

REFLEXION

Between borders and knowledge: a Freidsonian sociological reading of internationalization in nursing

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Graduation strengthens professional autonomy according to Freidson.
2. Internationalization expands networks and boosts professional competencies.
3. Advanced training consolidates professional status and legitimacy in Nursing.
4. Global Connection Strengthens Freidsonian Pillars of Specialized Knowledge.

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Establish a sociological analysis of the importance of internationalization in postgraduate nursing, based on Freidson's sociological assumptions. **Method:** Theoretical-reflective essay on internationalization in postgraduate nursing based on the assumptions of the sociology of Freidson's professions. The analysis was organized into two axes: Historical contextualization of postgraduate nursing in Brazil, historical rescue from the emergence of postgraduate nursing and its social context; The internationalization in the context of postgraduate nursing considers evaluative aspects carried out by CAPES and its importance for autonomy and professional status. **Results:** The internationalization is materialized by various academic strategies and connects international research networks that strengthen the profession, increase its autonomy and qualify scientific production. **Conclusion:** It is argued that internationalization is not just an opportunity, but an essential requirement, including assessed by CAPES, for Brazilian nursing to reach recognition and insertion in a globalized society.

DESCRIPTORS: Sociology; Internationality; International Cooperation; Nursing; Education, Nursing, Graduate.

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INTRODUCTION

The postgraduate in nursing in Brazil consolidated historically in 1972, with the approval of the first Master's Degree in Nursing, implemented at the Anna Nery School of Nursing. This institutional framework represented a decisive step towards building the professional identity of nursing, enabling the profession to cease to be perceived exclusively as technical practice to be recognized as an autonomous scientific field, based on systematized knowledge and production of scientific knowledge¹.

This scientific consolidation movement is directly related to the central concept of the sociology of professions proposed by Eliot Freidson², which emphasizes specialized knowledge as the main resource of power and autonomy of professions. For Freidson, the legitimacy and social prestige of a profession derive from control and mastery over a systematized body of knowledge, which confers self-regulation and autonomy in the execution of professional practices. Thus, nursing, by establishing graduate courses and developing scientific research, strengthens their professional status through the appropriation of this specialized knowledge.

Freidson structures his sociological analysis of professions from three fundamental pillars: professional autonomy, specialized knowledge as power base, and status in the division of work. Professional autonomy translates into the ability of the profession to control its own field of action, avoiding external subordinations that could compromise its social legitimacy. Specialized knowledge ensures the technical and scientific authority necessary to maintain this autonomy. Finally, the status and division of work indicate the relative position of the profession in the social system, especially in the face of historical hierarchical relationships that cross the field of healthcare. Therefore, the expansion of the postgraduate in nursing and its rigorous evaluation by bodies such as the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Level Personnel (CAPES) are essential mechanisms for strengthening these structural dimensions of the profession².

In this context, it is noted that the postgraduate programs in nursing have sought the continuous elevation of their academic standards, driven by the four-year evaluations of CAPES. This agency, responsible for regulating and promoting graduate education in Brazil, establishes strict criteria that not only guarantee the quality of training, but also stimulate the competitiveness of programs, favoring their insertion in the national and international scenarios³. Such insertion is a crucial strategy for the scientific strengthening of nursing, as it expands the borders of knowledge and promotes the profession's participation in global networks of scientific production.

The internationalization of postgraduate studies, recognized by CAPES as a structural criterion in the evaluation of programmes, thus emerges as a contemporary imperative in the face of the challenges imposed by globalization. This is not just a geographical shift, but a complex process of cultural and academic immersion that potentiates the critical training of nurses, making them able to dialogue with multiple sociocultural contexts and develop innovative solutions to global health problems³⁻⁴.

In addition, internationalization plays a strategic role in the expansion of scientific cooperation networks and the exchange of knowledge, elements that contribute to technological innovation and to the elevation of the professional status of nursing. As emphasized by Bourdieu⁵, such practices strengthen the symbolic capital of the profession, increasing its social recognition and consolidating its position in the field of professions. Thus, internationalization strengthens the Freidsonian pillars of professional autonomy and specialist knowledge, by promoting the insertion of nursing in global debates and by broadening the social recognition arising from accumulated cultural and

scientific capital, as a strategic movement to strengthen identity, autonomy, articulating postgraduate training on a global scale.

