



## CROSSING BORDERS IN NURSING EDUCATION: AN EXPERIENCE REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC RESEARCH

### TRANSPONDO FRONTEIRAS NO ENSINO DE ENFERMAGEM: UM RELATO DE EXPERIÊNCIA EM PESQUISA ACADÊMICA INTERNACIONAL

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#### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Descrever a experiência de uma estudante brasileira de graduação em enfermagem por meio de um programa de bolsas de estudo canadense. **Método:** Relato descritivo da experiência de uma estudante brasileira de enfermagem em um programa canadense, de setembro de 2023 a fevereiro de 2024, financiado pelo Programa de Líderes Emergentes nas Américas (*Emerging Leaders in the Americas Program*, ELAP). **Resultados:** A estudante brasileira de enfermagem, em nível de graduação, vivenciou um crescimento pessoal e profissional significativo durante seu intercâmbio na Universidade Brock, no Canadá. Os principais resultados incluíram maior sensibilidade cultural, aprimoramento das habilidades em inglês, desenvolvimento de capacidades de pesquisa e aprimoramento de habilidades de comunicação terapêutica. Além disso, a experiência facilitou o estabelecimento de valiosas colaborações acadêmicas internacionais e enriqueceu o conhecimento e as práticas da estudante ao retornar ao Brasil para continuar seus estudos na área em parceria com o Canadá. **Conclusão:** O programa ELAP beneficiou significativamente tanto a aluna quanto sua comunidade acadêmica local. As habilidades e o conhecimento adquiridos, incluindo o aprimoramento das capacidades de pesquisa e da sensibilidade cultural, foram compartilhados com colegas e professores no Brasil, fomentando o desenvolvimento da aluna na continuidade de seus estudos de pesquisa e prática. A colaboração com um professor canadense também abriu caminho para futuros projetos de pesquisa nacionais e internacionais. Isso destaca o imenso valor dos programas de intercâmbio internacional para o avanço da educação e da prática de enfermagem.

**Descritores:** Enfermagem; Intercâmbio Educacional Internacional; Cooperação Internacional; Educação em Enfermagem; Pesquisa em Enfermagem.

#### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To describe the experience of a Brazilian undergraduate nursing student through a Canadian scholarship program. **Method:** Descriptive experience report of a Brazilian nursing student's journey in a Canadian program from September 2023 to February 2024 funded by the Emerging Leaders in the America Program (ELAP). **Results:** The Brazilian undergraduate nursing student experienced significant personal and professional growth during her exchange at Brock University, Canada. Key outcomes included increased cultural sensitivity, improved English language skills, enhanced research capabilities, and the development of therapeutic communication skills. In addition, the experience facilitated the establishment of valuable international academic collaborations and enriched the student's knowledge and practices upon her return to Brazil to continue her studies in the field in partnership with Canada. **Conclusion:** The ELAP significantly benefited both the student and her local academic community. The skills and knowledge acquired, including enhanced research capabilities and cultural sensitivity, were shared with colleagues and faculty in Brazil, fostering the student's development in continuing her research studies and practice. Collaboration with a Canadian professor also paved the way for future national and international research projects. This highlights the immense value of international exchange programs in advancing nursing education and practice.

**Descriptors:** Nursing; International Educational Exchange; International Cooperation; Education, Nursing; Nursing Research.

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## INTRODUCTION

Student mobility on a global scale has shown steady growth over the last two decades. In 2019, over twice the number of tertiary students, compared to 2007, pursued their studies across borders, totaling 6.1 million worldwide<sup>(1)</sup>. In the scenario of globalization, education has been building the internationalization of knowledge, removing barriers to the transmission of knowledge and instituting a new mode of education, namely international education, driven by academic exchanges that involve partnerships between universities and countries<sup>(2)</sup>.

Student exchange programs promote cultural exchange and mutual understanding among individuals from different backgrounds<sup>(2)</sup>. Within immersion in a new academic and social environment, students gain firsthand experiences of diverse cultures, traditions, and perspectives along with potential gains related to the experience of being in a different academic teaching environment, enabling the dissemination of knowledge among different educational centers. This exposure not only broadens their worldview but also helps break down stereotypes and build bridges of knowledge between nations<sup>(3)</sup>. The exchange of knowledge and experiences can offer novel perspectives and enhance critical thinking, ultimately refining creative problem-solving skills. Furthermore, educational and scholarship opportunities can be an extremely enriching experience for students, allowing for a deeper understanding of their field of study as well as the broader social and economic context<sup>(4)</sup>.

