

Research on the Cultivation Pathways of Academic English Literacy for Medical Postgraduates

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Abstract: With the advancement of the "Healthy China 2030" strategy and the deepening of global health cooperation, Academic English literacy serves as a foundational capability for medical postgraduates to stay at the forefront of their disciplines, conduct rigorous research, engage in global scholarly dialogue, and enhance their international competitiveness. Currently, academic English teaching for medical postgraduates faces practical challenges such as outdated course contents, reduced class hours, and vague cultivation objectives. Moreover, research on the structure of academic literacy specifically for medical postgraduates remains insufficient. Grounded in the realities of medical postgraduate education at our university and taking into account the differentiated publication requirements set by the state for academic-degree and professional-degree postgraduates, this paper elucidates the connotation and functions of academic English competence for medical postgraduates. It proposes cultivation pathways centered on the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) as the core teaching philosophy, advancing curriculum and textbook reforms, transforming teacher roles, and constructing a diversified evaluation system. This study aims to clarify the key elements of academic English literacy, optimize the public English teaching model for postgraduates, and support the international cultivation and career development of medical postgraduates.

Keywords: medical postgraduates; academic English literacy; Production-Oriented Approach; cultivation pathways

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1. Introduction

In 2025, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the *Outline of the "Healthy China 2030" Plan*, which proposed advancing medical science and technology, with the goal to rank among the top countries in terms of both scientific paper impact and the total number of triadic patent families by 2030, while further increasing the contribution of technological innovation to the growth of the pharmaceutical industry and the rate of achievement commercialization. With the deepening implementation of this plan, China's medical research has been developing rapidly. Online statistics show that the number of papers published by Chinese scholars in foreign medical journals—including top-tier journals—has increased dramatically year by year. This underscores the urgent need for current foreign language education for medical postgraduates to strengthen their academic reading and writing skills in the international academic language.

The plan also calls for implementing China's global health strategy and actively promoting international cooperation in the field of population health across all fronts. This includes active participation in global health governance, exerting influence in the research, negotiation, and formulation of relevant international standards, norms, and guidelines, and enhancing China's international influence and institutional discourse power in the health domain. The outbreak of COVID-19 has further highlighted the importance of international scientific collaboration among countries. The sharing of viral strain sequences, clinical trials, and vaccine development all require medical postgraduates to participate in international conferences and cooperative efforts. Therefore, academic English literacy has become an indispensable capability for global public health development and collaboration.

Chinese scholars have drawn on international experience and implemented multi-level academic English teaching practices in Chinese universities, such as instruction guided by the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) (Liang Liwen, 2023). In response to practical issues emerging from Chinese teaching practice—such as surveys on academic English needs and knowledge/skill levels (Zhao Xueqin et al., 2017), as well as matters concerning the research environment, teaching administration regulations, and academic ethics (Tao Quansheng, 2014)—developing

academic English literacy for medical postgraduates has become a "rigid demand" in their English learning.

However, research on both the comprehensive academic English literacy of medical postgraduates and analyses of specific aspects of this literacy remains in an exploratory stage. Studies from the perspective of foreign language education planning are particularly scarce, and teachers remain perplexed by three fundamental questions: "why to teach," "what to teach," and "how to teach." As English teachers at a medical university, we aim to explore the constituent elements of academic English literacy for medical postgraduates in the Chinese context, analyze its influencing factors and pathways, with a view to clarifying the concept, effectively leveraging the role of public English teaching for medical postgraduates, facilitating the internationalization of medical postgraduate education, and providing a reference for the planning and practice of academic English education for medical postgraduates.

2. Connotation and Functions of Academic English Competence for Medical Postgraduates

The academic literacy cultivated through public English teaching for medical postgraduates refers to the integration of academic English knowledge, skills, and competencies required when engaging in academic research. It helps postgraduates construct a transitional identity from "student" to "professional" and ultimately facilitates their career development. The cultivation of academic English literacy for postgraduates has long been a key focus of public English teaching for non-English-major postgraduates.

For medical postgraduates, the learning of professional content is inseparable from the review of medical literature. Currently, nearly all top-tier literature in core medical databases such as PubMed and Web of Science is published in English. Chinese translations are not only lagging behind but also contain deviations or even errors in the expression of certain technical terms. Although various real-time translation software and AI tools are now available online, direct reading of the original text enables a faster and more accurate understanding of the author's research logic, as well as the innovations and limitations of the study. More importantly, it helps avoid ambiguities and misjudgments caused by translation. At the same time, given the massive volume of constantly updated online literature, possessing efficient English reading speed and summarization skills is essential for completing systematic reviews within a limited timeframe, thereby laying a solid foundation for subsequent academic research.

