

## Maritime education and language as the acting link between bridge and engine room – a report

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Edlynn Fabian-Perona

Maritime Academy of Asia and the Pacific, Philippines; [edlynn.perona@maap.edu.ph](mailto:edlynn.perona@maap.edu.ph)

### Abstract

*Maritime education is a significant component in preparing future seafarers with the technical competence, practical skills, and communication abilities required in the global shipping industry. As a major seafarers' provider, the Philippines aligns Maritime Education and Training (MET) with the global standards of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping (STCW). A key component of MET is the language training in Maritime English and Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP), which has a profound impact on maritime students' communication competence. The report, applying the Sociocultural Theory of Vygotsky, investigated the impact and found that the command of Maritime English is essential in ensuring safety and efficient operations. Simulation exercises, situated language learning, and international training programs provide experiential language competence to maritime students, resulting in the ability to navigate multicultural shipboard environments efficiently. The findings indicated that MET is recognized by the students as essential in communication skill development to ensure international standard compliance, efficient use of SMCP, and clear interpersonal and technical communication. Moreover, experiential learning activities such as emergency training and multicultural exposure also affect the students' value of language training. The report concluded that systematic language training in MET courses is essential in providing competent seafarers with practical communication competencies, ensuring safer and more efficient maritime operations.*

**Keywords:** *communication competence, maritime education, maritime English, seafarer training, simulation-based learning, standard marine communication phrases (SMCP)*

### Introduction

Maritime education is highly important in preparing future seafarers to work in the international shipping sector. Globally, maritime schools help students gain technical skills, practical knowledge and, most importantly, good communication skills to keep people safe and things running smoothly at sea (Jamil & Bhuiyan, 2021; Moreno, et al., 2022). Chibana (2023) affirmed that the Philippines, being among the top providers of seafarers, puts much importance on maritime education and training (MET) to meet international requirements. These requirements, set by organizations such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping (STCW), are crucial in ensuring the safety and efficiency of maritime operations. Excellent MET programs need language education as a key element because seafaring involves people from different countries and relies on Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) to avoid miscommunication.

Theories such as Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory identify how language enables individuals to think and learn, particularly in occupations where communication is crucial (Tzuriel & Tzuriel, 2021). Wahyuni et al. (2022) revealed that Maritime English is the standard language employed in shipping. Consequently, Barus and Simanjuntak (2023) confirmed that language issues could result in maritime incidents, which makes it crucial for MET schools to have well-established language education. These schools employ various strategies to develop students' language skills, including immersive language learning, practical

training in communication exercises, and role-playing and simulations to simulate real-life language use scenarios.

Effective communication aboard an ocean-going ship demands proper utilization of technical and operational terminology, especially during an emergency when miscommunication can be dangerous. Dewan et al. (2023) disclosed that students undergoing practical training, including radio communication exercises, bridge simulation, and real maritime cases, significantly enhance their Maritime English, instilling confidence in their ability to perform better and comply with safety standards.

Simulated shipboard scenarios, role-playing, and actual experiences play a significant role in shaping students' attitudes and confidence in language learning. Institutions that integrate bridge and engine room simulation in classes enable students to apply languages in real situations, preparing them for the challenges of their maritime careers. International training and exchange programs also introduce cadets to multicultural language environments, reinforcing the importance of acquiring a standard maritime communication system. These practical experiences not only enhance language skills but also instill confidence in students, ensuring they are well-prepared for effective communication in their maritime careers.

Learning materials, such as maritime textbooks, training manuals, computer simulations, and state-of-the-art facilities like high-tech deck and engine simulators, must be meticulously aligned to maritime communication standards. This alignment is not just a formality but a crucial step in ensuring that the students receive a high-quality education that prepares them for the challenges of their maritime careers. These materials lay the foundation for effective communication onboard ships, making them a vital part of maritime education.

A questionnaire of 179 sampled maritime students who participated in an international training program was employed to examine their perceptions of the applicability of their initial maritime training and education. The survey covered specifically the perceived utility of the foundation in the form of language on board ships. The outcomes of this investigation revealed the significant role of Maritime Education and Training (MET) in acquiring linguistic skills for effective shipboard communication.

The following statements have been concluded from the researcher's survey.

1. *Maritime students consider Maritime Education and Training (MET) as a cornerstone in developing the language skills necessary for effective communication onboard, particularly in a multicultural environment. Their training has instilled in them the recognition that proficiency in Maritime English is not just significant, but a key factor in adhering to international communication standards and preventing misunderstandings that could lead to accidents.* First-hand experiences and real-world scenarios demonstrate that when maritime students are well-trained in maritime language, they contribute to a safer, more efficient working environment at sea, reassuring the audience about the quality of MET.

2. Maritime students asserted that the knowledge and skills gained through MET have significantly improved their communication in several key areas but not limited to: (a) *proficiency in Maritime English has allowed them to follow international communication standards, reducing the risk of miscommunication.* (b) *MET has equipped them to use Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) effectively during routine and emergencies.* (c) *students noted that their training helped them navigate multicultural environments onboard, enhancing interpersonal communication.* (d) *MET has improved its technical communication, clearly articulating operational procedures and safety protocols.* (e) *they emphasized the importance of MET in developing language skills for reporting incidents, ensuring that critical information is conveyed accurately to shore personnel and authorities.*

3. The students disclosed that *specific incidents and real-life experiences have influenced and significantly shaped their attitudes toward the use of language on ships.* For example, *during onboard training simulations or exercises,* students immediately recognize the importance of effective

communication, mainly when working with multicultural crews and high-stress environments. One common experience influencing their attitudes is *emergency drills*, where concise and clear communication becomes noticeable and crucial to preventing accidents. More so, students recalled experiences during port calls or communication with shore-based personnel, where language differences sometimes lead to confusion or delays. These experiences lead students to understand that their Maritime Education and Training (MET), especially in studying Maritime English and Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP), is not just important but highly important for effective communication.

## Conclusion

The role of education, particularly Maritime Education and Training (MET), in shaping language proficiency is significant and indispensable in ensuring effective communication onboard ships. Education equips maritime students with the language skills necessary to navigate complex, multicultural environments and follow international communication standards, which are crucial for the safety and efficiency of maritime operations. Through MET, students develop essential competencies in Maritime English and Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP), vital for clear communication during routine tasks, emergency drills, and interaction with shore-based personnel. These experiences emphasize that education enhances linguistic abilities and fosters a deeper understanding of how language directly impacts operational success and safety.

By making language training a priority in MET programs, maritime schools, assisted by international agencies such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the Philippine government, and the education community, can ensure that future seafarers are well-equipped with the language proficiency required for effective communication onboard. This involves being proficient in Maritime English and Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) and capable of working in multicultural settings and addressing real-world communication issues. Teachers play a significant role in providing targeted lessons and practical exercises by international standards. With this collaboration, maritime schools can produce well-equipped professionals who make the maritime industry safer and more efficient, while the Philippine government and education community assist in integrating these language skills into national and international maritime regulations.

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