

Navigating Academic Careers: Professional Pathways of Bachelor of Elementary Education Graduates

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Abstract: The study aimed to explore the career pathways of Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) graduates under Contract of Service (COS) status who are teaching college students. Specifically, it examined the motivations that led them to pursue college teaching, described their career pathways in the college setting, and identified the opportunities and challenges that characterize their teaching experiences. The study employed a qualitative research method using a descriptive phenomenological design. Colaizzi's method of data analysis was utilized in interpreting the data gathered from eight (8) informants. Findings revealed that BEEd COS instructors were motivated to enter college teaching because of degree alignment, competitive salary and prestige, opportunities for professional growth, and personal preference for teaching adult learners. Their career pathways were marked by transition, pedagogical adaptation, continuous learning, and personal fulfillment through shaping future educators. The study also found that their experiences involved challenges in instructional and classroom practices, limited resources and facilities, and concerns regarding recognition and compensation. Despite these difficulties, the informants remained committed through adaptability, supportive colleagues, and professional development opportunities. The study concluded that BEEd graduates under COS status were able to succeed in a profession outside their expected specialization through resilience, flexibility, and dedication to teaching. The findings provide valuable insights for higher education institutions and policy makers in developing support systems, training programs, fair employment practices, and career advancement opportunities for contractual college instructors.

Keywords: academic career; bachelor of elementary education; career pathways; college teaching; phenomenology

Article info: Submitted Apr 19, 2026 | Revised Jun 1, 2026 | Accepted Jun 22, 2026 | Published Jul 25, 2026

Recommended citation: Gonzales, D. M., & Peña, J. T. (2026). Navigating Academic Careers: Professional Pathways of Bachelor of Elementary Education Graduates. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pengajaran Guru Sekolah Dasar (JPPGuseda)*, 9(2), 97–113. <https://doi.org/10.55215/jppguseda.v9i2.42>

Introduction

In the field of education, teachers are essential instruments in the success of the teaching-learning process across the various structures of the education system, including Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Within HEIs, faculty members are employed under different arrangements, ranging from tenure-track positions that ensure permanent employment to Contract of Service (COS) appointments characterized by temporary contractual engagements. In recent educational years, the increasing prevalence of instructors under COS status has become evident in many HEIs. Xu (2019) noted that hiring instructors under contractual arrangements provides institutions with greater flexibility while reducing employment costs. Despite the impermanent nature of their appointments, COS instructors continue to play an indispensable role in sustaining university operations by delivering instruction and providing meaningful learning experiences for students (Branson, 2021). The Joint Circular No. 1, s. 2017, entitled *Rules and Regulations Governing Contract of Service and Job Order Workers in the Government*, defines Contract of Service as an agreement for hiring services to accomplish specific work within a designated period. Likewise, Memorandum Circular No. 19, s. 2005 recognizes part-time instructors as members of the teaching staff who may be employed under COS or similar temporary arrangements, demonstrating that HEIs continue to rely on non-permanent faculty members to address instructional demands (Pepito & Bianan, 2026; Rugayan, 2026).

Although COS instructors perform instructional responsibilities comparable to those of permanent faculty members, they often encounter unique professional experiences shaped by their employment conditions. Part-time professors are expected to undertake duties similar to full-time faculty members, including course design, lesson planning, classroom instruction, student consultation, assessment, and grading (Danaei, 2019). In many instances, they even assume teaching loads equivalent to or exceeding those of permanent faculty (American Association of University Professors, 2024). In the Philippine higher education context, universities continue employing instructors under Contract of Service status to address faculty shortages, and many remain in temporary appointments for extended periods while awaiting opportunities for permanent employment (Japor, 2021). Previous studies have shown that contractual instructors frequently experience challenges related to compensation, benefits, recognition, workload, and job security. Carino (2021) reported that part-time faculty members in many Asian countries, including the Philippines, often receive lower compensation and fewer employment benefits than permanent faculty despite carrying comparable responsibilities. Similarly, Cabello et al. (2022), Anthony et al. (2020), Belmonte (2020), and Béteille & Ramachandran (2016) highlighted issues concerning institutional recognition, uncertainty in teaching assignments, excessive workloads, and limited security of tenure.

Beyond institutional concerns, prolonged exposure to heavy workloads and employment uncertainty may influence instructors' psychological and professional well-being. Whitmore (2023) explained that burnout among part-time professors may lead to anxiety, mood disturbances, reduced motivation, fatigue, sleep problems, headaches, and declining productivity. Nevertheless, existing literature also demonstrates that contractual instructors do not exclusively experience negative outcomes. Many remain committed to the profession because of their passion for teaching, professional autonomy, workplace flexibility, and desire to positively influence students' lives (McKendrick-Calder et al., 2026; Zitko & Schultz, 2020). Further suggested that numerous part-time faculty members continue teaching with the expectation of eventually obtaining permanent academic positions (Levin & Hernandez, 2014), while Powers (2016) emphasized that positive coping mechanisms and adaptive perspectives enable instructors to manage occupational pressures effectively. Professional development also serves as an important motivating factor, as graduate studies, seminars, and professional training enhance instructors' competence, confidence, and opportunities for career advancement. Continuing professional education enables educators to remain informed about emerging research, educational trends, and effective teaching practices, particularly when universities provide accessible opportunities for further academic development (Bland et al., 2023; Ladd & Sorensen, 2015; Rivero, 2015).

Among contractual instructors in higher education are graduates of the Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) program whose professional trajectories differ from the conventional pathway envisioned by their undergraduate preparation. The BEEd curriculum is primarily designed to prepare future teachers for elementary education; however, some graduates transition into higher education and assume teaching responsibilities for professional education courses and major subjects within BEEd programs (Salendab et al., 2023; Malacapay, 2022). This career movement requires substantial adaptation as instructors shift from teaching young learners to facilitating learning among adult students. Such transitions often involve modifications in pedagogy, communication styles, classroom management approaches, instructional delivery, and professional identity while simultaneously providing opportunities for career advancement, graduate education, prestige, professional growth, and personal fulfillment. Previous studies have also emphasized that teachers transitioning across educational levels must continuously adjust their pedagogical approaches according to learners' developmental characteristics and instructional needs. Despite these challenges, teaching future educators may generate a profound sense of purpose, as teachers become instrumental in students' academic growth, professional preparation, and future success (Baluyos et al., 2019).

