

# Overcoming Teaching Hurdles: The Contract of Service Teachers' Journey to Permanent Positions

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## Abstract

The aim of this research is to determine the lived experiences, professional challenges, and coping strategies of Contract of Service (COS) teachers at Abra State Institute of Science and Technology (ASIST) Main Campus Extension–La Paz. COS teachers are essential to Philippine higher education institutions but face precarious work conditions, including job insecurity, delayed compensation, lack of benefits, and limited access to institutional support and career advancement. These challenges impact both their professional growth and the quality of education they deliver.

The researcher employed total enumeration of COS teachers from the Criminology, Political Science, and Social Work departments at ASIST Main Campus Extension–La Paz. Data were collected through intensive interviews and focus group discussions using open-ended questions to reveal the depth and extent of their lived experiences. Thematic analysis based on Clarke and Braun's method was used to analyze transcribed data and elicit recurring themes. Ethical principles were observed throughout the research.

Findings indicated COS teachers faced professional and emotional challenges characterized by financial strain, mental health issues, and lack of recognition. They struggled with institutional inequalities, including exclusion from leadership positions and unequal access to development. Despite these constraints, participants showed resilience through coping strategies such as pursuing graduate degrees, establishing support networks, maintaining a positive attitude, and self-financing career advancement. The research also identified their limited but essential access to institutional training schemes, seen as stepping-stones to permanency.

Based on the findings, the research urges improvement of COS teachers' employment conditions through clearer paths to regularization, timely payment, and fair access to development. Recommendations include providing graduate study assistance, formal mentorship programs, inclusive leadership participation, and institutionalizing regular feedback loops to enhance policy and practice. This study promotes reforms that empower COS teachers and support quality, equitable education aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4).

**Keywords:** *Contract of Service teachers, job insecurity, professional development, coping strategies, Sustainable Development Goal 4.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Contract of Service (COS) teachers play an important part in bringing quality education to state universities and colleges. However, their temporary status faces great challenges, such as career development and limited assistance. These challenges thereby cause them precariousness, impacting the Contract of Service (COS) teachers' security, together with the quality of education received by students.

SDG 4, also known as Sustainable Development Goal 4, is aimed at ensuring equitable and inclusive quality education and helping create lifelong learning opportunities for all. The existence of qualified and committed teachers has played a fundamental role in the attainment of this goal. However, Contract of Service teachers face many challenges in becoming permanent teachers. The common problems are job insecurity and limited access to professional growth. Their uncertain employment can then impact their motivation and performance, which in turn can affect the students. These will provide a stable and effective teaching workforce, which is the center of focus of SDG 4 in improving teacher conditions and creating sustainable learning institutions.

Similar concerns also affected tertiary teachers in other countries. Adjunct teachers in the United States of America, who are like Contract of Service (COS) teachers in the Philippines, share the common dilemma of low salaries, no benefits, and insecure employment. As of 2021, according to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) report, adjuncts usually cover a large majority of undergraduate courses and are battling precarious employment and small amounts of professional development.

In Europe, there have been heated debates about precarious academics. Research by Courtois and O'Keefe (2021) showed that in nations such as Ireland and the United Kingdom, adjunct faculty experience obstacles to career growth, like indefinite tenure tracks and institutional bias. Likewise, in India, contract teachers in universities tend to be without access to professional status and economic stability, as emphasized by a study by Jayaram (2019).

Tertiary education in the Philippines has increased so much with the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (RA 10931). Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) have recruited more COS teachers to fill gaps in the workforce to bridge this gap. Based on research conducted by Alburo et al. (2020), the majority of Contract of Service teachers in the Philippines were employed on provisional contracts, which were renewed typically on a semester basis, and earned salaries that were significantly lower than those earned by permanent teachers. COS teachers are also not included in institutional benefits like opportunities for tenure track, research grants, and input into curriculum design. Abadilla (2018) similarly brings to the fore the fact that COS teachers are excluded from decision-making and have limited institutional support, resulting in frustrations over their contract of service status even as they undertake similar tasks as permanent teachers. Basas et al. (2020) write about how state universities and colleges' COS teachers experience such problems as low pay and limited opportunities for career advancement, which lead to disappointment and frequent staff changes. Bautista & Aligada (2021) highlight the role of precarious employment in the career advancement of COS instructors in state universities and colleges, whereas Diaz & Flores (2022) lay stress on the absence of formal career growth plans for these teachers, which in turn circumscribes their job opportunities.

In the Philippines, Contract of Service (COS) teachers are covered under some government policies that govern their hiring status and limitations. COS teachers are not regular employees of the government as declared under DBM Budget Circular No. 2017-2 and



Commission on Audit (COA) Circular No. 2012-01, nor are they given security of tenure or standard benefits like PhilHealth, Pag-IBIG, and GSIS. Their contract of employment is often temporary and subject to the agency's needs and availability of funds. The Civil Service Commission (CSC) likewise indicates that COS employees are excluded from civil service rules and cannot be permanently appointed to the Plantilla. COS teachers were usually hired to address teacher scarcity concerns and may also be compensated for Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE). COS instructors perform major roles in providing instruction and are nevertheless given precarious situations with small, if any, profits, a lowered income scale, and a weak guarantee for continuation, despite falling under performance rating programs that would decide future hiring.

The Commission on Higher Education has implemented some initiatives to support Contract of Service teachers through career advancement and permanent employment. Among them is CHED's scholarship grants, which include the Scholarships for Instructors Knowledge Advancement Program (SIKAP), which helps Contract of Service teachers secure permanent positions. They provide monetary grants through tuition fees and allowances for further master's and doctoral studies. SIKAP bridges the gap that often delays their eligibility for tenure. This initiative not only improves the professional skills of teachers but also makes them more competitive in the ASEAN and the world. Additionally, Santos (2023) examines the impact of government policies, particularly those of the CHED, on COS teachers' employment issues. Even with some reforms, he says that there are still policy loopholes, primarily in providing job security and clearer career progression to permanent employment.

