

## Review

# The experience of sessional teaching staff in pre-registration nurse education programs: A systematic review

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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** To uncover current international evidence of the working experience of sessional teaching staff in pre-registration nurse education programs.

**Design:** Systematic review.

**Data sources:** In April 2023, electronic databases of Web of Science, Education Source, American Psychological Association (APA) PsycInfo®, Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Scopus and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) were searched with no time limit for publication. Hand search material from Google Scholar was included.

**Review methods:** The inclusion criteria were research focused on (1) the work experiences of sessional nursing teaching staff (2) pre-registration nurse education programs including diploma, associate degree, bachelor's degree, or accelerated bachelor's degree (3) the post-secondary education setting. The quality of the included studies was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool. After extraction, thematic synthesis was performed.

**Results:** A total of 514 studies were retrieved and five studies were included: three qualitative studies, one quantitative study, and one mixed method study. Three themes were developed from this review: (i) Lack of a sense of belonging; (ii) Working experience and support; and (iii) Clinical recency, however, most of the studies have a small sample size.

**Conclusion:** Sessional teaching staff enjoy teaching nursing students as they feel a sense of responsibility to pass on their knowledge to future generations of nurses. They appreciate a supportive working environment and culture including professional development, feedback, mentorship and growth opportunities to increase job satisfaction. This will reduce the turnover. There is a need to conduct further research on sessional teaching staff to understand their experience in pre-registration nursing programs.

**Registration:** The protocol of this systematic review is registered with Open Science Framework (registration link: [doi:10.17605/OSF.IO/SUD4Y](https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/SUD4Y)).

## 1. Introduction

Sessional or casual nursing teaching staff are defined as staff who are not employed permanently or have a fixed-term contract in educational institutions including universities, community colleges, and other vocational or post-secondary institutions. They are part of the nurse education teaching team for pre and post-registration nurse education programs (Biedermann and Ahern, 2023; Bodak et al., 2019). Their roles include teaching registered nurses, enrolled nurses, licensed practical nurses or licensed vocational nurses, and teaching in advanced specialty

nursing programs. Sessional teaching staff are paid hourly rates and often carry out direct teaching and marking duties (Brouwer et al., 2024).

### 1.1. Nursing workforce shortage

Globally, there is a nursing workforce shortage, and it has been estimated by the World Health Organization (2024) that there will be a 4.5 million nursing shortage by 2030. Various factors impact this nursing workforce trend: burnout, stress, increased workload or job

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demand, inadequate staffing ratio, lack of support and an aging workforce (Drennan and Ross, 2019; Heijden et al., 2019; Hisel, 2019; Hung and Lam, 2020; Leung et al., 2020; Smiley et al., 2021; Tamata and Mohammadnezhad, 2022). The global nursing shortage may potentially affect the quality of nursing care and health outcomes, increasing mortality rates and ultimately damaging the sustainability of the global health system (Aluko et al., 2019; Buerhaus, 2021; Drennan and Ross, 2019; World Health Organization, 2024).

### 1.2. Nursing academics shortage and casualisation of teaching staff

As a result of the nursing workforce shortage internationally, the World Health Organization (2020) states that universities and colleges need to increase nursing student enrolment to meet such demand. This is seen in the nursing student enrolment increase in various countries including the United States of America (USA), Canada, the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2022, 2023; Boamah et al., 2021; Canadian Association of School of Nursing, 2022; Council of Deans of Health, 2023; Universities Australia, 2023). The rapid increase in nursing student enrolment has placed pressure on universities and colleges to meet the demand of providing sufficient teaching staff by employing sessional teaching staff (Boamah et al., 2021; Jarosinski et al., 2022). However, this is not the only reason for the increased demand for sessional teaching staff. Many nurse academics are near retirement age and suboptimal employment conditions leads to a demanding profession (Anderson et al., 2023; Boamah et al., 2021; Jarosinski et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2019). Nurse academics may leave their roles due to unrealistic workloads; stress; lack of support, collegiality and lack of opportunities to advance their career (Anderson et al., 2023; Jarosinski et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2019). Sessional teaching staff are considered essential for university program delivery, student experience and pedagogical relationships (Brouwer et al., 2024). As a result, they are the fastest-growing population in higher education (McComb and Eather, 2023b).

