Teach for America Baltimore's Impact on the Experience of Special Education Corps Members and Their Students

By Charles Mullin

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Special Education

May 2021

Graduate Programs in Education

Goucher College

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact that Teach for America Baltimore pre-service and in-service programming has on Special Education corps members and their students. Two measurement tools were used. Researcher created a Teacher Experience Survey (TES) to determine which essential knowledge, skills, and responsibilities special education corps members felt prepared for. Respondents shared that they did not feel prepared to execute the vast majority of responsibilities needed in Special Education. After collecting Maryland State Assessment scores for special education students in corps member classrooms and traditionally-certified classrooms, a t-test was performed. Statistically-significant difference was not found between treated and untreated groups. Research on the impact of Teach for America on Special Education teachers and their students should continue given the gaps in experience found in survey responses and the lack of impact on math and ELA proficiency scores in comparison to traditionally-certified teachers.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The current landscape of public education in the United States has changed rapidly in the last three decades. One major change has been in the world of teacher certification. In just the last few decades, non-profit organizations and education programs created alternative pathways for citizens to become teachers without the barriers that the traditional pathway initially presents. This is called non-traditional certification. One of the most popular organizations providing non-traditional certification is called Teach for America (TFA). TFA's corps members are trained over a summer and then sent to fill positions in urban or disenfranchised school districts. These same corps members are then supported in their first two years in the classroom by coaches, content specialists, and corps-wide learning programs. The organization, as of 2019, has over 6,000 corps members working in classrooms as well as over 55,000 alumni impacting education on a systemic level across the country (TFA, 2018). The impact of TFA does not go without controversy. On one hand, districts that experience wide-spread staff shortages receive new teachers with external professional development and training. On the other hand, many of the students in the greatest need of a quality and equitable education receive teachers with just one or less years of experience.

TFA presents incoming corps members with a compelling but concerning task—to lower education inequity as a teacher in just two years. Although the non-profit reports "85% of alumni...working in education or careers serving low-income communities," this research paper is more concerned with how said corps members—specifically special education teachers—are trained, developed, and supported to meet that challenge of equitable and rigorous teaching in just two years (TFA, 2018). Special education teachers carry with them extra responsibilities that

often are not required or a concern for general education teachers. A special educator must be able to balance the normal duties of high quality instruction and classroom management with case load management, IEP facilitation and creation, and consistent progress monitoring of goal growth. Do those extra facets of a special educator's role receive differentiated support in TFA's program?

TFA's model pushes special education corps members into the classroom after just one summer of training—often in a district summer school and content outside of their placement. Then those same corps members are expected to change long-lasting inequities in the classroom while also passing certification coursework, attending content specialist training sessions, and engaging in a observational coaching model. This is in direct contrast to the amount of training traditionally-certified teachers often receive as well as the expected outcomes of their work in the first two years. While there have already been a few studies in the past that have interrogated the effectiveness of TFA's program on new teachers and special education corps members, there is still room for more, especially when compared to the outcomes of traditional teachers in the first two years.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine whether special education teachers in Teach for America are given inclusive training and development in their first two years in the corps. To create a clear comparison, data will be organized into two groups: 1) the experience of special education corps members, and 2) the outcomes of special education corps members in comparison to traditionally-certified special education teachers. The former will be evaluated by examining the survey responses gathered in an experience survey targeting pre-service and in-service training and support. Further, the impact will be measured by examining the student

outcomes of special education corps members and traditional special educators on ELA and Math skills-based and state-wide assessments.

Hypothesis

TFA special education corps members will self-report "strongly agree" or "agree" that TFA prepared them to execute at least 50% outlined responsibilities in the Teacher Experience Survey (TES).

Also, there will be no statistically significant difference (alpha=0.05) between students of TFA teachers and similar students of TC teachers on the state-wide ELA and Math proficiency assessment.

Operational Definitions

Independent Variable (IV) is whether the special education teacher is a TFA corps member or traditionally-certified teacher. The Dependent Variables are (DV1) Teacher Experiences Survey Responses and (DV2) the Selected Outcome Variable.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction: Non-traditional Certification and Teach for America

The current landscape of public education in the United States has changed rapidly in the last three decades. Structures like Charter schools and policies like No Child Left Behind have been responsible for some of the more wide-spread change. Another major change has been in the world of certification for teachers. Previously, many aspiring teachers were required to earn a master's degree, complete a practicum experience, and pass the state-mandated PRAXIS exams in their respective fields. This is called traditional certification. However, in just the last few decades, non-profit organizations and education programs created alternative pathways for citizens to become teachers without the barriers that the traditional pathway initially presents. This is call non-traditional certification. This means that if someone has the deep desire to become a teacher, they have several routes to take towards that goal.

One of the most popular organizations providing non-traditional certification is called *Teach for America (TFA).* TFA was created in 1989 by Wendy Kopp with the mission of changing inequity in education for all students. "Teach for America is a diverse network of leaders who confront educational inequity by teaching for at least two years and then working with unwavering commitment from every sector of society to create a nation free from this injustice" (TFA, 2018). TFA's corps members are often sent to fill positions in urban or disenfranchised school districts. The organization, as of 2019, has over 6,000 corps members working in classrooms as well as over 55,000 alumni impacting education on a systemic level across the country (TFA, 2018). The impact of TFA does not go without controversy. In "Reacting to the Script: Teach for America Teacher's Experiences with Scripted Curricula" TFA

alumni Nicole Mittenfelner Carl says, "TFA teachers, like many other alternative route teachers, often do not have a degree in education. Following an intensive five-week teacher-training institute, most TFA teachers learn to teach on the job" (2014). In this fashion, TFA and many other non-traditional certification programs act as a two-pronged sword. On one hand, districts that experience wide-spread staff shortages receive new teachers with external professional development and training. On the other hand, many of the students in the greatest need of a quality and equitable education receive teachers with just one or less years of experience.

TFA presents incoming corps members with a compelling but concerning task—to lower education inequity as a teacher in just two years. Although the non-profit also reports "85% of alumni...working in education or careers serving low-income communities," this review is more concerned with how said corps members are trained, developed, and supported to meet that challenge of equitable and rigorous teaching in just two years (TFA, 2018). Mittenfelner's study uses a survey and qualitative interviews to gauge 2nd year corps members' comfort with scripted curricula and other elements of instruction in their placement district. One of the first conclusions found in analysis of the data was that "TFA teachers are left with the dilemma of whether they follow the scripted curriculum faithfully or risk deviating and possibly the threat of losing their jobs. Despite studies that contend that TFA teachers view their time in the corps as service rather than a career, the teachers in this study were concerned about losing their jobs and this in turn affected the risks they took in the classroom" (Mittenfelner, 2019). The study also explores how a "sense of urgency" to impact education for students in impoverished schools right away causes a deep frustration to build inside many corps members (Mittenfelner, 2019). How can a corps member change long-lasting inequities in education when they feel like they do not have all the correct answers or sound solutions as new teachers? On top of that, TFA places

corps members in Special Education positions across the country—a role that requires even more responsibility, training, and support than other placements. Mittenfelner's research and others included in this literature review call TFA's method of training and development for new teachers—specifically special educators—into question.

Effective Special Education: What does it look like?

Before exploring how Teach for America impacts new teachers and special educators, it is important to clarify what is needed and what works. The common adage of "do more with less" is often applicable to the role of a Special Educator. Teachers in this role have to balance the normal duties of high-quality instruction and classroom management with case load management, IEP facilitation and creation, and consistent progress monitoring of goal growth. What characteristics or actions do effective special educators share? What training or development methods have had the biggest impact on Special Educators?

