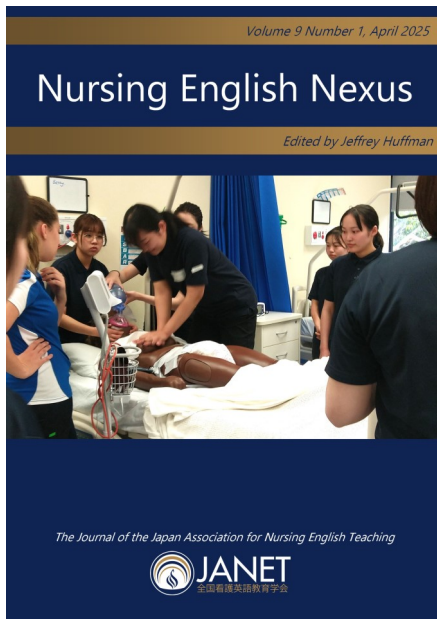


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Miku Nabuchi

Conestoga College



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The Importance of English Proficiency in Nursing Practice: Notes from a Nurse

Miku Nabuchi (moko.chibita@gmail.com)

Conestoga College, Ontario

Note: Miku Nabuchi was the recipient of a JANET conference grant in 2024 for a similarly titled presentation. Grants are awarded for outstanding presentation proposals from JANET members who lack other funding sources. Recipients are asked to contribute to Nexus.

This essay discusses the growing necessity of English in Japan due to globalization, emphasizing its importance for nurses working domestically and internationally. It examines the benefits of English proficiency in various nursing career paths and offers practical advice based on the author's personal experience in learning English. The essay highlights how English proficiency and the knowledge and skills it often brings can open learning and career opportunities in many countries.

Today, the need for English proficiency in Japan is increasing. According to recent data from the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), there were 3.59 million foreign residents in Japan in 2023, and 31.88 million inbound tourists in 2023, with the government aiming to increase inbound tourism to 60 million by 2030 (JNTO, 2024).

The benefits of English proficiency for nurses are not limited to those working in Japan, but also extend to those working abroad. For nurses working in Japan, there are three main benefits (Mancuso, 2016):

1. Improved communication with English-speaking patients.
2. Access to global nursing resources.
3. Enjoyment of diverse career opportunities.

Nurses in Japan usually develop their careers along one of three paths: "generalists," "specialists," and "educators." In all of these paths, broad experience and perspective are necessary, and English proficiency can be a valuable key to success. Generalists, for example,

can gain knowledge by searching for research articles in English, which gives them access to a wealth of information from all over the world. Specialists, who work in specific wards and need to know about up-to-date treatments and care for their patients, also benefit from access to global research. Educators have to generate new research and also stay up to date on recent evidence in their field, so that they can provide this information to their students. So, even for nurses who do not want to go abroad, they need to learn English for their career in Japan. Of course, if you want to widen your possible career paths by working as a nurse or nursing researcher or educator internationally, English proficiency becomes even more important. As for my own experiences, I joined a study program offered in collaboration with MD Anderson Hospital, which is one of the most well-known cancer hospitals. I had to submit an English essay as part of my application to join it. This program, which was conducted entirely in English, provided opportunities to connect with healthcare professionals worldwide and expand my nursing knowledge.

Having explained the impact of English proficiency on nurses and the benefits for their careers, I will now focus on how nursing students and nurses can improve their English skills. To continue practicing English, it is essential to clarify career goals and articulate why English learning is necessary. Identifying the specific reason to learn English is an important source of motivation to support continuous English learning. For nurses struggling with English, I recommend starting

with daily English conversation. This skill can be immediately applied in clinical settings and directly impacts patient satisfaction (Kamibayashi et al., 2020). When there are some patients who speak English, nurses who learn English can work smoothly and efficiently. Then, successful clinical experiences using English feed into your motivation to learn even more. I also want to emphasize the importance of perseverance in improving English proficiency. In reality, no one has an abundance of free time in their daily lives. People with established routines often feel they have no gaps in their schedules, and the idea of starting something new—like a hobby or studying—can seem impossible. Once a routine is set, it can feel difficult to change, and the thought of adding something as demanding as English learning might feel overwhelming. However, if this is the case, why not integrate English learning into your existing routine? By making it a part of your daily habits, you can turn English study into something as natural and automatic as brushing your teeth or having breakfast. Over time, this approach can make consistent learning achievable, even in the busiest of schedules.

Now I will share how I managed to incorporate English learning into my daily life as a nurse. When I started working, I found it challenging to balance English learning with my daily nursing duties. Nurses often work in high-stress environments that require urgent responses and interpersonal skills, leading to physical and mental strain. So, how can nursing students and nurses continue learning English? As a student, I encountered many new English words in my textbook. I would make it a daily habit to write down all the new words on a sheet of paper along with their meanings in order to memorize them. This daily routine helped me build a foundational knowledge of English, making it easier to continue learning as a professional. Reflecting on it now, I believe that the study habits and English foundation I built during my student days were

crucial. As a professional nurse, I faced challenges in continuing my studies alone, especially because nurses have to work night shifts. To overcome this, I created an online study community with members from around the world. It is a simple community which has a lot of members who want to study together. I have my own YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/@Nurse_miku) and Instagram account (https://www.instagram.com/miku_nurseo2/) to share about my study routine and how it helps me achieve my goals. People who want to join the group contact me, and I conduct interviews with them to decide on membership. This community makes me highly motivated. We hold morning study sessions via Zoom at 3 a.m., and the presence of motivated peers helps us build good habits together. If you find it difficult to continue alone, I recommend finding peers who share the goal of continuous learning, even if their specific goals differ.

Next, I would like to share my future goals and career vision related to English proficiency. In the future, I aim to learn about the concept of dementia villages outside Japan, particularly in Canada, and bring that knowledge back to Japan. Dementia villages, a concept originating in the Netherlands, are specialized care facilities for dementia patients. English proficiency will allow me to learn about nursing care practices abroad, thereby benefiting both Japanese healthcare and my own career.

I hope my experiences and suggestions will be useful for nurses. I strongly encourage nursing students and nurses to engage in daily English learning to broaden their networks, opportunities and knowledge.

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