THE POWER OF MEDIA IN PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY: A STUDY OF TEACH FOR AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

Teach For Australia (TFAus) is a government-funded program modeled after Teach For America, aimed at improving school education in Australia. This study explores the dominant media narratives surrounding TFAus between 2008 and 2020, analyzing 122 articles from print and online media outlets. The study identifies four key narratives: prestige, benevolence, alternative, and critique. While the first three narratives posit TFAus as a viable policy option to improve Australian education, the fourth narrative provides a critical assessment of the initiative. The study argues that media discourses play a crucial role in shaping education policy and underscores the need for support from key stakeholders to boost the program. The paper uses a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach to examine the role of text, practice, and context in shaping discourse.

Introduction

Teach For Australia (TFAus) is a government-funded initiative aimed at attracting high-achieving graduates to teach in disadvantaged schools for a minimum of two years. Founded in 2008, the program's goal is to improve the quality of education for all students, especially those in disadvantaged areas, by providing a pathway for non-teaching graduates to enter the teaching profession. The program works in partnership with schools and universities to prepare participants for the challenges of teaching in highly diverse and challenging contexts. TFAus is modeled after Teach For America (TFA), which has been in operation since 1990. While TFA has been the subject of significant research and media attention, less is known about TFAus.

This study explores how TFAus has been portrayed in the Australian media between 2008 and 2020. The paper employs a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach to examine how media discourses shape education policy and contribute to the proliferation of particular discourses within the public space in Australia and beyond. Drawing on a collection of 122 articles from both print and online media outlets, the study identified four dominant narratives: prestige, benevolence, alternative, and critique. The first three narratives champion TFAus as integral to improving Australian school education, while the fourth provided a critical assessment of the initiative. The study highlights the challenges of alternative pathways like TFAus, which have mixed evidence

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regarding teaching quality and effectiveness. Ultimately, the research underscores the need for TFAus and similar programs to have the support of key stakeholders like schools and policymakers to grow and thrive.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Teach For America and Teach For All

Teach For Australia is based largely on Teach For America (TFA). Since its inception in 1990, TFA has successfully marketed and offered (primarily) elite college graduates the opportunity to teach in low-income and underperforming urban and rural districts in the United States. These novice teachers, most of whom have not graduated from teacher education programmes, complete a condensed five-week training programme and are branded as Corps Members (CMs) in a nod to the Peace Corps (Kopp, 2001). By using a similar programmatic structure and discursive positioning, TFA aimed to create an aura of selectivity and public spirit for the programme, or in founder Wendy Kopp's words, 'our goal was to appear selective' (Kopp, 2001, p. 34). In total, nearly 60 000 CMs have completed TFA, and many alumni have subsequently become 'policy and advocacy leaders', with some elected to political office (TFA, 2021).

Based on the growth of TFA, Wendy Kopp joined forces with Brett Wigdortz—who founded Teach First UK—to launch Teach For All (TFAll) in 2007. TFAll is an umbrella network that supports social entrepreneurs adapting the TFA model for other national contexts (Rauschenberger, 2021). Despite some differences, these programmes share 'unifying principles', utilise similar structures and benefit from pooled financial and human resources (Thomas, Rauschenberger, et al., 2021). They also generally operate under the logic that education inequality can be reduced by placing primarily elite university graduates in low-income schools, then empowering them to effect change at higher levels (La Londe et al., 2015; Wilkins & Comber, 2015). This is part of a broader trend to reconceptualise and restructure public education, especially through complex networks of governments, international organisations, corporations, for/non-profits and philanthropists that influence national education policies worldwide towards market-based reforms (Adhikary et al., 2018; Ball, 2012; Cushing, 2021; Kretchmar et al., 2014; Olmedo et al., 2013; Stahl, 2020). While programmes associated with the TFAll network are certainly not the only examples of alternative teacher education—or broader movements to reshape public education—they are among the most prominent and powerful examples. With programmes in 60+ countries—from India to Israel to Italy—and strong ties to global philanthropic organisations and transnational corporations, the TFAll network and its programmes have become key players in domestic and international conversations about teachers, teaching and teacher education.

Teach For Australia

Modelled on TFA, and a part of the TFAll global network, TFAus emerged in 2009 and similarly seeks to confront educational disadvantage and develop high-achieving graduates into exceptional teachers who impact student outcomes, teaching quality and teacher leadership. Its recruits—known as 'Associates'—complete a condensed period of training and receive further support from TFAus and its university partner, now the Australian Catholic University (first the University of Melbourne, then Deakin University; see Windsor, 2014). Although TFAus has been funded largely by the federal government,[2] its emergence and continued growth has raised serious questions among scholars about the expense and effectiveness of the programme, particularly in light of the broader resource drain on disadvantaged schools caused by continued teacher attrition, as well as mixed evidence about the teaching quality of TFAus Associates (see dandolopartners, 2017; Rice et al., 2015; Skourdoumbis, 2012; Windsor, 2017).