Before Special Educators can take effective action in and outside of the classroom, it is first important for them to have a strong knowledge of the intervention process and disabilities they will be responding to. One of the most common intervention structures is called the Three-tier Model. This model and its use in collaboration with data is explored in Simonsen et.al's article "A Schoolwide Model for Service Delivery: Redefining Special Educators as Interventions. The authors state, "The three-tier model provides a vehicle for educators to (a) acknowledge the need to make the intervention fit the learner, rather than make the learner fit the intervention, and (b) commit to increasing their capacity to support a diverse group of students" (Simonsen et.al, 2010). The first tier is called Universal Intervention in which a special educator collaborates with the general educator to formulate supports they can give students in their classroom as well as screen potential students for more intervention. The next tier is called

Targeted-group Intervention. In this phase, the special educator provides small group instruction and support for students who are still demonstrating difficulty learning with universal accommodations. The last tier is called Individualized Intervention which applies to students that need to be given one-on-one instruction or support from a special educator after struggling to grow in academic or behavior outcomes in a small group setting. "In preparing special educators to function within a school-wide model, it will be necessary to articulate (a) how a special educator's role fits within the larger structure and (b) what roles all school professionals should play within the school-wide model" (Simonsen et.al, 2010). In "Taking Charge of Your Professional Learning: Tips for Cultivating Special Educator Expertise," Benedict et.al agree, interviewing effective special educators and finding that "they can talk at length and in great detail about their students' needs" (2014). In this intervention model, special educators need to be advocates for their students whether it is in advocating for them to receive increased/decreased support, in holding general educators accountable for implementing accommodations, or in making modifications to a student's IEP to meet their needs. If a new special educator does not have a strong foundational knowledge of this process, then they ultimately are at great risk of not fulfilling these key responsibilities.

Another key skill in effective special education is the collection and use of data. "[Effective Special Educators] frequently collect data to anchor their instructional decisions about their students, and they are careful observers of student behavior (Benedict et.al, 2014). A student's IEP contains a list of goals that track that student's progress on an annual basis. Those goals give valuable insight into how the IEP and listed interventions are impacting the student's learning. In order to track a student's performance with their IEP goals, each special educator needs to collect continuous data through an action called progress monitoring. Even more

challenging is that many special educators need to be highly organized, so they are able to execute progress monitoring in between their normal responsibilities of instruction, co-teaching, and facilitating IEP meetings. Data also influences the three-tier model for intervention. "Data are used to determine when a student is (a) responding and continues to benefit from the current tier of intervention or (b) not responding to the current level of intervention and requires additional support" (Simonsen et.al, 2010). In this way, being able to collect and use data from progress monitoring ensures that special educators can effectively advocate for their students in IEP creation and IEP meetings.

Once data is collected, the next step is for special education teachers to make responsive judgments for their students. In "Special Thinking in Special Settings: A Qualitative Study of Expert Special Educators," Laura M. Stough and Douglas J. Palmer collect data from 19 certified special educators through interviews, videotaping, observations, stimulated recall exercises and field notes. They found that "instructional decision making by the teachers was based upon their observations of the students' actions, behaviors, and levels of attention while delivering instruction and managing the classroom action" (Stough and Palmer, 2003). Effective special educators were not just concerned with data collected from progress monitoring, but also the data they could collect in the moment from lessons by just simply observing their students. "Teachers occasionally reflected on students' health history or medical diagnosis but only as a 'jumping off place' from which they subsequently evaluated the achievement and behavior of their students, rather than using these labels to govern their instructional decisions in the classroom" (Stough and Palmer, 2003). By using past and present data, effective special educators are able to make responsive judgments that result in more supportive teaching techniques in the classroom. Stough and Palmer call this "instructional assessment" (2003). Some special educators may have

a strong grasp on the intervention process and progress monitoring, but if they are not able to use that to make informed judgments, then they lose the impact.

Stough and Palmer set the stage for how difficult the job of a special educator is, saying, "effective teaching appeared to be not a particular method, but a complex body of knowledge nested within ever-present concern that allowed these educators to competently address the complex academic, behavioral, emotional, and independence needs of their students with disabilities" (2003). Just simply teaching special educators the basics before releasing them into the classroom is not enough. Alternative certification programs must be able to provide guidance for how to navigate that "nest" of concerns. Before exploring the outcomes of TFA's past development, it is important to also explore past effective training methods for special educators.

One of the first effective training methods found in a review of past literature was practice-based training. In "Envision the Future of Special Education Personnel Preparation in a Standards-based Era," Leko et.al argue for new special educators to "practice teaching in structured, carefully sequenced, and closely monitored practical experiences, ones in which special education teacher candidates practice the knowledge and skills they will need to collaborate around and implement tiered instruction" (2015). They also outlined key areas for special educators to practice in like "explicit instruction, engaging guided practice, corrective feedback and collecting and interpreting progressing-monitoring data" (Leko et.al, 2015) which share similarities to characteristics and actions of effective special educators found earlier in this review. The intention is that new special educators are given a safe environment to practice these essential skills over and over until mastery is achieved. This eliminates the risk of the problematic reality of teachers practicing essential skills in a classroom filled with students who need effective instruction immediately. Past training programs have executed this method

through strategies like tutoring opportunities, performance feedback coupled with self-reflection, coaching from peers, and even real-time coaching through an earpiece (Leko et.al, 2015). The biggest flaw in this line of thinking is that there just is not enough quantitative data on the impact of practice-based training for special educators yet because it is an under-researched field. This also does not negate the potential impact of this method of training as it is rooted in an andragogical approach.

Special educators also need to be prepared mentally and physically for the challenge that the role provides early on. Bonnie S. Billingsley makes the educational landscape clear in her article "Promoting Teacher Quality and Retention in Special Education," stating, "uncertified teachers are concentrated among beginning special educators, with approximately 30% of beginning teachers with 3 or fewer years of experience lacking certification for their main assignments" (2004). This often results in heavy retention issues. 15% of special educators leave after their first year as well as 25% leave after their second (Whitaker, 2000). Mary Fogarty in the article, "Teach for America fails the test" find similar overall trends in the non-profit's program, stating, "more than 50 percent of TFA teachers leave after two years and more than 80 percent leave after three years" (2011). It is an unfortunate reality that many school districts across the country are facing a devastating teacher retention crisis. The good news is that teacher training programs matter. "Professional development opportunities have a direct influence on special educators' commitment to the profession and an indirect effect on teachers' intent to leave" (Billingsley, 2004). What are those specific positive opportunities for professional development?

In "Working in Special Education: Factors that Enhance Special Educators' Intent to Stay," Gersten et.al gave a survey that measured which factors had a larger impact on special

educators' desire or motivation to stay. After reviewing the results, they found "the degree to which educators perceive dissonance between their expectations about the job and the job's actual requirements is a strong predictor of stress related to job design and satisfaction with current position" (Gersten et.al, 2001). This means that training programs should emphasize creating as much clarity about the role of a special educator as possible. Obviously, it is impossible to give each new teacher a picture-perfect preview of what their future responsibilities will be, but any decrease of this experienced dissonance could be meaningful. Billingsley posits that impacting retention could be achieved by simply providing realistic applicable assignments, actionable feedback, and an increase of one-on-one support (2004). New special educators seem to thrive when given clarity and personal support. Hiding the reality of the role and their growth in performance only creates further issues down the line. Losing a teacher mid-year has a disastrous effect on the learning in a special education classroom.

