Multidimensional context of technical nursing education: triangulation of meanings attributed by teachers*

Contexto multidimensional do ensino técnico de enfermagem: triangulação de significados atribuídos por docentes

Contexto multidimensional de la enseñanza técnica en enfermería: triangulación de significados atribuidos por docentes

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To unveil and discuss the meanings attributed by teachers to the teacher-student relationship in the multidimensional context of technical nursing education. **Method:** Qualitative research, supported by the representational theory of meaning, carried out with nine nurses who teach the technical nursing course at a technical school linked to a federal university in the northeastern region of Brazil. **Results:** The following meanings were revealed: student profile; lack of preparation and financial resources; reduction in performance and even course interruption; students' disinterest and resistance; academic support and qualified structure; opportunity for grants; teachers' dedication and holistic view; respect, ethics, and interactivity; concern with student learning and performance, and heterogeneous group. **Conclusion:** Social and financial difficulties and students' disinterest are the limitations that most hinder teaching effectiveness. On the other hand, the teachers' holistic view, dedication, support, and the availability of resources and academic support are the main multidimensional characteristics of living in this scenario.

DESCRIPTORS

Education, Nursing; Faculty, Nursing; Licensed Practical Nurses; Social Support; Students, Nursing.

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INTRODUCTION

The teaching-learning process is permeated by changes occurring according to the population's demands. Thus, student and professional training has a multidimensional amplitude, since knowledge influences the individuals' educational, social, and cultural development. Teaching guiding health care also involves such aspects; however, there is currently a challenge to address the biopsychosocial dimensions in the student's environment[1].

Teaching at a technical level has changed in recent years, and traditional mechanized training has been replaced by methods with an emphasis on skills, quality, and criticality. However, this trend has not yet fully materialized in reality because, over time, due attention has not been paid to the pedagogical training of nurses working in the training of new professionals. In fact, teachers themselves have not demonstrated any concern regarding their weakened performance[2–3].

Teaching performance fragility has a negative impact on pedagogical practice. Constantly, discouragement, dissatisfaction, personal demotivation, devaluation, daily physical exhaustion, disenchantment with the process of construction of knowledge and with teaching itself can be observed in the nurse teacher daily routine. This leads to suffering, as the frustrated individual sees his personal and professional trajectory shaken, which interferes with didactics and his/her ability to improve in the face of external context influences[3–4].

Teachers are important agents in society's processes of change. This means that they need investments from the appropriate institutions, in training and professional development, for quality performance and to master innovative didactic-pedagogical methodologies, capable of offering positive results in the students' development. Therefore, teachers are mediators among students, education, and the field of work. Therefore, its role shall meet the social demands[5–6].

Thus, the teacher needs to understand the broad notion of training that encompasses multiple dimensions, such as the educator's preparation, the student's profile, the teaching methodology, the didactic contents, the teaching strategies, the evaluation of learning, the cultural aspects, and the influence of interpersonal relationships in secondary education in nursing. Everyday life in the field of education is permeated by social experiences, and teachers can enjoy daily contact to get to know and understand students and their demands, seeking to improve teaching practice[7].

Teachers of the technical nursing course are relevant for teaching as well as for health care, as they are responsible for training those who serve the population and form the basis of care. Therefore, the teacher's role is complex and related to the commitment to share knowledge with future professionals, helping them in their educational and social emancipation. This explains the representativeness of teacher-student interaction, which prompts the following question: what are the meanings of the teacher-student relationship in the multidimensional context of technical nursing education?

We emphasize the scarcity of studies that, like this one, approach the technical nursing education under the educational, social and reflexive dimensions, presenting the interpersonal relationship between teacher and student, based on meanings.

This multidimensional perspective is little explored and deserves to be highlighted, as it reveals various aspects that interfere in teaching. Current studies approach the technical nursing course only with regard to training and pedagogical practice[2–3,6–9]. Therefore, the objective of this study is to unveil and discuss the meanings attributed by teachers to the teacher-student relationship in the multidimensional context of technical nursing education.

METHOD

DESIGN OF STUDY

This is a qualitative research, supported by Ogden and Richards' Representational Theory of Meaning (RTM).