While a considerable body of literature exists on the two earliest TFAll programmes— TFA and Teach First UK (e.g., Allen & Allnutt, 2017; Thomas & Mockler, 2018; Elliott, 2018; Kraemer-Holland, 2021; Kretchmar et al., 2014; Labaree, 2010; Olmedo et al., 2013)— research in other contexts is still emerging (Thomas, Crawford-Garrett, et al., 2021). Within the Australian context, Windsor (2014, 2017) conducted a series of interviews with

TFAus Associates and staff members—including TFAus Founder Melodie Potts Rosevear—about their experiences and perspectives on the programme, finding that Associates' perspectives of schooling were 'influenced by the discourse of "problems in school" that is present in the TfA [TFAus] promotional material and related media articles' (Windsor, 2014, p. 130). In addition, Rice et al. (2015) surveyed Associates near the end of their two-year commitments about their views on educational disadvantage and the means to ameliorate it. They found that:

… candidates in this *Teach For* [TFAus] program tend to attribute the poor performance of students in disadvantaged settings most strongly to the quality of the people who enter teaching to work in these schools, and suggest solutions that are in keeping with this belief – incentives to draw high performers into teaching,performance pay to hold onto them, and higher standards for entry into teacher education courses. (p. 508)

Other research has examined the teacher education programme completed by Associates (Evangelinou-Yiannakis, 2019), and how teacher educators experienced the complexity of working with a TFAll organisation within the Australian teacher education landscape (Moss et al., 2021). Finally, Walker-Gibbs (2018) analysed *Testing teachers*—a documentary about six TFAus teachers featured on the Australian public TV channel SBS—and 1000 social media comments about it that were posted on Twitter and the SBS Facebook page. She found the documentary and Twitter comments highlighted a perceived dichotomy between educational theory and teaching practice; the necessity of support for new teachers; a general distrust of teachers and their work; and deficit perspectives of students, parents and community members who were connected to underperforming schools. A more comprehensive summary of research on TFAus and other TFAll programmes can be found in Thomas, Rauschenberger, et al. (2021). To date, research has not examined the portrayal of TFAus in the print or online media, nor theorised its role in the proliferation and amplification of particular discourses within the public space in Australia, or arguably beyond.

Representations of teachers and teaching

The news media play a key role in framing, reinforcing and legitimising particular educational worldviews, perspectives and discourses, and a body of previous research has explored this phenomenon in Australia and elsewhere (see e.g., Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003; Hattam et al., 2009; Mills & Keddie, 2010). While much of this research has focused broadly on media representations of teachers and teaching (e.g., Alhamdan et al., 2014; Cohen, 2010), a more limited number of studies have focused on media representations of teacher education, and specifically alternative forms of teacher education. Gautreaux and Delgado's (2016) study of media narratives across 12 national contexts (including Australia) found that the 'universal Teach For All teacher' was proffered across these different contexts as a solution to education policy problems, such as underperformance of schools and falling teacher quality. Their limited Australian data comprised only three articles from 2013 to 2015, however. Osborn and Sierk's (2015) multimodal semiotic analysis of representations of TFA in four carefully selected media texts explored the linguistic techniques used to create positive representations (and corresponding reader orientations) to TFA, which was seen to be positioned as, once again, a solution to trenchant and enduring education policy problems. Adhikary et al. (2018) examined the social mediatisation of education policy through an analysis of the Teach For Bangladesh (TFB)[3] Facebook page, which included six types of 'domain sources', reposts of news articles about the organisation being one of them. Their study focused specifically on TFB's efforts to 'extend its policy influence' (p. 632) through this social media platform, however. Our study in Australia, by contrast, not only analyses more traditional forms of media instead of Facebook but takes as the primary starting point the media outlets themselves, not the TFAll organisation. Finally, Mockler's (2022) recent corpus-assisted study on media discourses of teacher education in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States found that initial teacher education programmes, candidates, institutions and educators are constituted as problematic, with

alternative pathways such as those represented by TFAll often posed as potential or actual solutions to these entrenched problems. The current study builds on this collection of previous work, exploring confluences and contrasts between representations of TFAus, derived from a systematic analysis of a significant collection of news media texts.

RESEARCH METHODS

This project is framed theoretically by an understanding of language as central to the creation and evolution of constructed realities. Fairclough (1989) suggests power is not only built and sustained through coercive means, but also through indirect ways in the use of language. Language works to set the context for debate, define issues, represent ideas and provide a platform to discuss the issues at hand. It further highlights power relations between all parties involved—family members, colleagues, educational researchers, policymakers, media representations, and so on. As such, the 'choices of words and their organisation into news stories are not trivial matters' and there is a need to examine the power of language in media narratives (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 70).

