



New Trends in
Qualitative
Research



VOLUME 21 | Nº1

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.36367/ntqr.21.1.2025.e980>

Virginia Cuellar Tufano

Emily Summers

Data de submissão: February, 2024

Data de avaliação: December, 2024

Data de publicação: January, 2025

PANDEMIC ERA PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH ABOUT NURSING EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

Recent COVID contexts have changed the patterns of phenomena occurring within healthcare settings. While there has been increased attention to the need for qualitative research across all areas of healthcare, a pandemic-era systematic research review of phenomenological studies specific to nurse educators can help this field to decide where/how to focus subsequent research. While qualitative research has been increasing in numbers and in professionals who value it, there remains minimal in-practice models on how to decide which qualitative methodologies were used most during pandemic increases. The purpose of this systematic review was to examine the following questions: (1) How frequently did COVID-era phenomenological research center on nurse educators? (2) When did phenomenological nurse educator studies increase during the pandemic era? (3) What was the most frequent type of phenomenological research done with nurse educators during the height of the pandemic era? We utilized PRISMA review methods fused with an Iterative Thematic Inquiry qualitatively-modified addition to analyze phenomenological nurse education studies published in the literature during the COVID pandemic. The researchers analyzed topics within cited peer-reviewed phenomenological nurse educator studies where data collection began after awareness and responsiveness to COVID. Our research resulted in a systematic and themed cataloguing of the most frequent topics researched in 2022 that followed a qualitative phenomenological approach centered on nurse educators. This assisted understanding about how phenomenology was utilized and aligned with shifting times, policies, and practices. Unlike other types of research, phenomenological strengths included starting with a globally validated identified phenomenon, which the COVID-19 pandemic naturally provided. Phenomenological studies helped to understand participants' actions and motivations while often challenging long-held status quo beliefs, which made this systematic review of phenomenological research ideal for times of flux and rapid change.

Keywords

Nurse Educators; COVID; Systematic Review.

1. Introduction

The World Health Organization declared the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) as a pandemic in early 2020 (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). As a result, the need to mitigate the spread of the disease became profoundly important. This had a direct impact on many sectors of healthcare, including nursing education at all levels. While healthcare administrators attempted to balance safety for healthcare workers and patients, nursing education worldwide was disrupted because of the pandemic. Nurse educators were given minimal time to adapt traditional teaching modalities in classroom and clinical settings. The largest challenge for nursing education was maintaining the rigor needed to teach an applied science in which the ability to learn tactile skills and care for patients was a necessary component to applying complex concepts learned in the classroom (Farsi et al., 2021).

Early in 2020, nursing education worldwide was disrupted because of the pandemic. To mitigate the spread of the disease, many schools of nursing closed their campuses to in-person teaching. As a result, nurse educators were required to immediately convert in-person courses to meaningful online formats and deliver these courses through virtual means (Riess et al., 2022). Clinical teaching in most healthcare facilities was either altered or stopped all together, leaving students with a gap in learning hands-on patient care. For those nursing faculty and students who were able to continue practicing direct patient care, the clinical experience was very different as they encountered stressful situations in patient care that were often frightening for both faculty and students (Farsi et al., 2021). Phenomenological studies captured this.

Throughout the years of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2023), many schools of nursing that were not able to continue in-patient clinical education resorted to teaching patient care and critical thinking skills to students in simulation laboratories associated with their schools (Nabolsi et al., 2021). For some schools with state-of-the-art simulator laboratories, plentiful supplies, and dedicated simulation teaching faculty, real-time clinical scenarios could be recreated effectively as simulations. This was a painstaking brainstorming, planning, and implementation process for faculty, but it provided the opportunity for nursing students to continue to practice their hands-on and clinical thinking skills in a semi-realistic setting. For other schools of nursing with limited simulation facilities and/or teaching supplies, the provision of realistic clinical scenarios and practice opportunities was very basic and difficult to re-create. Many clinical faculty had to develop the practice scenarios with very limited background knowledge on how to re-create clinical situations, and often very few simulators and clinical supplies (Nurse-Clarke & Sockol, 2022).

Nurses' phenomenological studies communicated a deep understanding of the nursing profession when they conducted research about nurse educators, acting as stewards of their profession. Many nurse educators also conducted phenomenological research about evidence-based practice initiatives (Gazza, 2022). One of the major concerns for researchers was the impact that the pandemic would have in altering or pausing in-person research during this time.