POPULATION

The participants were nine teaching nurses of the nursing technical course belonging to a technical school of reference that is linked to the Federal University, located in one of the capitals of the northeastern region of Brazil. It is a faculty consisting mostly of women (77.7%), with more than 10 years of training and experience in nursing (100%), with four doctors, two post-docs, two masters, and one specialist, all with experience in teaching, research, and extension. The invitations to participate took place in person, in the teachers' work environment.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Nurses who had been teaching the aforementioned technical course for at least one year were included in the study. It should be noted that all teachers met the inclusion criteria. As a result, exclusion criteria were not applicable.

DATA COLLECTION

Data production took place from January to April 2019, through interviews conducted privately, by a research nurse with experience in nursing education topics, who had no previous relationship with the interviewees. A semi-structured script was used, with an open questioning, in which the participants could freely discuss teaching in technical nursing education, and the audio contents were recorded on an electronic device.

Then, the recorded reports were fully transcribed and, to preserve anonymity, it was decided that the nurses' names would be replaced with the expression "Teacher" followed by the number corresponding to the order of participation during the interviews. In this study, the criteria established in the *COnsolidated criteria for REporting Qualitative research* – COREQ, a support protocol for studies with qualitative methods[10] were followed.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL BASIS

The reports were analyzed and, based on them, linguistic units organized according to the themes addressed by the teachers during the interviews were identified. Ogden and Richards' Representational Theory of Meaning was used, which brings the interconnection of three elements in the development of the sense of meaning, to compose the "Semantic Triangle" shown in Figure 1[12] with: the symbol (what the word means), the referent
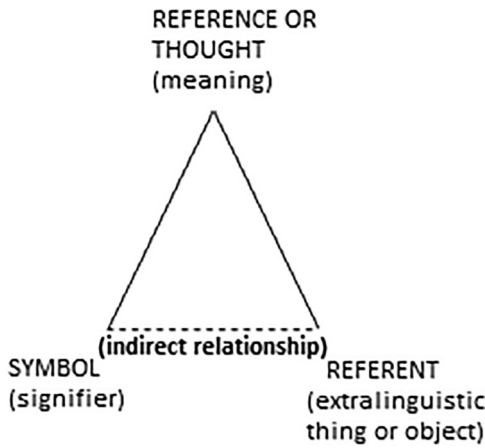
Figure 1 – Meaning Triangle[12] (Source: Littlejohn, 1982).

(the meaning of this linguistic thing/object) and the reference or thought (what it means to the person)[11–12].

The relationship between the symbol and the referent is associated with a person's thought. The interconnection of these aspects results in the creation of a meaning, in which it can acquire numerous concepts in communication; however, from the RTM, the one with the greatest representational meaning is adopted[11].

After reading the teachers' reports, the referents and symbols of the written stretches were extracted, according to the themes found; these evidenced a thought. When analyzing the association of the three elements together, the meaning of what was said by the research participants became clear.

ETHICAL ASPECTS

The research complied with the ethical principles of Resolution nº 466/2012 of the National Health Council – CNS[13] and the precepts of Resolution No. 510/2016 of the CNS, on standards applicable to research in the human and social sciences[14]. The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee on September 28, 2018, with Opinion No. 2.927.504.

RESULTS

Following the methodological proposal, we created a demonstrative chart to highlight the Semantic Triangle that emerged from the nine research participants' speeches.

Chart 1 presents, based on the referents and symbols, ten revealed meanings that reflect the thoughts of the interviewees according to their reports. The following discussion was developed from this perspective and deals with information that sequentially highlights each of the ten meanings.

DISCUSSION

Based on a contemporary conception, it is known that the educators' job begins the moment they assume that their mission goes beyond the professional activity, since the focus of the act of teaching is not the results and final sums, but the learning, the acquired experiences and the interpersonal relationships that are built and that facilitate the teacher, student, and teaching

Chart 1 – Symbol and referent in the construction of thought: meanings – Teresina, PI, Brazil, 2019.

