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Experiences of graduates of the nursing tutorial education program at the Universidade Estadual do Ceará

Vivências dos egressos do programa de educação tutorial de Enfermagem da Universidade Estadual do Ceará

Experiencias de egresados del programa de educación tutorial en enfermería de la Universidade Estadual do Ceará

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This research aims to analyze the speeches of former members of PET Nursing UECE, exploring their experiences, perceptions, and contributions. **Method:** Based on a qualitative and cross-sectional approach, the Content Analysis technique, according to Bardin, was used and organized into three stages: pre-analysis, categorization, and interpretation of the data. **Results:** The interviews conducted with graduating students and tutors show the relevance of PET in the academic and personal training of the participants, as well as in the development of skills such as leadership, teamwork, creativity, and innovation. The testimonies highlight the strengthening of interpersonal bonds and the positive impact of the program on the professional careers of those involved. In addition, the reports show that PET enabled significant experiences within the teaching-research-extension tripod, contributing to the construction of a critical and humanized education. **Final Considerations:** The study successfully achieved its objective, offering a new vision of the historical evolution of PET Nursing UECE and reinforcing the importance of strategies to strengthen the group in the future.

Descriptors: Nursing; Education; Nursing; Teaching; History of Nursing; Life Changing Events.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Analisar as falas dos egressos do Programa de Educação Tutorial, explorando suas vivências, percepções e contribuições. **Métodos:** Estudo descritivo com abordagem qualitativa e que utilizou a análise de conteúdo de Bardin para elucidar as falas. **Resultados:** As entrevistas realizadas evidenciaram a relevância do programa na formação acadêmica e pessoal dos egressos e tutores, bem como no desenvolvimento de competências como liderança, trabalho em equipe, criatividade e inovação. Os depoimentos destacam o fortalecimento de vínculos interpessoais e o impacto positivo do programa na trajetória profissional dos envolvidos. Além disso, possibilitou experiências significativas dentro do tripé ensino-pesquisa-extensão, contribuindo para a construção de uma formação crítica e humanizada. **Considerações Finais:** Os resultados revelaram a análise das vivências e ofereceram uma nova visão sobre a evolução histórica do programa, reforçando a importância de estratégias que fortaleçam o grupo no futuro.

Descritores: Enfermagem; Educação em Enfermagem; Ensino; História da Enfermagem; Acontecimentos que Mudam a Vida.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Analizar los discursos de los egresados del Programa de Educación Tutorial, explorando sus experiencias, percepciones y aportes. **Método:** A partir de un abordaje cualitativo y transversal, se utilizó la técnica de Análisis de Contenido, según Bardin, organizada en tres etapas: pre-análisis, categorización e interpretación de los datos. **Resultados:** Las entrevistas realizadas a alumnos egresados y tutores destacan la relevancia del PET en la formación académica y personal de los participantes, así como en el desarrollo de habilidades como el liderazgo, el trabajo en equipo, la creatividad y la innovación. Los testimonios destacan el fortalecimiento de los vínculos interpersonales y el impacto positivo del programa en la carrera profesional de los participantes. Además, los relatos muestran que el PET posibilitó experiencias significativas dentro del trípede docencia-investigación-extensión, contribuyendo a la construcción de una educación crítica y humanizada. **Consideraciones finales:** El estudio logró con éxito su objetivo, ofreciendo una nueva visión de la evolución histórica del PET Enfermería UECE y reforzando la importancia de las estrategias para fortalecer el grupo en el futuro.

Descritores: Enfermería; Educación en Enfermería; Enseñanza; Historia de la Enfermería; Acontecimientos que Cambian la Vida.

INTRODUCTION

The *Programa de Educação Tutorial* (PET, Tutorial Education Program), established by the Federal Government in 1979, originated within the *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* (CAPES, Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel), initially named the Special Training Program. Following a change in administration in 1999, it was renamed as it is known today. Conceived as a program of academic excellence, its purpose is to enhance higher education and train highly qualified professionals, particularly for university careers⁽¹⁾.

