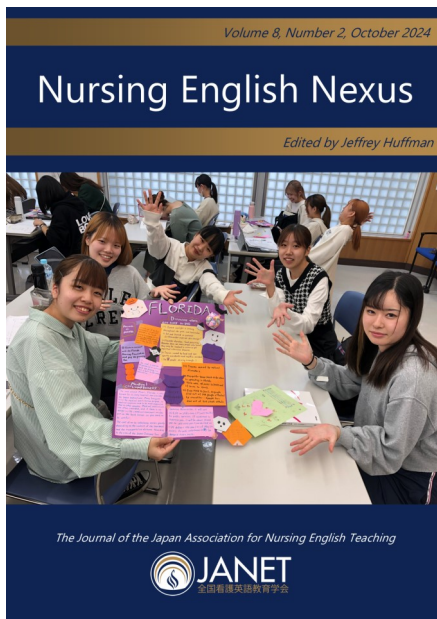


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## Role-Play as an Effective Classroom Activity in a Nursing English Course

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**About the Author:** Su-Jen Lai is an assistant professor at Chang Gung University, Taiwan. She earned her PhD in linguistics from Lancaster University, UK. Her instructional expertise encompasses ESP courses including Nursing English. She has published articles on EFL/ESP pedagogy in the *Journal of Asia TEFL*, *Asian EFL Journal*, and *Asian ESP Journal*.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been gaining importance in EFL contexts worldwide. ESP courses are designed to equip learners with specialized content knowledge and language skills tailored to specific contexts, thereby meeting their future career needs (see, for example, Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, for the pioneering work on ESP). English for Nursing Purposes (ENP), a branch of ESP, is dedicated to equipping learners with the language skills needed for nursing contexts—both in clinical settings and nursing education—by focusing on how nurses use English differently from doctors and other healthcare professionals (Bosher, 2013; Ching et al., 2020; Havery, 2024; Huang & Yu, 2023). Given that very few studies have explored the use of role-play as a teaching tool in ESP/ENP courses globally (e.g., Septiwi, 2019; Sulovska, 2023), this paper aims to provide practical teaching tips for integrating role-play as an effective classroom activity in a Nursing English course at a university in Taiwan.

### The Nursing English Course

The Nursing English course that is the context for the activity described here is a mandatory component of the curriculum in the School of Nursing at a university in Taiwan. It is specifically designed for third-year EFL undergraduate students to improve their listening and speaking skills within the nursing context. These students possess some degree of professional knowledge in nursing and healthcare, and their English proficiency levels range from intermediate to

upper-intermediate. The course spans sixteen weeks, with two additional weeks allocated for flexible classes, and each week includes two hours of instruction.

For instructional purposes, I use the commercially published textbook, *Cambridge English for Nursing* (intermediate plus level), which covers various topics, including patient admissions, respiratory problems, wound care, diabetes care, and more (Allum & McGarr, 2008). Each topic is paired with specific communication objectives, such as taking a patient's medical history, employing active listening strategies, and giving instructions effectively. Supplemental materials, adapted from various nursing-related books (e.g., Cheng, 2019; Putlack, 2017) and video clips (e.g., TED Talks), are also integrated into the curriculum. Classroom activities include listening practice, group discussions, dialogue exercises, role-play, and group oral reports.

### Procedures for the Role-Play Activity

A role-play activity in the Nursing English course is an educational exercise in which students simulate real-life nursing scenarios. The primary goal is to develop students' language skills in context, enhance their communication abilities, and boost their confidence in using English in professional settings. Below is a brief outline of how the activity works:

1. **Group Formation:** Students are divided into small groups of 3-4 members to prepare for a 10-minute nurse-patient role-play dialogue.

2. Topic Selection: Each group selects a topic from the following options:
  - (1) Patient Admissions: Taking patients' medical/surgical history, asking about health conditions, and gathering personal information.
  - (2) Medical Check-ups: Taking blood samples, obtaining urine and stool samples, and explaining pathology tests.
  - (3) Respiratory Problems: Educating patients about asthma management, and giving instructions on using a peak flow meter or nebulizer.
  - (4) Wound Care: Discussing wound care management, addressing pain concerns, and changing patients' dressings.
  - (5) Diabetes Care: Discussing diabetes management and offering advice on lifestyle changes.
  - (6) Pre-operative/Post-operative Care: Explaining possible medication effects, answering patients' questions, conducting pre-operative checks, and instructing patients on changing positions.
3. Communication Skills: In preparing for the 10-minute role-play dialogue, students are encouraged to incorporate the following communication skills:
  - (1) Using active listening strategies
  - (2) Giving instructions effectively
  - (3) Offering advice sensitively
  - (4) Making empathetic responses
  - (5) Asking for clarification
  - (6) Conducting pre-operative checks and post-operative handovers
4. Rehearsal: Before performing the role-play in class, students should rehearse their nurse-patient dialogue multiple times, ensuring they maintain eye

contact with their teammates.

5. Presentation: During the role-play, students are expected to present their dialogue confidently and spontaneously.

### Student Feedback

At the end of the semester, 23 nursing students enrolled in the Nursing English course during the spring 2024 academic year completed questionnaires about their learning preferences, particularly focusing on classroom activities that emphasize oral communication. The results are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1 reveals that most nursing students favored role-play and dialogue exercises over group discussions and oral reports. One questionnaire respondent wrote in English: *"I like role-play because I could apply clinical conversation in our role-play. It's a special experience for me."* Another noted: *"I liked the role-play activity as it allowed me to practically apply what I've learned in class. This practice made me more confident in communicating with foreign patients and their families in the future. I found it very useful!"* (author's translation from Chinese). These responses suggest that engaging in role-play scenarios between nurses and patients in various nursing-related situations provided valuable insights and practical experience. The findings here support Cheng's (2011) work, which highlights the importance of linking input materials with classroom activities when designing ENP courses, as well as the work of Ching et al. (2020), which emphasizes the significance of teaching language tasks and communication skills specific to the nursing context.

In contrast to role-play and dialogue exercises,

Classroom Activities (oral communication)	How much do you like each of them? (N = 23)		
	Like	Neutral	Dislike
Group discussions	15	5	3
Dialogue exercises	21	2	0
Role-play	21	2	0
Group oral report	18	5	0

only 15 students preferred group discussions. Throughout the course, I observed that many students frequently used Chinese when discussing with their teammates, as they found it challenging to express their ideas in English within a short timeframe. This observation is consistent with Yang and Su's (2003) findings, which identify poor pronunciation and communication skills as significant challenges for Taiwanese students.

### Implications and Conclusions

Overall, the nursing students greatly benefited from the role-play activity. It provided them with valuable opportunities to apply what they had learned in class to workplace settings. Through the processes of preparing, rehearsing, and presenting nurse-patient dialogues, these students were able to develop communication skills, enhance their English-speaking abilities, and boost their confidence. Based on student feedback, incorporating role-play into ENP courses is recommended as an effective way to prepare nursing students for their future careers. This activity allows them to apply classroom learning to real-world workplace scenarios.

In conclusion, this paper offers practical teaching tips for integrating role-play as an effective classroom activity in Nursing English courses. Considering that English teaching is socially embedded in ESP instructional contexts (Cheng, 2011), these tips can be utilized and adapted by English teachers in ENP courses within EFL contexts in Taiwan, Japan, or other Asian countries.

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