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Brazilian Nursing Association National Student Committee: constitution, progress and challenges

Comitê Estudantil Nacional da Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem: constituição, avanços e desafios

Comité Nacional de Estudiantes de la Asociación Brasileña de Enfermería: constitución, avances y desafíos

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to describe the experience in establishing the Brazilian Nursing Association National Student Committee, emphasizing its advances and challenges. **Methods:** this is a descriptive study and experience report. The activities were developed together with the Brazilian National Nursing Association Education Board. **Results:** the report was developed through three categories, namely: Establishment of the first thematic student committee in the Brazilian National Nursing Association; Advances of the Brazilian Nursing Association National Student Committee; Past, present and, perhaps, future challenges of the student committee. **Final considerations:** student participation in the Brazilian National Nursing Association and Sections, through a student committee, allows future nurses to contribute to strengthening the entity, bringing students together, in addition to experiencing contexts of struggles for nursing and public policies in education and health.

Descriptors: Nursing; Students Nursing; Education Nursing; Unified Health System; Politics.

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RESUMO

Objetivo: descrever a experiência na constituição do Comitê Estudantil Nacional da Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem, enfatizando seus avanços e desafios. **Métodos:** trata-se de estudo descritivo do tipo relato de experiência. As atividades foram desenvolvidas junto à Diretoria de Educação da Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem Nacional. **Resultados:** desenvolveu-se o relato por meio de três categorias, sendo: Constituição do primeiro comitê temático de estudantes na Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem Nacional; Avanços do Comitê Estudantil Nacional da Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem; Desafios passado, presente e, quiçá, futuro do comitê estudantil. **Considerações finais:** a participação estudantil na Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem Nacional e Seções, por meio do comitê estudantil, permite que os futuros enfermeiros contribuam para o fortalecimento da entidade, aproximando os estudantes, além de que vivenciem contextos de lutas pela enfermagem e pelas políticas públicas em educação e saúde.

Descritores: Enfermagem; Estudantes de Enfermagem; Educação em Enfermagem; Sistema Único de Saúde; Política.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: describir la experiencia en la constitución del Comité Nacional de Estudiantes de la Asociación Brasileña de Enfermería, destacando sus avances y desafíos. **Métodos:** se trata de un estudio descriptivo del tipo relato de experiencia. Las actividades fueron desarrolladas en conjunto con la Mesa de Educación de la Asociación Nacional de Enfermería de Brasil. **Resultados:** el informe fue desarrollado a través de tres categorías, a saber: Constitución del primer comité temático de estudiantes de la Asociación Nacional de Enfermería de Brasil; Avances del Comité Nacional de Estudiantes de la Asociación Brasileña de Enfermería; Desafíos pasados, presentes y, quizás, futuros del comité estudiantil. **Consideraciones finales:** la participación de los estudiantes en la Asociación Nacional de Enfermería y Secciones de Brasil, a través del comité de estudiantes, permite a los futuros enfermeros contribuir al fortalecimiento de la entidad, acercando a los estudiantes, además de vivir contextos de luchas por la enfermería y las políticas públicas en educación y salud.

Descriptores: Enfermería; Estudiantes de Enfermería; Educación en Enfermería; Sistema Único de Salud; Política.

INTRODUCTION

The Brazilian Nursing Association (ABEn – *Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem*) is the oldest representative entity of Brazilian nursing. It was founded in 1926, having initially been called the Brazilian National Association of Graduate Nurses (ANED – *Associação Nacional de Enfermeiras Diplomadas*). Its general objective is to contribute to the cultural, scientific and political development of the category in question^(1,2).

Seeking to build and solidify the Brazilian nursing network, in its support and maintenance in the struggles for the category and society, the association brings together professional nurses, nursing technicians and assistants; undergraduate, graduate and technical nursing students; and schools, courses, colleges or departments, in addition to societies and other associations in the category⁽¹⁾.

In this context, ABEn is committed to working with other Brazilian and international nursing organizations, as it seeks to promote the political, social, cultural and scientific development of nursing constituents. This is possible through the following axes: the defense and consolidation of nursing professionals' education, scientific research and work. Therefore, it reflects nursing's contribution to society and health, and the strengthening of the free and public Brazilian Health System (SUS – *Sistema Único de Saúde*), supported by its doctrinal principles of universalization, comprehensiveness and equity^(1,3,4).