The PET is composed of faculty tutors and undergraduate students. The groups develop teaching, research, and extension activities that promote student protagonism, autonomy, and leadership. Moreover, the program has contributed significantly to the formation of more qualified professionals prepared to handle challenging situations, as well as to the development of critical-reflective thinking and the inseparability of teaching and extension, fostering a comprehensive education⁽¹⁾.

Participation in PET provides undergraduate students with an expansion of their academic training, which distinguishes them in the job market and facilitates their entry into postgraduate programs⁽²⁾. Thus,

the program allows participants to engage with diverse activities within the areas of teaching, research, and extension, thereby enabling the broad development of skills and competencies.

As a non-hierarchical educational space, PET offers its members ("petianos") the opportunity to exchange experiences among themselves and with their tutors. Consequently, the environment fostered values the diverse cultural and academic backgrounds of the students, permitting the execution of ideas and projects⁽³⁾. Although PET has existed for 40 years, there are few studies that analyze its contributions to academic training and professional practice⁽³⁾.

From this perspective, the PET of the Nursing course at the *Universidade Estadual do Ceará* (UECE) was created in 1994. However, there is a scarcity of available material that narrates the trajectory, history, and activities developed by PET Nursing UECE over these three decades. As a strategy to recover this history, the opportunity arose to interview former members of PET Nursing at UECE.

OBJECTIVE

To analyze the experiences, perceptions, and contributions of the alumni from PET Nursing at UECE.

METHODS

This is a descriptive, qualitative research study that followed the recommendations of the Enhancing the QUALity and Transparency of health Research (EQUATOR) Network reporting guidelines. Qualitative research is concerned with social and subjective issues, as it seeks to understand individual human actions as well as the social and cultural context⁽⁴⁾.

In this manner, the qualitative method is understood as a way to reflect upon and seek new possibilities for the obstacles that permeate society, considering characteristics that cannot be measured by equations or statistics⁽⁵⁾.

For the organization of the interviews, the alumni were first segmented according to the period in which they were part of the program. The 30 years were organized into five six-year blocks: 1994–1999; 2000–2005; 2006–2011; 2012–2017; 2018–2023. For this, a database containing the names and contact information of the PET alumni was used. The selection of the "petianos" was carried out using a convenience sampling approach, and invitations were sent via WhatsApp, including a request for permission to use the copyright of their voice. In the event of non-acceptance or unavailability, another alumnus was selected.

The technical procedures for the recordings involved organizing the environment, adjusting audio and video equipment, and conducting tests to ensure quality. The 13 PET Nursing scholarship holders were responsible for operating the equipment, such as cameras and microphones, as well as supervising the recordings and ensuring the content was captured correctly. After the recordings, the scholarship holders also participated in the editing and organization of the material for the final presentation.

The interviews were conducted in person using a semi-structured script, which was provided to each participant in advance. To develop the interview script, studies that addressed both script creation and the history of PET Nursing at UECE were utilized. In this regard, the following studies were intentionally selected: the book "From creation to script"⁽⁶⁾, which addresses the creation of scripts for narratives, and the research papers titled "Academic Tutoring Program: Experience Report of Undergraduate Nursing Students"⁽⁷⁾, "Contribution of tutoring in the academic education of undergraduates in nursing"⁽⁸⁾, and the e-book "25 Years of PET Nursing: A Trajectory of Research, Knowledge, and Health Promotion"⁽⁹⁾, which discuss the experiences of former PET Nursing UECE scholarship holders.

The interview organizes and aligns the interviewer with the research objectives, adding the potential for spontaneous questions that arise during the interaction between the researcher and the participant, thus contributing to the acquisition of information. Furthermore, it provides a space for the informant to effectively participate in the research and contribute their thoughts alongside the interviewer⁽¹⁰⁾.

For the former tutors, eight categories of questions were developed: context and motivation, experiences and challenges, activities and projects, contribution to the "petianos", interaction and relationships, evolution and improvement, advice and messages, and personal reflection. For the alumni, the script comprised six categories: experience in PET, activities developed, challenges faced, contributions of PET, suggestions for improvement, and messages for future "petianos".