The experiences of BEEd graduates who serve as college instructors under Contract of Service status can be further understood through the lens of Social Exchange Theory (SET) proposed by Ahmad et al. (2023), Homans (1958). SET posits that individuals continuously evaluate the balance between the costs and benefits they experience within organizations, and their organizational commitment is strengthened when perceived benefits outweigh associated costs. Within the context of this study, BEEd COS instructors invest considerable effort in adapting to higher education teaching, delivering quality instruction, and providing meaningful learning experiences despite temporary employment status and differences between their academic preparation and teaching assignments. These efforts represent the "costs" of their professional engagement. Conversely, opportunities for professional development, career advancement, prestige, fulfillment, and personal growth constitute the "benefits" they derive from their teaching experiences. Consequently, Social Exchange Theory provides a relevant theoretical foundation for understanding how BEEd COS instructors interpret their lived experiences and sustain their commitment to the teaching-learning process within Higher Education Institutions despite employment-related challenges (De Cuyper et al., 2026; Ahmad et al., 2023).

Despite the growing body of literature concerning part-time and contractual faculty, existing studies have predominantly examined employment conditions, workload, compensation, and instructional performance, while comparatively little attention has been given to the specific career pathways of BEEd graduates employed under Contract of Service status who teach college students (Pham et al., 2026; Albatin et al., 2025; Gaytos et al., 2023). In one state university in Pampanga, BEEd graduates serving as COS college instructors represent an existing yet underexplored phenomenon within Philippine higher education. Their motivations for entering college teaching, experiences in transitioning from elementary teacher preparation to higher education instruction, and the opportunities and challenges they encounter remain insufficiently documented. Addressing this gap is important because these instructors occupy a distinctive professional position that combines temporary employment with a transition across educational levels. Guided by Social Exchange Theory, this study therefore aimed to explore the career pathways of Bachelor of Elementary Education COS college instructors in teaching college students at a state university in Pampanga by examining the motivations that led them to pursue college teaching, describing their career pathways throughout this transition, and identifying the opportunities and challenges that characterize their experiences as college instructors.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design (Webb & Welsh, 2019), specifically adopting a descriptive phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of BEEd COS instructors. Descriptive phenomenology is particularly appropriate for investigating and understanding the shared meanings of individuals who have experienced a common phenomenon, event, or situation (Webb & Welsh, 2019). Through this approach, the researchers sought to capture the participants' subjective experiences while minimizing preconceived assumptions, thereby allowing the essence of the phenomenon to emerge from the participants' own perspectives. In this study, the phenomenon under investigation was the career pathways of BEEd COS instructors who pursued teaching careers in higher education. The descriptive phenomenological design enabled an in-depth examination of the motivations, career transitions, and professional experiences that shaped the participants' journeys into college teaching. By emphasizing participants' narratives, the study generated rich contextual data that illuminated both individual and shared meanings associated with their career trajectories. This methodological approach also facilitated the identification of essential themes that characterized the phenomenon while preserving the authenticity of participants' lived experiences. Consequently, the findings provide a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing career decisions and professional development among BEEd COS instructors within the context of higher education.

The participants of this study consisted of college instructors employed under a COS arrangement at one state university in Pampanga. A purposive sampling technique was employed to identify information participants who could provide comprehensive insights into the phenomenon under investigation. Purposive sampling involves the deliberate selection of participants based on their ability to contribute meaningful and relevant information regarding a specific phenomenon, concept, or research focus (Campbell et al., 2020; Robinson, 2014). This sampling strategy is particularly appropriate in phenomenological research, where participants are expected to possess first-hand experience of the phenomenon being explored. To ensure the relevance and consistency of the data, participants were required to meet the following inclusion criteria: (1) college instructor under a contract of service status; (2) graduate of Bachelor in Elementary Education major in General Education; (3) handling Professional Education Subjects and Major Subjects under the BEEd program. These criteria ensured that all participants possessed direct and substantial experience related to the research objectives. By selecting participants with shared professional backgrounds and teaching responsibilities, the study was able to generate rich, contextually grounded descriptions of their career pathways and experiences in higher education. Such participant homogeneity enhanced the depth of phenomenological inquiry by enabling the identification of common meanings and essential structures underlying the phenomenon.

The researchers crafted a letter asking for approval from the Dean of the College of Education to conduct the study. Then, the researchers wrote a letter of request to the select campus directors where they intend to conduct the interview. After being given the permission to conduct the study, an informed consent was provided to the informants to gather the necessary data needed for the study. In scheduling interviews, the researchers asked the informants for their most convenient time. The interview guide was given to the selected informants prior to their schedule, as this served as the preparation of what to expect from the interview. The interview was conducted online, through Google Meet Links, which lasted between twenty to sixty minutes, with one person audio recording for accuracy of information. The collected data were then transcribed after the interview. The researchers, with the assistance of data analyst, now began to identify the themes and codes for the informants. Transcripts were reviewed by the informants to verify the accuracy of their responses.

The data analysis of this study utilized the [Morrow et al. \(2015\)](#), [Colaizzi's \(1978\)](#) Descriptive Phenomenological Method in interpreting the collected data. This provided valuable and reliable meanings from the narrated experiences, challenges, practices, and recommendations of BEd COS college instructors. The Colaizzi's method of data analysis follow seven (7) steps. (1) Read and rereading all the transcripts; (2) Identifying significant statements or phrases; (3) Creating meanings from the identified statements; (4) Organizing the themes; (5) Developing an exhaustive description; (6) Establishing the fundamental structure; and (7) Seeking validation of the fundamental structure to the informants. Through this method, the insights and knowledge about the career pathways of BEd COS college instructors in teaching college students were revealed. [Wirihana et al. \(2018\)](#) stated that with the use of Colaizzi's method, the existing themes and interconnected relationships among people under a phenomenon will be uncovered.

