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**Abstract:**

The teaching profession has experienced a significant diminution in the status over the past few decades in India. This paper explores as well as explicates status of a contract teacher in the current scenario including the multifaceted factors contributing to this trend of imbibing the societal attitudes, economic conditions, framework of the policy including the evolving role of digital innovation in the education. The paper aims to question the status simultaneously analyze the causes of the decline and its impact on the educational landscape. It also examines the implications of the depreciating status on morale of the teacher, student outcomes including the overall education system in which reformation is required.

**Key Words:** Contract, Factors, Landscape, Outcomes, Teacher.

**Introduction:**

As has been rightly said that every experience is a learning experience because with every experience follows its pros and cons. The status of contract teacher has not changed over a significant period of time but has rather reached the worsening stage. A similar experience was witnessed when the researcher got the job of a teacher (contract) in the school which eventually turned out to be worst nightmare leaving a grave impact on my mental health including questioning the status of teacher in 21<sup>st</sup> century so to be known as the era of reformation. It can't be subjected to comment how much this reformation era stands faithful in accordance to with the reality. Historically, once teaching was regarded as the noblest profession in India and much deeply respected within society. But, this perception gradually changed because of disparate socio-economic variations, commercialization of the education and rising influence of technology.

The factors contributing to the dwindling status of contract teachers include firstly, attitude of the society wherein there is erosion of respect that is, appreciation the teachers once commanded has evaded away, primarily witnessed in the changing dynamics of student-teacher relationships and parental expectations which encompasses the increasing parental pressure on students for academic excellence bringing in a blame game culture directed towards teachers in case expectations are not met. Secondly, economic conditions which include lesser salaries signifying that despite the critical role of contract teachers, many receive inadequate compensation leading to lack of stimulation and professionalism along with this, job insecurity in which several contract teachers have to face precarious employment situations particularly in private institutions contributing to de-escalating their morale. Thirdly, under policy frameworks, the prime concern comprises of education reforms enunciated frequent variations being witnessed in educational policies without adequate support for teachers creating an unstable working environment. Also, neglect in professional development wherein continually a lack of investment in this domain, leaves the teachers ill-equipped for handling the educational challenges of the contemporary era. Fourthly, the impact of technology that encompassing the digital disruption withering the rise of online education and learning apps altering the dynamics of traditional teaching, leading to the perception that teachers are on the verge of becoming obsolete. As a consequence, the students have become incompetent to a larger extent. In addition to this, overemphasis on standardized testing; herein the focus on exams has transposed the educational paradigm drifting away from holistic teaching approaches thus, marginalizing the roles of teachers. Teachers have become more prone to a systematic format of teaching which does become coercive and at one point of time students have become adhered to it consequentially are unready for the concept of harmonious development.

Teachers being considered as friend, philosopher and guide moreover, in 21<sup>st</sup> century as a facilitator as they play a crucial role in shaping the future of a nation. However, in India, the status of teachers has currently been witnessing on a downward trajectory.

**Literature Review:**

The research studies have explicitly mentioned about the dwindling status of the teacher particularly in schools. This structured literature review provides an insight into the complex dynamics impacting the status of teachers in India, mainly focusing on namely the historical context, economic factors, policy interventions including other ongoing debates.

Atherton and Kingdon (2010) mentioned that usage of contract teachers provided a low-cost way to raise the teachers' number; which elevated the quality concern that the less trained teachers' might not be that effective. The estimate of the causal contract-teacher effect was studied on student achievement on Indian data using school fixed effects including value-added models of the education production function. For highlighting the mechanisms through which the contract teacher effect worked both in homogenous and heterogeneous treatment effects were being used. The school fixed effects affected teachers pay equations and predicted achievement marks used upon per rupee spent on regular and contract teachers. The results depicted that despite being paid just a meagre salary of regular teachers with indistinguishable observed attributes, higher student learning was fabricated by the contract teachers.