Authors Brouwer et al. (2024); Hattam and Weiler (2021); Leathwood and Read (2022); McComb et al. (2021); Stubaus (2023) have argued that internationally, sessional teaching staff deliver most of the university teaching in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom (UK), the USA and some European countries. In Australia, up to 60 % of academics are non-permanent, resulting in a high proportion of sessional teaching staff delivering tertiary education courses (McComb et al., 2021; McComb and Eather, 2023a). Although much research has highlighted the experiences of tenured nurse academics, very few empirical studies have explored the experiences of sessional nursing teaching staff in pre-registration programs (Singh et al., 2021). The most recent literature review on sessional teaching staff only focused on Australian nursing programs (Bodak et al., 2019). With the trend of casualisation in nurse education globally, a systematic review is needed to capture the global picture of sessional nursing teaching staff experiences.

### 1.3. Objectives

The primary objective of this systematic review was to uncover current international evidence on sessional nursing teaching staff's working experiences in pre-registration nurse education programs. This will assist further primary research on this population according to the knowledge gaps discovered from this review.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Design

This systematic review followed the steps in the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews for Interventions and reporting followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analysis

(PRISMA) guidelines (Higgins et al., 2024; Page et al., 2021).

### 2.2. Eligibility criteria

The inclusion criteria for this review were research focused on (1) sessional nursing teaching staff working experiences, (2) pre-registration nurse education programs including diploma, associate degree, bachelor's degree, or accelerated bachelor's degree and (3) the post-secondary education setting.

The exclusion criteria for this review were research focused on (1) role transition or onboarding, (2) postgraduate nursing programs, (3) enrolled nurse, licensed practical nurse, licensed vocational nurse or post-registration nursing programs, (4) teaching non-nursing subjects in nursing programs such as research, anatomy, pathophysiology, or pharmacology, and (5) literature review articles, book chapters, protocols, reports, non-empirical papers, unpublished manuscripts and conference abstracts.

### 2.3. Information sources

We conducted the search in April 2023 using electronic databases including Web of Science, Education Source (EBSCOhost), American Psychological Association (APA) PsycInfo® (EBSCOhost), Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) (EBSCOhost), Scopus and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) (EBSCOhost). In addition, hand search material was added from Google Scholar using the search phrase "experience of nursing sessional academic in higher education".

### 2.4. Search strategy

The population, context and concept (PCC) framework was used to guide the search process as it is best suited for an exploratory review question (Pollock et al., 2023). The 'population' consisted of two defining elements: nursing and sessional teaching staff. The 'context' for the review was higher education settings and the 'concept' was working experience as outlined in Table 1. All keywords were linked with Boolean operators with no date restriction. Searches were limited to English only as outlined in Supplementary file 1.

### 2.5. Selection process

A total of 514 records were retrieved, and 30 duplicate records were removed using the Covidence online platform leaving 484 records for screening (Covidence, n.d.). All studies were initially screened by title

**Table 1**  
Keywords.

Databases	Population	Context	Concept
CINAHL	Academic*	Higher education	Activit*
Education Source	Adjunct	Tertiary education	Employ*
ERIC	Associate	Universit*	Experience
PsycINFO	Casual		Work
Scopus	Contingent		
Web of Science	Contracted		
	Educator*		
	Faculty*		
	Instructor*		
	Non-continuing		
	Non-permanent		
	Non-tenure-track		
	Non-tenured		
	Nurs*		
	Nursing		
	Professor*		
	Sessional		
	Teacher*		
	Temporary		

and abstract by two independent reviewers (TR, HB) with 463 records assessed to be ineligible and 21 records assessed to be eligible for full-text screening. After the full-text screening, 16 of the records did not meet the eligibility requirements. Any conflicts during the title, abstract and full-text screening were resolved by a third or a fourth reviewer (EJ, LL). A total of five records were included in this review. A PRISMA flow diagram outlines the selection process in Fig. 1.

