

# Tutorial education program in the formation of nurses: reflections of alumni

*Programa de Educação Tutorial na formação de enfermeiros: reflexões de egressos*

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to identify the contributions of the Tutorial Education Program to academic and professional life according to alumni of the undergraduate course in Nursing. **Method:** exploratory-descriptive qualitative study with 11 alumni of a Nursing TEP group from a public university in the Brazilian Central-West. The data were collected between November 2018 and April 2019, using a semi-structured interview analyzed according to thematic content analysis. **Results:** data analysis resulted in the following categories - personal and interpersonal skills, professional formation, and formation for citizenship. Among the strengths and skills developed by the graduates, communication, teamwork, leadership, constructing a promising curriculum, and the exercise of citizenship stand out. **Conclusion:** through education, research, and extension programs, the Tutorial Education Program favored the development of indispensable skills and competencies for nursing practice in the current job market.

**Descriptors:** Education, Higher; Mentoring; Nursing; Education, Nursing; Interprofessional Education.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** identificar as contribuições do Programa de Educação Tutorial na vida acadêmica e profissional segundo egressos da graduação em Enfermagem. **Método:** Pesquisa descritiva exploratória de abordagem qualitativa com 11 egressos de um grupo PET Enfermagem de uma universidade pública do Centro-Oeste brasileiro. Os dados foram coletados entre novembro de 2018 e abril de 2019, utilizando-se da entrevista semiestruturada e analisados à luz da modalidade temática da análise de conteúdo. **Resultados:** a análise dos dados resultou nas seguintes categorias habilidades pessoais e interpessoais, formação profissional e formação cidadã. Entre as habilidades e potencialidades desenvolvidas pelos egressos estão em destaque a comunicação, trabalho em equipe, liderança, construção de currículo promissor e o exercício da cidadania. **Conclusão:** o Programa de Educação Tutorial, por meio de atividades de ensino, pesquisa e extensão, tem favorecido o desenvolvimento de habilidades e competências imprescindíveis para a atuação do enfermeiro no mercado de trabalho atual.

**Descritores:** Educação Superior; Tutoria; Enfermagem; Educação em Enfermagem; Educação Interprofissional.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1979, the Coordination for the *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* (CAPES) created a program initially entitled Special Training Program (*Programa Especial de Treinamento*) with the intention of contributing to professional qualification, academic formation, and the strengthening of higher education in Brazil. In 1999, its management was transferred to the *Secretaria de Educação Superior do Ministério da Educação* (SESu/MEC) and, in 2004, it received a new denomination: Tutorial Education Program (*Programa de Educação Tutorial – TEP*)<sup>(1)</sup>. Since its creation it has supported the inextricable connection of the pillars of university (education, research, and extension programs), which complement the curriculum framework of the students involved, broadening and deepening the content envisaged in graduation, and governed by Decree 976/2010<sup>(2)</sup>.

This program gets together teachers and students with the intention of learning and producing knowledge, thus strengthening individual and collective capabilities. It enables students to take on an active role in their learning and carry out activities tutored by a professor or in group settings with other students<sup>(3)</sup>.

There are 842 TEP groups in Brazil distributed across 121 Higher Education Institutions (*Instituições de Ensino Superior – IES*)<sup>(4)</sup>, covering various undergraduate courses; the characteristics, objectives, and responsibilities of which are established through governmental regulations<sup>(2)</sup>.

Studies have shown that for undergraduates, being on a TEP means broadening their formation, standing out in the job market, and creating opportunities for enrollment in graduate courses<sup>(5)</sup>. In addition, the students that participate in the program have better performance and a lower evasion rate<sup>(6)</sup>.

Nursing graduates are expected to be professionals whose competencies and skills permeate their decision-making, communication, leadership, adaptability to cope with constantly changing situations, self-perception as a team leader and team worker, and understanding of their social role regarding decisions on public health<sup>(7)</sup>. As such, the differentiated teaching-learning experiences in the TEP may be an important instrument for the consolidation of the desired profile of alumni of the undergraduate course in Nursing.

