained and placed in government-controlled English-medium classrooms to teach children from socially disadvantaged families and communities who cannot speak English. While TFI is a program aimed at closing teaching gaps, its rigid approach in deploying English Speaking recruits in its strictly English-medium host schools where English is being "taught and learnt by compulsion" has played a role in surrendering control of local forms of knowledge production and contextually pedagogy which could have been a potential strength of TFI (Blumenriech and Gupta, 2015).

4.2 *Neoliberal Interferences with Local Education Governance Structures*

Firstly, since its inception in 2007, TFAll has grown substantially from being an INGO aimed at filling vacant teaching positions in disadvantaged settings to an influential proponent of 'neoliberal marketised solutions to educational inequality (Londe, Brewer& Lubienski, 2015,p.4).   Beyond its superficial two-year teaching intervention approach, TFAll's growth and influence as a major non-state institution reflect through its key role in large-scale neoliberal education reforms around the issues of school management practices, alternative teacher credentialing programmes, para-teachers training/recruitment, student learning assessment and public-private partnerships for education (Blumenreich & Gupta, 2015). With a presence in over 46 countries, the transnational spread of the TFAll's NGO model across various political, social and economic contexts exemplifies a "policy borrowing or micro-lending system" (Friedrich, 2014) within its network partners. Undoubtedly, this supposed transformative approach for local education reform is presented as "apolitical" and "simplistic" (Vellanki,2014). However, TFAll's role in the "uncritical exchange of ideas and educational practices from the West" (Blumenreich & Gupta, 2015), especially in addressing the urgent demand for teachers in disadvantaged settings can be viewed as a form of neoliberal globalization, which is governed by the notions of marketisation and privatization and has evidently empowered traditionally disadvantaged groups which it was targeted at (Gupta, 2012).   Additionally, with its imposition of external values and neglect of the significance of implicit beliefs and cultural diversity,

TFAll has propagated a new order of educational colonization within several local educational systems as its western concepts of private schooling and alternative teacher credentialing programmes spread globally (Blumenreich & Gupta, 2015). It is noteworthy that with such marketised solutions for educational inequality emanating from a Western discourse, TFAll's approach ensures the continuous lending of a neoliberal policy that does not only reinforce the marginalisation of disadvantaged groups but is also strategically positioned to benefit the developing world through political and economic means.

4.3 Inadequate Teacher Preparation Model

While TFI's vision of deploying 1000 new teachers per year in at least eight major Indian cities to help advance nationally set educational objectives for disadvantaged children seems laudable (TFAll, 2017), it's teacher preparation model which involves just five to six weeks of residential training presents a great concern. Borrowed from its Western counterparts like Teach for America and Teach First UK, the TFI's short-duration teacher training programme leaves limited time for the fellows to get acquainted with and build their knowledge about the local culture which they can use to contextualise their teaching methods (Thomas, 2007). Furthermore, since most of the selected fellows had no prior training in education, five to six weeks of professional training do not equip them enough to understand and engage with complex social aspects like caste, class and tribes which interacts with the relationship between the teacher, the student and the process of teaching and learning itself which are peculiar to the Indian context.   According to Vellanki (2014), TFI's teacher preparation practices are antithetical to the principles and beliefs of the India's 2005 National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and to the 2009 National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE), both of which underlines the significance for teachers to develop and nurture socio-emotional skills that are vital for a learner-friendly progressive approach to teaching. Drawing on the sociological underpinnings of education which implies that social structures and identities influence schooling and education, he further argued that the minimal understanding of theoretical perspectives and lack of sensitivity towards diverse socio-cultural backgrounds creates a vast socio-cultural gap between TFI's young teachers and their students. Therefore, reflecting on the drawbacks of TFI's teacher preparation model, it can be argued that a grounded understanding and engagement with certain dynamics, such as caste, gender, race, which are peculiar in the Indian context is significant for TFI fellows to maximise learning experiences for its target beneficiaries.

4.4 Deprofessionalisation of Teaching

Conclusively, beyond the limitation of its inadequate teacher preparation model, TFI's approach in tackling teacher gaps faces stiff opposition from professional teachers' associations across India over the de-professionalization of teaching. The employment of contractual or para-teachers with little or no prior training in education has become a contentious issue whose short and long-term effects have a significant influence on the social status and roles of teachers in the society. By employing people without adequate professional orientation, (Talukdar & Sharma 2015) argues that TFI de-emphasizes the professional nature of teacher's work and further demotivates regular teachers especially within the Indian society where teaching is considered a profession of high accountability and teachers perceived as a bank of knowledge. As captured within NCFTE (2009),

"The status of the teacher reflects the socio-cultural ethos of the society; it is said that no people can rise above the level of its teachers". Such exhortations are indeed an expression of the important role played by the teachers as transmitters, inspirers and promoters of man's eternal quest for knowledge. Should this role expectation be not taken as rhetoric but as a goal to be constantly striven for, the urgency is to address ourselves seriously to examining the issues related to the preparation of teachers as well as to prune the theory and practice of teacher education."

This perception of teachers as "professionals" depict the core fundamental issue upon which the NCFTE is built and based on the foregoing, it is arguable that the representation of teaching as "a short-term social work" by NGOs with fast-track teacher preparation and licensure programmes like TFI contributes to the declining reputation of teaching as a worthy profession. There need to be improvement on approaches to teacher preparation with further emphasis on professional training, induction into teaching and other professional development opportunities.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper underscores the importance of context and culture within the global educational policy transfer landscape. It explores and establishes how the negligence of contextual realities and cultural differences in the adoption of the TFAll model in India comes with grave implications.   Major social disadvantages such as castes, tribes, gender, geographical location, uneven development and poverty represent the multiple barriers to education and learning faced by children from disadvantaged groups across India and it takes context-specific interventions to address them.

Firstly, to address teacher gaps with impact and sustainability in sight, TFAll must address its lack of national cultural and policy context in India and the inadequate teacher preparation model. Furthermore, systemic analysis needs to be done to assess various factors that can aid the program's approach in event of any state and non-state collaboration to scale such intervention and to ensure it does not exacerbate exclusion in the longer term. As the central figure of a growing transnational network and its role in the spread of a neoliberal and market-oriented model of education reform, it is also beneficial for TFI to engage in critical reflections of how its organisational design and approach can be improved on to scale its localised and global-level impact.

As Teach for all's intervention model continues to gain widespread attention and attract support from various stakeholders such as national governments, foundations, local and international corporations, localization must be prioritized. Importantly, non-state actors such as local NGOs intending to borrow such ideas of education reforms for local adaptation will need to understand the scope of educational challenges to inform programme planning, design and operations.

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