

## INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP IN UNIVERSITY PRACTICE: UNRAVELING THE VIEW OF STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to ascertain the opinion of students on factors associated with interpersonal relationships (teacher-student) in the university environment, and to identify the contribution of interpersonal relationships to the professional training of students. It is an exploratory, descriptive study of quantitative and qualitative nature. Data was collected at the Federal University of Campina Grande – Education and Health Center, from a sample of 140 students from the nursing, pharmacy and nutrition programs. Objective data was analyzed descriptively. For subjective data the content analysis technique was adopted, through which it was possible to categorize data thematically and build three categories of analysis: dialogue and trust in interpersonal relationships, skills in professional conduct, and enhancement of cognitive skills. In conclusion, the students perceived the importance of dialogue for interpersonal relationships in the organizational teaching-learning environment; the gaining of trust meant benefits for both. This study emphasized the importance of a humanized training for future health professionals, permeated by effective interpersonal relationships, which will allow them to provide a better service to users of the health sector.

**Keywords:** Interpersonal Relationships. Higher Education. Human Resources Training. Health Sciences Students.

### INTRODUCTION

Before a globalized and technological context with significant advances in the economy, politics and society, the Brazilian scenario seems to be favoring transformations in various government sectors, with highlight to education, especially at university level, which has been facing major challenges with constant epistemological discussions, overcoming of paradigms, and innovative scientific discoveries<sup>(1)</sup>.

From this perspective, since 2000 education in the health field has been opposing to conservative views supported by positivist and biological convictions, presenting changes founded on the problematization of knowledge practices. Training centers are expected to provide human resources for the consolidation of the Brazilian Unified Health System [*Sistema*

*Único de Saúde*] (SUS), which aims at universality, equity in access to health services, decentralization and comprehensive approach of individuals<sup>(2)</sup>.

In this sense, paradoxically, technological and scientific advances tend to rationalize relations between people, and technology becomes a commodity. The exacerbation of the technological dimension evidences a human being's sensation of not knowing what it means to be in the sociocultural context, since the ideology of the capitalist socio-economic system disseminates values involving owning, power and profit, which, in some situations, inhibit initiatives that put in evidence the being who feels, thinks, suffers and falls ill<sup>(3)</sup>.

Considering that the future health professional will work with humans in their health-disease context, and be surrounded by their emotions and feelings, the process involving relationships, either intra or

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interpersonal, is not to be disregarded. This is because the contact established between professional and patient during assistance may mobilize the professional's own feelings<sup>(4)</sup>.

In this same reasoning, interpersonal relationships involving teachers and students have influences ranging from hierarchical relations limited to the classroom micro space to emotional entanglements that converge to close, more serious relationships and which may lead to a lasting friendship that resists time<sup>(2)</sup>.

Thus, the concept of interpersonal relationship has to do with convivial relations, communications and contact between people, in a way that one interacts with the other in the most different situations which are part of human existence. For this research the academic environment itself and the labor characteristic of a teacher's practice stimulate situations that favor the development of interpersonal relationships that can positively or negatively influence the student's performance<sup>(5)</sup>.

With regard to pedagogical strategies used with students pursuing a career in the healthcare field, who deal directly with human beings at decisive moments in their lives, which often involves an imminent risk of death and individuals depending on others to meet their basic human needs, it becomes necessary that relations established in the academic environment converge with values that prioritize aspects of humanization in health and that such an attitude reflects on the population to be assisted.

In this sense, the teacher-student relationship can enable the understanding and development of interactions concerning life in society which translate positive behavioral modes such as solidarity, loyalty, respect, ethics, responsibility, among others; the opposite can also be true<sup>(6,7)</sup>.

Given the above, the following question is raised: what kind of interpersonal relationships are maintained between Nursing, Pharmacy and Nutrition teachers and students from the Education and Health Center of the Federal University of Campina Grande? In order to answer the question, this study aimed to learn the opinions of students on factors associated with interpersonal relationships (teacher-student) at university level and to identify the

contribution of interpersonal relationships to the students' professional training.