## 2.6. Data collection process and synthesis

Data synthesis for this review was guided by Lockwood et al. (2015), using a three-step approach to examine findings and identify themes inductively. This review follows Braun and Clarke's (2022) approach to guide the data synthesis process. The authors first familiarised themselves with the included articles and developed the initial themes by identifying core concepts that answer this review's objectives. These themes were reviewed again to collapse into three main themes. Each theme contains two or more shared patterned meanings. The reviewers extracted data related to positive and negative working experiences of sessional teaching staff. Other data reported include the year, country of origin, research methods, number of participants, aim and summary of findings. Any conflicts were resolved by a third or a fourth reviewer (EJ, LL) and consensus was confirmed by a third or a fourth reviewer (EJ, LL).

## 2.7. Study risk of bias assessments

The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) was used to evaluate the

quality of the studies (Hong et al., 2018). The MMAT provides comprehensive quality assessment items that are easy to understand and use in addition to the risk of bias assessments (Hong et al., 2017). Given this systematic review included qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies, the MMAT was chosen to assess the quality of the studies (see Table 2). All five studies provided clear research questions including aims. Two independent reviewers (TR, HB) completed the initial quality assessments, and any conflicts were resolved by a third or a fourth reviewer (EJ, LL). Consensus of the risk of bias assessments was confirmed by a third or a fourth reviewer (EJ, LL).

Studies by Gazza and Shellenbarger (2010) and Dixon et al. (2015) used a hermeneutic phenomenology or thematic analysis. Gazza and Shellenbarger (2010) used a five-step process described by Barritt et al. (1984). Studies by Andrew et al. (2010) Dixon et al. (2015) and Ryan et al. (2013) do not explain their approach to data analysis. The study by Woodworth (2017) provides some justification for their data analysis. No studies were excluded from the quality appraisal.

## 2.8. Certainty assessments

Certainty assessment allows readers to understand the process of confidence assessment in the evidence and themes included and provides explicit transparency in a systematic review. The GRADE Confidence in Evidence from Review of Qualitative Research (GRADE-CERQual) was used for the certainty assessment. Three themes were developed and evaluated with confidence levels as outlined in Supplementary file 2. The reviewers (TR, HB) checked the consistency of the developed themes against the five domains including methodological

