

Teaching leadership in undergraduate nursing programs in Portuguese-speaking countries: a documentary study

Ensino da liderança em cursos de graduação em Enfermagem em países lusófonos: um estudo documental
Liderazgo docente en cursos de pregrado en Enfermería en países de habla portuguesa: un estudio documental

Vitória Talya dos Santos
Sousa¹

ORCID: 0000-0002-5403-2820

Jocilene da Silva Paiva¹

ORCID: 0000-0002-8340-8954

Maria Rayssa do

Nascimento Nogueira¹

ORCID: 0000-0003-0355-5901

Ana Caroline Rocha de

Melo Leite¹

ORCID: 0000-0002-9007-7970

Edmara Chaves Costa¹

ORCID: 0000-0003-0007-6681

Thiago Moura de Araújo¹

ORCID: 0000-0002-3924-9570

Patrícia Freire de

Vasconcelos¹

ORCID: 0000-0002-6158-9221

Abstract

Objective: To analyze the presence of courses on the subject of "leadership" in the curricula of Nursing programs at Higher Education Institutions in Portuguese-speaking countries. **Methods:** A qualitative, documentary study, with data collected from official sources of educational institutions, focusing on Nursing programs in 10 Portuguese-speaking countries. The curricular matrices of the programs were analyzed and data on the classes were extracted and organized into figures and tables. **Results:** 155 institutions were identified, 75 of which offer a Nursing degree. When considering the institutions that offer a Nursing degree, 18 have courses that include the topic "leadership" in their syllabus, and they are only located in three countries: Brazil, Portugal, and Macao. **Conclusion:** There are still gaps in the training of nurses in Portuguese-speaking countries, which is a cause for concern given the struggle for Nursing to be recognized and valued in Portuguese-speaking countries.

Descriptors: Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries; Nursing; Health Management; Leadership Education; Diploma Programs.

¹Universidade da Integração
Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-
Brasileira. Redenção, Ceará, Brasil.

Corresponding author:
Vitória Talya dos Santos Sousa
E-mail:
vtoriatsantossousa@gmail.com

What is already known on this?

There is a shortage of leaders in the job market, especially in Nursing, which demonstrates the gaps in the education offered by universities.

What this study adds?

There are courses on the subject in Brazil, Portugal, and Macao. This corroborates the literature, pointing to the existence of a gap in the training of nurses in the regions evaluated.



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Resumo

Objetivo: Analisar a presença de disciplinas que abordem a temática “liderança”, nas matrizes curriculares dos cursos de Enfermagem de Instituições de Ensino Superior de países lusófonos.

Métodos: Estudo de abordagem qualitativa, do tipo documental, com coleta de dados em fontes oficiais das instituições de ensino, com foco nos cursos de Enfermagem de 10 países falantes de língua portuguesa. Analisaram-se as matrizes curriculares dos cursos, e foram extraídos os dados das disciplinas, organizados em figuras e tabelas. **Resultados:** Foram identificadas 155 instituições, das quais 75 possuíam o curso de Enfermagem. Quando consideradas as instituições que dispõem do curso de Enfermagem, 18 possuem disciplinas que têm em suas ementas o tópico “liderança”, e estão localizadas apenas em três países: Brasil, Portugal e Macau. **Conclusão:** Ainda existem lacunas na formação dos enfermeiros da lusofonia, informação que indica uma preocupação devido à luta da Enfermagem por valorização e reconhecimento nos países lusófonos.

Descritores: Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa; Enfermagem; Gestão em saúde; Liderança; Programas de Graduação em Enfermagem.

Resumen

Objetivo: Analizar la presencia de asignaturas que abordan el tema del “liderazgo” en las matrices curriculares de los cursos de Enfermería en Instituciones de Educación Superior en países de habla portuguesa. **Métodos:** Estudio de tipo documental, con enfoque cualitativo, con recolección de datos de fuentes oficiales de instituciones educativas, con foco en cursos de Enfermería en 10 países de habla portuguesa. Se analizaron las matrizes curriculares de los cursos y se extrajeron los datos de las asignaturas, organizados en figuras y tablas. **Resultados:** Se identificaron 155 instituciones, de las cuales 75 contaban con carrera de Enfermería. Al considerar las instituciones que ofrecen el curso de Enfermería, 18 poseen asignaturas que tienen el tema “liderazgo” en sus menús y están ubicadas en sólo tres países: Brasil, Portugal y Macao. **Conclusión:** Todavía existen lagunas en la formación de enfermeros de habla portuguesa, información que indica preocupación debido a la lucha de la Enfermería por la apreciación y el reconocimiento en los países de habla portuguesa.