Our approach is informed by an understanding of media discourses as constructed via a complex interplay of language, processes of media production that involve not only journalists and media organisations but also policymakers and politicians, and the social and historical contexts within which they emerge (Fairclough, 1992, 1999). Fairclough's (2000) notion of 'mediatisation', defined variously by different fields, further describes the relationships between these entities and, more specifically, how 'intermediaries' such as journalists or political parties can accumulate power and consequently reshape relations within politics and (educational) policymaking (see Rawolle, 2010). This phenomenon links closely to Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which posits that the dimensions of discourse require different approaches to analysis, namely textual analysis, process analysis and social analysis. CDA therefore draws these three dimensions and approaches together to examine the role of text, practice and context in the shaping of discourse, requiring the researcher to work iteratively between levels of analysis. While immensely worthwhile, considerations of how intermediaries gain power or public opinions are changed lie beyond the scope of this study.

Using CDA and keyword analysis, we drew on a collection of articles published in key national and capital city-based publications and examined the form, structure and content of discourse, as well as the language employed in its creation (van Dijk, 1998). In particular, we were interested in exploring how the discourses framed TFAus as a viable policy option for improving school education in Australia; and how the media positioned TFAus in relation to common educational discourses, most notably those of teacher quality and teacher education.[4]

Data collection

The dataset was constructed using articles published from 2008 (prior to the launch of TFAus in 2009) to December 2020. A Factiva search for 'Teach for Australia' in the 12 national and capital city daily newspapers (including online and Sunday variants) along with online news sources *The Brisbane Times*, *Guardian Australia* and *ABC News*, with identical duplicates removed, yielded 376 articles published within the identified timeframe. Manual inspection indicated that many of these articles referred to TFAus incidentally rather than substantively, so we further focused on articles including three or more instances of the phrase 'Teach For Australia'. Accordingly, the Factiva 'atleast3' operator was used with the same parameters to identify relevant articles. A second manual examination was conducted subsequently to capture articles where one instance of 'Teach For Australia' and an acronym (e.g., TFAus or TFA) was used two or more times to represent the organisation. Thus, the final dataset used for analysis included 122 articles, and Table 1[5] highlights their distribution across the media outlets.

TA B L E 1 Number of articles by publication, format, location and readership

Publication	Articles	Format	Location	Readership

The Age	32	Broadsheet	Melbourne	342 M–F; 428 Sa; 386 Su
The Australian	25	Broadsheet	National	347 M–F; 606 Sa
The Australian Financial Review	19	Broadsheet	National	178 M–F; 130 Sa
The Canberra Times	7	Broadsheet	Canberra	55 M–F; 57 Sa; 43 Su
The Courier Mail	6	Tabloid	Brisbane	239 M–F; 312 Sa; 473 Su
ABC News	5	Online	National	10.4 million weekly
The Sydney Morning Herald	5	Broadsheet	Sydney	368 M–F; 478 Sa; 403 Su
The West Australian	4	Tabloid	Perth	314 M–F; 388 Sa; 344 Su
Northern Territory News	4	Tabloid	Darwin	14 M–F; 17 Sa; 13 Su
The Advertiser	4	Tabloid	Adelaide	221 M–F; 287 Sa; 326 Su
Hobart Mercury	4	Tabloid	Hobart	45 M–F; 61 Sa; 45 Su
The Guardian Australia	3	Online	National	6.7 million monthly
Herald Sun	2	Tabloid	Melbourne	546 M–F; 576 Sa; 610 Su
The Brisbane Times	1	Online	Brisbane	1.3 million monthly
Daily Telegraph	1	Tabloid	Sydney	394 M–F; 378 Sa; 630 Su
Total	**122**			

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the largest number of articles in the dataset was published by Melbourne broadsheet *The Age*, as TFAus is headquartered in Melbourne and has partnered with multiple institutions there since its inception in 2009. Both national newspapers, *The Australian* and *The Australian Financial Review*, also took a strong interest in TFAus, reflected in the relatively large number of articles published in both. On the whole, broadsheet newspapers demonstrated more interest in the programme than tabloids, consistent with the 'human interest' focus of tabloids, which tends to correspond with less attention paid to public policy in areas such as teacher education (Mockler, 2022; Baker et al., 2013). TFAus also had a solid presence in Canberra and the Australian Capital Territory from 2011 to 2019—when it was discontinued due to concerns over its high costs and low retention rates (see McGowan, 2018)—so it is not surprising that both *The Canberra Times* and *ABC News* published

several pieces on TFAus. Till 2020, TFAus was not permitted to operate in New South Wales, Queensland or South Australia, however, so it is interesting that articles have appeared in news media outlets in the capitals of these three states: Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide.

