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ABSTRACT

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Contract Faculty in Telangana Universities: Disparities in Recognition, Workload and Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the disparities in recognition, benefits, teaching load, job security, and professional development opportunities experienced by contract faculty in Telangana universities. Despite their critical role in sustaining higher education, contract faculty often face systemic challenges not encountered by their tenure-track counterparts. The objective is to evaluate these inequities and propose actionable recommendations for fostering a more equitable and supportive academic environment. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 211 contract faculty members across nine universities in Telangana, spanning disciplines such as Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities & Arts, and Engineering. A semi-structured questionnaire incorporating a five-point Likert scale was administered via Google Forms. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA, and homogeneity tests to assess disparities. Findings reveal that 100% of respondents reported receiving no Dearness Allowance, House Rent Allowance, or medical benefits. Additionally, 30.3% lacked leave benefits and only 21.8% had access to professional development opportunities. The mean score for recognition-related perceptions was 2.92 (SD=1.690), indicating low institutional acknowledgment. Teaching loads were reported as equal or higher than those of regular faculty, with 65 respondents indicating a “very high” workload. This study offers region-specific insights into the lived realities of contract faculty in Telangana, contributing to the discourse on academic equity in Indian higher education. The recommendations-enhancing recognition

practices, ensuring equitable benefits, balancing workloads, improving job security and expanding professional development access-align with broader institutional reforms and aim to improve job satisfaction, retention, and the overall quality of education.

Keywords: contract faculty, recognition disparities, job security, professional development, teaching load, higher education, faculty benefits, academic equity, university governance, job satisfaction.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Universities are multifaceted institutions that serve as engines of intellectual growth, social transformation and economic development (Sanyal & Martin, 2008). They function not only as centres of learning and research but also as workplaces for a diverse spectrum of academic professionals (Harris & Holley, 2016). Among these, contract teaching faculty constitute a significant and growing segment, particularly in Indian public universities, where they are often appointed on temporary or fixed-term bases to meet rising student enrolments and faculty shortages (Baume & Popovic, 2016; Gallas & Shah, 2024).

In Telangana, the reliance on contract faculty has intensified over the past decade, yet their professional experiences remain markedly different from those of regular, tenure-track faculty. This study evaluates disparities in five key

dimensions: recognition, benefits, teaching load, job security and professional development opportunities. These disparities raise critical questions about fairness, institutional equity, and the sustainability of higher education systems. While contract faculty contribute substantially to teaching and departmental operations, they often lack access to institutional recognition, comprehensive benefits, and long-term career pathways (Klainot-Hess, 2020a; Cohen, 2013).

Recognition, a cornerstone of academic identity and job satisfaction, is frequently elusive for contract faculty (Day et al., 2005). Without the permanence or visibility afforded to regular faculty, they may struggle to establish reputations or participate in governance structures, leading to diminished morale and professional disenfranchisement (Locke & Latham, 1990). Similarly, disparities in benefits—such as health insurance, retirement plans and leave entitlements—create financial and personal stress, undermining their well-being and long-term engagement (Klainot-Hess, 2020b).

Despite these challenges, limited scholarship has addressed the lived realities of contract faculty in the Indian context, particularly within Telangana's state universities. Existing studies tend to generalize faculty experiences or focus on national-level policy without capturing region-specific dynamics. This research fills that gap by offering empirical insights into the conditions of contract faculty across nine universities in Telangana, thereby contributing to the discourse on academic equity and institutional reform.

By framing the study around five core dimensions—recognition, benefits, teaching load, job security, and professional development—the research provides a structured lens to examine systemic disparities. These issues are not only administrative but also pedagogical, as they influence faculty motivation, student learning outcomes, and the overall quality of education. Addressing them is essential for fostering inclusive governance, enhancing institutional resilience and advancing social justice in higher education.

Teaching load is a significant factor in the work-life balance of faculty members (Rashid et al., 2022). Contract faculty often carry heavier teaching loads, sometimes with less support and fewer resources than regular faculty (Qazi Abdul Subhan, 2023). This increased workload can lead to burnout and negatively affect the quality of education they provide (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014). Job security is another major concern for contract faculty. The temporary nature of their contracts can create a sense of instability and uncertainty about their future (Smithson & Lewis, 2000), affecting their long-term career planning and overall well-being. In contrast, regular faculty often enjoy the stability of tenure or long-term contracts. Professional development opportunities are essential for faculty growth and advancement (Kilag et al., 2023).