Descritores: Comunidad de Países de Lengua Portuguesa; Enfermería; Gestión en Salud; Liderazgo; Programas de Graduación en Enfermería.

INTRODUCTION

There has been a growing search for training in health and Nursing in recent years. However, it is clear that there are still historical and contemporary challenges, even after the implementation of the Health Education Management strategies of the established National Curriculum Guidelines.⁽¹⁾

Nursing is integrated into the development of actions centered on care and its integrality; it seeks to integrate the aspects inherent in the act of proposing unified, transversal assistance focused on training that encompasses the concepts and definitions of health care. It is therefore necessary to understand how training for care management in nursing takes place in theory and in practice.⁽¹⁾

According to the National Curriculum Guidelines (NCG), nurse training should include a curriculum that includes a set of desirable competencies for professional practice, such as health care, administration, management, continuing education, decision-making, communication, and leadership.⁽²⁾ The training curriculum for Nursing graduates in some Portuguese-speaking countries, such as Angola and Portugal, is similar to the principles of the NCG in Brazil.⁽³⁻⁴⁾ This highlights the importance of management in the work of nurses, understood as the ability to coordinate a team, as well as the resources and strategic actions that favor the care process.⁽²⁾

However, there is a shortage of leaders in the job market, especially in Nursing, demonstrating the gaps in the education offered by universities, as well as the shortcomings in in-service training, which should invest in introducing organizational ethics, which is fundamental for leadership training.⁽⁵⁾ This highlights the need to invest in teaching management and leadership skills in undergraduate and postgraduate curricula and to maintain this training throughout professional life.

There have currently been several reforms in the health sector, aimed at improving access and equity and offering quality services in the European context and in the Portuguese-speaking African countries (PSAC). It is therefore necessary to strengthen training to create managers with managerial skills and attitudes aimed at resolving challenges in the workplace through leadership. One of the mechanisms for training health managers is the creation and implementation of training programs.⁽⁶⁾

The management process seeks to ensure that activities are carried out to a high standard, while leadership, in order to achieve objectives, makes sure that the best practices and teams are chosen according to their particularities. Institutions demand that management procedures and leadership actions be developed and transformed in line with market demands.⁽⁷⁾

In view of this, the choice of management models by institutions is linked to institutional philosophy, as well as the administrative, strategic, and operational characteristics of organizational activities. In Nursing, management activities include management and care, with a strong connection

between both dimensions, and can also contribute to conflict management in the workplace - an aspect that directly influences professional and user satisfaction.⁽⁸⁾

In addition to administering Nursing care, and developing activities aimed at hiring employees and work schedules that favor the adequacy of the care environment, the Nursing manager also works to provide the appropriate conditions for carrying out activities, thus promoting the well-being of patients and safe care.⁽²⁾ Nursing management is a fundamental skill.

Among the activities carried out by nurses, management is a fundamental skill, the objective of which is linked to the coordination and execution of activities, planning, and the development of care-oriented strategies.⁽¹⁾ There are several factors related to management skills, which involve knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the area of management, involving leadership, decision-making, communication, interpersonal relationships, and costs, among others. Therefore, leadership is a dialogical and reflective process and its construction takes place in day-to-day interactions.⁽⁹⁻¹⁰⁾

The impact that training in management and leadership can have on care and management practice strengthens actions aimed at safe, quality care. In view of the above, the question arose: How is the theme of "leadership" included in the training process for nurses at public universities in Portuguese-speaking countries?

The aim of this study was to analyze the presence of subjects that address the theme of "leadership" in the curricula of Nursing courses at Higher Education Institutions in Portuguese-speaking countries.

METHODS

This is a qualitative study, of the documentary type, developed in accordance with the guidelines of the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR) checklist for qualitative studies.⁽¹¹⁾

Data was collected from the official websites of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in order to analyze the Political-Pedagogical Projects (PPP) and course syllabuses of Nursing courses in Portuguese-speaking countries, and sought to identify the existence of subjects that addressed the theme of "leadership".