Additionally, another concern that arose regarding the importance of studying the effects of the pandemic on nurses and nurse educators was that the number of phenomenological studies in nursing during this era would be severely reduced (Farsi et al., 2021).

The literature explored nursing students' experiences during the pandemic. However, a review exploring nurse educators' perceptions, coping skills, and motivations attributed to successfully continuing teaching in nursing was needed. This systematic review of phenomenological nurse educator focused studies during the COVID-19 pandemic focused on studies published in 2022, as the researchers determined this to be when phenomenological nurse educator studies peaked. The phenomenological studies the researchers reviewed extended knowledge about nurse educators' motivations by exploring how (1) nursing faculty viewed their educator roles and (2) changed their teaching strategies to adapt to adversity during challenging circumstances. Identifying phenomenological studies centering on nurse educators during the pandemic uncovered beneficial strategies ready for adaptation during similar future disruptions. The researchers opted to conduct a systematic review exploring phenomenological research about nurse educators during the pandemic to understand their lived experiences, specifically regarding investigating the frequency and distribution of topics within the literature.

2. Research Questions/Objectives

This systematic review examined the following questions: (1) How frequently did COVID-era phenomenological research center on nurse educators? (2) When did phenomenological nurse educator studies increase during the pandemic era? (3) What was the most frequent phenomenological research done with nurse educators during the height of the pandemic era? For this study, we operationally defined nurse educators as nurses who taught nursing education in an academic setting. We included any study with a phenomenological method, regardless of the type of phenomenology, that centered on nurse educators.

3. Methodology

We conducted a traditional systematic PRISMA review (García-Peñalvo, 2022), enhanced by a qualitative theming Iterative Thematic Inquiry (Morgan & Nica, 2020). Initially, we utilized a fixed time search of Google Scholar under the exact terms phenomenology + "nurse educator". We used these terms individually and combined to investigate the frequency changes and content foci of phenomenological studies centered on nurse educators between 2020-2023. We chose this period of time because these were the years most closely associated with the start and the end of the primary pandemic surge that shifted nurse educator professional approaches and contexts. We performed a time-locked search with the same key terms for each individual year of the pandemic including 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023.

We discovered that, overall, the number of phenomenological studies had a downward trend during these years. In contrast, published articles that focused on nurse educators rose and then peaked in 2022. Likewise, the narrowed focus trend for phenomenological studies on nurse educators also peaked in 2022.

As a result, we selected the year 2022 to investigate the topical trends for phenomenological studies on nurse educators. Table 1 shows the number of articles published, delineated by key word and year, throughout this four-year period that guided our temporal selection.

Table 1. Phenomenological Nurse Educator Studies Overview

Year	Articles			Included Studies
	Phenomenological Studies	Nurse Educator Studies	Nure Educator Phenomenological Studies	
2020	75,600	4,380	573	0
2021	64,600	4,700	603	0
2022	50,100	4,800	645	65
2023	46,100	4,360	537	0

Finally, we incorporated an additional qualitative analytical step to the traditional PRISMA process by entering the systematic review results into NVivo and conducting a theming analysis on the results (Morgan & Nica, 2020). This approach fused historical systematic PRISMA review with newer Iterative Thematic Inquiry qualitative analysis processes. This novel approach made the findings more digestible and applicable for nurse educators.

The researchers' review followed guidance from the modified Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework (Moher et al., 2010) to describe the screening process from the total number of records identified in the initial search through the total number of studies included in the review corpus. The PRISMA flowchart in Figure 1 illustrates this process. We followed PRISMA guidance, specifically aligned to item 16 within the 27-item checklist of the PRISMA statement to give a graphical representation of the review.

We followed a modified PRISMA approach for the reduction process (see Figure 1). To derive a suitable sample, the researchers included only articles that met the following inclusion criteria: (1) peer-reviewed, (2) cited, (3) phenomenological in methodological approach, and (4) primarily centered on nurse educators. This PRISMA guided refining process resulted in 65 articles for full review.

3.1 Search Strategy

The researchers initiated the search by using the exact keywords “phenomenology” + “nurse educator” in our university’s full-text linked access to Google Scholar.