Despite its 40 years of existence, few studies evaluate the contributions of the TEP to the academic formation and professional practice of nurses. Moreover, most studies are also outdated<sup>(8,9)</sup>. A theoretical trial based on the premises of the program and the activities of the Nursing TEP concluded that the TEP has similarities with Paulo Freire's *Education that Liberates*, with the potential to form skills and competencies that formal education cannot guarantee<sup>(10)</sup>. It should be emphasized that there is also a Work Education Program, which shares the same acronym in Portuguese of PET, but

with different objectives to the Tutorial Education Program<sup>(2)</sup>, and as such, it will not be discussed in this article. Therefore, the aim of this study was to identify the contributions of the Tutorial Education Program to academic and professional life according to alumni of the undergraduate course in Nursing.

## METHODS

Exploratory-descriptive qualitative study<sup>(11)</sup>, participants were alumni of a Nursing TEP group from a public university in the central-west region of Brazil. The Nursing TEP in this institution began in 1995 and completed 25 years in 2020.

Alumni of the undergraduate course in nursing, who remained in the institution's TEP for at least two years and, at the time of data collection, were in the job market or in *stricto sensu* post-graduation programs were selected for the study.

Data collection was carried out between November 2018 and October 2019, through a semi-structured presential interview with 11 alumni. This number was determined through data saturation, as observed by the recurrence and complementarity of information<sup>(12)</sup>. The contacts of the participants were obtained through current and former members of the TEP group. Social networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and e-mail were used to contact the alumni. The times and places of the interviews were determined according to the availability of each graduate, with all interviews being recorded using electronic equipment, and lasting an average of 30 minutes.

The interview script was composed of a central question: "What was being a part of the TEP like to you?" and four complementary questions: "Did you perceive any change in your personal characteristics through your participation in the program?", "What was/were the influence(s) of the program in your academic formation?"; "Did your participation in the TEP contribute in some way to your insertion in the job market?"; and "During participation in the TEP, were you encouraged to join a post-graduation program be it a specialization, Master's, and/or doctorate?"

The interviews were transcribed in their entirety and subjected to thematic content analysis<sup>(13)</sup> through three complementary phases. The first consisted of pre-analysis (reading; "corpus" constitution, and premise development and reformulation); the second, exploration of the material (data classification through grouping of similar information); and the third (data processing and interpretation) aiming to establish inferences, interpretations, and relationships between the data and the existing literature. Each thematic category was exemplified by fragments of the participant's discourse, which, to guarantee anonymity, were described using the acronym "TA", representing the term TEP Alumnus, followed by an Arabic numeral according to the chronological order of the interviews.

All the ethical precepts of Resolution *CNS nº 466/2012*, which foresees the guidelines for research involving human beings, were followed. The project was approved by the *Comité de Ética da Universidade Federal de Goiás (CAEE) 2.403.287*. All the participants were informed about the purpose of the study, its risks and benefits, and their agreement to participate in the study was given through the signature of two copies of the Informed Consent Form (ICF).

## RESULTS

All study participants were female, with a mean age of 26 years old, varying from 25 to 34. The mean time on the TEP was three years. All study participants were involved in their field of study, be it in the area of care or in *stricto sensu* post-graduation programs. Table 1 presents the profile of the alumni.

Through data analysis, it can be perceived that the interviewees listed various contributions from their participation in the program, which reflected directly in their academic and professional formation. Thus, three categories emerged:

1. personal and Interpersonal skills;
2. professional formation;
3. formation for citizenship.

### Category 1: Personal and Interpersonal skills

The alumni stated that participation in the TEP stimulated the development of personal and interpersonal skills. The enhancement of interpersonal relationships and teamwork capacity were the most cited contributions by the TEP alumni, as shown in the following phrases:

*I learned a lot about dealing with groups, and dealing with people, understanding different points of view (TA4).*

*Working in a group helped me a lot to respect the opinion of others even more (TA3).*

The interviewees stated that they had been able to develop and strengthen personal skills such as responsibility, planning, autonomy, commitment, organization, maturity, proactivity, creativity, communication, opinion forming, decision making, and leadership.