Data analysis

Data analysis in CDA is not linear; rather, Fairclough (1995) emphasises that CDA involves a 'simultaneity of description, analysis and interpretation' (p. 98), which may be enacted using a range of different techniques (Fairclough, 2000). The analysis used in this study employed two different techniques placed into conversation with each other around the emergent discourses. First, a thematic analysis was undertaken which involved the development, through immersive reading of the data, of a startlist of codes which were iteratively identified within the texts and allocated to themes/discourses based on the patterns that emerged from the data.

Complementing this analysis, AntConc 3.5.8 (Anthony, 2019) software was used to explore word frequencies and systematically examine the occurrence of central words and phrases via concordance analysis. Keyword analysis was then conducted using Wordsmith Tools 8 (Scott, 2020), to compare the 122 texts under examination with the 2008 to 2020 subsection of the Australian Teacher Corpus (Mockler, 2022), a purpose-built corpus of over 65 000 articles from Australian national and capital city daily newspapers including the wordform 'teacher/s' three or more times. Keyword analysis, which identifies words used more frequently (in a statistically significant sense) in one group of texts than in another, highlights the 'aboutness' (Scott, 2010) of the texts under investigation and as such provides a useful lens for understanding and exploring the discourses produced by and contributed to by these texts.[6] In this case, the keyword analysis was used to supplement and triangulate the findings from the manual analysis. It thus constitutes an example of corpus-assisted discourse analysis (Baker, 2006).

MEDIA NARRATIVES OF TEACH FOR AUSTRALIA

Three dominant discourses emerged from our analysis, namely those relating to prestige, benevolence and TFAus as 'alternative'. While each of these dominant discourses, on the whole, might be seen to laud the virtues of the programme, amplifying the messaging produced by TFAus itself, a fourth and more critical narrative also emerged questioning the effectiveness of TFAus and contesting its claims.

Prestige: Australia's best and brightest

Prestige surfaced as the most prominent discourse and was represented by references both to individual TFAus recruits and to the programme itself, including competitiveness, connections and the high-status job options available to TFAus Associates. Approximately half of the articles referenced the high-achieving nature of the Associates, constituting them as the nation's 'best and brightest', a common discourse among TFAll programmes worldwide (Thomas, Rauschenberger, et al., 2021). In 18 of the 122 periodicals, the exclusivity of TFAus was punctuated specifically by examples of high volumes of applications to the programme, a common proxy for its prestige. For example, one article declared the programme '… received more than 1500 applications for just 130 positions' in its most recent application round (Knot, 2016). Other articles discussed how TFAus was supported by high-profile companies such as Google and Microsoft (e.g., MacDonald, 2009; Mather, 2009), and how TFAus Associates had declined job offers from Google and McKinsey (Dodd, 2015). Moreover, many articles (76 of the 122 articles, or 62%) engaged in discursive replication and legitimation by using the unique term 'Associates' to reference TFAus teachers, amplifying the discourse produced by TFAus itself. This discourse of prestige positions Associates as a distinguished group—distinct from regular teachers—with additional prestige and capacity to effect change (Crawford-Garrett & Thomas, 2018).

Given perceived links between job prestige, status and esteem, and the ability to attract talented individuals (see Kraemer-Holland, 2021), it is not surprising that the media articles often presented TFAus as bestowing a newly transformed and attractive status on the teaching profession. For example, one article discusses how a TFAus Associate—a previous law graduate—'knows how he could earn a higher salary if he wasn't a teacher', but affirms

'he is energised everyday working in a profession helping transform young lives' (Burrell, 2016). Such proclamations by '"best-of-the-best" young professionals or university graduates, who might have been destined for top careers in law, medicine or banking' (Overington, 2012) help to underline not only the status of TFAus Associates but also the prestige and high standing of the programme itself. In another article, a member of the TFAus Board asserts

TA B L E 2 Keywords: Prestige

Associates, recruits, placement, alumni, applicants, postgraduate, corporate, master's, intake, placing, brightest, recruit, attracting, associate, mentoring, placed, mentors, candidates, achieving, professionals, applications, puts, masters, attract, talented, individuals, profession

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that 'TFA[us] has managed to do what once seemed unachievable. It has transformed school teaching from an unexciting career into an attractive form of public service' (Schwartz, 2014).

The keyword analysis similarly pointed to the prominence of the discourse of prestige, including the three key aspects of Associates, TFAus programme and teaching profession, with 27 of the 87 keywords identified using the parameters specified above mapping onto this discourse. These are highlighted in Table 2, ordered by effect size from highest to lowest.

