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Educators' invisible labour: A systematic review

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Abstract

The hidden or overlooked nature of many of educators' professional activities complicates the already difficult task of supporting educators' labour—in both K-12 and higher education settings. These efforts can be understood as types of *invisible labour*. Following PRISMA standards, we conducted a systematic literature review to answer a single research question: *How have scholars framed educators' professional activities in terms of invisible labour?* This systematic review searched 10 educational databases and identified 16 peer-reviewed journal articles spanning 2011–2021. From thematic analysis of these studies, we developed a model of five types of invisibility that intersect and mask educators' professional efforts: background, care, precarious, identity and remote labour. The review also showed several overall themes related to educators' invisible labour, which we discuss in connection to the literature: effort is often semivisible, invisibility is subjective, effort by marginalised educators is often overlooked, labour in unexpected places often means effort is overlooked, and there are layers of factors masking effort. We then discuss implications for practice, starting with five invisible labour questions to prompt reflection, then how to apply invisible labour as an improvement lens for identifying needs, allocating resources, analysing jobs and tasks, and evaluating performance.

KEYWORDS

educators, invisible labour, professional activity, systematic review

Context and implications

Rationale for this study

We conducted a systematic literature review because the extent to which invisible labour has been applied in educational contexts is unknown.

Why the new findings matter

A lack of acknowledgement of or value placed in educators' professional activities can further complicate the already difficult task of supporting educators' labour.

Implications for practice

Invisibility can be applied as an improvement lens through which to discover and reflect on educators' efforts by identifying needs, allocating resources, analysing jobs and tasks and evaluating performance. Additionally, findings from the systematic review suggest five invisible labour questions: (1) How might educators' efforts be dismissed because they are not the activities directly evaluated for increased compensation or promotion? (2) How might the emotional costs of educators' efforts be trivialised? (3) How might educators' efforts carry risk? (4) How might some educators' efforts be disproportionately burdensome? (5) How might educators' efforts occur where they never have before?

INTRODUCTION

Numerous professional activities comprise the labour of educators, varied as their roles are across K-12 teaching, faculty research and administration in higher education. To ensure consistency throughout the paper, we use the term *educators* to refer to a broad range of professionals working in education. *Teachers* specifically refer to those working in K-12 settings. *Faculty* refers to professors, instructors and similar professionals in higher education, and *staff* refers to administrative and support personnel in educational settings including school districts, colleges and universities. However, these various job titles often do not fully reflect the professional activities performed by educators (Rodrigo & Romberger, 2017). For example, teachers perform multiple roles as *leaders* in the classroom (Sato, 2005) and active, adult *learners* (Gregson & Sturko, 2007). Navigating these multiple, unofficial roles can produce stress for educators (McCarthy et al., 2016). As the expectations and responsibilities of educators have continued to change and intensify (Selwyn et al., 2017), teacher burnout and attrition have produced an international shortage of teachers (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Many of educators' crucial and necessary professional activities take place behind the scenes and are difficult to articulate. There are some benefits to working outside the spotlight, such as the freedom to exercise agency and creativity without scrutiny. However, a lack of acknowledgement of or value placed in educators' professional activities by different stakeholders (e.g., administrators, students, parents) can further complicate the already difficult task of understanding and supporting educators' labour.

As a specific example of unseen professional activity, many educators today engage in voluntary self-directed learning on social media to supplement required training and professional development (PD; Greenhow et al., 2020; van Bommel et al., 2020), a need

that continues to increase as schools have decreased the number of PD programs offered (Bergviken Rensfeldt et al., 2018). This ongoing and often hidden activity is necessary because educators never stop learning their profession and indeed may feel like they return to address the same problems again and again throughout their careers (Labaree, 1998).

The benefits of such self-directed—and potentially overlooked—professional activities have been researched extensively and can be understood through a *professional learning networks* (PLN) lens. PLNs highlight the people, places and tools that support educators' PD beyond conventional training (Trust et al., 2016; Trust & Prestridge, 2021). A self-initiated PLN offers advantages by allowing educators to ensure that resources are curated to their specific needs and are accessed 'just-in-time' (Greenhalgh & Koehler, 2017). Although educators are not required to pursue such forms of self-directed learning, they do need to spend their own time, energy and resources to become the facilitators of their own PD (Liao et al., 2017).

We suggest *invisible labour* as a framework to foreground educators' labour that is overlooked or undervalued—whether this labour is self-directed learning or the many other professional activities in which educators engage. We define *labour* as an effort- or process-oriented understanding of professional activities, which we contrast to an understanding of *work* as a means-to-an-end (Arendt, 1958/1998, as cited in Fayard, 2021), or outcome-oriented understanding of professional activities. The invisible labour concept pairs labour with *invisibility*, or processes through which these professional activities might be taken for granted, ignored, or devalued.

As a framework, invisible labour directs attention to the full scope of what educators do, assigning value to the time and effort educators spend on all aspects of their jobs while acknowledging the associated opportunity costs. With this perspective, fully *visible* labour would mean professional activities and efforts are both acknowledged and valued. Invisibility is highly contextualised, complicated and relational (Hamblin et al., 2020; MacLeod et al., 2017; Star & Strauss, 1999). That is, at different times and in different circumstances, educators may want different degrees of publicity or scrutiny related to their work—while still hoping that those efforts would still be acknowledged and valued. Acknowledgement and value do not necessarily mean work that is public or openly shared; there are many circumstances where educators would want or require privacy. For example, K-12 teachers' grading of student assignments is visible in the sense that it is a recognised and compensated part of the job—but it is not open to scrutiny or part of the public record.

In contrast, the *absence* of either acknowledgement or value would render a professional activity invisible or semi-invisible. For instance, the teaching activities of faculty in higher education are acknowledged—clearly evident when faculty show up to class—but often undervalued in terms of what is measured for promotion in research-intensive institutions. The degree of invisibility of teaching can increase as instructors take additional steps to redesign curriculum and assignments to meet the needs of diverse learners or translate materials into another language. These efforts are also part of 'teaching' but become less obvious—less acknowledged, hence more invisible—as the focus and tasks become more specialised.

HISTORY OF THE INVISIBLE LABOUR CONCEPT

Early invisible labour scholarship addressed issues regarding wage and household labour divisions, economic dependency and limited opportunities for women in the 1970s and 1980s (Thompson, 1991). Sociologist and feminist scholar Arlene Daniels (1987) first used the term 'invisible work' to characterise unpaid domestic labour carried out by women at home. This labour is invisible because it occurs in a private household; however, it remains devalued and invisible even when domestic labour is performed in the public sphere and

becomes commodified (Hochschild, 1983). Similarly, invisible labour research has also focused on other forms of culturally gendered professions, such as nurses (Wolf, 1989) and secretaries (Wichroski, 2008). Thus, notions of invisible labour have been characterised by activities that are taken for granted, unacknowledged, or devalued due to workers' gender, skill or location.