Under this perspective, the sociology of professions provides a valuable analytical framework for understanding the consolidation of nursing as a scientific profession. By examining how certain occupations structure their knowledge, legitimate their practices and gain autonomy, this field evidences the relevance of institutional instruments, such as graduate programs, for the strengthening of professional status. The Freidsonian approach evidences that the appropriation of specialist knowledge, coupled with the ability to self-regulate and strategic insertion in national and international networks, constitutes a central element for the construction of professional identity and for the social recognition of nursing as an autonomous scientific field.

In view of these considerations, this study proposes an analysis from the sociology of the professions of Eliot Freidson on the importance of internationalization for the development of nursing, highlighting it as a strategic vector for the consolidation of professional autonomy, the legitimacy of scientific knowledge and the expansion of the social status of nursing in the contemporary global scene.

METHOD

This is a theoretical-reflective essay on the importance of internationalization for nursing, conducted in 2024, designed from an experience of academic mobility (sandwich doctorate) at the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico. This experience constituted a reflective and epistemological device, allowing to observe, in situ, the dynamics of valuation, autonomy and recognition of nursing in distinct academic contexts.

This academic immersion in an international context allowed to reflect and guide the analytical process, based on the sociology of the professions of Eliot Freidson. The reflexive process was structured from analytical axes built on the basis of interpretative categorization of theoretical findings, convergent to the central objective of the essay. This strategy made it possible to articulate the historic rescue from institutionalization of postgraduate nursing in Brazil and then approach internationalization as an object of CAPES evaluation and as a way to broaden the boundaries of the profession and ensure its autonomy, in a globalized context. These aspects are articulated with the central axes of Freidsonian sociology. The creation of analysis axes was guided in the categorization of the findings through an interpretative analysis converging to the research objective.

The historical context of postgraduate nursing in Brazil, makes a historic rescue from the emergence of postgraduate nursing and its social context. The second axis addresses internationalization in the context of postgraduate nursing, considers evaluative aspects carried out by CAPES and its importance for autonomy and professional status, in a globalized context, analyzed in the light of the sociological theoretical reference of Eliot Freidson.

Freidson's choice of sociological theory is based on its relevance to understanding the process of consolidation and expansion of professions in the global setting. When addressing the internationalization of nursing, it is essential to reflect on the positioning of the profession in the scientific field in a global setting.

DISCUSSION

Historical context of postgraduate nursing in Brazil

The trajectory of graduate nursing in Brazil is marked by a gradual process of academic and scientific construction, which is articulated with the historical development of the profession and with the social and educational transformations of the country, articulated to the construction of the professionalism of nursing, according to Freidson's concepts, in response to the growing complexity of health care and the need for social legitimacy of the profession. It had as an institutional framework the promulgation of the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (Law No. 4.024/1961) and its regulation by the Federal Council of Education in 1965, followed by the University Reform of 1968 (Law No. 5.540/1968), which formally structured the courses *lato sensu* and *stricto sensu* in the country⁶⁻⁷.

After the creation of the first MSc course of EEAN/UFRJ there was the expansion of postgraduate programs to other regions of Brazil, spreading the research and production of knowledge of Brazilian nursing. The creation of the first doctoral course in nursing in Latin America took place in 1981, at the USP, with effective start in 1982, representing a milestone for the consolidation of research and the formation of highly qualified faculty⁶.

Starting in the 1990s, with the strengthening of the support policies of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Level Personnel (CAPES) and the maturing of existing programs, the graduate degree in nursing has consolidated as a relevant scientific field, expanding the number of dissertations, theses and publications indexed in national and international journals⁸.

Despite significant growth, challenges persist, such as regional inequality in access to programmes, especially in the northeastern and northeastern regions, although decentralization and interinstitutional cooperation initiatives are progressively expanding the capacity of *strictu sensu* training⁹.

Currently, the postgraduate in nursing in Brazil occupies a strategic position in the production of knowledge in healthcare, in the formation of leaders and in the internationalization of research, strengthening the autonomy and scientific identity of the profession. The historical course demonstrates that its consolidation was not a punctual event, but a continuous process, supported by public policies, institutional expansion and increasing insertion of nursing in the global scientific scene.