Additionally, the FFmpeg software was used for audio preparation, and the generated file was converted and processed in Python with libraries such as Speech Recognition to perform speech recognition and convert the audio to text. Following this process, the authors performed a double-check of the transcriptions.

For the analysis of the statements, Bardin's content analysis⁽¹¹⁾ was chosen, which is structured in three phases: (i) pre-analysis; (ii) exploration of the material, categorization, or codification; and (iii) treatment of the results, inference, and interpretation.

Rigor in the organization of the research stages ensured the reliability of the results, as well as prevented inconsistencies and ambiguities in the process, certifying the validity of the information⁽¹²⁾ as proposed by the EQUATOR reporting guidelines.

The pre-analysis refers to the stage of organizing and systematizing ideas. At this point, a floating reading was conducted to become familiar with the material, the content to be analyzed was chosen, hypotheses and objectives were formulated, and the indicators that support the final interpretation were developed⁽¹¹⁾.

Subsequently, the exploration of the material was carried out, in which the study was deepened, aiming at coding and then categorizing the data, which were systematically transformed into units of registration. The unit of registration is the coded unit of meaning and can be of varied nature and dimensions, such as themes, words, or phrases.

In the third stage, the treatment of the results occurred, where the obtained data were analyzed in order to make them meaningful⁽¹¹⁾.

The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. From the statements, four categories emerged: "Initiatives Developed," "Experiences in PET and Challenges Faced," "Contributions of PET," and "Affective Bonds and Guidance for Future 'Petianos' and Tutors".

The flowchart presented in Figure 1 shows the main stages of interview development and speech analysis, which were: (i) Development of categories, (ii) Organization and structuring of the script, (iii) Recording of interviews, (iv) Transcription of audios and analysis of statements.