1.1 Understanding the Nature of Work for Contract Faculty

The professional experiences of contract faculty differ markedly from those of regular faculty due to the temporary and often precarious nature of their appointments. Typically hired to meet immediate teaching demands, fill staffing gaps, or manage rising student enrollments, contract faculty often assume highly variable roles across disciplines (Levin & Quinn, 2003). This flexibility, while beneficial to institutions, can result in a lack of specialization and continuity for the faculty themselves.

Balancing teaching responsibilities with research, service and community engagement poses significant challenges. Respondents noted that their temporary status often excludes them from supervising Ph.D. scholars or participating in scholarly activities essential for career advancement (Duffy, 2019). This imbalance can lead to a cycle where teaching dominates their workload, limiting opportunities for professional growth and institutional visibility.

Recognition of contract faculty contributions is frequently constrained by their transient roles. Unlike regular faculty who benefit from long-term departmental integration, contract faculty may struggle to establish a lasting presence or receive

acknowledgment for their work (Schenkewitz, 2019; Brandford et al., 2022). This lack of recognition can erode professional identity and diminish their sense of belonging within the academic community.

Access to professional development resources—such as workshops, conferences and research grants—is critical for faculty advancement (Baldwin & Others, 1981; Smith & Gillespie, 2023). However, many contract faculty report limited institutional support in this area, which hinders skill enhancement and long-term career planning.

The disparities in recognition, benefits, workload, job security and development opportunities between contract and regular faculty present urgent challenges. Addressing these inequities is essential to fostering a more inclusive and supportive academic environment. By evaluating these differences, this study aims to identify actionable solutions that ensure contract faculty feel valued, empowered and able to contribute meaningfully to the university's mission.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To assess disparities in institutional recognition between contract faculty and regular faculty in Telangana universities.
- To evaluate differences in access to faculty benefits, including allowances, insurance and retirement provisions.
- To analyse variations in teaching load and workload distribution across disciplines.
- To examine the level of job security and contractual stability experienced by contract faculty.
- To investigate the availability and utilization of professional development opportunities among contract faculty.
- To develop actionable recommendations for improving equity, support, and institutional inclusion of contract faculty.

This study employs a quantitative research design using survey methodology, with data collected from 211 contract faculty members across nine universities in Telangana. Statistical tools such as

ANOVA and descriptive analysis were used to identify patterns and disparities.

2.1 Importance of the Study

The significance of this research lies in its region-specific focus on Telangana's public universities, offering empirical insights into the lived experiences of contract faculty—a group often overlooked in national policy discourse. By highlighting disparities in recognition, workload, and career advancement, the study contributes to the broader conversation on academic equity and institutional reform.

The findings have implications for

- Higher education policy-making, especially in the context of faculty recruitment and retention strategies.
- Institutional governance, by informing equitable practices in workload distribution and benefit allocation.
- Student learning outcomes, as faculty well-being directly influences teaching quality and academic engagement.
- Social justice in academia, by advocating for inclusive and supportive environments for all faculty members.

This research fills a critical gap in the literature by contextualizing contract faculty challenges within Telangana's higher education landscape, thereby offering practical recommendations for systemic improvement.

III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study employed a descriptive survey design, which was deemed appropriate for capturing the perceptions and lived experiences of contract faculty regarding disparities in recognition, benefits, teaching load, job security and professional development. The design facilitated the collection of standardized data across a diverse population, enabling comparative analysis and the identification of patterns within the academic workforce.

The research was conducted across nine public universities in Telangana state: Osmania University, Telangana University, Kakatiya

University, Palamuru University, Satavahana University, JNTU(H), Mahatma Gandhi University, Telangana Mahila University, and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University. These institutions were selected to represent a cross-section of higher education contexts in the region. The study focused on four major academic disciplines: Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities & Arts and Engineering.

The target population consisted of 1,445 contract faculty members employed across these universities. A sample of 211 faculty members—approximately 20% of the population—was selected using simple random sampling, ensuring a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Randomization was achieved by generating a randomized list of faculty contacts from departmental rosters and inviting participants through stratified outreach across disciplines. Regular faculty were excluded from the sample to focus exclusively on the self-reported experiences of contract faculty. Comparative insights regarding regular faculty were drawn from institutional norms and secondary literature, rather than direct survey data.

Data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire developed and distributed via Google Forms. The instrument included both open-ended and closed-ended items, with a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The questionnaire was reviewed by subject experts for content validity and piloted with a small group of faculties to refine clarity and relevance. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.82, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The questionnaire measured dimensions such as perceived recognition, access to benefits, workload intensity, job stability and professional development opportunities.