The study was conducted in accordance with the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012, ensuring compliance with established ethical standards for research involving human participants. To uphold the fundamental ethical principles of the study, the researchers safeguarded the anonymity and confidentiality of the informants while demonstrating respect for their lived experiences throughout the research process. Ethical procedures included obtaining informed consent, protecting participants' privacy, and managing all collected data responsibly and securely. Prior to data collection, the informants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the expected duration, the research procedures, and any potential risks, discomforts, or adverse effects before voluntarily providing their written informed consent. The researchers also ensured that all participants were treated with dignity and respect and that their rights to privacy and data protection were fully maintained throughout the study. These ethical safeguards contributed to the credibility, trustworthiness, and integrity of the research by fostering a secure environment in which participants could openly share their experiences without fear of disclosure or misuse of their personal information.

To ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the study, the researchers adapted criteria of [Lincoln & Guba \(1985\)](#). Firstly, in ensuring credibility, the researchers employed a descriptive phenomenology approach to delve deeper and create understanding with the shared experiences of the informants. Secondly, purposive sampling technique was used in deliberately selecting the informants, with this, dependability was ensured. Thirdly, in maintaining confirmability, the instrument used in the study was validated from three experts, this made sure that the questions included from the semi-structured interview guide captured the experiences, challenges, practices, and recommendations of the informants. Lastly, transferability was ensured as the researchers provided reliable and well-written descriptions of the research design, method, and procedures, that will allow the readers to observe transferability of the findings to similar contexts. Through adhering with these four principles of trustworthiness and rigor, the researchers strengthened the overall content and findings of the study.

Result and Discussion

Using a descriptive phenomenological approach, the researchers unfold the career pathways of BEd COS instructors in teaching college students, including the motivations, opportunities and challenges, together with the unheard desires in enhancing their overall welfare. Using the [Morrow et al. \(2015\)](#), [Colaizzi's \(1978\)](#) Descriptive Phenomenological Method of data analysis, the findings of the study were classified into different themes and subthemes. To identify the informants without revealing their identity, they were coded starting from I1 to I8 which stands for informant and their corresponding numbers. The eight (8) informants have been teaching as BEd COS college instructors for at least one (1) to four (4) years, who have also previously worked as an elementary teacher. The seven (7) out of eight (8) informants are currently pursuing their master's degree. The different backgrounds possessed by the informants were vital in contributing valuable insights and perspectives for this study. The Results and Discussion section of this article is organized into three main parts to provide a comprehensive understanding of the findings. Specifically, it examines (1) Motivation for Entering College Teaching, (2) Career Pathways in Teaching College, and (3) Opportunities and Challenges, highlighting the key factors influencing graduates' decisions, career development, and experiences in higher education teaching.

Motivation for Entering College Teaching

The motivation of BEd COS college instructors to engage in higher education teaching emerged as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing four major themes identified throughout the data analysis: career alignment and qualification, salary and professional prestige, opportunities for career advancement and professional growth, and personal preferences for teaching adults rather than children. These themes indicate that participants' decisions to enter college teaching were shaped by an interplay of professional, economic, developmental, and personal considerations rather than by a single motivating factor. Career alignment and

qualification reflect the extent to which their academic preparation and professional competencies correspond with the demands of teaching in higher education. Meanwhile, salary and professional prestige represent important extrinsic considerations that may influence individuals' perceptions of the attractiveness and sustainability of the profession.

Opportunities for professional growth further suggest that college teaching is perceived as a pathway for expanding professional competencies, gaining new experiences, and advancing one's career trajectory. In addition, the preference for teaching adults over children highlights the role of individual dispositions and teaching preferences in shaping career decisions. Collectively, these motivations provide insight into why BEEd COS instructors choose to pursue and sustain teaching in higher education despite the distinct demands associated with the profession. Such motivations serve as important drivers that encourage educators to remain committed to their chosen profession, continuously exert effort, and pursue their instructional objectives. Thus, understanding these motivational dimensions is essential for recognizing the factors that shape the career decisions and professional engagement of BEEd COS college instructors.

Career Alignment and Qualification Issues

The primary driver propelling the informants to become BEEd COS instructors in higher education stems from the structural alignment with their undergraduate degree. However, a salient tension arises between their formal credentialing and their affective readiness for primary classrooms. Although the standard professional trajectory for BEEd graduates is elementary school teaching, the informants recognized a personal limitation regarding the specific socio-emotional demands of young learners, particularly lacking the requisite patience. Consequently, this critical mismatch between degree intention and personal disposition prompted a strategic reevaluation of their teaching domain. Leveraging their formal qualifications and academic background, the informants resolved this career alignment issue by making a decisive transition toward instructing college students (Müller & Gold, 2026). Rather than exiting the educational discipline entirely, they redirected their credentials to tertiary education, where their competencies could be utilized without the affective constraints of managing primary pupils (Sanchez-Danday, 2023). This shift illustrates how educators navigate qualification alignment by adapting their career trajectories to higher education settings.

This reorientation is further justified by the rigorous pedagogical foundation inherent in primary teacher education programs. Although elementary teachers are traditionally expected to teach young pupils, they possess a strong grounding in pedagogy, curriculum development, and classroom management (Müller & Gold, 2026; Sanchez-Danday, 2023). These core competencies constitute essential qualities for effectively preparing and mentoring future elementary teachers at the university level. Thus, the informants' BEEd degree provided both the theoretical legitimacy and practical capability to succeed as college COS instructors, aligning their formal qualifications with their motivation to teach in higher education. Moreover, their prior experiences in elementary education enabled them to translate pedagogical knowledge into higher education contexts while adapting their practices to the needs of adult learners (Generalao et al., 2022). This alignment between their academic preparation, professional competencies, and teaching responsibilities demonstrates that BEEd graduates can extend their pedagogical expertise beyond the conventional elementary school setting. These findings are further supported by evidence obtained from the informants' interview responses, as presented below.

