European Journal of Special Education Research
ISSN: 2501 - 2428
ISSN-L: 2501 - 2428
Available on-line at: www.oapub.org/edu

DOI: 10.46827/ejse.v11i3.6057 Volume 11 | Issue 3 | 2025

NAVIGATING THE SEAS OF LANGUAGE: THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH TERMINOLOGY FOR MARITIME ENGINEERING CADETS

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Abstract:
Maritime engineering cadets operate in an international context where English functions as the lingua franca of the seas. Effective communication using standardized English terminology is not only essential for operational safety and technical accuracy but also for the global mobility and professional competence of cadets. This article explores the necessity of acquiring English maritime terminology and provides pedagogical strategies for mastering such vocabulary within the curriculum of a merchant marine academy. Drawing on academic literature, International Maritime Organization (IMO) guidelines, and educational research, this article argues for a robust integration of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in maritime engineering education.

Keywords: Maritime English, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English terminology acquisition, maritime communication

1. Introduction

In today's globalized maritime industry, the ability to communicate effectively in English has become a non-negotiable skill. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has designated English as the official working language for maritime communication, particularly in safety-critical operations. For maritime engineering cadets, familiarity with English terminology is not merely academic—it is a prerequisite for safety, competency, and career advancement. This article argues that maritime engineer cadets must attain a solid grasp of English technical terms to succeed professionally and proposes educational strategies to enhance this acquisition during their academic training.

1.1 The Role of English in the Maritime Industry

The maritime domain is inherently international. Ships often sail under flags of convenience, employ multinational crews, and dock at ports across the globe. The

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Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP), developed by the IMO, have codified English as the medium of communication for standardized maritime procedures (IMO, 2001). Moreover, most technical documentation, training materials, engineering manuals, and regulatory documents are written in English.

In the engineering context, the use of English is particularly pronounced. Engine room operations, maintenance procedures, safety drills, and emergency responses all involve terminology that is standardized globally. As such, maritime engineer cadets must master this specialized vocabulary to interact efficiently with international colleagues, understand operational protocols, and comply with international standards such as those outlined in the Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) Convention.

2. Why Maritime Engineer Cadets Need to Master English Terminology

2.1 Operational Safety and Risk Reduction

Miscommunication in a technical environment such as the engine room can have catastrophic consequences. The use of English terminology ensures that all crew members understand the nature of operations and can respond accurately to commands or warnings. Research has shown that a significant proportion of maritime accidents are linked to communication failures (The Nautical Institute, 2015). For engineer cadets, proficiency in English terminology enhances their ability to follow instructions, execute procedures correctly, and issue reports or alerts with clarity.

2.2 Understanding Technical Documentation

Engineering cadets are expected to consult manuals, blueprints, equipment datasheets, and safety instructions—all of which are predominantly written in English. A lack of vocabulary can hinder comprehension, leading to errors in execution and maintenance. Familiarity with English engineering terms allows cadets to interpret such documents efficiently and accurately, an ability that is indispensable in the fast-paced and high-stakes maritime environment (Bocanegra-Valle, 2010).

English proficiency, particularly in technical vocabulary, enhances the global mobility of maritime professionals. Employers prioritize candidates who can communicate effectively across borders. Additionally, many professional exams and certifications, including the STCW assessments, are conducted in English. Cadets with a command of the relevant terminology are better equipped to succeed in these evaluations and to meet the linguistic expectations of shipowners, charterers, and maritime regulators (Zhang & Liu, 2017).

2.3 Teamwork and Multinational Collaboration

The modern engine room is often staffed by a multinational team. In such environments, English serves as the bridge language. Effective collaboration hinges on the mutual understanding of standard technical terms. Cadets who are fluent in this terminology

contribute more effectively to teamwork, decision-making, and conflict resolution on board (Cabrera, 2014).

3. Challenges Faced by Cadets in Acquiring English Terminology

Maritime engineering terminology is not commonly encountered in general English education. Many cadets enter the academy with limited exposure to technical vocabulary and struggle with its pronunciation, usage, and meaning. Furthermore, maritime English is both lexical and functional, encompassing not only words but also specific structures used in commands, reports, and warnings (Cole & Trenkner, 2008). Therefore, acquiring this language requires targeted instruction and context-based practice.

Another challenge is the limited classroom time devoted to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in some maritime academies. Without sustained exposure and practice, cadets may find it difficult to retain and use terminology effectively.

3.1 Strategies to Master Maritime English Terminology During Academic Studies

Given the centrality of English in maritime operations, it is imperative that cadets begin mastering terminology early in their academic journey. The following strategies are recommended for implementation in merchant marine academies:

3.1.1 Integration of ESP Courses into the Curriculum

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses should be mandatory components of maritime engineering programs. These courses should focus on the vocabulary, structures, and functions specific to maritime operations, with an emphasis on engineering contexts. Tailoring instruction to the students' future professional tasks enhances motivation and learning outcomes (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

3.1.2 Use of Authentic Materials

Authentic resources such as ship manuals, engine schematics, safety regulations, and simulation transcripts should be integrated into language instruction. These materials familiarize cadets with real-world usage and improve contextual understanding. Videos of engine room operations with subtitles and transcripts can also be effective tools (Pritchard & Nasr, 2004).

3.1.3 Simulation-Based Learning

Language learning is more effective when paired with experiential learning. Maritime academies should incorporate language objectives into engine room simulators and safety drills. During simulations, cadets can practice using English terminology in real-time scenarios, reinforcing both linguistic and technical competencies (Ziarati et al., 2012).

3.1.4 Collaboration with Subject Matter Experts

Language instructors should work closely with engineering faculty to ensure that terminology instruction aligns with technical training. Co-teaching modules or collaborative lessons can help bridge the gap between language and content, making vocabulary instruction more meaningful and applied.

3.1.5 Online Learning Platforms and Apps

Digital tools such as Quizlet or Maritime English e-learning platforms can provide cadets with on-the-go vocabulary practice. Spaced repetition systems (SRS) help with long-term retention of complex terminology. Some apps also include speech recognition to improve pronunciation.

4. Conclusion

In the high-stakes and globally connected world of maritime engineering, proficiency in English terminology is essential. For cadets, mastering this vocabulary is not just about academic achievement—it is about operational safety, professional competence, and career success. Merchant marine academies have a critical role to play in equipping their students with this linguistic toolkit. By integrating ESP instruction, authentic materials, simulation-based practice, and digital tools into the curriculum, educators can ensure that future maritime engineers are linguistically as well as technically prepared for the demands of the sea.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Evangelia Giovanoglou is an English Language teacher. She received a Bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece and a Master's degree from the Hellenic Open University, Greece. She has been active in teaching English as a foreign language in the private sector since 2007. Her current field placement is with the Merchant Marine Academy of Crete, Greece as a visiting professor for the subject of Maritime English. She is interested in intercultural classes and teaching English for Specific Purposes.

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