The last major training method found was co-teaching. Sotiria Tzivinikou studies the impact of a co-teaching training model for special educators in "The Impact of an In-service Training Program on the Self-efficacy of Special and General Education Teachers" by enrolling participants in a program that pushed them to take 30-hours of lectures on pedagogy with over 70-hours of teaching in a classroom of students with learning disabilities together. Throughout the process, participants were paired up ensuring that one was a general educator and the other was a special educator. The results of the program were almost immediate. "The findings showed that the program influenced positively the participants' skills as regards lesson planning, teaching methods, cooperation between general and special teachers for improving the process of students' assessment, planning and implementing interventions for learning disabled students" (Tzivinikou, 2015). Leko et.al agreed with this, finding that special educators enrolled in a co-

teaching program were more effective at planning for student needs and analyzing their own impact on student outcomes (2015). Those enrolled in these co-teaching programs must have noticed the impact because many desired to continue working with their partner even after the study had completed (Tzivinikou, 2015). Gersten et.al noticed the same trend, stating, "A recurrent theme that emerged from a qualitative study of these data was the desire of special education teachers to have more opportunities to learn from and observe each other" (2001). Not only do special educators who co-teach report higher student outcomes, but those who have yet to co-teach express a deep desire to try. It becomes difficult to argue against any training program that uses a co-teaching model as a cornerstone.

Direct Observations: Teach for America's Coaching Model

There are many elements of Teach for America's programming that are stark in comparison to other traditional and non-traditional teacher development programs. However, the coaching model TFA uses is closely aligned with the mentoring and direct observations that have already been used in many schools and training programs. Teach for America calls the coach they provide to corps members a Manager of Teaching and Learning Development (MTLD). "In addition to facilitating your ongoing professional development, your MTLD will visit your classroom for observations on a regular basis and provide you with feedback and guidance on improving your teaching practice" (Corps Member Training, 2018). Coaching in the form of direct observations is not just provided when corps members enter the classroom but also before during their summer training called Institute. As corps members spend their mornings teaching a small class of summer school students in their placement content and grade level, they also receive quick observations with feedback from their Institute coach called a Corps Member Adviser (Corps Member Training, 2018). Suffice to say, this is the only element of TFA's

programming that is present for the duration of a corps member's first two years of teaching. Since TFA's model of coaching has been used in the past by other programs and school districts, what research is available to show the impact of such a model?

Susan Whitaker examines the impact of direct observations and coaching in her study called "Mentoring Beginning Special Education Teachers and the Relationship to Attrition. She first collected a sample of close 200 first-year special education teachers and gave them a questionnaire that asked targeted questions about their current experience with mentoring and observations at their current school. After reviewing the results, Whitaker found that "first-year special education teachers in this study indicated a very strong preference for mentors who are special education teachers over mentors who are in the same school" and "a statistically significant relationship between the perceived overall effectiveness of the mentoring and the first-year special education teacher's plans to remain in special education" (2000). TFA runs into some issues here as their MTLD's are often not mentoring corps members in the same content they are experts in, but the presence of a consistent coach throughout the first two years could show a similar positive impact on teacher retention. New special education teachers survey also listed emotional support, assistance with learning school policies, providing classroom materials, and development in classroom management as the most sought-after areas of coaching (Whitaker, 2000). The pressure on a coach to cover all of these areas in just two years with a heavy caseload of teachers is high.

Even though there were positive trends found in an examination of direct observations and coaching, the room for error is low. In an article called "Learning from Teacher Observations: Challenges and Opportunities Posed by New Teacher Evaluation Systems," authors Heather hill and Pam Grossman examine the impact of observations and support for new

teachers by Principals and Department Heads. In this context, both are fulfilling a coaching role that TFA, and other programs executed, giving observations with feedback on teacher performance and growth. Unfortunately, "three-quarters of teachers surveyed reported that their most recent evaluations failed to identify areas for improvement, and almost half of teachers who did report an identified area for improvement stated that they failed to receive support for that work" (Hill and Grossman, 2013). Ineffective coaching is common, and it can have disastrous consequences. Whitaker agrees, "The lack of observations and feedback and the minimal emphasis on the aspects of the job that directly impact students indicate that perhaps more can be done to improve the effectiveness of the mentoring being provided" (2000). So, what does effective direct observations and coaching look like? There are two strong suggestions. First, observations should be frequent and throughout the school year. Past research has shown that new teachers only improve after receiving "more than a few visits per year" (Hill and Grossman, 2013). Last, feedback needs to be "individualized" and "actionable" so new teachers can take it and directly apply it to their classroom the next day (Hill and Grossman, 2013). The literature shows that direct observations and coaching can be helpful to new teachers, but only if done effectively.

Comparing the Outcomes of TFA Teachers vs. Traditionally-certified Teachers

Teach for America represents a coagulation of traditional and non-traditional training methods. TFA uses a traditional coaching and direct observation model. TFA also partners with universities to provide traditional certification classes for corps members. TFA even uses a traditional professional learning community (PLC) structure called content specialist sessions that give corps members content-focused instruction and development similar to a PLC that might be offered in a district. The biggest difference is the time that corps members are given to complete

these experiences and requirements in comparison to a traditionally-certified teacher. "TFA claims to spend more than $19,000 per corps member in professional development and training, which includes a 5-week summer training program in which corps members complete a modified student teaching experience" (Carter, Amrein-Beardsley, and Hansen, 2011). Suffice to say, TFA corps members are expected to do more, learn more, and grow more than traditional teachers in more than half the time. How do TFA and University partner courses support corps members in the process? What are the ultimate outcomes on the students they teach?

TFA, as a non-profit education organization, is simply unable to facilitate the certification courses and training of corps members without partnering with local or state-wide universities. For example, in Baltimore City, corps members participate in sessions of development offered by Teach for America and complete certification coursework offered by Johns Hopkins University. Other regions offer the same model for development in a corps members' two years of service. In "So NOT Amazing! Teach for America Corps Members' Evaluation of the First Semester of Their Teacher Preparation Program," Heather Carter, Audrey Amrein-Beardsley, and Cory Cooper Hansen compare the experiences of traditionally-certified students and TFA corps members enrolled in the same graduate-level courses. They first collected the responses from the Fall semester student evaluations, and then analyzed the data received from a questionnaire sent out to the same participants in the following Spring. One of the first realizations was that corps members were far more critical of the instruction they were given than their traditionally-certified counterpart: "The lowest evaluation score for all instructors was 1.6, from a student in a traditional program, and 17% of TFA students awarded perfect 4s, compared with 50% of traditional students" (Carter, Amrein-Beardsley, and Hansen, 2011). This could be due to higher expectations from corps members or just simply a misalignment between the content taught and

the content they needed in their first year in the classroom. This should not imply that corps members only gave critical feedback or never had a positive experience in their graduate coursework. Whereas traditional students often complimented their professors on their practicality or knowledge, TFA teachers focused their positive feedback on how helpful, organized or prepared the professor was" (Carter, Amerein-Beardsley, and Hansen, 2011). Universities face a difficult problem of having to create teacher training curriculum for two populations that need and respond to different content.