## METHOD

This is an exploratory, descriptive study of quanti-qualitative nature conducted at the Federal University of Campina Grande [*Universidade Federal de Campina Grande*] UFCG- Health and Education Center [*Centro de Educação e Saúde*] (CES), Cuité campus, Paraíba, Brazil, with students from health programs involving nursing, pharmacy and nutrition. These are the only health programs offered by said campus.

The sample consisted of 140 students, being made up by 30 nursing students, 30 pharmacy students and 30 nutrition students – all freshmen –, in addition to 21 nursing students, 21 pharmacy students and 8 nutrition students who had all completed the theoretical courses of these programs.

Concerning the sample, the following inclusion criteria were adopted in this research: students attending the first and last term of theoretical courses of the Nursing, Pharmacy and Nutrition programs; students who were duly enrolled in said terms of the programs and were attending all courses of those terms; students aged over 18 years old, who were willing to participate in the study and signed the informed consent form. The excluded ones were those who did not fit the parameters described above.

For data collection, a semi structured questionnaire was used, being composed of multiple-choice and essay questions prepared based on the study objectives in order to characterize the sample as well as to obtain information about knowledge, feelings, interests and expectations.

After the grouping of quantitative data on Microsoft Excel 2007, results were analyzed descriptively. For the interpretation of subjective data, the content analysis technique was used, which is understood as a set of communication analysis techniques that treats information collected from the investigated subjects' speeches on a particular topic, allowing centralizing ideas and categorizing them thematically. Content Analysis seeks to code

units of comprehension and works with the frequency of information in the speeches<sup>(8)</sup>.

Four phases in Content Analysis which the researchers needed to follow to analyze the data can be highlighted: Phase 1 – pre-analysis; Phase 2 – exploration or coding of the material; Phase 3 – categorization; Phase 4 – treatment of obtained results and interpretation or inference<sup>(8)</sup>.

The conduction of the study complied with the recommendations of Resolution No. 466/2012 of the Brazilian Ministry of Health, and its project was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Nursing and Medical Schools of Nova Esperança (CAAE 01910351000-11). All participants signed the informed consent form and, to ensure anonymity, their reports were identified as follows: letters NS, P and N standing for Nursing, Pharmacy and Nutrition; a number indicating the order of the interview according to the program, and the letters FRMN or COMP to indicate that the subjects were freshmen students or had completed the theoretical courses.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data collected through the application of the questionnaire was divided into two parts: the first one concerned information on the characterization of the study participants; the second one comprised the research objectives. For a better presentation of results, quantitative data was described, and qualitative information was arranged in categories.

Regarding age group, the majority of freshmen students participating in the study were aged 18-20 years old; 86% (26) of them were from the nursing program, 93% from pharmacy (28), and 90% (27) from nutrition. As for state of origin, 43% (13) of the nursing students were from Paraíba, and 43% (13) from Rio Grande do Norte; among the nutrition students, 70% (21) were from Paraíba; and 50% of the pharmacy students were from Paraíba too. A total of 37% (11) of the nursing students had household income between 3 and 4 minimum wages; 30% (9) of pharmacy students had household income of 3 to 4 minimum wages and 30% (9) between 5 and 6 minimum wages; 37% (11) of the nutrition students had a household income of up to one minimum wage, considering that at the

time of data collection the minimum wage was worth R\$ 545,00 reais.

Most of the students participating in the research who had completed theoretical courses were aged between 18 and 20 years old; 57% of them were nursing students, 71% pharmacy students, and 63% nutrition students. Paraíba was the most often reported state of origin; 43%, 57% and 83% of the nursing, pharmacy and nutrition students, respectively, were from there. The household income of most participants (38%) from the nursing program was around 3-4 minimum wages; 29% of the pharmacy students reported it to be 2 to 3 minimum wages, and another 29% between 5 and 6 minimum wages; 37% of the nutrition students had a household income of up to 1 minimum wage.