Academic English competence not only directly affects medical postgraduates' learning and assimilation of the latest domestic and international medical research but also impacts the publication of research outcomes and the writing of master's theses. The majority of medical schools in China have explicit publication requirements for master's graduation.

Taking the postgraduate training program at our university for example, it explicitly stipulates that academic-degree postgraduates applying for a master's degree must provide one research article related to their specialty, published in a journal indexed by SCI/SCD-designated journals or Peking University Core Journals, or provide a formal acceptance notification/letter, before they are eligible to apply for the degree. Professional-degree postgraduates, on the other hand, must publish at least one paper as the first author in a journal indexed in the Statistical Source Journals or above, related to their specialty direction and research topic. Many students, due to insufficient English proficiency, frequently make grammatical errors or use Chinese-style expressions in their paper writing. Meanwhile, the peer-review process of international journals imposes strict requirements on language quality. Reviewers may question the academic precision of the research based on the English expression, repeatedly requesting major revisions or even directly rejecting the manuscript. And even when publishing in Chinese journals, they are required to write English abstracts, and their theses strictly demand high-quality English abstracts. Failure to meet these standards not only directly affects the overall evaluation of the thesis but may also result in the inability to graduate on schedule. Therefore, strengthening the academic English proficiency of medical postgraduates involves more than mastering the translation of professional literature and specialized terminology. It equally demands the ability to frame arguments in accordance with internationally accepted conventions, present research contributions and innovations with clarity, and ultimately secure constructive recognition and impartial evaluation from the

peer-review community. To help medical postgraduates adapt to future academic development needs, their academic English teaching and cultivation should focus on improving their abilities to consult foreign literature and engage in academic writing, including the comprehension and application of advanced medical syntactic structures and vocabulary, as well as academic English learning strategies and other language skills.

3. Cultivation Pathways for Medical Academic English Competence

3.1 Implementation of Teaching Reforms

The academic English course for medical postgraduates constitutes an integral component of the internationalization-oriented cultivation system in medical colleges and universities. To bridge the gap between classroom learning to authentic academic usage for medical postgraduates, curriculum reform should serve as the starting point, with a focus on exploring how to cultivate international perspectives and academic literacy competencies—such as intercultural communication and collaboration with both domestic and overseas medical professionals. In recent years, China's higher education has been accelerating the construction of "New Medicine", the core objective of which is to cultivate future-oriented medical professionals who are capable of leading medical innovation and driving social development (Niu & Guo, 2021).

With these developmental demands of the new era, medical postgraduates are expected to acquire the language and communication competencies necessary for understanding international medical frontiers, participating in academic exchanges, and engaging in interdisciplinary collaboration. As an integral component of the medical postgraduates' cultivation system, the functional orientation of postgraduate English courses should likewise undergo a fundamental shift—from traditional language skills training to providing competency support for professional learning and academic development (He, 2023). The cultivation priorities—including innovative spirit, international vision, and interdisciplinary integration capabilities—should be systematically addressed through structured support that prepares students for future transnational clinical collaboration, enables them to assimilate the latest international medical advancements, and enhances their overall professional competence.

However, Current medical postgraduate English courses are confronted with a number of practical problems, including outdated content in traditional textbooks, insufficient reading volume of academic texts, monolithic course delivery models, and continuously compressed instructional hours. In response to these challenges, this study attempts to integrate course instruction with academic application by initiating reforms in both the curriculum system and textbook development, and subsequently designing a structured cultivation pathway for medical postgraduates' academic English competence. It is hoped that this research will provide empirical and data-based support for the establishment and implementation of a postgraduate English education model that aligns with the evolving demands of the New Medicine era.

3.2 POA-Centric Instructional Model

Building upon the curriculum and textbook reforms outlined in the preceding section, this subsection elaborates on the specific instructional model centered on the Production-Oriented Approach (POA). In implementing the instructional model, teachers should adopt a backward design approach, with instructional objectives derived from the English competencies that medical postgraduates are expected to demonstrate in future international clinical and academic settings. These objectives prioritize the development of key competencies for broadening academic horizons and engaging in international collaboration. During their graduate studies, students frequently have opportunities to attend international conferences or participate in cross-border research projects. Proficiency in academic English enables them to move beyond routine social exchanges and engage substantively in medical academic debates, articulate their research insights, and critically evaluate the work of others. Such competencies not only expand their intellectual scope but also have a direct and positive bearing on their future career trajectories, including doctoral applications, overseas visiting scholarships, and competitive positions in leading medical institutions.