Goyal and Pandey (2011) in their study on non-experimental data from government schools of two of the largest states of India, i.e. Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, put forth school outcomes via contract status of teachers. The findings indicated that contract teachers were linked with greater effort as compared to the civil service teachers to that of permanent tenures, before as well as after controlling of school fixed effects. The results depicted that higher teaching effort was connected to better student performance after controlling the inputs for other school and characteristics of the students. The salaries of contract teachers were

one-fourth or less than civil service teachers thus; contract teachers could be considered as a more cost-effective resource. However, a contract 'as they are' seemed feeble. The contract teachers did had fairly low average effort in absolute terms; also those who have been in the job for at least a full tenure made less effort in comparison to others who were in the first contract period.

The study by Muralidharan and Sundararaman (2013) based upon the large-scale expansion of primary schooling in the developing countries led to the over use of non-civil-service contract teachers who were hired locally by the school; not been professionally trained had fixed-term renewable contracts, were being paid much lower salaries than regular civil-service teachers. This had been a controversial policy, but there was limited proof on the effectiveness of the contract teachers in improving the student learning. As per the results, experimental evidence for the effect of contract teachers making use of data from 'as is' expansion of contract-teacher via a sample of 100 randomly-selected from the government-run rural primary schools of Andhra Pradesh in the end of two years, it was concluded that students in the schools with an extra contract teacher performed much better in comparison to schools, in both math and language tests respectively. The contract teachers were also much less likely to remain absent from school conversely to civil-service teachers. The experimental reduction integrated with school-level pupil-teacher ratio persuaded by the provision of an extra contract teacher, including the high-quality panel data estimates of the influence of reducing pupil-teacher ratio with a regular civil-service teacher, further representing that contract teachers were not only effective at improving student learning outcomes, but that they were efficient at doing so rather than regular civil-service teachers who were highly qualified, better trained and paid higher salaries.

Chandra (2015) in its study summarized that lesser pay for contract teachers versus civil service teachers including lack of attention to contract teacher preparation in India might negatively influenced contract teacher confidence and stimulation in the long term. One the way to preclude the damaging results of growing discontentment among this inflated section of the teacher labor force was to ensure better equitable pay scales across this profession. A complementary and additional long-term solution was to provide proper support mechanisms for the novice teachers via pre-service teacher preparation and mentoring. In the study it was also depicted that improving professional qualifications was a key pre-requisite for the progression in the career ladder. Appropriate teacher training combined with ongoing mentoring support was a way for contract teachers for moving forward from the "lower-order needs" to "higher-order needs" as defined by Maslow for instance, a sense of professional efficacy and collaboration of teachers, necessary for sustaining motivation of the teacher and quality of education in the long term. The skilfully designed teacher pre-service and in-service programs could contribute towards enabling the contract teachers to settle trials and tribulations of working in rural areas, practising multi-grade teaching, improper classroom materials and poor infrastructure. Providing non-monetary compensation for the tumultuous working conditions that contract teachers encountered could also assist in wavering away a growing sense of injustice amongst these crucially progressive group of teachers. A valuable alternative for the ongoing paucity of job security and meagre pay for contract teachers could establish a structure for their promotion and a definite plan for their eventual inclusion into the mainstream of the regular teachers. Policy makers needed to be made aware of the fact that, over time, improper remuneration and lack of preparation among the contract teachers in India particularly might disintegrate teaching commitment among contract teacher labor force to the abrasion of education quality in the government schools.