The invisible labour literature has expanded to incorporate a broader spectrum of work performed by paid employees; that is, more recent studies have identified different forms of invisible labour performed in a wide variety of contexts. The research framed by invisible labour has been conducted in disciplines including sociology (Hatton, 2017; Poster et al., 2016), public health and social services (Kosny & MacEachen, 2010), computer science (Star & Strauss, 1999), and more recently, education (Amanti, 2019).

The notion of invisible labour is still important and relevant today, particularly as modern technologies increase new responsibilities, and more labour occurs beyond job descriptions and conventional locations (Fox & Bird, 2017; Selwyn et al., 2017). Framing different types of human effort in terms of invisible labour suggests an urgency to acknowledge the time, skills and expertise contributed to groups, organisations, institutions and societies. Invisible labour denotes a tacit invitation to shift evaluation metrics and make the invisible visible. For instance, when a K-12 teacher receives their annual performance review, the administrator conducting the review could use an invisible labour approach to identify and acknowledge the teacher's additional efforts that have gone beyond their official job description. Similarly, a faculty member's promotion and tenure review could evaluate often overlooked efforts, such as public engagement, by openly sharing research through social media channels (Greenhow et al., 2019).

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Despite its history dating back to the 1970s and study across numerous academic disciplines, the extent to which the invisible labour concept has been applied in education—from K-12 to higher education contexts—is unknown. Without a clear understanding of invisible labour, educational leaders may find it challenging to identify the needs of their teachers, faculty and staff, let alone adjust educational policies and evaluation metrics to account for behind-the-scenes work and then provide the necessary support. Therefore, we seek to understand how educators' invisible labour has been considered and applied in past research. We accomplish this purpose by conducting a systematic literature review aiming to answer a single research question: *How have scholars framed educators' professional activities in terms of invisible labour?*

METHOD

Procedure

Our methodology for this systematic literature review follows the procedures outlined in Greenhow et al.'s (2020) review and adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) standards (Moher et al., 2009). The PRISMA standards recommend transparent, step-by-step procedures for searching the literature and reporting findings. In broad terms, these procedures include four phases: identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion (Figure 1).

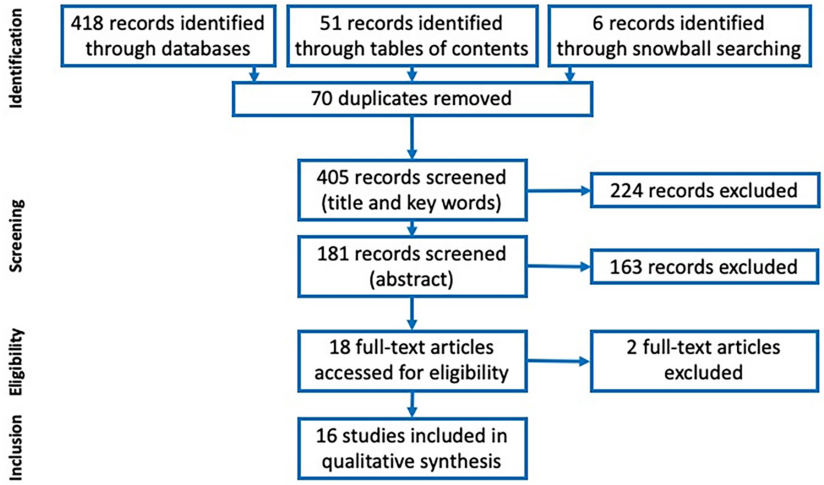

FIGURE 1 PRISMA flow chart.

TABLE 1 Database search terms.

Search terms for article abstract	Search terms for article full text
education	invisible work
teacher	invisible labor
educator	digital labor
instructor	hidden work
social media	hidden labor
professional development	shadow work
professional learning	shadow labor
informal learning	shared economy
	gift economy
	invisible economy
	hidden economy

Phase one: Identification

Database search

Following recommendations from our university library, we identified 10 databases related to education. Four databases were available through ProQuest (Computer & Information Systems Abstracts, ERIC, PsycINFO, Sociological Abstracts), two through EBSCO (Education Full Text, Education Source) and one each through American Psychological Association (APA PsycNet), Clarivate (Web of Science), Elsevier (ScienceDirect) and Gale OneFile (Educator's Reference Complete). We searched these 10 databases for peer-reviewed academic journal articles, written in English, within the 2011–2021 time period and with at least one of the following keywords (Table 1) in the article's abstract: education, teacher, educator, instructor, social media, professional development, professional learning, or informal learning. We combined this abstract search with requiring the full text of the article to contain at least one of the following keywords (Table 1): invisible work, invisible labour, digital labour, hidden work, hidden labour, shadow work, shadow labour, shared economy,

gift economy, invisible economy, or hidden economy. Our intent in searching numerous databases with many general keywords was to capture as many potentially relevant articles as possible through the first step of the database search, knowing that we would get many false positives that we would need to filter by hand later. The database search returned 418 records.

Table of contents search

From these 418 records, we identified six journals that contained three or more articles from the database search:

1. *Computers and Composition*
2. *Computers in Human Behavior*
3. *Higher Education*
4. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*
5. *Teaching and Teacher Education*
6. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*

We read through the 2011–2021 table of contents for each of these six journals, looking for article titles that could be related in any way to invisible labour, teacher professional development, informal learning, or teachers' use of social media. For instance, we included articles with titles such as ‘Coaching as a Professional Development Strategy for Adjunct Instructors in a Colombian University’ (Gómez Palacio et al., 2019) that might connect to our topic. In total, we examined the titles of 9510 research or review articles through the table of contents search and identified 51 that merited further examination.

Snowball search

Finally, we identified six additional articles by looking up articles cited in those already identified.

After compiling results from the database search, table of contents search and snowball search, we removed 70 duplicate articles. In total, our identification phase returned 405 articles after duplicates had been removed.

Phase two: Screening

The two authors of this study examined the titles and keywords of the 405 identified records. Both authors independently coded the articles as relevant or irrelevant—with relevant articles having titles and keywords that left open the possibility that the content of the study might focus on educators' invisible labour. For instance, we excluded articles with titles such as ‘Precarious Labour in Waiting: Internships in the Chinese Internet Industries’ (Xia, 2019) and ‘Crowdsourcing as a Platform for Digital Labour Unions’ (Arora & Thompson, 2019) because they did not focus on educators. We did include articles such as ‘Work-Life Balance of Nursing Faculty in Research- and Practice-Focused Doctoral Programs’ (Smeltzer et al., 2015) and ‘Why Do Academics Blog? An Analysis of Audiences, Purposes and Challenges’ (Mewburn & Thomson, 2013) at this stage of screening because it seemed as if they could potentially pertain to educators' invisible labour. We then calculated interrater reliability scores and found our categorisation had 86.2% agreement and a Cohen's kappa

of 0.706, or 'substantial' agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). We discussed any coding discrepancies until we came to consensus. During this process, we excluded 224 records that were irrelevant to the purposes of the current study.