While some of these keywords (e.g., *associates*, *alumni*, *applicants*, *brightest*, *associate*, *candidates*, *achieving*, *talented*, *individuals*) ostensibly signify the high-quality, 'best and brightest' status of TFAus applicants, others point to the selectivity of the programme. These include *recruits*, *placement*, *corporate*, *intake*, *placing*, *recruit*, *attracting*, *placed*, *applications*, *puts* and *attract*, which together present a sense of TFAus as deliberate and selective in both their intake of Associates and their placement of Associates within schools. A final set of keywords linked to the prestige discourse (*postgraduate*, *master's*, *mentoring*, *mentors*, *professional*, *masters*, *profession*) relate to the role of TFAus in the recasting of teaching as newly transformed and attractive for accomplished graduates who might not otherwise choose teaching as a post-bachelor degree option. Emphasis here is on the graduate-level qualification that accompanies participation in TFAus, the high quality of mentoring it provides and a (positive) sense of teaching as a profession that is often missing from media discussion of teaching generally. Remembering that keyword analysis highlights the distinctiveness or 'aboutness' of a selected group of texts, in this case the 122 articles focused on TFAus, when compared to a reference corpus of articles about teachers and teaching in Australia generally (Mockler, 2022), the analysis highlights the way that the discourse of prestige is very characteristic of the texts on TFAus, not teachers, teaching and teacher education more broadly.

Benevolence: 'Doing good works'

The second strongest discourse, and related to these notions of prestige, was one framing TFAus and Associates as saviours of disadvantaged and less privileged members of the community, as well as TFAus as a benevolent public service provider. Embedded in this was the suggestion that the privilege presumably possessed by TFAus Associates entails certain social responsibilities—a form of 'noblesse oblige' (see Ardinger, 2012)—such as working to combat educational disadvantage. In one article, for instance, a TFAus employee was quoted as saying: 'A nation should have its best and brightest working with its most challenging problems. The two go hand in hand', as part of a broader claim that the key objective of TFAus was to 'boost students who come from low SES households' (Bolton, 2018).

While this premise is based on particular (and problematic) constructions of 'high-quality teachers' and their relationship with 'low-SES students', the criterion seems to play a significant role in TFAus recruitment practices. Building an elite group with the power to effect change is heavily promoted by the organisation, as noted in two

articles published in *The Australian* and *The Australian Financial Review* five years apart: 'Convincing motivated, energetic, [and brilliantly (2014)] creative people to pass up glamorous jobs with merchant banks or law firms to be teachers in poorly performing schools is an ambitious goal, but it's not impossible' (Schwartz, 2009, 2014). This framing of teaching as subservient to the

'glamorous' world of finance, law and consulting firms is not new, although this is a particularly extreme example, advanced over time by a long-term TFAus Board Member. Elsewhere in the dataset, TFAus is framed as 'encourag[ing] graduates to postpone their plans for prosperous careers in corporate finance, law and medicine, to instead spend a few years teaching in some of the country's neediest schools' (Craig, 2010). TFAus Chief Executive, Melodie Potts Rosevear, declares that the programme aims to 'lift the prospects of students in the lower SES schools' and that TFAus Associates are 'high-quality, enthusiastic, motivated teachers who make the difference, especially in low-SES schools' (Abernethy, 2016). In this framing, it is through the unique characteristics of the Associates that educational equity is advanced.

Once again, keyword analysis pointed to the prominence of the 'saviour' discourse, revealing that the notion of disadvantaged, challenging or low-SES backgrounds and classrooms strongly contributes to the 'aboutness' of these texts, as highlighted in Table 3. Of particular interest here is the observation that almost exclusively within the dataset, *backgrounds*, *classrooms* and *status* are used with descriptors such as *disadvantaged*, *challenging* or *socio*[-economic] *status*.

This discourse, embedded across the media articles included in our dataset, is also evident in other research on the TFAll network, where there is a consistent reference to 'give back' to the community and 'serve the people who need it most', particularly as this moral imperative bears positively on one's soul (La Londe et al., 2015, p. 14). As Labaree (2010) suggests, TFA CMs in the United States can 'do good by teaching disadvantaged students for 2 years, as a kind of domestic Peace Corps stint, and then they can move on to their real life of work with high pay and high prestige' (p. 48), having not invested fully in teaching as a career. Our research suggests that the Australian media has helped to consolidate Teach For Australia's profile as a public good, public service endeavour aimed at addressing issues of entrenched educational inequity.

