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The impact of teach South Africa through experiences of teach alumni: recruitment and support of motivated teacher candidates

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ABSTRACT

The teaching profession suffers from a low social status and public image, as South African teachers are generally considered to have low motivation and commitment. Consequently, the Department of Basic Education struggles to attract young, top achievers and retain quality, experienced teachers. The need for quality teachers is particularly felt in critical subjects and in disadvantaged schools. The NGO, TEACH South Africa (TSA), modelled after Teach for America, has positioned itself as a additional source of teachers and future leaders through its two-year induction and on-going support programme. By rigorously recruiting, selecting and inducting young, high-achieving graduates with particular characteristics to teach critical subjects in disadvantaged schools, TSA aims to produce future leaders both inside and outside the classroom, committed to improving educational outcomes in the long-term.

The study seeks to investigate the impact of the TSA programme on its recruits, called TEACH Ambassadors (TAs), now alumni, by exploring their experiences during the programme and subsequent career paths. It also aims to ascertain the extent to which the programme produces what it intends. This is done through a qualitative study, where semi-structured interviews of three TSA mentors and eleven alumni from the first three cohorts of the TSA programme (2009-2011) were used as a method of data collection.

The research reveals that TSA's strength is in its rigorous recruitment and selection process, which attracts top-tier candidates, who are intrinsically motivated to make a difference in education and who would not normally choose teaching. Furthermore, the career path trajectory of most TAs changed as a result of their experiences during the programme, as at least 60% of TAs decided to remain teachers and others remained in education, outside the classroom. However, the placement of TAs was subject to provincial departments' needs, which sometimes did not align with TSA and unconducive school environments compromised TAs work. Furthermore, weaknesses in the programme design, strategy and provision of some key services pose a real threat to the quality of the programme, its outcomes and its viability.

KEY WORDS: MOTIVATION, COMMITMENT, TEACHER RECRUITMENT & RETENTION