Next, we read the abstracts of the remaining 181 records. As before, both authors independently coded the articles as relevant or irrelevant—with relevant articles having titles or abstracts that included mention of any type of educator (e.g., PK-12 to higher education), work (i.e., a broad conceptualisation of the things that educators do, including work, labour, activity, practices and professional development), and some element of invisibility (e.g., work or activity that is not seen, captured, or counted by evaluation metrics). From reading the abstracts, we found that many articles had one or two relevant keywords in the title but were not directly related to education, such as '#familygoals: Family Influencers, Calibrated Amateurism, and Justifying Young Digital Labour' (Abidin, 2017). We excluded this article and others like it. We also filtered out Smeltzer et al. (2015) at this stage because the abstract emphasised work-life balance but did not suggest any connection to invisible labour. We again calculated interrater reliability scores and found our categorisation had 96.1% agreement and a Cohen's kappa of 0.754, again considered 'substantial' agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). We again discussed any coding discrepancies until we came to consensus. During this step, we excluded 163 additional records that were irrelevant to the purposes of the current study.

Phase three: Eligibility

Upon reading the full text of the 18 screened articles, we filtered two more that did not address invisible labour, despite the title, keywords and abstract suggesting that educators' invisible labour might be addressed. Specifically, we excluded Mewburn and Thomson (2013) because the article focused on the challenges of credibility in blogging rather than discussing invisible labour. We also excluded Burkinshaw and White (2020) because the article examined invisibility in terms of the underrepresentation of female leaders, rather than labour that is overlooked. This full-text screening left us with a final count of 16 academic articles that centered on educators as the focus of research and discussed some aspect of educators' invisible labour.

Phase four: Inclusion

We included 16 studies in our qualitative synthesis. Summary characteristics of the included articles are detailed in Table 3.

Data analysis

After completing the PRISMA procedure (Figure 1) to identify and screen academic journal articles relevant to our investigation of invisible labour in education, we used Hatton's (2017) *sociological mechanisms of invisibility* framework and Kosny and MacEachen's (2010) concept of *background work* from public health to categorise the 16 included studies through qualitative thematic coding (Saldaña, 2016).

The categories from Hatton's (2017) framework provided a priori codes for analysing the journal articles identified and included through our systematic literature review. Hatton's (2017) framework was the broadest and most comprehensive approach to invisibility that we found in our initial exploration of invisible labour. Hatton (2017) established the framework in a theoretical article in the field of sociology. The goal of the article was

to operationalise 'invisible work' not as a precise set of job tasks but as a comprehensive analytical framework through which to understand a wide range of activities, including some types of labour that would not typically be associated with jobs at all. Hatton's sociocultural and sociospatial mechanisms seemed particularly relevant for understanding labour in the field of education. First, *sociocultural mechanisms* obscure workers' efforts through the deployment of hegemonic cultural ideologies that either naturalise or require hidden bodily labour. One effect of these sociocultural mechanisms is the invisibility of emotional labour, identity work and naturalised labour. Second, *sociospatial mechanisms* devalue labour that occurs outside of traditional physical workplaces. This includes jobs performed in the domestic sphere and at other non-traditional worksites, such as by remote workers.

In our data analysis process, the two authors took turns reading the 16 articles and assigning relevant codes from Hatton's (2017) model. After we had both independently coded the articles, we met to discuss coding discrepancies and identify emergent invisibility themes present in the articles but not fully represented by the a priori models. Specifically, we added new categories—not included in Hatton's (2017) model—of *background labour* (Kosny & MacEachen, 2010) and *precarious labour* to our final codebook (Table 2). Kosny and MacEachen (2010) developed the concept of background work through their ethnographic case study research investigating the labour performed behind the scenes performed by paid workers in nonprofit social service organisations. We associated these professional activities with educators' labour that might be similarly out of sight, such as lesson planning. The category of precarious labour was an inductive code established using the language of the articles included in the systematic review (e.g., Drake et al., 2019; Macfarlane, 2017).

We report our final coding of each article in Table 5, and we took an additional analytical step to emphasise how many of the 16 included articles contained multiple types of invisibility. This decision stemmed from Hatton's (2017) observation that some labour is made 'multiply invisible' (p. 345) through different mechanisms of invisibility. We propose a new model to highlight these overlaps, emphasising intersections of factors masking educators' professional efforts (Figure 2). We visualise this model like a sociogram in

TABLE 2 Types of invisible labour.

Type of invisibility	Definition	Examples
Background labour	Hegemonic cultural ideologies are enacted on workers' skills to relegate some activities as taken for granted, unimportant, or non-strategic	Creating curricular materials, translation, academic service
Care labour	Hegemonic cultural ideologies are enacted on workers' skills to dismiss or trivialise the emotional effort required by the activity	Providing informal guidance, offering encouragement and emotional support, academic advising
Identity labour	Hegemonic cultural ideologies are enacted on workers' bodies to assert certain activities as norms or unspoken expectations that are more easily fulfilled by some workers than others	Cultural translation, professional self-presentation, public reputation management
Precarious labour	Hegemonic cultural ideologies are enacted on workers' skills to make job security temporary or uncertain	Adjunct faculty, non-tenure-track faculty, graduate student workers
Remote labour	Locations of professional activities that are spatially segregated from 'workplaces' that have historic norms (e.g., office buildings, school buildings)	Distance education, online education, social media

TABLE 3 Brief summary of included studies.

	Count	Percentage
Publication year		
2011	2	12.5
2012	0	0.0
2013	0	0.0
2014	0	0.0
2015	0	0.0
2016	0	0.0
2017	4	25.0
2018	3	18.8
2019	3	18.8
2020	2	12.5
2021	2	12.5
Research methodology		
Qualitative	11	68.8
Quantitative	3	18.8
Mixed	2	12.5
Country		
United States	10	62.5
United Kingdom	2	12.5
Australia	1	6.3
Canada	1	6.3
Finland	1	6.3
Hong Kong	1	6.3
Sweden	1	6.3
Level		
Higher Ed	11	68.8
K-12	5	31.3
Type of educators		
Faculty	11	68.8
K-12 teachers	6	37.5
Pre-service teachers	1	6.3
Higher Ed staff	1	6.3

social network analysis, where the intent is to show the relationships between objects (Kadushin, 2012).

RESULTS

Overview of included studies

First, we provide a brief summary of the 16 included studies (Table 3). We report how many articles on educators' invisible labour were published each year, 2011–2021. Notably, nearly

all included studies have been published since 2017, suggesting a growing interest in the topic of invisible labour in education. We also observe that more than two-thirds of the articles (11 out of 16) used qualitative methods. The research setting of the studies spanned several countries, although the majority were in the United States (10 out of 16). Finally, more than two-thirds focused on higher education and the labour of faculty and staff (11 out of 16 for both).

Second, we take a more in-depth look at the 16 included studies (Table 4). Here we offer an overview of the specific types of educators and the professional activities covered in these articles as well as the theoretical or conceptual frameworks that were used. We also examine the research methodologies in more detail, listing methods, means of data collection and sample size.

Types of labour in included studies

After identifying and summarising the 16 included articles, we conducted thematic analysis of the articles. In our final codebook (Table 2), we named five types of invisible labour. Here, we report which types of invisible labour were present in each of the 16 included studies (Table 5) before describing the themes represented in each of the five categories.