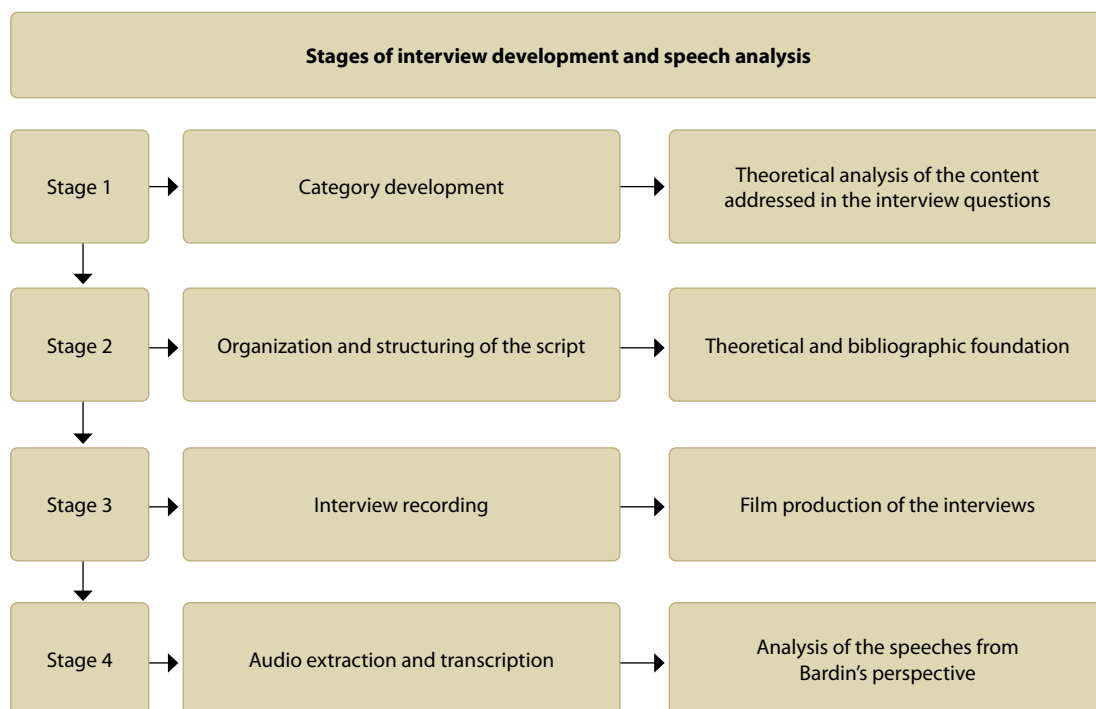


Figure 1 - Stages of interview development and speech analysis, Fortaleza, Ceará. 2024

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2024.

The research was conducted at UECE by the scholarship holders and the tutor of the Nursing PET program, obtaining approval No. 7.049.965 from the Research Ethics Committee of UECE.

RESULTS

In accordance with each category analyzed from the transcribed statements, the contribution of each alumnus and tutor during the interviews is made evident, conveying their experience in PET and what had the greatest impact during their time in the program. The statements from the alumni were recorded with the codenames "P1," "P2," "P3," "P4," "P5," "P6," "P7," and "P8" for former student members, and for tutors, the identification is made using the letter T to indicate their role, as in "T1," "T2," "T3," and "T4".

Initiatives developed

Upon analyzing the category "Activities Developed," it is understood that in the interviewees' statements, there was a great similarity in the information related to context and motivation when they were asked about the activities that were most important individually and collectively. Alumni P2 and P8, interviewed from the 2019 to 2023 period, reported that DesPeT, a PET activity offered to newly admitted students in the UECE Nursing course, was an activity of major academic, personal, and professional relevance. Thus, for P8, the activity was both a result and a motivation for her trajectory within the Program.

"[...] And I thought it was a very important activity because it was the activity that made me want to join PET, right? When I entered, I was a freshman, I participated in Despert. And so I got to know PET through that activity, and that's why, when I became a 'petiana,' right, when I was accepted as a 'petiana,' I did my utmost to showcase PET, to help the students[...]. So it was an activity I really liked" (P8).

P2 and T1 pointed out that in 2004, PET was called the "Special Training Program" and highlighted a widely publicized extension activity, the Companhia da Algazarra (The Commotion Company), whose target audience was hospitalized children at a leading trauma hospital.

"[...] It was always a very pleasant activity that had a very nice return, you know, from the professionals, the mothers, and especially the children [...]" (P2).

"[...] we worked with health education, so we sought to bring health to the children in a playful way, bringing joy to the children who were hospitalized and to their parents; they felt supported, so it was a very beautiful project. [...] So it was a very cool project, and we reaped many fruits from it, and we also presented at conferences, so at all the health-related conferences we... And the students created theatrical plays, so there were various modalities besides games and recreational activities [...]" (T1).

Still within the activities, the experiences and transformations that these projects provided to their participants are highlighted. This space reveals the significant impact that PET has on both the personal and professional growth of the scholarship holders. Through the program's diverse activities, such as teaching, research, and extension projects, the members have the opportunity to enhance skills essential for academic life and the job market.

"[...] During my time in PET, I participated intensely in the growth and development of the program, which integrates teaching, research, and extension. In a scenario where the SUS [Unified Health System] was still in its initial phase, PET provided us with the opportunity to act actively on several fronts. From getting involved in negotiations, organizing scientific events, to overcoming infrastructure limitations, we learned to adapt and innovate with the available resources [...]" (P1).

"[...] It was a project developed during my tenure and was also quite challenging, as we started working with adolescents in schools. We would usually take over some of the teachers' classes, who kindly gave up part of their time so we could implement the project. The objective was to develop health education activities, addressing topics important to youth, such as sexuality, first aid, family planning, and teenage pregnancy. In this way, we directed the content to meet the specific needs of this audience [...]" (T2).

Experiences in PET and challenges faced

The interviewees were asked about the challenges and experiences that the program provided during their respective periods of participation. The main points of analysis obtained were the workload exceeding the program's stipulated hours, balancing PET activities with undergraduate coursework, lack of investment, and group work.

