

NURSE PROFESSION STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES ON EXIT EXAMINATION PREPARATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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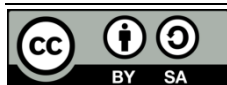
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Abstract.

Exit examination is a mandatory requirement for nurse profession students, making it crucial to understand their experiences during preparation. This qualitative study aims to explore the experiences of nurse profession students in preparing for their exit examinations, a critical component in their transition from academic learning to professional practice. Using in-depth interviews with six nurse profession students from Universitas Advent Indonesia, Bandung, the research investigates the physical, psychological, spiritual, social and economic aspects that influence their preparation process. The findings reveal the themes of physical health, mental strength, spiritual practices, social connections and financial challenges. These findings underscore the importance of addressing the holistic needs of nurse profession students during exit examination preparation and suggest that a balanced approach encompassing physical, mental, spiritual, social and economic support can enhance student well-being and improve examination outcomes.



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A. INTRODUCTION

The exit examination is a process used to assess a student's knowledge, skills, and attitudes based on professional standards (Sepriyanda et al., 2019). This comprehensive evaluation is given to students as they near the completion of their educational program. In nursing programs, the nursing exit exam is typically administered towards the end of a student's education, usually just before graduation or licensure. Its purpose is to determine whether students have gained the necessary knowledge, clinical skills, and critical thinking abilities to perform safely and effectively as registered nurses (Palingrunji et al., 2021). After successfully passing the exit examination, nursing students may receive a

nurse registration certificate, known as Surat Tanda Registrasi (STR). This certificate is crucial for practicing as a professional nurse in various healthcare environments, including hospitals, clinics, and other medical facilities (Kemenkes, 2019). According to Article 2 of Regulation Number 1796/MENKES/SK/VIII/2011 issued by the Ministry of Health, health employees are required to possess a registration certificate (Kemenkes, 2011)

In Indonesia, the Nurse Profession program is a required postgraduate course for those who have completed a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing. This program aims to equip nurses for professional practice through advanced

clinical training, leadership skills, and ethical education (AIPNI, 2021). The study period lasts between one to two years, with a curriculum that emphasizes clinical practices, advanced patient care, health management, and ethical considerations in nursing. Successfully finishing the program allows graduates to take the exit examination necessary for obtaining their registration certificate (Kemdikbud, 2020).

Previous studies indicate that nursing students have diverse experiences when preparing for their exit exams, influenced by their educational backgrounds, study methods, and the support they receive from their institutions. Some students feel well-prepared thanks to organized review programs, collaboration with peers, and access to extensive resources (Setiawaty et al., 2021). In contrast, others face considerable stress and anxiety, often stemming from unclear expectations, insufficient preparation time, or lack of guidance (Brodersen et al., 2020). These differing experiences underscore the need for personalized support, such as customized study plans and stress management strategies, to ensure that every student is ready for the crucial assessments that signify their transition from nursing education to professional practice (Syapitri et al., 2020). Additionally, variations in preparation can impact students' confidence and, ultimately, their performance on the exit exam, highlighting the necessity for more uniform and effective preparation programs across nursing schools (Lubis, 2022).

Preparation is the surefire key to successfully taking the exit exam for nursing

students, and it is not just academic preparedness but also extends to physical, mental, social, and spiritual preparedness (Sitorus et al., 2024). Physically, one has to be in good health through proper rest, appropriate nutrition, and regular exercise to sustain energy and concentration. These may mentally include effective study habits, time management, and stress-reduction techniques that will allow them to retain information and do well under exam pressure (Setiawaty et al., 2021). Building a supportive network of peers, instructors, and family members is also crucial socially to alleviate stress and encourage them throughout this period of intense studying. Spiritually, the sense of balance and purpose is nurtured through meditation, prayer, or reflection, thus building resilience and emotional well-being (Judha et al., 2022). Thus, nursing students will be able to approach the exit exam in a holistic manner with confidence, clarity, and mental fortitude to succeed (Hadi et al., 2020).