To mitigate response bias, participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Reminders were sent to non-respondents and participation was voluntary to reduce self-selection effects. The final dataset was analysed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate measures of central tendency

(mean, standard deviation), while cross-tabulation was applied to examine relationships between variables such as discipline, community status, and qualification levels. One-way ANOVA and homogeneity tests were employed to test hypotheses regarding disparities across groups. Assumptions of normality and homoscedasticity were verified prior to conducting ANOVA.

While the methodology was rigorous, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to personal bias or selective recall. The representativeness of the sample, though statistically justified, may not capture all nuances of contract faculty experiences across institutions. Additionally, the exclusion of regular faculty from direct survey participation limits the scope of comparative analysis.

Despite these limitations, the study offers a robust and contextually grounded examination of contract faculty conditions in Telangana universities, contributing valuable insights for institutional reform and policy development.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Work Experience of Contract Faculty

The study examined the work experience distribution among 211 contract faculty members across nine universities in Telangana. The data reveal a notable trend of long-term service among contract faculty. The majority of contract faculty (84.3%) have over a decade of teaching experience, with 42.8% serving between 11 to 15 years and 41.5% exceeding 16 years. This reflects a high degree of institutional continuity and professional commitment. However, despite their long tenure, many faculty members remain in precarious employment conditions without access to promotion, retirement benefits, or job security.

4.1.1 Qualitative Insights from Group Discussion (GD-I)

Faculty members participating in group discussions expressed deep concern over the lack of institutional recognition and benefits, even after decades of service. Several recurring themes emerged:

- *Absence of Retirement Benefits:* Faculty reported retiring as assistant professors after 30–35 years of service without receiving pension, gratuity or other retirement entitlements.
- *Equal Workload, Unequal Recognition:* Participants emphasized that their teaching responsibilities often matched or exceeded those of regular faculty, yet they were excluded from formal recognition and career advancement.
- *Unacknowledged Contributions:* Despite publishing in reputed journals and guiding students, contract faculty felt their academic contributions were undervalued.

One faculty member noted:

“Some of our colleagues retired without any promotion or retirement benefits. We perform the same duties as regular faculty, yet we are invisible when it comes to recognition.”

These insights underscore systemic inequities in job security and recognition—two core objectives of this study. The persistence of long-term service under temporary contracts reflects institutional gaps in policy implementation and workforce planning. The findings call for urgent reforms to ensure that contract faculty are not only retained but also respected and supported within the academic ecosystem.

4.2 Community Representation Across Disciplines

The study analysed the distribution of contract faculty members across academic disciplines and community categories, revealing patterns of representation and potential gaps in inclusivity. Table 1 presents the demographic breakdown.

Table 1: Community Status and Type of Faculty

Community	Sciences	Social Sciences	Humanities & Arts	Engineering	N
General Category	25	6	0	6	37
Other Backwards Classes	77	45	13	13	148
Scheduled Tribes	7	6	0	0	13
Schedule Caste	6	0	0	7	13
Total	115	57	13	26	211

The data indicate that the Sciences department hosts the largest number of contract faculty (115), followed by Social Sciences (57), Engineering (26) and Humanities & Arts (13). The Other Backward Classes (OBC) constitute the most represented community, accounting for 70.1% of the total sample. In contrast, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes each comprise only 6.2% of the faculty population.

Notably, SC and ST faculty members are absent in Humanities & Arts and underrepresented in Engineering and Social Sciences. This uneven distribution suggests potential barriers to entry or retention for marginalized communities in certain disciplines. The absence of General Category faculty in Humanities & Arts also reflects a skewed demographic pattern.

These findings align with the study’s broader objective of examining equity and recognition within university systems. The data underscore the need for targeted inclusion strategies and community-sensitive recruitment policies to ensure balanced representation across disciplines. Enhancing diversity not only promotes social justice but also enriches academic discourse and institutional resilience.

4.3 Ph.D. Status of Contract Faculty

The study examined the academic qualifications of contract faculty across four major disciplines, focusing on whether faculty members had secured their Ph.D. degrees in accordance with University Grants Commission (UGC) norms. Table 2 presents the distribution.