Throughout data analysis three categories were identified, with two referring to factors associated with interpersonal relationships maintained between teachers and students in the university environment, the first being entitled “dialogue and trust in interpersonal relationships”, and the second “skills in professional conduct”. The third category refers to contributions from the teacher-student interpersonal relationship to the academic training of students, entitled “enhancement of cognitive skills”.

### Dialogue and trust in interpersonal relationships

First of all an open dialogue. And greater understanding on the part of teachers. (NS12-FRNM)

Dialogue is a must! One should not be authoritarian just for feeling superior! (P2-COMP)

There should be more dialogue, showing that the student is there to learn, not to be repressed. (N1 - COMP)

Yes, because from the moment the student gains his/her teacher's trust, he/she receives instructions that will help him/her follow the right way. (NS8 - COMP)

Yes, it does. It contributes to increasing social knowledge, leading to a greater trust between professionals. (P11 - COMP)

Yes. Through a relationship of trust between both. (N18 -FRMN)

The statements above show that the students realize the importance of dialogue to

interpersonal relationships in the organizational environment surrounding teaching and learning, and that having each other's trust brings benefits to both.

An authentic dialogue in interpersonal relationships is possible by means of one's capacity to express himself/herself and the other's capacity to understand what his/her interlocutor says. In the search for a greater awareness of interpersonal relationships, teachers and students need freedom and autonomy to express their feelings and anxieties to each other<sup>(4, 9)</sup>.

In this way, in order to avoid conflicts students and teachers should be more open to a dialogue in which they can expose their difficulties and together come up with strategies that enhance this dialogue by bringing solutions to problems found within the training context<sup>(10)</sup>.

Once dialogue is understood, it is possible to comprehend its role in the gaining of trust. When the student realizes the seriousness with which the teacher deals with what he/she expresses, does or feels, the bond between them grows stronger, increasing trust in their relationship<sup>(4,10)</sup>.

Trust permeates and founds any relationship, being one of the factors for the success or failure of an interpersonal relationship, as it can be understood as the confidence put in someone. For this reason, trust is built on an individual's rational judgment through information collected<sup>(11)</sup>.

In addition to trust helping consolidate interpersonal relationships, it favors stability and decreases the chances of a relationship breakup. At the same time it does so, it also strengthens the interaction and assists the team mobilization<sup>(9)</sup>.

This assertion about the teacher-student relationship is seen as an indispensable factor in interpersonal relationships, as both individuals need to perform activities together, in which trust is critical to the assignment of these activities. Therefore, dialogue and trust go together and in a parallel way towards achieving an effective interpersonal relationship in the teaching-learning environment<sup>(4)</sup>.

### **Skills in professional conduct**

Regarding the second category, it can be noticed in this study that skills are guided by

ethics, commitment and responsibility. Such an assertion can be seen in the following statements by students participating in the research:

The strategy is the respect that not always exists, because along with respect other things may come, like trust, ethics, dialogue. (NS14 - COMP)

Respect, attention and ethics. (N9 - FRMN)

Between students and teachers there should be responsibility and dialogue. (NS11 - FRMN)

Responsibility, ethics, dialogue, morals. (NS4 - COMP)

Responsibility, commitment, trust, ethics, affinity and communication. (NS8 - COMP)

Ethics, commitment and communication. (P7 - COMP)

The research subjects, in the speeches presented, emphasize that one of the strategies to achieve and maintain an interpersonal relationship is to use professional conduct skills, which are essential for the student-teacher interpersonal relationships within university practice.

It is evident, therefore, that education and ethics are inextricably linked to an educational relationship. Consequently, education begins with the ethical relationship between student and teacher, that is, the teacher hears the needs and responds to this request in a responsible manner and, by doing so, he/she is listening, mentoring and supporting the student<sup>(3,4,7,10)</sup>. So that ethics comes true in interpersonal relationships, the training of future health professionals must include willingness from both parties involved, as well as institutional support, so that it is made concrete in the academic environment<sup>(9)</sup>.

