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Precarity in the lives of contract teachers: A qualitative study from Odisha, India

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School enrollment rates in developing countries have increased substantially over the past few decades. However, due largely to budget constraints, hiring contract teachers has become an *ad hoc*, yet a popular solution to teacher shortages in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Studies concerning contract teachers have primarily focused on their performance, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness. In light of the literature on precarity associated with contractual employment, this article seeks to explore how contractual employment affects teachers in India. The study analyzes narrative data obtained through semistructured interviews with 17 contract teachers employed in government-run schools in Odisha, a state in eastern India. According to thematic analysis of the data, participants experience precarity in six dimensions: prioritisation of non-teaching work over teaching, financial hardships, sense of inferiority, anxiety about transfer, experiences of discrimination and desire for course correction. We argue that these six dimensions contribute to the demoralization and disempowerment of teachers. We also explore possible explanations for why Odisha continues to employ contract teachers despite criticism. It is recommended that policymakers be sensitized to the plight of contract teachers and reconsider the policy of contractual employment.

KEYWORDS

contract teacher, India, precarity, teacher recruitment, thematic analysis

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the term precarity has been widely used to describe adverse changes in employment conditions. Precarity usually refers to a situation of “generalized insecurity” resulting from the disappearance of “full-time, predictable, unionized, and stable livelihoods” (Means, 2022, p. 1,360). As evident from a number of studies, teaching has not remained immune to the process of casualization (Ivancheva, 2015; Cuervo and Chesters, 2019; Melville et al., 2019; Rey et al., 2020; Stacey et al., 2022). In countries such as Finland, where teachers are highly valued professionals, the appeal of teaching career seems to be declining (Mankki and Kyrö-Ämmälä, 2022). The precarity of teachers in developing countries is, however, not well studied. A probable explanation is that the dominant discourse about teachers in these countries, which Tao (2016) calls the “third world teacher” discourse, attributes poor education quality to teachers. Due to this, much of the literature surrounding teachers in developing countries often focuses on their deficiencies, such as high absenteeism rates, lack of accountability, and ineffective teaching practices. The purpose of this article is to draw attention to the issue of precarity in the lives of teachers in developing countries.

During the last two decades, school enrolment rates have increased at an unprecedented rate in the developing world. Many countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America have resorted to hiring contract teachers due to severe teacher shortages and perceived financial constraints (Fyfe, 2007; Chudgar et al., 2014). There is a wide range of recruitment policies for contract teachers within and across countries. In most cases, contract teachers have lower educational requirements and are paid a fraction of the salary of regular or civil service teachers. As opposed to regular teachers, contract teachers are usually hired for a period of 1 or 2 years with the possibility of renewal. International organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have actively promoted the policy of hiring contract teachers as the solution to a range of problems affecting the educational system in developing countries (Klees, 2008). A majority of studies on contract teachers have examined whether they are as effective as regular teachers in improving student outcomes (Atherton and Kingdon, 2010; Goyal and Pandey, 2013; Muralidharan and Sundararaman, 2013; Duflo et al., 2015). In general, the research findings are positive (Kingdon et al., 2013), which has led researchers to advocate for the widespread use of contract teachers, with strict enforcement of their contracts.

It is estimated that approximately 12.7% of all teachers in India are contract teachers (Mukhopadhyay and Ali, 2021). In some states, the practice of hiring contract teachers has been discontinued, whereas in other states, such as Odisha, hiring policies have evolved over time. Except for teachers in state-run model schools, all teachers in Odisha are recruited as contract teachers (Ramachandran et al., 2018). However, unlike the initial years of hiring contract teachers when untrained local youth could be recruited, now candidates with proper educational qualifications and training are eligible to apply. Contract teachers are eligible to become regular teachers after 6 years of service (School and Mass Education Department, 2019). Recently, Odisha's government has made minor changes to employment norms for the first 6 years of employment, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this article. In addition to changing the designations, the need for contract renewal has been waived after 3 years of service (School and Mass Education Department, 2019). Even so, the first 6 years of a teacher's career remain to be the period characterized by insecurity in many ways. During this period, teachers receive about one-third of a regular teacher's salary (Ramachandran et al., 2018). Most importantly, these 6 years are not included in the service record of a teacher. In view of the significant difference in employment terms between the first 6 years of service and subsequent years of service, we consider the first 6 years of service to be the teachers' contract period.

The critics of contract teacher policies assert that hiring untrained youth as teachers on contract with poor pay contributes to the degradation of the professional status of teachers and, therefore, in the long run, will have a detrimental effect on education (Kaushik et al., 2009; Steiner-Khamsi, 2012; Mukhopadhyay and Ali, 2021). Bourdieu (1998) writes, "[T]he salary granted is an unequivocal index of the value placed on the work and the corresponding workers. Contempt for a job is shown first of all in the more or less derisory remuneration it is given" (p. 3). While most studies examined the impact of contract teachers on student learning, in this article, we pose a rather different question: how contractual employment affects teachers' personal and professional lives. Thematic analysis of narrative data collected from 17 participants indicates that contract teachers experience precarity in six dimensions: non-teaching work takes precedence over teaching,

worries over salaries that barely allow them to survive, sense of inferiority, anxiety about transfer, fractured solidarity among teachers, and devising plans for course correction.