Kumari (2018) in her work while studying the employment and working conditions of the teachers for the quest of quality education. The United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which aimed to achieve universalization of elementary education, had led to expanding of higher scale low quality primary schools in India. Thus, the contractual teachers were used as an approach to amplify effectively access to education specifically in rural and inaccessible areas wherein qualified teachers were hesitant to be posted. Thereupon, the appointment of teachers on a fixed short-tenure with only a meagre salary and no additional financial benefit hence, became a major cost-reduction tool for the government. But there were significant unrecognised costs such as the effect on performance of the students; school's inspection; getting familiar with the syllabi and curriculum which restricted the policies being cost effective, etc. There had also been a contentious debate that government expense on teachers' inducement, training and other capacity building measures had been depleted. The study put forth that the problem of educated unemployment was connected to the appointment of contractual teachers in Delhi primary schools. With the data collected from Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) schools in Delhi, the results depicted that from the 34 contract teachers were being interviewed, 49% possessed a graduation degree and 24% were post-graduates and had obtained higher qualifications. Further, it was also revealed that the higher levels of educated unemployment were another contributing factor to the employment of contract teachers in states of India. Lastly, it was suggested that contractual teachers were young and better qualified than permanent teachers, but still got very less salary along with were devoid of incentives to keep them motivated.

Apat and Swain (2023) in their qualitative study initially expounded that substantially over the past few decades; school enrollment rates increased in developing countries. But due to budget constraints mainly, hiring of contract teachers had become an ad hoc, however was a popular solution to shortage of teachers in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Studies concerning contract teachers focused primarily on their performance, efficiency as well as cost-effectiveness. This research article tried to explore how contractual employment affected teachers in India. The study analyzed narrative data obtained via semi-structured interviews with 17 contract teachers employed in government-run schools in the state of eastern India i.e. Odisha. According to the thematic analysis of the data, participants experience mutability in six dimensions namely, prioritising of non-teaching work over teaching, financial constraints, inferiority complex, transfer anxiousness, discriminative experiences and preference for course correction. In this study, it was argued that these six dimensions contributed to the demoralization and disempowerment of the teachers. The plausible explanations as to why in Odisha, teachers continued to work as contract teachers despite the criticism they faced as being explored in the study. It was recommended in the study that policymakers required to be sensitized about the plight of contract teachers and their policy of employment must be again taken into reconsideration.

#### **Conclusion:**

The analysis primarily, from the review of literature but under the following sub-headings i.e. decreases in morale of the teachers leading to denting job satisfaction and momentum. This in turn, might too lead to high turnover rates henceforth,

exacerbating the shortage of qualified educators. Secondly, student outcomes, a disheartened teaching workforce also could affect student engagement and learning outcomes adversely, perpetuating the cycle of educational decline. Lastly, long-term consequences of the education system wherein the declining status of teachers could undermine the quality of education thus, hampering the national development and innovation in the long run.

Along with the above inferences, the observations of the researcher, that have been collected over a period of time during my teaching experience as a contract teacher is that I felt underemployed when I availed the opportunity, due to the indifferent behaviour of the school authorities the major reason of discrepancies in the way of treating teachers can be attributed to the basis of the status of their recruitment process in the school; furthermore, pertaining to the school students were disrespectful towards teachers; they inculcated fear in the minds of the teacher by constantly threatening them with the complaints to higher authorities if the teachers didn't abide by them; for the incomplete work which the students constantly keeps ignoring and leaves it as it is, teachers were held accountable; teachers couldn't justify their stance; teachers were overburdened with work load some seemed to be even trivial; teachers couldn't even become corrective towards students; teachers were forced to reproduce erroneous outcomes; turning a deaf ear towards the issues of the teacher, etc. these are a few to list while there are many more.

All these issues put forth question the status of the contract teachers' specifically. And requisite solutions needed to be scrutinized for these persisting problems.

#### **Recommendations:**

Following are the recommendations based upon the conclusions these include firstly, policy revisions ought to be inclusive of formulation of policies which prioritized contract teacher welfare and professional development. Community engagement promoting initiatives directed for rebuilding respect for the teaching profession within the communities. Last but not the least, establishment of robust support systems for contract teachers specifically to navigate within the challenges posed by technology and changing educational paradigms.

The diminishing status of contract teachers specifically in India has been a serious and complex issue that requires immediate attention. It is imperative to implement comprehensive policy reforms which enhance the professional stature of teachers, provide them adequate compensation including fostering a culture of respect and collaboration in the education system.

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