Alternative: 'More' than traditional teacher education

Linked to the prestige narrative and particularly to the repositioning of teaching as an attractive career option for high-flying graduates was a narrative that positioned TFAus in opposition to or as 'more than' traditional teacher education. This dichotomy is reflected in the following quotation from TFAus CEO Melodie Potts Rosevear:

The cost of the program is about $80,000 per person. That has been falling because there were obviously start-up costs. That compares quite favourably to traditional pathways. The main thing that distinguishes Teach For Australia is we are selecting and training teachers differently. They [TFAus Associates] have an unrelenting focus on improving student outcomes. (Maiden, 2014)

This contrast between TFAus and 'traditional' teacher education pathways is one that appears in 27 (22%) of the articles in our dataset, where 'traditional' programmes are positioned in opposition to new or innovative pathways to teacher education. The distinction between TFAus Associates and other teacher education students highlighted by Potts Rosevear in the quotation above similarly positions 'traditional' teachers as inferior to TFAus Associates both in terms of personal qualities and their prospective effectiveness as teachers.

This contrast between TFAus and traditional teacher education pathways is further elaborated in the dataset via the stories of TFAus Associates, many of whom are quoted

commenting on missed opportunities in the past, different career pathways or other external factors that prevented them from previously pursuing teacher education. One article, for example, follows the story of an Associate who had initially studied law and taken a graduate position in a top-tier law firm, which in hindsight he recognised as 'going along with the crowd' (Ward, 2019), before seeing the error of his ways and joining TFAus. Another Associate was a research scientist with a doctorate who 'had left his 14-year research career to become a high school teacher. Why? He said it was something he had always wanted to do' (Dodd, 2016). In total, 43 (35%) media articles incorporated TFAus Associates' perspectives in drawing attention to the alternative path offered by TFAus for high-achieving career changers or other non-teaching graduates. Keyword analysis (Table 4) also reinforced the 'alternative' discourse across the texts, with the fast-tracking of TFAus Associates, the different pathway offered by the programme and a contrast between the six-week intensive and 'traditional' teacher education all emerging in this analysis.

On a broader scale, in the past two decades Australian governments and universities have created special initiatives to increase the number of pathways into teaching (Moss et al., 2021). Alternative pathways like TFAus come at a time of increased concern regarding the 'crisis' of quality of teaching in Australian schools, and are linked to increasing reform approaches based on the 'market', school choice and competition (e.g., Mockler, 2020; Connell, 2009; Walker-Gibbs, 2018). In its alternative form of recruitment and teacher education, TFAus has arisen within the complex Australian educational milieux as an attractive policy 'solution'. The focus on 'fast-tracked' 'career changers' in the 122 media articles helps to further frame TFAus in a way that promotes a supposedly win–win situation for both policymakers and the general public: the involvement of 'high-achieving' and experienced professionals who require shorter training before transitioning into schools that need them the most (Wilkins & Comber, 2015; Windsor, 2014).

Critique: Subset of critical narratives

While the majority of the 122 articles in our dataset take a positive—and indeed almost promotional in some cases—orientation to TFAus, a smaller number demonstrate a counter-narrative that is more critical of TFAus or seeks to problematise it. Keyword analysis, in particular, revealed this counter-narrative through the appearance of a set of eight 'critical' keywords (as revealed through concordance analysis and presented in Table 5) on the broader list of 87 keywords.

Of the 122 articles in the dataset, 57 (47%) presented a view of TFAus that was entirely uncritical. Among these were human interest stories, news stories and op-eds by, among them, TFAus CEO Melodie Potts Rosevear, and other affiliates including one TFAus alumnus, who reported 'from the trenches': '[Teach for Australia] is a growing movement that is successfully countering educational disadvantage. The work of its teachers has raised the achievement of students in schools across Victoria and improved their access to further educational opportunities' (Walters, 2012).

A smaller number of articles—28 (23%)—presented a positive representation of TFAus while also noting that this view was subject to some contestation. In these articles, the positive narrative was generally interrupted with a short note about the opposition of teachers' unions or other groups, such as this interlude within a 1200-word article on the TFAus CEO:

Despite its good intentions, the scheme has been criticised by some, including teachers' unions, who argue that it is preposterous to suggest that teaching is a skill that can be learnt in a mere six weeks (although the new recruits do further training during their postings). Can these freshly-minted rookies, often from fairly affluent backgrounds, really have the skills and nous to relate to disadvantaged children?

(Evans, 2016)

Beyond these primarily positive articles, a critical narrative was embedded in 37 articles (30%) that presented either a consistently critical view of TFAus (13), a critical view while noting support from some quarters (6), or

mixed views on TFAus in a reasonably balanced way (18). In these more critical or balanced articles, the keywords presented in Table 5 tend to appear more frequently, observing that 'unqualified' TFAus Associates are 'parachuted' into schools; noting critics/criticism of TFAus; quoting then-Australian Education Union President Angelo Gavrielatos; drawing attention to the controversial nature of the programme; or highlighting poor retention rates as an indicator of the programme's failures. In sum, the distribution of the 122 articles across the dataset suggests the majority of the coverage was positive, with 70% of the articles either ignoring or merely noting opposition in passing. Meanwhile, only 15% were generally critical (or noted minimal support), as represented in Figure 1.