The implications of the findings have been discussed, as well as possible reasons for the continuation of the use of contract teachers in spite of criticism. The practical implication of this research includes a reconsideration of contract teacher hiring policy. Our position is that teacher hiring and management practices should ensure that the dignity and wellbeing of teachers are protected. In order to gain a better understanding of the relationship between contractual employment of teachers, precarity in their lives, and their effectiveness, further research is needed in other contexts in developing countries, as this field is understudied. It is also necessary to explore how teachers exercise agency and resist the disciplinary power of governance that is based on precarisation.

2. The emergence of contract teacher recruitment policy

The policy of recruiting contract teachers emerged at the intersection of two global movements in the 1980s and 1990s. On the one hand, the internationalization of the Education for All (EFA) campaign compelled developing countries to expand their education systems for universal accessibility. The positive impact of primary education on a country's socio-economic development and competitiveness in the international market was one of the main justifications for this global objective (Welmond, 2002). The EFA campaign was soon followed by the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), one of which was to achieve universal primary education. On the other hand, in this period, neoliberal thought emerged as the dominant paradigm, replacing development economics and the idea of a welfare state. As leading global agents of neoliberalism, the World Bank and IMF enforced policies and conditions known as adjustment programs (SAPs) on developing countries in exchange for loans. SAPs required countries to "liberalize trade barriers, eliminate subsidies, dismantle public services, privatize, deregulate, and promote markets as extensively as possible while "shrinking" the state' (Kamat, 2012, p. 35).

Meeting the financial resources to expand and improve the quality of the school systems was a major challenge for many countries. Many international financial institutions stepped in to offer financial assistance to health care and education programs in the developing world. The pressure to quickly expand educational access, the neoliberal ethos and external aid, together affected the education systems and the teacher management policies of many countries in numerous ways (Klees, 2008; Connell, 2009; Kablay, 2012). Both the issues of education systems and their solutions were framed in terms of economic costs and benefits. Each investment was to be weighed against others (primary vs. higher education, salaries vs. materials) to decide which would have the greatest impact on outcome and efficiency. Certain types of education expenditures (such as primary education) were considered more effective and thus, legitimate than others (like higher education). The apparently contradictory objectives of expanding access to education while reducing expenditure were to be achieved through the pursuit of efficiency (Welmond, 2002).

Neoliberal policies imagined teachers as "one-dimensional economic beings" who were "governable *via* the metrics of the market,

each serving primarily her own self-interests while working to maximize personal value in the market” (Attick, 2017, p. 38). In light of this, it is not surprising that for all teacher-related issues, such as teacher shortages, a lack of accountability, and ineffectiveness, typical policy solutions took the form of incentives, and disincentives for teachers. It was argued that hiring teachers with renewable contracts rather than as permanent civil servants would provide the correct balance of incentives and disincentives. From an incentive standpoint, the absence of job stability could be expected to make contract teachers more accountable for performance (Bruns et al., 2011).

Rapidly expanding educational opportunities meant a sharp rise in student enrolment and teacher shortage. In 1993, the World Bank published a book titled “Teachers in Developing Countries: Improving Effectiveness and Managing Costs”. The book focused on improving the effectiveness of teachers through remuneration and managerial policies. In one of the chapters of this book, Manuel Zymelman, with Joseph De Stefano, suggested: “delink teachers from other civil servants; find ways to increase qualifications while mitigating budgetary impact, such as instituting different combinations of training and experience to produce the same teaching proficiency at lower levels of the salary scale; improve data collection and salary forecasting capacity (in order to locate inefficiencies); *abolish guaranteed employment for teachers*” (quoted in Welmond, 2002, p. 41, emphasis added).

To address teacher shortages with a limited budget, many countries in South Asia, Africa and Latin America began hiring contract teachers. The Government of India launched the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 1994 with foreign aid. To fulfil one of the conditionalities attached with the fund – that of filling existing teacher vacancies – several states of India resorted to recruiting contract teachers and stopped recruiting full-time permanent teachers (Mehendale and Mukhopadhyay, 2021). In light of the budget constraints facing many state governments, as well as the tremendous pressure to expand the primary education system, the appointment of teachers on lower salaries and contracts seemed an attractive option (Kaushik et al., 2009). Initially, contract teacher recruitment policies differed from state to state in terms of educational requirements, salaries, appointment bodies, and career prospects. Over the past two decades, these policies have also evolved differentially. Several states, such as Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, have stopped recruiting contract teachers while others, such as Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and Punjab recruit contract teachers and regularize their employment after a few years (for details see Ramachandran et al., 2018).

3. The effectiveness of contract teacher recruitment policy

In the majority of studies conducted on contract teachers, the purpose has been to determine whether contract teachers have any effect on student learning outcomes. Based on a review of the most rigorous studies on this topic, Kingdon et al. (2013) conclude that contract teachers are “generally more effective in improving student outcomes than regular teachers” (p. 3). For example, Muralidharan and Sundararaman (2013) estimated that students in schools with an extra contract teacher performed significantly better than those in comparison schools by 0.16 and 0.15 standard deviations, in math and

language tests, respectively. The results of similar studies (Atherton and Kingdon, 2010; Kingdon and Sipahimalani-Rao, 2010; Goyal and Pandey, 2013; Duflo et al., 2015) also indicate that contract teachers are less likely to be absent and spend more time in classrooms than regular teachers. Absenteeism is lower among students too when taught by contract teachers. Since all these positive outcomes are achieved at a fraction of the cost of regular teachers, recruiting contract teachers is professed as a cost-effective policy solution.

A better understanding of the above-mentioned research agenda can be gained from the words of Steiner-Khamsi (2012).

