





# Motivation of sessional teaching staff to remain employed in pre-registration nursing programs: A systematic review

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Casual  
Employment  
Higher education  
Motivation  
Nursing  
Sessional  
Sustainability

## ABSTRACT

**Aim:** To identify motivational and demotivational factors for sessional teaching staff to undertake employment in pre-registration nursing programs.

**Background:** Sessional teaching staff are part of the nurse education team; however high turnover can cause challenges to the university and impact the quality of teaching and learning for students. Understanding the motivational factors for working as sessional staff can help create a more sustainable nurse education workforce.

**Design:** Systematic review.

**Methods:** The review protocol was registered with the Open Science Framework and the search was conducted in September 2024 using the databases CINAHL, Education Source, ERIC, PsycInfo® and MEDLINE. The inclusion criteria were sessional teaching staff, teaching into pre-registration nursing programs in tertiary education settings. Themes were deductively developed following data extraction. The quality of the included studies was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool.

**Results:** Four studies were included in this review. Two themes were developed: i) Motivation to remain employed; ii) Demotivational factors to remain employed. The top motivating elements for sessional staff were the enjoyment of teaching, the work flexibility and the ability to nurture the next generation of nurses. Demotivational factors for working sessionally included feeling disconnected from the nursing school and not having adequate resources and support for teaching.

**Conclusions:** Sessional teaching staff provide benefits to nurse education programs. Universities need to enhance motivational factors such as flexibility and address the lack of sense of belonging, support and resourcing of sessionals to create a sustainable academic workforce and to ensure the quality of nurse education.

## 1. Introduction

Sessional teaching staff are part of the higher education teaching team, contributing many benefits to nursing programs (Bodak et al., 2019; Clarke, 2021). For the purpose of this systematic review, sessional nursing teaching staff are casual academics who are nurses and do not work permanently or have ongoing employment or fixed-term contracts in a tertiary education setting (Richardson et al., 2021, 2018; Ricks et al., 2025). They often perform teaching and marking duties in nursing

programs ranging from vocational, undergraduate to postgraduate levels.

For the last few decades, higher education providers have been using sessional teaching staff to address the academic workforce shortage (Harvey, 2017; Kendall and Schussler, 2017; Richardson et al., 2021). This trend of casualisation of the academic workforce is due to factors including both an aging academic workforce and increased nursing student enrollment leading to a nursing academic workforce shortage (Boamah et al., 2021; Boniol et al., 2022; Clarke, 2021;

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2025.104433>

Received 25 October 2024; Received in revised form 6 February 2025; Accepted 18 June 2025

Available online 19 June 2025

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Fangonil-Gagalanga et al., 2023; Smiley et al., 2021). As sessional teaching staff are casual academics they do not have ongoing contracts, allowing universities to employ them as needed to address fluctuations in student numbers and manage teacher numbers.

Sessional nursing teaching staff provide considerable benefits to nurse education. Many sessional teaching staff work part-time in health services as well as casually in universities. With the current trend of healthcare globalisation, the rapidly developing and changing health informatics, technologies and improvements in clinical practice, clinically active nurses provide current practice knowledge and skills to the nurse education team (Richardson et al., 2018; Shoghi et al., 2019; Shrestha et al., 2020). These clinically active nurses can contextualise current workplace issues with theoretical and practical teaching to benefit nursing students' learning, linking theories to clinical skills and assisting them in transitioning from the classroom environment to clinical practice (Burgess et al., 2020).

High casual staff turnover is recognised as a concern in the higher education sector requiring educational facilities and administrators to regularly reemploy, reorientate and onboard new sessional staff to maintain the teaching workforce (Brouwer et al., 2024). Education facilities have specific processes and academic policies regulating their programs and curriculum, requiring new staff members to be educated on the required policies and processes at each education facility so that they can function as members of the teaching team. Sessional nursing teaching staff often require additional support with the development of teaching and assessment skills as this is not part of normal nursing practice, creating administrative and professional development burdens for the educational facilities and increasing the time and financial burden to recruit and develop new sessional staff to fill the teaching gaps (Frögéli et al., 2023).