According to its bylaws, the entity is organized into statutory bodies: deliberation, such as the Brazilian National Assembly of Delegates (AND – *Assembleia Nacional de Delegados*) and the Brazilian National Council of ABEn (CONABEn – *Conselho Nacional da ABEn*); administration and execution, such as the National Board (president, vice-president, secretary-general and directors); advisory/consulting, such as commissions, departments, advisory boards and thematic committees, such as Student Committee (COEST – *Comitê Estudantil*); and oversight, such as the Brazilian National Fiscal Council⁽¹⁾. Many of these bodies were implemented at the national level years ago, whereas others were recently established/implemented, such as National COEST, which occurred in 2019⁽⁵⁾.

COEST, representing undergraduate and technical nursing students associated with ABEn, contributes to discussions on issues related to education policies and professional practice, encouraging leaders' political training, in addition to promoting ABEn and student participation in the entity, among other competencies, according to ABEn's Bylaws⁽¹⁾.

Thus, considering the importance of organizing the student movement at ABEn, through a thematic committee, there was an initial concern among students from different regions of Brazil, motivated by student movements that were of fundamental and expressive importance, resulting from collective work, for establishing/implementing National COEST. This movement continued with student organization that took place in Florianópolis, in 2018, during the 16th Brazilian National Seminar on Guidelines for Nursing Education (SENADEn – *Seminário Nacional de Diretrizes para a Educação em Enfermagem*) and the 13th Brazilian National Symposium on Nursing Diagnoses (SINADEn – *Simpósio Nacional de Diagnósticos de Enfermagem*), resuming the search for establishing/implementing National COEST. It is worth noting that, during the event, the new ABEn Nacional's Bylaws was approved⁽¹⁾.

In this regard, the experience to be reported in this article represents the advancement of knowledge in nursing, especially in the history of Brazilian nursing. The process of establishing the ABEn Nacional COEST, the advances since its implementation and the challenges, covering the past, the present and, perhaps, the future of this representation of nursing students at a national level, stand out.

OBJECTIVE

To describe the experience in establishing the ABEn Nacional Student Committee, emphasizing its advances and challenges.

METHODS

This is a descriptive study and experience report, in National COEST members' experience was systematized, participating in its constitution and supporting the advances and facing of the challenges of ABEn Nacional's student representation front.

Considering the need to provide a methodological path outlined for describing and discussing the experience presented here, the steps of the systematization of experiences proposed by Holliday were used as a methodological basis⁽⁶⁾. The systematization of experiences is a path that proposes a reflection on social attitudes and experiences, with the aim of producing knowledge and sharing based on the experienced reality, thus incorporating new aspects into contemporary thought⁽⁷⁾.

In the first stage, the starting point, the experience and organization of records are considered. To construct this article, the records/documents used were the minutes of the group meetings dated June 23 and 26, 2019, Ordinance 055/2019 of ABEn⁽⁵⁾, which appoints National COEST members, National COEST internal regulations, ABEn Nacional's Bylaws⁽¹⁾ and personal notes of the authors of this article. It is worth noting that some of these documents cited were used only as records to recover the process experienced, not as a data source.

The second stage is the moment of the **initial questions**, in which the experience, the object of the process, the objective and the axis within the broad spectrum of discussion of the experience are delimited. For this study, the object was considered to be participation in the ABEn Nacional COEST implementation and, as the axis, the constitution, the advances and the challenges in the process.

The next two stages are **recovery of the lived process** and **background reflection**, both presented in results and discussion in an integrated manner. In this stage, when recovering the lived process, some categories emerged that guided the description, namely: Constitution of the first thematic Student Committee in the Brazilian National Nursing Association; Advances of the Brazilian Nursing Association National Student Committee; Past, present and, perhaps, future challenges of student representation.

Finally, in the last stage, called **point of arrival**, the reflections guided the authors to final considerations on the relevance of the experience, supporting the production of new knowledge in student representation in Brazilian nursing, allowing the participation of new actors in this and other similar experiences to guarantee continuity and strengthening of student representation at state, national and international levels.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Establishment of the first thematic student committee in the Brazilian National Nursing Association

The student movement in Brazil has made important historical contributions, such as the struggles that took place in the 20th century against the military dictatorship, and the SUS construction and implementation^(3,8). In nursing, there are records dating back to 1963, with scores for its causes that are in line with the general student movement and specifically the profession⁽⁹⁾. As an example of Brazilian nursing student organizations, there is the Brazilian National Executive of Nursing Students (ENEEnf – *Executiva Nacional de Estudantes de Enfermagem*) and the Academic Centers^(3,9).