"...instead of teaching in elementary, which I do not have the patience to, I cannot teach in secondary. I do not have a BSEd degree...so the safest way to do so, to teach my practice or my profession, is to teach college. Especially the BEEd. So there's an alignment with my degree and my current profession right now." - I1

Competitive Salary and Prestige

The findings indicate that competitive salary is an important extrinsic motivation influencing the informants' decision to continue working as BEEd COS instructors. Several informants reported that their current compensation was relatively better than that offered by their previous institutions. This favorable financial condition contributed to their willingness to remain in their current teaching profession. Although enthusiasm, passion, and dedication are important internal motivations, financial considerations remain essential in sustaining teachers' professional engagement. The need for competitive compensation may even outweigh these intrinsic motivations when teachers perceive that their financial needs are not adequately met (Singh, 2026; Primas, 2021). Consequently, some teachers may seek alternative teaching opportunities that provide better financial benefits. In this context, adequate compensation serves not only as an economic benefit but also as an important factor supporting teacher retention. For BEEd COS instructors, competitive salary therefore represents a significant consideration in maintaining their commitment to higher education teaching.

In addition to salary, institutional prestige emerged as another important motivation for the informants to pursue college teaching. The informants expressed a sense of pride from being employed at a state university, which contributed to their perception of professional respect and recognition. Working in a state

university was therefore viewed not only as an employment opportunity but also as a source of professional prestige. According to [Times Higher Education \(2024\)](#) noted that state universities are associated with prestige because of their emphasis on teaching, research, and internationalization. Such institutional characteristics may strengthen educators' professional identity and increase their perceived social and academic recognition. Consequently, affiliation with a reputable state university can serve as an important motivational factor alongside financial compensation. The combination of competitive salary and institutional prestige makes the position more attractive to educators ([Kraft & Lyon, 2024](#); [Price & Weatherby, 2018](#)). These findings demonstrate that both economic and symbolic rewards contribute to the informants' motivation to sustain their careers in higher education teaching. It is proven by the evidence from informants interview results for gain the data below.

"...the competitive salary. Because when it comes to salary, if I compare it to where I used to teach, it's far off, like two times, almost three times. It's really a big difference...of course, the prestige of teaching at a State University...we all know that when you teach in college, the prestige, the respect is high." - I2

Opportunities for Professional Growth

Continuous professional development is essential for teachers to strengthen their competencies and remain responsive to developments in education. Pursuing a master's degree represents an important pathway for achieving this professional growth. Teachers who pursue postgraduate education are better positioned to engage with current research, emerging educational trends, and evidence-based teaching practices ([Bland et al., 2023](#); [Ladd & Sorensen, 2015](#)). For the informants, opportunities for further education constituted an important consideration in their experience as COS instructors. Their employment provided access to an institution that offers various graduate programs relevant to their professional and academic development. This institutional environment enabled them to pursue higher academic qualifications while remaining actively engaged in teaching. Thus, postgraduate education was perceived as an integral component of their professional development rather than merely an additional academic qualification.

The findings further suggest that the availability of graduate programs within the institution created a supportive pathway for balancing professional responsibilities and academic advancement. As BEEd COS instructors, the informants were able to conveniently pursue their master's degree while continuing to fulfill their teaching responsibilities. This accessibility reduced potential barriers associated with pursuing further education while maintaining employment. The opportunity to simultaneously work and study allowed the informants to develop their academic qualifications without having to discontinue their professional activities. Moreover, continued engagement in postgraduate education may strengthen their knowledge and competencies in responding to changing demands in higher education ([Berja, 2026](#); [David & Hill, 2021](#)). Therefore, professional growth opportunities provided through accessible graduate programs served as an important motivation for the informants to remain engaged in college teaching. This finding highlights the role of institutional opportunities in supporting teachers' long-term career development. It is proven by the evidence from informants interview results for gain the data below.

"...it's also about the opportunity for professional growth. Of course, when you're already in a State University, you're inside the university, the Graduate School becomes more accessible. So, it's like, it's easier because while I'm teaching, I'm also studying for my Master's." - I2

Personal Preference for Teaching Adults Over Children

The findings indicate that the informants' personal preference for teaching at the college level was another important motivation for entering higher education. The informants expressed greater comfort in transferring their knowledge and expertise to adult learners than to elementary school children. They perceived substantial differences between teaching adults and children, particularly in terms of learners' intellectual maturity and independence. Teaching children requires instructors to adjust their approaches to accommodate their developmental characteristics and level of understanding ([Villena-Martínez & Muñoz-García, 2026](#); [Woods & Jeffrey, 2019](#)). In contrast, the informants considered adult learners more capable of engaging with academic content and managing their learning responsibilities. This perceived difference contributed to their preference for teaching college students rather than elementary school pupils. Thus, personal teaching preferences and perceived compatibility with adult learners influenced the informants' decisions to pursue college teaching.

The preference for teaching adults was also associated with the perceived practicality and reduced instructional demands of working with mature learners. According to [Welshman \(2022\)](#) and [Pollard et al. \(2023\)](#), teaching adults can be more comfortable for educators because it generally requires less physical and emotional energy compared with teaching children. Adult learners are typically more independent and capable of taking responsibility for their academic tasks, allowing teachers to adopt a less directive instructional approach. The informants similarly perceived college students as requiring less intensive supervision and behavioral adjustment than elementary learners. This perception enabled them to focus more directly on

knowledge transfer and academic instruction. Consequently, the relative independence of adult learners strengthened the informants' preference for college-level teaching. These findings suggest that compatibility between teachers' instructional preferences and learners' characteristics can play an important role in shaping career choices in higher education. It is proven by the evidence from informants interview results for gain the data below.