Despite the frequent use of sessional teaching staff in nurse education, sessional staff often feel marginalised, unsupported and lack job security (Heffernan, 2020; Loyd and Murray, 2021; Walton, 2018). Sessional teaching staff do not have the job security and career support such as leave entitlements, performance reviews and professional development opportunities offered to permanent nurse academics and they lack opportunities to advance in their career as they are often not educational experts but clinically active practitioners (Baik et al., 2018; Heffernan, 2018). Sessional teaching staff usually participate in teaching and marking activities only and are not engaged in research, administrative or curricular tasks (Brouwer et al., 2024; Heffernan, 2018; Ryan et al., 2013). This may potentially decrease their motivation and desire to stay employed as sessional teaching staff, causing human resource management issues including maintaining a sustainable organisation, job satisfaction, job security, sense of belonging and performance management (Ali and Anwar, 2021; Anwar and Abdullah, 2021; Gu et al., 2022; Vo et al., 2022). This can impact the continuity of teaching and hence the student learning experience (Brown, 2018) and ultimately the quality of the future nursing workforce. Currently, there is limited information on why sessional teaching staff choose to undertake sessional employment in pre-registration nursing programs and why some remain in these roles for many years while others are only there for a short period. Whilst a previous literature review examined the experience of sessional staff working in undergraduate nursing programs (Bodak et al., 2019), no literature reviews were identified examining the sessional nursing teaching staff motivation to work in higher education. Therefore, this systematic review is warranted.

### 1.1. Aims/objectives

This literature review aimed to explore the motivation of sessional academics to undertake employment in nursing pre-registration programs. The specific objectives were to:

1. Identify motivational factors for sessional nursing teaching staff to undertake employment in pre-registration nursing programs internationally.
2. Identify demotivational factors for sessional nursing teaching staff to remain employed in pre-registration nursing programs internationally.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Design

A systematic review approach was chosen as it aims to uncover international research literature, appraise its quality and identify any knowledge gaps to guide future research (Munn et al., 2018). This systematic review was guided by the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews for Interventions and reporting of the findings followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) checklist (Higgins et al., 2024; Page et al., 2021). The protocol of this systematic review was registered with the Open Science Framework in May 2024 (Registration link: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/Y3N2J>) and the search of databases was undertaken in September 2024.

### 2.2. Eligibility criteria

The inclusion criteria for this systematic review required papers to include: (1) sessional nursing teaching staff, (2) motivational or demotivational factors to stay employed, (3) pre-registration or pre-licensed nursing programs including diplomas, associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, accelerated bachelor's degrees and (4) the post-secondary or tertiary education settings.

The exclusion criteria for this systematic review were papers that focused on (1) onboarding or role transitioning, (2) postgraduate, post-registration or post-licensed nursing programs, (3) enrolled nurse, licensed practical nurse, licensed vocational nurse programs, (4) staff working in the non-nursing subjects in nursing programs such as anatomy, physiology, research or pharmacology and (5) non-empirical or grey literature such as literature reviews, book chapters, protocols, reports, conference abstracts or papers.

### 2.3. Information sources

The search was conducted in September 2024 using the following databases: Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) (EBSCOhost), Education Source (EBSCOhost), Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) (EBSCOhost), American Psychological Association (APA) PsycInfo® (EBSCOhost), Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE) (EBSCOhost). In addition to searching in databases, hand searching was performed using Google Scholar with the search phrase "motivation of sessional nursing academic in higher education".

### 2.4. Search strategy

The search terms were developed using the population, context and concept (PCC) framework to suit the research question (Pollock et al., 2023). The population keywords included both sessional teaching staff and nursing alternative terms. The context keywords included the higher education setting's alternative terms. The concept keywords included employment and motivation-related alternative terms. All keywords and alternative terms were linked with Boolean operators. The searches had no date restriction and were limited to English only (Table 1 & Supplementary File 1).

**Table 1**

Keywords used in database searches.