Table 2: Type of Faculty and faculty Ph.D. status

Type of Faculty	No Ph.D.	Yes, as per UGC norms	N
Sciences	13	102	115
Social Sciences	13	44	57
Humanities & Arts	0	13	13
Engineering	13	13	26
Total	39	172	211

The data reveal that 81.5% of contract faculty (172 out of 211) have earned their Ph.D. degrees in compliance with UGC standards, reflecting a strong commitment to academic excellence. The Humanities & Arts discipline shows full compliance, with all faculty members holding Ph.D. qualifications. However, notable gaps exist in Sciences, Social Sciences, and Engineering, where a combined total of 39 faculty members have yet to attain doctoral degrees.

This disparity highlights areas where further academic support and professional development may be needed. In particular, the Engineering department shows an equal split between Ph.D. holders and non-holders, suggesting potential challenges in qualification pathways or institutional support mechanisms.

The findings align with the study's objective of evaluating professional development opportunities. While the overall qualification rate

is commendable, the presence of faculty without Ph.D. credentials-especially in technical and research-intensive fields-underscores the importance of sustained efforts to promote higher academic attainment. Institutional initiatives such as research grants, mentorship programs, and eligibility support for doctoral enrolment could help bridge these gaps and enhance the quality of education and research across disciplines.

4.4 Teaching Eligibility Qualifications: NET and SET Status

The study assessed the teaching eligibility qualifications of contract faculty across disciplines, focusing on their status with respect to the National Eligibility Test (NET) and the State Eligibility Test (SET). These certifications are critical for academic recruitment and career progression in Indian universities. Table 3 presents the distribution.

Table 3: Type of Faculty and Qualified for teaching eligibility test

Faculty	No, NET or SET	Only NET	Only Set	Both NET & SET	N
Sciences	26	20	56	13	115
Social Sciences	12	18	14	13	57
Humanities & Arts	0	0	7	6	13
Engineering	13	7	0	6	26
Total	51	45	77	38	211

The data reveal that SET is the most commonly attained qualification, with 77 faculty members (36.5%) holding only SET certification. A total of 38 faculty members (18%) have qualified for both NET and SET, while 45 (21.3%) hold only NET. However, 51 faculty members (24.2%) have not

qualified for either test, indicating a significant gap in teaching eligibility credentials.

Disciplinary variations are evident. The Sciences department shows a strong presence of SET-qualified faculty (56), but also the highest number

of faculty without NET or SET (26). Engineering presents a concerning profile, with 50% of its faculty lacking either qualification. In contrast, Humanities & Arts demonstrates full compliance, with all faculty members holding at least one certification.

These findings align with the study’s objective of evaluating professional development opportunities. The presence of faculty without NET or SET qualifications-particularly in Sciences and Engineering-suggests the need for targeted institutional support. Initiatives such as preparatory workshops, mentoring programs, and financial assistance for test registration could help bridge these gaps and enhance faculty eligibility.

Moreover, the uneven distribution of qualifications across disciplines may reflect

structural barriers, such as limited access to test preparation resources or differences in recruitment practices. Addressing these disparities is essential for fostering equitable career advancement and maintaining academic standards across Telangana’s universities.

4.5 Teaching Load Compared to Regular Faculty

The study examined the perceived teaching load of contract faculty across disciplines, comparing it to that of regular faculty. The data reveal significant disparities, particularly in Sciences and Engineering, where contract faculty report heavier workloads. Table 4 presents the distribution.

Table 4: Type of faculty and teaching load compare to regular faculty

Faculty	Equally	Somewhat High	Very High	N
Sciences	58	25	32	115
Social Sciences	32	12	13	57
Humanities & Arts	6	7	0	13
Engineering	0	6	20	26
Total	96	50	65	211

Overall, 45.9% of contract faculty (96 members) report teaching loads equal to those of regular faculty, while 23.7% (50 members) describe their workload as somewhat high, and 30.8% (65 members) consider it very high. The Engineering department stands out, with 76.9% of its faculty reporting very high teaching loads and none reporting parity with regular faculty. In contrast, Humanities & Arts shows a more balanced workload, with no faculty reporting excessive teaching demands.

These findings align with the study’s objective of evaluating workload disparities. The data suggest that contract faculty, particularly in Sciences and Engineering, are often tasked with heavier teaching responsibilities, potentially without corresponding institutional support or recognition. This imbalance may contribute to

burnout, reduced job satisfaction and diminished teaching quality.

The results also highlight the need for equitable workload policies that consider discipline-specific demands and ensure fair distribution of teaching responsibilities. Addressing these disparities is essential for fostering a supportive academic environment and enhancing the overall effectiveness of faculty contributions.