Teacher	Report
Meaning 1: Student Profile	
Symbols: academic preparation, improved training	
2	Referent: (...) They are students who come from high school, but who are well prepared, and they are concurrently taking an undergraduate course, so we have a very distinctive student. (...) The student's profile has changed, he is a demanding student, a student who studies, who reads... of course he has his reservations, but most students are very interested and hardworking. (...) We even had undergraduate students (...).
6	Referent: (...) Our technical nursing course is different from all the others I've seen and heard about, because we have a well-prepared teaching staff. Among our students, some have difficulties, especially the older ones, but most of them are students of a young age group; and it's like I say, the course is distinctive because they make a selection process, our students are prepared. (...) We look for extracurricular activities and they have monitoring, they have PIBIC, they have extension services. (...) We have a class of up to 35 students, unlike schools that have very large classes (...).
Meaning 2: lack of preparation and financial resources	
Symbol: social difficulties	
1	Referent: (...) Although being a teacher at the technical college is rewarding, in the first years I was not able to reach the three levels of teaching, research, and extension. The student comes from a school that has a high school education, but he/she does not have the maturity for research and there is no time to develop it in two years (...).
3	Referent: (...) The difficulty that I perceive is in the social area. At graduation we also find students who have social difficulties, but I have the impression that here at school this difficulty is greater. Sometimes there are students who are excellent and start to miss classes, and we get concerned: 'that student was not used to missing classes so often, he is sad, his performance declined... go see it' is a difficulty... it's because the father, or mother, is unemployed, and he talks about giving up at once (...).
4	Referent: (...) When I arrived here at the technical college, there were still more students who came from high school, who couldn't pass the entrance exam to a college and took the test here as they wanted to take the vocational course to work; and to finish the course faster the way is definitely professionalization. (...) Sometimes there is a student who is very good and starts to feel sad, starts missing classes due to lack of money to pay transportation, for not being able to stay in school all day... and despite having student assistance, for transport, for food, there is the University Restaurant, but even so, the greatest difficulty for our students, I see, is the social issue (...).
6	Referent: (...) There are cases of students who always arrive late and we did not understand why, and it was because they came on foot and lived very far away. Then, as we get to know this student, there are things that we have to work around (...).
Meaning 3: reduction of student's performance and even interruption of training	
Symbol: everyday limitations	
9	Referent: (...) As they are professional students, most of them do not work, live in their own school, or live with their families, but dedicate themselves only to studying. So they have a different profile compared to undergraduate students or other technical schools. They are good students, from a somewhat heterogeneous class, because we have a diversity of ages. (...) A considerable part is very young, some with low income, with limited access to information, and this restricts the application of methodologies such as online platforms, distance education courses, despite the university having this.
Meaning 4: Student Disinterest and Resistance	
Symbol: difficulties for the effectiveness of teaching	
3	Referent: (...) At the beginning of the period, we started trying to get to know and diagnose the class, to see if it is a cohesive class. (...) There is nothing more discouraging for a teacher than seeing a disinterested class, which when you arrive say: 'teacher, is the

	subject today fast or will it take a while?' oh my Gosh thisquestion makes us sad... (...) I count to ten so as not to be impolite. I take a deep breath to be able to teach that class with the same enthusiasm, but deep down I feel it's not, because I see that the student is already unmotivated and that demotivates me. (...) And we seek to diversify; with texts to read, slides, conversation circles; we try in different ways to make a different class, but we still have difficult groups. So we're never ready; every day you learn from them because they give you tips, day to day, even personal life tips, not just how to improve a class (...).

Meaning 5: Academic Support and Qualified Structure

Symbols: student availability, well-prepared laboratories, material resources and good internship fields.

9	Referent: (...) The experience with a technical course in a public school is quite different from that in private technical courses, due to the student's own behavior. Here it is full time, so the student has availability to study, teachers have availability of resources for teaching. It has excellent laboratories, with anatomical parts, despite the low fidelity of models, but the teacher manages to bring successful experiences with clinical cases, so that students can improve their practice. The student has clinical experience and has excellent internship fields such as a university hospital, a reference maternity hospital; and as a teacher this makes me feel welcomed by the institution, because they have a great political pedagogical course project, well-connected curricula, which allow the student to develop well in their training and allow us to apply active methodologies, which provide an expansion of teaching (...).

Meaning 6: Aid Scholarship Opportunity

Symbol: provision of scholarships to help students during the course.

6	Referent: (...) We have students who have financial difficulties, and at school we have work grants, monitoring grants, so we try to allocate these students so that they are assisted (...).

Meaning 7: Dedication and holistic view of teachers

Symbols: interpersonal relationship, understanding, sensitivity, professional and personal support.