Database	Population	Context	Concept
CINAHL	academi*	college*	drive
Education Source	adjunct	higher education	employ*
ERIC	associate	post-secondary	incentive
MEDLINE	casual	school*	inspir*
PsycInfo®	contingent	tertiary education	intent*
Web of Science	contracted	universit*	motivat*
	facult*		reason*
	instruct*		stimulat*
	lecturer*		
	non-continuing		
	non-permanent		
	non-tenure track		
	non-tenured		
	non-tenured		
	nursing		
	nusr*		
	off tenure track		
	professor*		
	sessional		
	sessional		
	staff		
	teach*		
	untenued		
	visiting		

## 2.5. Data selection and collection process

A total of 613 studies were identified through the initial search process. References were imported to Covidence for de-duplication and screening and 91 duplicated records were removed (Covidence, n.d.). Title and abstract screening were performed in Covidence by two independent reviewers (TR, HB) and 500 records were assessed to be ineligible leaving 22 records for full-text screening. There were 18 studies excluded during full-text screening due to not meeting inclusion criteria including irrelevance, not nursing-related, non-empirical studies, not registered nurse programs, not sessional or focusing on onboarding. Conflicts were resolved by a third or fourth reviewer during the screening process (LL, EJ). A total of four studies were included in this systematic review (Fig. 1).

## 2.6. Data synthesis process

The Lockwood et al. (2015) approach was used to guide the data synthesis process where findings were reviewed against the objectives by two independent reviewers (TR, HB). Data related to motivational and demotivational factors of sessional teaching staff were extracted independently by two reviewers (TR, HB). Two themes were deductively developed, and each theme had at least two or more findings. Consensus were confirmed by a third or fourth reviewer (LL, EJ).

## 2.7. Study risk of bias assessment

The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) was used to appraise the quality of the four studies (Hong et al., 2018). MMAT provides comprehensive assessment items for literature reviews containing more than one type of methodology and it includes elements of reviewing research quality (Hong et al., 2017). Two independent reviewers (TR, HB) appraised the quality first then conflicts were resolved by a third or fourth reviewer (LL, EJ). Overall, two studies were identified to have 80 % quality (Cowen, 1991; Woodworth, 2016) and two studies (Andrew et al., 2010; Dixon et al., 2015) were assessed to have 100 % quality (Table 2).

All four studies used a purposive sampling method and given the specificity of the population of the research this is an appropriate sampling method. The papers were all authored by nursing academics from a university or a community college with experience in pre-registration

nursing programs. Woodworth (2016) focused on the correlation between adjunct nursing educators' job satisfaction and intent to stay employed in a university and used a quantitative methodology to collect data and perform statistical analysis to draw conclusions. This is an appropriate design to test the hypothesis that higher job satisfaction supports sessional teaching staff's intent to stay and increase retention. Cowen (1991) used a mixed-method approach to investigate job perception and satisfaction. This study included part-time nursing staff demographic data, a ranking of their satisfaction factors and their reasons for the ranking as an exploratory study approach. The study design was justified to answer their research questions; however, the study is over 30 years old and limited to one university. We have included this article in our review as this is early research examining sessional nursing teaching staff's perceptions and experience which contains elements of motivation to work as sessional staff. However, given the paper is over 30 years old, the findings may not be relevant to current university settings internationally, as the working environment and working conditions have changed and there were fewer sessional staff employed in the past. Additionally, computers were not common in 1991 when most students were taught face-to-face using paper-based material without many technologies. Two studies (Cowen, 1991; Woodworth, 2016) used Herzberg's (1968) two-factor motivation-hygiene theory to guide their research approach. This approach is not seen in the other two studies (Andrew et al., 2010; Dixon et al., 2015) which used qualitative methods to explore the perceptions of sessional teachers' experience and contribution to a Bachelor of Nursing program in Australia. This is an appropriate methodology to answer their research question given that a qualitative methodology focuses on perception and experience.