Next, we queried databases including APA PsychInfo, CINAHL Ultimate, Complementary Index, Directory of Open Access Journals, EBSCOhost, Education Source, Eric, Gale Academic, MEDLINE Complete, OmniFile Full Text Mega, PubMed, Science Citation Index Expanded, Science Direct, Sciendo, and Social Sciences Citation Index. We followed the PRISMA flowchart (Figure 1), which was organized into four phases.

In the first phase, *Identification*, the researchers initially reported the number of articles they identified when launching the search with the exact keywords ($n = 645$) for 2022 after the temporal selection described above. The researchers then refined the selection further by eliminating dissertations and theses, non-peer reviewed articles, and any articles not cited by other articles. During this phase, the researchers eliminated 43 articles from the selection ($n = 602$).

In the next phase, *Screening*, the researchers refined the sample by conducting a screening of the titles and key words. They then closely examined the abstracts for each of the 602 remaining articles to assure that the pre-established criteria for inclusion of nurse educators or nursing education were included within the phenomenological research. In this critical phase, all articles that did not meet the criteria were eliminated ($n = 301$). The researchers conducted a confirmatory scan of the remaining articles to assure that academic nurse educators, as opposed to education by nurses in clinical settings, were the centralized focus of the phenomenological research. Once confirmed, the researchers did not exclude any additional records from the full analysis.

In the third phase, *Eligibility*, the researchers conducted full-text, double-screening of each article to assure their appropriateness across all inclusion criteria. The first author’s nurse educator background allowed for content expertise, while the second author’s methodologist background allowed for methodology expertise. During this phase, the researchers eliminated an additional 236 articles with reason. The main reason for exclusion was that the implications were for nurse educators; however, the phenomenological study in the article was not centered on nurse educators. The second most frequent reason for exclusion was that the researchers of the phenomenological study were nurse educators, yet the study did not center on nurse education. The third most frequent reason for exclusion was that while the study was authentically about nurse educators, it was specifically about nurse educators in clinical patient education settings, as opposed to roles as academic nurse educators. These eliminated articles differed in their operational definitions from how we operationally defined a nurse educator in our study. We intrinsically accepted researchers’ claims of using phenomenological methods, regardless of their depth of that approach. If the research authors called a qualitative approach ‘phenomenology’, we accepted it as phenomenology without exclusions.

The final phase in the PRISMA flow chart, *Included*, indicated the final number of records that met the requirements for qualitative and quantitative synthesis ($n = 65$).