In general, students must strive to participate in various experiences in areas that are fundamental to the exercise of their future professional career, such as administrative management, organization of events and political discussions, which are directly linked to the nursing category through student organizations^(3,9). Furthermore, through this participation, it is possible to collaborate, for instance, with significant changes even during undergraduate studies, providing fundamental advances for the profession and proposing new strategies⁽³⁾, such as for ABEn dissemination and strengthening, thus taking into account the fundamental role of the entity for nursing and society.

COEST is linked to ABEn, and is included in the entity's bylaws as a thematic committee since 2013⁽¹⁰⁾. The proposed format, in addition to guaranteeing the representation of students linked to the association (undergraduate and technical nursing courses), aims to bring them together both to join forces to strengthen the entity and to fight for education in nursing and beyond, as historically done by other movements^(1,3,8,9). However, even with the statutory guarantee, until 2018, the committee had not yet been implemented at the national level of the aforementioned entity.

Nursing education gains relevance in a committee of student members with institutional representation whose mission is to bring together student representatives and active members of the country's student movement to facilitate the exchange of agendas and actions between students and nursing professionals. This therefore reflects the alignment with political activities in education and health⁽⁹⁾, with the aim of awakening students to fight for the class, improving information about programs and activities. Furthermore, it enhances the learning of extra skills during training, facilitating the insertion of young professionals into the job market with a critical and reflective perspective while also promoting class consciousness among students⁽³⁾.

The movement to create committees in ABEn sections began in 2016, when, at the inauguration meeting of ABEn *Nacional* (2016–2019) board of directors, two undergraduate nursing students were invited to participate as representatives of the nursing student category. At that time, they were informed about the update of ABEn *Nacional's* Bylaws⁽¹⁰⁾, under the management of president Ivone Evangelista Cabral (2010–2013), including COEST and its competencies, starting the student movement led by ABEn member students throughout Brazil.

However, it was only in 2016 that the first committee, the Brasília Section COEST, was created during the 68th Brazilian Nursing Congress (CBEn – *Congresso Brasileiro de Enfermagem*), held in the Federal District. From then on, the implementation of committees for the Rio de Janeiro, Amazonas,

Minas Gerais, Santa Catarina and Maranhão sections, respectively, began. It is worth noting that this process involved efforts by local boards together with students associated with ABEn in the states independently, all supported by the experiences of each section.

At that time, with each local implementation, sporadic virtual meetings were held with student groups to share experiences and establish effective strategies for the process of creating committees in different regions. Considering this, the need to implement the aforementioned student representation at the national level was recognized. However, to do so, the fundamental guidance of ABEn *Nacional's* Education Board was needed for this purpose - to establish/implement a thematic student committee.

Thus, it is believed that the ABEn *Nacional* National COEST creation originated from the concerns of many other students who preceded us. However, it was only in 2018, more specifically during the 16th SENADEn and the 13th SINADEn, that the need to implement National COEST was reaffirmed. Students were responsible for strengthening the interstate contact network between students associated with ABEn, expanding discussions with other student entities nationwide.

Thus, due to the non-existence of National COEST, a group of students, with representatives from sections of various regions of the country, showed willingness to establish the first committee with the support of ABEn *Nacional* board of directors at the time, in search of the operationalization of its purposes of this student representation. As a result, in 2019, student representation in the entity was established, beginning the implementation of its competencies, as per statutory provisions, with students from the Northeast (2), Southeast (2), South (1), Midwest (2) and North (1) regions and a representative of the National Board⁽⁵⁾.

In this assertion, student entity formation largely stems from the restlessness at the grassroots level. With this, organizational spaces are formed supported by pillars, such as the diversity of participation in other representations of students and ideas^(3,8,9) to then constitute the thematic committee of the nursing students in question to perform their competencies.

Carrying out political activities related to the profession and the training process of these future workers in a student movement body is essential for engagement during graduation⁽³⁾. For instance, students' associative life in a class entity represents the great strength of the professions that, in the eyes of society, are establishing themselves through the activities they develop. Thus, professional associations acquire great prominence due to the contribution they make to government agencies in solving the problems inherent to each profession. The results of their actions are directly related to their organization, to the interaction among their members and among them and the communities that constitute their areas of work. Therefore, nursing students' engagement in all these struggles is relevant, preparing them for active professional practice also when inserted in the world of work in the category⁽³⁾.