Background labour

Twelve of the included articles exhibited the theme of *background labour*, professional activities that are taken for granted or viewed as non-strategic (i.e., not directly related to job promotion), such as teachers' creation of curricular materials and faculty members' academic service. For example, Amanti (2019) found that elementary teachers' experiences of translating Dual Language Bilingual Education (DLBE) materials from English to students' first languages is a type of invisible labour that is not recognised or acknowledged by school administrators. Schools failed to provide professional development for DLBE instructors due to these efforts being taken for granted—that is, undervalued. Also in a K-12 setting, Viilo et al. (2011) examined how one teacher designed, organised and guided students' inquiry and design practices; their findings suggest that effective pedagogical practices for successful collaborative inquiry-learning (e.g., organising, directing, facilitating and other background preparations) are time-intensive but invisible as background labour.

In a higher education setting, Hamel and Jaasko-Fisher (2011) investigated how teacher educators provide mentorship to pre-service teachers, requiring a substantial amount of effort but occurring behind the scenes. That is, mentorship activity is easily overlooked in the assignment of faculty members' responsibilities and often undervalued in terms of evaluation and compensation. Hamel and Jaasko-Fisher (2011) recommended naming even mundane mentoring practices to make them visible—that is, acknowledged and valued. Rodrigo and Romberger (2017) researched faculty members' technology-related services and found that assisting with the development of computer-mediated learning environments does not fall into teaching or research categories of academic labour—efforts that are measured and rewarded. Furthermore, these activities are misunderstood or undervalued by others, rendering the effort invisible. Taggart (2021) examined the relationship between faculty members' job stress and increased background labour in the form of increased, but unacknowledged, administrative responsibilities. Brew et al. (2018) developed the concept of *academic artisan* to characterise service and administrative activities that are crucial to university functioning but often overlooked.

TABLE 4 Detailed overview of included studies.

Included study	Study title	Type of educator	Professional activities	Theoretical/Conceptual framework	Research methodology
Amanti (2019)	The (Invisible) Work of Dual Language Education Teachers	Teachers (K-12 bilingual)	Planning (translating and developing curriculum)	Occupational lens; Feminist theory (Hatton, 2017; Kosny & MacEachen, 2010)	Qualitative Data collected from interviews ($n=6$)
Bergviken Rensfeldt et al. (2018)	Teachers 'Liking' Their Work? Exploring the Realities of Teacher Facebook Groups	Teachers (K-12)	Professional development	Virtual work (Hughes, 2014; Webster & Randle, 2016); Immaterial labour (Hardt, 2005); Digital labour (e.g., Bucher & Fieseler, 2017; Scholz, 2013)	Mixed methods Data collected through Facebook Graph API, survey ($n=44$ respondents), online focus group ($n=10$), and interviews ($n=1$)
Brew et al. (2018)	Academic Artisans in the Research University	Faculty members (in research-intensive universities)	Service activities	Critical realism	Mixed methods case study The paper discussed three cases in depth from a larger project
Burciaga and Kohli (2018)	Disrupting Whitestream Measures of Quality Teaching: The Community Cultural Wealth of Teachers of Colour	Teachers (K-12 racial justice-oriented teachers of colour)	Teaching	Community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005)	Qualitative case study The paper discussed two cases in depth
Drake et al. (2019)	Invisible Labor, Visible Change: Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Agency in a Research University	Faculty members (Non-tenure-track)	General faculty labour in higher education	Faculty agency (O'Meara & Campbell, 2011)	Qualitative case study (an institution as a case) Data collected from semi-structured interviews ($n=20$) and document analysis
Hamblin et al. (2020)	A Phenomenological Approach to Explore Faculty Perceptions about Invisible Labor	Faculty members (in community colleges)	Service activities and administrative tasks	Invisible labour (Daniels, 1987; DeVault, 2014)	Qualitative phenomenology Data collected from semi-structured interviews ($n=16$)

(Continues)

TABLE 4 (Continued)

Included study	Study title	Type of educator	Professional activities	Theoretical/Conceptual framework	Research methodology
Hamel and Jaasko-Fisher (2011)	Hidden Labor in the Mentoring of Pre-Service Teachers: Notes from a Mentor Teacher Advisory Council	Faculty members and pre-service teachers	Mentoring and internships	Economic systems (Marx, 1867/1996)	Qualitative Data collected from observations and meeting notes ($n=15$) Participants were candidates and mentors in a Master of Arts in Teaching programme
Macfarlane (2017)	The Ethics of Multiple Authorship: Power, Performativity, and the Gift Economy	Faculty members and graduate students	Authorship	Authorship ethics (Endersby, 1996; Wager et al., 2008)	Quantitative Data collected from survey questionnaires ($n=108$ respondents)
MacLeod et al. (2017)	The Invisible Work of Distributed Medical Education: Exploring the Contributions of Audiovisual Professionals, Administrative Professionals and Faculty Teachers	Faculty members and staff	Planning and delivering distance education	Articulation work (Star & Strauss, 1999)	Qualitative ethnography Data collected from observations, interviews, and document analysis ($n=33$)
O'Brien (2020)	Mapping Deaf Academic Spaces	Faculty members (deaf)	General faculty labour in higher education	Time (Lefebvre, 1971/2016)	Qualitative Data collected from interviews ($n=5$)
Restler (2019)	Countervisualities of Care: Re-Visualizing Teacher Labor	Teachers (K-12)	General teacher labour in K-12	Caring labour (Collins, 1991); Carework (Smith, 1987).	Qualitative Multiple data sources were collected: teachers' and the author's artefacts, teacher talk in workshops, interviews, and field notes ($n=10$)

TABLE 4 (Continued)

Included study	Study title	Type of educator	Professional activities	Theoretical/Conceptual framework	Research methodology
Rodrigo and Romberger (2017)	Managing Digital Technologies in Writing Programs: Writing Program Technologists & Invisible Service	Faculty members	Service activities related to technology	Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000); Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986)	Qualitative Data collected from interviews ($n=23$)
Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group (2017)	The Burden of Invisible Work in Academia: Social Inequalities and Time Use in Five University Departments	Faculty members	General faculty labour in higher education	Cultural taxation (Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011; Padilla, 1994)	Quantitative Data collected from a demographic survey, daily time journals, and a follow-up questionnaire ($n=26$)
Taggart (2021)	Administrative Intensity and Faculty Job Stress	Faculty members	Administrative tasks	Administrative intensity (Bohte, 2001; Meier et al., 2000; Rutherford, 2015; Smith & Meier, 1994)	Quantitative Data drawn from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System ($n=151$ universities) and a national survey ($n=1774$ respondents)
Vie (2021)	The Invisible Labor of Social Media Pedagogy: A Case Study of #TeamRhetoric Community-Building on Twitter	Faculty member	Teaching	Communities of practice (Novakovich et al., 2017; Potts, 2014; Wenger, 2001)	Qualitative Data drawn from an interview ($n=1$)
Viilo et al. (2011)	Supporting the Technology Enhanced Collaborative Inquiry and Design Project: A Teacher's Reflections on Practices	Teacher (K-12)	Teaching	Collaborative inquiry-learning (Kreijns et al., 2003; Roth, 1998)	Qualitative ethnography Data drawn from reflective diary entries ($n=1$)

TABLE 5 Types of invisible labour in included studies.