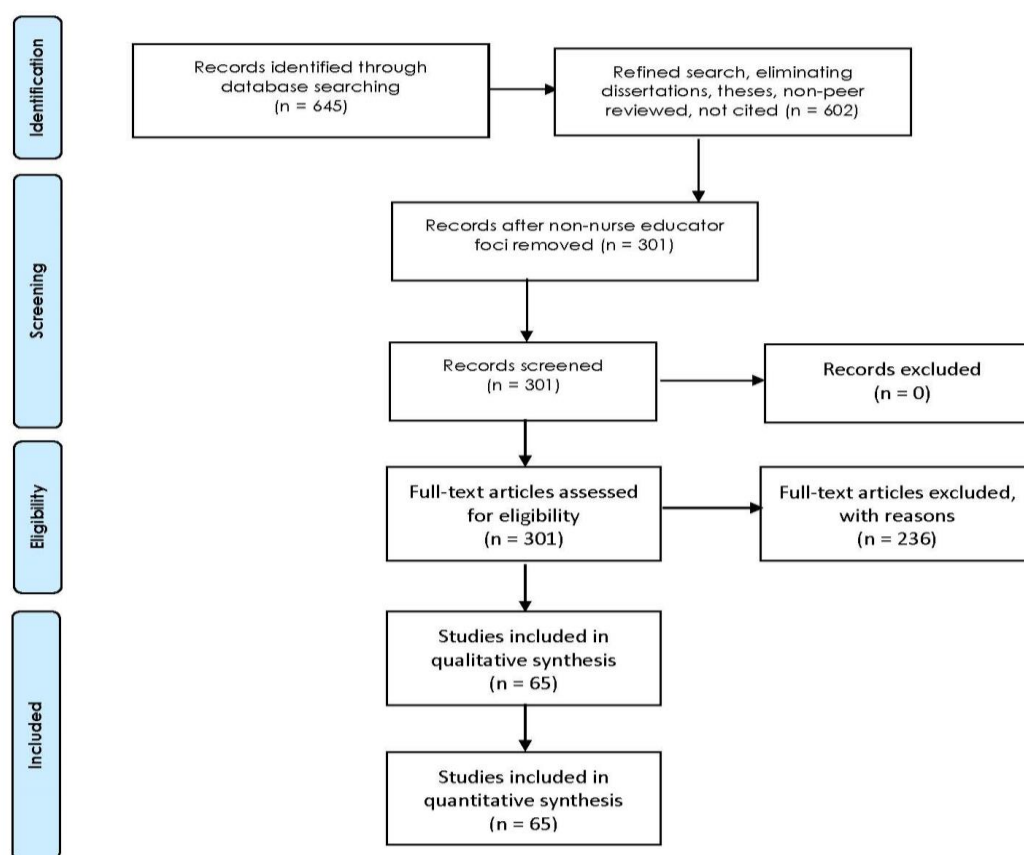


Figure 1. Modified PRISMA Flow Chart

Note. Modified PRISMA Flow Chart adapted from Moher et al., (2010), p. 339,

3.2 Qualitative Analysis

The initial 2022 search for phenomenological studies focused on nurse educators resulted in 645 publications. After the modified PRISMA process and final reduction, the researchers identified a total of 65 research studies that fully met nurse educator phenomenology inclusion criteria (Figure 1). Next, the researchers uploaded the 65 full-text articles representing each of the included studies in the synthesis into NVivo qualitative analysis software. The researchers conducted full-text qualitative coding analysis on each of the 65 articles. We then sorted the codes by total frequencies. Finally, the researchers qualitatively analyzed the codes into themes. Only when both researchers agreed upon placement was a code moved into a theme. Unlike other qualitative approaches, we did not allow codes to overlap nor articulate under more than one theme.

Finally, the researchers moved to within-theme analyses, which resulted in sorting the codes within each theme into categorized sub-themes. As with theming, codes were included in one and only one theme to retain authenticity in the frequency of occurrence.

While allowing codes to occur in more than one theme may have provided greater authenticity in terms of organic qualitative analysis, as this was inappropriate for maintaining the authenticity of the frequencies of occurrences.

Allowing codes in more than one theme could have artificially inflated total frequency count. Thus, the researchers utilized interrater reliability with a minimum threshold of 100% agreement, or interrater reliability score of 1 (Belur et al., 2021). This was accomplished through independent coding and theming followed by research team meetings to analyze together until both researchers agreed with code placements within themes and sub-themes. In team meetings, the first author, a nurse educator, served as the recognized authority on any theming or sub-theming regarding professional organization within nurse educators. The second author, a methodologist, provided expertise regarding methodological processes for theming and qualitative reorganization of data into sub-themes. This transparent, pre-decided organization, applied to both manifest and latent content, allowed all disagreements about placement to be easily resolved toward the goal of 100% agreement. From a qualitative perspective, this interrater reliability management plan also met Krippendorff's (2004) criteria for stability, accuracy, and reproducibility.

4. Results

4.1 Overall Distribution of Codes by Frequency for 2022 Nurse Educator Phenomenological Studies

Chart 1 indicated the 25 most common occurrences by frequency in the 65 included research articles. The researchers reduced and refined the multiplicity of initial codes and associated frequencies into 52 commonly occurring topics most relevant to nursing education. An example of where we combined codes was placing the code entitled Role within the code entitled Professional. We did this after checking that every iteration of role referred to nurse educators' professional roles. In Chart 1 we included the top 25 codes in descending occurrence of frequencies.

They represented the essence of the 65 articles well and this number was visually accessible in terms of size and space within the reporting. The representation of the top 25 coded frequencies also included all codes with over 175 occurrences, which the researchers perceived as a fair point to conclude the chart.