Research reveals that nepotism, partisan interference, and paper-intensive evaluations affect fair hiring in higher educational institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines, especially in state universities and colleges. Politics have been found, based on the study of Abdullah et al. (2018), to play a role in faculty and leadership appointments, which leads to merit-based recruitment. Nepotism is also not uncommon, with political affiliations and family ties at times given priority over competence in appointments (International Journal of Specific & Technology Research, 2019). Requirements for credentials, such as higher degrees and publications, can also get in the way of qualified individuals because of money (Abdullah et al., 2018). Furthermore, conversion from a contract of service (COS) to permanent employment in higher education institutions (HEIs) poses several challenges. These challenges may consist of obstacles, slim chances for advancement, and issues regarding fairness and equity in the hiring and promotion process. Moreover, considerations such as competition for slim tenure-track opportunities make this journey even more difficult.

In Abra, teachers under Contract of Service (COS) encounter more difficulty due to unique socio-cultural and educational situations in the region. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) of the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) has answered by establishing programs to answer, especially those who are geographically far from the metropolitan areas. Regional integration and professional development programs are being initiated, with institutions like the Abra State Institute of Sciences and Technology (ASIST) leading the charge. ASIST provides important training, research, and extension services to enhance the capabilities and career paths of COS teachers.

Local and global research continually identifies systemic disparities in the employment patterns of higher education, specifically among COS teachers. This research investigates the lived experiences of COS teachers in tertiary education, identifying the specific barriers they



encounter and the coping mechanisms they employ while striving for permanent roles. The study provides actionable recommendations for policymakers and education administrators to change employment practices, enhance teachers' assistance mechanisms, and create fair career paths. By solving these issues, institutions can create a more secure, well-supported, and motivated teaching profession, ultimately improving the standard of tertiary schooling.

### **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

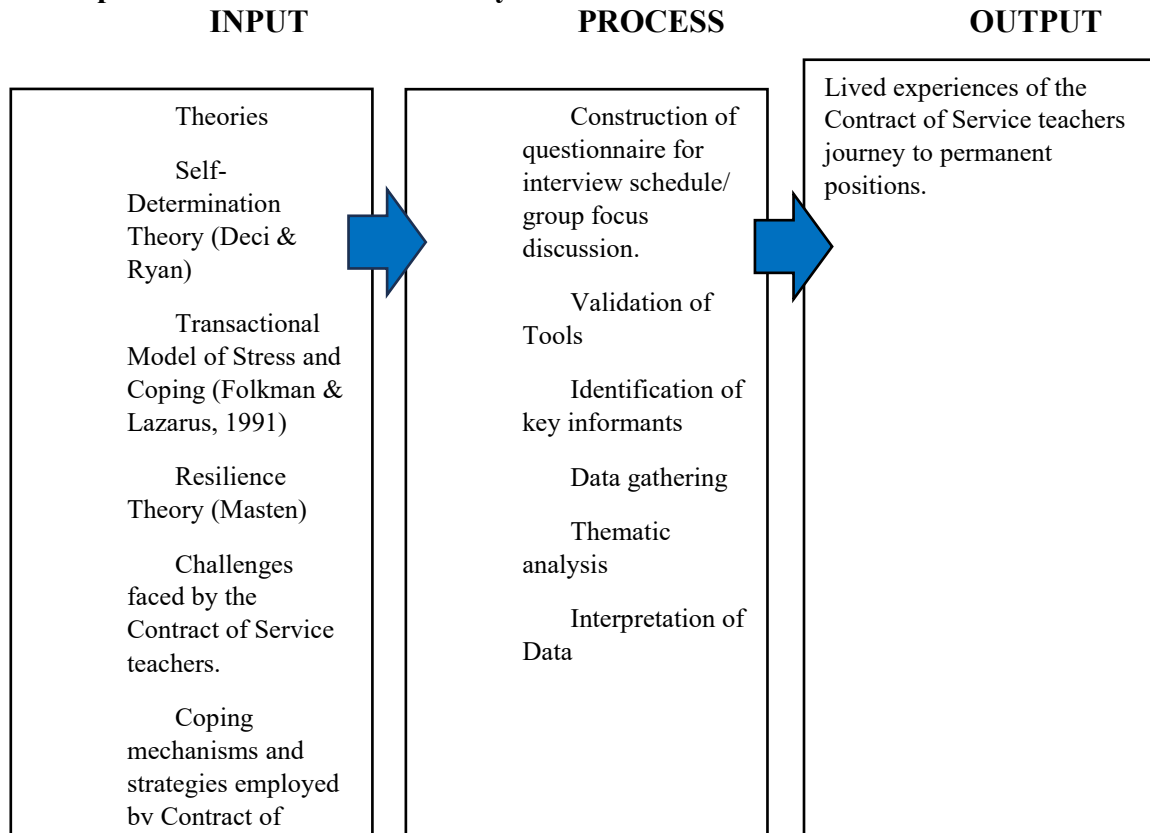
This research is based on the following theories: self-determination theory, the transactional model of stress and coping, and resilience theory. Distinctly, theory provides a specific understanding of the experiences and challenges of contract teachers, especially in coping with personal and professional misfortunes.

**Self - Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan).** This theory explains the extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, for example is employment security, drives their commitment. The theory explains how contract of service teachers continue to be committed despite adversity in the form of financial insecurity, overworked conditions, and insecure career progression. Their ability to derive meaning and satisfaction from work makes them stay motivated even under adverse conditions.

**Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1991).** This perceives stress as an ongoing process in which the person interacts with the environment. Stress occurs when the individual perceives that the demands of the environment exceed the resources that they have to deal with the environment.

In the case of COS teachers, this model helps study their experience of teaching problems and how they manage their working lives. It differentiates between: Problem-focused coping, which is to attempt to meet the stressor directly, for example, seeking professional development or networking. Emotion-focused coping, which is an emotional distress coping mechanism, like seeking support from others or reframing problems positively. This situational model understands that coping behaviors vary with situation demands and is therefore a productive frame of reference for understanding COS teachers' persistence in goal achievement. This dynamic model recognizes that coping mechanisms vary with demands at the situation level and is therefore an ideal focus for understanding COS teachers' persistence in goal achievements.