In teacher policy research, for example, the World Bank is enamoured with impact evaluations that show that underpaid contract teachers produce better student outcomes than regular teachers who are not accountable, do not fear losing their jobs, and therefore either do not show up regularly in school, or if they show up, do not teach, or if they teach, do not teach effectively. This complex causal chain of explanations is often simplified and reduced in the end to two variables only: low payment of teachers and job insecurity—both, according to the economists cited in World Bank publications, considered highly desirable for education systems that attempt to improve teacher effectiveness. (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012, p. 11)

It is not that studies have not reported the negative implications of recruiting contract teachers. Kingdon et al.'s (2013) review includes studies that report instances where regular teachers either outperform contract teachers or there is no significant difference between the two cadres. Similarly, absenteeism among contract teachers has been found to be as high as that among regular teachers Kremer et al., 2005. While contract teachers may perform better in their first year of employment, their performance may decline in the second year of employment (Goyal and Pandey, 2013). In addition to these studies, scholars have argued for a long time that the low salary, coupled with the contractual nature of the job, is the main contributor to dissatisfaction and lack of motivation among contract teachers and thus, the policy is at best a stopgap measure (Kaushik et al., 2009; Chudgar et al., 2014; Chandra, 2015).

It is difficult to answer whether the lack of job security and poor compensation of contract teachers make them more effective since there are a variety of opinions on this subject. In this article, however, we attempt to go beyond this question and pose a question that can be more or less definitively answered. The study examines how contractual employment affects teachers themselves. It is argued here that contractual employment contributes to precarity in teachers’ lives. In the following section, we discuss the concept of precarity and its relevance to the current study.

4. Contractual employment and precarity

Bourdieu (1963) is credited with the term *précarité* (Alberti et al., 2018). In his research in Algeria, he used it to distinguish between casual workers and permanent workers. With the worsening of working conditions over the last few decades, the term “precarity” has become increasingly prevalent. Scholars have had difficulty defining precarious work as the concept has been used for a variety of purposes, including

describing employment structures, describing subjective feelings of insecurity among workers, and even referring to a lack of workers' engagement in labourist politics (Alberti et al., 2018). There are four major factors that in certain combinations can lead to different degrees of precarity for individuals (Jonsson and Nyberg, 2009, as cited in McKay et al., 2012, p. 83). The first factor is job insecurity, which depends on the duration of the contract and the uncertainty surrounding the renewal of the contract. The second factor is low pay. This refers to a situation in which a person's earnings are below the minimum or average wage, and there is not much opportunity for further increase. Third, subordinate employment which means exclusion from full social and welfare rights as well as employment protection. The final contributing factor is the lack of rights to representation. In this situation, workers lack the ability to engage in collective bargaining and have difficulty exercising their legal rights.

Thus, those who are employed on a contract basis are subject to precarious circumstances, especially when their salaries are low. Casualization and contractualization of teaching jobs are not limited to developing countries. Governments in North America, Europe and Australia are also hiring teachers on a fixed-term basis in an effort to stimulate flexibility (De Koning, 2013). Based on their study of Australia's fixed-term contract teachers, Stacey et al. (2022) report that the workload of contract teachers is similar to that of permanent teachers. However, the main difference between both groups lies in how they experience their work. Contract teachers work harder as they feel compelled to "prove themselves." As their employment is at the mercy of the principals, they become increasingly silent in school matters and say "yes" to everything. They feel "surveilled", "marginalized" and "othered" in the schools. Outside, they have difficulty obtaining bank loans and finding adequate accommodations. Such findings led the authors to argue that experience of precariousness may have "scarring" effects on contract teachers.

Additionally, precarious employment delays the transition of young people into adulthood (Cuervo and Chesters, 2019). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), an individual has not transitioned until he or she has been placed in a position that meets the basic criteria of "decency," which is a permanency that provides a sense of security for the worker (Cuervo and Chesters, 2019). The achievement of economic independence has therefore been equated with achieving a successful transition into adulthood. Before making other significant life commitments, such as marriage, parental responsibilities, and home ownership, most young people prefer to obtain a permanent and full-time job. A precarious employment situation not only delays the attainment of milestones of adulthood but also makes it difficult to plan for the future.

As indicated in this section, contractual appointment of teachers is likely to be a form of precarious employment, which can adversely impact their personal and professional lives. The purpose of this study is to examine whether and how contract teachers experience uncertainty and insecurity in their lives during their contract period, as well as how they navigate through it. Is it reasonable to attribute the effectiveness of contract teachers to insecure employment and inadequate compensation?

5. Method

Prior to 2019, contract teachers in Odisha were known as Sikhya Sahayaks (teaching assistants), although their

responsibilities were no less than those of regular teachers (Béteille and Ramachandran, 2016; Panda, 2018). They could be absorbed into the regular teacher workforce after 6 years of service. In 2019, the government of Odisha abolished the designation of Sikhya Sahayak and introduced two new cadres- Junior Teacher-Contractual (JTC) and Junior Teacher (JT) (School and Mass Education Department, 2019). In order to become a regular teacher, one must first serve 3 years as a JTC and another 3 years as a JT. Although JTs do not have renewable contracts like JTCs, they do not receive the same benefits as regular teachers. The salary of a JT is slightly higher than that of a JTC, indicating that the promotion is not significant. Rather, this amendment can be viewed as an effort towards concealing the significant differences between JTs and regular teachers. In this study, we consider both JTCs and JTs as contract teachers because they share one major feature of precarious employment - poor pay. Consequently, this study draws participants from both cadres.

