



ENHANCING MARITIME ENGLISH PROFICIENCY THROUGH ACADEMIC JOURNAL ARTICLES AND FIELD-RELATED ONLINE MATERIALS

Seda Çınar Alabay*

Abstract. Maritime English proficiency is crucial for ensuring effective communication and safety at sea. While there is no globally standardized curriculum, most maritime schools, academies, and faculties design their Maritime English courses in alignment with the IMO Maritime English Model Course, emphasizing the use of SMCP and other internationally recognized materials. However, these structured materials may not fully address the dynamic language needs of maritime professionals. This study explores the impact of integrating academic journal articles and maritime-related online materials into Maritime English instruction to enhance both language skills and professional communication abilities. Specifically, it investigates the extent to which non-standardized resources contribute to improved comprehension, technical vocabulary acquisition, and situational language use. In the study, a qualitative research approach is adopted and a case study design is utilized to explore the subject in depth. Data are collected through a questionnaire comprising open-ended questions, and content analysis is conducted to interpret the responses of students. The questionnaire includes questions on students' perceived effectiveness of academic journal articles and maritime-related online materials in improving their language skills. Preliminary findings indicate that integrating academic journal articles and maritime-related online materials significantly enhances students' technical vocabulary, reading comprehension, and practical communication skills. Considering the pedagogical benefits of supplementing existing curricula with academic journal articles and maritime-related online materials, the findings suggest that integrating such diverse texts into Maritime English instruction can significantly enhance learners' speaking skills, reading comprehension, and domain-specific awareness in maritime contexts..

Keywords: Maritime English; SMCP; Content Analysis; Journal Articles; Online Resources.

Istanbul Technical University,
Maritime Faculty, Istanbul,
Türkiye

* **Corresponding author:**
cinarsed@itu.edu.tr

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1. INTRODUCTION

Maritime English has long been recognized as a critical component of safe and effective maritime operations. As the lingua franca not only in the shipping industry but also in other global sectors, English plays a pivotal role in facilitating communication among multinational crews, port authorities, and other stakeholders in maritime contexts. In order to reduce ambiguity and ensure clarity in the exchanged messages, particularly in emergencies and other navigational procedures, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has codified communication practices in the *Standard Marine Communication Phrases* (SMCP). As Trenkner (2005) points out, SMCP effectively standardizes essential safety and bridge communications but does not encompass a wide variety of real-world conversational exchanges required both on modern vessels and in relevant settings. However, seafarers are frequently required to engage with a broader range of communicative situations demanding language competence beyond SMCP. As Pritchard (2002: 5) observes, this highlights a key tension between the need for standardized communication and the natural variation that occurs in real-world maritime contexts, particularly with regard to safety, language learning, and instructional practices in Maritime English.

While the SMCP and the IMO Maritime English Model Course provide a foundational framework for the curricula of many Maritime English courses, this framework is often limited to prescriptive phrases and routine instructions and also it is not implemented in a unified manner across institutions. In many higher education settings, Maritime English instructors, similar to instructors teaching other ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses, frequently face challenges in accessing suitable materials and textbooks (Pašalić & Plančić, 2018: 210). These limitations hinder their ability to effectively support students in developing the linguistic competence required for their students' future maritime careers.

Pritchard (2002: 11) emphasizes that while meeting the minimum requirements set by the STCW Convention such as understanding meteorological data, navigational charts, and safety-related communications is essential, this alone is not sufficient. He argues that instructors should also undertake a comprehensive needs analysis and address a wider set of competencies, including socio-cultural, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and cognitive dimensions of maritime language use. Such an approach would better prepare students to engage with the complex communicative demands of real-world maritime operations. In the light of these considerations, instructors of Maritime English, unlike the instructors

teaching English for General Purposes (EGP) need specialized methodologies and accordingly teaching materials so that they could meet the needs of their students who possess higher levels of English proficiency and being prepared for their prospective professions (Baleghizadeh and Rahimi, 2011; Hyland, 2002 as cited in Pašalić & Plančić, 2018: 211).