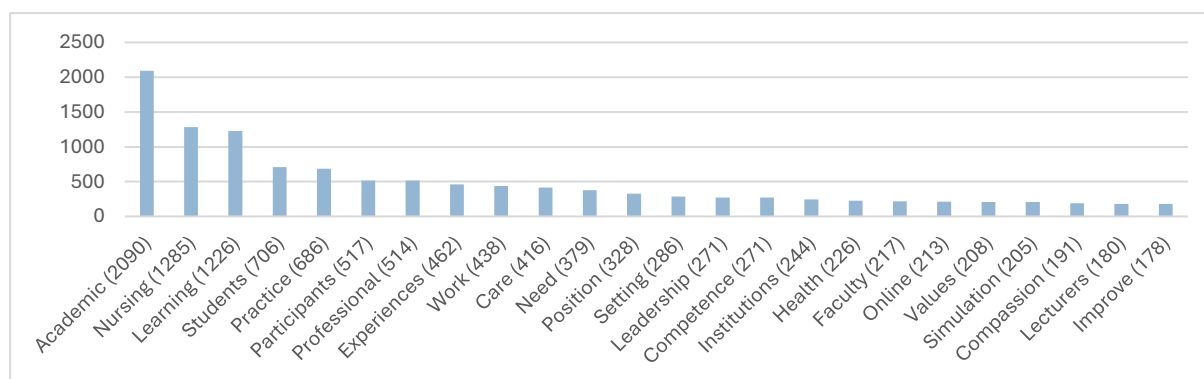


Chart 1. 2022 Nurse Educator Phenomenological Top 25 Coded Frequencies

4.2 Frequency Distributions of Themes within the Peer-Reviewed, Published, and Cited 2022 Nurse Educator Phenomenological Research

The researchers deeply analyzed each of the identified codes and reviewed their associated word occurrences. After the researchers reviewed the data individually and jointly, four primary themes emerged from the identified codes. The four themes were labeled as *Professional*, *Educational*, *Methodological*, and *Emotive* based on the grouping of codes. These themes were synthesized by word frequency in the results below (see Table 2). The *Professional* theme included a frequency of 5,817 unique occurrences within the identified articles, making it the strongest of the four themes. The *Educational* theme had a frequency of 4,799 occurrences, which also made it a prominently recurring theme within the 2022 nurse educator phenomenological literature. The *Methodological* theme, which had 1,565 occurrences, and the *Emotive* theme, with 1,171 occurrences, while still highly prevalent, had a much lower frequency of occurrences than the first two themes.

Table 2. Frequencies of Topics within 2022 Nurse Educator Phenomenological Studies by Theme

Frequencies of Topics by Theme		
Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Professional	5,817	44%
Educational	4,799	36%
Methodological	1,565	12%
Emotive	1,171	8%
Total	13,252	100%

4.3 Professional Theme Frequencies

The most prominent theme the researchers derived from the 65 final articles was the *Professional* theme.

The researchers categorized the codes that articulated under the *Professional* theme into a total of 26 sub-themes, totaling a frequency of 5,817 occurrences. *Nursing* was the most predominant sub-theme associated with the professional theme, with a total frequency of 1285 occurrences within the included articles. Most codes that the researchers collapsed into the *Nursing* sub-theme included derivatives of the root word nurse, such as nursing, nurses. Codes such as adept, applied, proficiency, and skills-based practice were examples of what the researchers encapsulated into the sub-theme of *Practice*, which had a final combined frequency of 686 occurrences. Chart 2 (below) identified with the frequency of all sub-themes that articulated under the *Professional* theme after the reorganizational analyses.