The study reported in this article was conducted in the Keonjhar district of Odisha. Using maximum variation purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012), 20 contract teachers were selected for interview. To interview the teachers listed in the sample, permission was obtained from the District Education Officer (DEO) of Keonjhar. Prior to conducting the interviews, participants provided their oral/verbal consent. Among the 20 teachers approached, 17 agreed to participate in the study.

This study drew its data from in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Interviewing is the most effective method of capturing people's life experiences and the meanings they attribute to those experiences (Forsey, 2012). FGDs facilitate interaction among participants who share some common characteristics. In addition to revealing common concerns, the interaction even raises questions that were not considered previously and encourages participants to participate in unexpected ways (Robinson, 2012). The interview schedule included questions pertaining to participants' educational trajectories, career decision-making, experiences as teachers, and future plans, which resulted in rich biographical narrative data. Over the course of 2018 and 2019, each participant was interviewed three times and three FGDs were conducted. The interviews lasted about 50–90 min. The interviews were digitally recorded. All the interviews were conducted in Odia, the vernacular language of Odisha. The interviews were later transcribed and translated into English for computer-assisted analysis.

The data were analyzed following the thematic analysis method elaborated by Braun and Clarke (2006). In order to become familiar with the dataset, we read the transcripts several times and noted our initial thoughts. Data chunks were coded using descriptive codes (Saldana, 2013). These codes were then analyzed and combined into themes and sub-themes. A thematic map was used to clarify the relationship between themes. Finally, the themes and sub-themes were evaluated to ensure they adequately represented the dataset. In this article, we present data relating to the theme of precariousness.

The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee for Human Research at the National Institute of Science Education and Research, Bhubaneswar. The demographic characteristics of the participants have been presented in Table 1. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of the participants.

6. Results

As shown in the thematic map below (Figure 1) six sub-themes constitute the theme of precariousness in contract teachers' lives. Before presenting the findings, it is important to shed some light on the reasons why participants decided to become contract teachers. Among the 17 participants, only three had aspirations of becoming teachers while they were growing up. Since their fathers were teachers, they were inspired by the inherent "nobility" of the profession and made a conscious choice to pursue a career in teaching (Ramachandran et al., 2005). The majority of participants chose to pursue teacher training when they realized it was the most accessible and affordable route to becoming a government employee. The findings presented below indicate that contractual employment turned intrinsically motivated teachers towards extrinsic factors such as salary and reputation, and those teachers who had intended to endure 6 years of hardship in order to secure a government job were also revising their life strategies to make the contract period more manageable.

6.1. The burden of non-teaching workload

Along with teaching, teachers in government schools are expected to provide administrative support, organize events, manage mid-day meals, supervise construction work, collect and submit data on students, maintain records, facilitate visits of officials, open bank accounts for students, update their Aadhaar IDs, help them in getting caste certificates and distribute uniforms and books. During the interviews, some participants claimed to have placed a higher priority

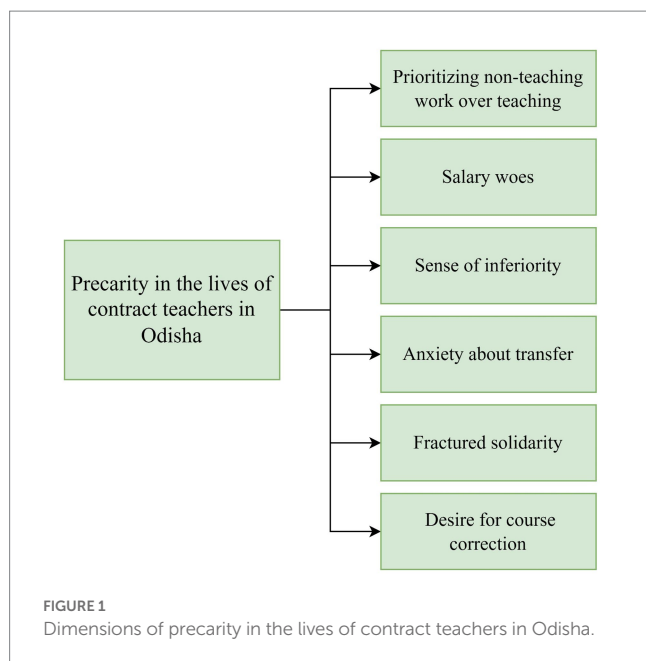
on non-teaching work than on teaching. They believe that neglecting their non-teaching activities may have greater detrimental effects than neglecting their teaching activities. One explanation for this belief could be that school administrators generally focus on the non-academic aspects of schools on their school visits. The block and district education officers usually review registers and records, observe the operation of the mid-day meal program, and evaluate the cleanliness of school facilities. Furthermore, although regular teachers may experience similar pressures with respect to non-teaching workloads, contract teachers are the ones who feel vulnerable, because their jobs are insecure and administrators can easily take disciplinary action against them. According to some participants, contract teachers are usually assigned most of the non-teaching duties because they are the most junior teachers and are less likely to raise voice for a fair distribution of responsibilities.

Located next to a national highway, Manisha's school received many visiting officials throughout the year. It was, therefore, necessary for the teachers to be ready for unexpected visitors. Being "ready" generally entailed being present in school when one was not on an officially sanctioned leave and maintaining all records and lesson plans, which usually attracted the inspectorial gaze. Manisha was assigned the responsibility of overseeing the preparation of midday meals (MDM). This seemingly simple task was costing Manisha more than an hour every day. She described:

As children, we used to arrive at school before ten o'clock each morning. Today's children do not arrive on time for school. They keep on coming. We do not get a final count of students present in a day until 11 a.m. Following the final count, the required

TABLE 1 Participants' characteristics (n=17).