It can also be easy to read the qualitative comments presented in Carter, Amrein-Beardsley, and Hansen's study as too critical, demanding, or impatient from TFA teachers. The amount of negative feedback is staggering in contrast to traditional teachers. However, context matters. TFA teachers are working a full-time, challenging, and unforgiving job while also completing graduate-level work. "As intensive as the summer training may be, it stands in contrast to the one to four years of coursework (with student teaching) that is typical of traditional teacher education programs" (Glazerman, Mayer, and Decker, 2006). There are solutions that have posited though. It just requires more collaboration between TFA and the Universities it partners with. Carter, Amrein-Beardsley, and Hansen state, "A teacher preparation program would benefit from professional development to help instructors make the leap from working with students who have the luxury of time to learn how to teach, to working with adult learners in the throes of the job today" (2011). Until that middle ground is found, corps members will continually feel like the development they are being given are not fitting their needs which could trickled down into the outcomes of the students they teach.

Unfortunately, there is not a large amount of literature focused on comparing the outcomes of TFA teachers with traditionally-certified teacher. The ones present focused on more

measurable outcomes like test scores for Math and ELA. This is what Glazerman, Mayer, and Decker study in their research titled "Alternative Routes to Teaching: The Impacts of Teach for America on Student Achievement and Other Outcomes." In their study, they included participants for at least six regions TFA serve across the country, incorporating almost 100 teachers. A control was created with 18 new teachers and 39 veteran teachers that did not complete the TFA program. The remaining teachers were TFA corps members in their first years of teaching. After the groups were created, the researcher's measured the change in achievement in ELA and Math in a full school year—Fall to Spring. There were two stark differences observed, but many similarities. First, Glazerman, Mayer, and Decker state, "The average control class students scored in the 15th percentile in the fall and remained in the 15th percentile [for math] at the end of the year.... In contrast, the average TFA class students increased their ranking from the 14th percentile to the 17th percentile over the same period" (2006). However, for reading, both classrooms "experienced the same growth rate" (Glazerman, Mayer, and Decker, 2006). This is meaningful, hard data that shows that TFA's program—despite many criticisms and challenges—is starting to make a meaningful difference. Even the lack of a difference in growth in reading shows that TFA teachers in this study were performing just as highly as teachers who came from a different program or traditional education. There more commonalities observed as well. Students in TFA classrooms were no more or less likely to be held back a grade in comparison to the control group. TFA teachers also did not demonstrate any different impact on chronic absenteeism or student disciplinary situations (Glazerman, Mayer, and Decker, 2006). The only other compelling difference found were that "TFA teachers were significantly more likely to report that student disruptions and physical conflicts among students in their classrooms were a 'serious' problem'" (Glazerman, Mayer, and Decker, 2006). This result hearkens back to

Carter, Amrein-Beardsley, and Hansen's study finding TFA teachers were far more critical of their university professors in graduate school. However, just like that qualitative data, it is difficult to decide on a root cause. This could be because corps members have higher expectations of students, so they are more shocked by the outcomes they see immediately. It could also speak to a problematic mindset issue that corps members have about their students, the schools, and the communities they work in since many are "outsiders" entering the classroom with a privileged background. More research on student outcomes and corps member development will only yield more results.

Conclusion

The story created by TFA and about TFA in this literature review contain no easy, straight-forward answers. Becoming an effective Special Educator in today's education landscape is difficult, rigorous, and demanding, but training programs—not just TFA—have struggled with addressing this need. School districts are still exploring how to provide support for Special Educators. Teach for America primarily uses a direct observation coaching model that has been used by school districts and traditional certification pathways to great effect, but the model is not perfect. It requires coaches to be extremely personalized in their support and have expertise in a wide range of contents and grade levels. Both of which are difficult for TFA and many teacher training programs to present. Although there are some differences in student outcomes between TFA teachers and traditionally-certified teachers, there are even more similarities. This overabundance of conflicting results and observations is more so evidence of a need for more research on Teach for America's impact on teachers, students, and—especially—new special educators. This is a gap that this paper hopes to fill.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This study attempted to capture the experience of current Special Education corps members in Teach for America Baltimore as well as their impact on student Math and ELA proficiency levels district-wide in comparison with non-TFA Special Education teachers.

Design

The research methodology used in this study was a descriptive approach through collection of both participant responses on a self-created Teacher Experience Survey (TES) and student proficiency scores on the Maryland State Assessment. In particular, the collected outcomes were intended to compare the ELA and Math proficiency scores of students with an IEP at Baltimore City schools staffed by Special Education corps members and traditional Special Educators. The TES measured the pre-service and in-service experience of those same Special Education corps members. Only school level PARCC scores that were publicly available via the 2019 Maryland Report Card website were used for this study. The Maryland Report Card provided PARCC school means for students with IEPs. The survey was given once—in the middle of the 3rd Quarter. While the proficiency scores were meant to surface any differences in special education student outcomes across lines of certification, the survey provided a deeper dive into the specific experience of each current special education corps member. This was achieved by collecting responses on which pieces of TFA Baltimore programming were the most helpful/least helpful, what parts of the Special Educator role they felt most prepared for, and how inclusive their programming was to their school placement context.

Participants

For the survey, 14 out of 20 current special education corps members participated. Six

corps members were completing their first year of teaching while eight corps members were finishing their second year. The majority of participants were between the age of 22 and 25; however, there were three corps members surveyed who were older. Only one taught as a special educator in high school while eight taught middle school and five taught in elementary school. The survey participants also fit a wide range of special education roles. Eight worked as a resource push-in/pull-out special educator, five worked in a self-contained classroom, two worked in a full-inclusion model, and one worked as a general educator with a special education caseload. Only one corps member earned a bachelor's degree with a major in education; just five are either currently pursuing a master's or have already received one. These participants were chosen due to their current membership in the corps for TFA Baltimore and because of their placement as a Special Educator. Because this study was being executed during a phase when hundreds of schools were transitioning to hybrid, an emphasis was placed on using a sample size that was the most impactful and realistic to reach.

Instrument

The Teacher Experience Survey (TES) was created by the researcher for the purpose of dissecting the experience of current special education corps members in Baltimore. Previously, there were no experience surveys created that isolated the pre-service and in-service experience of current corps members in Teach for America. Further, many experience surveys found only isolated the pre-service or in-service experience for traditionally certified general educators. 52 questions were created in total. The survey was structured by priority—with the most important data placed first. The first section of 14 questions had participants use a likert scale to evaluate how prepared they felt to execute necessary actions, skills and responsibilities of a special educator based on TFA programming. The second section of nine questions asked corps members

to isolate which specific structures of TFA programming felt the most or least helpful. The next three questions targeted how committed current corps members feel to teaching long-term. The fourth section had participants describe their current teaching context in detail, sharing how frequently they have positive experiences in culture, learning, or job security in their current role as a special educator. The fifth section asks four questions to learn how often current corps members are receiving feedback from mentors, veterans or TFA staff. The sixth section seeks greater context on placement by uncovering how much control participants feel they have with materials, strategies, and assessment. The last section was the lowest priority but still beneficial in getting a clearer picture on the sample. The final nine questions targeted demographics and even gave participants a chance to share anything further about their experience. You can consult some of the results of this section in the participant's section.

Procedure

The research needed to go through multiple revisions to be inclusive of COVID-19 protocols and the limited access to participants. Determining the sample size for the experience survey was simple. Due to the researcher's current position on TFA Baltimore staff, all current special education corps members, their school placement and contact information was collected. Only special education corps members were surveyed using the TES because COVID-19 protocols made the possibility of contacting traditional special educators unlikely. After the corps members were determined, the focus shifted to finding schools with traditionally-certified (TC) special educators to use as a comparison. Baltimore City schools use a structure called "learning networks" to organize schools into groups for professional development based on geographic location and similarity in content and grade-level. The researcher chose to pull out schools staffed by TC special educators in learning network 13 because close to 50% of current special

education corps members also worked in the same network. In this way, comparisons could be made with confidence since the district had already deemed the differences between schools in that group as minimal. To go one step further, more demographic data was collected on each school's MSDE star rating, Teacher/student ratio, and FARMS percentage. In total, 30 schools were selected for comparative analysis of student outcomes and 20 current corps members were picked as potential participants in the survey.