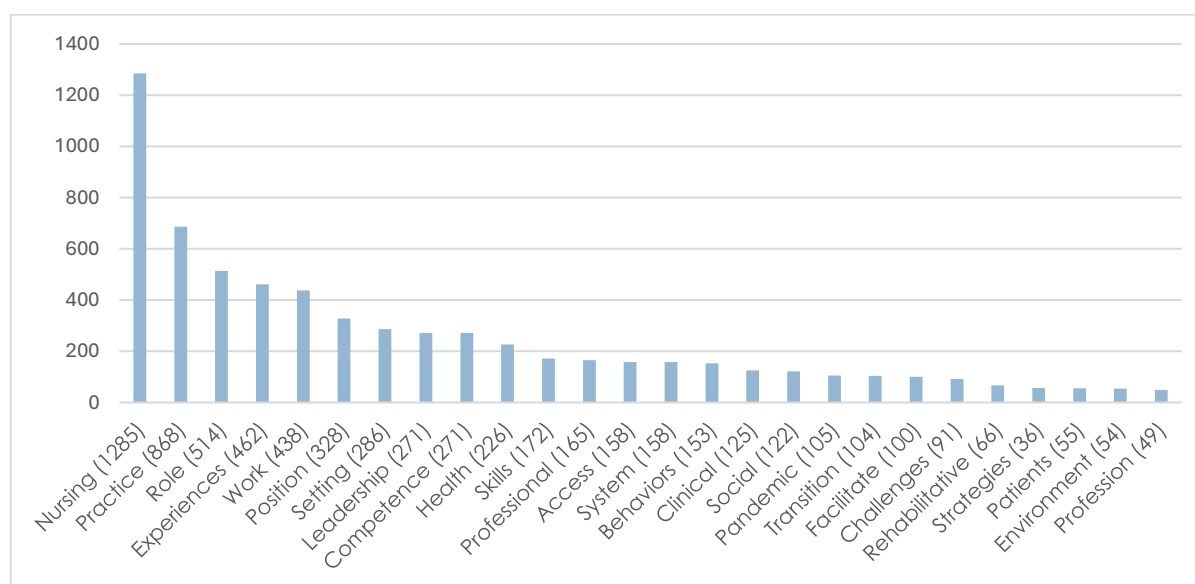


Chart 2. Professional Theme Frequencies

4.4 Educational Theme Frequencies

The second most prominent theme the researchers derived from the 65 final articles was the *Educational* theme. The researchers categorized the codes that initially articulated under the *Educational* theme into seven unique sub-themes, totaling a frequency of 4,799 occurrences. The sub-theme *Academic* was the most predominant of all the *Educational* sub-themes in the studies, with a total frequency of 2090 occurrences. Some codes that the researchers collapsed into the *Academic* sub-theme included *Pedagogical*, *Training*, and *Preparing*. In contrast, the *Learning* sub-theme totaled a frequency of 1226 occurrences. In this sub-theme, researchers collapsed codes including, but not limited to *Acquiring*, *Memorize*, *Read*, and *Determinants*.

This provided the researchers with reassurance that the final 65 articles included for review were reliable for inclusion of academic nurse educators. The sub-themes identified with the *Educational* theme are labeled and their frequencies were identified in Chart 3.

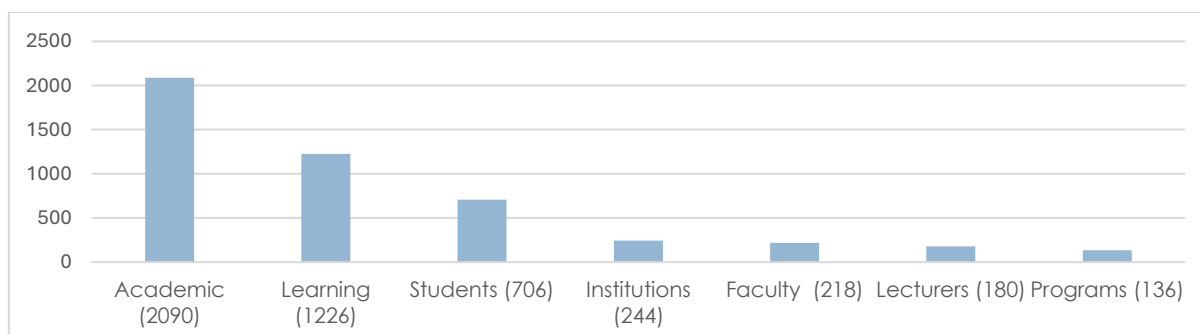


Chart 3. *Educational* Theme Frequencies

4.5 Methodological Theme Frequencies

The third most prominent theme of the four themes the researchers derived from the 65 articles was *Methodological*. Researchers categorized the codes that articulated under the *Methodological* theme into nine unique sub-themes, totaling a frequency of 1565 occurrences. The sub-theme *Participants* was the most predominant of all the *Methodological* sub-themes in the studies, with a total frequency of 517 occurrences. While many of the *Methodological* sub-themes are self-evident to researchers, the themed grouping was important. For example, it was the study aimed usage of Including that anchored this code within the *Methodological* domain instead of in *Education*, which could also have been inclusive. This was why the qualitative analyses beyond sole quantitative frequency counts mattered. Interestingly, the second most frequent sub-theme, *Online*, had only one code, also called *Online*, with a total frequency of 213 occurrences. The sub-themes identified with the *Methodological* theme were labeled and their frequencies were identified in Chart 4.