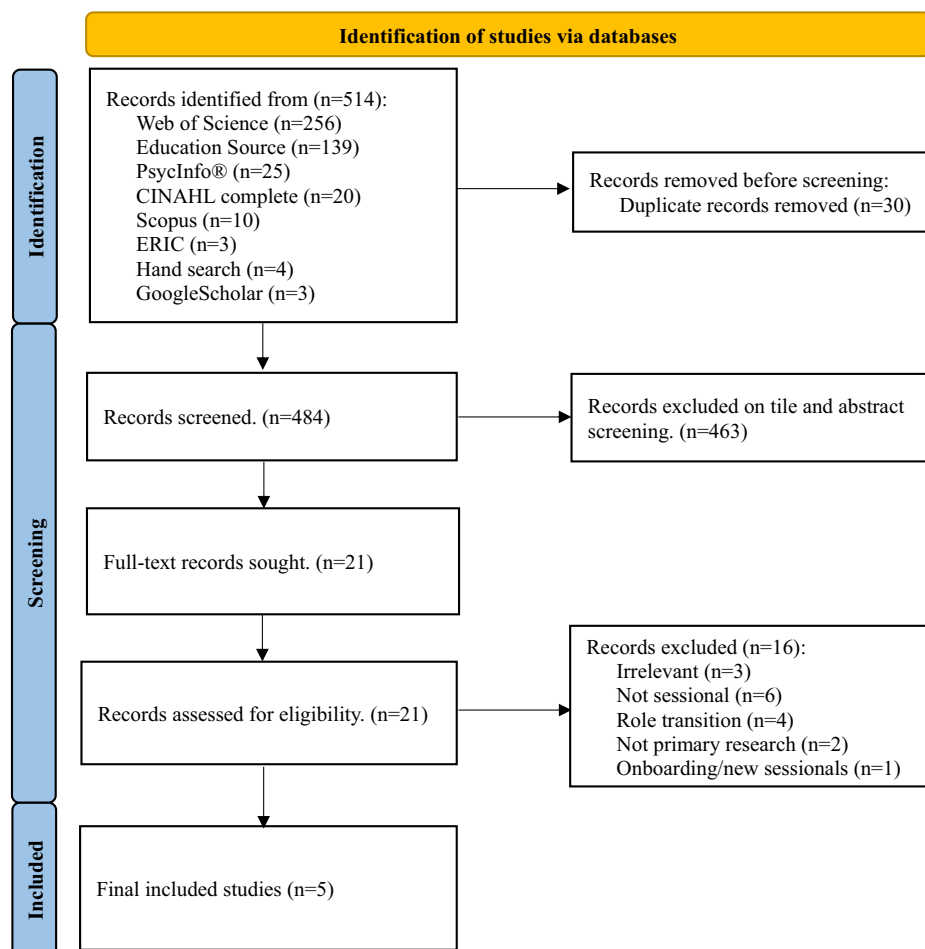


Fig. 1. PRISMA flowchart adapted from Page et al. (2021).

**Table 2**  
Quality appraisal.

Authors and year	Screening (all types)		Qualitative					Quantitative descriptive					Mixed methods				
	1	2	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	5.1	5.2	5.3	5.4	5.5
Andrew et al. (2010)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Dixon et al. (2015)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Gazza and Shellenbarger (2010)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Ryan et al. (2013)	Y	Y	Y	Y	C	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Woodworth (2017)	Y	N	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Y=yes, N=no, C=cannot tell, RCT = Randomised Controlled Trial. NA = not applicable.

1.1. Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question? 1.2. Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question? 1.3. Are the findings adequately derived from the data? 1.4. Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data? 1.5. Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation? 2.1. Is randomization appropriately performed? 2.2. Are the groups comparable at baseline? 2.3. Are there complete outcome data? 2.4. Are outcome assessors blinded to the intervention provided? 2.5. Did the participants adhere to the assigned intervention? 3.1. Are the participants representative of the target population? 3.2. Are measurements appropriate regarding both the outcome and intervention (or exposure)? 3.3. Are there complete outcome data? 3.4. Are the confounders accounted for in the design and analysis? 3.5. During the study period, is the intervention administered (or exposure occurred) as intended? 4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question? 4.2. Is the sample representative of the target population? 4.3. Are the measurements appropriate? 4.4. Is the risk of nonresponse bias low? 4.5. Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question? 5.1. Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question? 5.2. Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question? 5.3. Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted? 5.4. Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed? 5.5. Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?

Quantitative RCT and quantitative non-RCT were removed from the table as they are not applicable.

limitations, coherence, adequacy of data, relevancy, and publication bias (Lewin et al., 2018a, 2018b). The consensus of the certainty assessment was confirmed by a third or a fourth reviewer (EJ, LL).

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Study characteristics

Five studies (Andrew et al., 2010; Dixon et al., 2015; Gazza and Shellenbarger, 2010; Ryan et al., 2013; Woodworth, 2017) were included in this systematic review. Three studies were conducted using a qualitative approach (Andrew et al., 2010; Dixon et al., 2015; Gazza and Shellenbarger, 2010), one study used a quantitative descriptive survey (Woodworth, 2017), and one study used a mixed-method approach (Ryan et al., 2013). Studies were conducted in Australia (Andrew et al., 2010; Dixon et al., 2015; Ryan et al., 2013) and the USA (Gazza and Shellenbarger, 2010; Woodworth, 2017). All studies included sessional nursing teaching staff as their participants as outlined in Table 3.

#### 3.2. Themes

Three themes were developed from the studies in this review: (i) Lack of sense of belonging; (ii) Working experience and support; and (iii) Clinical recency.