	Male	Female	Total
Gender	10	7	17
<i>Age group</i>			
20–29	5	2	7
30–39	4	3	7
40 and above	1	2	3
<i>Social category</i>			
General	1	2	3
Scheduled Caste (SC)	2	0	2
Scheduled Tribe (ST)	3	1	4
Socially and Economically Backward Classes (SEBC)	4	4	8
<i>Education</i>			
Higher secondary and Certificate of Training (CT)	2	0	2
Undergraduate and CT or Bachelor of Education (BEd)	8	4	12
Postgraduate with CT/BEd	0	3	3
<i>Other aspects</i>			
Teaching in urban school	2	2	4
Teaching in rural school	8	5	13
More than 3 years work experience before becoming JTC	3	2	5
Married	6	5	11
Living away from family	2	3	5



amount of MDM ingredients are sourced from the storeroom. The number of eggs being cooked should always match the number of students present in the classroom on any given day. There must be one egg for each student. Inspection personnel will verify this. In the event that he does not find enough eggs for students present that day, we will be charged with theft. The fact that some children have arrived late will not be taken into consideration.

Several participants narrated stories that circulated in the local teacher community concerning contract teachers who had been punished for matters related to non-teaching duties. Typically, the punishment consisted of a suspension of salary for a few months. Some participants even sought to assist their headteachers in non-teaching tasks in order to maintain their goodwill. Even when a headteacher is a Booth Level Officer (BLO), contract teachers perform tasks related to the BLO. The participants who spent most of their time working on non-teaching tasks hoped that once they became regular teachers, their workload would be reduced. At least, as regular teachers, they hope, their position would be secure enough to provide strategic flexibility to cope with the demands of non-teaching work.

6.2. Salary woes

The low salary of contract teachers in Odisha is arguably the most critical factor contributing to their experience of precarity. During the fieldwork, the gross monthly salaries of Junior Teacher-Contractual (JTC) and Junior Teacher (JT) were Rs 7,400 and Rs 9,200, respectively, while the salary of a regular teacher was approximately Rs 25,000 (313 USD). In January 2022, the Government of Odisha increased the salaries of JTCs and JTs by 50% (The Print, 2022). A JTC now receives Rs. 11,000 a month or Rs. 423 per day for 26 working days. According to the latest revision of minimum wage rates, unskilled agricultural workers should receive between Rs. 382 and Rs. 423 per day, depending on location (Government of India, 2022). Poor pay of

contract teachers is more than a problem of survival. It is a challenge to their reputation as well.

Sasmita's father was a high school teacher. She always aimed to be a teacher like her father. However, she got a teaching position in a primary school. Her school is approximately 10 km from the nearest town. The regular teachers of her school live in the town and commute to school by scooter. As Sasmita did not know how to drive, and there was no reliable or affordable means of transportation from town to the village, she was forced to find a house within the village. Her monthly rent is Rs. 1,000. Almost every Sunday, she travels to the town to purchase essential items. She spends approximately Rs. 1,000 per visit - Rs. 200 is charged by the auto-rickshaw, and the balance is spent on shopping. Each month, she visits her family, which is also a costly endeavour. Her salary barely allows her to make ends meet.

Ranjan is 42 years old and is married. Before becoming a contract teacher, he was employed by an insurance company for more than a decade, earning more than Rs. 30,000 per month. Having completed his teacher training course, he had attempted to become a teacher in a government school, but had never considered teaching in a private school due to the low salaries offered to teachers in private schools. When he was selected to be a contract teacher, he reluctantly joined due to the low salary, but he was also looking forward to becoming a regular teacher after 6 years of hardship.

Soon after joining, he realized that reducing expenses would not be sufficient, he would need to find a second source of income. So, he began offering private tuition classes after school hours. It is not uncommon for parents living in the nearby town to pay as much as Rs. 2,000 each month per child for private tuition classes. Tuition fees for English medium students are even higher. However, this strategy may not be feasible for all contract teachers. Parents in rural areas do not pay much for private tuition, nor do they pay on a regular basis. Consequently, many participants are unable to earn an additional income from tuition classes. Besides, young teachers such as Manisha and Rajendra, instead of offering private tuition, take advantage of their free time to prepare for competitive examinations that might lead to better employment opportunities.

Not only is the salary low, but it is also paid irregularly. During the interviews, many participants complained that they had not received salaries for more than 3 months. Delayed payments are not a problem for female teachers living with their families. Irregular salaries pose problems for teachers who reside away from their families in rented houses, as well as married male teachers. As much as Prakash dislikes it, he is required to borrow money from his family when the salary is delayed since he is paying an EMI on a motorcycle. The salary Sarojini receives can support her well as she is living alone. However, she keeps her husband's debit card on hand in case she does not receive her salary for long. Together with his wife and child, Mohan lives in a rented house. He said, "I have not received my salary for the last 3 months. I have not paid the rent. The local shopkeepers allow us to purchase items on credit. They are willing to sell us credit because they know that we will eventually receive our salaries. If I need to buy anything from the town, I will have to either borrow or wait." A sense of financial uncertainty is evident in all participants' narratives.