Study	Type of invisibility				
	Background labour	Identity labour	Care labour	Precarious labour	Remote labour
Amanti (2019)	X	X			
Bergviken Rensfeldt et al. (2018)	X				X
Brew et al. (2018)	X				
Burciaga and Kohli (2018)	X	X	X		
Drake et al. (2019)	X			X	
Hamblin et al. (2020)	X	X		X	X
Hamel and Jaasko-Fisher (2011)	X				
Macfarlane (2017)				X	
MacLeod et al. (2017)	X				X
O'Brien (2020)	X	X	X		
Restler (2019)		X	X		
Rodrigo and Romberger (2017)	X			X	
Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group (2017)		X	X		
Taggart (2021)	X				
Vie (2021)		X	X	X	X
Viilo et al. (2011)	X		X		

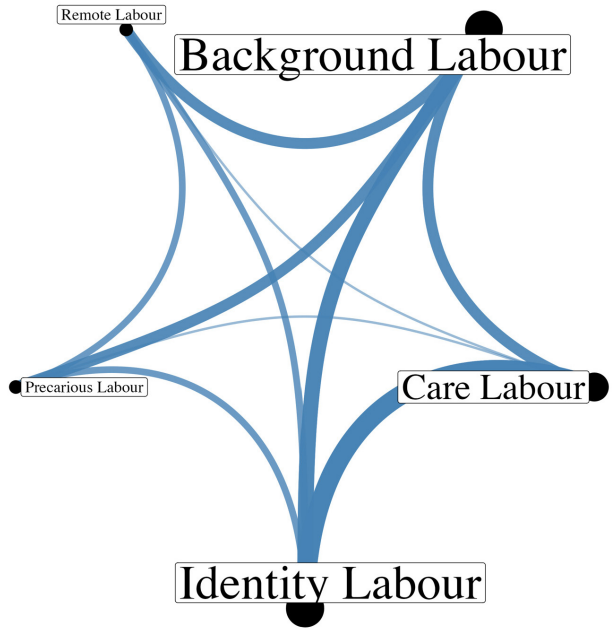

FIGURE 2 Invisibility intersections masking educators' professional efforts in the included studies.

Identity labour

Seven of the included articles exhibited the theme of *identity labour*, the norms or unspoken expectations that are more easily fulfilled by some workers than others, such as cultural translation or public reputation management. For example, in a higher education context, the Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group (2017) investigated whether gender influences the amount of invisible versus visible labour faculty members perform. They found that gender is not associated with the distribution of invisible labour, but faculty with other minoritised identities (e.g., faculty of colour, faculty from lower socioeconomic backgrounds) did spend more time doing invisible labour, specifically identity labour and care labour. In contrast, non-marginalised colleagues (e.g., white male professors) were able to spend additional time on research, labour that is highly visible and rewarded in academia.

Care labour

Six of the included articles exhibited the theme of *care labour*, professional activities whose emotional costs are dismissed or trivialised, such as providing informal guidance or offering encouragement. For example, Restler (2019) explored K-12 teachers' classroom experiences, specifically the physical labour and emotional care that go into making school a safer place for Black and Brown students living in under-resourced communities in New York City. Burciaga and Kohli (2018) followed the counternarratives of two highly experienced, women of colour teachers, identifying the cultural knowledge that these two teachers brought to their classrooms as a type of invisible labour—through the care these teachers offered students. In a higher education context, O'Brien (2020) investigated the lived experiences of deaf academics, finding that they are burdened with additional demands and emotional labour to create and maintain professional networks with hearing colleagues and participate in deaf communities. These added responsibilities are often time-intensive yet invisible, meaning that deaf academics lack institutional support, understanding from colleagues and recognition for their professional efforts.

Precarious labour

Five of the included articles exhibited the theme of *precarious labour*, instances where job security is temporary or uncertain, such as for adjunct faculty or graduate student workers. For example, in a higher education context, Macfarlane (2017) looked at the ethical implications of multiple authorship of publications in the social sciences. They named power- and gift-ordering as two forms of authorship ordering that might obscure or mask scholars' efforts and intellectual contributions, especially for students and early career researchers. Drake et al. (2019) studied how non-tenure-track faculty members perceive and operationalise their agency in a higher education research institution. Participants reported restrained agency due to overarching power structures; they felt invisible, misunderstood, undervalued and vulnerable to leadership changes.

Remote labour

Four of the included articles exhibited the theme of *remote labour*, professional activities occurring in spaces other than those historically associated with work, such as distance

education, online learning, or social media. For example, in a higher education setting, Hamblin et al. (2020) examined faculty members' perceptions of their own invisible labour, analysing whether these perceptions of invisible labour are influenced by rank or status. They found that the *location* of some faculty labour (e.g., outside classrooms) and lack of understanding of the effort required, both contributed to invisibility. MacLeod et al. (2017) looked at a case where the site of learning was non-traditional, exploring the visible and invisible forms of labour performed by faculty and staff to ensure the effective delivery of a medical distance-learning programme.

Invisible labour also occurs on social media, a newer type of remote space. For example, Bergviken Rensfeldt et al. (2018) researched professional development activities in a K-12 teacher Facebook group, finding that teachers participate in professional development by spending long hours developing educational knowledge; contributing to the group by creating, consuming and sharing content; networking; and promoting their own goods and resources. However, these activities were often not considered 'real' work (which typically involves compensation) by administrators or even by the teachers themselves who engaged in them (Bergviken Rensfeldt et al., 2018). Furthermore, the invisibility from this remote labour not occurring in traditional workspaces raised concerns about the exploitative nature of digital and online knowledge labour. For instance, teachers voluntarily create and consume content on social media platforms; these activities generate huge profits for social media companies as advertisers pay for users' attention and third parties pay for users' activity data. In higher education, Vie (2021) investigated social media use in a graduate-level course. They found that asking graduate students to use social media to enhance learning inadvertently created invisible labour for other educators and academics by inviting these professionals outside the class to comment, reply and provide advice to students. Although outside professionals' engagement with these graduate students was freely volunteered and public, their efforts were invisible in the sense that they were overlooked as instances of offering expertise and undervalued as meaningful contributions to public engagement (both of which could potentially be acknowledged in an annual review and have implications for compensation). However, the remote and informal nature of social media interactions means that this sort of activity was not 'counted' toward professional work.

Intersections between types of invisible labour

We also created a sociogram depiction of how the various types of invisibility coincided with each other in the 16 included studies (Figure 2)—that is, a visualisation of the frequencies and overlaps in Table 5. The types of invisibility are represented by circles. Larger circles indicate that type of invisibility is present in more of the included studies; smaller circles mean that type of invisibility occurs in fewer studies. A line between two circles indicates the co-presence of those two types of invisibility in an article. A thicker line means those invisibility types coincide in articles more often.

We observe that background labour, identity labour and care labour appeared most frequently across the 16 studies. The most common intersections were between care labour and identity labour as well as between background labour and each of the other types of invisibility.