In Brazil, securing international scholarships for students often proves to be a complex endeavor due to various factors. One primary challenge is the intense competition for limited scholarship opportunities, as many students pursue their dreams of studying abroad<sup>(4)</sup>. The selection process is rigorous, typically requiring exceptional academic achievements, language proficiency, and a compelling personal statement<sup>(4)</sup>. However, there are several different options for obtaining an international scholarship in the country, including government organizations and funding institutions such as the *Fundação Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* (CAPES), the *Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* (CNPQ) and the *Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo* (FAPESP). In addition, there are international cooperation programs between Brazilian and foreign universities, such as the Canadian Emerging Leaders in the Americas Program (ELAP), a program that aims to strengthen connections between Canadian post-secondary institutions and those in the Americas<sup>(3-6)</sup>.

In this study, in particular, the ELAP is presented, which in 2009, the Government of Canada introduced the ELAP to foster human capital development and cultivate future leaders across the Americas. The program offers scholarships to students from Latin American, such as Brazil, and Caribbean post-secondary institutions, providing them with short-term exchange opportunities for study or research at Canadian institutions<sup>(7)</sup>. The duration of the ELAP exchange program varies from 4 to 6 months depending on whether the student is in undergraduate or postgraduate studies. During this period, the student is awarded a scholarship in Canada, which will subsidize the student's daily living expenses. Therefore, this is one of the programs that Brazilian students can apply for to pursue their dreams of studying abroad<sup>(5-7)</sup>.

In this context, this experience report study aims to

describe and provide insights into the experience of a Brazilian nursing undergraduate student who spent the period from September 2023 to February 2024 at a Canadian university, addressing her perspectives related to collective and individual gains.

## METHOD

This is an experience report of a student exchange, experienced by a Brazilian nursing undergraduate student, during international academic mobility from September 2023 to February 2024 at Brock University, in Ontario, Canada with a descriptive nature.

This educational endeavor was made possible through the support of the ELAP. By sharing this first-hand experience, this study delves into the advantages and challenges encountered during the exchange, contributing to a broader conversation about the importance of international student exchanges in contemporary education, in the areas of health sciences, particularly nursing area.

## RESULTS

Following the decision to pursue international mobility, a nursing undergraduate student from the Federal University in Brazil embarked on an academic journey through a program supported by the ELAP initiative. This student was in her final year of undergraduate studies and had acquired nursing and research experience through participation in two scientific initiations supported by the FAPESP, participation in extension projects, volunteer work, and research group. The opportunity to study in Canada was chosen due to its high-quality courses, as well as the Canadian university and professor, were chosen due to the establishment of a relationship with the student's Brazilian supervising professor. This international experience was anticipated to provide significant contributions to the academic knowledge of the student, as well as to her personal, social, and professional development.

To evaluate and present the results of this enriching experience, Chart 1 was created to better visualize the outcomes. It summarizes the results from the student time at Brock University, highlighting the main aspects of her academic and professional growth. The Chart 1 is divided into distinct categories, including cultural aspects, contact with foreign language, research involvement, and contributions upon returning to Brazil. Each category outlines the specific experiences and their impacts, providing a comprehensive overview of how the exchange program contributed to her overall development.

## DISCUSSION

The student's experience abroad was transformative, offering a comprehensive view of both personal and professional growth. Immersing herself in the Canadian academic environment exposed her to significant cultural differences, which broadened her perspective on diversity and inclusion. This exposure was not just an academic exercise but a deeply personal journey that enhanced her sensitivity to cultural nuances given that cultural diversity is a hallmark of Canadian identity and societal structure<sup>(8)</sup>. The inclusive nature of the Canadian university environment, where diversity is celebrated and integrated into daily practices, provided a new

lens through which the student could view her professional and personal interactions. In this way, the importance of adapting nursing care to meet the diverse cultural needs of

patients became more evident, highlighting the importance of culturally competent care in a globalized world<sup>(9)</sup>.

**Chart 1** - Description of the aspect of experience, divided into distinct categories, including cultural aspects, contact with a foreign language, research involvement, and contributions upon returning to Brazil. São Paulo, Brazil, 2024