Finally, across the three most prolific outlets, *The Age* (32), *The Australian* (25) and *The Australian Financial Review* (19), the majority of articles supported TFAus, many without noting opposition or critique of the programme (see Figure 2). While not all members of the general public may be reading these particular outlets, the findings suggest that the narratives offered most often were not necessarily balanced in their analysis. Moreover, the percentage of all articles published annually that are balanced or include a critical view of TFAus has decreased over time, as noted in Figure 3.

The publication of articles in these outlets—and the narratives noted above that are emphasised in them—suggest that the Australian public is not necessarily exposed to robust and balanced debates about the nature of teaching and teacher education, an issue we address further below.
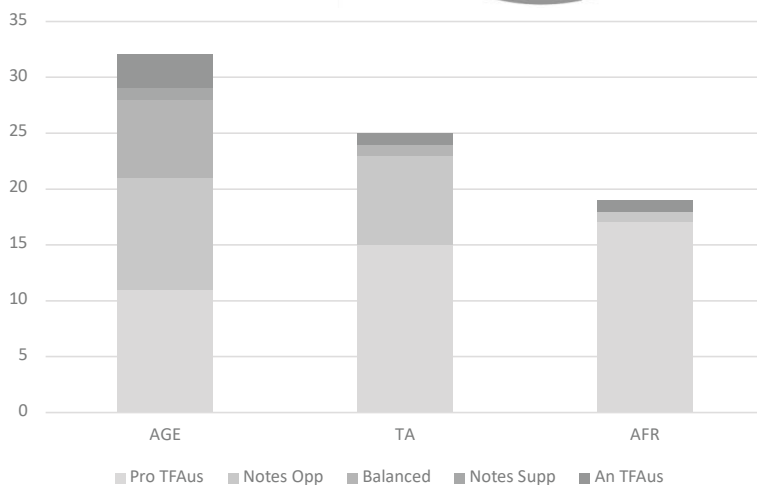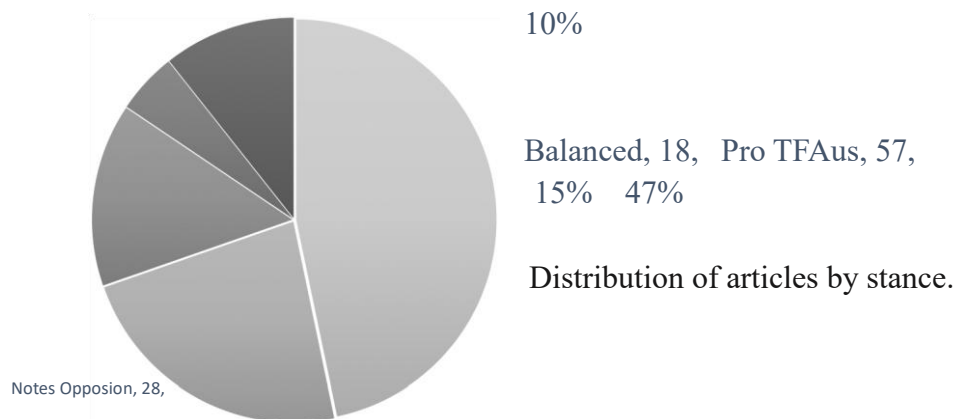
TA B L E 5 Keywords: Critical narrative