DISCUSSION

Historically, labour in many fields has been invisible—overlooked and undervalued—because of socially constructed power structures and hegemonic cultural ideologies that privilege

and value certain roles over others. Early studies of invisible labour focused on unpaid domestic tasks traditionally undertaken by women at home, or through feminist perspectives on culturally gendered professions (Hochschild, 1983; Wichroski, 2008; Wolf, 1989). Echoes of gender disparity around work have persisted and are present in the field of education, as reflected in the identity labour and care labour performed disproportionately by women of colour (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012; June, 2015). Furthermore, the scope of invisible labour has evolved and broadened over time, due in part to technological advancements that have shifted and expanded understandings of labour.

Through this systematic literature review, we have discovered numerous additional ways that educators' professional activities may be rendered invisible, overlooked, ignored, devalued, or marginalised. In the following paragraphs, we discuss how our findings align with and extend the existing literature. We then discuss how an invisible labour lens can serve to illuminate educators' efforts. We also discuss implications for practice and we conclude by noting limitations and directions for future research.

Effort illuminated by an invisible labour lens

At the outset, we connected *labour* to effort, a process-oriented view of professional activities. We contrasted this definition to *work*, an outcome- or product-oriented understanding of professional activities. Work, as Arendt (1958/1998, as cited in Fayard, 2021) conceptualised it, is a means to an end. Work can be associated with completed artefacts like teacher-created curricula and lesson plans. On the other hand, labour is never-ending, making it harder to measure. Often, this means that labour is not immediately visible. Labour can be associated with educators' efforts toward preparing lessons, mentoring students, performing academic service and participating in professional development.

Despite the clear distinctions between labour and work made by Arendt (1958/1998), none of the 16 studies included in our systematic review explicitly defined the differences between the two terms. Most articles used the terms interchangeably; some used labour more often than work, or vice versa, without acknowledging the similarities and differences of the words. However, despite this, we emphasise educators' *labour* to foreground their efforts and processes across a wide variety of professional activities. We found several themes related to educators' labour in this systematic literature review: (a) effort is often semivisible, (b) invisibility is subjective, (c) effort by marginalised educators is often overlooked, (d) labour in unexpected places often means effort is overlooked, and (e) there are layers of factors masking effort. We discuss these themes in detail in the following paragraphs.

Effort is often semivisible

Our analysis of the studies included in this systematic literature review demonstrates that invisibility is a messy concept—the boundary between the visible and invisible is not always clear. Instead, visibility is a continuum of possibilities rather than a dichotomy. Poster et al. (2016) used the term *semivisible* to describe jobs that 'may have some commonalities with visible labour in that they are located in the public sphere, physically identifiable, and formalised on the books. However, they are devalued socially, politically, and economically in ways that subordinate them relative to visible labour' (p. 11). Here, we found that many of educators' professional activities cannot be neatly categorised as completely visible or fully invisible. Educators' efforts are often somewhat acknowledged and somewhat valued—but where on the spectrum between visibility and invisibility matters.

Invisibility is subjective

Invisibility can be subjective, varying by who is perceiving the job or efforts. The 16 articles included in our systematic literature review demonstrate that invisible labour in education is highly contextualised, complex and relational (Hamblin et al., 2020; MacLeod et al., 2017). Most of the included studies (12 out of 16) relied upon self-report data collected through interviews; participants were asked about their perceptions of the invisible labour in which they were involved. However, this reliance upon self-reflection to identify invisibility means some participants' invisible labour might be considered visible by other participants or researchers. For instance, in one study in the context of higher education, teaching was regarded as invisible work performed by marginalised faculty members (Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest, 2017). Furthermore, invisibility varies by context. For instance, the visibility of teaching in higher education is much higher at a liberal arts college (where research efforts might be more invisible) than at a research-intensive university, where research is preeminent for promotion, tenure and career advancement purposes (and teaching efforts are likely to be semivisible at best). Finally, invisibility also varies by job type. For instance, MacLeod et al. (2017) and Rodrigo and Romberger (2017) studied the invisible labour performed by technologists and staff in higher education, labour that is essential for universities to operate but not as valued (or compensated as well) as faculty members' teaching or research.

Effort by marginalised educators

Another common theme, observed across half of the included studies (8 out of 16), is a connection between invisible labour and the professional activities of educators who are marginalised in some way. This theme aligns with research on the invisible labour of members of minoritised groups outside of education. For instance, DeVault (2014), Pendo (2016) and Poster et al. (2016) shed light on the challenges faced by minoritised groups as well as the invisibility of their efforts. This means that across a variety of settings, already marginalised and minoritised workers are also more susceptible to the masking effects of different types of invisible labour. These inequities can be explained by socially created power structures and hegemonic cultural ideologies (Hatton, 2017).

Our findings reveal that marginalised educators include those from groups minoritised by race, gender, class and disability (e.g., Amanti, 2019; Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Drake et al., 2019; O'Brien, 2020), as well as professionals in higher education with precarious or vulnerable positions such as adjunct and non-tenure-track faculty (Drake et al., 2019) and graduate students (Macfarlane, 2017). For example, faculty of colour—women of colour in particular—are increasingly burdened with the responsibility to serve as role models, mentors and even surrogate parents to minority students, as well as meeting norms of institutional ethnic representation (Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012).

In addition, the cultural knowledge of K-12 teachers of colour—which we identified as care labour and identity labour—often is not recognised or appreciated by school leaders (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). As June (2015) reported in an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, faculty members of colour receive a disproportionate number of requests for support and help from students—a form of *cultural taxation* (Padilla, 1994) that can be linked to invisible labour.

These additional efforts by faculty and teachers of colour require time and increase workload. Without appropriate acknowledgement, such labour may go unseen and consume faculty members' time that could have been spent on professional advancement

or achieving outcomes required for promotion and tenure. Furthermore, women in higher education disproportionately perform care labour to improve and support women's conditions (Bird et al., 2004). However, this labour often goes unacknowledged because it is assumed to be natural—and therefore easy—for women. As a result, researchers have called for increased attention to be given to the contributions of culturally and historically marginalised educators as well as the structural changes needed at an institutional level (e.g., Brew et al., 2018; Drake et al., 2019). We further discuss this theme in the Implications for Practice section below.

Effort in unexpected spaces

We also found that 12 out of the 16 included studies began with an investigation of educators' professional activities taking place in traditional educational settings, such as the campus buildings of colleges and universities. Educators' professional activities in online contexts like social media were linked to invisible labour far less often. However, when educators' do work remotely, outside traditional educational settings, their labour is often semivisible—somewhat invisible because it is valued less but also somewhat visible because it is highly acknowledged, even if for being performative, competitive and scrutinised (Fox & Bird, 2017; Selwyn et al., 2017; Staudt Willet, 2024). Only two studies included in this systematic review discussed digital labour specifically, such as K-12 teachers' use of Facebook groups for PD (Bergviken Rensfeldt et al., 2018) and social media pedagogy through Twitter (now X) for a higher education course (Vie, 2021). This means that although there have been many studies on the use of social media in education (e.g., Luo et al., 2020; Macià & García, 2016), very few of these have interpreted educators' use of social media as invisible labour. This gap invites further research into understanding the benefits and detriments of using social media for PD and digital labour in education. In addition, because disruptions of the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 changed the spaces in which educators were expected to work (Hodges et al., 2020), there has likely continued to be an increase of educators' invisible labour in recent years. It is not yet clear if emerging research will characterise these new forms of remote labour in terms of invisibility. However, whether or not the word ‘invisible’ is used, we would expect that there would be similarities between this study's themes and the themes in the literature pertaining to educators' pandemic and post-pandemic labour.