Aspect of Experience	Description	Personal Impact	Professional Impact
<b>Cultural Aspect</b>	Experience with cultural differences, participation in multicultural clinical practices, and adaptation to local customs.	Increased cultural sensitivity, promoted personal growth, and global awareness.	Development of intercultural communication skills, and adaptation of nursing care to meet diverse cultural needs.
<b>Contact with Foreign Language</b>	Daily immersion in English, participation in English classes, and interaction with colleagues from various nationalities.	Improved language skills and facilitated integration into the local community.	Enhanced communication in English, access to academic resources in English, and improved interactions with colleagues and healthcare professionals.
<b>Research Group Experience</b>	Participation in a research group, development of a scoping review, unlimited access to scientific articles.	Strengthening of research skills, collaboration, and idea sharing.	Specialization in high-quality research projects, increased access to relevant scientific literature.
<b>Work at Canadian University</b>	Worked as a Research Assistant, data verification, participated in scientific meetings on donation and transplantation.	Enriched technical knowledge in research methods, communication, and problem-solving skills.	A global perspective on healthcare challenges and opportunities, support in developing postgraduate projects.
<b>Participation in nursing course subject at Canadian University</b>	Participation in the "Professional and Therapeutic Communication" nursing course subject at Canadian University.	Increased self-awareness and understanding of personal impact on intercultural communication.	Application of principles and techniques of therapeutic communication and group collaboration in clinical practice.
<b>Return to Brazil</b>	Academic gains from the exchange shared with the research group in Brazil, establishment of a collaborative link between Canadian and Brazilian professors, and advancements in future projects.	Personal satisfaction in contributing to the local academic community and fostering international collaboration.	Enrichment of the Brazilian research group with new knowledge and techniques, enhanced research capabilities, and strengthened international partnerships.

Moreover, the participation in the nursing subject course “Professional and Therapeutic Communication” further deepened the student’s understanding of how beliefs, values, and personal experiences impact professional communication in nursing. The course’s focus on self-assessment and reflective practices allowed her to gain valuable insights into her own communication style and its implications in a multicultural environment. This increased self-awareness and enhanced ability to manage complex interpersonal dynamics align with nursing literature, which highlights the critical role of professional and therapeutic communication in building effective patient relationships, improving health care quality, and promoting patient-centered care<sup>(10-11)</sup>.

Daily immersion in English was another critical component of the student experience. Engaging with the language in various contexts such as academic, social, and professional, significantly improved her language skills and facilitated her integration into the local community. The English classes provided by the university were essential in honing her communication abilities, which are crucial for ac-

cessing academic resources and collaborating with international colleagues. This linguistic proficiency not only enriched the student's personal interactions but also expanded her professional capabilities, particularly in a field where much of the research and literature is in English.

The opportunity to work within a prestigious research group in Canada was also a highlight of the student academic journey. Engaging in high-quality research projects, including the development of a scoping review, allowed her to refine her research skills and deepen her understanding of bibliographic methodologies. Utilizing advanced software for literature reviews was instrumental in introducing these new technologies to Brazil. Furthermore, working as a Research Assistant further complemented her academic experience by providing practical insights into research methodologies and data verification processes. Exposure to international research practices and participation in scientific meetings provided a global perspective on the challenges and opportunities in healthcare.

Upon returning to Brazil, the undergraduate student completed the nursing course and completed her scientific

initiation that she had begun in Brazil. After completing the course, the student entered the academic master's degree in a new area of knowledge, related to her activities carried out in Canada, in a hospital in the municipality, with co-supervision from her professor in Canada. Furthermore, the academic gains from her exchange were shared with her research group, establishing valuable connections between Canadian and Brazilian professors.

This collaboration not only enriched her home research group with new knowledge and techniques but also fostered international partnerships that are likely to benefit future projects. The satisfaction of contributing to her local academic community and enhancing research capabilities through these international links highlighted the profound impact of her experience abroad.

However, some limitations must be acknowledged. This report is based on a single student's personal experience, which may not fully represent the broader impacts of international academic exchanges on nursing education and research. The findings and benefits described are inherently tied to the specific context of the exchange, including the student's personal motivations, the resources available at the Canadian institution, and the academic focus of her home research group. Additionally, the collaboration was geographically and thematically limited, being centered around a single university in the student's municipality and focused on specific research areas. These factors may limit the generalizability of the outcomes to other students, institutions, or fields of study.

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## CONCLUSION

The exchange program not only benefited the student on multiple fronts but also had a ripple effect on her local academic community. The cross-cultural exposure and professional development gained in Canada have equipped the student with a unique perspective and skills that she has shared with her peers and professors in Brazil. This dissemination of knowledge has elevated the standards of research and practice within her home institution. Furthermore, the collaboration established with a Canadian professor has laid the groundwork for future joint research projects, fostering a sustained international academic partnership. These outcomes underscore the value of international exchange programs in nurturing global competencies and advancing nursing education and practice both locally and globally.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have declared that there is no conflict of interests.

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### **AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS**

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All authors are responsible for the textual writing and critical review of the intellectual content, for the final published version, and for all ethical, legal, and scientific aspects related to the accuracy and integrity of the study.



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