Regarding the lack of financial investment, the majority of the "petianos", from more recent periods, reported this topic as the greatest challenge.

"[...] the difficulties revolve around resources, right, the events, the difficulty of sponsorship, you know, wondering if it will work out or not. In those uncertainties, in our time, there was a period when the scholarships were delayed, so the activities had to happen, and we were left with this uncertainty of when we would receive the scholarship [...]" (P2).

"[...] The biggest challenge was the lack of investment, I saw many 'petianos' suffering from a lack of scholarship payments, you know [...], the PET scholarship was something that was often missing, and this interfered, for example, with the resources we needed for extension projects and other activities as well, which we often had to pay for out of our own pockets, literally, to make things happen [...]" (P3).

From the tutors' perspective, working in PET is a challenging experience, demanding constant self-improvement. Among the main challenges identified, the lack of financial investment, the need to mediate conflicts, and the management of events stand out, demands that require organization and management skills.

"[...] It was a remarkable experience in my professional life and, especially, in my trajectory as a professor at UECE. At the time, I can summarize that they were the ten best years of my life as a teacher. I was just starting out, but I also learned a lot from PET, which has much to teach us. I believe the program gives us more than what we offer it. [...] There are always conflict situations; after all, they are different people living together almost daily. Therefore, we know that these conflicts can arise, and we need to be prepared to mediate them. These were, without a doubt, some of the challenges faced [...]" (T2).

"[...] During my time as a PET tutor, which lasted about six years, I faced many challenges, especially due to the pandemic, which required a rapid adaptation of planned activities. The absence of the nursing event, held for the first time, was a significant moment, but we managed to reorganize and conduct online activities[...]" (T3).

Contributions of PET

The category "Contributions of PET" gathers the perceptions and reports of former PET participants on how this experience impacted their academic, professional, and personal trajectories. The contributions of PET, according to the interviewees, go beyond technical learning and academic training, also promoting the development of skills such as leadership, collaboration, and resilience.

This set of experiences in PET reveals how the program influenced the growth of its members, preparing them for future challenges and broadening their perspectives for practice in the fields of nursing and education. For the tutors, PET represents an opportunity for mutual growth, allowing them to develop competencies such as conflict mediation, leadership, and creativity while guiding students on their journeys, as can be observed in the following statements from two alumni.

"[...] PET opened the doors to my professional life. In addition to extension activities, PET provided workshops and lectures that contributed to the development of my teaching skills and encouraged me to participate in research projects" (P3).

"[...] This environment of learning and mutual support among colleagues created lasting bonds that continue to this day. Many of us pursued careers in teaching or in clinical practice, and we continue to apply what we learned in PET. For me, the program was and still is a tool for constant evolution, fostering the development of a critical mindset and the strengthening of professional practice" (P1).

From the perspective of academic tutoring, the prominence of the leadership profile acquired and embodied by the tutor is noticeable, as it explores the dynamics of coexistence and the bonds established among PET members, addressing a managerial role within the program, as well as the role of interpersonal relationships among members in the personal and academic development of participants.

"[...] PET contributes to the formation of highly qualified professionals, prepared to face the challenges of the job market and academia. Observing the 'petianos,' I notice that they become natural leaders, with the ability to work in a team, adapt to new situations, and continue to develop their knowledge throughout their lives" (T3).

Affective bonds and guidance for future 'petianos' and tutors

When answering the questions, "What message would you like to leave for the 'petianos'?" and "What message would you like to leave for future tutors?"; a strong emotional bond with the program was perceived. The participants, both recent and past, highlighted the relevance of PET, its credibility, and the importance of full engagement in its activities, evidencing the positive impact of the experience on their academic and personal development.

"[...] Enjoy this moment. I'm going to say something that is cliché, but it's true: it goes by very fast. Live it intensely, give yourselves body and soul to this program. Love the activities you are doing, do each one as if it were the first time. Sometimes, in the rush of daily life, we forget that first encounter, that first love for the program [...]" (P5).