3	Referent: (...) Teaching these students is wonderful for me, because with them I'm learning a lot. I have to follow the present! I can't be stuck in the past. (...) We teach not only for the course; We care a lot about preparation for life. All of us here are concerned not only with passing on the lessons, practices, and techniques, but also with offering a little more. And that makes me happy here in the technical course (...).
8	Referent: (...) We experience daily growth, we both teach and learn with them, which makes us even more dedicated. The existing difficulties are those of a daily basis, (...) it is more the matter of the content itself, which needs to be explained to a student who does not have much base to assimilate the subjects (...).
7	Referent: (...) The students really stand out, because teachers demand a lot from them. There's always that student who can't keep up, but we try to direct a little more attention to him; everything we can do for them to have a good learning experience, we do (...).

Meaning 8: Respect, Ethics and Interactivity

Symbols: appreciation and reflection on teaching in the technical nursing course.

5	Referent: (...) The work as a substitute teacher for the technical course is my first experience as a hired employee, and it has been wonderful. The environment I found, I did not expect and did not know; among the different places that I have already entered, this one is really different. (...) The students exceeded my expectations, and I saw a side of teaching that I always wanted to experience and had not yet had the opportunity to, which is to be fully involved with the student. I realize that most teachers are not only concerned with whether the student will achieve the grade, or only with teaching their class, no, we have this look at the student's person, as a whole. (...) The students are very open to talking to the teachers, I feel that they realize that they can count on us, and the feedback is real. (...) The course time is reduced, but something we can work on to optimize this is the teacher's pedagogy (...) Whenever I'm at the hospital I say to my students, don't look at the procedure, you're not doing procedure 'X', 'Y', 'Z'; you are taking care of a person, you have to look at everything

	that involves that person, the whole context because care has to be comprehensive, and I notice their positive response quite often (...).

Meaning 9: Concern about student learning and performance

Symbols: commitment and caution in the development of teaching and continuous assessment of student learning.

6	Referent: (...) When the student is weak, I look at his/her test and say: 'now you're going to look at the test, correct, redo it and tell me what you didn't understand, so you don't make mistakes'. (...) When the practical test ends, I say to the student: 'look, you got this and this wrong, repeat it so I can see it again', so I can guarantee that he really learned. (...) Sometimes we come across students with problems such as depression, anxiety disorder, and we talk to the student, then to the parents, we refer them to the psychologist... we try to work around it; (...) so the life of a teacher is not just about teaching, correcting tests. One way or another you get involved with the students. (...) You can't pretend to be a teacher: 'I'll arrive, teach my class, I'll leave and that's it' no! We are involved and we try to overcome these difficulties that we always face and will always exist.

Meaning 10: heterogeneous group

Symbol: need for an approximation during training in nursing categories.

2	Referent: (...) Every day I want to go after new knowledge. I know that nursing changes constantly. What makes me sad is because I believe that we, technical course teachers, along with undergraduate teachers, could be more united, and we could be exchanging new experiences and knowledge (...).
9	Referent: (...) As a nurse or as a teacher, I still observe heterogeneity within the nursing team, and I think that this can be improved within the process of training nurses and nursing technicians. So, that at some point a congruence would be rethought, so that we would have the skills of these two groups that are a single team. You see different training processes, at different times, and that at no point in training do they develop skills together, so it reflects on the nursing team being often a very heterogeneous team, and this produces conflicts between the two professional profiles. At some point they could walk towards a congruent arrow, nurses and technicians (...).

triad. Thus, education constitutes one of the pillars of human development, by virtue of transcending the parameters of teaching and strikingly incorporating itself into the social scenario.

A society in constant transformation has different problems in the financial, social, political, or ideological sphere; however, knowledge opens new horizons for a fairer social environment with more opportunities. Teachers expressed that, in general, students have a profile with good academic performance (meaning 1). However, this fact reveals a discrepancy when we are faced with a frequent problem that impacts the course: social difficulties. From the teachers' view, the social issue represented by the lack of resources is one of the biggest barriers to the teaching-learning process (meaning 2).

Parents' unemployment, financial limitations for public transport, and restricted access to information were some of the mentioned symbols that usually cause sadness and withdrawal. Furthermore, the resistance of some students, the immaturity for research and extension, and the limited time of the course were other aspects mentioned. The reports reveal problems that students deal with on a daily basis. Many students leave small towns to study; however, they go through an adaptation process and carry deficiencies with them that can result in a reduction of performance and even course interruption[15].