## 2.8. Certainty assessment

The GRADE – Confidence in Evidence from Review of Qualitative Research (GRADE-CERQual) framework was used to establish confidence level against five aspects including methodological limitation, coherence, adequacy, relevancy and publication bias (Lewin, Bohren, et al., 2018; Lewin, Booth, et al., 2018). The reviewers (TR, HB) first evaluated the confidence levels of the two themes independently against the five aspects and any conflicts were resolved by a third or fourth reviewer (LL, EJ) (Supplementary File 2).

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Study characteristics

From a total of 613 studies, only four studies met the inclusion criteria of research including sessional nursing teaching staff motivational or demotivational factors to stay employed to teach in pre-registration nursing programs in the tertiary education settings and were included in this systematic review (Andrew et al., 2010; Cowen, 1991; Dixon et al., 2015; Woodworth, 2016) (Fig. 1). Two studies were conducted in the USA (Cowen, 1991; Woodworth, 2016) and two were in Australia (Andrew et al., 2010; Dixon et al., 2015). One study was completed with a mixed-method approach and used quantitative and open-ended surveys for data collection (Cowen, 1991). Two studies were completed with a qualitative approach using interviews to collect data (Andrew et al., 2010; Dixon et al., 2015). One study was completed with a quantitative approach using a descriptive survey for the data collection (Woodworth, 2016). All four studies included sessional nursing teaching staff's perceptions, experiences or intent to stay teaching in pre-registration nursing programs (Table 3). The population terms used for the four articles vary including sessional teachers, part-time nursing facilities and adjunct nursing educators. However, they are all referring to sessional nursing teaching staff.