"[...] For future 'petianos,' what I can say is: enjoy every moment in PET. Don't let opportunities pass by, participate actively, get involved in all the activities, and live this unique experience intensely. PET is more than a program; it's a space for growth, learning, and development. Don't be afraid to make mistakes, because it's by making mistakes that we learn. Value every exchange, every challenge, and every achievement. PET is a program that transforms, and in the end, you will realize how much it contributed to your academic, professional, and personal life. Being a 'petiano' is a privilege, and you have the opportunity to make history. Enjoy it and make it worthwhile! [...]" (P7).

The coexistence with colleagues and tutors in PET is described as an opportunity for continuous learning and for creating bonds that extend beyond the academic environment, promoting a network of support and mutual encouragement.

"[...] As a PET tutor, it contributes immensely to the education of the students who are part of it, not just the students, but I observe that it is also an expansive program for what we jokingly call the 'aggregated Pets,' right? So not only the scholarship holders but all those other students, and professors too, who in some way are colleagues and members of PET, they also manage to expand and experience, indirectly, let's say, this experience" (T4).

"[...] My suggestion for future tutors is: 'Wear the PET shirt.' It's important to understand that PET is a family and that the tutor must be willing to connect with the students on multiple levels, from academic challenges to personal issues, which also influence their development. Tutoring in PET requires dedication, commitment, and the ability to inspire students to continue their learning journey, whether in teaching, research, or extension [...]" (T3).

DISCUSSION

The data obtained from interviews with former tutors and alumni of the PET Nursing program highlight its relevance to the academic and personal development of participants, as well as to the cultivation of competencies essential for the practice of Nursing. Programs like PET play a fundamental role throughout the academic trajectory, aiming to promote quality in academic production and stimulate personal values indispensable for professional training⁽¹³⁾. In this context, it was observed that PET not only enhances specific technical skills in health but also contributes significantly to the interpersonal growth of its participants.

The interviewees' statements underscore the enriching experience provided by PET, demonstrating the positive impact of an educational foundation based on the academic tripod—teaching, research, and extension—and on the dynamics of group work. This format solidifies itself as a distinguishing factor in the preparation of healthcare professionals⁽¹⁴⁾.

It is understood that teamwork is imperative in the health context, as it promotes the recognition of one's own limits, coexistence with differences, the development of social skills, and the practice of humanized actions. These competencies are fundamental for an education that prepares students for a more realistic and committed engagement with their future profession, strengthening the guidelines of the Unified Health System (SUS). Thus, PET contributes to building teamwork skills and reinforcing ethical and professional commitment in the practice of Nursing.

Furthermore, the former tutors reinforce the importance of the program's continuity and consistency as central elements for its effectiveness and excellence. PET is essential for academic knowledge to be transformed into meaningful and useful learning for the professional context⁽¹⁵⁾. The exchange of experiences between tutors and students emerges as one of the program's pillars, evidencing the importance of support and mentorship networks in the academic environment. This type of interaction allows shared knowledge to be more lasting and impactful.

The projects and activities promoted by PET Nursing play a crucial role in the practical training of participants, offering a solid foundation for the development of competencies and skills essential for work in healthcare.

The application of active methodologies enables the integration of theory and practice, an indispensable aspect of health education⁽¹⁶⁾, preparing students to deal efficiently and skillfully with the demands of the job market. Moreover, the learning environment provided by PET encourages participants' self-confidence and strengthens their professional development, forming more complete and prepared nurses.

Another relevant point is the continuous bond between alumni and PET, which can open new opportunities for partnerships and program improvements. Former members, already established in the job market, have the capacity to share the challenges and realities of the health field, offering current members a practical and updated perspective on professional demands⁽¹⁷⁾. Thus, the institution can adjust activities and projects to new demands, promoting a continuous cycle of enhancement.