The Nurse Profession program at Universitas Advent Indonesia (UNAI) is a comprehensive postgraduate program designed to equip nursing graduates with the advanced clinical, theoretical, and professional skills required to excel in their roles as registered nurses. The program, therefore, prepares students for the exit examination, which is one of the most important requirements to get the registration certificate to become licensed nurses. Preparation for this high-level test, however, highly varies among students depending on factors related to institutional support and personal study habits and

mental preparations. With such diversity in experiences, there is a need to explore the experiences of the students in preparing for the exit examination. This study therefore, seeks to explore the experiences of the nurse profession students on exit examination preparation. The study will seek to inform the improvement in curriculum, support systems, and resources available for students to enhance their readiness and performance on the exit examination through an understanding of these experiences.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The research was carried out at Universitas Advent Indonesia (UNAI), concentrating on students in the nursing profession program. This institution was chosen due to its strong reputation in nursing education, and its students are currently gearing up for the exit exam, a significant milestone in their training. The study aims to explore the experiences of nursing students as they prepare for this crucial examination. It focuses on the challenges they face, the strategies they employ, their emotional responses, and the support systems they rely on during this preparation phase. The study specifically targets nursing students who are in the final stages of their program and are preparing for the exit exam, which is essential for obtaining their registration certificate and becoming licensed nurses in Indonesia.

This study involved six nursing students from the nurse profession program at UNAI, all in the final phase of their studies and getting

ready for their exit examination. A semi-structured interview guide was created to help conduct one-on-one interviews, focusing on the students' personal experiences related to the physical, psychological, spiritual, social and economic aspects of their preparation. The interviews were held in a quiet and comfortable setting to ensure privacy and encourage open communication. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were carried out with a purposive sample of nursing students who are preparing for their exit examinations.

Operational definitions including exit examination, nurse profession students' and preparation. Exit examination is the final assessment that nursing students in the nurse profession program must complete to evaluate their readiness to work as professional nurses in Indonesia. Nurse profession students' experiences refers to the personal experiences that they face during the preparation for the exit examination. Preparation refers to various methods and techniques employed by students to prepare for the exit examination. This includes their physical, psychological, spiritual, social and economic aspects of preparation.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected from interviews, which involves the identification and interpretation of patterns or themes within data (Creswell et al., 2018). The steps include familiarization of data, initialing codes, theme development, reviewing themes and reporting the findings (Polit et al., 2018)

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this qualitative study on the experiences of nurse profession students at Universitas Advent Indonesia as they prepare for their exit examination highlight a variety of preparation strategies that include physical, psychological, spiritual, social and economic elements. Insights gathered from in-depth interviews shed light on how these five dimensions of preparation influence students' readiness for the exam. The five key themes that emerged are physical health, mental strength, spiritual practices, social connections and financial challenges.

The theme of physical health emerged prominently among the informants, who noted that maintaining their well-being was a crucial aspect of their preparation for the exit examination. They highlighted that regular sleep, exercise, and balanced nutrition were essential for sustaining energy levels and ensuring mental clarity. Nursing students particularly stressed the significance of staying physically healthy, as fatigue and poor health were seen as major obstacles to effective studying. Some students mentioned participating in light physical activities, like walking or jogging, to relieve stress and enhance focus. However, others acknowledged that during intense study periods, they often neglected physical self-care, which led to burnout and fatigue.

The significance of physical preparation for exam success is immense. Physical health has a direct impact on cognitive abilities, concentration, and emotional stability

(Palingrungi et al., 2021). However, the study revealed that some students found it challenging to maintain physical self-care alongside demanding study schedules, resulting in burnout. This indicates that nursing programs should promote healthier habits among students, like integrating exercise into their daily routines and emphasizing the importance of rest during study periods (Monica et al., 2023). Additionally, universities could provide resources such as workshops focused on sustaining physical health during stressful times, which could assist students in managing their well-being more effectively (Delfina et al., 2021)

Mental strength emerged as a crucial element of the exit exam experience. Students shared a variety of emotions, including anxiety, fear of failure, and self-doubt. The pressure to pass the exam and obtain their professional licensure created significant stress. Many students mentioned experiencing "imposter syndrome," feeling unprepared despite their extensive training. To cope with these psychological challenges, students employed different strategies. Some focused on time management techniques to alleviate feelings of being overwhelmed, while others practiced relaxation methods like deep breathing and mindfulness to ease their anxiety. Psychological preparation also included building confidence through self-reflection and concentrating on their past achievements in their academic journey.