Meanwhile, given that medical postgraduates are heavily burdened with rigorous professional coursework and demanding clinical practice, enhancing learning strategies is more constructive than mere knowledge transmission. Therefore, instructional contents should be tailored to enable students to make full use of fragmented time with greater specificity. This approach moves beyond the conventional practice of mere vocabulary memorization and generalized reading, focusing instead on high-frequency vocabulary and syntactic patterns extracted from top-tier journals in their respective specialties. Students are expected not only to extensively read the latest articles from professional journals in their fields but also to develop the habit of regularly engaging in close reading of seminal papers from leading journals in their disciplines. Under the guidance of their teachers, students should establish their personal "corpus" (or language repertoire), systematically categorizing and archiving high-quality sentence patterns and idiomatic expressions encountered in their reading. Particular attention should be paid to common structures in medical academic writing, experimental reporting, and data presentation. Beginning with structural analysis and abstract writing, students should progressively master academic writing conventions, prioritizing logical clarity and accuracy in data presentation. Additionally, the judicious use of AI-powered tools—such as Grammarly—is encouraged for grammar checking, thereby facilitating the production of clear, fluent, and idiomatic English expression.

3.3 Redefining the Teacher's Role

Teachers responsible for medical postgraduate English instructions should possess relevant academic backgrounds. For medical postgraduates, academic English is not merely a linguistic tool but also a vehicle for academic thinking. For the instructor, the selection of academic content and the establishment of stage-specific training objectives are closely tied to their own academic competence. Only when teachers possess a solid command of the subject matter can they effectively guide students in developing and training their academic thinking.

For instance, in the practice of reading medical academic literature, teachers should select materials of appropriate difficulty and content, set attainable stage-specific learning objectives, design corresponding tasks—such as group presentations and discussions—and assess students' learning outcomes at each stage. These tasks, unlike those at the college English level, must take into account students' diverse research orientations and language proficiencies, while also requiring strong information retrieval skills on the part of the teacher. They are therefore highly challenging. Similarly, in academic writing training, teachers are expected to guide students in the precise use of medical terminology and reinforce the norms of discipline-specific accurate description and terminology use. This places considerable demands on teachers' own writing and translation competence.

In terms of practical and innovative cultivation, the goal of transferable competency for medical academic and professional scenarios is to enable students to extend their oral English skills to international medical academic and professional contexts, achieving advanced intercultural communication competence. To this end, the classroom should incorporate immersive virtual clinical scenario training conducted in English, which requires a high level of competence on the teacher's part in identifying and correcting errors.

3.4 Continuous Improvement of Teaching Evaluation Methods

English teaching for medical postgraduates should establish a multi-dimensional and comprehensive evaluation system, with assessment criteria that are both holistic and dynamic. In formative assessment, attention should be given to comprehensive tracking of students' ability to use medical terminology and scenario-based performance, with regular teacher-set evaluation targets and peer-assessment objectives. In summative assessment, evaluation rubrics for both in-class and out-of-class practical activities should be developed, utilizing standardized scales to document and assess students' performance in clinical scenario simulations, medical literature reading, and written output. In outcome-based assessment, emphasis should be placed on the quantification of academic output and research productivity, evaluating tangible products such as research papers, conference abstracts, literature reviews, and oral presentations.

To ensure continuous improvement, the evaluation system should be regularly reviewed and refined, with active students' involvement in self- and peer-assessment, and assessment results systematically should feed back into instructional design to create a closed-loop system of ongoing pedagogical enhancement.

4. Conclusion

At present, medical postgraduates in China constitute the mainstay of the country's future medical workforce, and increasing attention is being paid by universities to curriculum design and textbook development related to medical academic English. Medical postgraduates generally lack academic English competence and are in urgent need of systematic academic English training. Therefore, while strengthening disciplinary development, medical schools across China should intensify their efforts to cultivate academic English competence among their medical postgraduates. Drawing on both domestic and international research, our research group has focused on the existing problems in academic English teaching for medical postgraduates at our university, exploring cultivation pathways for their academic English literacy. This research not only provides new ideas for reforming the classroom teaching model of English for medical postgraduates but also encourages postgraduate English teachers to comprehensively reflect on their teaching processes, conduct teaching research from multiple perspectives, and offer feedback to teaching administration departments, thereby comprehensively enhancing the quality of postgraduate English teaching.

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