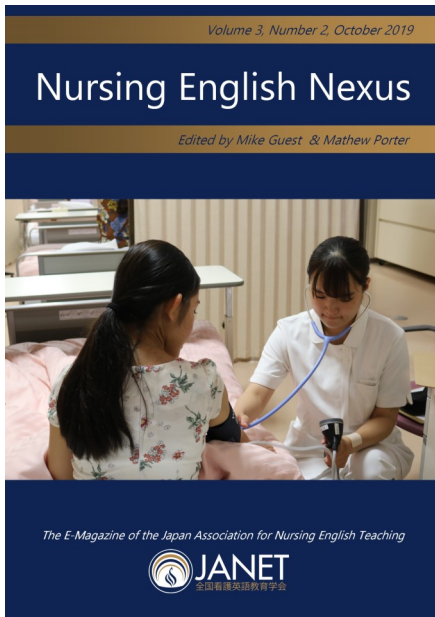


Enhancing Nurse-Patient Communication Through the Development of English Speaking Fluency Skills

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Enhancing Nurse-Patient Communication Through the Development of English Speaking Fluency Skills

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When we ask our nursing students to reflect on their English learning experiences and their English language ability, a common theme that emerges is students' desire to be able to speak English more fluently. This is perhaps not surprising seeing as research has shown that Japanese nurses' main need for using English is for the purpose of talking to patients, their families, or caregivers (Willey et al, 2016).

It has been reported that there is a relationship between the quality of small talk between nurses and patients and the positive health outcomes for the patients (Macdonald, 2016). In addition, nurses deal with patients who are under stress due to their illness. Engaging patients in general conversations may significantly reduce the patients' anxiety toward their medical condition and any procedures which need to be carried out. As a result, enhancing English-speaking skills can help to strengthen the nurse-patient relationship.

The Nara Medical University Department of Clinical English has developed a required English-speaking fluency programme, which extends over the first and second years, in order to help our students to improve their spoken English. The first-year nursing course is a general, four-skills communicative English course designed to prepare students for the more difficult content-based second-year nursing and healthcare English course.

Therefore, these fluency speaking activities aim to enhance students' English speaking ability by encouraging them to effectively communicate their ideas, opinions, and feelings in English, and to help them acquire the ability to engage in ongoing, ever-evolving conversations. Therefore, for the purposes of this article, we will explain more about

how the fluency speaking activities are set up and conducted.

One of our course principles involves flipping our classroom and providing students with course materials and handouts in advance of lessons. This includes the fluency speaking and fluency writing topics, which are aligned with the units in the course syllabus. Consequently, students are expected to be prepared for their fluency speaking activities in advance.

In addition, each lesson begins with a 10-minute fluency writing activity on the same or a similar topic as the fluency speaking activity, thus providing students with one further opportunity to prepare for the fluency speaking activity. Here is a topic example:

Writing: What foreign culture or cultures do you like? Why?

Speaking: Share your impressions of other cultures. How are they similar or different to Japanese culture?

The core component of the fluency speaking activities involves a five-minute pair speaking activity on a set topic as an integral exercise in every class. However, during the past year, we have also chosen two classes out of the four first-year nursing English language classes to add a three-person speaking activity to the programme. It is important to point out that an ongoing study is being conducted to assess the effectiveness of this three-person speaking activity as compared with the pair speaking activity.

During the pair speaking activity, students used their preparation notes and were also able to utilise their writing for the fluency writing activity which immediately preceded each fluency speaking

task. Students were then asked to pair up with a classmate for five minutes of English conversation about the topic.

As for the three-person speaking activity, students were divided into groups of three, and each student within the group was assigned a designated role.

The first role was Discussion Leader. For this role, the student was responsible for starting the conversation and making sure that the other students engaged in the conversation. The second role was that of Reporter. The reporter's job was to make notes about the ideas that were discussed, and then report one or more of those ideas back to the whole class. The final role was the Troubleshooter. This role involved writing down English words or expressions that students did not know or were uncertain about.

After the three-person speaking activity time was up (usually between 5-10 minutes), the reporters shared their group discussion ideas with the other students in the class. Next, the Troubleshooters disclosed any problematic or unclear words and expressions to the class, and then checked and discussed the meanings.

For example, when having difficulty expressing the meaning of the word *hadashi* (裸足, barefoot) during a discussion about their favourite childhood memories, all the class members were encouraged to participate in solving the language problem.

There were of course numerous challenges involved in implementing these speaking activities, both for teachers and for students. For the teachers, the question was how we could help our students to meet their expectations and expressed desire to improve their English-speaking skills. As a starting point, developing an encouraging approach to our students' speaking interactions seemed appropriate, while having various pair- and group-based speaking activities also seemed beneficial.

To assist students, we provided a number of learner support tools, including giving them the speaking topics in advance and providing handouts with guidance about how to start and how to

maintain a successful English conversation. Yet, in spite of all of this support, there were some problems with the implementation of these classroom speaking activities, particularly the three-person speaking activity. This activity was initially very time-consuming during the preparation phase, and some students had difficulty fulfilling their assigned roles. However, as both the students and the teachers became more accustomed to the activity format and flow, it began to bear fruit.

To pursue this further we asked our students for their feedback relating to the speaking activities, which was generally very positive and encouraging. Most students who participated in the three-person speaking activity said that they enjoyed the speaking time in general and that the teamwork aspect and the clear division of roles helped the conversations to progress. In particular, students' reflections upon the troubleshooter role also noted that it helped them in learning new and interesting expressions.

Overall, despite the potential shortcomings with coordinating teams, class time management, and different teachers' standards and expectations, these fluency speaking activities proved to be very successful. The speaking activities appear to help improve students' English speaking and listening fluency, and judging by the students' feedback, it may also help to create a stimulating and enjoyable classroom environment for both students and teachers.

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