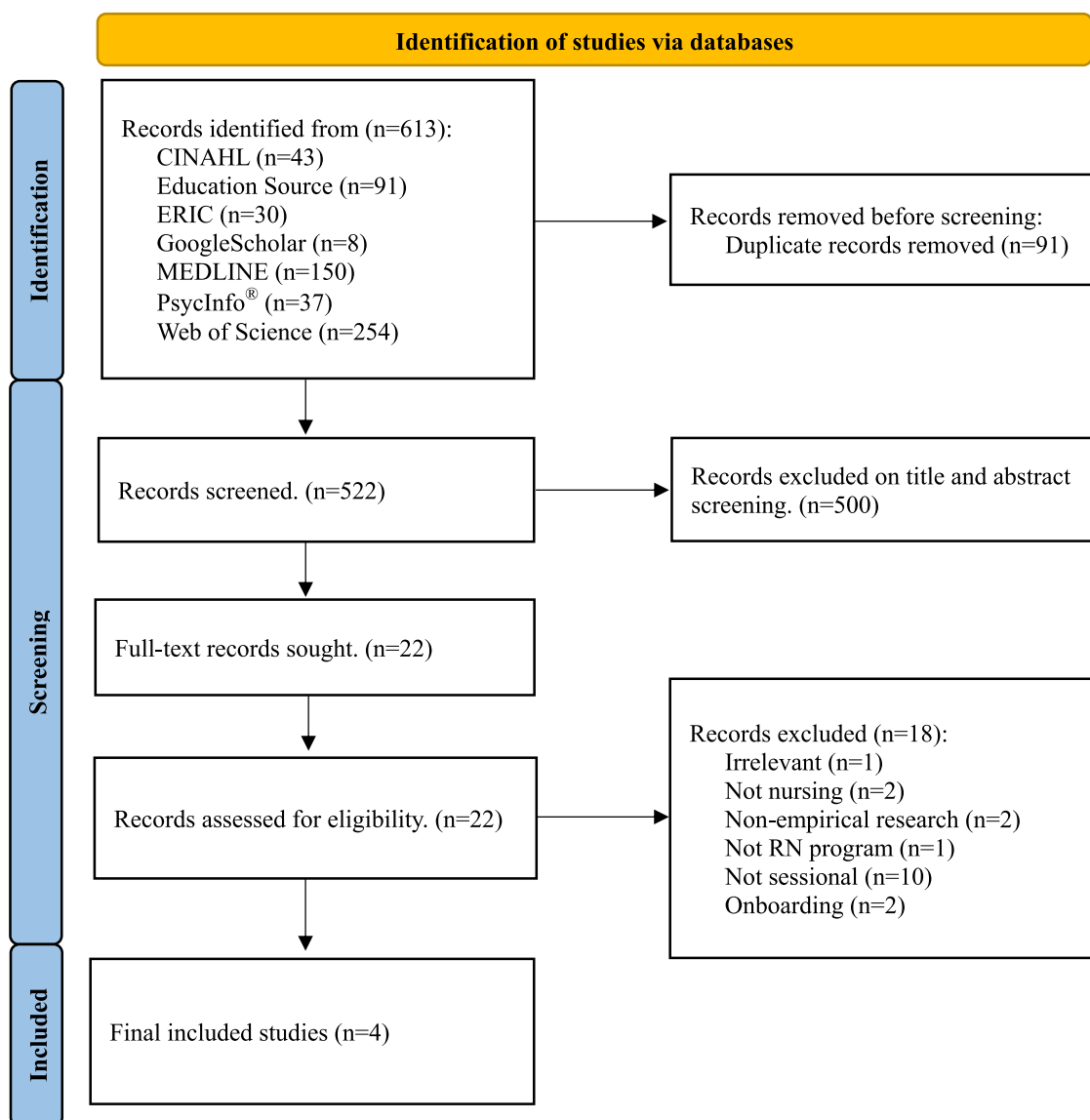


Fig. 1. PRISMA Flowchart adapted from Page et al. (2021).

### 3.2. Themes

Two themes emerged in this systematic review: i) Motivation to remain employed and ii) Demotivational factors to stay employed.

#### 3.2.1. Theme i: motivation to remain employed

The theme 'motivation to remain employed' refers to the reasons for sessional teaching staff to continue their employment at a university and includes work enjoyment and work flexibility. All four articles (Andrew et al., 2010; Cowen, 1991; Dixon et al., 2015; Woodworth, 2016) identified a generally positive sense of work enjoyment by sessional teaching staff which served as the motivation to stay employed. A higher job satisfaction rate was associated with a higher intent to stay employed for sessional teaching staff (Woodworth, 2016). Sessional teaching staff felt privileged to provide their clinical experiences and knowledge from their current nursing practice to students as they felt they provided a practical approach in contrast to a theoretical focus (Andrew et al., 2010). Clinically active sessionals were able to bring the reality of clinical practice to the classroom environment and many expressed the desire to make an impact in shaping the new generation of nurses so they feel enthusiastic and passionate (Dixon et al., 2015). Work flexibility, autonomy and student interaction are valued by sessional teaching staff

as they consider them as optimal and enjoyable working conditions (Cowen, 1991).

Work flexibility is the ability of sessional teaching staff to negotiate with the university on the amount of workload, types of work such as marking or teaching and the time of working before accepting the responsibility. Work flexibility was a positive working experience and motivational factor identified in three studies (Cowen, 1991; Dixon et al., 2015; Woodworth, 2016). Sessional work allows sessional teaching staff to have flexible work arrangements for managing family responsibilities, study and other employment arrangements such as clinical nursing work (Cowen, 1991). Dixon et al. (2015) found that sessional teaching staff use flexible working hours to maintain their clinical employment, fulfil family commitments and undertake further university studies such as master's or doctoral degrees.

#### 3.2.2. Theme ii: demotivational factors to remain employed

The theme 'demotivational factor to remain employed' refers to factors and reasons that can decrease staff retention and job satisfaction for sessional teaching staff and includes a lack of sense of belonging and lack of professional development. Three studies (Cowen, 1991; Dixon et al., 2015; Woodworth, 2016) identified that there is a general lack of a sense of belonging or acceptance felt by sessional teaching staff and that



**Table 2**  
Quality appraisal.

Authors and year	Screening		Qualitative					Quantitative descriptive					Mixed methods					Quality rating
	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	*****
Cowen (1991)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	C	C	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	*****
Dixon et al. (2015)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	*****
Woodworth (2016)	Y	Y	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	*****

Y=Yes, N=No, C=Can't tell, RCT=Randomized 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?

