

Developing and Implementing Policies for the HESI™ Exit Exam: A Qualitative Study

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Background: Schools of nursing use standardized exit examinations as a means of testing student readiness for the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN). There is little congruency between program policies that govern these exams. A phenomenological study explored policy creation and implementation practices utilized for the Elsevier HESI™ Exit Examination (E²).

Method: Snowballing and purposive sampling was implemented for recruitment of nurse educators. The Elsevier national database (N=600) nursing programs that used the E² was employed for initial recruitment. The final sample was comprised of 15 deans, program directors, and faculty from nine different states.

Results: The primary reason schools made exit exam policy changes were NCLEX-RN passing scores. In this study E² was a graduation criterion at 13% (n=2) of the schools. Most schools used a benchmark of 850 for success (n=10) and followed testing with remediation. One essential component of success for the E² was seen when value was given to the exam. At many schools, policy changes are initiated at the faculty level, unless a higher policy making body hands down a decision.

Conclusion: As new policies were written and student success increased, faculty and students alike were found to be accepting of policy changes.

Abstract

- National Standardized Tests prior licensure are implemented to inform faculty
 - Predict licensure or certification exam passage
 - Determine student progression and remediation
 - Evaluation of curriculum
- Testing policy impacts students, faculty and universities
 - Reputation and accreditation
 - Ethical and legal ramifications
 - Schools of Nursing policy varies across the U.S.

Background

- A phenomenological study explored policy creation and implementation practices utilized for the Elsevier HESI™ RN Exit Exam (E²).
- What are baccalaureate (BSN) and associate degree nursing (ADN) program practices regarding exit exam policy creation, implementation, and remediation?

Research Question

- Following IRB approval
- Email invitation to participate
- Informed consent obtained
- Demographic data collected
- Semi-structured telephone interview
- Recording transcription by Adept Word Management

Data Collection

- Elsevier HESI™ database
 - Purposeful sample of exam users for fiscal year 2010
 - Size, location and program type
 - Electronic invitation for participation was sent by the test producer to 48 Deans/Directors of BSN or ADN programs
- Purposeful sampling
 - Nine participants responded within the timeframe
- Snowballing sampling
 - Eight schools contacted and 6 schools participated
- Telephone interviews continued until saturation (N=15)
- Digital recording and Transcription by professional company

Methods

Demographic data

- Job title
- Number of years in position
- Program design
- Program funding
- Number of students
- Age Range
- Gender
- Ethnicity

Semi-structured interview guide

- Tell me about the exit exam policy at your school of nursing
- How is the exit exam policy implemented?
- Tell me about your remediation methods.

Instruments

Demographic data sheet – Descriptive statistics

- Students
 - Number in program, age range, gender, ethnicity
- Faculty
 - Job title, years as in this position, type of school/program, funding source

Treatment of Data

- Analyzed using Giorgi's method (1985)
 - Read each transcript completely
 - Get a sense of the whole
 - Re-read transcripts often
 - “meaningful units”
 - Grouped important terms / common themes
 - Identified common patterns
- Examples documented using direct quotes

Data Analysis: Interviews

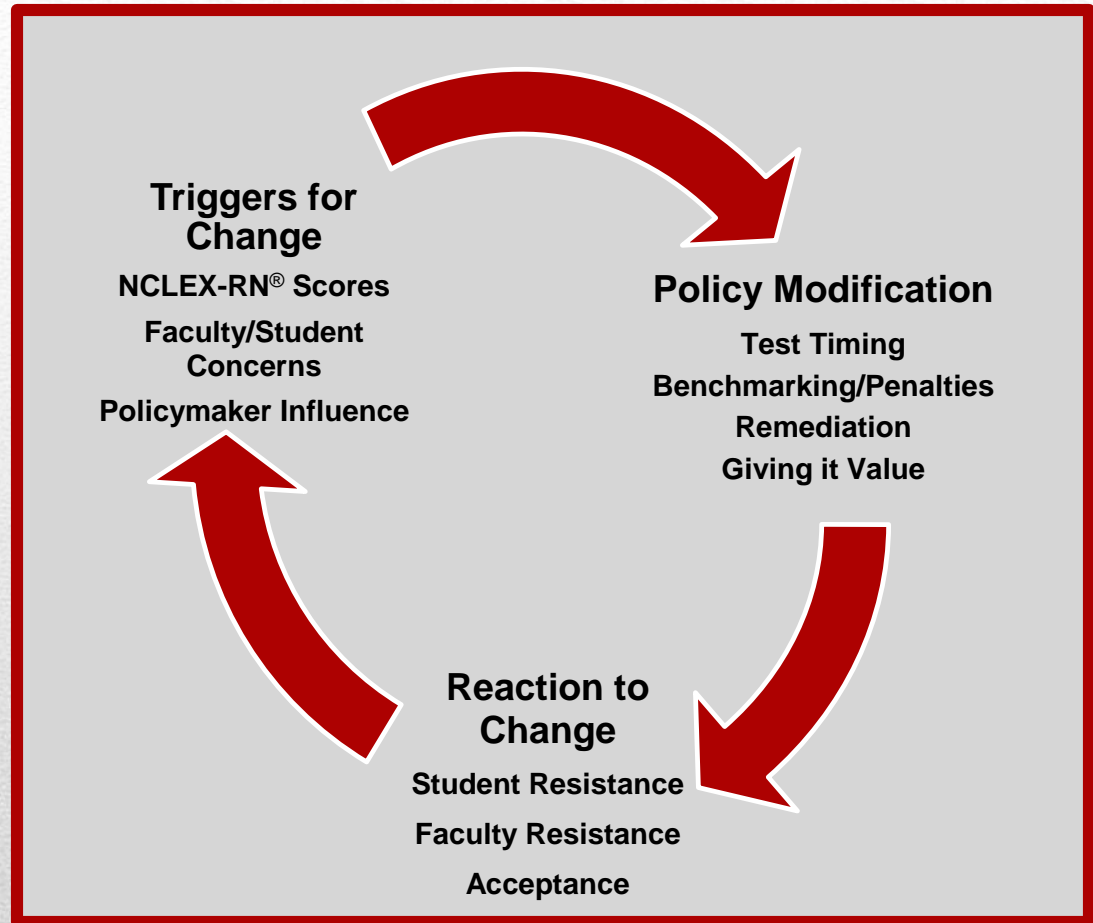
- Diversity of sample: 9 states nationwide
- Gender
Female 85% ($n=11$); Male 20-35% ($n=4$)
- Ethnicity:
Caucasian 59%, mixed diversity 41%
 - 1 school African American 90% (average 17-37%)
 - 1 school Hispanic 48% (average 11-19%)
 - 1 school Asian 21% (average 3-17%)