**Resilience Theory (Masten, 2001).** Resilience theory focuses on rebounding after adversity in the continuation of demonstration of well-being in the face of adversity. Resilience is not a stable trait but rather a developing process as a response to personal and environmental factors. Those who are resilient compensate and develop utilizing interior strengths, for example, optimism, self-regulation, confidence, as well as external support, for example, monitoring, peer contracts, and organizational support. For Contract of Service teachers, they need to be resilient to cope with uncertainty in the role of being a temporary employee. This helps them be encouraged, cope with disappointments like contract renewals, and concentrate on long-term career goals. Together, these theories offer an integrated explanation of the Contract of Service teachers' experiences.

**Conceptual Framework of the Study**


*Figure 1. Paradigm of the Study*

The research paradigm includes the Input, Process, and Output (IPO). This IPO model provides a structured framework for conducting the research, data analysis, and generating actionable insights to see the challenges of Contract of Service teachers in their journey towards permanent positions. The Input of this study is the theories, challenges faced by the Contract of Service teachers, coping mechanisms and strategies they employed, and the support system available. The Process includes an interview schedule and group focus discussion, validation of the tool, identification of key informants, data gathering, thematic analysis, and interpretation of data. Lastly, the output of this study lived experiences of the Contract of Service teachers' journey to permanent positions.

**Statement of the Problem**

Generally, this study aims to explore and describe the lived experiences of Contract of Service (COS) teachers in their teaching at the Abra State Institute of Sciences and Technology of Abra Main Campus Extension – La Paz. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the relevant challenges and experiences faced by the respondents while under the Contract of Service status of employment?
2. How do Contract of Service (COS) teachers cope with the difficulties they encounter in their professional lives during their Contract of Service (COS) employment?



3. What professional development and growth programs can be developed to help the Contract of Service teachers under the COS status of employment?

## II. MATERIALS and METHODS

This chapter includes the research design, population and locale, data gathering tools, and procedure.

### Research Design

This research explored the pedagogical challenges of Contract of Service (COS) teachers through a qualitative approach, namely phenomenological qualitative research. Through the use of this method, the research aimed to examine the raw experiences of COS teachers in their journey to permanent positions.

### Population and Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the Abra State Institute of Sciences and Technology Main Campus Extension – La Paz. The participants of this study were the total enumeration of all Contract of Service (COS) teachers of various courses, particularly from the three main departments: Bachelor of Science in Criminology, Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, and Bachelor of Science in Social Work. The respondents took part in the face-to-face and focus group interviews.

### Data Gathering Instrument

The researcher developed an interview guide with questions for gathering data among the Contract of Service (COS) teachers in the Abra State Institute of Sciences and Technology Main Campus Extension – La Paz. These included in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were also carried out to get qualitative data and have a deeper understanding of the challenges encountered by COS teachers while striving towards permanent status. In addition, open-ended questions were used by the researcher for the in-depth interviews, and research participants were centered on the problems encountered by COS teachers while teaching at Abra State Institute of Science and Technology Main Campus Extension – La Paz. The sessions also sought to find out the strategies they used in managing the challenges.

### Data Gathering Procedure

The following data collection process was used to conduct in-depth interviews and focus group interviews of Contract of Service teachers who are employed in the Abra State Institute of Sciences and Technology Main Campus Extension – La Paz. Firstly, an interview guide was developed, which asked questions regarding the problems faced by Contract of Service teachers using open-ended questions. Second, experts verified the guide for validity in obtaining the required information. On check for validity, the selection process began. A request letter seeking permission from the Office of the President was submitted. The letter explained the purpose and scope of the study, the data collection procedure, and the expected outcomes, while highlighting the potential benefits of the study to the university and its stakeholders. After obtaining approval, potential participants were identified, focusing on teachers currently employed under Contract of Service at the Abra State Institute of Science and Technology, Main Campus Extension, Paz. Once participants were identified, focus groups and interviews were scheduled at their



convenience. Consent was obtained before each interview to ensure they understood the research and their rights as participants.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The semi-structured interviews allowed for open-ended and follow-up questions to probe for deeper understanding and clarification. All sessions were audio-recorded with participant consent to ensure accuracy and facilitate later analysis. To protect the identity of the participants, the researcher used codenames. Upon completion of the interview data, it was transcribed. This cycle was repeated until data saturation occurred, where no new information or themes arose during the interviews. Ethical considerations were considered, and the data collected ensured validity, accuracy, and its representativeness as expressed by the experiences of teachers under Contract of Service at Abra State Institute of Science and Technology Main Campus Extension-La Paz.

The researcher used thematic analysis to present the findings of the study. According to Clarke and Braun (2006), thematic analysis is defined as the process of extracting themes or patterns from the data gathered and employing these themes to resolve the research issue (Maguire et al., 2017). The researcher studied the manuscripts and listened to the recorded data from the interviews. The gathered data was transcribed into writing, and the common answers were coded. Theories and related literature were used to interpret the data. The six steps of Clarke and Braun's thematic analysis process were as follows:

- Familiarization with the data,
- Initial coding,
- Collating codes with supporting data,
- Searching for themes,
- Reviewing themes, and
- Writing the narrative.

### III. RESULTS

This chapter presents the interpreted data gathered in this study. It presents the full details of discussing and interpreting the problems of the study based on the lived experiences of the contract of service teachers' journey to permanent positions.