Although math and ELA proficiency data on the PARCC for the past 2020 school year was not available, the researcher and adviser were able to collect data for the 2019 school year on the Maryland Report Card website. Then the researcher and adviser extracted only the special education proficiency rates at said schools. There were only two scores that were not able to be collected based on availability on Maryland Report Card; the schools were Bel-Air Edison Elementary School and Vivien T. Thomas Medical Arts Academy. This reduced the sample size for student outcomes to 28. After the collection of data, a t-test was performed to discover possible differences in the mean between the treated group (TFA special education corps members) and the untreated group (TC). This approach was selected to test the study's hypothesis and check for any statistically significant difference in the student outcomes of both groups.

At first, the researcher sought to use a teacher experience survey available on Mental Measurements Yearbook but had to switch approaches when no appropriate surveys were created yet. Past experience surveys either only focused on traditionally certified general educators or selected the pre-service and in-service time period in isolation from the other. The researcher created their own TES survey as a result. Three clear intentions were drafted: 1) to isolate how prepared and in which skills corps members felt prepared for, 2) which elements of TFA

Baltimore programming were helpful or not helpful, and 3) what was the unique context of each

placement school? Although there were supplemental and demographic questions added, those

three were the main subjects that interested this research study. After finalizing the draft, the

survey was uploaded as a google form with a restricted link only available to the researcher,

adviser, and participants. The survey link and introduction to the study was sent out to each corps

member's preferred email address present in TFA's contact data base. The researcher sent two

reminder emails indicating the survey closing date and encouraging more in the sample to

participate. After a week, the survey was closed, and 14 responses were collected. This meant

70% of current special education corps members participated.

CHAPTER IV

Main Results

At the beginning of the study, there were two main hypotheses that were created. TFA special

education corps members will self-report "strongly agree" or "agree" that TFA prepared them to

execute at least 50% outlined responsibilities in the Teacher Experience Survey (TES).

Also, there will be no statistically significant difference (alpha=0.05) between students of TFA

teachers and similar students of TC teachers on the state-wide ELA and Math proficiency

assessment. In this fashion, the study would focus on two different outcomes: experience survey

response and student assessments scores.

One can delve deeper into the TES results first by consulting Table 1 below:

Table 1. *Tallies of TFA Special Ed Teachers Survey items 1 – 14*

1.variety method	Count	2.my subject	Count	3.use tech	Count	4.handle virtual	Count
Agree	1	Disagree	14	Agree	5	Agree	2
Disagree	12	N=	14	Disagree	6	Disagree	9
Neutral	1			Neutral	3	Neutral	3
N=	14			N=	14	N=	14

5.assess pupils	Count	6.mgt progress	Count	7.manage IEP	Count	8.effective learning	Count
Agree	2	Disagree	14	Disagree	14	Agree	6
Disagree	11	N=	14	N=	14	Disagree	7
Neutral	1					Neutral	1
N=	14					N=	14

9.comm family	Count	10.cultural relevant	Count	11.include all	Count	12.do IEP mtgs	Count
Agree	6	Agree	10	Agree	4	Disagree	14
Disagree	5	Neutral	4	Disagree	9	N=	14
Neutral	3	N=	14	Neutral	1		
N=	14			N=	14		

13.do coteach	Count	14.use data	Count
Agree	2	Agree	6
Disagree	10	Disagree	7
Neutral	2	Neutral	1
N=	14	N=	14

There were 14 questions that targeted the first hypothesis which did not end up being met. There was only one question that SpEd corps members as a majority shared, they felt prepared to execute: culturally relevant pedagogy. 10 submitted "agree" and 4 submitted "neutral." Although each of the other questions received a majority response rate of "disagree" or "strongly disagree," there were a few extra questions that stood out. 100% of respondents entered "disagree" or "strongly disagree" that they felt prepared to 1) teach in their assigned content, 2) execute progress monitoring for their caseload, 3) manage their caseload's IEP's, and 4) facilitate IEP meetings. While many of the areas measured by this survey bear closer examination, these findings bear the most relevance to the first hypothesis.

No matter the experience TFA Special Educators are given in their pre-service and in-service training, what is their impact on students in comparison to traditional teachers? The second hypothesis predicted that there would be statistically significant difference between TFA special educators and traditionally-certified Special Educators. One can examine the outcomes of each individual school in Table 2 below:

Table 2. List of TFA (treated) and Traditional (untreated) Schools used in the study

group	school	farms	pctsped	math	eng
treated	Baltimore Collegiate School for Boys	41.7	18.3	5.6	2.1
treated	Beechfield EMS/Yorkwood Elementary School	66.2	14.6	15.6	16.0
treated	Bel Air Edison School	58.3	.	.	.
treated	Collington Square Elementary/Middle School	79.9	15.1	0.0	0.0
treated	ConneXions: A Community Based Arts School	65.7	28.5	0.0	0.0
treated	Furman Templeton Prepatory Academy	80.0	15.5	0.0	0.0
treated	Glenmount Elementary/Middle School	51.5	17.9	4.1	2.7
treated	Green Street Academy	54.9	18.0	3.5	7.7
treated	Hampden Elementary/Middle	37.1	16.9	7.2	5.7
treated	Highlandtown #237	39.2	8.5	6.6	8.3
treated	John Ruhrah Elementary Middle School	32.3	8.4	0.0	3.3
treated	Moravia Park Elementary School	59.9	13.1	2.4	2.4
treated	Morrell Park	59.7	18.4	3.7	3.7
treated	Mount Royal Elementary/Middle School	51.9	12.1	2.4	0.0
treated	Patterson High School	39.7	16.1	10.0	10.0
treated	Patterson Park Charter	41.4	14.5	3.2	6.4
treated	Vivien T. Thomas Medical Arts Academy	66.4	13.2	.	.
untreated	Afya Public Charter School	57.9	31.6	16.8	18.8
untreated	Baltimore International Academy	38.6	5.0	0.0	0.0
untreated	Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women	50.3	6.7	0.0	0.0
untreated	Baltimore Montessori Public Charter School	34.9	13.9	5.6	8.7
untreated	Bard High School Early College Baltimore	35.5	5.0	.	.
untreated	City Neighbors Charter School	22.3	21.4	7.4	4.8
untreated	City Neighbors Hamilton	23.5	24.8	4.3	5.2
untreated	City Springs Elementary/Middle School	78.8	15.3	0.0	0.0
untreated	Coppin Academy	48.9	17.3	0.0	0.0
untreated	Creative City Public Charter School	55.4	18.5	0.0	0.0
untreated	Henderson: A Johns Hopkins Partnership School	55.7	11.6	1.9	1.9
untreated	Empowerment Academy	49.6	11.7	0.0	0.0
untreated	Frederick Elementary School	84.3	12.7	0.0	0.0
untreated	Govans Elementary School	65.1	13.1	0.0	3.6
untreated	Hampstead Hill Academy	25.4	5.4	0.0	18.8
untreated	Lillie May Carroll Jackson School	47.0	11.3	0.0	0.0
untreated	Midtown Academy	33.3	17.4	5.0	10.0
untreated	New Song Academy	60.6	10.6	.	.
untreated	Southwest Baltimore Charter School	63.9	19.5	11.1	14.3
untreated	The Crossroads School	52.2	13.7	0.0	0.0
untreated	The Green School of Baltimore	19.0	13.7	23.1	7.7
untreated	Tunbridge Public Charter School	25.6	14.1	1.9	0.0