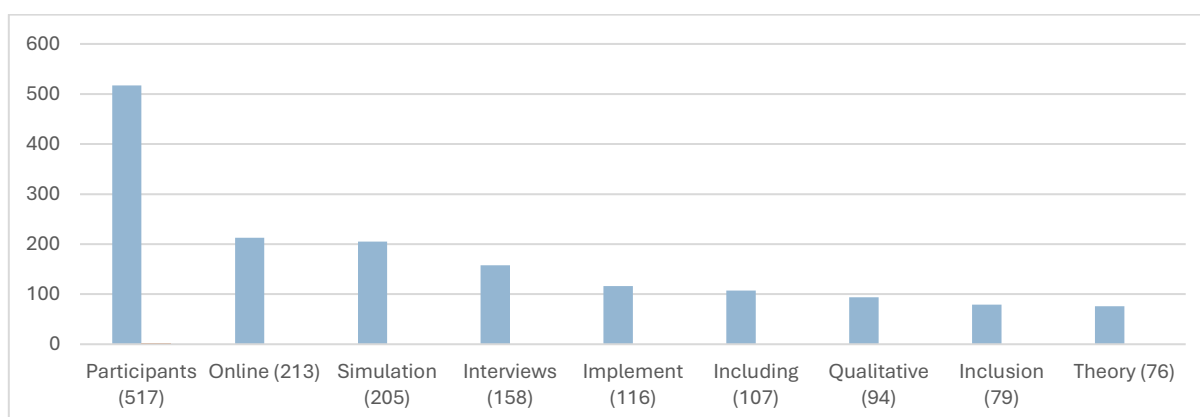


Chart 4. *Methodological* Theme Frequencies

4.6 Emotive Theme Frequencies

The fourth most frequent theme that the researchers found in the systematic review was the Emotive theme.

The researchers categorized the codes that articulated under the *Emotive* theme into six unique sub-themes, totaling a frequency of 1,171 occurrences. The sub-theme *Care* was the most predominant of all the *Emotive* sub-themes in the 65 studies, with a total frequency of 416 occurrences. Some codes that the researchers collapsed into the *Care* sub-theme included: *Aid*, *Concern*, *Manage*, and *Wished*. The code *Wished* became part of *Care* in that it anchored what nurse educators wished for others under their care. The second most frequent sub-theme located under the *Emotive* theme was *Need*, totaling a frequency of 379 occurrences. In this sub-theme researchers collapsed codes including, but not limited to *Involve*, *Motivate*, *Require*, and *Want*. The sub-themes identified with the *Emotive* theme are labeled and their frequencies can be identified in Chart 5.