#### **Problem 1. What are the relevant experiences and challenges faced by the respondents while under the Contract of Service status of employment?**

**Table 1, Relevant Experiences and Challenges Faced by Respondents Under the Contract of Service (COS) Employment Status**

Axial Theme	Codes
Job Insecurity and Lack of Benefits	No job security, delayed/low salary, no benefits
Emotional and Mental Challenges	Workplace stress, Toxic environment, Emotional burden
Lack of Professional Development and Career Advancement	Master's degree requirement, Lack of academic advancement, Career competition, Limited development opportunities



Heavy Workloads	Excessive teaching load, multi-subject preparation, overtime for task completion, and large class sizes
Navigating Relationships and Building Support Networks	Toxic colleagues, the Importance of support circle
Limited Access to Professional Development and Leadership Opportunities	Inequity in recognition and funding for training, Priority given to permanent faculty in professional development, Equal participation in some seminars and training, excluded from institutional committees and leadership roles
Inequity in Growth Opportunities Compared to Permanent Faculty	Enrolling in graduate programs for career advancement, personal investment in education for growth, Graduate studies viewed as a pathway to job security
Contract Status as a Barrier to Leadership Roles	Limited participation in leadership roles, Lack of leadership opportunities despite competence, Barriers to formal leadership positions

Table 1 presents the relevant experiences and challenges faced by teachers under Contract of Service (COS) status. The data reveal that COS teachers face multifaceted struggles that significantly impact their professional, emotional, and personal well-being. Through thematic analysis of the interview responses, eight core themes identified: (1) job insecurity and lack of benefits, (2) emotional and mental challenges, (3) limited access to professional development and career advancement, (4) heavy workload, and (5) navigating relationships and building support networks, (6) limited but valuable access to professional development, (7) inequity in growth opportunities compared to permanent faculty, (8) contract status as a barrier to leadership roles

**Job Insecurity and Lack of Benefits.** The most prominent and consistent theme identified in this study is job insecurity and lack of benefits. Respondents expressed deep concerns about the instability of their employment status. Unlike permanent teachers, Contract of Service (COS) teachers are not guaranteed continuous service, leading to constant uncertainty about whether they will be rehired for the succeeding academic year. This precarious employment situation causes persistent anxiety and stress among COS teachers.

One respondent shared, *“The biggest challenge I’ve encountered is job insecurity because contract teachers do not have the same stability as permanent faculty members.”* Respondent 7 echoed this sentiment, *“The lack of permanent status, no work benefits, and no job security is tough, especially when I’m not sure if I’ll be hired next semester.”*



In addition to employment instability, low and delayed salary was a recurring issue. Respondents reported that they were often paid below standard salary rates, and their salaries were sometimes delayed, affecting their financial security. One teacher stated, *“Our salary sometimes gets delayed, and I can’t pay my bills on time because I don’t know when it will come.”* Another added, *“We earn less and have fewer benefits, especially since I am one of the breadwinners in my family.”*

These concerns are consistent with CSC and DBM Joint Circular No. 1, Series of 2017, which outlines the Guidelines on the Contract of Service and Job Order Workers in the Government. According to this circular: “COS workers are not entitled to salaries and benefits enjoyed by regular government employees such as mid-year and year-end bonuses, health insurance, retirement pay, or leave credits. Their compensation is determined by the agency based on available funds and often not aligned with Salary Standardization Law (SSL) rates.”

This policy landscape complements COS teachers’ vulnerabilities. As noted in the research, they are not eligible for GSIS, PhilHealth, or Pag IBIG contributions, which further subjects them to health and financial insecurities. According to one of the respondents, “we don’t have any insurance benefits like GSIS, Pag IBIG AND Phil Health.” The absence of uniform salary scales and social protection, according to CSC guidelines, contributes majorly to job dissatisfaction, psychological strain, and professional disengagement among COS workers diminishes their motivation and decreases their long – term commitment to public education service.

**Emotional and Mental Challenges.** The second major theme that is revealed is the emotional and mental struggles experienced by Contract of Service (COS) teachers. Most respondents explained stresses, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion associated with both the transitory nature of their employment and with the workplace culture. A few teachers reported the existence of a toxic work culture, under which they were judged, excluded, or downgraded on account of their non- permanent status.

Respondent 5 said, *“It was tough to handle toxic colleagues; it made me wonder whether I could handle being a COS teacher long – term.”* Similarly, Respondent 4 shared, *“I wish I had known how tough this journey would be the insecurity, the unfair treatment, and the way some of my colleagues would attempt to bring me down just because I am COS.”*

The psychological cost of job insecurity was another consistent issue. Respondent 11 explained, *“The greatest challenge that I overcome was managing the emotional stress resulting from being constantly unsure about my future.”* Respondent 17 further stated, *“It was emotionally draining because I’m not sure whether I would still be employed the following semester,”* whereas Respondent 19 agreed, *“If I had known beforehand how hard it was going to be, I would have been better prepared.”*

As per de Guzman et al. (2019), these findings establish that contract teachers are frequently under stress from interpersonal conflicts and job insecurity, both of which have tremendous effect on psychological and emotional stress.

**Lack of Professional Development and Career Advancement.** A lot of Contract of Service (COS) teachers were eager to improve professionally but were constrained by cost considerations, job insecurity and institutional inability to support them. Urgency to earn a master’s degree to become permanent was a shared concern. Respondent 12 stated, *“Securing permanent status was very difficult, it was a long process. Completing a master’s degree was*



*difficult due to financial limitations.*” Respondent 5 also shared the same view, saying, *“for me the biggest challenge is taking up my master’s degree because it requires a lot of money.”*

Others mentioned that training and professional growth opportunities were more frequently offered to regular teachers, making it more difficult for COS teachers to enhance their skills or qualify for promotions. As Respondent 7 noted, *“The permanent and COS teachers are treated very differently, especially when it comes to training, most of which, particularly those funded by the school or held outside the province, are reserved for permanent employees.”*

This disparity created a sense of exclusion and professional stagnation among COS teachers. Respondent 19 thought, *“I wish I had known more about the challenges that come with being a COS, particularly the restricted access to chances. Having known these things previously would have also prepared me emotionally.”* Likewise, Respondent 12 confessed, *“I did not know that having a COS teacher status would restrict me from attending seminars or opportunities for development.”*

The relevance of higher education qualifications was also highlighted. Respondent 14 said, *“I didn’t know that a master’s degree is a requirement in order to get a permanent job earlier on.”* Others complained about the overall system. Respondent 2 said, *“I wish I had been more familiar with the aspects of job permanency and career growth in academe,”* while Respondent 8 added, *“having more access to professional development and additional training would have made me feel better prepared.”*

Their views indicate a wider systemic problem where COS teachers tend to be overlooked for professional development prospects, thereby disadvantageously positioning them on long term career advancements. This is a conclusion supported by the study conducted by Ledesma and Lindo (2021), which disclosed that COS teachers often have no access to professional development resources, significantly restricting their opportunities for progression and reducing their prospects of obtaining permanent employment.