Depending on one's income, one can adjust their standard of living. It is, however, humiliating to compromise one's obligations to others. Rajendra could not refuse his younger brother's request to buy him a smartphone. Prakash's cousin sister was getting married. As a wedding gift, his aunt requested him to buy a necklace for her

daughter which he had to oblige. Sarojini's father-in-law was investing his retirement savings in the construction of a house. As the construction was nearing completion, he ran out of money. So, he abandoned the idea of installing tiles on the floor. Sarojini decided to help her father-in-law as much as she could. It was only through borrowing from colleagues and friends that Rajendra, Prakash, and Sarojini were able to meet their financial obligations. Indebted, they had to further reduce their expenses.

6.3. Sense of inferiority

As mentioned in the sub-theme of salary, contract teachers often struggle to maintain a sense of self-worth. As Ranjan lamented, "the regular teachers treat us as if we were laborers. Our government has enough money to provide our children with books, uniforms, shoes, and cycles, but not for us. In my opinion, the government believes that we do not even deserve what we are receiving. Only a teacher can live with dignity in such circumstances."

Sasmita too echoed this sentiment when she said, "I do not think bright students are interested in becoming teachers. The salary is low. Even though it is increased after 6 years, by that time the damage has already been done. Getting less than a laborer hurts one's self-respect."

A recurrent theme in most participants' narratives was the comparison of contract teachers with laborers. Bijay said, "For 6 years I am occupied with only one concern- survival. For 6 years we are forced to live like laborers. It is a huge amount of mental pressure. They have recruited three teachers with the salary of one. It is easy for them. Is it easy for us?"

Sarojini taught in numerous private schools before joining the government school system as a contractual teacher. She recognizes that her school could be improved in so many areas. She, however, feels powerless in school as she is merely a contractual teacher. She said:

I am just a JT, not even a permanent teacher. What can I do about these things even though I want to do? I can only contribute physical labour. I don't have money. I can encourage children to work with me for the development of the school. I can take a few tiny steps like a *gunduchi musha* (*Squirrel*). But there are people who can make significant changes. The headteacher can work with the cooperation of SMC members and other teachers to develop the school.

Schools are not the only places where participants feel inferior. Many participants, often men, dislike the idea of identifying themselves as contractual teachers in primary schools. According to Mohan, male contractual teachers are not very attractive as marriage prospects. He said, "Many males choose to become contractual teachers as a second option. It is unlikely that anyone will marry them. With their salaries, they are not able to afford a comfortable life for themselves. How can they support families?"

6.4. Anxiety about the possibility of transfer

Before 2012, the Odisha government had a policy of hiring contract teachers through local authorities and from the local pool of

applicants. Teachers were able to obtain posts in schools near their homes as a result of this policy. If a teacher wished to transfer to another school within a district, it was possible and, in many cases, it required bribing local officials. In 2012 and all the recruitments after that, applicants were permitted to apply for vacancies in any district of their choice. Due to this change in policy, teachers from coastal Odisha like Sarojini, Mohan, and Ghanshyam got jobs in a northern district. Being posted hundreds of kilometres away from their homes, they wish to be transferred. Sarojini said:

Teachers who live with their parents or stay somewhere near their homes don't really understand our problem- the problem of teachers who live far away from their homes. The school needs me here and my family needs me there. From both sides, I can sense equal pressure. You might have seen me today calling my son repeatedly and walking around the field while I spoke with him. It is important for me to know how he is doing and what he is doing. Whenever I learn of bad news, I lose control. Suddenly, I am confused. It is unlikely that I will be able to reach my family in time even if I take leave immediately. Recently, my father-in-law passed away. My mother-in-law is now living alone. If she falls ill, I will not be able to get to her as quickly as I would like. If I had been working close to my home, I would have been able to respond to such emergencies much more efficiently. I could have taken care of my job and family at the same time. Since I'm here, I'm not much help in an emergency.

Transfers of teachers during the first 6 years of their employment are not clearly defined by the government. Most contract teachers believe that it is difficult to obtain a transfer to a school of their choice during this period. Upon completion of 6 years, the transfer option is available, but inter-district transfers are unlikely. Therefore, as contract teachers, they must stay put. There is also the option of mutual transfer, wherein teachers with the same educational qualifications and belonging to same social category can exchange positions on a voluntary basis. However, the difficulty lies in finding a teacher with similar characteristics and who is willing to relocate.

6.5. Fractured solidarity

According to several scholars, the creation of multiple cadres of teachers is not only inefficient on the part of the administration, but also undermines the professionalism of the teaching workforce (Kaushik et al., 2009; Jha et al., 2021). It is reasonable to suspect that regular teachers may discriminate against contract teachers owing to the differences in their employment terms. When asked about this, none of the participants shared any first-hand experience of discrimination. However, some participants felt that they were given more non-teaching work since they were new to the school. Also, they shared instances of discrimination experienced by their friends in other schools. Rajendra noted:

Regular teachers discriminate against us when we attend block-level teacher meetings. They make us feel inferior through their behaviour. Recently, the middle school in the neighbouring village was merged with the high school. Both schools were adjacent to one another and had different head teachers. The head teacher of the high school now supervises everything. All the tedious

paperwork is assigned to middle school teachers, all of whom are contract teachers. In fact, they sit in two separate staff rooms. When it comes to taking leaves, contract teachers have more difficulties than regular teachers.