Regarding National COEST, according to an ordinance published by the president of ABEn *Nacional*⁽⁵⁾, a team was formed with student representatives from the ABEn sections in order to establish a meeting schedule and define an activity plan based on the statutory powers of said committee. It is worth noting that, through CONABEn, a deliberative body, in a meeting held in Rio de Janeiro, on June 23, 2019, the internal regulations, schedule and work plan to be followed by COEST Nacional were approved. CONABEn makes up ABEn and is subordinate to AND, for the purposes of specific deliberations of the entity⁽¹⁾.

In this context, the fulfillment of the meeting agenda began, held in virtual and in-person modalities. Among the notes of these spaces, the construction of ABEn *Nacional* National COEST internal regulations was highlighted with the purpose of standardizing its organization and operation, in accordance with ABEn's Bylaws. The internal regulations are a guiding document for the ABEn Sections student committees, guiding their operation.

The point that marks the alignment of the COEST constitution and the joint meeting with associated students from all over the country is the 1st ABEn Student Committees Forum (*Fórum dos Comitês Estudantis da ABEn*), held at the 71st CBEn in 2019, in Manaus, in the state of Amazonas. At the event, the experiences of the committees of each section were presented, and the importance of implementing this thematic committee was reaffirmed by the entire community present, with a view to strengthening student representation at ABEn.

Advances of the Brazilian Nursing Association National Student Committee

Following the National COEST establishment, the operationalization of the thematic committee's purposes began, such as developing actions aimed at meeting student committees' demands established in sections or that were in the beginning of organization.

National COEST's work represents a way of approaching the professional field structured in its representative class association, guiding education in nursing, in the technical and university system, and preparing socialization for professional life⁽¹⁾.

However, this required regular meetings. These were divided into internal training of members to develop the work plan and to meet the demands of any requesting committee, with the purpose of presenting the ABEn entity in a space for political training in nursing.

As an instance, it is worth highlighting that on June 25, 2019, in a space for political training, National COEST representatives met with nursing students from the *Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro* (UFRJ) and the *Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro* (UERJ), discussing the nursing student movement. They also discussed the importance of National COEST's and ENEEnf's work, emphasizing the importance of organizing themselves in the management of their academic centers in favor of active participation in the nursing student movement.

In this training space, the theme on the history of the nursing student movement and the constitution of National COEST was addressed, with notes on the need for nursing students to be aware, from undergraduate and technical courses, of the importance of recognizing ABEn representativeness and strengthening the entity. Moreover, the role of ENEEnf was emphasized, with an explanation of the structure of the executive, the local-regional Rio de Janeiro and the possibilities of articulation between the two student representations, supporting student political participation. Finally, the student movement's historical and social overview and how nursing has been articulated were presented.

On June 26, 2019, National COEST met in person during the 20th National Nursing Research Seminar (SENPE – *Seminário Nacional de Pesquisa em Enfermagem*) and the 1st International Nursing Research Seminar (SINPE – *Seminário Internacional de Pesquisa em Enfermagem*), held in the city of Rio de Janeiro, RJ, to continue planning activities after the approval of the bylaws. The representatives who make up the committee management sought to develop strategies to approach the sections and define the schedule for the 1st ABEn Student Committees Forum, which took place in November of the same year, during the 71st CBEn, to which they invited the student community to participate.

Furthermore, in 2019, during the 71st CBEn, the reduction of the annual fee for nursing students (undergraduate and technical) was also achieved, facilitating future nursing professionals' participation in the entity as well as in scientific events promoted by ABEn. In this way, technical-scientific knowledge and political participation were expanded, starting during training.

Another step forward is the encouragement of other sections that had not yet implemented the committee. The ABEn sections boards recognized the necessary involvement of students to strengthen the entity, as they understand it as a way of providing opportunities for future nursing professionals and an exercise for participation in the struggles in defense of nursing and the SUS.

Also noteworthy is the creation of the student monitoring process at ABEn, an initiative carried out by student committees of some sections together with their respective education directorates. The activity aimed to encourage student participation in the actions proposed by ABEn in the states, also enabling the enrichment of students' curricula and experience in the organization of scientific events and general activities of the entity.

The progress, in general, was only possible with the joint persistence of those involved, full members, substitutes and representation of ABEn *Nacional* board of directors in the process of initiating the organization of the student committee in question and the operationalization of its purposes, both set out in internal regulations and in the entity's bylaws.