Besides ethics, another important skill component mentioned by the study participants was commitment. It guarantees the continuity and loyalty of the relationship. Thus, it should seek balance in the relationships through ethical attitudes emphasizing responsibility, commitment and respect for the other<sup>(4,7,12)</sup>.

Responsibility was another skill component referred to among the others which was worth highlight in the speeches. Both students and teachers need to acknowledge the importance of commitment and responsibility in academic education, and teachers need to have the responsibility of awakening the scientific

knowledge in students<sup>(1,10)</sup>. In this way, students and teachers who use such skills in their interpersonal interactions manage to keep the effectiveness of their relationships.

It is imperative to point out that the students identify with their teachers, using the professional conduct skills practiced by them, which shows the importance of teachers thinking and acting in a coherent way, because their professional conduct will serve as a model for students in practice<sup>(13)</sup>.

Therefore, the university practice environment should be grounded on effective strategies aimed at enhancing the cognitive skills used by students and teachers for a positive interpersonal relationship, which will facilitate the student's learning-teaching process.

### Enhancement of cognitive skills

The investigation about the possibility of interpersonal relationships contributing to academic growth and about how this happens gives rise to the next category - enhancement of cognitive skills -, illustrated below by the students' speeches:

Of course it contributes positively, because this is what allows the exchange of experiences that will support the academic education of the students, and it is a way for the teacher to deal with the student. (P13 - FRMN)

Yes. If the student has a good relationship with the teacher, this will help the student to learn better. (NS14 - FRMN)

More projects (encouragement from both parties) (P6 -COMP)

Yes. It encourages and is a model for the student so that he/she becomes a qualified professional with an excellent relationship with the civil society. (N2 - COMP)

Yes, because teachers often are the professional example that students want to be; this example can also come from classmates. (NS3 -COMP)

Yes. Interpersonal relationships interfere with an individual's behavior and attitude, contributing to professional efficiency. (P1 - COMP)

In the view of the study participants interpersonal relationships are critical to academic growth. This growth, they say, is possible through the sharing of information, encouragement and improvement of learning among students.

Thus, teachers must be willing to maintain a harmonious relationship in the teaching-learning process through planning and teaching strategies that enable the teacher-student interaction. Moreover, it is respectable that teachers encourage students to participate in the teaching-learning process so that the latter can build up their own knowledge<sup>(9,14,15)</sup>.

In university practice students and teachers face in their everyday lives different emotions; it is necessary, thus, to control reason and emotion for the best interpersonal relationship between them. Therefore, the way teachers manage their emotions and react to situations before them can change the teaching-learning process, because by knowing how to handle interpersonal relationships properly they can put students on the desired track. In this way, teachers can motivate learning<sup>(13)</sup>.

It is noteworthy that teachers need new proposals in university practice in order to achieve an effective interpersonal relationship. One of the proposals is to keep themselves updated, as well as to insert themselves in the reality of their experiences, dialoguing with new proposals and respecting the teaching-learning process<sup>(16)</sup>.

Thus, the university practice environment should be based on effective strategies aimed at enhancing the cognitive skills used by students and teachers for a positive interpersonal relationship, which will facilitate the student's teaching-learning process.

### FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The subjective dimension of health professionals in their work field causes changes on the quality of the care provided to users of the health sector. Consequently, the way that the relationship between teachers and students occurs determines the change in the way that the latter will interact with their clients in their professional life. Thus, the establishment of an effective interpersonal relationship results in professionals trained with a humanized and relevant healthcare dimension. Therefore, both students and teachers should employ strategies in order to maintain interpersonal relationships and organize their work process.

Regarding the categories analyzed, it was possible to observe that the students perceived

the importance of dialogue to interpersonal relationships in the organizational teaching-learning environment, and that the gaining of trust brings benefits for both.