PET Nursing, therefore, stands out as an indispensable component in the academic and practical training of students. It offers an active learning environment that stimulates both personal and professional development. Authors⁽¹⁸⁾ argue that programs like PET are essential for forming critical and committed professionals, which is reflected in the quality of care and the social responsibility of future nurses. Through the use of active methodologies, the program creates a space to develop a practice based on ethical principles and solid technical competencies, training professionals capable of facing the challenges of the healthcare sector.

For the future, it is essential to conduct new studies that deepen the analysis of PET's impacts on the trajectory of its alumni, as well as identify possible improvements to the program. Longitudinal studies can offer a comprehensive view of PET's effects over time and highlight areas that require enhancement, especially concerning the challenges faced after graduation⁽¹⁹⁾. This will allow the program to continue evolving and adapting to students' needs, maintaining its relevance and effectiveness in the training of Nursing professionals.

Among the challenges faced, participants pointed to the need for integration with other health areas as a way to strengthen the program, and the necessity for greater institutional financial support. Promoting interdisciplinary partnerships can enrich PET activities, contributing to a broader and more collaborative vision of healthcare. This integration can foster the development of a multidisciplinary approach, which should be increasingly valued in the health field.

Another relevant aspect concerns the financial resources allocated to the program. Although these resources are fundamental to overcoming economic limitations and ensuring its continuity, there is still insufficient institutional support, which compromises the full development of the proposed activities. Despite these challenges, PET Nursing remains a transformative space dedicated to forming critical professionals prepared to face the challenges of the job market with competence and social commitment.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

Although the study made a significant contribution by demonstrating the repercussions of the PET Nursing program at UECE over its 30 years, a limitation was identified related to the possible occurrence of memory recall errors and the diversity of perspectives. To overcome this limitation, the option of recording additional information via Google Forms was offered as a strategy to obtain further details that the interviewees deemed necessary.

Therefore, despite consulting the literature for the construction of the interview script, a scarcity of studies on the same theme was observed. This limited the available theoretical basis for comparison, in-depth analysis, and discussion of the findings.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HISTORY OF NURSING

This study contributes to the History of Nursing by recovering, documenting, and valuing the trajectory of the PET Nursing program at UECE over its three decades of existence. By recording the experiences and perceptions of alumni and former tutors, the research preserves the collective memory of a group that plays an important role in the critical, ethical, and civic education of nursing professionals.

Furthermore, it demonstrates how PET influenced pedagogical practices, scientific productions, and extension activities that marked different moments in the construction of university-level nursing in Ceará. By emphasizing these experiences, the article strengthens the recognition of student initiatives as an essential part of the historical development of the profession, contributing to the understanding of the paths taken by Brazilian nursing in its pursuit of autonomy, qualification, and social integration.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It was observed in the reports that PET provided opportunities for the development of activities that contributed to the professional growth of its members, fostering creativity and innovation within the academic tripod. Moreover, all participants reported that PET contributed to the development of skills such as leadership and teamwork, highlighting mutual learning through the support that existed among members, which established important interpersonal bonds. This causes all of them to remember the Program with great affection.

In addition to the sharing of unique experiences among the members, many reported common learnings and challenges, leading to the reflection that these collective experiences indeed marked their lives. The study prompted the alumni to reflect on the influence of PET in shaping the people they are today, both personally and professionally, by reliving important memories from their academic journeys.

It became evident that the Program has formed nurses who are distinguished in the job market, not only for their professional skills but also for their excellent personal and interpersonal development and their appreciation for strong bonds throughout their professional trajectory. This is what sustains the existence of PET, as the Program contributes not only to the lives of its members but to society as a whole by training capable professionals.

The process of interviewing the alumni allowed the current members and tutor to learn about the history of PET through its former participants, as well as the most relevant activities of each period. It also provided an understanding of how projects that continue to this day were initiated.

Furthermore, it was possible to perceive how the program has impacted the personal and professional lives of the alumni, demonstrating the numerous opportunities they could pursue after leaving PET and bringing a new perspective to the historical evolution of the Program.

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