**Heavy Workloads.** The pressure of handling large class sizes and studying for several subjects within limited time frames. Respondents often work overtime outside regular teaching hours, resulting in fatigue and eventual burnout.

As noted by Respondent 8, *“We, teachers don’t just work 8 hours. The teaching profession demands more than the time available to work.”* Likewise, Respondent 7 stated, *“The workload is too much; I had to teach several subjects and prepare with minimal time.”* The class size challenge was stressed by Respondent 21, who said, *“I have to deal with over 50 students in one classroom, which was extremely difficult for me as a new teacher.”*

Other participants referred to the complex role of teaching duties. Respondent 13 clarified, *“The pressures of lesson preparation, grading, and dealing with students were better than I anticipated,”* while Respondent 16 complemented, *“Sometimes, I had to work late into the evenings simply to complete lesson plans and grading.”*

This result supports the research by Rivera et al. (2019), which determined that contract of service teachers tend to have more heavy workloads than their permanent colleagues, which results in job dissatisfaction and a higher risk of burnout.

**Navigating Relationships and Building Support Networks.** The fifth theme, Navigating Relationships and Building Support Networks, was an important part of the Contract of Service (COS) teachers’ experiences. While a few respondents experienced cold, competitive, or even unfair treatment from their permanent colleagues, most of them developed coping strategies by building strong relationships with colleagues who were in the same contractual



situation. These peer relationships played a crucial role as emotional anchors, allowing them to cope with stress and uncertainty surrounding their employment status.

One of the respondents gave the following: *“Having other COS teachers who realize the same challenges has enabled me to survive emotionally,”* and so the importance of common experience in fostering resilience. Another teacher said, *“If not for my co – COS friends, I would have already given up,”* emphasizing the sense of peer support as being a strong protective factor against burnout and disappointment.

Some respondents indicated that they felt undervalued or downgraded in the workplace. As Respondent 10 related, *“I was emotionally affected when regular colleagues treated us an inferior. But I found comfort in the company of other COS teachers.”* Respondent 6 also shared similar feelings, stating, *“It’s tough when you feel isolated at work. I’m thankful that I built good relationships with fellow COS teachers who understand the struggle.”* In spite of there being discrimination as Respondent 18 explained, *“There are supportive colleagues, but you can sense the discrimination sometimes”* most teachers were able to form tiny, dependable support networks. These networks proved vital to dealing with the emotional requirements of the job. As Respondent 1 described, *“I depend on a little group of colleagues who are also COS teachers.*

*They are my support system,”* and Respondent 9 stressed, *“Workplace toxicity is present, but creating good relationships makes all the difference.”*

These results support the study of Santos and Dela Cruz (2021), which also found that the capacity to construct supportive professional networks also decisively enhances the coping ability of Contract of Service teachers amidst occupational stress, inequity, and instability.

#### **Limited Access to Professional Development and Leadership Opportunities.**

Contract of Service (COS) teachers indicated they gained access to professional development activities including workshops and seminars. Nonetheless, these were frequently narrow in depth and relevance, consistency. Although these training sessions assisted in establishing confidence and core capabilities were often generic and unaligned with the teachers’ subject specializations or long – term professional development.

Respondent 1 said, *“The ISO 9001-2015 was a difficult but fun experience.”* *It was very useful in gaining confidence.”* Likewise, Respondent 10 also said, *“There were seminars, workshops, and training. Although they were beneficial, I wish there were programs particular to our technical area.”* Respondent 3 agreed, *“Some opportunities that shaped me and made me a more confident person were the seminar workshops and training.”*

In spite of the advantages, several respondents indicated limited access to more sophisticated development initiatives like research grants, specialization – oriented training, or leadership development classes. Respondent 12 explained, *“There were training available, but they were not adequate for me to develop in my field of specialization.”* Similarly, Respondent 2 noted, *“Opportunities were scarce. Access to advanced degrees and research funding was largely reserved for permanent faculty.”*

These issues are corroborated by Gonzales et al. (2019), who reason that Contract of Service teachers undergo training marginalization, where their exposure to quality professional development is limited. Likewise, SEAMEO (2020) reiterates that Contract of Service teachers’ trainings tend to be lacking in content specifically, which affects subject mastery and innovation in education.

Aside from development constraints, COS teachers are subjected to structural limitations on engagement in leadership and decision – making activities at their institutions. Some



respondents felt angry at being left out of administrative positions, committee memberships, and organizational core functions, regardless of their capabilities.

This restriction is supported by Section 5 of CSC-DBM Joint Circular No. 1. Series of 2017, which declares: *“COS and JO employees shall not be assigned to perform functions pertaining to standard Plantilla positions, like signing formal documents, issuing instructions that bind the agency, or representing the agency in official capacity.”*

Therefore, COS teachers are prevented by law from taking up leadership roles or functions that will identify and leverage their competencies outside the classroom. Respondent 11 said, *“Even when we do a good job, we cannot be given leadership roles because we are not permanent employees.”* This exclusion generates a sense of institutional invisibility where COS teachers feel heard and their contributions and efforts undervalued.

Lack of participation in administration can ruin motivation and diminish their professional identity. Without them, their growth, job satisfaction, and long – term commitment to the teaching profession could still be hindered.

**Inequity in Growth Opportunities Compared to Permanent Faculty.** The seventh theme, inequity in opportunities for growth compared to permanent faculty, reflects the experienced and perceived setbacks of Contract of Service (COS) teachers in availing institutional opportunities for professional development. Although a few COS teachers enjoyed occasional limited training programs, the majority reported a distinct and persistent imbalance in accessing funded research, training, leadership positions, and institutional promotion.