"The PPP is the guiding instrument for the performance of the HEI, and consequently expresses the pedagogical practice of a school or university and its courses, giving direction to management and educational activities."⁽¹²⁾ Therefore, initially, a search was made on the Internet in order to identify the HEIs based in ten Portuguese-speaking countries, namely: Brazil, Portugal, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe, Mozambique, Macau, Angola and East Timor. In Brazil, the Federal Universities were considered, given the volume of data and number of HEIs in the country.

Next, the official websites were accessed in search of information on the Nursing degree course on offer. After the initial search, institutions that did not offer this course were excluded. The PPPs of the courses were then searched in order to identify the subjects that addressed the issue. HEIs whose PPPs could not be located were excluded. After analyzing the documents, the subjects were categorized according to a central theme.

The HEIs included and the link to access the material analyzed are shown in **Table 1**.

Chart 1. Access data to the HEIs included in the research. Redenção, CE, Brazil, 2022.

Institution	Country	Material analyzed
University of the International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony	Brazil	PPP ⁽¹³⁾ Access link
Federal University of Alfenas	Brazil	Curriculum ⁽¹⁴⁾ Access link
Federal University of Catalão	Brazil	PPP ⁽¹⁵⁾ Access link
Federal University of Goiás - Jataí Region	Brazil	PPP ⁽¹⁶⁾ Access link
Federal University of Juiz de Fora	Brazil	PPP ⁽¹⁷⁾ Access link
Federal University of Santa Catarina	Brazil	Curriculum ⁽¹⁸⁾ Link de acesso
Federal University of São Carlos	Brazil	PPP ⁽¹⁹⁾ Access link
Federal University of Viçosa	Brazil	PPP ⁽²⁰⁾ Access link
Federal University of Recôncavo da Bahia	Brazil	PPP ⁽²¹⁾ Access link
Federal University of the Triângulo Mineiro	Brazil	PPP ⁽²²⁾ Access link

Federal University of Vale do Jequitinhonha e Mucuri	Brazil	PPP ⁽²³⁾ Access link
Polytechnic University of Macau	Macau	Curriculum ⁽²⁴⁾ Access link
Portuguese Catholic University	Portugal	Curriculum ⁽²⁵⁾ Access link
University of Madeira	Portugal	Curriculum ⁽²⁶⁾ Access link
University of Évora	Portugal	Curriculum ⁽²⁷⁾ Access link
University of the Algarve	Portugal	Curriculum ⁽²⁸⁾ Access link
University of the Azores	Portugal	Curriculum ⁽²⁹⁾ Access link
Fernando Pessoa University	Portugal	Curriculum ⁽³⁰⁾ Access link

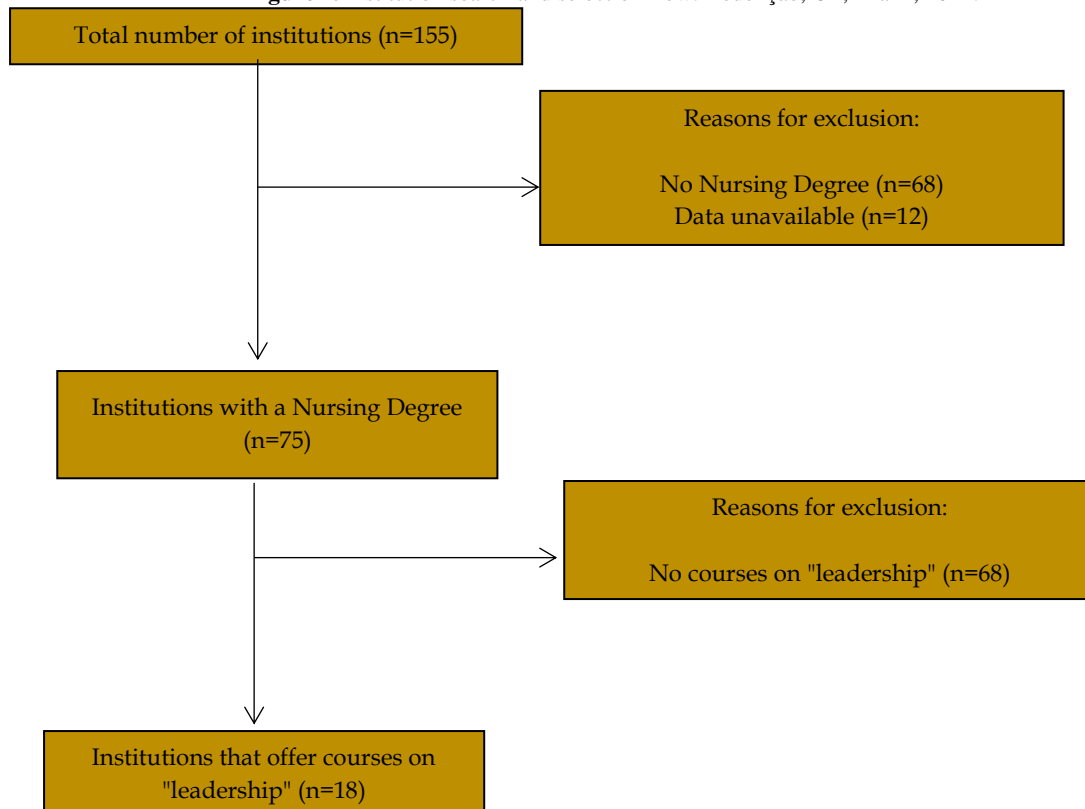
Source: Elaborated by the authors (2023).