*I improved my proactivity and my creativity a little bit as well (TA5).*

*TEP gives the student autonomy. I feel like a more organized person, who knows how to search for knowledge and maybe can deal better with interpersonal relationships (TA4).*

*It makes you have all the responsibility, commitment, and planning to execute the action that the tutor puts in your hands (TA1).*

According to the participants, the organization methodology itself and the activities proposed in the TEP contribute to personal and academic improvement:

*The participants were very diverse, and my ability to speak in public, to solve problems, and deal with issues related to projects that needed to be developed improved over time. I realized that my interpersonal relationships and teamwork abilities also improved (TA7).*

**Table 1.** Sociodemographic characteristics of alumni from a Tutorial Education Program. Goiânia, GO, 2020.

Identification	Sex	Age	Time on the TEP (years)	Year of course conclusion	Title/Professional activity	Time in professional activity (years)
TA1	F	34	4.5	2006	Doctor of Nursing/Professor	12
TA2	F	25	2	2016	Master's student/Care	1
TA3	F	28	4	2014	Master's student	3.5
TA4	F	25	2	2016	Master's student/Care	2
TA5	F	24	2	2016	Specialist/Care	2
TA6	F	27	3.5	2014	Master's student/Care	4
TA7	F	30	4	2013	Doctoral student/Management	6
TA8	F	32	4	2013	Master's graduate/Care	6
TA9	F	29	3	2014	Master's graduate/Business	5
TA10	F	34	2	2010	Specialist/Management	9
TA11	F	26	2	2014	Master's graduate/Care and teaching	5

TEP: Tutorial Education Program.

*I remember to this day that meetings were always punctual at the TEP. This is something that I brought to my life (TA2).*

*I participated in various events, event planning, certificate elaboration activities, we also thought about the financial conditions of course attendees (TA8).*

The program also provided the opportunity to interact with students from different periods, which favored the development of interpersonal relationships and the exchange of experiences between the students. These group activities guaranteed the approximation of students from various undergraduate courses, mainly through extension programs, which, from the point of view of the interviewees, facilitates mutual learning, knowledge enhancement, and multi-professional interaction, essential attributes in nursing work.

*In every project that we did with professionals from various areas of healthcare, like nurses, nursing technicians, doctors, pharmacists, and physical therapists, we had a rich exchange of experiences, as well as exposure to diverse publics and different types of patients (TA9).*

*About the extension programs, the connection with other TEPs enabled us to learn a lot about other professions (TA4).*

*Another thing that is really good on TEP is the interaction with colleagues from various stages in their undergraduate studies. We learn to get on and get to know each other (TA1).*

## Category 2: Professional formation

According to alumni, TEP was also able to strengthen important competencies that are currently useful in their professional field:

*TEP contributed in the sense of favoring interpersonal relationships, working in groups, accepting the opinion of others, and teamwork, which is what drives nursing (TA3).*

*I believe that the main [skill] is leadership. That is what I most use today in my work (TA6).*

*TEP taught us how to deal with problems, deal with the team, mediate conflicts, and have empathy; also, having participated in TEP made me a better nurse for my patients (TA11).*

The fact that the program offered diversified activities, providing the participant with varied experiences, contributing directly to the acquisition of a promising curriculum, was a differential for job market placement, as seen in the following phrases:

*It improved my ability to speak in public, to have the spirit of leadership, and to manage team work; I think that all this that we developed in the TEP helped a lot when it came to participating in selection processes to enter the job market and in post-grad courses (TA10).*

*It enhanced my curriculum, to the point where my curriculum grade in the job market selection process that I participated in was one of the highest (TA6).*

Another aspect addressed by alumni was TEP's encouragement regarding enrollment in *stricto sensu* graduate courses. Of the 11 interviewees, 8 had taken graduate courses at some time of their lives. According to the participants, TEP directly influenced the choice of this activity:

*So, since I left university, I've always wanted to enroll in a Master's course and without question this was something I inherited from my time at the TEP (TA3).*