##### 3.2.1. Theme i: lack of a sense of belonging

The theme 'Lack of a sense of belonging' referred to sessional teaching staff feeling that they did not belong to the teaching team. The perceived contingent and ad hoc nature of their employment arrangement, lack of dedicated office space, lockers and computers, lack of social interaction within the nursing school, and the division between continuing staff and sessional staff were cited as reasons for a lack of sense of belonging (Dixon et al., 2015; Gazza and Shellenbarger, 2010; Ryan et al., 2013). The sessional teaching staff's role of "filling in" adds to the feeling that they are not a part of the team (Ryan et al., 2013). Dixon et al. (2015) and Gazza and Shellenbarger (2010) found that sessional teaching staff only engage in teaching and marking activities and are not included in other academic activities. These activities may include meetings, discussions and decision-making about the nursing programs. There is also a division between permanent academics and sessional teaching staff including at an educational level where a majority of the sessional teaching staff do not hold a Doctor of Philosophy

(PhD) qualification (Gazza and Shellenbarger, 2010). Job security for sessional teaching staff is different from permanent academics as both sessional teaching staff and the university desire the flexibility of casual employment (Ryan et al., 2013), impacting further the sense of not belonging to the teaching team.

##### 3.2.2. Theme ii: working experience and support

The theme 'Working experience and support' refers to the sessional teaching staff's ability to receive adequate support, guidance and resources to function in the teaching team. Factors identified in this review that affected the working experience include the availability of supervision, guidance and feedback, access to professional development opportunities and adequate paid time to complete their assigned teaching and marking tasks (Ryan et al., 2013). When these factors were available, sessional teaching staff felt valued in their roles. Conversely, if they were not available, sessional teaching staff had less fulfilment in their roles (Chen, 2023; Naidoo-Chetty and du Plessis, 2021). Due to the 'filling in' nature, some sessional teaching staff found that they did not receive adequate notice to teach or mark assessments causing them to feel underprepared to do their job (Dixon et al., 2015; Gazza and Shellenbarger, 2010; Ryan et al., 2013).

Sessional teaching staff appreciate feedback about their performance as this allows them to improve their teaching practice. However fragmented and delayed feedback may hinder their performance and create a negative working experience (Dixon et al., 2015). Other forms of support and resources identified included orientation, course schedules and information, provision of textbooks, appropriate supervision, and professional development opportunities (Gazza and Shellenbarger, 2010). Having support was seen to assist sessional teaching staff in becoming familiarised with university processes and systems rather than being "thrown in the deep end" (Ryan et al., 2013, p. 169).

Students can serve as a source of positive working experience for sessional teaching staff as the gratitude they express towards the sessional teaching staff helps them feel that they play an important role in shaping the future generation of nurses (Gazza and Shellenbarger, 2010). Classroom teaching provides a sense of enjoyment and fulfilment for sessional teaching staff and serves as an important element in increasing job satisfaction and positive employment experience (Dixon et al., 2015; Gazza and Shellenbarger, 2010). This can increase the likelihood of employment retention for sessional teaching staff (Woodworth, 2017).