FARMS stands for the % of enrolled students that are accommodated with Free and Reduced Meals. PCTSPED speaks for itself, targeting the % of students with an IEP currently enrolled at the school. The proficiency scores of special education students at each school were pulled out using Maryland Report Card and listed above. For traditionally-certified special educators, 12 out of 23 schools had no proficient tested special education pupils. At TFA special education schools, 5 out of 17 schools had no proficient tested special education students.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for the sample variables by group

Statistics

Variable	group	N	N*	Mean	SE Mean	StDev	Median
math	treated	15	2	4.29	1.11	4.31	3.55
	untreated	21	2	3.97	1.37	6.26	0.00
ELA	treated	15	2	4.56	1.17	4.55	3.35
	untreated	21	2	5.03	1.40	6.41	1.85

N*=schools with missing data, SE Mean=variation of group means in the theoretical population, StDev=variation of school means within the study groups.

In Table 3, above, special education corps members received a slightly higher average (4.29%) of students who scored proficiently on the PARCC compared to traditionally certified special educators. On the other side, students in traditionally certified special education spaces scored slightly higher in ELA than their corps member counterparts. The Standard Error Mean is greater for both outcomes measured for traditionally certified teachers which raises more doubt in how statistically significant those gains are. One can see this further illustrated with the difference between treated and untreated for standard deviation. While the treated populations are both under 5, untreated experienced an increase in the spread of its data.

To finally test the hypothesis, a t-test was performed to find if the variance between the treated and untreated groups was statistically significant. One can peruse the results in both Tables 4 and 5 below:

Table 4. t-tests for equality of population mean ELA proficiency for treated vs untreated groups

Method

μ₁: population mean of ELA when group = treated
μ₂: population mean of ELA when group = untreated
Difference: μ₁ - μ₂
Equal variances are assumed for this analysis.

Descriptive Statistics: ELA

group	N	Mean	StDev	SE Mean
treated	15	4.56	4.55	1.2
untreated	21	5.03	6.41	1.4

Test

Null hypothesis   H₀: μ₁ - μ₂ = 0
Alternative hypothesis H₁: μ₁ - μ₂ ≠ 0

T-Value	DF	P-Value
-0.24	34	0.811

Table 5. t-tests for equality of population mean math proficiencies for treated vs untreated groups
Method

μ₁: population mean of math when group = treated
μ₂: population mean of math when group = untreated
Difference: μ₁ - μ₂
Equal variances are assumed for this analysis.

Descriptive Statistics: math

group	N	Mean	StDev	SE Mean
treated	15	4.29	4.31	1.1
untreated	21	3.97	6.26	1.4

Test

Null hypothesis   H₀: μ₁ - μ₂ = 0
Alternative hypothesis H₁: μ₁ - μ₂ ≠ 0

T-Value	DF	P-Value
0.17	34	0.864

For ELA, the treated group averaged lower than the untreated group in ELA proficiency, but the difference was not statistically significant at the .05 alpha level (p=.811). Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected so that the chance of a false positive is no more than five

percent. There is no discernible effect of certification type on ELA achievement. On the opposite

end, for math, the treated group averaged higher than the untreated group in math proficiency,

but the difference was also not statistically significant at the .05 alpha level (p=.864). Therefore,

the null hypothesis cannot be rejected so that the chance of a false positive is no more than five

percent. There is no current discernible effect of certification on math achievement as well.

Overall, this means that only one hypothesis put forward at the beginning of this study

succeeds. The survey hypothesis fails due to a statistically significant opposite result (corps

members felt prepared to execute just 7% of surveyed responsibilities). The student outcomes

null hypothesis succeeds because a statistically significant difference was not found between

both populations in both assessments.

<div align="center">

Other Findings

</div>

Although dissecting the results of the hypothesis was the main priority, there were other findings

that were relevant to uplift in this study. The focus of the TES was to unpack which

responsibilities special education corps members felt prepared for, but it also measured the

experience of their placement school and the impact of specific programs in Teach for America.

In Table 6, you can discover which specific elements of TFA programming SpEd corps

members found most helpful/least helpful:

Table 6. Tallies of TFA Special Ed Teachers Survey items 15 – 23

15.did VSTT	Count	16.did Philly	Count	17.strong start	Count
N/A	7	N/A	5	Helpful	1
Not Helpful	6	Not Helpful	3	Not Helpful	10
Sometimes Helpful	1	Sometimes Helpful	6	Sometimes Helpful	3
N=	14	N=	14	N=	14

18.content spec	Count	19.all corps	Count	20.coaching	Count

Helpful	9	Helpful	1	Helpful	11
Sometimes Helpful	5	Not Helpful	6	Sometimes Helpful	3
N=	14	Sometimes Helpful	7	N=	14
		N=	14		

21.PLC	Count	22.affinity	Count	23.hundred days	Count
Helpful	4	N/A	5	Helpful	2
N/A	3	Not Helpful	3	Not Helpful	10
Not Helpful	3	Sometimes Helpful	6	Sometimes Helpful	2
Sometimes Helpful	4	N=	14	N=	14
N=	14				

While some questions receive a mixed response, one can see some clear outliers. On questions 18 and 20, all respondents stated that "content specialists" and "coaching" was either "helpful" or "sometimes helpful." On the opposite end, 71% of special education corps members shared that "First 100 Days" was not helpful for their development. The remaining questions experienced more mixed responses, speaking to the differing impact that programming can have on corps members even in the same role.

Also, the survey was able to paint a clearer picture of special education corps member's experience at their placement school. Considering each corps member is placed at a different school, this can be valuable data. One can consult the placement context data by reviewing Table 7 below:

Table 7. **Tallies of TFA Special Ed Teachers Survey items 24 – 35**

24.teach meaning	Count	25.teach career	Count	26.commit teach	Count	27.stud engage	Count
Agree	6	Agree	4	Agree	10	<=Little	1
Disagree	4	Disagree	4	Neutral	4	>=Some	13
Neutral	4	Neutral	6	N=	14	N=	14
N=	14	N=	14				

28.involve family Count		29.respect-tch Count		30.secure job Count		31.comm support Count	
<=Little	6	<=Little	2	<=Little	1	<=Little	7
>=Some	8	>=Some	12	>=Some	13	>=Some	7
N=	14	N=	14	N=	14	N=	14

32.account Count		33.impact Count		34.ok load Count		35.plan period Count	
<=Little	4	<=Little	2	<=Little	8	<=Little	7
>=Some	10	>=Some	12	>=Some	6	>=Some	7
N=	14	N=	14	N=	14	N=	14

There are some trends that can be uncovered by this data to illustrate a more detailed picture about the experience of SpEd corps members at their placement school. For questions 27, 29, 30, and 33, a majority of corps members (75% or higher) answered in the affirmative with a response of "all of the time," "most of the time," or "some of the time." In other words, a majority of special education corps members experienced high engagement from the students, feel respected by their colleagues, feel secure in their job, and believe they make an impact in their current position at their placement schools. Even though the response rate never reached a majority-level, there are some results that indicate a more negative experience with specific elements at a placement school. For questions 28, 31, 34, and 35, 43% - 57% of special education corps members answered with a negative response of "very little of the time" or "not at all." This meant that many in this sample of special education corps members do not receive heavy family involvement, do not receive community support at school, are not given a realistic caseload, and often have their planning period impacted by caseload responsibilities. This paints a more nuanced picture of how current special education corps members feel in their current placement schools and begs for more discussion on how aligned TFA programming is to these needs.