*After I started my Master's, and the doctorate, I realized that it was also because of what I had learned at the TEP (TA1).*

*TEP was essential for my enrollment in the Master's, thinking precisely about providing continuity to the research and extension programs (TA7).*

The participants reported that the program did not prepare them only for a specific focus, but rather prepared them to face any challenge that they wished to pursue:

*I believe that TEP doesn't stimulate you either for the Master's or for the job market, it prepares you for both, as opposed to research groups (TA6).*

*So, the TEP was very important for my approval on a residency program (TA4).*

## Category 3: Formation for citizenship

In addition to the contributions to academic and professional life cited by program alumni, formation for citizenship was also presented as a skill acquired by program participants. In their discourse, it can be observed that this competency is mainly developed through extension programs, enabling the student to improve their empathy and exercise their citizenship in daily and professional life:

*We start to develop empathy, putting ourselves in the place of the person and trying to be a better person and professional (TA2).*

*Most of the TEP projects had a social angle; we would go to shelters for children and adults, and this ended up making us reflect not only on the importance of nurses in these places, but also as on our roles as citizens (TA6).*

*In the TEP we were stimulated to act ethically, with commitment, with social responsibility, and to always have respect for others. We were always stimulated to respect cultural differences and mediate conflicts through dialogue (TA7).*

## DISCUSSION

It is noteworthy that all of the interviewees were female, which is a historical characteristic in nursing. According to the *Conselho Federal de Enfermagem* (COFEN) report published in 2017, females occupy 86.2% of the positions in the profession<sup>(14)</sup>.

A particularity of Tutorial Education is the development of activities that prioritize teamwork, providing the student with perception of their role and collective responsibility<sup>(5)</sup>. For students in the Nursing course at the *Universidade Estadual do Ceará*, when questioned on their participation on the TEP, they implied that the experience enabled personal, professional, and academic growth, assisting in the development of maturity in their relationships, discipline, and their capacity for teamwork<sup>(8)</sup>.

Regarding the nursing professional, it is necessary to develop interpersonal relationships and communication, as through these skills the nurse will be able to care for and understand the patient's needs to establish a coherent care plan<sup>(15)</sup>. Thus, the student nurse participating in the program develops these skills, as shown in the discourse of the interviewees, which contribute to better academic performance and consequently becoming a more qualified professional.

According to the perspective of healthcare managers interviewed in the state of São Paulo, the competencies that should be developed by nursing students during graduation are based on responsibility, commitment, organization, interpersonal relationships, creativity, humanization, public speaking abilities, punctuality, ethics, and professionalism<sup>(16)</sup>. Most of these skills were reported by the interviewees, which corroborates the strength of the TEP in the complementary formation of Nursing undergraduates.

Therefore, it is perceptible that the program has a positive effect on the students and teachers involved, given that it enables ample academic experience with repercussions in the local community and the dynamic interdisciplinary involvement of the teaching and student bodies of the university. This directly contributes to improving the undergraduate course<sup>(3,6)</sup>. The interaction between its members and the other students on undergraduate courses is one of the aspects that

differentiates the TEP from other higher education programs. Therefore, implementing actions that are able to join the entire academic community with the intention of enabling reflection in relation to various themes inherent to professional formation, citizenship, and ethics is one of the concerns of the program<sup>(17)</sup>. In addition to guaranteeing interaction with members of the course itself, one of the aspects that is strongly encouraged in the TEP is the work carried out with other groups. This leads to consciousness of interdisciplinarity and strengthens the development of teamwork skills, which are skills demanded for success in the job market and are also considered scarce by employers<sup>(18)</sup>.

Nursing is considered the most cited profession when discussing collaborative interprofessional practice and interprofessional education, which reinforces its role as mediator in relation to other healthcare professions. Thus, there is an explicit need to use interdisciplinary experiences as a learning technique in the formation of healthcare professionals, whose focus is integral human care, surpassing the technical dimension<sup>(19)</sup>. These aspects were contemplated in the discourse of the alumni, demonstrating the importance of the program in the consolidation of these skills.