5\*\*\*\*\* or 100 % quality criteria met, 4 \*\*\*\* or 80 % quality criteria met, 3 \*\*\* or 60 % quality criteria met, 2 \*\* or 40 % quality criteria met, 1 \* or 20 % quality criteria met.

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

they feel a sense of “just filling in”.

Sessional teaching staff often face challenges in accessing essential resources, feeling disconnected from the university and participating in decision-making processes, which has an impact on their motivation and job satisfaction (Cowen, 1991; Woodworth, 2016). Dixon et al. (2015) found that sessional teaching staff were not able to access appropriate information, technology and teaching material to do their jobs. This may be course material, university processes and systems or semester timetables. Cowen (1991) and Woodworth (2016) identified that some sessional teaching staff do not always enjoy their roles as they feel disconnected from the university and do not know how to address students' needs. They also expressed concerns about not being able to participate in discussions and meetings to improve their teaching methods and styles (Dixon et al., 2015). Both Cowen (1991) and Woodworth (2016) found that sessional teaching staff are not included in the course and staff meetings and important decisions about nursing courses are made without them. In addition, where sessional teaching staff hold at least a part-time clinical role outside of their sessional roles, they are less likely to stay motivated and employed as sessional teaching staff (Woodworth, 2016).

#### 4. Discussion

This review explored the motivational and demotivational factors experienced by sessional nursing academics working in tertiary education. Motivational factors identified included enjoyment of teaching, flexibility of the role and the ability to influence the next generation of nurses. The demotivational factors included a lack of resources, a lack of sense of belonging and a lack of professional development opportunities.

Work enjoyment is one of the main reasons employees stay employed (Sirgy and Lee, 2017). Sessional teaching staff work in universities because of the enjoyment of teaching nursing students, the sense of responsibility in shaping the next-generation nursing workforce and flexible working arrangements (Cowen, 1991; Dixon et al., 2015). This is where sessional teaching staff have the ability to work with students closely, passing on their knowledge, skills and experience as nurses and bridging theoretical knowledge with contemporary clinical practices (Bodak et al., 2019; Dixon et al., 2015; Shoghi et al., 2019). In this review, sessional teaching staff were found to feel honoured to teach using their clinical expertise and experiences to contextualise the theoretical knowledge (McComb et al., 2021; Ryan et al., 2013). Teaching enhances

job satisfaction in various ways including sharing knowledge and practices, having a positive impact on younger generations, building relationships with students and facilitating learning (Frenzel et al., 2018; Xie et al., 2023). There are elements of esteem, recognition and respect generated from directly teaching students, as students see sessional teaching staff as mentors which sessional staff may not gain from performing clinical work (Jameel and Ahmad, 2020; Szromek and Wolniak, 2020). These are elements that can facilitate intellectual stimulation providing increased motivation to work in the sessional teaching role and serve as a fuel to drive employees' motivation to stay employed, increase engagement and boost creativity and innovative ideas (Díaz-Fúnez et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2022; Shafi et al., 2020).

Role flexibility was another important factor for sessional teaching staff continuing their employment. Some sessional teaching staff reported the importance of the flexibility of sessional work to enable them to maintain their clinical work and manage other commitments such as studies or family responsibilities (Cowen, 1991; Dixon et al., 2015; Woodworth, 2016). This flexibility of work arrangements allowed employees to reduce stress and burnout and improved work-life balance by giving them the ability to choose their tasks (marking, teaching or clinical facilitation) and time of work (Amer et al., 2022; Aust et al., 2023). As the nursing workforce internationally is predominantly female, the need for flexibility to manage family responsibilities is not surprising (Livesay et al., 2022; Nursing and Midwifery Board Australia, 2024). Increasing flexibility for women at work can support them in having a career and meeting their other parental and family responsibilities, hence increasing their job satisfaction (Fine et al., 2019; Jessiman-Perreault et al., 2023).