6.6. The desire for course correction

As mentioned before, the majority of the participants had decided to take teacher training and join the teaching workforce as contract teachers because they were unable to pursue their preferred career paths. For instance, Prakash achieved a good ranking in the entrance examination for engineering schools. Due to his family's financial difficulties, he was uncertain whether he would be able to arrange funds for 3 years of study in engineering. On the other hand, teacher training was less expensive and shorter in duration. Therefore, he abandoned the idea of studying engineering and enrolled in a teacher training program instead. According to Lortie (1975), this is a case of "constrained entry". For teachers such as Prakash, the position of contract teacher represents a stepping stone. As they work through their contractual service, they study and prepare for better-paying government jobs. If they had been offered regular positions with a decent salary, they might have accepted teaching as their career and strived to improve themselves as teachers.

It is also apparent that the female participants who became teachers out of their passion are rethinking their career choices. The following statement illustrates Sasmita's confusion.

Nowadays, people prefer to work in banks. A banking career has never been of interest to me. I wanted to become a teacher. But, am I really able to teach here? Most of the time I am engaged in paperwork. And, what do I receive as a salary? Perhaps I should consider joining the administrative services.

However, course correction is not a concern for all participants. Minati began teaching shortly after her marriage. Changing careers is not an option for her because her family considers teaching as the only suitable work for married women. Similarly, Anjali does not want to rock the boat because her husband changed his job to be with her. With regard to course correction, teachers like Minati and Anjali have only one option- to obtain teaching positions in high schools.

7. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how contractual employment affects teachers themselves. The thematic analysis of interview data reveals that the lives of teachers in the contract period are structured around six themes: precedence of non-teaching work over teaching, financial hardships and uncertainties, sense of inferiority, anxiety over transfer, experiences of discrimination and planning for course correction. We argue that these subthemes together signal precarity in the lives of contract teachers. Precarity here is evidently due to "manufactured uncertainty" (Alberti et al., 2018). While it is rare for a teacher's contract to be not renewed, the threat of dismissal is real. Managerial strategies such as withholding salary payments have

contributed to the subjective precariousness of teachers. However, following Gilmartin et al. (2021), we can characterize the participant's case as one of "promising precarity" because the opportunity to secure a stable, well-paying position is available after 6 years of precarious contractual employment.

Nevertheless, when teachers are more worried about security and survival, the "lower-order" needs in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it is difficult for them to progress towards satisfaction of "higher-order" needs such as a sense of efficacy and professional development (Chandra, 2015). It can be demoralizing for teachers to devote a disproportionate amount of time and energy to non-teaching tasks (Tsang and Liu, 2016). Finally, when there are multiple cadres of teachers, a teacher with low pay may view herself as an insignificant member of the larger teaching community, as Sarojini's metaphor of *gunduchi musa* suggests so insightfully. *Gunduchi musa* is the Odia term for squirrel. According to the epic Ramayana, a squirrel contributed to the construction of the bridge through the ocean that allowed Lord Rama's army to travel to Lanka. As the army of monkeys threw large stones into the ocean, the squirrel rolled on the sand while wet and shook it off at the construction site in order to transport a few grains of sand. The squirrel's contribution was apparently inconsequential and unwarranted. Although contract teachers perceive themselves as powerless, they are usually those who bear the most weight in most schools.

There is a connection between contracting and casualizing teaching staff and other policy solutions, including performance-based pay and increased monitoring and surveillance. These reforms are largely grounded in the discourse of new public management (Mukhopadhyay and Ali, 2021) and in recognition of their widespread implementation, they have been termed as Global Managerial Education Reforms (GMERs) (Verger and Altinyelken, 2013). The central principle guiding this package of reforms is that public sector administrators should take advantage of the rules, values, and techniques used in the private sector. As these reforms strive to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public education systems, they disempower teachers and deprofessionalize the workforce (Verger and Altinyelken, 2013). Additionally, Mukhopadhyay and Ali (2021) argue that while the new public management discourse constructs a narrow concept of teacher accountability, it rarely engages with the larger institutional context within which teachers operate. It does not address basic resource deficiencies in government schools, the involvement of teachers in numerous non-teaching activities, the low quality of preservice and in-service teacher training programs, and the lack of teacher involvement in policy-making.

The controversial nature of these reforms may cause one to wonder why governments are attracted to these reforms so strongly. First and foremost, these reforms are recommended by large and powerful international organizations, such as the World Bank. In the last decades, the World Bank has positioned itself as a producer and manager of knowledge in the domain of education (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012). Now, as a knowledge bank, it determines what works and what does not in terms of educational development. The World Bank has been criticized for its selective use of "evidence" (Verger and Altinyelken, 2013) and short-sighted policy prescriptions (Klees, 2008). For example, for two decades before 2000, the World Bank argued that higher education had a low social return than primary education. In 2000, it admitted that the externalities of higher education (technology development, better governance, democracy,

etc.) were not taken into account in the calculation. As Klees (2008) points out:

Thus, the Bank now admits that the returns to society from investment in higher education may be as great as or greater than for primary education. ... The Bank is basically saying that it followed incorrect policies for the 1980s and 1990s, caused by a technical error, a miscalculation. How many individuals and countries have been harmed by the Bank's admitted erroneous insistence that higher education investment be curtailed and misdirected? (p. 318)

Secondly, policies such as hiring contract teachers are justified not only based on their effectiveness, but also because they do not have a significant impact on the state budget. Promoted as a “cost-effective” solution, the policy of hiring contract teachers was readily adopted by governments experiencing “budget constraints”. Klees (2008) writes, “Perhaps the most disingenuous part of the justification for neoliberal policies in education and elsewhere was the creation of what the World Bank has called the “budget constraint” ... The overnight “discovery” of this budget constraint or cap was pure politics” (p. 318). The case of Odisha is illustrative in this regard.