The “skills in professional conduct” category showed that said skills, in this study, are grounded on ethics, commitment and responsibility.

It is undeniable that an effective relationship between students and teachers is a highly complex issue, as it involves several variables. In addition, these variables directly influence the main actors in the teaching-learning process.

Given the above, it is worth stressing that this study has helped and will help students, teachers and health professionals who attempt to understand a little more about the sublime process that

interpersonal relationships are, seeing the importance of an effective relationship to the training of professionals who value ethical and human principles.

It should be noted, thus, that there is a need for further studies which ensure the continuity of interpersonal relationships between students and teachers in order to improve the teaching-learning process, given that little is published on this sublime theme. New studies should be conducted seeking to assess the process involving interpersonal relationships and the importance of an effective relationship for the training of health professionals, so that they can enter the job market as ethical and human professionals able to interact with their clients.

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## RELACIONAMENTO INTERPESSOAL NA PRÁTICA UNIVERSITÁRIA: DESVENDANDO A VISÃO DO DISCENTE

### RESUMO

O estudo visa conhecer a opinião do discente sobre os fatores associados ao relacionamento interpessoal (professor-aluno) em âmbito universitário; e identificar a contribuição do relacionamento interpessoal na formação profissional dos discentes. Estudo exploratório-descritivo de natureza quanti-qualitativa, cujos dados foram coletados na Universidade Federal de Campina Grande – Centro de Educação e Saúde, sendo a amostra composta por 140 discentes, envolvendo ingressantes e concluintes dos cursos de enfermagem, farmácia e nutrição. Os dados objetivos foram analisados descritivamente. Para os dados subjetivos adotou-se a técnica da análise do conteúdo, com identificação de três categorias: “Diálogo e confiança nas relações interpessoais”; “Habilidades nas condutas profissionais” e “Aprimoramento das habilidades cognitivas”. Conclui-se que os acadêmicos percebem a importância do diálogo para o relacionamento interpessoal no ambiente organizacional de ensino-aprendizagem, e que a conquista da confiança repercute em benefícios para ambos. Os resultados do estudo salientam a importância da formação humanística do profissional de saúde permeada pelo relacionamento interpessoal saudável entre educador e educando, possibilitando melhor qualidade da assistência prestada ao usuário do serviço de saúde.

**Palavras-chave:** Relações Interpessoais. Educação Superior. Formação de Recursos Humanos. Estudantes de Ciências da Saúde.

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## INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP IN UNIVERSITY PRACTICE: UNRAVELING THE VISION OF THE STUDENT

### RESUMEN

El estudio tiene el objetivo de conocer la opinión del discente sobre los factores asociados a la relación interpersonal (profesor-alumno) en el ámbito universitario; e identificar la contribución de la relación interpersonal en la formación profesional de los discentes. Estudio exploratorio-descriptivo de naturaleza cuantitativa-cualitativa, cuyos datos fueron recolectados en la Universidad Federal de Campina Grande – Centro de Educación y Salud, siendo el muestreo compuesto por 140 discentes, involucrando novatos y alumnos del último año de los cursos de enfermería, farmacia y nutrición. Los datos objetivos fueron analizados descriptivamente. Para los datos subjetivos se adoptó la técnica del análisis del contenido, con identificación de tres categorías: “Diálogo y confianza en las relaciones interpersonales”; “Habilidades en las conductas profesionales” y “Perfeccionamiento de las habilidades cognitivas”. Se concluye que los discentes perciben la importancia del diálogo para la relación interpersonal en el ambiente organizacional de enseñanza-aprendizaje, y que la conquista de la confianza repercute en beneficios para ambos. Los resultados del estudio señalan la importancia de la formación humanística del profesional de salud permeada por la relación interpersonal saludable entre educador y educando, posibilitando mejor calidad de la atención prestada al usuario del servicio de salud.

**Palabras clave:** Relaciones interpersonales. Educación superior. Formación de recursos Humanos. Estudiantes Ciencias de la Salud.

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