Demotivational factors are reasons for not remaining employed and included a lack of sense of belonging, a lack of resources and a lack of professional development opportunities (Cowen, 1991; Dixon et al., 2015; Woodworth, 2016). Sessional teaching staff are less likely to stay employed with universities for various reasons including having clinical employment as well as their sessional teaching roles, a lack of resources to support their teaching and a lack of sense of belonging within the teaching team (Cowen, 1991; Dixon et al., 2015; Woodworth, 2016). A lack of sense of belonging was expressed by some sessional teaching staff who felt they were segregated from permanent academics and did not belong to the teaching team (Dixon et al., 2015). The nature of the work for sessional teaching was often unplanned and ad hoc and the duties available may be restricted to only marking assessments or teaching

**Table 3**

Results.

Author(s), year and country	Methods	Aim	Population	Results
Andrew et al. (2010) Australia	Qualitative (semi-structured interview)	Explore the perceptions of sessional teachers about their perceived contribution to an undergraduate Bachelor of Nursing program.	Sessional teachers in nursing from an Australian university (n = 12).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sessional teaching staff feel privileged to offer their experience and knowledge from their current clinical practice as university study offers a more theoretical focus.</li> <li>2. Bringing the reality of clinical practice to the classroom environment as Sessional teaching staff are most likely clinically current.</li> </ol>
Cowen (1991) USA	Mixed Methods (quantitative and open-ended survey)	To investigate and compare job perceptions (satisfaction-dissatisfaction) of part-time nursing faculty teaching and to recommend guidelines for increasing job satisfaction of part-time employees.	Part-time nursing faculties (n = 42).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sessional teaching staff reported that they have good working conditions, are recognised, and have autonomy working sessionally. Interaction with students is the most satisfying element in teaching.</li> <li>2. Sessional work provides flexibility with family responsibilities, studying working part-time, or maintaining a current nursing practice.</li> <li>3. Sessional teaching staff feel that they are just filling in.</li> <li>4. There is a lack of support for professional and personal growth in their employment as Sessional teaching staff.</li> <li>5. Salary is a maintenance factor that increases job security.</li> </ol>
Dixon et al. (2015) Australia	Qualitative (interview)	Provide insights into the experience of sessional teachers related to nursing skills in simulation, nursing environments, and classroom tutorials teaching nursing.	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 want to make a difference to the next generation of nurses, they feel enthusiastic and passionate about their work.</li> <li>2. Working sessionally allows flexible working hours and the ability to maintain clinical employment, undertake higher educational studies, and fulfil family commitments.</li> <li>3. Not being able to access information on using technology, and discussion about teaching styles and approaches. Sessional teaching staff want more opportunities to participate in development.</li> <li>4. Being able to access support from the university, staff and teaching and marking material in advance would assist Sessional teaching staff in their roles of teaching.</li> </ol>
Woodworth (2016) USA	Quantitative (descriptive survey)	To understand the predictive factors of intent-to-stay teaching for associate degree adjunct clinical nurse faculty.	Adjunct nursing educator (n = 61).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Sessional teaching staff who rated highly motivated intended to stay employed as Sessional teaching staff whereas if they have full-time employment outside of their sessional job, they are less likely to be motivated or stay employed as sessionals.</li> <li>2. Sessional teaching staff are not included in governance meetings to increase the sense of autonomy and support decision-making activities.</li> <li>3. Mentoring and orientation programs provide positive experiences and support for Sessional teaching staff.</li> </ol>

students, hence they are less involved in other academic tasks such as research projects, staff meetings and curriculum decisions about nursing programs (Crimmins et al., 2016; Richardson et al., 2018). In addition, some sessional teaching staff feel they do not belong due to their lack of qualifications as many do not have a doctoral degree (Gazza, 2017). Despite the increasing employment of sessional teaching staff, Woodworth (2016) argues that sessional staff are most likely to resign within the first three years of their employment due to low job satisfaction. Other reasons for sessional teaching staff to resign include burnout, increased job demand and lack of support to do their jobs (Schmiedehaus et al., 2023). Due to the increasing employment of sessional teaching staff, universities need to address job satisfaction and motivational factors to retain sessional teaching staff to maintain a sustainable sessional teaching workforce.