Student Characteristics

- Schools
 - BSN ($n=9$, 60%)
 - AD ($n=6$, 40%)
- Funding
 - Public 73% ($n=11$)
 - Private 27% ($n=4$)
- Program size
 - >350 students 46% ($n=7$)
 - <350 students 53% ($n=8$)

School Characteristics

- Triggers for Change
- Policy Modification
- Reactions to Change



Major Themes

- NCLEX-RN Scores

“...E²...one of the ways they [the faculty] decided they would try. And clearly the NCLEX scores have improved considerably.”

- Student/Faculty Concerns

“...a B in the class from all the class grades and yet they are failing because they could not pass the E².”

Nine (60%) schools discussed **cheating** as an issue *“...that the faculty has to address on an ongoing basis”*.

- Policymakers

“The board [BON] doesn't ever mandate anything, but they make very strong suggestions.”

- Modify the Policy

“Once we attached the [course] grade to it, you know, there was no more discussion”.

Triggers for Change

- **Timing of Testing**

...early in the semester...have the entire semester to coach.

...end of the course was always a way to see whether or not the students were being adequately prepared.

- **Benchmarking and Penalties**

66% (n= 10) 850 HESI score, 27% (n=4) 900, 7% (n=1) 800

- **Remediation**

100% remediation, 93% (n=14) Evolve program, 47% (n=7) added reviews

- **Making the E² Count**

“... if it doesn't count for something for students they're like, 'Okay, well I'm not going to do that'.”

Policy Modification

- Resistance of students

“Well most of the students are a bit resentful for having to take it [E²].”

- Resistance of faculty

“I think the biggest issue you run into is any time you try to change something somebody is not going to like it.”

- Acceptance

“... we find that it [E² exam] gives them a feeling of, ‘... I can do this NCLEX. I can pass this test’. So they’re glad after the fact.”

Reaction to Change

- 13% require passing HESI™ to graduate
 - 44.74% require passing HESI™ to graduate (Langford & Young, 2013)
- 100% require remediation
 - 57% require remediation (Young & Willson, 2012)
- 100% give HESI™ during senior year
 - 100% give HESI™ during senior year (Sifford & McDaniel, 2007)
- 66% use 850 Benchmark
 - 72% use 850 Benchmark (Langford & Young, 2013)
- 60% discussed cheating
 - 75% provide information defining cheating (McCabe, 2009)
- HESI™ grade value was 20-30% course grade
 - Placing value on HESI™ important. (Lauer & Yoho, 2013)

Discussion

- Policy making about Exit Exam testing is cyclical process initiated by negative triggers, followed by policy development, and ultimately implementation.
- Policy development dependent on needs of institutions related to issues determined by stakeholders and policymakers.
- Remediation important means of preparing for NCLEX-RN.

Conclusions

- Measuring student readiness to take NCLEX-RN important.
- Students must understand value of taking E².
- Deans/Directors should encourage faculty input as program policies are being crafted and implemented.

Implications

- Research regarding effectiveness of nursing program's specific testing and remediation policies to foster NCLEX-RN success.
- Evaluation of types of faculty mentoring and individual student remediation for best practices.
- Comparison of mandatory and non-mandatory remediation programs and their relationship to NCLEX-RN success.

Recommendations

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References

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Questions