4.6 Access to Employment Benefits

The study assessed the availability of employment benefits for contract faculty across Telangana universities. The data reveal stark disparities in financial, health, and professional support when compared to tenure-track faculty. Table 5 presents the distribution of benefits.

Table 5: Benefits Received by Contract Employees in Universities

Statement	N (YES)	%	N (NO)	%
Dearness allowance (DA)	0	0	211	100
House rent allowance (HRA)	0	0	211	100
Conveyance allowance	39	18.5	172	81.5
Medical allowance	0	0	211	100
Leave encashment	0	0	211	100
Pension	0	0	211	100
Gratuity	0	0	211	100
Provident fund	0	0	211	100
Medical insurance	0	0	211	100
Group insurance	0	0	211	100
Leave benefits	64	30.3	147	69.7
Academic leave	72	34.1	139	65.9
Professional development opportunities	46	21.8	165	78.2

The data show that contract faculty are systematically excluded from core employment benefits. All 211 respondents reported receiving no DA, HRA, medical allowance, pension, gratuity, provident fund, or insurance coverage. Conveyance allowance was available to only 18.5% of faculty, while leave benefits and academic leave were accessible to 30.3% and 34.1% respectively. Professional development opportunities were reported by just 21.8% of respondents.

These findings reflect a critical gap in institutional support, directly impacting the financial security, health coverage and career advancement of contract faculty. The absence of basic entitlements-often extended even to industrial workers-raises concerns about the structural marginalization of academic professionals in temporary roles.

4.7 Qualitative Insights from Group Discussion (GD-II)

Faculty members with over 15 years of service voiced deep frustration over the lack of benefits despite their sustained contributions. Key themes included:

- **Disparity in Compensation:** Faculty highlighted that their salaries were lower than those of regular faculty, despite performing equivalent duties.
- **Exclusion from Research Opportunities:** Contract status limited their eligibility to apply for government-funded projects or serve as Ph.D. supervisors.
- **Unrecognized Excellence:** Despite publishing in reputed journals and mentoring students, their achievements were not institutionally acknowledged.

One participant remarked

“We are treated as temporary, yet we have served for decades. Even basic benefits like medical insurance and gratuity are denied to us-benefits that are standard in private sectors.”

These insights reinforce the study’s objectives related to recognition, benefits, and professional development. The findings call for urgent policy reforms to ensure that contract faculty are not only retained but also respected and supported. Equitable access to benefits is essential for enhancing job satisfaction, institutional loyalty, and the overall quality of education.

4.8 Recognition and Professional Development Opportunities

The study assessed contract faculty perceptions regarding institutional recognition and access to professional development opportunities.

Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), with mean scores and standard deviations calculated for each item. Table 6 presents the results.

Table 6: Faculty perception on recognition with in university

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	St. Div
Establish specific awards or honours for contract faculty, recognizing excellence in teaching, research, or service	211	1	5	2.92	1.690
Include contract faculty representation on the faculty senate or other governing bodies.	211	1	5	2.97	1.737
Contract faculty as opportunities for professional development, such as workshops, conferences, or research grants	211	1	5	3.19	1.640
Contract faculty with experienced tenure-track to offer mentorship and guidance	211	1	5	3.03	1.696
Highlight the contributions of contract faculty in university newsletters, websites, or public events.	211	1	5	3.24	1.543
Recognize contract faculty achievements within their departments	211	1	5	3.20	1.582
Contract faculty have opportunities for professional development and advancement	211	1	5	2.94	1.674
universities often provide funding or support for contract faculty to attend workshops, conferences, or professional development seminars	211	1	5	2.61	1.613

The highest mean score (3.24) corresponds to the visibility of contract faculty contributions in public-facing platforms such as newsletters and websites, suggesting moderate institutional efforts in external acknowledgment. Recognition within departments (mean=3.20) and access to professional development activities (mean=3.19) also received general agreement, indicating some support for skill enhancement and career visibility.

However, the lowest mean score (2.61) reflects limited funding or institutional support for attending workshops and conferences-an essential component of academic growth. Similarly, the moderate scores for awards (2.92), governance inclusion (2.97), and career advancement (2.94) suggest that contract faculty perceive recognition

structures as insufficient or inconsistently applied.

These findings align with the study's objectives concerning recognition and professional development. While faculty acknowledge the importance of institutional support, the data reveal gaps in implementation and resource allocation. The relatively low scores for funding and advancement opportunities point to systemic barriers that may hinder long-term career progression and morale.