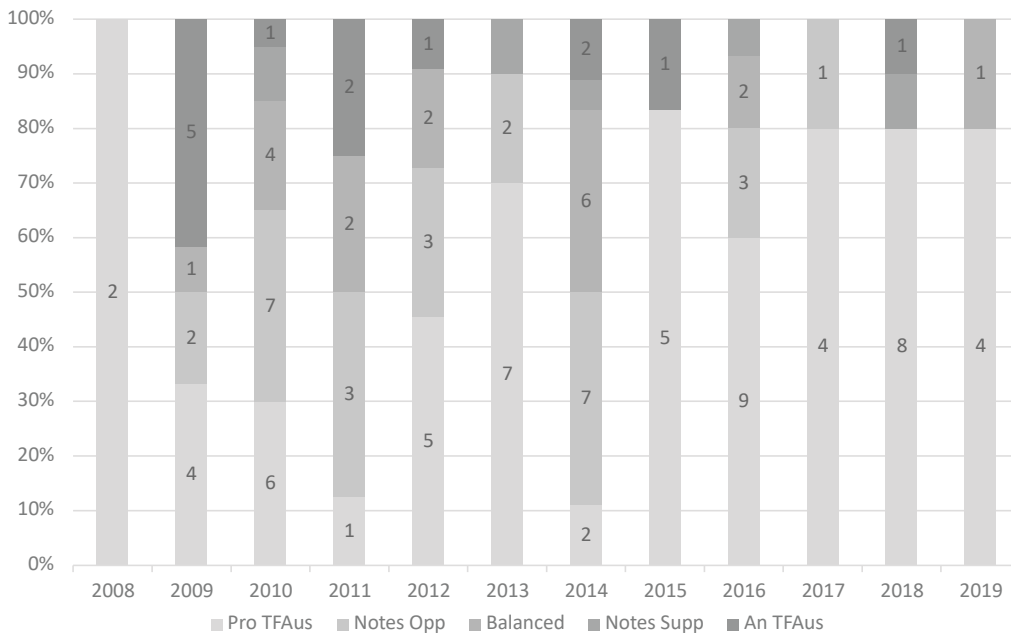Parachuted, unqualified, retention, Angelo, controversial, critics, criticism, Gavrielatos

F I G U R E 1 Distribution of articles by stance.

F I G U R E 2 Articles by stance in most prolific outlets.

F I G U R E 3 Distribution by year and stance.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined the different positionings and framings of TFAus within Australian news media, and the particular discourses produced across the 122 articles in the dataset. The findings highlight how news media can amplify the voices of already powerful actors such as Teach For Australia, which was launched with support from former Prime Minister Julia Gillard and championed by recent Education Minister Alan Tudge (2021). The three most prominent themes—prestige, benevolence and alternative—are evident in promotional and branding materials produced by TFAus, as well as quotes from its staff, teachers and alumni; our research thus suggests that portrayals of TFAus in the print media are largely consistent with the organisation's own messaging, constituting the amplification of this messaging in the public space and the legitimation of this messaging as 'news'. Researchers have found similar 'elite' and 'saviour' themes in the texts and materials produced by TFAll organisations across China, India, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States (e.g., Blumenreich & Gupta, 2015; Elliott, 2018; Ellis et al., 2016). What our analysis shows is that these discourses are largely replicated verbatim in the print media, highlighting the way in which the discourse travels from recruitment and promotion materials to public knowledge via media production.

Moreover, the vast majority of the articles were entirely or mostly positive about the programme, particularly in the three newspapers with the most publications included in the dataset. In this way, we continue to observe the role of media outlets in advancing the programme's reputation as a major contributor to education reform and champion of educational equity. This stands in contrast to the United States, for example, where in recent years press coverage of TFA has become increasingly negative, or mixed at best, while critiques and resistance movements have mounted (see Brewer & DeMarrais, 2015; Kretchmar & Sondel, 2014). Time will tell whether TFAus maintains or loses its darling status in the media.

It cannot be denied that the programme's 'apprenticeship-type' model has become increasingly attractive to educational stakeholders, particularly within Australia's 'crisis' of teaching and teacher education. Most recently, and prior to the federal election held in May 2022, the then-government announced it would commit $40 million, if re-elected, to 'strongly support innovative, proven pathways into teaching' (The Liberal Party of Australia, 2022), a pledge matched by the then-opposition. A large percentage of these funds would have gone directly to Teach For Australia to 'recruit and train an additional 700 teachers who can start in classrooms in 2023 and 2024' (TFAus, 2022b). These announcements further highlight the continued attractiveness of the programme for

politicians, policymakers and, ostensibly, the general public who read print and online media articles like those included in our dataset. Perhaps ironically, the original federal government announcement arrived on 4 May 2022: the very same day thousands of teachers in the state of New South Wales, which has not yet hosted TFAus, pursued industrial action in support of increased wages and improved working conditions (Daniel & Kidd, 2022).

Yet lingering questions remain regarding the nature of reforms applied across different contexts and the effects of TFAus on equitable schooling conditions in Australia (e.g., Skourdoumbis, 2012; Windsor, 2014). Our focus here is on the framing of such interventions, and while acknowledging we cannot make claims on how news texts actually shape readers' knowledge, perceptions and understandings, this study suggests that not only do global alternative teacher education programmes circulate worldwide; concomitant discourses are also taken up, reinforced and amplified by news media. More research on the flows and mutations of discourses that follow policy interventions like alternative teacher education is warranted. Yet overall, we hope that by analysing the media portrayal of TFAus, further attention will be directed to the power of the media in promoting seemingly 'common-sense'—however problematic—logics and discourses about teachers, teaching and teacher education.

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