Although the majority of the results for the PARCC scores for the treated and untreated

groups was already explored above, there was one finding that feels important to uplift here. You can view this in Figure 8:

Figure 8. Box & Whiskers Plots for Math and ELA Proficiency by Group
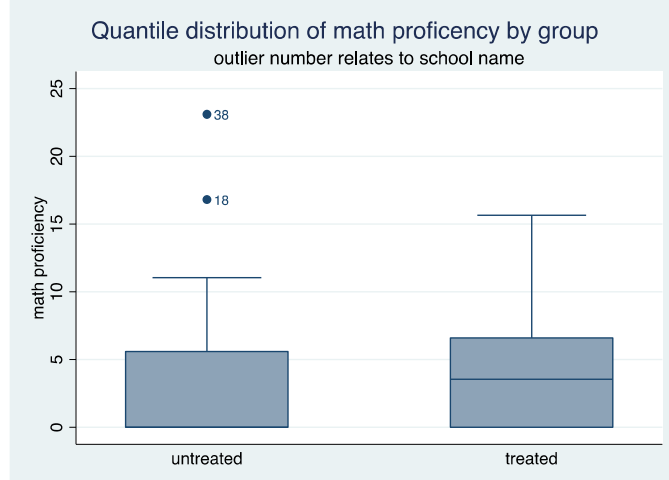
In the untreated group, Afya Public Charter (#18) and The Green School (#38) were outliers for math proficiency.

When examining the math proficiency data for treated and untreated schools, two outliers emerged. Both Afya Public Charter and The Green School scored above a 16% for Math Proficiency, creating a stark comparison with the mean proficiency of both groups. In future studies, it would be significant to take a deeper look into the actions that the special education department at both schools takes to result in such an increase in proficiency for their students in comparison to the rest of their learning group for the district.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This study attempted to determine the impact of Teach for America Baltimore on the experience of special education corps members and their students. Analysis of the data determined that one hypothesis failed and the other succeeded. TFA special education corps members self-reported that TFA did not prepare them to execute at least 50% of outlined responsibilities in the TES. Also, the null hypothesis should not be rejected as no statistically significant difference (alpha=0.05) was found between students of TFA special educators and similar students of TC teachers on the state-wide ELA and Math proficiency assessment.

Implications of Results

For the first hypotheses, the results implies that TFA Baltimore is sending special education corps members into classrooms under-prepared. The hypothesis was set at 50% for a purpose—to give respect to how difficult it is for pre-service and in-service teacher programs to prepare teachers for every responsibility in the classroom. There was only one element that respondents shared they felt prepared for: culturally relevant pedagogy. That means that special education corps members felt prepared to execute just 7% of their responsibilities at school. These results should be shared with the current TFA programming and coaching team to determine next steps that they can take to be more responsive to the needs of corps members by content and placement.

On the other hand, the result of the null hypothesis implies that TFA Baltimore are sending special education corps members into classrooms that are performing at a similar level to TC special educators. Although there were small differences like TFA special educators seeing higher math proficiency rates and TC seeing higher ELA proficiency rates, the differences were

not statistically significant (alpha=.05). TFA is treated with controversy in the field of education —some of that is covered in the literature review. To see that TFA Baltimore special educators are seeing similar student outcomes makes it more difficult to accuse the program of having an adverse impact on students. Besides creating a connection between alternative and traditional certified special educators, this result also begs a deeper question about how effective current special education models in Baltimore City are.

Theoretical Consequences

The results of this study are not necessarily theory-based or theory-focused. However, there are some direction connections that can be made to staples of educational theory. The purpose behind TFA pre-service and in-service programming is to prepare and support corps members in the classroom. How does the current program lean into proven educational theory? Where does it lean out? One can start with Wolfgang Kohler's cognitivism which posits that learning occurs when one is given opportunities to reorganize and create connections between old and new information. The results from the TES survey imply that current corps members are only building deeper connections between their specific placement and culturally relevant pedagogy. While important, this leaves out numerous connections between their current role and TFA programming that should still be made.

If we further analyze the TES results through the scope of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, more insights follow. Questions 27 – 35 dived into each special education corps member's individual experience at their placement school. How comfortable do they feel in their position and environment? What needs are being met? The results were overwhelmingly positive, showing that a majority of corps members feel like their physiological, safety, and belonging needs are being met solely from their school placements. While this is great news, it

leaves a gap in corps members feeling like their needs for esteem and self-actualization are met. Coaching and Content Specialist sessions were the only major programming that a majority of respondents stated were helpful. This shows many special education corps members only feel like they are learning valuable things in a few spaces in TFA Baltimore. Ultimately, this prevents corps members from feeling like they are performing to their highest ability, which could have an impact on their ability to stay in the classroom for the full commitment.

Threats to Validity

Although there are always threats to validity, this study faced a clear external threat and internal threat. This study was started and completed during a chaotic school year nation-wide. All schools, especially the Baltimore City district, were forced into virtual and hybrid learning as a consequence of Covid-19 CDC regulations and safety precautions. Not only did this change the landscape of what effective instruction looked like, but it also changed data collection and survey possibilities. Students first went into quarantine late into the 2019 – 2020 school year. The district missed important testing windows for the majority of students and was unable to collect accurate student outcomes data for the entire school year. Thus, an absence of data was created. The researcher believes that if data were available from the last school year that the chances of finding a statistically significant difference would have increased. Also, because all teachers were working from home and navigating radically different teaching schedules and expectations, it was close to impossible to contact traditional special educators in connected Learning Groups. The intention was that both corps members and TC special educators would take the TES. Then a comparison of experiences could occur on the same level as the student outcomes data. To say that the district this year was experiencing unprecedented challenges would be an understatement, expecting over a dozen TC special educators to participate was unrealistic. Still,

these adjustments to the scope of the research were necessary and led to learning being possible.

An internal threat to validity is that the researcher is the TFA coach for a majority of the participants in the survey. Approximately, 12 out of 14 participants were on the researcher's caseload for the 2020 – 2021 school year. This meant that when participants answered questions about the impact of coaching experiences, they might have been judging the impact of the researcher as much as the impact of the TFA support. While the opportunity for each participant to complete the survey anonymously was given, 10 out of 14 participants chose to share their identity. Corps members are grouped by content and placement in their coaching cohorts. The researcher has primarily English as a Secondary Language (ESOL) teachers and special educators. It was impossible to complete the research without this threat present. It is of the opinion of the researcher that the questions targeting the experience in coaching not be given the same weight as the rest of the TES.