Limited access to the internet is one of the factors that can hinder the course smooth running (meaning3). Similar to what was exposed in the results, the participants of a study pointed out

that the absence or poor quality of the internet is a factor that makes it difficult to participate in distance education or blended courses[16]. Greater access to the internet and digital platforms is something that can be extremely beneficial for teaching and learning if the student uses interactive tools to search for knowledge[8]. In a survey of nursing students, 91.4% of them used materials from the internet in their studies[17].

Another aspect revealed is the students' lack of interest and resistance regarding teaching, which leads to teachers' discouragement (meaning 4). This datum is analogous to that found in a survey carried out with nurses who teach technical courses, which pointed out that the teacher feels disrespected and devalued in the face of students' lack of commitment to training[4]. To encourage students in class, teachers seek teaching strategies to streamline learning, such as the use of active methodologies that facilitate learning and interactivity. Allied to this, educators need to be proactive, creative, and innovative in pedagogical practice, aiming at horizontal communication and teaching quality[18–19].

Student availability, well-prepared laboratories, quality material resources and internship fields were aspects highlighted by "teacher 9", who mentions that they bring confidence to the teacher's practice, something relevant to the teaching quality (meaning 5). The equipment available for the classes allows the use of methodologies that develop theoretical and clinical skills.

In a study carried out in South Africa, regarding the implementation of problem-based learning, the authors highlighted that this methodology can bring together the aspects of training and nursing care, benefiting the workforce[20]. Innovative and interactive methodologies stimulate individual and collective reasoning and critical thinking, associating theory with professional practice. Considering that quality teaching comes from well-structured proposals, "Teacher 9" also informed that the technical course has a well-designed pedagogical project, which contributes to the teaching and learning process being developed with planning and efficiency.

On the other hand, in a study carried out with 15 teachers, it was found that 46.7% do not know the pedagogical project of the course in which they work, which means that the teaching practice is not in line with the guidelines proposed by the institution for the educational process[7]. It is essential that the educator knows the field pedagogical policy, as well as the student's profile, to understand the perspectives of the profession and offer qualified and updated training[21].

At school, students also have opportunities to receive a tutoring grant, a work grant, residency at the school and institutional food service at the university restaurant, as well as the teachers' support and assistance. These assistance opportunities offered by the institution mean support for students (meaning 6).

In addition, aiming at settling the obstacles encountered in the course's day-to-day, the teachers emphasize the importance of supporting the student and maintaining a holistic view (meaning 7). The teachers reveal the attention and helpfulness they direct to their students, reinforcing the concept that care is born from human relationships and is characterized by attention to the other and by interaction, which awakens empathy and the construction of affective bonds[22].

Empathy, understanding, patience and respect are characteristics understood as socio-emotional skills necessary for teachers of a technical nursing course, considering the relevance of these aspects[23]. In this regard, the bond between teachers and students shall be mediated by embracement, appreciation of knowledge, humanization and dialogue, as these aspects are the key pieces for the construction of successful interpersonal relationships[9].

The participants assume an embracing posture as they turn their eyes to the students' social difficulties, and try to overcome them in the best way. Through the interviews, it was noted that teachers value involvement with students and seek, daily, to listen and support them in their experiences, and not only in the professional aspect (meaning 8). An international study brings in its data that the teaching-learning process becomes easier in an environment in which students feel comfortable to express themselves and manifest their aspirations and thoughts, as the development of relationships must be based on respect, ethics, and interactivity[24].

Based on the reports, the teachers of technical nursing education, besides keeping a holistic view of their students, strive to transmit this perspective to them, so that they later become professionals capable of attending to the patients' singularities. The student has to develop a reflective look at the nature of care, so that they can understand the practical reality of the nursing field[25].

The concern with student learning and performance also demonstrates the ethical and committed attitude from teachers, who seek to prove the success of their teaching (meaning 9). A research that addresses Technical Schools of the Brazilian Public Health System (*ETSUS*) in the Northeast states that these institutions have an evaluation method and chances of recovery, offering an opportunity for the student to improve deficits and strengthen learning[26].

An Iranian study on clinical nursing education found that after students performed practical procedures, clinical educators did not provide feedback to them about their performance, making students feel insecure about their abilities[27]. In view of this, it is pertinent that the teacher knows how to provide the student's intellectual and practical independence, through training that allows the wide development of skills, so that the student has autonomy, attitude, and flexibility to act in different situations that may arise in their experience[28].