The historical trajectory of postgraduate nursing in Brazil consolidates academically and socially as a movement of construction and professional consolidation, and can be understood in the light of the sociology of the professions of Eliot Freidson and supported by three independent pillars: autonomy, the institutionalization of postgraduate nursing represents the strengthening of the profession and the transformation from a historically subordinated occupation into a profession with scientific and organizational autonomy; specialized knowledge, transforms nursing into a field of production of autonomous knowledge and not just consumer of science; professional status, social and symbolic representation of autonomy and specialized knowledge, an advance in the social legitimation of the role of the nurse.

The institutionalization of postgraduate education in Brazil has built the structural and symbolic foundations that enable, at present, the strategic insertion of the profession in processes of internationalization. This contemporary movement is therefore the

continuity and expansion of a path started decades ago, now powered by the demands and opportunities of an interconnected global landscape.

Internationalization in the context of postgraduate nursing

Internationalization is a fundamental strategy for improving the scientific and professional training of nurses and strengthening the visibility of the profession on a global scale, promoting the sharing of ideas and cooperative training between the institutions¹⁰.

The process of internationalization has materialized through various initiatives and promotional editorials, such as the academic exchange program, called the doctorate sandwich, which occurs through agreements between Brazilian and foreign universities. Actions that foster the dialogue between Brazilian and foreign institutions, fostering the global character of teaching and science, these initiatives aim to encourage graduate students to explore distinct and multifaceted contexts¹¹.

In addition to the individual experiences, the CAPES assessment and guidance documents have reinforced the importance of internationalization. Indicators such as international mobility of faculty and students, partnerships with foreign networks and institutions, co-orientations, joint supervision, double titulation and participation in international events are recognized as strategic components for the qualification of postgraduate programs in health, including nursing¹¹.

Under the Freidsonian perspective, internationalization strengthens nursing through its connection in global networks of research and teaching, named by Freidson as the power of the occupational group, which represents the ability of the profession to determine its own qualification and performance criteria. The conclusion of agreements between the institutions expands the influence of Brazilian nursing in defining international scientific agendas, which strengthens the social function of the profession by promoting intercultural and ethical competencies necessary for practice in global health contexts¹².

More than a CAPES assessment requirement, internationalization, in the Freidsonian reference, constitutes a strategic instrument to consolidate the profession in the global scientific scene and sustain its social legitimacy, while promoting intercultural and ethical competencies essential for practice in global health contexts¹⁰.

In this context, the internationalization of postgraduate nursing works directly on the three Freidsonian pillars of professions. Professional autonomy is enhanced by enabling nursing to develop their own practices, standards and research in dialogue with global standards, reducing external dependencies and consolidating their ability to self-regulate. The specialist knowledge is broadened through access to international research networks, exchange of knowledge and participation in global scientific debates, raising the technical-scientific level of the profession. Finally, the status of nursing is strengthened as insertion into international academic and scientific scenarios increases its social and symbolic prestige, recognizing the profession as an autonomous and legitimate field not only nationally, but also globally.

However, internationalization in postgraduate nursing is not a homogeneous movement. While expanding the scientific reach of the profession, it also shows regional and institutional asymmetries that guide the funding flows, often concentrated in hegemonic networks and institutions¹¹⁻¹⁴. In light of the Freidsonian benchmark, such inequalities compromise the effective reach of professional autonomy and, consequently, the status of the profession, as they favor the legitimacy and recognition of innovations

produced by hegemonic groups². Thus, internationalization should be understood as a political-organizational movement, in which entities, knowledge and powers are negotiated, reflecting dynamics of dispute and affirmation within the scientific and professional field of nursing.

CONCLUSION

Internationalization is both an academic imperative and a tool for professional strengthening. From a sociological point of view, it expands the legitimacy and autonomy of nursing, inserting it into networks of production and validation of knowledge that transcend borders. Meeting the CAPES requirements in this field does not just mean meeting institutional goals, but taking an active role in building a global, critical and socially relevant nursing. However, this movement also reveals ethical-political tensions and regional asymmetries between epistemological centers and peripheries, challenging the autonomy gained by the profession in local contexts, transcending the academic field and reflecting a social and political struggle.

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