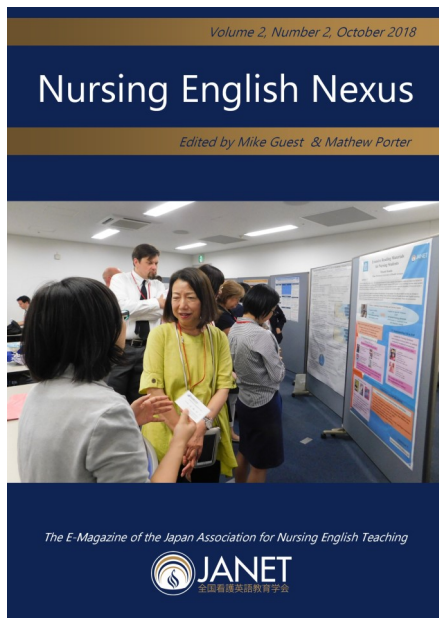


# Teaching Nursing English that Focuses on Students' Future Careers

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## Teaching Nursing English that Focuses on Students' Future Careers

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*Abstract: In the first part of this report I introduce my experiences teaching nursing English to first- and second-year students using a variety of unsuccessful approaches which motivated me to develop my own textbook and modify my teaching approach. This textbook consists of dialogs covering various authentic medical situations that serve as the basis for role-playing activities. In the second part of this report, I reflect on student reactions to the textbook.*

Since there is no foreign language component to the national examination for nurses, English does not seem to be important for students majoring in nursing at university and therefore they are not so motivated to learn it. However, due to an increasing number of both foreign tourists and residents in Japan, medical institutions are seeing more foreign patients and will need to have medical staff prepared to treat them.

Students at nursing schools study English for Specific Purposes (ESP), specifically nursing English, which is quite different from the general English they had learnt previously. As studying nursing English at university seems to be difficult for students encountering such content for the first time, teachers are required to take measures to support students' transition to learning nursing English. English teachers at universities thus need to make a concerted effort to bridge the gap between general English and nursing English.

### Approaches

I have taught English for 15 years at a university which consists of a school of medicine and a school of health sciences. The following approaches have been used in two English courses for nursing students: a course called *English* in the first semester of the first year and *Nursing English I* in the second semester of the second year.

#### First Approach

At first, the English course was focused on ESP reading comprehension, organized around a textbook about medicine and human biology written in simplified English. The aim of the

course was to give the first-year students an opportunity to review basic biology, which they had learnt at senior high school, and better understand it through English. Since students study biology-related subjects in other classes, I believed that they would be able to use their prior knowledge to understand what they read in English class. Important grammatical explanations and unknown vocabulary words were described in class, but only when students needed support. Students were required to prepare for the class by reading through the assigned content and looking up the words which they did not know.

From observation, first-year students seemed satisfied with the topics themselves but found it difficult overall to understand the content because of the specialized vocabulary which included anatomy items and the names of disorders and procedures. They were not confident that they were able to understand the meaning of the reading passages. Unable to make connections between related topics in other classes, it was hard for them to understand the content, and this seemed to cause a decrease in students' motivation to study.

#### Second Approach

In the Nursing English I course, I focused primarily on listening comprehension using a televised medical drama from overseas. The aim was to provide students with an enjoyable method for becoming familiar with medical terminology in English by watching a popular television show. Students are generally more interested in authentic audio-visual materials used in a reading

comprehension course, and are especially interested in television dramas even though they were not good at English. In these classes, students were shown the same scene a few times and completed a worksheet with fill-in-the-blank questions. Japanese translations and grammatical explanations were given as a key to recognizing the words needed for the blanks. However, some students were only able to follow the plot without catching any of the English to complete the answers, while others had difficulty choosing the right words from the scene despite being able to understand what was happening in more detail. It seemed that these materials raised students' interest in nursing-related topics and motivation in class, but the materials were beyond the students' listening comprehension level.