Respondent 2 narrated, *“No, there were more opportunities for permanent faculty members, including research funds, conference travel grants, and tenure – track privileges.”* Similarly, Respondent 5 remarked, *“No, I didn’t feel I had the same opportunities. COS teachers were often overlooked.”* This was echoed by Respondent 16, who said, *“No, permanent teachers had more access to continuous training and leadership roles,”* and Respondent 11 emphasized, *“Permanent teachers had more chances to be invited for national training.”* Respondent 14 added, *“They always prioritize permanent teachers for programs, especially those with funding or travel.”*

Some COS teachers acknowledged a few inclusive efforts. Respondent 3 observed, *“I believe COS and permanent teachers have the same opportunities in some seminars and training.”* Respondent 1 also remarked, *“Yes, I do. I believe the passion to work for yourself or to improve yourself made no difference.”* However, these instances were outliers rather than the norm.

The CSC-DBM Joint Circular No. 1, s. 2017, contributes to this structural disparity. It states that: *“COS workers are not entitled to career development training programs that are intended for regular government employees, unless otherwise allowed by the agency.”*

While the policy provides some flexibility, it places discretion in the hands of agency leadership. In practice, this often results in the exclusion of COS teachers from formal development programs. Respondent 8 highlighted this issue, stating, *“We are rarely invited to training opportunities. Sometimes, only plantilla teachers are prioritized.”*

This institutional arrangement fosters what Guevarra (2020) calls the “invisible participant” phenomenon where COS teachers, despite performing similar duties, are systematically excluded from the development pipeline. Arenas and Javillonar (2021) similarly found that access to professional growth is often exclusive to regular or tenured faculty.



The inequity in growth opportunities diminishes morale, discourages long-term engagement, and undermines the potential of COS educators to fully contribute to educational improvement. Institutions should adopt policies that ensure equal access to specialized training, research support, and leadership roles regardless of employment status to create a more inclusive and high-performing teaching workforce.

**Contract Status as a Barrier to Leadership Roles.** The seventh theme, *Contract Status as a Barrier to Leadership Roles*, highlights how Contract of Service (COS) status is widely perceived as a limiting factor in assuming formal leadership roles even among experienced and capable teachers. Many respondents expressed frustration over being excluded from administrative positions and school-based committees.

Respondent 2 shared, *“My status limited my participation in leadership roles. Opportunities were given to permanent faculty.”* Respondent 13 emphasized, *“You cannot lead any position even though I had the passion and commitment. We are deprived from doing so.”* Similarly, Respondent 14 stated, *“My contract status barred me from department roles.”* Respondent 19 continued, *“We’re kept out of significant committees or even elections to leadership positions.”* Respondent 5 stated, *“I believe I could lead, but my COS status gets me overlooked when it comes to administrative decisions.”*

Other than these, some COS teachers managed to find alternate channels to display leadership or had little roles bestowed upon them. Respondent 8 said, *“Being COS is not a disadvantage in taking leadership positions. I can assert that my leadership is comparable to the advice of the other department.”* Similarly, Respondent 21 stated, *“Formal leadership positions were restricted, but were concentrating on classroom leadership and teamwork.”* Respondent 9 explained, *“I was able to give inputs in team meetings, but restricted access to professional development made it difficult for me to participate in leadership roles.”*

The exclusion of COS teachers from leadership positions is an indication of a systemic devaluation of their potential contributions to institutional governance. Not only does it inhibit their professional development, but it also constrains the range of voices in decision – making. Inclusive leadership, however, institutions need to unlink leadership opportunities from employment status and instead frame them on competence, experience, and commitment. Providing COS teachers with leadership training, committee participation, and administrative responsibilities will foster a more equitable and vibrant learning environment.

According to Oracion (2022), who reports that educational institutions' leadership is often associated with employment status. Although contractual teachers can show leadership in subtle manners, they are hardly given formal decision – making powers or administrative positions.

Briefly, Contract of Service (COS) teachers experience the degrading challenges they experience, such as job insecurity, restricted benefits access, emotional stress, and professional stagnation. Regardless of their commitment and talent, the structural inequities they face like exclusion from leadership positions, lack of adequate professional development, and excessive workloads severely hinder their growth and well-being. These problems require immediate intervention by educational institutions to provide a more supportive and inclusive environment that recognizes the efforts of COS teachers and ensures equal opportunities for career progress, emotional support, and professional growth. By addressing these challenges, we can empower COS teachers and enhance the overall quality of education.



**Problem 2. How do Contract of Service (COS) teachers cope with the difficulties they encounter in their professional lives during their Contract of Service (COS) employment?**

**Table 2, Coping Mechanisms Employed by COS Teachers in Navigating Challenges**

Axial Theme	Codes
Resilience and Perseverance	COS teachers remain determined and focused on long-term goals, enduring uncertainty in their roles.
Professional Development	Teachers invest in upskilling through further education, training, and research to enhance career prospects.
Building Support Networks	Strong relationships with colleagues and mentors provide emotional and professional support.
Maintaining a Positive Outlook	Teachers focus on staying optimistic and finding satisfaction in their work, despite challenges.
Pursuit of Graduate Studies as Key to Progress	Taking up graduate programs for career growth, Investment in education for self - advancement, Graduate studies as a road to job stability

Table 2 illustrates the coping strategies by Contract of Service (COS) teachers in coping with challenges.

With job insecurity, limited institutional support, and no access to permanent benefits, Contract of Service (COS) teachers create a different coping strategy in dealing with both emotional and professional stress. These strategies not only indicate their resilience but also their professionalism in ensuring the teaching profession despite challenges. Based on the interview and supported by current psychological theory, the discussion identifies crucial themes and an understanding of how COS teachers manage to hold themselves together in times of uncertainty.

The coping strategies embraced by COS teachers are a dynamic interaction of individual resilience, effective self-investment, and intense motivations for institutionally recognized respect. Based on Folkman and Lazarus (1991) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping these teachers employ both problems – focused coping like studying for graduate school and developing support systems and emotion – focused strategies, such as optimism and emotional control.

**Resilience and Perseverance.** A common thread running throughout is Resilience and Perseverance, in which teachers repeatedly showed determination in the face of uncertainty. As Respondent 5 explained, “*Being a COS teacher was stressful and challenging but it taught me resilience,*” and Respondent 10 explained, “*Despite disappointments, I decided to keep going because I love teaching,*” Respondent 17 repeated the same: “*I kept reminding myself that all this was only temporary,*” highlighting the psychological energy needed to remain energized. These accounts support Masten’s (2001) Resilience Theory, which conceptualizes resilience not as an exceptional capacity but rather as a universal ability to flourish in spite of adversity.