Addressing these disparities requires universities to institutionalize inclusive recognition practices, allocate dedicated resources for contract faculty development, and ensure their representation in decision-making bodies. Such reforms are

essential for fostering a more equitable and empowering academic environment.

4.9 Faculty Perceptions Based on Experience

The study assessed contract faculty perceptions across ten key statements related to recognition, compensation, workload, job security,

professional development, and institutional support. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), with mean scores and standard deviations calculated. Table 7 presents the results.

Table 7: Faculty response with their experiences

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	St. div
I feel adequately recognized for my contributions as a contract teaching faculty	211	1	5	2.28	1.381
The salary I receive as a contract teaching faculty is fair and competitive	211	1	5	1.84	1.204
I have sufficient opportunities for professional development and advancement	211	1	5	1.82	1.215
The benefits provided to contract teaching faculty are comparable to those offered to regular faculty.	211	1	5	1.38	.798
I believe that contract teaching faculty are treated fairly and equitably within the university.	211	1	5	1.55	.921
The workload assigned to contract teaching faculty is reasonable and manageable	211	1	5	3.10	1.414
I feel secure in my position as a contract teaching faculty	211	1	5	1.89	1.256
I am satisfied with the overall job satisfaction and work-life balance as a contract teaching faculty	211	1	5	1.92	1.166
The university provides adequate support and resources for contract teaching faculty	211	1	5	1.80	1.126
I would recommend a career as a contract teaching faculty to others.	211	1	5	1.62	1.082

The data reveal consistently low mean scores across most indicators, suggesting widespread dissatisfaction among contract faculty. The lowest mean score (1.38) pertains to benefit comparability, indicating that faculty overwhelmingly perceive their benefits as inferior to those of regular faculty. Similarly, perceptions of salary fairness (1.84), job security (1.89), and institutional support (1.80) are notably low, reflecting systemic gaps in compensation and workplace stability.

Recognition (mean = 2.28) and professional development opportunities (mean = 1.82) also scored poorly, underscoring the need for inclusive acknowledgment and career advancement

pathways. The only relatively positive response relates to workload manageability (mean = 3.10), suggesting that while teaching demands are high, they may be perceived as manageable in some contexts.

Importantly, the mean score for recommending a career in contract teaching (1.62) reflects deep concern about the desirability and sustainability of such roles. These findings align with the study's objectives and reinforce the urgency of institutional reforms to improve equity, support, and long-term engagement of contract faculty.

4.10 Impact of Work Experience on Recognition

To evaluate whether work experience influences the level of institutional recognition received by contract faculty, a one-way ANOVA test was

conducted across five experience categories: below 5 years, 6–10 years, 11–15 years, 16–20 years, and 21 years and above. Table 8 presents the descriptive statistics and test results.

Table 8: One way ANOVA results for work experiences and recognition within university

			Test of Homogeneity of Variances		ANOVA	
Experiences in years	mean	Std. Deviation	Levene's Statistic	Sig.	F	Sig.
Below 5	3.74	1.378	3.787	.005	4.197	.003
6 to 10	2.78	1.672				
11 to 15	2.82	1.660				
16 to 20	3.80	1.486				
21 and above	3.08	1.038				

Test Statistics

- Levene's Statistic (Homogeneity of Variances): 3.787, $p = .005$
- ANOVA *F-value*: 4.197, $p = .003$

The ANOVA results indicate a statistically significant effect of work experience on recognition ($F=4.197, p=.003$). Since the p -value is below the conventional threshold of 0.05, the null hypothesis-stating no difference in recognition across experience levels-is rejected. This confirms that faculty members' years of service significantly influence their perceived recognition within the university.

Interestingly, faculty with 16-20 years of experience reported the highest mean recognition score (3.80), followed closely by those with less than 5 years (3.74). In contrast, faculty with 6-15 years of experience reported lower recognition scores, suggesting a possible mid-career recognition gap. The relatively moderate score for those with over 21 years of experience (3.08) may reflect institutional fatigue or stagnation in acknowledgment practices.

These findings align with the study's objective of examining disparities in recognition. They suggest that while long service may enhance visibility, it does not uniformly translate into institutional appreciation. The results underscore the need for structured recognition frameworks that

consistently honour contributions across all career stages, thereby promoting morale, retention and equity among contract faculty.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the persistent disparities faced by contract faculty in Telangana universities, revealing systemic inequities in recognition, benefits, workload, job security and professional development. These disparities reflect broader trends in academic labour markets, where contingent faculty often occupy structurally marginalized positions (Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997). Situating these findings within equity frameworks and higher education policy discourse offers deeper insight into the implications for institutional sustainability and academic quality.

