

There are too few well-designed studies to know the effects of Teach for America on Math, English Language Arts, and Science outcomes of K–12 students in the USA



TFA is the most evaluated program of its kind, yet this systematic review found that only a small number of studies met evidence review standards and compared the same type of TFA corps members and non-TFA teachers.

What is the aim of this review?

This Campbell systematic review examines the impact of Teach for America on learning outcomes. Four studies were included in the review.

Teach for America (TFA) is an alternate route teacher preparation program that aims to address the decades-long shortage of effective teachers in many rural and urban public schools for kindergarten through 12th grade (K–12), that serve the highest proportions of high-poverty students across the USA. This review finds that there are very few studies – just four – which reliably measure the effects of TFA on learning outcomes, so that no firm conclusions may be drawn.

What did the review study?

This systematic review evaluated the impact of TFA prepared teachers (corps members) relative to novice teachers and alumni relative to veteran teachers on K-12 student outcomes in Math, English Language Arts (ELA), and Science.

What studies are included?

Studies had to be a quantitative evaluation of the effects of TFA on K-12 student academic outcomes. Studies also had to use a research design which: 1. allowed valid causal inferences about TFA's effects, 2. targeted participants K–12 students taught by TFA corps members or TFA alumni in the USA, 3. compared TFA corps members to novice teachers, or compared TFA alumni with veteran teachers, and 4. reported at least one academic student outcome in Math, ELA, or Science domains.

A total of 919 citations were retrieved on TFA, of which 24 studies were eligible for review. However, when the research design and study quality along with types of TFA corps members and non-TFA teachers compared were reviewed, the evidence base for estimating the effects of TFA on student academic outcomes was reduced to just four studies.

What are the main results of this review?

There is no significant effect on reading from teaching by TFA corps members in their first



How up-to-date is this review?

The review authors searched for studies published up to January 2015. This Campbell systematic review was published in June 2018.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?

The Campbell Collaboration is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

This summary was prepared by Howard White (Campbell Collaboration) based on the Campbell Systematic Review 2018:7 What Are the Effects of Teach For America on Math, English Language Arts, and Science Outcomes of K–12 Students in the USA? by Herbert Turner, Mackson Ncube, Annette Turner, Robert Boruch, and Nneka Ibekwe (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2018.7>). Tanya Kristiansen redesigned and edited the summary. Financial support from the American Institutes for Research for the production of this summary is gratefully acknowledged.



or second year of teaching elementary-grade students (PreK to grade 5) compared to non-TFA teachers who are also in their first or second year of teaching elementary-grade students. There is a small positive for early elementary-grade students (PreK to grade 2) in reading but not in Math.

However, given the small evidence base these findings should be treated with caution.

What do the findings in this review mean?

TFA is the most evaluated program of its kind. Multiple quasi-experimental and experimental studies have been conducted on its effectiveness in improving student outcomes. However, this systematic review found that only a small number of these studies that (1) met the evidence review standards and (2) compared the same type of TFA corps members and non-TFA teachers. So it is not possible to draw firm policy conclusions.

Future research can contribute to this evidence base by designing, implementing, and reporting experiments and quasi-experiments to meet objective extant evidence standards and by comparing the same types of TFA and non-TFA teachers so that effect sizes can be included in a future systematic review and meta-analysis.