Intersecting layers masking effort

In addition to subjectivity and semivisibility, the factors masking educators' efforts are complicated by intersecting with one another. These intersections are evident in Figure 2, where we visualised how many of the included studies referenced multiple types of invisibility. For instance, although background labour, identity labour and care labour appeared most often in the included studies, these factors were rarely the only type of invisibility discussed. Background labour, especially, seemed to be multilayered, frequently appearing alongside each of the other types of invisibility across the included articles. This finding reflects Hatton's (2017) and Kosny and MacEachen's (2010) observations that various forms of invisibility can multiply or intersect, thereby exacerbating inequality and disadvantage in the workplace. This means that when educators self-report invisible labour, or when researchers observe invisible labour, they should not stop at whichever masking factor is identified

first. Instead, the investigation should continue to determine if other types of invisibility are present as well.

Implications for practice

Understanding invisible labour holds numerous practical implications. Poster et al. (2016) argued that invisibility matters in terms of which professional activities are measured, valued, compensated, rewarded, advocated for, and regulated through policy and law. Through the 16 studies included in our systematic literature review, we have seen numerous ways educators' efforts have been overlooked and undervalued. The invisibility of educators' efforts can lead to them leaving their school, institution, or the profession.

In the following paragraphs, we explore the practical implications of invisible labour. As Hatton (2017) argued, the goal is less to neatly categorise professional activities as visible or invisible and more to apply invisibility as an improvement lens through which to discover and reflect on educators' efforts. We start by suggesting five questions to prompt reflection and identify where labour might be invisible.

Five invisible labour questions to prompt reflection

The invisible labour framework serves as an improvement lens through which to reckon with the complexity of educators' varied professional activities and to begin making their invisible efforts visible. Inspired by Vie's (2021) heuristic, here we propose five questions drawn from our model of invisibility intersections that mask educators' professional efforts (Figure 2). These questions are meant to stretch the imagination—focusing attention on educators' efforts and highlighting what may have been otherwise overlooked or undervalued.

1. How might educators' efforts be dismissed because they are not the activities directly evaluated for increased compensation or promotion?
   Reflecting on *background labour*, which professional activities might be taken for granted or viewed as insignificant, unimportant or non-strategic?
2. How might the emotional costs of educators' efforts be trivialised?
   Reflecting on *care labour*, which professional activities might be assumed to be natural or simple, but actually require substantial time, attention and skill?
3. How might educators' efforts carry risk?
   Reflecting on *precarious labour*, which professional activities might occur in situations where educators' future stability and security are uncertain?
4. How might some educators' efforts be disproportionately burdensome?
   Reflecting on *identity labour*, which professional activities might assume, as a norm, additional effort by some educators rather than others because of their membership in a minoritised group?
5. How might educators' efforts occur where they never have before?
   Reflecting on *remote labour*, which professional activities might be overlooked or undervalued because they are conducted in unexpected places and times?

The process of asking and seeking to answer these questions helps to establish invisible labour not just as a categorisation scheme for different types of work but as an *improvement lens*, an analytic tool useful for evaluating situations and identifying alternative possibilities. In the following paragraphs, we apply invisible labour as an improvement lens for identifying needs, allocating resources, analysing jobs and tasks, and evaluating performance.

Invisible labour as an improvement lens for identifying needs

Applying the invisible labour framework to make professional efforts visible can help to identify needs by uncovering indicators of larger problems. For instance, Drake et al. (2019) found that higher education institutions' failure to address overarching power structures between tenured and non-tenured faculty members has made non-tenure-track faculty members feel inferior—lacking the security and prestige of tenure. In this way, the limited term contracts of non-tenure-track faculty members have led to not just invisibility (i.e., feeling overlooked and undervalued), but also very real issues of power that have become an increasing concern in higher education. The invisible labour framework helps identify and illuminate broader, more overarching challenges related to faculty power dynamics. Applying invisible labour as an improvement lens will not fix systemic challenges in education, but it could be an important first step. This process must be followed by broader changes to offer educators the space, time, resources and support needed to meet the increasing demands and intensification inherent to many jobs in education (Amanti, 2019; Selwyn et al., 2017).

Invisible labour as an improvement lens for allocating resources

In K-12 settings, administrators could better support educators' efforts by keeping invisible labour in mind when developing strategic plans, goals, objectives and metrics. For instance, administrators could acknowledge teachers' time and efforts spent in self-directed learning or curriculum development that goes beyond minimum expectations to accomplish the background, care and identity labour of planning learning activities that are more inclusive for all learners. These additional efforts likely happen outside the school building during evenings, weekends and summer months—remote labour that might not be readily visible. If administrators intentionally asked about these efforts, it would be an acknowledgement and honouring of the invisible labour. Furthermore, administrators could communicate the value of these efforts by finding ways to provide time, compensation, professional development and mentoring toward labour that previously had been invisible (Author, 2023; Spencer et al., 2018). Still, any incentivisation should be evaluated to ensure that it is not impeding educators' independence and creative expression, because some educators pursue such activities specifically for the autonomy they offer.

In higher education, forms of labour that have been previously invisible, such as course planning, preparation and production of class materials, are taken for granted by stakeholders, leading to inadequate institutional support. Then, as universities continue to reduce the number of staff, faculty members are assigned more invisible labour. This means more administrative and clerical tasks are imposed on faculty members, hampering their productivity in the professional activities by which they are evaluated for promotion and tenure: research, teaching and service. The additional burden of invisible labour also produces negative effects on students' outcomes and leads to faculty turnover (Taggart, 2021). In response to these challenges, universities could respond with a variety of approaches, such as reallocating resources, hiring specialised staff (or students for scholarships), streamlining administrative tasks through automation, offering time management training and conducting regular workload reviews to enhance efficiency. Recognising administrative tasks in evaluations and compensation, coupled with clear communication channels and the provision of adequate resources, would also be beneficial.

Furthermore, results from this systematic review showed that the effects of invisible labour are inequitable, with marginalised educators (e.g., minoritised identities, precarious employment status) suffering more when systems fail to account for the matrix of visible and invisible labour (Star & Strauss, 1999). To address this concern, universities should

intentionally recognise care labour, identity labour and precarious labour. Furthermore, administrators could revaluate compensation structures for faculty members who do not pursue a research path but are nonetheless vital to the institution's broader purposes and functions (Brew et al., 2018). Universities could also offer specific professional development opportunities to non-research faculty members for career advancement.