**Table 3**  
Results.

Author(s), year and country	Aim	Methods	Population	Results
Andrew et al. (2010) Australia	Explore the perceptions of sessional teachers about their perceived contribution to an undergraduate Bachelor of Nursing program.	Qualitative (interview)	Sessional teachers in nursing from an Australian university ( $n = 12$ ).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sessional teaching staff believe that they bring the reality of clinical practice to the classrooms bridging the gap between university education and clinical practice by “dispelling the fantasy world [theoretical or simulated learning]”.</li> <li>2. There is a closer and reciprocal relationship between sessional teaching staff and nursing students compared to permanent academics.</li> </ol>
Dixon et al. (2015) Australia	Provide insights into the experience of sessional teachers related to nursing skills in simulation, nursing environments, and classroom tutorials.	Qualitative (interview)	Sessional teachers in nursing in a large nursing school on a multi-campus metropolitan university ( $n = 15$ ).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sessional teaching staff perceives feedback as a helpful way to support their teaching performance and that they can contextualise knowledge points better than textbooks or permanent academics when they are clinically current.</li> <li>2. There is a lack of support and orientation by the university and permanent academics related to teaching activities where fragmented information is often provided sporadically.</li> <li>3. Sessional teaching staff feel isolated and inadequately prepared for their duties as a result of being underpaid.</li> </ol>
Gazza and Shellenbarger (2010) USA	To seek an understanding of the lived experience of being part-time faculty members in a baccalaureate nursing program.	Qualitative (interview) Hermeneutic phenomenology	Part-time nursing faculty members ( $n = 9$ ).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sessional teaching staff see nursing students as the source of positive reinforcement or gratification for them as they feel fulfilled and play an important role in shaping future nurses.</li> <li>2. There is a lack of information and resources for sessional teaching staff to do their job and they lack the opportunity to participate in mainstream academic activities.</li> <li>3. There is an obvious segregation between permanent academics and sessional teaching staff due to the educational level differences.</li> </ol>
Ryan et al. (2013) USA	Explore the employment relationship of sessional teaching staff, in particular the extent to which sessionals have access to fundamental human resource management.	Mixed methods (survey and interview)	Causal nursing academics ( $n = 297$ ).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. High level of job insecurity and lack of support by the permanent academics and university including professional development opportunities and feedback related to their teaching performance.</li> <li>2. Sessional teaching staff feel marginalised from mainstream academic activities as they are only participating in teaching and marking tasks.</li> <li>3. Insufficient notice and time to prepare for their teaching and marking duties.</li> </ol>
Woodworth (2017) USA	Examine demographic variables' impact on sessional teaching staff decisions to leave a teaching position and measures to improve sessional teaching staff intent to stay.	Quantitative (survey)	Adjunct nursing educators ( $n = 61$ ).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is a lack of orientation, mentoring, professional development, feedback, and recognition for sessional teaching staff causing a lack of sense of belonging.</li> <li>2. Sessional teaching staff are clinically current but not educationally prepared or supported risking them resigning within the first three years.</li> </ol>

### 3.2.3. Theme iii: clinical recency

The theme ‘Clinical recency’ refers to sessional teaching staff who are working clinically in the nursing profession as their main occupation and at the same time working sessionally with universities to teach, tutor and mark assessments in the nursing programs. Sessional teaching staff practising clinically provides current knowledge of contemporary nursing workplace issues as clinical practice changes when new research or clinical issues emerge in clinical practice (Andrew et al., 2010; Bodak et al., 2019). Having current clinical experiences enables sessional teaching staff to engage in more meaningful and relatable discussions with nursing students through a storytelling approach as they draw on their own experiences to contextualise the theoretical knowledge (Dixon et al., 2015). Some sessional teaching staff also find that they have a closer relationship with nursing students than the permanent academics as some of the students may be working or undertaking a clinical

placement at the sessional teaching staff’s workplace (Andrew et al., 2010). One participant from the Gazza and Shellenbarger (2010, p. 356) study explained that students are more comfortable approaching sessional teaching staff as they are considered “real nurses” as they practice concurrently in healthcare settings. Sessional teaching staff feel fulfilment from teaching and use it as a source of positive reinforcement in their roles as they carry the responsibilities of shaping the future nursing workforce (Gazza and Shellenbarger, 2010).

## 4. Discussion

There is a significant gap in the current literature to help understand sessional teaching staff experience in pre-registration nurse education programs. The experience of sessional teaching staff is not well determined as the current literature provides limited insight into different

employment factors. This systematic review identified factors relating to sessional teaching staff experience in pre-registration nurse education programs including the lack of a sense of belonging to the teaching team, the need for a positive work environment and support, and the benefit of recency of practice. We found that sessional teaching staff do not feel they belong to the teaching team which can be influenced by the lack of tangible resources, the division between permanent and sessional teaching staff due to different formal qualifications and only participating in teaching or marking activities (Dixon et al., 2015; Gazza and Shellenbarger, 2010; Ryan et al., 2013). These factors are related to the work conditions and relationships with others which can decrease their loyalty to an organization and increase the risk of resignation (Salles et al., 2015). However, in the context of sessional employment, job insecurity is a given element in their work, unlike tenure track or ongoing employment where job security is a lower priority for staff to consider (Hair, 2016). Other factors that influence sessional teaching staff's loyalty may be a positive work culture, work environment, work conditions, growth opportunities and support from the employer. These factors can create a sustainable workforce to reduce sessional teaching staff turnover (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021; Mahadi et al., 2020; Rakhra, 2018).