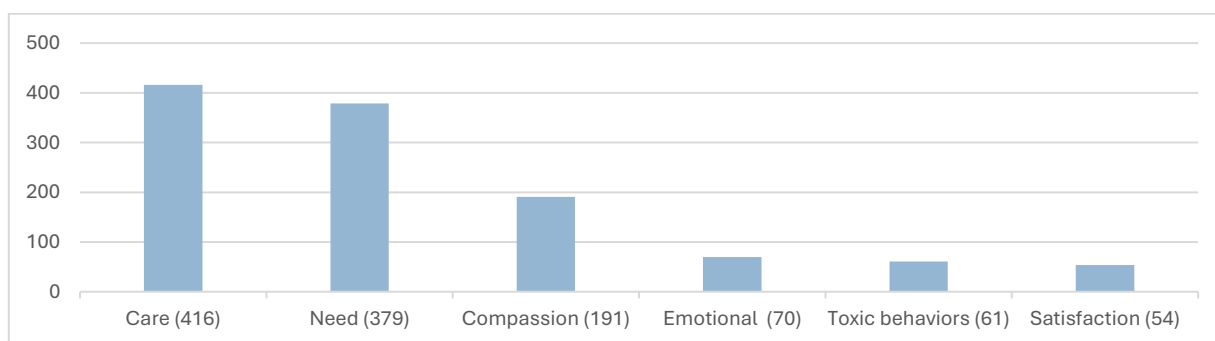


Chart 5. *Emotive* Theme Frequencies

5. Discussion

This systematic review of the nursing education literature in 2022 uncovered Covid-19 era pandemic phenomenological research trends in nursing education. The systematic review included 65 articles focused on nurse educator phenomenological studies during the height of the pandemic, as refined by a modified PRISMA process that focuses on nurse educators. The researchers' additional Iterative Thematic Inquiry analyses of these data derived four prevalent themes and corresponding sub-themes, collapsed from the initial coding, toward answering the study's research questions. This provided a novel quantitative/qualitative fusion approach to systematic reviews of literature. From 2020 and 2023 the number of studies on phenomenology markedly decreased by more than one-third. However, nurse educator studies and phenomenological studies focusing on nurse educators both increased between 2020 to 2022. and then began to decrease in 2023 (see Table 1).

This increase in nurse educator phenomenological studies during the pandemic's most challenging years may have been due to the rapid changes occurring in the nurse educator roles and responsibilities.

While other professions were often working remotely, health care professions, including nurse educators, were still dealing with in-person contexts, which aptly matched with phenomenological approaches.

6. Final Considerations

The uncertain future of global health was at the forefront of nurse educator concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they had to quickly transition in mid-semester to teaching all their courses online without any prior preparation or warning while still providing nursing students with in-person clinical experiences where possible. The findings of this systematic review provided a better thematic understanding of the research that investigated the lived experiences of nurse educators throughout the pandemic. Phenomenological research offered prime opportunities to focus studies qualitatively on the lived experiences of nurse educators at this time. Surprisingly, the three most frequent themes in the phenomenological nurse educator literature at this time were not related to stress, anxiety, or burnout. *Emotive* was only the fourth most frequent theme. The hope imbued that with *Educational*, *Professional*, and *Methodological* themes having greater frequencies than *Emotive* themed articles spoke to the resilience and hope within the field of nursing education.

This systematic review extended current knowledge of how nurse educators demonstrated resiliency during difficult and turbulent times brought on by the pandemic. It explored the frequencies of literature detailing how faculty adapted and identified strategies to cope and maintain their resilience. Identifying the characteristics and teaching methods of nurse educators who persevered in modifying their teaching strategies to continue teaching the future nursing workforce. Understanding literature about nurse educators' self-efficacy and ability to adapt to these alternative and resilient methods of teaching will be beneficial for academic nurse administrators and struggling nurse educators to understand strategies for alternative methods of teaching and learning.

7. References

- Belur, J., Tompson, L., Thornton, A., & Simon, M. (2021). Interrater reliability in systematic review methodology: Exploring variation in coder decision-making. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 50(2), 837-865.
- Cucinotta, D., & Vanelli, M. (2020). WHO declares COVID-19 a pandemic. *Acta bio medica: Atenei parmensis*, 91(1), 157
- Farsi, Z., Sajadi, S.A., & Afaghi, E. (2021). Explaining the experiences of nursing administrators, educators, and students about the education process in the COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative study. *BMC Nursing*, 20(1), 151.
- García-Peñalvo, F. J. (2022). Developing robust state-of-the-art reports: Systematic Literature Reviews.

Gazza, E. A. (2022). The experience of being a full-time academic nurse educator during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Nursing Education Perspectives*, 43(2), 74-79.

Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., & Altman, D.G. (2010). Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: The PRISMA statement. *International Journal of Surgery*, 8, 336-341.

Morgan, D. L., & Nica, A. (2020). Iterative thematic inquiry: A new method for analyzing qualitative data. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1609406920955118.

Nabolsi, M., Abu-Moghli, F., Khalaf, I., Zumot, A., & Suliman, W. (2021). Nursing faculty experience with online distance education during COVID-19 crisis: A qualitative study. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 37(5), 828-835.

Nurse-Clarke, N., & Joseph, M. (2022). An exploration of technology acceptance among nursing faculty teaching online for the first time at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 41, 8-18.

Riess, D., Mersiovsky, A., & Gruhn, C. (2022). Nurse educators' perceptions and self-efficacy in response to COVID-19: A systematic review. *Nurse Educator*, 48(2), E47.

Virginia Cuellar Tufano, Ed.D, RN

Texas State University, United States

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3136-1485>

✉ vet171@txstate.edu

Emily Summers, Ed.D.

Texas State University, United States

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8179-6454>

✉ ejsummers@txstate.edu