In technical education, teachers shall daily encourage the development of their students in a comprehensive way, understanding them as social subjects who must be prepared not only as students, but as citizens and future professionals[9]. The human being is inseparable from its inherent characteristics, so these must be involved in the development process, not suppressed.

After reflecting on the pedagogical experiences, the reports showed that the nursing profession corresponds to a heterogeneous group, composed of workers from different categories, but who work in the same team (meaning 10). The stratification of work is the result of a historical conception in which care is arranged between supervision and assistance, giving rise to different training processes over time[25,29]. Therefore, the teachers pointed out that the training of nursing workers requires an approximation, as professional practice is carried out in a team, and this requires symmetry within the groups.

CONCLUSION

From the reports obtained, ten meanings were revealed about the teacher-student interpersonal relationship in the technical nursing course, which allowed us to understand that social and financial difficulties and the student's lack of interest are the limitations that most hinder teaching effectiveness. On the other hand, the holistic view, dedication, support from teachers and the availability of resources and academic support are the main multidimensional characteristics of living in this scenario. Through these attributes, teachers daily seek to circumvent the obstacles encountered and offer quality education, aiming at the development of knowledge and citizenship.

As a limitation of the study, we highlight the fact that the technical school has an excellent structure for teachers, and that entry into the work field occurs through a public test, and represents financial stability. These positive aspects may have influenced the teachers' critical view in relation to existing difficulties, as the teacher may have felt uncomfortable to report them in full.

In short, this study contributes to the scientific community by exposing the psychosocial relevance of the mission of educating, considering that teachers of technical nursing education are important agents in the edification of ethical citizens and in the training of new professionals who will be responsible for the population's health care. Further studies in the area are recommended to broaden the discussion on technical nursing training, and so that it is possible to understand even more the teachers' pedagogical experiences and the students' needs.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Desvelar e discutir os significados atribuídos por docentes à relação entre professor e aluno no contexto multidimensional do ensino técnico de enfermagem. **Método:** Pesquisa qualitativa, apoiada na teoria representacional do significado, realizada com nove enfermeiros docentes do curso técnico em enfermagem de um colégio técnico vinculado a uma universidade federal da região nordeste do Brasil. **Resultados:** Foram desvelados os significados: perfil dos alunos; falta de preparo e de recursos financeiros; queda do rendimento e até interrupção da formação; desinteresse e resistência dos alunos; suporte acadêmico e estrutura qualificada; oportunidade de bolsas de auxílio; dedicação e olhar holístico dos docentes; respeito, ética e interatividade; preocupação com o aprendizado e desempenho do estudante, e grupo heterogêneo. **Conclusão:** Dificuldades sociais, financeiras e o desinteresse estudantil são as limitações que mais dificultam a efetividade do ensino. Por outro lado, o olhar holístico, a dedicação, o apoio dos docentes e a disponibilidade de recursos e suporte acadêmico são as principais características multidimensionais da vivência nesse cenário.

DESCRITORES

Educação em Enfermagem; Docentes de Enfermagem; Técnicos de Enfermagem; Apoio Social; Estudantes de Enfermagem.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Desvelar y discutir los significados atribuidos por docentes sobre la relación entre profesor y alumno en el contexto multidimensional de la enseñanza técnica en enfermería. **Método:** Investigación cualitativa, apoyada en la teoría representacional del significado, realizada con nueve enfermeros docentes del curso técnico en enfermería de un colegio técnico vinculado a una universidad federal de la región noreste de Brasil. **Resultados:** Fueron desvelados los significados: perfil de los alumnos; falta de preparación y de recursos financieros; baja del rendimiento e incluso interrupción de la formación; desinterés y resistencia de los alumnos; soporte académico y estructura calificada, oportunidad de becas de auxilio; dedicación y mirada holística de los docentes, respeto, ética e interacción, preocupación por el aprendizaje y desempeño del estudiante y grupo heterogéneo. **Conclusión:** Dificultades sociales, financieras y el desinterés del alumnado son las limitaciones que más dificultan la efectividad de la enseñanza. Sin embargo, la mirada holística, la dedicación, el apoyo de los docentes y la disponibilidad de recursos y soporte académico, son las principales características multidimensionales de la vivencia en ese escenario.

DESCRITORES

Educación en Enfermería; Docentes de Enfermería; Enfermeros no Diplomados; Apoyo Social; Estudiantes de Enfermería.

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