The data was organized in figures and tables, containing the percentage analysis of the data.

RESULTS

155 institutions were identified in the ten Portuguese-speaking countries. Of these, 75 offered a Nursing degree; 68 did not; and 12 could not be identified. The flow of research and selection of institutions is shown in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1. Institution search and selection flow. Redenção, CE, Brazil, 2022.



Source: Elaborated by the authors, 2023.

In addition, the distribution according to country can be seen in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Distribution of Nursing Courses in Portuguese-speaking countries. Redenção, CE, Brazil, 2022.

Country	Number of Institutions (n)	Offer a Nursing Degree (n)
Angola	10	2
Brazil	69	52
Cape Verde	7	4
Equatorial Guinea	1	0
Guinea-Bissau	11	1
Macao	10	2
Mozambique	14	3
Portugal	27	9
Sao Tome and Principe	1	1
East Timor	5	1
Total	155	75

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2023).

When we consider the institutions that offer Nursing programs, 18 offer courses on the topic of "leadership" on their syllabus, and they are located in Brazil, Portugal, and Macao (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Distribution of courses addressing the theme of Leadership. Redenção, CE, Brazil, 2022.

Country	Offer a Nursing Degree (n)	Subjects dealing with leadership (n)
Angola	2	0
Brazil	52	11
Cape Verde	4	0
Equatorial Guinea	0	0
Guinea-Bissau	1	0
Macao	2	1
Mozambique	3	0
Portugal	9	6
Sao Tome and Principe	1	0
East Timor	1	0
Total	75	18

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2023).

Of the 18 institutions that cover the subject of "leadership" in their curricula, 27 courses were identified, with course hours ranging from 24 to 414 hours. Most of them are taught in the 4th year of the program and are part of components whose major area is Nursing Management (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Data relating to courses on Leadership. Redenção, CE, Brazil, 2022.

Aspect evaluated	n	%
<i>Area of Specialization</i>		
Business Administration	11	40.8
General Management	8	29.6
Executive Management	2	7.4
Professional Development	2	7.4
Leadership	1	3.7
Health Practices	1	3.7
Work Process	1	3.7

Community Health	1	3.7
<i>Course hours</i>		
20-60 h	11	40.8
61-90 h	11	40.8
>91h	5	18.4
<i>Year in which the course is available</i>		
1st	2	7.4
2nd	2	7.4
3rd	6	22.2
4th	16	59.3
5th	1	3.7

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2023).

DISCUSSION

The courses that deal with the subject of "leadership" are located in Brazil, Portugal, and Macao. In Portugal, the teaching of this skill had already been identified in another study, applied directly or indirectly in the curricula, and closely related to subjects related to management and organization.⁽³¹⁾ In Brazil, despite the number identified, there is still a shortage of teaching in universities, which can impact entry into the job market and professional development.⁽³²⁻³³⁾

At the same time, in African countries, there is still a shortage of higher education courses in the field of Nursing and a consequent lack of teaching on the subject. The problem may be due to the lack of training schools and the impediment to career progression due to the lack of specialization programs for professionals, as well as contributing to the little autonomy that nurses have in these countries' health services, especially with regard to the possibility of assuming leadership positions and receiving recognition from staff and health regulatory bodies.⁽³⁴⁾