Past, present and perhaps future challenges of the student committee

With the establishment of National COEST and the progress made in the search for implementing its competencies, challenges arose related to the search for democratic strategies for defining the

members of the aforementioned committee for the years following the establishment of the first board, in addition to ensuring representation by geographic region of Brazil and taking care not to go against other historical and active student entities that already exist, such as the Brazilian National Union of Students (UNE – *União Nacional dos Estudantes*)⁽⁸⁾ and ENEEnf⁽⁹⁾.

Since the committee was established, new challenges have been posed, such as: overloading of functions by members, whether in nursing or in participating social organizations; possible ways of inviting nursing students to participate in discussions and movements; and promoting debate on topics such as the Nursing Proficiency Exam, Distance Learning and the new curriculum guidelines, i.e., the committee's compliance with its statutory powers.

Thus, considering the initial challenges before the establishment of National COEST and those that arose after its establishment, they were understood as possible challenges to be faced, whether related to continuity of the work initiated by the first board of COEST, when seeking better strategies in order to implement the purposes of the thematic committee, when facing the possible damages resulting from remote training in nursing, imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic⁽⁹⁾, when aligning with other student representations, without entering into the other student representation's competency, and, above all, when finding a common denominator.

Thus, the challenges (past, present and, perhaps, future) must be overcome together, considering the possibilities of contribution of each person involved, based on the differences of those involved, but with the foundation of objectives, which must be common, such as the fight for high quality nursing training (undergraduate and technical) and in defense of the public and free SUS^(3,9) as well as for strengthening the ABEn *Nacional* thematic student committee.

Photographic records



Source: authors' personal archive (2018).

Figure 1 – Meeting with the Brazilian Nursing Association sections Student Committees during the 70th Congresso Brasileiro de Enfermagem in Curitiba/PR, in 2018



Source: authors' personal archive (2019).

Figure 2 – Day of review and approval of the *Comitê Estudantil Nacional* internal regulations, during the extraordinary meeting of the *ABEn Nacional* Council, held on June 23, 2019 in the city of Rio de Janeiro/RJ



Source: authors' personal archive (2019).

Figure 3 – National Student Committee meeting, held on June 26, 2019, in the city of Rio de Janeiro/RJ

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the systematized experience, socializing the constitution of National COEST and its state representations, it is clear that students began to have greater knowledge about ABEn through activities organized and spaces occupied by the committee in events, ceremonies and other actions carried out in dialogue with the student community, strengthening the feeling of belonging of the student class to an entity historically relevant to the profession at a national level.

Hence, we highlighted the relevance of the work of the students who are members of COEST in construction and mobilization around nursing agendas, under the coordination of ABEn Nacional Education Board, which allowed articulation with other entities, with the sections of ABEn itself and its existence, serving as a model for inserting students throughout the entity's existence.

Student participation in ABEn strengthens the entity's struggles, bringing future nursing professionals' strength, inserting them, from training, into the logistics of a class representative entity and bringing training elements that go beyond theory, also providing the scope for training future professionals with critical and reflective thinking.

This experience report draws attention to the need for engagement and representation in other existing student movements for social and nursing struggles, highlighting these as an exercise in participatory life as a citizen, encouraging them, as nursing workers, to continue defending the profession, social and health policies. Furthermore, it is hoped that it can awaken class consciousness and the fight for a country and for the exercise of the profession that is more just and egalitarian, without prejudice.

The study, as it is a report by a pioneering team in the construction of the first COEST, cannot be generalized to the point of representing the student movement's vision as a whole regarding participation in nursing class or social struggle entities. The discussions promoted or in which COEST participated are limited to the academic and theoretically professional student experience of a future that is yet to be presented to the world of nursing work.

The systematization of the experience regarding the constitution, advances and challenges of a nursing student association, as part of a professional association, allowed disseminating the work done and to be continued, which contributes to the history of nursing. The participation of National COEST in ABEn favors the approximation of associated students with the representative entity and adds to their inclusion in nursing and society debates, guiding future nursing workers' training - a working class.

Therefore, we noticed the importance of ABEn for supporting nursing as a science, joining forces, through COEST and other student organizations, to achieve ever greater student engagement, not limiting ABEn dissemination as an almost century-old "mother" entity, only to historical records, as an entity in full activity today and which brings together and represents the ideals of the category since its development.

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