Invisible labour as an improvement lens for analysing jobs and tasks

Across all levels of education, clearly labeling and defining job responsibilities may be an important first step toward increasing the visibility (i.e., acknowledgement and value) of professional activities and effort—an important step in conducting job and task analyses that can improve hiring and evaluating educators (Rothwell & Kazanas, 2008). For instance, Brew et al. (2018) advocated a change in university policy to properly acknowledge employees who do not pursue a research path but contribute in other ways to their institution's larger academic activities and goals. Identifying intersections between research, teaching, service and administrative activities in higher education, as well as the intellectual knowledge required, would likely make academics' efforts more recognised and valued (Rodrigo & Romberger, 2017).

Invisible labour as an improvement lens for evaluating performance

Seeking to uncover invisible labour would allow administrators to have a clearer understanding of what educators actually do and evaluate their job performance more accurately. For instance, principals and department chairs should consider teachers' and faculty members' digital labour when conducting annual reviews or assessing progress toward promotion and tenure. Although it would be impractical to list all social media activities, Vie (2021) suggested considering the depth, frequency and purpose of these activities to determine whether they are substantial enough (i.e., the level of disciplinary service) to merit inclusion. Existing models and guidelines (e.g., Acquaviva et al., 2020; Cabrera et al., 2018) could serve as useful reference points for evaluating academic achievement through social media engagement as a form of scholarship.

Invisible labour can also be useful for self-assessment. Although Hatton's (2017) model took a top-down approach by emphasising how hegemonic ideologies render labour invisible, a bottom-up approach of understanding workers' own perspectives is also essential. Invisibility is subjective, and different workers may perceive the invisibility of similar jobs and tasks differently, answering questions of efforts invisible to whom, to what degree, and in what contexts. Different workers may also navigate semivisibility differently, as some may desire simple acknowledgement of their efforts, and others may have a stronger felt need for greater value—and increased compensation—to be placed on their work. Others still may believe having their efforts somewhat overlooked and undervalued is an acceptable tradeoff for less scrutiny and more separation between professional and private spheres of life—particularly as the expectations placed upon many educators continue to intensify (Authors, 2023; Selwyn et al., 2017). This subjective experience of invisibility is all the more reason that each educator should consider self-reflecting on their efforts and professional activities—the invisible labour lens may help them find new appreciation for their jobs or areas where they need to self-advocate for better recognition and/or support.

Limitations

As with any research project, we made tradeoffs in how we chose to conduct this systematic literature review. We aimed to survey the literature as broadly as possible by searching 10 education-related databases, but it is possible that using additional search tools may have yielded additional studies to include. Likewise, we searched for as many synonyms and terms related to 'invisible labour' as possible, but it is likely that we missed some, which again could result in missed studies. We also chose to focus on educators' invisible labour, but an argument could be made that students, parents, policymakers and other educational stakeholders also perform invisible labour in education. For instance, although we did not intentionally exclude Pre-K (i.e., early childhood) educators, we did not find any studies related to this segment of educators during our screening process. In addition, we focused our inquiry on the years 2011–2021, meaning that there were several decades when 'invisible labour' was a topic of study prior to our search window, and of course there will likely continue to be invisible labour studies in 2022 and beyond. This is particularly noteworthy because of our finding that there seems to be a more recent interest in invisible labour in literature, which we expect to continue in the post-COVID-19 educational landscape. Finally, we only included studies published in English, which may account for the overrepresentation of articles from the United States as relevant studies written in other languages were not included. In addition, the included keywords, centered on invisible labour and invisible work, might be terms used predominantly in the United States—it is unclear whether other countries use different words to describe similar concepts.

Future research

Each of these limitations suggests directions for further investigation. Future research could search additional databases with extra search terms; perhaps databases outside education would yield more studies. Looking for studies on the invisible labour of other educational stakeholders besides educators might alter or expand our proposed invisible labour model. Also, searching the literature from the 1980s to 2010 might reveal when invisible labour was first considered in an educational context. Because most invisible labour studies have focused on higher education and traditional educational settings—with only five articles discussing K-12 contexts and no studies focusing on Pre-K—intentional work is needed to investigate invisible labour in Pre-K and K-12 settings as well as self-directed contexts. Further research in the Pre-K and K-12 contexts could help deconstruct how labour may become invisible across different job titles, as the studies we identified to date have primarily focused on teaching professionals in K-12 schools. It is also possible for other Pre-K or K-12 personnel to carry out a variety of activities that are unnoticed. More work is needed to investigate potential different understandings of invisible labour across geography and sector (i.e., K-12 versus higher education) that might pertain to disparate views of industry relations, worker rights and cultural tensions. Moreover, future self-report studies (e.g., interviews, surveys, focus groups) could unpack educators' perceptions of their professional activities, such as differences between effort and outcomes, as well as the norms of where and when labour occurs. Because these norms are likely to be highly contextualised, this research should take into account specific groups of educators. Researchers could also explore the intersections of different types of invisibility and the continuum of semivisibility to gain a better understanding of the intersecting inequities and disadvantages educators face. This approach aligns with the line of research of intersectionality scholars (Crenshaw, 1989; McCall, 2005), as recommended by Hatton (2017).

Finally, most selected studies focused on the undesirable and negative sides of invisibility; however, invisibility—certainly in terms of freedom from scrutiny—can sometimes be a desired state. Hatton (2017) connected the concept of the 'weapon of the weak' (Scott, 1985) to invisibility. For instance, some non-tenure-track faculty members appreciate the invisibility within their departments and among colleagues, because it afforded them a sense of freedom and ownership in deciding their teaching methods and materials (Drake et al., 2019). However, invisibility can also result in educators having less to no power and voice in shaping programme and university policies. It is also possible that educators may exploit their out-of-sight status to evade evaluation or additional workloads (Anteby & Chan, 2018; Star & Strauss, 1999). Building upon these examples, future studies could delve into both negative and positive aspects of invisible labour.

CONCLUSION

In conducting this systematic review of the literature, we seek to understand how educators' invisible labour has been considered and applied in past research. We searched 10 databases to identify articles in academic journals that framed educators' professional activities in terms of invisible labour. From thematic analysis of 16 studies spanning 2011–2021, we developed a model of five types of invisibility that intersect and mask educators' professional efforts: background, care, precarious, identity and remote labour. We offer five questions to identify professional activities that may have otherwise been invisible. Naming these forms of invisibility can serve to acknowledge and highlight efforts that are too often taken for granted—from regular activities that are undervalued (e.g., background labour, precarious labour, remote labour) to extra activities that go unacknowledged (e.g., care labour, identity labour).

In the past decade, educators' professional activities have rarely been named as invisible labour in the literature. However, there is much potential for applying the invisible labour concept in practice and in research. Making invisible efforts visible can affect identifying needs, allocating resources, analysing jobs and tasks, and evaluating performance. Ultimately, applying invisible labour as an improvement lens can bring new understanding of educators' satisfaction with their careers during a time when professional support and encouragement are much needed.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Open Science Framework (OSF) at https://osf.io/fqhd9/, reference number DOI:10.17605/OSF.IO/FQHD9.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The BERA code of ethical practice has been followed.

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