When nurses have autonomy, they contribute to teamwork by exerting a positive influence and increasing team efficiency and engagement. In this context, it is essential to expand the learning spaces in academic training on leadership and its driving forces, as well as the need to reinforce the ongoing education of professionals on the subject. It is also important for institutions to recognize and provide autonomy for Nursing professionals in order to overcome the challenges of health management.⁽³⁵⁾

This scenario is a contributing factor to a worldwide problem, concerning the lack of almost six million Nursing professionals to meet the needs of the population. This gap mainly affects underdeveloped countries, such as some located in Africa and Latin America.⁽³⁶⁾ In addition to the need for human resources, this situation is also related to the lack of leadership skills given to nurses, one of the consequences of which is the lack of bureaucratic and procedural issues.

As an example, the area of specialization that covers the most courses on "leadership" is Nursing Administration, followed by Management. In Portugal, the scenario is similar, with the curricular units covered by these areas being the training ground for future nurse leaders.⁽³¹⁾ It is therefore worth reflecting on the dissolution of the subject among others, which can be positive when considered across the board, or negative when left aside.

In any case, teaching the subject is still a challenge, as it must be built not only in a theoretical way but also with a view to practical implementation. Thus, it is important to include it in undergraduate programs in a cross-cutting way and not just as an isolated topic, and training should be based on developing a critical and reflective approach to reality, with a view to beneficial changes to improve the current scenario.⁽³⁷⁾

In the meantime, it is necessary to provide enough hours for the approach to be adequate. In this study, a wide variation was found, from shorter courses - aimed at specific competencies to those with more than 400 hours, with most of the time allocated to curricular internships. Even though there is no consensus, targeted educational interventions have a positive impact on leadership development but there is still a need for a better definition of how they should be planned and applied.⁽³⁸⁾

When analyzing the semesters in which leadership-oriented subjects are offered, there was a predominance in the 4th year of the course. This may be related to the need for students to mature in order to absorb the content, given that the training of nurses is based on numerous skills and competencies, built up during the training process, including a multiplicity of knowledge, practices, competencies, and skills needed to become leaders.⁽³⁹⁾

In view of this, the training of nurse leaders is a strategic objective that favors working relationships with the team. However, health institutions need programs that encourage this competence and professionals who favor health management. In this way, the development of leadership potential while still in training and its ongoing improvement in health services needs to be a premise, and is still a concern shared by managers, teachers, students, and professionals in their working practices.⁽⁴⁰⁾

The study is limited by the unavailability of PPPs, syllabuses, and, in some cases, official information portals, especially in African countries, making it impossible to analyze the curriculum offered by the institutions.

In terms of contributions to Nursing practice, this is the first study to analyze the role of leadership in the training of nurses in Portuguese-speaking countries. The findings suggest the importance of articulating management in the PPPs of the institutions that train these professionals in these countries, in order to include aspects of nurse leadership. This could foster important changes in the academic environment, enabling students to have a different education and be better equipped to work in the job market with confidence and leadership.

CONCLUSION

It is noteworthy that only three countries have programs with courses on "leadership": Brazil, Portugal, and Macao. Such finding points to a gap in the training of nurses in the regions evaluated. This scenario is all the more worrying given that Nursing is still struggling to structure and strengthen associations that fight for the development of nurses as leaders and managers and for the profession to be recognized by government bodies in these countries.

Therefore, there is a need to reflect on the inclusion of the theoretical and practical study of leadership in Nursing degrees, with a view to formulating changes that promote improvements in the training of nurses, so that they can act as competent managers and leaders in health services.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Study conception or design: Sousa VTS, Paiva JS, Nogueira MRN, Vasconcelos PF. Data collection: Sousa VTS, Paiva JS, Nogueira MRN. Data analysis and interpretation: Sousa VTS, Paiva JS, Nogueira MRN. Writing of the article or critical review: Sousa VTS, Paiva JS, Nogueira MRN, Leite ACRM, Costa EC, Araújo TM, Vasconcelos PF. Final approval of the version to be published: Sousa VTS, Paiva JS, Nogueira MRN, Leite ACRM, Costa EC, Araújo TM, Vasconcelos PF.

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