**Professional Development and Upskilling.** Equally significant is Professional Development and Upskilling in which many COS teachers pursued as a means towards personal and professional development. Respondent 2 responded, “*I took up my master’s degree and attended all seminars available,*” whereas Respondent 15 indicated, “*Research presentations provided me with confidence and visibility.*” Others, such as Respondent 13 and Respondent 20,



specialized in training related to their specialization, as they thought that it would improve their qualifications. These teachers actively sought self-improvement to remain competitive despite limited institutional support—mirroring *Salas & Juanillo's (2021)* findings that many COS teachers self-finance graduate studies as a form of self-validation. *Ingersoll (2001)* also notes that continuous learning contributes positively to teacher satisfaction and retention, particularly among non-permanent educators.

**Building Support Networks.** Another vital coping strategy is Building Support Networks. Teachers leaned on peers and mentors to manage workloads and emotional strain. Respondent 9 shared, *"I built strong relationships with my co-teachers who helped me adjust,"* and R11 added, *"My mentor guided me on what to do and how to survive the contract system."* Others, like R8 and R23, emphasized that emotional support from fellow COS teachers gave them strength. These accounts highlight the emotional value of collegial bonds and align with *Ingersoll and Strong (2011)*, who stressed the importance of mentorship in fostering early-career resilience and retention.

**Positive Outlook and Adaptability.** Finally, maintaining a Positive Outlook and Adaptability was a core emotional strategy. Respondent 8 shared, *"I told myself every day, 'this too shall pass' and smiled through it,"* while R17 stated, *"I stayed flexible and adjusted to whatever was needed."* Others, like R12 and R16, emphasized the importance of mindset and focusing on controllable aspects of the job. These perspectives affirm *positive reappraisal*, a concept from *Folkman & Lazarus (1991)* that involves reframing stressful situations through an optimistic lens to protect emotional well-being.

**Pursuit of Graduate Studies as a Key to Advancement.** For many Contracts of Service (COS) teachers, pursuing a Master's degree has become a strategic move to improve their qualifications, enhance their competencies, and increase their chances of securing permanent employment. Respondent 4 stated, *"Master's degree, it will help my career growth."* Respondent 20 echoed this, saying, *"We are offered to enroll and study our master's degree while teaching. I believe that will help me grow professionally."* Similarly, Respondent 13 shared, *"Masteral with uniting and seminars helped my confidence and eligibility."* Respondent 7 remarked, *"Even if I'm busy, I study my Master's to increase my chance for a permanent item."* and Respondent 6 affirmed, *"Taking my master's degree is part of proving that I'm serious about teaching."*

The consistent pursuit of graduate studies among COS teachers highlights both their commitment to professional growth and the gaps in institutional support for career advancement. While commendable, the self-financing burden may deter some from further education, especially those already juggling full-time teaching responsibilities. Institutions should recognize these efforts and consider providing financial assistance, study leaves, or formal incentives to support COS teachers in their academic advancement. Such support mechanisms would not only be advantageous to the individual teacher but also to the quality and stability of the overall teaching workforce.

These are results of how graduate education is both a credentialing necessity and a process of self-empowerment. *Salas and Juanillo (2021)* highlight that most COS teachers pursue graduate education as both a professional imperative and a personal method of self-validation. *Mercado (2018)* further suggests that such activities are typically self-funded, making up for the absence of organized institutional funding for further studies.



Together, these answers indicate the collective struggle of COS teachers, who have to navigate a professional environment of inequality, exclusion, and precariousness. Their adaptation strategies whether based on skill development, emotional resilience, or activism speak a deep commitment to the profession. The interference is obvious: schools and educational institutions should not only appreciate these endeavors but also establish more inclusive structures. This encompasses formal mentorship, equal access to training, more defined routes to permanency, and institutional recognition of their services. Only then can the resilience of these teachers be equaled by the support that they rightly deserve. The persistent undertaking of graduate studies by COS teachers' degree is viewed as a strategic career step to advance their qualifications and professional prospects, the economic and time demands continue to be hindrances. Institutions can aid these initiatives by providing money, study leaves, or official incentives so that COS teachers are not only rewarded for their dedication but also facilitated to reach their career ambitions.

**Problem 3. What are the professional development and growth opportunities available to the respondents under the COS status of employment?**

**Table 3, Professional Development and Growth Opportunities of COS Teachers**

Axial Theme	Codes
Institutional support and access	Provided seminars, workshops, and trainings
Self-initiated Professional Growth	Participation in webinars and online trainings

Table 3 shows the Professional Development and Growth Opportunities of Contract of Service teachers' status.

Institutional support and access. It can be seen from the data that most Contract of Service teachers identified and valued the professional development opportunities offered by their respective institutions. In spite of being non – permanent employees, numerous respondents indicated that they had access to workshops, seminars, webinars, and in – service training programs to enhance their teaching competence and professional capabilities.

These institutional interventions positively impacted their instructional strategies, confidence, and sense of belonging in the school community. For example, Respondent 3 cited, *“The seminar workshops and training that the institution offered helped me enhance my strategies and methods in the classroom,”* demonstrating how institutional support led to the improvement of pedagogical practices. Likewise, Respondent 6 said, *“Seminars and training are adequate enough that enabled me to progress and become and enhance teachers.”* Solidifying the fact that these chances are critical to teacher growth.

Respondent 9 specified, *“School gives us training and development workshops which assist me in my profession,”* testifying to the alignment of these activities towards long – term career objectives. In addition, Respondent 12 detailed a broad array of learning structures, such as online courses, webinars, and conferences, showing the diversity and flexibility in modes of delivery. Finally, Respondent 21 reported, *“As a COS, I enjoyed access to different opportunities for professional development like workshops, seminars, and training sessions provided by the*



*institutions.*” Highlighting that some institutions try to include COS teachers inclusively in professional development opportunities.