The working experience of sessional teaching staff was found to vary. Many of them enjoyed their relationship with nursing students (Gazza and Shellenbarger, 2010; Woodworth, 2017). This can potentially be a motivational factor for them to stay employed and create a more sustainable nurse education workforce. Teaching can be a rewarding and fulfilling career for some sessional teaching staff. This is seen by students expressing appreciation and engaging with sessional teaching staff in meaningful discussions and sessional teaching staff having a sense of responsibility in shaping the next generation of the nursing workforce (Dixon et al., 2015; Gazza and Shellenbarger, 2010). Being a nurse educator is perceived as a way to give back to the nursing profession (Evans, 2018). This is one of many reasons that nurses become educators. Other factors include the enjoyment and satisfaction of teaching, influencing the future nursing workforce, the ability to work with students, and the ability to be involved in research (Evans, 2018; Mutenga et al., 2023). However, in this review, we found that sessional teaching staff are not able to participate fully in these activities and this decreases their work enjoyment and satisfaction.

We also found several factors that damage the working experience of sessional teaching staff. They may receive inadequate feedback and guidance from the teaching team evidenced by some of them receiving fragmented feedback that hinders them from improving their teaching performance (Dixon et al., 2015; Gazza and Shellenbarger, 2010; Ryan et al., 2013). While sessional teaching staff are clinically current, they may not be trained to be educators and many require professional development and guidance (Satoh et al., 2020). Feedback provided by supervisors and employers can assist them in improving their performance in teaching activities. On-the-job training for new sessional teaching staff is essential to boost their job satisfaction and improve productivity as each educational institution operates differently, and there is a shift from their professional identity and scope of practice from being clinical nurses to nursing teaching staff (Brouwer et al., 2024; Ebert et al., 2020; Sawaneh and Kamara, 2019; Siqueira, 2023; Vasanthi and Basariya, 2019). This means that sessional teaching staff can be provided with a practical approach to enhance their skills and existing knowledge to function as members of the teaching team. Guidance and feedback provided to them and the ability to receive professional development leads to a more positive working environment, increasing both performance and productivity (Rakhra, 2018; Singh, 2019; Tamimi and Tamam, 2023).

The nature of ad hoc work for sessional teaching staff makes it difficult to establish their roles and boundaries as universities usually prioritise the academic workload to permanent academics first after the student enrolment is finalised (Bodak et al., 2019; Ryan et al., 2013). The allocation of workload for sessional teaching staff usually occurs

closer to the commencement of a semester which can leave insufficient time for sessional teaching staff to plan and receive adequate information and resources to prepare for their teaching or marking tasks (Bodak et al., 2019; McDermid et al., 2013). Sessional teaching staff may sometimes need to work outside their normal hours to meet the work requirements or they may be feeling underprepared to teach with short notice of workload allocation (Bartlett et al., 2021). This is due to the nature of academic work which does not only require physical tasks to be completed such as marking or delivering a lesson, but also the preparation and mental work around the physical tasks (Inegbedion et al., 2020). This may potentially increase burnout, and stress and decrease job satisfaction causing attrition (Janib et al., 2022; Leung et al., 2021).

We found that sessional teaching staff have an advantage in relating contemporary nursing workplace issues in their teaching when they are maintaining recency in nursing in healthcare settings (Andrew et al., 2010). This allows sessional teaching staff to relate and contextualise theoretical knowledge when teaching nursing students. This model of clinician-educator teaching is commonly used approach in healthcare education (Knott et al., 2015). There are various forms of clinician-educator teaching models depending on the professions and settings, including teaching in tertiary education settings using simulated environments (Tseng et al., 2021). These approaches require current clinicians to integrate clinical and theoretical knowledge in teaching (Burgess et al., 2020). This benefits nursing programs as sessional teaching staff bring in current healthcare knowledge to student learning and bridge the gap between theory and practice (Dixon et al., 2015; Shoghi et al., 2019). This is also an opportunity for sessional teaching staff to develop their education and leadership skills.