### **Third Approach**

Later, I tried adopting a general reading comprehension focus for the first-year course, using a current affairs textbook not limited to medical or nursing topics. The aim was for students to acquire an interest in current affairs. When asked, students did not show much interest in either watching nightly news programs or reading newspapers, but I believed it was important for university students to be exposed to timely topics and given opportunities to discuss their opinions. It was easy for students to understand current events in English because they could apply their existing knowledge of those events in Japanese. However, they were neither interested in current affairs, except when it concerned something or someone they liked, nor could they see how the course differed from previous English courses they had experienced in high school.

### **A New Approach**

Based on the above-mentioned observations and reflections, I then created a textbook focusing on actual interactions at hospitals, with the intent of providing students with some idea of how they

will use English in their future careers. Considering the increasing demand of foreign language skills for nurses, I thought it would be effective for students to learn relevant English and train to be able to use English using these actual situations. In addition, since nurses have a lot of opportunities to communicate with other healthcare staff at a hospital, the textbook introduced the roles of other medical staff so nursing students could learn about working as a member of a healthcare team. Using this textbook, I introduced a conversation-centered approach using role-plays and pair work. I believed this would lead to improvements in student motivation and more active participation in class.

### **Verifying the Approach**

To check the effects of introducing this new approach, I collected reaction papers and end-of-class questionnaires (Appendix 1) at the completion of each of the 15 classes in the second semester between October 2017 and January 2018 from all 132 second-year students enrolled in the faculty of nursing. All responses were anonymous. Students could write anything about the course in their reaction papers. The questionnaire contained multiple choice questions addressing the textbook's relevance, appearance, and the level of difficulty compared to the textbook used in the first-year class, plus an open question seeking feedback on the textbook and its use in class.

### **Results and Discussion**

Compared to the textbook used previously, 115 (87%) students rated the new textbook relevant or very relevant to their future careers. Not only did most students believe the classes based on this textbook would be useful and helpful for their future careers, students also indicated that the contents of the textbook were useful for their daily lives. For example, giving patients directions to the examination rooms can also be applied to

giving customers directions to the lavatory in their part-time job situations. In addition, 102 (77%) students felt the difficulty level was suitable. The appearance of the textbook, including the size of characters and use of colors, was also rated highly by 126 (95%) students.

In open comments and reaction papers, students reported greater interest in studying nursing English and increased motivation to study it because they were able to get clearer ideas of the types of interactions they would have with foreign patients in hospital situations. Since each dialog in this textbook is based on an actual medical situation, students can imagine their future working environments, which can contribute to increasing their motivation toward studying nursing English as indicated by Miyama (2000).

Furthermore, the conversation-centered approach adopted with the textbook focusing on role-playing in class helped make learning more practical and realistic. Students were actively involved in role-playing by changing the voices according to the roles and were able to perform despite having difficulty remembering expressions. Working in pairs or groups enabled students to feel at ease when studying English, even if they were not good at English. It is widely known that less apprehension when studying a language is effective for its acquisition (Miyama, 2000). These results make me believe I was able to help bridge the gap between ESP and general English and found a way to teach my nursing students practical and meaningful English more effectively.

### Conclusion

As illustrated above, I arrived at my current approach through a process of trial and error with other approaches and teaching materials, finally deciding to create my own textbook. When I created the textbook, I had the situations and dialogs reviewed by an interpreter at the

university hospital. This helped me feel more confident and comfortable teaching because I was sure that students would eventually encounter the situations and dialogs we practiced. I was also confident that the vocabulary and expressions introduced in the textbook would be useful to students in both their future and present lives.

It seems that students enjoyed role-playing, imagining as if they were nurses in the hospital, and I think this clear image of their future selves helped increase their motivation toward English learning. In addition, the practice of role-playing and a conversation-centered method supported by the textbook seemed to have reduced my students' anxiety about English. I also observed more cooperation as students seemed more comfortable to ask each other questions and try to solve problems together.

The presence of nurses with English skills is a benefit to both patients and healthcare staff for safe and secure care. These nurses are needed in response to the growing number of foreign patients requiring language support. If teachers can guide nursing students to ESP by helping them see that specific English is useful for their future careers but can also be adapted to general English used in daily lives, students can learn nursing English more actively without much difficulty. In this way, teachers can bridge the gap between general English and ESP and thereby better enable students to care for foreign patients in the future.

### Acknowledgements

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