In an investigation of the dire state of health and education at the grassroots level in Odisha, journalist M. Rajshekhar has identified misplaced spending priorities as one of the contributing factors (Rajshekhar, 2015). According to his report, in the late nineties, Odisha had faced a severe financial crisis. The cyclone of 1999 had devastated the state. It was a time of low inflows, high expenditures, and excessive borrowing. The state needed 5 years to engineer a turnaround. It was during this period that the state ceased to appoint regular personnel. Since then, Odisha has maintained a conservative fiscal policy. In recent times, the government of Odisha has taken pride in its ability to consistently generate revenue surpluses (Financial Express, 2022; The New Indian Express, 2022). While the situation of the state exchequer has improved significantly over the past two decades, the situation of its contractual employees remains unchanged. The Odisha Government Contractual Employee Association (OGCEA), as well as the Odisha Junior Teachers Association (OJTA), have been voicing the demand of equal pay for equal work through strikes and social media platforms (The Samikhsya, 2022; Zee Odisha, 2022).

Finally, apart from the appeal of efficiency and cost-effectiveness, contractualisation of teachers is also an instrument of discipline and domination (Pedaci, 2010; Masquelier, 2019). In Bourdieu's (1998) view, precarity serves as a cover for the exercise of power: “Casualization of employment is part of a mode of domination of a new kind, based on the creation of a generalized and permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing workers into submission, into the acceptance of exploitation” (p. 85). Pedaci (2010) suggests that occupational insecurity produces nonconflicting, if not entirely submissive, attitudes and behaviors. A contract worker is more likely to accept unfavorable conditions and perform tasks that exceed the workload that has been agreed upon. When it comes to education, it means that, as a result of the contractualization of the teaching workforce, governments can and do implement anti-teacher policies without much resistance, thereby intensifying the work of teachers. Sasmita depicted contractual employment as damaging. In addition to the loss of self-esteem, this damage may also imply a loss of agency in the face of state power. Despite teachers' disagreement with

educational reforms and everyday management practices, they do not feel empowered to resist them.

8. Limitations and policy implications

This study explored the effect of contractual employment on a small group of teachers working in one of the districts of Odisha. The narrow focus enabled us to gather in-depth data that allowed us to argue that contractual employment has caused precarity in their lives. Researchers must however exercise caution when considering the transferability and generalizability of the findings since many context-specific factors affect participants' experience of precarity. The majority of participants in this study were from lower middle-class families living in small towns and rural areas, and all aspired upward social mobility through government employment. It is possible that a contractual position at a decent salary would not have caused them much concern. Whether and to what extent teachers experience precarity is severely influenced by their family circumstances, aspirations, and nature of contracts. Nevertheless, this study makes a strong case for reconsidering the policy of hiring contract teachers in Odisha and elsewhere. Even as early as in 1966 the ILO/UNESCO recommendation stated that “teaching should be regarded as a profession .. a form of public service which requires of teachers expert knowledge and specialized skills, acquired and maintained through rigorous and continuing study” and their “salaries should .. reflect the importance to society of the teaching function” (Quoted in Robertson, 2012, p. 590, emphasis added). The blind pursuit of efficiency, competitiveness, accountability and cost-effectiveness promoted by neoliberal policymakers and researchers has undermined the progressive ideals of education (Mukhopadhyay and Sarangapani, 2018) and specifically the relevance of teachers (Compton and Weiner, 2008). As the findings of the study indicate, contractual employment contributes to teacher demoralization and disempowerment in more than one way. Thus, with Mukhopadhyay and Ali (2021), we advocate educational reform efforts that act “with” teachers rather than “on” teachers (p. 1,302). Addressing the diverse dimensions of precarity in teachers' lives that can augment dignity of and a sense of security among the teachers can be a great step in this regard. Policymakers may be sensitized to the adverse impacts of contractual employment on teachers. In states such as Odisha where financial constraints no longer exist, the policy of hiring contract teachers can be abolished.

9. Conclusion

Taking into account the growing body of research on the effectiveness of contract teachers, this article posed the question of how contractual employment affects teachers themselves. The findings suggest that contractual employment contributes to precarity in the lives of teachers in six dimensions: prioritization of non-teaching work over teaching, financial hardships, sense of inferiority, anxiety about transfer, experiences of discrimination, and desire for course correction. In the face of uncertainties, teachers await the regularization of their employment. However, by that time, as one of the participants said, “the damage has already been done”. We also explored why the policy of hiring contract teachers continues despite criticism and proposed that it be reconsidered.

Given the limited amount of research available concerning the effects of contractual employment on teachers, future studies may explore the extent and nature of precarity in the lives of contract teachers in diverse contexts. It is important to know whether strict enforcement of contract norms by dismissing non-performing teachers has the effect of incentivizing them, as the proponents of contract teacher hiring policy claim (Bruns et al., 2011; Kingdon et al., 2013), or it places them in more precarious positions as the present study indicates. Most importantly, as Lorey (2015, pp. 2–4), suggests, we need to investigate the “cracks and potentials for resistance,” the “counter-conducts” that subvert the disciplinary power of the mode of governance through precarisation.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

This study involving human participants was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of NISER Bhubaneswar. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

BA is the lead researcher who conceptualized the study and collected the data. PS had a supervisory role initially and contributed

to the thematic analysis. Both were involved in writing the manuscript. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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