Connections to Previous Studies/Existing Literature

The current study on the impact of TFA Baltimore on the experience of special educators and the outcome of their students connects to several previous studies covered in Chapter II. There were three key skills for effective special educators to possess. Simonsen et.al elevated the ability to execute a three-tier intervention structure as foundational (2010) to being able to fulfill the core responsibilities of a special educator. A key step in this intervention structure are IEP meetings—a piece that 100% of surveyed corps members stated they did not feel prepared to lead. Next is the ability to collect data for a caseload and use it appropriately to monitor students' progress over time (Benedict et.al, 2014). Questions 5 (assess_pupils), 6 (progress_managing), and 7 (manage_iep) on the TES covered the breadth of this skill. 78% of participants stated they were unprepared to assess students, and 100% of participants shared they were not prepared to

complete progress monitoring for their caseload and manage their IEP's. The last essential skill listed was making responsive judgments using data which Laura M. Stough and Douglas J. Palmer explore in their study (2003). This skill was measured in the last question of section 1. The results were more mixed. 42% agreed that they felt prepared, while 50% disagreed (with 8% answering "neutral). If TFA Baltimore is examined through this close lens, they are not sufficiently preparing incoming special educators to be able to execute key skills in their role.

The last big prominent connection is the similarity in student outcome results found in this study in comparison to previous research. Past researchers have tried to compare the impact of TFA teachers when placed in opposition with the results of their counterparts: TC educators. In "Alternative Routes to Teaching: The Impacts of Teach for America on Student Achievement and Other Outcomes," Glazerman, Mayer and Decker analyzed the outcomes of almost 100 teachers. The study found that the average TFA math class had students who increased from the 14th percentile to the 17th percentile while the average TC math class experienced no positive growth—staying static (2006). When examining the outcomes of TFA special educators and TC special educators in Baltimore City, a similar trend was found. TFA special educators in the district achieved an average proficiency rate of 4.29% while TC special educators experienced a 3.97% proficiency rate. While it is important to state that the difference was not statistically significant, it still continues a trend cited in previous studies.

Implications for Future Research

The results of this research provide one with data that shows clear gaps in the experience of current TFA Baltimore special educators but is limited in its scope and its comparative possibilities. This study was completed without the ability to compare the pre-service and in-service of current TC special educators in their first and second year of teaching. Including this

important sample size would give more opportunity to critically examine both alternative-certification programs like TFA and traditional-certification programs. Future researchers would be able to narrow down whether the gaps in experience of current special educators are a TFA issue or a flaw in the overall approach to teacher training and development.

Because the scope of this study is also limited to TFA Baltimore, it eliminates possible regions across the country that are seeing different results in the experience of their special educators. Although much of TFA's programming is centralized—designed, planned, and distributed by national leadership—there is still room for regions to make differentiated choices that are more responsive to their corps members. Does the Miami-Dade region use a more radical coaching model? Does the New York region place more emphasis on content training in their regional summer institute? Opening up this study to examine the experience and outcomes of TFA special educators across the board could provide results that show clearer strengths and critical weaknesses.

Conclusions

The goal of this study was to determine both the strengths and weaknesses in TFA Baltimore's programming for special education corps members as well as to compare their outcomes with TC special educators. The results indicate that while TFA Baltimore seems to be keeping pace with the impact of TC special educators, it is not creating and executing pre-service and in-service programming that prepares current special educators to reach higher outcomes in the classroom. In order for TFA Baltimore to see momentous progress towards "one day" or educational equity for their special education students, they need to apply a critical lens to how inclusive their programming is for special educators. How can regional practicum, All Corps, and other development sessions be adjusted to give space to the key skills that special educators need

to build? It will be beneficial other researchers to continue examining TFA's impact on special educators and their students on a wider scale. This researcher has found that the possibility of change in TFA increases when success is found internally. Future research could help pull out stronger programming or practices used in other regions that could be replicated nation-wide.

References

Benedict, A. E., Brownell, M. T., Park, Y., Bettini, E. A., & Lauterbach, A. A. (2014). Taking

charge of your professional learning: Tips for cultivating special educator

expertise. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 46*(6), 147-157. Retrieved from

https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-

com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/1552688599?accountid=11164

Billingsley, B. S. (2004). Promoting teacher quality and retention in special

education. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 37*(5), 370- 6

http://dx.doi.org.goucher.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0022219404037 0050101

Carl, N. M. (2014). Reacting to the script: Teach for america teachers' experiences with scripted

curricula. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 41*(2), 29-50. Retrieved from

https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-

proquestcom.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/1721349274?accountid=11164

Carter, H., Amrein-Beardsley, A., & Hansen, C. (2011). So NOT amazing! teach for america

corps members' evaluation of the first semester of their teacher preparation

program. *Teachers College Record, 113*(5), 861-894. Retrieved from

https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?   url=https://www-proquest-

com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/877440566?Accountid=11164

Corps Member Training. (2018, August 02). Retrieved November 12, 2020, from

https://www.teachforamerica.org/life-in-the-corps/corps-member-training

Fogarty, M. (2011). Teach for america fails the test. *Education, 92*(10), 7. Retrieved from

https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?   url=https://www-proquest-

com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/903698504?accountid=11164

Gersten, R., Keating, T., Yovanoff, P., & Harniss, M. K. (2001). Working in special education: Factors that enhance special educators' intent to stay. *Exceptional Children, 67*(4), 549-567. Retrieved from https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login? url=https://www-proquest-com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/201225539? accountid=11164

Glazerman, S., Mayer, D., & Decker, P. (2006). Alternative routes to teaching: The impacts of teach for america on student achievement and other outcomes. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 25*(1), 75-96. http://dx.doi.org.goucher.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/pam.20157

Hill, H. C., & Grossman, P. (2013). Learning from teacher observations: Challenges and opportunities posed by new teacher evaluation systems. *Harvard Educational Review, 83*(2), 371-384,401. Retrieved from https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login? url=https://www-proquest-com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/1399327195? accountid=11164

Leko, M. M., Brownell, M. T., Sindelar, P. T., & Kiely, M. T. (2015). Envisioning the future of special education personnel preparation in a standards-based era. *Exceptional Children, 82*(1), 25-43. Retrieved from https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login? url=https://www-proquest- com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/1719015849? accountid=11164

Mawhinney, L., & Rinke, C. R. (2020). Teacher identity making, shifting, and resisting: The case of two former teach for america corps members. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 47*(4), 78-99. Retrieved from https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/2449502280?accountid=11164

Simonsen, B., Shaw, S. F., Faggella-Luby, M., Sugai, G., Coyne, M. D., Rhein, B., . . Alfano, M.

(2010). A schoolwide model for service delivery: Redefining special educators as

   interventionists. *Remedial and Special Education, 31*(1), 17-23.

   doi:http://dx.doi.org.goucher.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0741932508324396

Spear-Swerling, L. (2009). A literacy tutoring experience for prospective special educators and

   struggling second graders. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 42*(5), 431-43.

   http://dx.doi.org.goucher.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0022219409338738

Stough, L. M., & Palmer, D. J. (2003). Special thinking in special settings: A qualitative study of

   expert special educators. *The Journal of Special Education, 36*(4), 206-222.

   doi:http://dx.doi.org.goucher.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/002246690303600402

Tzivinikou, S. (2015). The impact of an in-service training program on the self-efficacy of

   special and general education teachers. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century, 64*,

   95-107. Retrieved from https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?   url=https://www-

      proquest-com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/2343799545?accountid=11164

What We Do. (2018, August 28). Retrieved October 18, 2020, from

   https://www.teachforamerica.org/what-we-do

Whitaker, S. D. (2000). Mentoring beginning special education teachers and the relationship to

   attrition. *Exceptional Children, 66*(4), 546-566. Retrieved from

   https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-

   com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/201214185?accountid=11164

Staff. (2018, August 30). Certification & Training. Retrieved October 18, 2020, from

   https://www.teachforamerica.org/where-we-work/baltimore/join-the- corps/certification-

   and-training