Psychological preparation has become one of the most important and intricate

elements of getting ready for exit exams (Marsidi, 2021). The emotional strain associated with preparing for such a high-stakes test can be overwhelming, leading many students to feel anxious, doubtful, and stressed (Minarsih, 2021). A common experience among students is imposter syndrome, where they feel unprepared despite clear evidence of their abilities. This highlights the necessity for improved psychological support in nursing education (Yunia, 2023). Universities might consider implementing more focused interventions to support students' mental health, such as offering stress management workshops, counseling services, and regular check-ins to help them cope with exam-related anxiety. Moreover, promoting a culture of academic resilience and self-affirmation could empower students to build their confidence and better handle the challenges of exam preparation (INDARYANI et al., 2020; Marsidi, 2021)

Spiritual practices played an important role for many students, especially those who incorporated religious or spiritual activities into their daily lives. Students frequently mentioned that prayer, meditation, or spiritual reflection gave them strength and resilience, helping them remain focused and calm during stressful times. Engaging in spiritual preparation was viewed as a means to cultivate inner peace and uphold a sense of purpose throughout the exam preparation process. For some, spirituality also created a sense of community, as they would gather to pray or discuss their challenges with fellow students who shared similar faith-based practices.

For many students, spiritual practices played an important role, especially for those who incorporated religious or spiritual practices into their daily lives. They often shared that activities like prayer, meditation, or spiritual reflection gave them strength and resilience, helping them remain focused and calm during stressful times. This preparation was viewed as a means to cultivate inner peace and uphold a sense of purpose throughout the exam preparation journey. Additionally, for some, spirituality fostered a sense of community, as they would come together to pray or discuss their challenges with peers who engaged in similar faith-based practices.

Spirituality served as a crucial source of strength and resilience for many students, with practices like prayer, meditation, and spiritual reflection providing comfort and mental clarity (Marsidi, 2021). This indicates that spiritual preparation should be acknowledged as an important part of holistic student development. Nursing programs might think about creating spaces for spiritual reflection or incorporating mindfulness practices into the curriculum to assist students in managing stress and improving their emotional well-being (Syapitri et al., 2020). Additionally, acknowledging the variety of students' spiritual beliefs and practices can help create an inclusive environment where all students feel supported in their preparation (Judha et al., 2022).

Social connections including the support from peers, family, and faculty, played a crucial role in how students prepared for their exams. Many students found peer study groups

particularly beneficial for reinforcing their learning, boosting motivation, and providing emotional support. They also emphasized the importance of discussing challenging concepts with classmates and sharing effective study strategies. Family support was essential for maintaining emotional well-being, with numerous students noting that encouragement from their loved ones helped reduce stress and foster resilience. Faculty support was also deemed important, as students highlighted the value of mentorship, guidance on exam content, and reassurance from their instructors. However, some students pointed out that while peer support was abundant, faculty support could benefit from being more structured and tailored, especially for those facing specific academic challenges or high levels of anxiety.

Support from peers, family, and faculty was crucial for students' emotional well-being during exam preparation. Peer study groups proved to be a particularly effective strategy for enhancing learning and providing moral support (Fitria et al., 2024). The social interactions and shared experiences helped alleviate feelings of isolation and stress. However, some students voiced a need for more structured support from faculty, such as personalized academic advising or mentoring. The study indicates that nursing programs should actively promote a sense of community and collaboration among students, encourage peer learning, and ensure that faculty are accessible and proactive in offering both academic and emotional support. Faculty could take a more active role in reducing student

stress by organizing regular office hours, providing feedback on practice exams, and mentoring students who experience higher levels of anxiety (Glorya et al., 2023).

Financial challenges emerged as a major source of stress for numerous nursing students. Many voiced worries about the financial demands of tuition, exam fees, and the expenses associated with study materials. A significant number had to juggle part-time or full-time jobs to make ends meet, which restricted their study time. This financial pressure contributed to heightened stress levels, and some students shared their concerns about being able to concentrate on their studies while dealing with these economic burdens.

The economic challenges that nursing students encounter play a vital role in shaping their overall experience and readiness for exit examinations. With the rising costs of education worldwide, financial stress can pose significant obstacles for students, impacting their academic performance and mental well-being. This study's findings support existing research indicating that financial strain can adversely affect students' academic results, elevate stress levels, and contribute to burnout (Lubis, 2022)

D. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the importance of providing comprehensive support to nursing students as they prepare for their exit examination. Effective preparation involves more than just academic learning; it encompasses physical, psychological, spiritual,

and social aspects. A student's physical health, mental strength, spiritual practices, and social connections all play a vital role in their readiness and performance during the exam. To better assist students, nursing programs should implement a holistic approach to exam preparation that includes physical wellness initiatives, mental health resources, spiritual support, and robust social networks. By addressing these interconnected factors, universities can help students manage the pressures of exam preparation and transition more smoothly into their professional roles as confident and well-rounded nurses.

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