"I'm more comfortable in college. I've already experienced handling elementary. I've seen the difference. When you handle elementary, you're a bit tied down. It's somewhat limited when it comes to knowledge. It's like the way you... you really have to adjust to the child's level." - 14

Career Pathways in Teaching College

The career pathways of BEEd graduates under COS status in college teaching were identified into four themes throughout the data analysis. These include their transition from elementary to higher education teaching, pedagogical adaptation to college learners, professional growth and learning, and personal fulfillment through shaping future educators. These pathways reflect how the informants navigated their professional journeys in a college setting despite the demands of contractual employment. Teaching is indeed the noblest profession, as the individuals who are part of this field play a vital role in ensuring that society continues to be composed of knowledgeable citizens who possess competence and character in different facets of life. Because of this great responsibility, teachers are expected to devote their time, effort, and dedication in fulfilling their duties. In the college setting, where learners, environment, and culture are more complex, triumphs are often intertwined with inevitable challenges that instructors must face and endure, especially for those who are novice in the field and were not originally prepared to teach adult learners. This study explored the remarkable phenomenon in the field of education, the career pathways of BEEd graduates under Contract of Service status who embraced a profession in college teaching.

As the researchers investigated the phenomena further, they discovered that the informants' career paths were influenced by opportunities, challenges, transitions, and motives. Their degree qualifications, the allure of a competitive pay and prestige, chances for professional development, and their personal preference for instructing adults rather than children all played a role in their decision to pursue college teaching. Their determination to pursue a career that deviates from the conventional route taken by graduates of the BEEd was motivated by these factors. The survey also showed that their college teaching careers were characterized by growth and adaptability. They underwent a significant shift from being taught to instruct younger kids to managing college students, who call for different pedagogical strategies, deeper subject matter, and more developed classroom interactions. The respondents saw their journey as a path for professional development thru graduate education, ongoing learning, and enhancing their instructional competency despite the demands of their line of work. In addition to these, they found personal joy in molding future teachers, imparting their knowledge, and helping their students succeed.

The career pathways of BEEd COS college instructors in teaching at the college level indeed expanded their horizons. It showed that teaching college students in an environment where complexity is present is not a piece of cake. Flexibility and adaptability are needed to embrace this challenging profession. As these instructors entered a profession outside of their comfort zone, they reflected that teaching is not for the weak. It requires constant endurance, tenacity, and undying love for teaching. As they explored deeper into the dynamic realm of education in the college context, the dreams of their students in becoming elementary teachers also became part of their own mission. Resulting in their full commitment to becoming vital instruments in shaping the future generation of elementary teachers. They showed that although they are bound to establish the foundational knowledge of young learners, they can also be the gateway in providing a guided path in successfully reaching the dreams of adult learners that are nearly within the palm of their hands. After all, the BEEd graduates COS college instructors are generalists, the jack of all trades.

Transition from Elementary to College Teaching

Moving from teaching young pupils to adult learners required them to reconsider their established instructional practices and communication strategies (David & Hill, 2021; Rudio et al., 2020). The informants acknowledged that they sometimes unconsciously applied techniques previously used with elementary students when teaching college learners. Such practices created challenges because adult learners possess different levels of maturity, independence, and academic expectations. Consequently, the informants needed to modify their teaching approaches to become more appropriate for a higher education context. This transition required not only changes in instructional techniques but also adjustments in how instructors communicated and interacted with students. The findings therefore indicate that prior elementary teaching experience both supported and challenged their adaptation to college teaching. Successful transition required the informants to critically reflect on and modify practices developed during their previous teaching experiences.

One particular challenge involved adapting communication styles that had been developed through years of teaching elementary students. Len (2018) noted that elementary teachers may find it difficult to abandon child-oriented communication practices, including expressions such as “Po” and “Opo” and the use of a baby voice. Such communication patterns may become habitual because teachers consistently employ simplified language when interacting with younger learners. However, these practices may be inappropriate within higher education contexts, where students generally have more mature intellectual and communicative expectations. The informants therefore needed to gradually replace child-oriented communication with more professional and academically appropriate interactions. This adjustment was essential to maintaining instructional effectiveness and establishing appropriate teacher–student relationships in college classrooms (Villena-Martínez & Muñoz-García, 2026). The findings highlight that transitioning from elementary to college teaching involves a substantial shift in both pedagogy and professional communication. Thus, adaptation to the expectations of adult learners is an important component of developing competence as a higher education instructor. It is proven by the evidence from informants interview results for gain the data below.

“...when I started as a college instructor, it was a big adjustment for me. I always used 'Po and Opo,' and sometimes I used to baby talk with my elementary pupils, but I still carried that into the college. So, it was quite challenging in the classroom setting” - I5

Adapting Pedagogical Approaches for College Students

The informants explained that their undergraduate preparation in the BEE program primarily emphasized pedagogical practices for teaching children (Salendab et al., 2023). Consequently, their transition to college teaching required substantial adjustments in their pedagogical approaches and instructional methods. They needed to reconsider previously acquired strategies to accommodate the diverse academic characteristics and learning needs of adult students (McKendrick-Calder et al., 2026). The informants emphasized that college teaching requires a more structured and serious instructional approach, particularly in presenting and discussing course content. Such adjustments involved adapting teaching strategies to learners with greater maturity, independence, and capacity for understanding complex academic concepts. The findings suggest that their previous preparation provided a foundational pedagogical background but did not fully prepare them for the distinctive demands of higher education teaching. Therefore, transitioning to college instruction required the informants to continuously reflect on and refine their established teaching practices. This process became essential for ensuring that their instructional approaches remained responsive to the expectations of adult learners.