5.1 Recognition and Institutional Visibility

The data reveal that contract faculty perceive a lack of institutional recognition for their contributions. Low mean scores on recognition-related items suggest that many faculty members feel undervalued, which aligns with existing literature on academic precarity (Varma, 2017). This lack of acknowledgment can erode morale, diminish engagement and ultimately affect teaching quality and student outcomes. From a policy perspective, recognition is not merely

symbolic-it is foundational to building inclusive academic cultures and retaining skilled educators.

5.2 Benefits and Financial Security

Contract faculty report receiving few or no core employment benefits, including Dearness Allowance (DA), House Rent Allowance (HRA), medical insurance, and retirement provisions. These findings reflect a structural exclusion from institutional welfare systems, contributing to financial stress and job dissatisfaction. The absence of benefits, even among faculty with over 15 years of service, suggests a disconnect between service duration and institutional reward. This phenomenon resonates with labour market segmentation theory, where long-term service does not guarantee upward mobility or security.

5.3 Workload and Burnout

The study highlights significant disparities in teaching load, particularly in Engineering and Sciences, where contract faculty report “very high” workloads. This imbalance not only risks burnout but also limits time for research and professional development-key components of academic growth (Sabagh et al., 2018; Barnett & Bradley, 2007). The findings suggest that workload policies may disproportionately burden contract faculty, undermining both educational quality and faculty well-being.

5.4 Job Security and Career Stagnation

Low perceptions of job security among contract faculty reflect broader concerns about employment precarity. Despite long-term service, many faculty members remain on temporary contracts without promotion or retirement benefits. This stagnation aligns with global trends in contingent academic labour, where career pathways are often opaque or non-existent (Darvishmotevali & Ali, 2020). The lack of security not only affects mental health but also discourages talented professionals from entering or remaining in academia.

5.5 Professional Development and Governance Inclusion

Limited access to workshops, conferences, and research grants further compounds the challenges faced by contract faculty. The low mean scores on professional development indicators suggest that institutional support for skill enhancement is insufficient. Moreover, the absence of contract faculty representation in governance bodies restricts their ability to influence policies that directly affect their work. This exclusion perpetuates inequities and weakens participatory decision-making structures.

5.6 Comparative and Contextual Insights

While the study focuses on Telangana, similar patterns are observed nationally and internationally. In India, contractual appointments have increased amid budget constraints and faculty shortages, often without corresponding policy safeguards. Globally, contingent faculty face comparable challenges, as documented in studies from the United States, Canada, and Australia, where academic precarity has become a defining feature of higher education employment (Fahnert, 2015). Positioning the Telangana experience within this broader context highlights the urgency of reform.

5.7 Policy and Institutional Implications

The findings call for targeted interventions to address the identified disparities. Recommended measures include:

- Standardized contracts with clear provisions for benefits, promotion, and renewal
- Incremental benefit structures tied to years of service and performance
- Mentoring programs to support career development and research engagement
- Inclusive governance frameworks that ensure contract faculty representation
- Dedicated funding for professional development and academic participation

Such reforms are essential for fostering equity, enhancing faculty retention, and sustaining institutional excellence. Recognizing and

supporting contract faculty is not only a matter of fairness—it is a strategic imperative for the future of higher education.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the study's findings, it is evident that contract faculty in Telangana universities face systemic disparities in recognition, benefits, workload, job security, and professional development. To address these challenges, the following recommendations are proposed, organized into thematic categories and prioritized by feasibility.

6.1 Recognition and Institutional Inclusion

Short-Term (University-Level Interventions)

- Establish awards and honours recognizing excellence in teaching, research, and service among contract faculty.
- Regularly highlight contract faculty achievements in university newsletters, websites, and public events.
- Include contract faculty in departmental meetings and academic planning processes to foster visibility and inclusion.

Long-Term (Policy-Level Reforms)

- Develop transparent promotion pathways that allow contract faculty to apply for government-funded projects and serve as Ph.D. supervisors.
- Create digital platforms showcasing contract faculty research, teaching innovations, and community engagement.

6.2 Compensation and Benefits

Short-Term (University-Level Interventions)

- Offer competitive salaries that reflect qualifications, workload, and contributions.
- Provide cost-neutral benefits such as access to university health clinics, subsidized transport, and academic leave.