Sessional teaching staff usually come from a clinically strong background where they are actively working in the nursing field. This may mean that their training and professional experience allow minimal

exposure to best-practice teaching theories and approaches (Brouwer et al., 2024). Providing resources to support sessionals is vital to ensure the quality of education and retention of sessionals. Sessional teaching staff require educational support to enhance their ability to teach and to feel valued in their roles as academics (Bodak et al., 2019; Hitch et al., 2018).

Sessional teaching staff choose to work in universities due to positive motivational factors. Positive working experiences identified in this review included work enjoyment, flexibility and autonomy of employment and a sense of responsibility to teach the future generation of nurses. Other elements that increase motivation in employees generally include extrinsic factors such as recognition, ongoing support, mentoring, resources, career growth, professional development and socialisation opportunities (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021; Brouwer et al., 2024; Mahadi et al., 2020). Addressing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors is part of positive human resources management practices to increase employees' well-being and job satisfaction, leading to higher

job retention and a sustainable workforce (Papa et al., 2020; Yadav, 2020). While the shortage of academics in nursing has led to increased sessional teaching staff to perform more direct teaching for nursing students, it is recognised that they require support including being provided with professional development as they lack a pedagogical teaching approach to teach and assess nursing students (Garvey et al., 2025; McComb and Eather, 2023; Ricks et al., 2025). There is a need for increased research to better understand sessional staff's motivation to work to create a more sustainable sessional workforce in nurse education. Future research should focus on the sessional nursing teaching staff demographic, their job experience, career trajectory and intent and strategies to support a sustainable sessional workforce.

## 5. Limitations

There were some limitations of the review, largely the lack of research published on the motivational and demotivational factors related to sessional nursing teaching staff resulting in limited research papers. As a result, only four articles were included in this systematic review. This systematic review included four studies from the USA and Australia. This is not a comprehensive representation of the global perspective of sessional teaching staff's motivation. However, there was a challenge in identifying relevant articles related to this population as the term sessional varies from country to country due to various terms and definitions used globally (Brouwer et al., 2024). The recency of the studies is also of note as Cowen's (1991) research is over 30 years old and may not be a current representation of the sessional teaching staff's motivation. The licensed practical nurse, licensed vocational nurse and enrolled nurse sessional teaching staff were not included in this literature review. This may limit the generalisability of this review to the broader sessional nursing teaching staff globally.

## 6. Conclusion

This systematic literature review found several factors that motivate sessional teaching staff to remain employed in universities including the enjoyment of teaching and facilitating nursing students, having the ability to shape the next-generation nursing workforce, flexible working arrangements to increase work autonomy and having the ability to remain in clinical employment. These factors are found to be facilitating sessional nursing staff to have a positive working experience to create a sustainable workforce. Demotivational factors were also identified as these factors create barriers for sessional teachers to remain employed. These factors include a lack of a sense of belonging, a lack of opportunity to undertake professional development and a lack of support to develop teaching skills which lead to a lower level of job satisfaction for sessional nursing staff. This impacts the sustainability of the sessional nursing teaching workforce in nurse education.

Sessional teaching staff require support and mentorship including opportunities to develop and advance their careers. Most of the sessional teaching staff come from a clinically strong background and require professional development and mentoring to teach nursing students and mark assessments. Some sessional teaching staff identified that the sessional work itself provides flexibility and a source of additional income as the attraction to continue to work but this element is not well investigated in the current literature. Future research could focus on exploring these shortfalls in the knowledge gap.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

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

review & editing, Validation, Supervision.

## Registration

The protocol of this systematic review is registered with the Open Science Framework (Registration link: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/Y3N2J>).

## Funding

This literature review was not supported by any funding.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

No conflict of interest has been declared by the authors.

## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge research engagement librarian Clare Duffy from the Australian Catholic University Library Service for her guidance.

## Appendix A. Supporting information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version at [doi:10.1016/j.nepr.2025.104433](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2025.104433).

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