The need for pedagogical adaptation was further associated with differences in instructional complexity between elementary and higher education contexts. Teaching strategies designed for elementary pupils tend to be relatively simpler, whereas higher education instruction places greater emphasis on conceptual understanding, analytical thinking, and critical engagement with content (Rico Erika & Caballes Dennis, 2026; Ivic, 2016). The informants consequently recognized that approaches effective for younger learners could not always be directly transferred to college classrooms. They needed to place greater emphasis on substantive lesson content and instructional strategies that encouraged students to engage more deeply with academic concepts. This shift required the instructors to become more deliberate in selecting methods that aligned with students’ maturity and intellectual capabilities. Such adaptation also enabled them to respond more effectively to the diverse learning needs encountered in college classrooms. Therefore, pedagogical flexibility emerged as an important competency in their transition from elementary to higher education teaching. Overall, the findings demonstrate that adapting instructional practices was essential for the informants to establish effective and contextually appropriate college teaching (Figure 1).

“In BEE, they are teaching you how to teach children. How to teach kids, and yet, college students are not kids. That’s a big challenge there, especially in terms of pedagogy.” - I1

“...when it comes to college students, it’s the opposite. The subject should be given attention, the lesson, the topic should be the focus, and of course, pedagogy also plays a role...” - I1

Figure 1. Informant Evidence of Adapting Pedagogical Approaches for College Students Practices Theme

Opportunities for Professional Growth

For the informants, becoming COS instructors at a state university provided meaningful opportunities for professional growth and career development. Their employment within the university made access to graduate studies more feasible, allowing them to pursue a master’s degree while simultaneously fulfilling their teaching responsibilities. This opportunity enabled the informants to integrate academic advancement with their ongoing professional practice. They perceived postgraduate study not merely as an additional qualification but as a means of strengthening their knowledge, skills, and competencies as educators. The university environment therefore provided a supportive context in which professional responsibilities and academic development could

be pursued concurrently. Such accessibility was particularly valuable for instructors seeking to advance their qualifications without interrupting their teaching careers (Berja, 2026; David & Hill, 2021). The findings indicate that institutional opportunities for further education can influence educators' perceptions of career sustainability and advancement. Thus, the COS position functioned not only as an employment opportunity but also as a pathway for continuous professional development.

The opportunity to pursue graduate studies also enabled the informants to expand their professional knowledge and remain responsive to developments in the education sector. Teachers who pursue graduate education are better positioned to keep abreast of current research, educational trends, and best practices. This perspective is reflected in the informants' recognition that postgraduate education could strengthen their capacity as educators practices (Bland et al., 2023; Ladd & Sorensen, 2015). Their simultaneous engagement in teaching and graduate study created opportunities to connect academic knowledge with practical instructional experiences. Such integration may contribute to the continuous refinement of their teaching competencies and professional perspectives. The findings therefore suggest that access to graduate education represents an important institutional factor supporting the professional growth of COS instructors. More broadly, opportunities for continuous learning may strengthen educators' readiness to respond to evolving demands in higher education. Consequently, professional development opportunities contributed to the informants' motivation to sustain their engagement in college teaching.

"...it's also about the opportunity for professional growth. Of course, when you're already in a State University, you're inside the university, the Graduate School becomes more accessible. So, it's like, it's easier because while I'm teaching, I'm also studying for my Master's." – 12

Personal Fulfillment and Influence

Despite the challenges inherent in college teaching, the informants described their experiences as a meaningful source of personal fulfillment. They expressed a sense of pride in contributing to the academic and professional development of their students, particularly those preparing to become future educators. This sense of contribution strengthened their perception that teaching was not merely an occupational responsibility but also a meaningful professional role. The opportunity to support students who were pursuing the same career pathway they had previously undertaken further enhanced this sense of fulfillment. Their experiences allowed them to connect their professional journeys with the development of the next generation of educators (Rudio et al., 2020; Ivic, 2016). Thus, personal fulfillment emerged from the perceived significance and impact of their teaching contributions. This finding indicates that meaningful professional influence can strengthen educators' commitment to higher education teaching.

The informants also valued the opportunity to share their knowledge, professional wisdom, and both positive and negative teaching experiences with their students. These experiences enabled them to provide practical insights that could help students become more reflective and competent teachers in the future. Such knowledge sharing allowed the informants to transform their professional experiences into learning resources for prospective educators. Baluyos et al. (2019) similarly emphasized that teachers often experience fulfillment when they serve as instruments of students' growth, success, and development. The informants' experiences reflect this perspective, as their fulfillment was closely associated with witnessing and contributing to student development. Consequently, their influence extended beyond classroom instruction to the formation of future teachers. Personal fulfillment and professional influence therefore constituted meaningful factors supporting their engagement in college teaching (Figure 2).

"It's a fulfillment knowing that I may be one of the reason for the success of the students, after they graduated college... the future status of my students if they become successful in their career as a teacher..." – 14

"I get to share my wisdom with the students, the future educators... Both the positive and negative experiences I had as an elementary school teacher..." – 12

Figure 2. Informant Evidence of Personal Fulfillment and Influence Theme

Opportunities and Challenges

The opportunities and challenges that characterize the college teaching experiences of BEd graduates under Contract of Service status were identified into four (4) themes all throughout the data analysis. These include challenges in instructional and classroom practices, limitations in infrastructure and institutional resources, employment-related concerns on recognition and compensation, and opportunities for support and professional advancement. These experiences reveal both the difficulties and possibilities encountered by the informants while serving as college instructors under COS status. As the researchers delved deeper into the phenomenon, the findings revealed that the career pathways of the informants were shaped by motivations,

transitions, opportunities, and challenges. Their decision to pursue college teaching was driven by the alignment of their degree qualifications, the attraction of competitive salary and prestige, opportunities for professional growth, and their personal preference for teaching adult learners over children. These motivations served as the driving force behind their willingness to enter a profession that is different from the traditional pathway of Bachelor of Elementary Education graduates.