The current demand of the job market is based on a creative, versatile, flexible professional, capable of relating to others, communicating, leading, and problem solving<sup>(18,20,21)</sup>, going beyond the curricular formation offered by universities. Actions within TEP groups demand attitudes and behaviors similar to those demanded on the job market. Leadership, opinion forming, argumentative skills, posture, personal organization, and interpersonal relationships are important characteristics developed in the TEP.

The fact that it is centered around the pillars of university education, along with its political character and tutorial education, makes the TEP an instrument capable of supplying indispensable elements for the formation of leaders. In the program, this skill is developed through the distribution of coordination of activities, liability, and autonomy, contributing directly to the improvement of communication, argumentative skills, and decision making, which are fundamentals in the work of a nurse<sup>(21)</sup>. To provide opportunities for all in the development of this skill, and maintain good functioning of the group, strategies of alternating positions and preparing successors are indispensable<sup>(22)</sup>.

On the TEP, the student has contact with scientific research activities, enabling development of scientific reasoning, autonomy, and enhancement of technical skills, which are important requirements in the formation of a professional<sup>(23)</sup>. In addition to scientific practice, the student develops and partakes in extension programs, which provide society with a direct return on what has been invested and for the student it consolidates the theoretical content through experience and improvement of the studied techniques<sup>(2)</sup>.

The TEP optimizes the formation of multi-faceted professionals with the skills and competencies to exercise activities both in the conventional job market and on graduate courses. A study carried out in the Physics TEP/UFRN demonstrated that 55% of the evaluated students, followed an academic career, and that 36% were in the process of professional qualification through graduate courses<sup>(6)</sup>. This demonstrates the potential of the program in the preparation of the student to enroll in a graduate course, given that the largest market for physics undergraduates is teaching. In the present study, despite working in their field, most of the alumni had finished or were currently enrolled in graduate courses, demonstrating that the program is capable of contributing by supplying human resources to post-graduation in the area of nursing.

One of the concerns of the program is ethical formation and formation for citizenship of the students through activities that stimulate reflection on issues that permeate society<sup>(2)</sup>. The Nursing TEP carries out extension programs in various scenarios, such as elementary and middle schools, orphanages, and long-stay institutions for the elderly. In addition, they permeate all social strata and encompass gender and ethnic diversity. Participation in extension activities favors the development of social responsibility<sup>(24)</sup>. The construction of human values and ethics is observed, thereby reinforcing the citizenship of the Nursing TEP alumni, which is consistent with the global competencies of the profession<sup>(25)</sup>. These principles emerged in the reports of the Nursing TEP alumni. Formation for citizenship is essential to the nurse, as they are placed in scenarios of struggles for human rights, and for the defense of the *Sistema Único de Saúde*, and are thus transforming agents of society.

There were limitations to the study such as the inclusion of alumni of only one university, which may reflect only the local reality. However, the program is governed by national regulations and supervised by MEC, which leads us to believe that the results found here may be repeated in the analysis of other groups from different regions of the country, since the philosophical bases of the program are followed throughout the country.

## CONCLUSIONS

TEP contributed positively to the academic and professional formation and the formation for citizenship of the student nurse. Regarding the individual as an academic, the development of personal and interpersonal skills is observed, such as: teamwork capacity, responsibility, planning, autonomy to seek knowledge, commitment, organization, maturity, proactivity, creativity, communication, opinion forming, and decision making.

Regarding professional formation, study participants stated that the program prepared them for the job market through the development of important competencies for the practice

of nursing, besides enriching their curricula for selection processes. In addition, the program encouraged students to enroll in graduate courses. The TEP is also able to promote formation for citizenship, which is indispensable for nursing practice with social responsibility, and necessary for integral and equal care, besides making the student aware of human rights issues.

The TEP in the Nursing course contributed to the formation of nurses, providing skills that surpass conventional curricular formation, making it an important tool to guarantee the consolidation of interpersonal skills essential to nursing practice. Future studies, with other Nursing TEP groups, from other regions of Brazil, and with other approaches are needed.

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