These results indicate that although such opportunities may not be equally available in all institutions, there is an increasingly better understanding of the need to nurture COS teachers’ development. Engagement in institutional development courses not only increases instructional ability but also consolidates the feeling of belongingness and professionalism among non-permanent teachers.

This is also reinforced by the qualitative study of Salas and Juanillo (2021), who noted that while individual teachers pursue professional development on their own, institutional training programs available provide important substances for their professional development and integration into the school community. Likewise, Mercado (2018), in the professional growth and development of public-school teachers in the Philippines, concluded that workshops and in-service training significantly enhance teaching practices and enhance job satisfaction among both permanent and contract teachers. These results are consistent with the introspection of Respondent 3,6, and 9.

In addition, Bautista, Bernardo, and Ocampo (2019), in their research inequities in teacher professional development: experiences of non-permanent teachers in Philippines public school, discovered that permanent teachers tend to be prioritized, but there are institutions that actively make efforts to involve COS teachers in capacity-building. This is the same experience of Respondents 12 and 21, who underscored the importance of equal inclusion in training activities.

Overall, these studies reaffirm the fundamental contribution of institutional support in facilitating COS instructors to overcome systemic impediments. Fair access to personal development not only improves individual performance but also helps create a more cooperative, motivated, and professionally active teaching force.

Self-initiated professional growth. Self-initiated professional growth emphasizes the proactive measures initiated by Contract of Service (COS) teachers to advance their profession despite the absence of institutional support and job security. COS teachers have limited opportunities for professional development, yet they show an impressive resilience by pursuing education advancement on their own. It includes taking graduate studies, attending seminars, undertaking research activities, and obtaining certifications.

These behaviors show a strong determination and self-motivation to pursue personal and professional development opportunities, usually at their own cost, representing a high degree of self-financed and involves making substantial time and resources-related sacrifices.

Sample answers: Respondent 4: “*Master’s Degree, it will be beneficial for my career development.*” R13: “*Masteral with uniting and seminars.*” Respondent 20: “*We are offered to enroll and study our master's degree while teaching. I believe that will help me grow professionally and I find this sufficient in my career.*” Respondent 10: “*There were seminars, workshops and training. While they were helpful, I wish there were programs specifically related to our specialized field.*” Respondent 12: “*Yes, school-based workshops, online courses and webinars and conferences and seminars.*” These responses illustrate how COS teachers are not merely passive recipients of professional development but active agents in their own growth. Even when formal support is limited, they strive to enhance their qualifications and teaching effectiveness through self-initiated actions.



Tan (2020) highlighted that Filipino teachers pursuing graduate degrees often do so independently to improve their qualifications and secure better career opportunities, particularly in competitive teaching environments. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) reported that actively seeking professional development amongst teachers makes them more reflective, effective, and resilient in a multicultural classroom environment. Gonzales (2019), assumed that temporary teachers within the Philippine context are pressured into self-financing and acquiring extra credentials as a stepping stone toward permanency. Eventually, this theme shows the COS teachers in determining their careers and stresses the necessity of systems that facilitate and incentivize such self-directed activities.

Generally, COS teachers show a high degree of professionalism and dedication by undertaking means of career development on their initiatives. These findings highlight both the commitment of COS teachers and the educational institutions and policymakers to acknowledge their efforts and offer increased institutional support for their professional development.

#### **IV. DISCUSSION**

The following are the findings of the study.

Contract of Service (COS) teachers experienced various challenges in their employment, mostly due to job insecurity and lack of benefits. Emotional and mental stress were also common, with respondents experiencing anxiety, burnout, and feelings of undervaluing because of job insecurity, unhealthy workplaces, and limited institutional support. Opportunities for professional growth and career promotion were limited. The intense workload, as most COS instructors juggled full loads of teaching, resulted in physical exhaustion and bad work-life balance, all without proper institutional support.

Contract of Service (COS) teachers used different coping strategies to deal with the setbacks of their employment status. There was a high sense of resilience and determination that arose as a shared characteristic, with most seeing their jobs as stepping stones and staying focused on their teaching profession despite adversities. Ongoing professional development was also a predominant strategy, with respondents highlighting the need to upskill, pursue graduate studies, and carry out research to help both personal and professional development. Establishing support networks also came into show while keeping a positive attitude was on full display.

The researcher recognized the availability of professional development and growth opportunities during their COS status through the institutional support and access they enjoy and the self-initiated professional growth.

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

Based on findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

The challenges experienced by Contract of Service (COS) teachers are job insecurity, lack of benefits, limited professional development, and heavy workload can influence their efficiency, motivation, and well-being. Such circumstances not only hinder their career and personal development but also influence the quality of education imparted to students.

Contract of Service (COS) teachers demonstrate high determination and positive attitude despite numerous challenges in their profession. They adapt by pursuing further study, acquiring new skills, conducting research, and relying on supporting advice from peers and friends. These demonstrate the commitment they are to education and self-development, even under challenging circumstances.



The respondents recognized that despite being in Contract of Service (COS) status, there were still options for professional development. These resulted from institutional assistance in the form of access to training or facilities and also from their initiative to enhance themselves through self-directed learning and growth. This emphasizes that, even under less stable employment status, COS teachers can seek career progress when provided with institutional support, together with their initiative for personal growth.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

The Institution and their respective government offices must consider how to enhance the employment status of COS teachers by establishing a clearer path to permanency, timely salary, and entitlement to basic employment benefits;

The Institutions must provide equal opportunities for COS teachers to attend professional development seminars, training, and workshops regardless of employment status. Both in-person and online opportunities must be made available;

Institutions must provide financial support, study leave schemes, or scholarship opportunities to assist COS teachers pursuing Master's Degrees as this will be an important step in their career growth;

Formal mentorship schemes must be established, where veteran teachers guide COS teachers in collaboration, emotional support, and mutual professional growth;

COS teachers must offer chances to join leadership positions and decision-making, particularly in school initiatives, committees, and academic projects, to appreciate their role and potential;

Institutions should regularly review the experiences and needs of COS teachers, utilizing feedback to influence policies, enhance working conditions, and support them better on their professional path.

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