The study further revealed that their career pathways in college teaching were marked by adjustment and growth. From being trained to teach younger learners, they underwent a major transition in handling college students who require different pedagogical approaches, greater content depth, and more mature classroom interactions. Despite the demands of the profession, the informants viewed their journey as an avenue for professional development through graduate studies, continuous learning, and improvement of their instructional competence. Alongside these, they also experienced personal fulfillment in shaping future educators, sharing their wisdom, and contributing to the success of their students. However, the career pathways of the informants were not free from difficulties. Their college teaching experiences were characterized by instructional and classroom challenges, limitations in infrastructure and institutional resources, and employment-related concerns on recognition and compensation. They encountered issues in classroom participation, subject assignments beyond their expertise, inadequate teaching resources, and unequal treatment compared with permanent faculty members. Nevertheless, despite these realities, the informants also recognized opportunities through supportive colleagues, seminars, training, graduate studies, and other avenues for professional advancement.

Challenges in Instructional and Classroom Practices

The informants mentioned that teaching college students is accompanied by several instructional challenges (**Figure 3**). These revolve around classroom management, student attendance and participation, adapting to adult learners, and handling subjects beyond their expertise. Although college students are mature learners, there are still instances wherein some students do not follow simple classroom rules, intentionally skip classes, or show low participation, especially in online settings. In addition, some informants shared that they were assigned subjects outside their forte, making lesson preparation more difficult. According to [Quin \(2017\)](#), disruptive student behaviors and low engagement interfere with the teaching-learning process and create additional struggles for instructors. There is also noted that teaching specialized subjects may become difficult when educators need to balance content expertise and pedagogy ([Villano-Ac, 2024; Attia, 2017](#)).

"...especially in college because it seems... As they say, it's harder to get adults to follow instructions than children..." – I3

"...they talk among themselves about not attending. So, that's the biggest challenge for me..." – I5

"...the misalignment is also an issue. Even though I'm a BEEd college instructor, there are times when the subject assigned to me isn't my forte..." – I2

Figure 3. Informant Evidence of Challenges in Instructional and Classroom Practices Theme

The Social Exchange Theory, which served as the guiding framework of the study, made the findings more concrete. The theory explains that when individuals become part of organizations or institutions, they assess the exchange process between the costs and benefits they experience ([De Cuyper et al., 2026; Ahmad et al., 2023](#)). In the case of the informants, the costs included the adjustments, struggles, and challenges they had to endure in teaching college students despite their elementary education background and contractual status. On the other hand, the benefits included competitive salary, prestige, professional growth, fulfillment, and the opportunity to shape future teachers. Although the process of exchange between costs and benefits was not always balanced, they chose to remain in the profession and continue teaching to the best of their abilities. This finding suggests that the informants' continued engagement was influenced not only by tangible rewards but also by the perceived professional and personal value derived from their teaching experiences. Moreover, their willingness to remain in the profession indicates that the perceived long-term benefits of college teaching could outweigh the challenges and limitations associated with their contractual employment status.

Teaching is indeed not all about rainbows and butterflies. The reality that lies on the other side of the teaching profession can be as brutal as a storm that swirls educators round and round and takes them to unfamiliar places they have never been before. In the world of teaching, it is always a matter of resiliency and perseverance together with genuine dedication and passion. The complex responsibilities tied to being a teacher, from meeting the diverse needs of students and handling the classroom environment to keeping pace with the dynamic demands of the curriculum, already present challenges in themselves. Nevertheless, fueled by dedication and passion to effect change and impact the lives of students, educators continue to persevere ([Singh, 2026; Musa, 2020](#)). For them, this is the calling they want to fulfill wholeheartedly. These experiences

demonstrate that effective teaching requires not only pedagogical competence but also the capacity to adapt, overcome challenges, and remain committed to students' development. Ultimately, the persistence of educators amid professional uncertainties and difficulties reflects the enduring personal and social significance they attach to the teaching profession.

Limitations in Infrastructure and Institutional Resources

The findings indicate that inadequate infrastructure and instructional resources constituted a significant challenge for the informants in fulfilling their teaching responsibilities (**Figure 4**). They described learning environments characterized by overcrowded and uncomfortable classrooms, including high temperatures and insufficient seating capacity. Such physical limitations potentially disrupted the teaching and learning process and made classroom management more demanding (Saripah & Tejawiani, 2026; Handayani & Hidayat, 2025). In addition, the lack of readily available instructional materials required informants to independently develop their own teaching resources. This situation placed additional demands on their preparation, particularly when instructional materials had to be produced within limited time constraints. The findings suggest that resource limitations may affect not only instructional effectiveness but also the overall quality of the learning environment. Therefore, adequate infrastructure and accessible instructional resources are essential to support effective college teaching.

The transition to online learning introduced another dimension of resource-related challenges, particularly in relation to monitoring students' learning progress. The informants expressed uncertainty about whether students were genuinely engaging with and understanding the learning materials during online classes. This difficulty was associated with the reduced visibility of students' learning processes compared with face-to-face instruction. Kapur (2019) emphasized that teachers can perform their responsibilities more effectively when educational institutions provide adequate infrastructure and instructional resources. The informants' experiences support this perspective, demonstrating how resource constraints can influence both instructional preparation and teachers' confidence in evaluating student learning. These challenges highlight the importance of institutional support in ensuring that educators have the necessary conditions to deliver effective instruction. Strengthening infrastructure, learning facilities, and instructional resources is therefore essential to improving teaching effectiveness in higher education.