To ensure the quality of teaching, universities must focus on retaining current sessional teaching staff who have experience in educational practices to improve the consistency in teaching quality and learning experience for students (Pascoe et al., 2021). This requires the provision of a positive work environment where sessional teaching staff feel valued and respected, creating a more sustainable workforce in the university with less expenditure on reemploying and onboarding new teaching staff (Brouwer et al., 2024; Pascoe et al., 2021). This can also improve staff performance and productivity (Bakjer and DiPiro, 2019; Frögéli et al., 2023). Universities can improve the job satisfaction of sessional teaching staff by including adequate support, recognition, job security, and professional development (Callaghan and Coldwell, 2014; Jameel and Ahmad, 2020; Szromek and Wolniak, 2020). It is common that sessional teaching staff feel a lack of sense of belonging because they do not feel like part of the teaching team. This may damage the wellbeing of sessional teaching staff and the universities' work culture (Brouwer et al., 2024; Rodrigues, 2019). The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency in Australia (TEQSA) has argued that for universities to retain a high-quality sessional workforce and reduce turnover, they need to recognise and reward them for their work (TEQSA, 2022). Universities also need to enable and encourage them to participate in professional development (BLASST, 2013). A positive work environment can be created by ensuring a work-life balance and providing support to prevent staff from burnout and stress (Hung and Lam, 2020; Tamata and Mohammadnezhad, 2022).

## 5. Limitations

This systematic review is not without limitations. Most of the research was conducted with a small sample size or limited to a single campus university in either Australia or the USA and they are at least a decade old. This may not represent the current state and knowledge of sessional nursing teaching staff well which can prevent the generalisability of this review to other countries.

## 6. Recommendations

Further research may include an investigation of sessional teaching staff demographic information such as years of nursing experience and clinical specialties and reasons to work as sessional teaching staff. Further research may also focus on how sessional teaching staff gain knowledge, experience and support including teaching practices and qualifications in higher education as this would be useful to strengthen the nurse education workforce and to better support sessional teaching staff to function in nurse education.

This systematic review focused on pre-registration nursing programs. However, there is a large number of sessional nursing teaching staff in vocational, community colleges and postgraduate nursing programs that can be further researched as they may face different issues.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper highlights the experience of sessional teaching staff in pre-registration nursing programs. The limited literature identified in this systematic review is possibly due to the sessional teaching staff population not being well-researched and there is a lack of empirical evidence on this topic. Nevertheless, this review uncovers the current international evidence on this topic and the quality of the current literature. Findings include the need for adequate supervision and support for sessional teaching staff to provide a positive work environment. Sessional teaching staff with clinical recency in nursing practice contributes to a positive nursing student experience. The management of sessional teaching staff may require a different approach than that for permanent academics. Universities should focus on processes to assist sessional teaching staff to feel supported and to be part of the teaching team to improve working conditions and increase retention. To strengthen the sessional teaching staff workforce, we need to gain further insights and data related to the quality of teaching and learning, sessional teaching staff support and reasons or motivation for them to remain employed. Despite most of the findings being related to areas of improvement of sessional teaching staff experience, there are some positive outcomes revealed including the ability of sessional teaching staff to bring in current clinical practice and the sense of achievement for them when they educate future generations of nurses.

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2024.106457>.

## Registration

The protocol of this systematic review is registered with Open Science Framework (Registration link: [doi:10.17605/OSF.IO/SUD4Y](https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/SUD4Y)).

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## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Thomas Aaron Ricks:** Writing – original draft, Validation, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Hendrika Jacoba Brouwer:** Validation, Investigation, Formal analysis. **Louisa Lam:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Conceptualization. **Elisabeth Jacob:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Conceptualization.

## Declaration of competing interest

No conflict of interest has been declared by the authors.

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