Long-Term (Government and Regulatory Interventions)

- Extend core benefits—Dearness Allowance (DA), House Rent Allowance (HRA), Gratuity,

Pension, and Medical Insurance—to contract faculty through standardized employment policies.

- Introduce multiyear renewable contracts with incremental benefit structures tied to years of service and performance.

6.3 Workload Management

Short-Term (University-Level Interventions)

- Implement equitable workload distribution policies across departments, ensuring parity between contract and regular faculty.
- Monitor teaching assignments to prevent burnout and maintain instructional quality.

Long-Term (Regulatory Oversight)

- Mandate workload audits and reporting mechanisms to ensure compliance with fair teaching load standards.

6.4 Job Security and Career Progression

Short-Term (University-Level Interventions)

- Offer longer-term contracts with clear renewal criteria and performance-based incentives.
- Establish mentorship programs pairing contract faculty with senior faculty to support career development.

Long-Term (Policy-Level Reforms)

- Create tenure-track conversion pathways for long-serving contract faculty.
- Introduce state-level guidelines for career progression and retirement planning for contract faculty.

6.5 Professional Development

Short-Term (University-Level Interventions)

- Allocate professional development funds for contract faculty to attend workshops, conferences and training programs.
- Provide access to internal research grants and collaborative projects.

Long-Term (Government and Institutional Collaboration)

- Develop centralized platforms for contract faculty to apply for national and international development opportunities.

- Encourage partnerships with academic bodies to offer certification and skill enhancement programs.

6.6 Representation and Governance

Short-Term (University-Level Interventions)

- Ensure contract faculty representation in faculty senates, curriculum committees, and grievance redressal forums.
- Conduct regular feedback sessions to incorporate contract faculty perspectives into institutional planning.

Long-Term (Regulatory Frameworks)

- Institutionalize governance inclusion through UGC or state-level mandates requiring proportional representation of contract faculty in decision-making bodies.

6.7 Job Satisfaction and Work-Life Balance

Short-Term (University-Level Interventions)

- Foster a supportive work environment through peer networks, wellness programs, and flexible scheduling.
- Recognize emotional and professional well-being as integral to faculty performance and retention.

Long-Term (Institutional Culture Building)

- Promote inclusive academic cultures that value all faculty contributions, regardless of employment status.

These recommendations aim to balance immediate institutional reforms with long-term policy transformations. By implementing both cost-effective and structural interventions, universities and governing bodies can create a more equitable, supportive and sustainable environment for contract faculty—ultimately enhancing the quality and integrity of higher education.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study set out to evaluate the disparities faced by contract faculty in Telangana universities across five key dimensions: recognition, benefits,

teaching load, job security, and professional development opportunities. Through a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative analysis and qualitative insights, the research has confirmed that contract faculty experience systemic inequities that hinder their professional growth, institutional inclusion, and overall well-being.

The findings reveal that recognition remains inconsistent, with many contracts' faculty feeling undervalued despite long years of service and significant academic contributions. Benefits such as Dearness Allowance, House Rent Allowance, medical insurance, and retirement provisions are largely absent, creating financial insecurity and emotional distress. Teaching loads are disproportionately high in disciplines like Engineering and Sciences, contributing to burnout and limiting time for research and development. Job security is tenuous, with many faculty serving for over a decade without promotion or tenure pathways. Opportunities for professional development are limited, and representation in governance structures remains minimal, further marginalizing contract faculty voices in institutional decision-making.

By focusing on Telangana universities, this study offers context-specific insights that enrich the broader discourse on contingent academic labour in India. It contributes to existing literature by documenting the lived realities of contract faculty in a regional setting, highlighting the urgent need for policy reforms that address both structural and cultural dimensions of academic employment.

If left unaddressed, these disparities risk long-term consequences: faculty attrition, declining educational quality, erosion of academic morale, and weakened institutional credibility. Urgent reforms are necessary to ensure equity, sustainability and excellence in higher education. Universities and governing bodies must collaborate to implement inclusive policies, equitable benefit structures, and transparent career pathways that recognize and support all faculty members.

Future research could explore comparative studies across Indian states, longitudinal tracking of contract faculty career trajectories, and case studies on successful policy interventions. Such scholarship would deepen understanding and inform evidence-based reforms that strengthen the academic workforce.

In conclusion, addressing the disparities faced by contract faculty is not merely an administrative obligation-it is a moral and strategic imperative for the future of higher education in India.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest associated with the publication of this research.

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