"...it's hot, the blackboard is broken, there aren't enough chairs, it's overcrowded..." – I1

"...you make your own materials... there are no readily available materials that you can find." – I1

"...the online set up...the question there is how can I assess the knowledge gained by the student..." – I4

Figure 4. Informant Evidence of Limitations in Infrastructure and Institutional Resources Theme

Employment-Related Concerns on Recognition and Compensation

Employment under a COS arrangement also generated concerns related to professional recognition among the informants (**Figure 5**). Although they demonstrated competence, commitment, and dedication in fulfilling their teaching responsibilities, they perceived that COS instructors did not always receive recognition equivalent to that afforded to permanent faculty members. This perceived disparity affected how they viewed their professional standing within the institution (Vicente, 2017). The findings suggest that employment status may influence not only access to institutional privileges but also educators' sense of professional legitimacy. Despite making substantial contributions to teaching and student development, COS instructors remained aware of distinctions associated with contractual employment. Such experiences highlight the importance of equitable recognition for instructors regardless of employment category. Professional acknowledgment therefore emerged as an important employment-related concern among the informants.

Compensation and employment benefits represented another significant issue associated with COS status. The informants expressed a desire for fair remuneration and benefits, including paid holidays, because they perceived that their professional efforts were not always matched by the benefits they received. These concerns reflected broader issues of employment equity rather than dissatisfaction with teaching itself. According to Hansen and Quintero (2017) similarly observed that contractual instructors in higher education often experience disparities in compensation, benefits, and institutional recognition compared with permanent employees. The experiences of the informants are consistent with this perspective, demonstrating how contractual arrangements can create differences in employment conditions. Such disparities may influence educators' perceptions of fairness and long-term career security. Addressing recognition, compensation, and benefits is therefore important for supporting the well-being and professional commitment of COS instructors in higher education.

"They also recognize us COS. Because to be honest, the permanent ones are always recognized." – I3

"I do hope and pray that it would not be a case of 'No work, no pay.'..." – I4

Figure 5. Informant Evidence of Employment-Related Concerns on Recognition and Compensation Theme

Opportunities for Support and Professional Advancement

Despite the challenges, the informants also recognized valuable opportunities while teaching in college (**Figure 6**). They highlighted the importance of supportive senior colleagues who guided them in handling unfamiliar subjects and adjusting to the college environment. They also appreciated opportunities for seminars, training, graduate studies, and continuous learning that helped improve their competence and confidence as instructors. As mentioned in Hitch et al. (2018), a supportive working environment contributes positively to the performance of part-time and contractual teachers. Teräs (2016) also stated that professional development opportunities enhance teachers' confidence, competence, and commitment.

"...our pioneers often became our support. I never felt shy about asking questions when I didn't know something." – I3

"To have professional development opportunities for us, such as more seminars, trainings, and sessions..." – I7

"...the Graduate School becomes more accessible... while I'm teaching, I'm also studying for my Master's." – I2

Figure 6. Informant Evidence of Opportunities for Support and Professional Advancement Theme

These findings and discussions of the study were confined only to a state university with its corresponding satellite campuses located in Pampanga. The study did not include private colleges or provinces outside the specified location, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other institutional and geographical contexts. The sample size of eight informants may not fully represent the experiences and practices of the broader population of BEEd graduates teaching as COS college instructors in higher education settings. The study did not delve deeply into other aspects of their lived experiences, as these may involve different encounters and perspectives that were beyond the scope of the present investigation. Furthermore, variations in institutional policies, employment conditions, and organizational cultures may influence the career experiences of COS instructors in ways that were not captured in this study. Future research could therefore incorporate participants from diverse institutional settings and geographical locations to provide a broader understanding of the career pathways and professional experiences of BEEd graduates serving as COS college instructors.

To further provide valuable support for college instructors under COS status, particularly those who are BEEd graduates teaching at the college levels, the researchers proposed the following recommendations, for instance offering intensive training programs focused on the criteria of employing the appropriate teaching strategies, techniques, and approaches in terms of pedagogy and content tailored for college students will benefit the BEEd COS college instructors. This initiative will equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to competently handle college students. Providing and having accessibility to adequate teaching resources will lessen the BEEd COS college instructors' burden of creating their own materials and will enhance the quality of their instruction. Then, providing additional benefits, such as paid holidays, healthcare coverage, and professional development allowances, is necessary as it greatly contributes to their motivation on fulfilling their job more competently. And also establishing clear pathways to permanent positions and providing opportunities for career promotion based on their performance and qualifications will keep the BEEd COS college instructors on developing as professionals.

Conclusion

The study revealed that their decision to pursue college teaching was driven by the alignment of their qualifications with the BEEd program, competitive salary and professional prestige, opportunities for professional growth, and personal preferences for teaching adult learners. Their career pathways were characterized by a continuous process of transition, adaptation, and professional growth, particularly as they shifted from teaching children to instructing mature college students and consequently adjusted their pedagogical approaches, classroom practices, and professional identities. College teaching also provided opportunities for graduate education, continuous learning, competence development, and personal fulfillment through their contribution to the preparation of future educators. Nevertheless, the informants encountered challenges related to instructional and classroom practices, inadequate infrastructure and institutional

resources, and employment concerns involving professional recognition, compensation, and benefits. Support from colleagues, access to seminars and training, and opportunities to pursue graduate education helped them navigate these challenges and sustain their professional commitment. Overall, the findings demonstrate that entering higher education teaching outside the conventional career pathway of BEEd graduates did not prevent them from developing into competent, adaptable, and effective college instructors, but rather provided opportunities for them to reconstruct and expand their professional identities. Future research should examine this phenomenon across multiple universities and contexts using larger and more diverse participant groups, while longitudinal studies could further investigate how the career trajectories, professional identities, and long-term outcomes of BEEd graduates in COS positions evolve over time.

Author Contributions

DMG and JTP contributed to the conceptualization and methodology of the study. JTP performed the formal analysis, prepared the original draft, and provided supervision. DMG carried out the investigation and was responsible for writing, reviewing, and editing the manuscript.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors used ChatGPT 5.6 solely for language editing and grammar improvement. The authors reviewed and verified all AI-assisted revisions and take full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

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