Recent studies have started to emphasize the critical role of reading skills in fostering maritime literacy. Pujiastuti et al. (2023) highlight that reading proficiency not only enables learners to acquire domain-specific terminology, but also plays a key role in building awareness of essential maritime topics such as safety, environmental sustainability, and responsible use of marine resources. Their systematic review underscores the importance of integrating both theoretical frameworks and practical applications into reading instruction. Such an approach helps learners engage more deeply with authentic maritime content, supporting their cognitive development and professional readiness. These findings further reinforce the shift toward content-based, context-sensitive Maritime English pedagogy, which aims to align language learning with the communicative and disciplinary demands of the maritime field.

In line with this view, Zhang and Cole (2022: 145) propose a genre-based approach to Maritime English instruction, emphasizing that communicative competence should be developed through exposure to domain-specific tasks and professional discourse. Their two-stage syllabus, General Maritime English (GME) and Specialized Maritime English (SME), connects language learning with real workplace roles, helping students use English more effectively in maritime settings. This approach reflects a broader trend in ESP that values genre-based teaching as a way to link language with context, purpose, and professional practice (Berkenkotter, 2009, as cited in Zhang & Cole, 2022: 147). However, many existing Maritime English textbooks still present grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation in isolation, with limited focus on how these elements function in real maritime communication. As Zhang and Cole point out, this gap shows the need for teaching materials that are better aligned with actual maritime duties and communication tasks.

To address these concerns, Trenkner, Cole, and Pritchard (2013: 159) advocate for collaboration between technical experts and language instructors—a strategy developed from findings in the MARCOM Project. Their recommended twinning approach suggests that joint instruction by English and subject-matter teachers can ensure both linguistic clarity and technical accuracy. This model which is rooted in Content-Based Instruction (CBI), supports the deliv-

ery of language education embedded within authentic maritime contexts.

In alignment with these pedagogical insights, the present study implemented a content-based reading strategy. Students were assigned weekly academic articles and field-related online materials selected according to the thematic focus of each lesson. This integrative method was chosen not only to enhance students' language proficiency but also to strengthen their professional awareness by exposing them to authentic maritime texts and communication practices.

2. METHODOLOGY

Aim: The aim of this study is to investigate how the integration of academic journal articles and maritime-related online materials into Maritime English instruction can enhance students' language proficiency and communicative competence in professional contexts. It specifically explores the impact of such materials on vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and real-world readiness.

Method: In this study, qualitative research method was employed. Qualitative research is a well-established tradition grounded in disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and linguistics and it seeks to explain a phenomenon in depth and within its natural boundaries (Yıldırım, 1999; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011).

Data Collection: Data Collection was carried out using a questionnaire which consisted of 10 open-ended questions.

Participants: The participants in this study consisted primarily of first and second year students ($n = 51$) enrolled in the Department of Maritime Transportation and Management Engineering at the Maritime Faculty of Istanbul Technical University (ITUMF). After passing the national university entrance examination, these students complete a two-semester English preparatory program at ITU's School of Foreign Languages, where they are expected to reach an intermediate proficiency level and pass the proficiency exam. Once admitted to the Maritime Faculty, they receive only two hours of Maritime English (ME) instruction per week during the relevant semesters.

Procedure: Starting from the first week of the term, students enrolled in *Maritime English I* were assigned weekly readings selected to align with upcoming lesson topics. These materials comprising academic journal articles and maritime-related online sources were uploaded to a shared digital platform in advance. Each class began with a brief discussion based on the readings, during which students were asked questions to assess their understanding of key ideas

and arguments. While some texts offered detailed explanations, others, such as blog posts and articles from maritime websites, provided thematic overviews. To encourage active participation, students were given guiding questions and were prompted to refer to the readings during discussions. At the end of the term, a questionnaire was administered to evaluate the effectiveness of this newly implemented reading-based approach. The survey focused on students' perceptions of the method's impact on both general English and maritime-specific language development. As this approach was introduced for the first time in *Maritime English I lesson*, the findings were intended to inform future applications of the method in *Maritime English II*, helping assess its relevance and effectiveness in maritime communication domain.

Data Analysis: During the data analysis process, Thematic categories were identified from the responses to the 10 open-ended questions in the questionnaire. These themes were then explored to understand the impact of the instructional method used during the semester. Responses were collected anonymously, and each was assigned a reference code (e.g., S1, S2, S3). A thematic analysis was conducted to group similar ideas, and students' attitudes were broadly categorized as positive, neutral, or negative based on their answers. These reference codes were used to support interpretation and illustrate patterns across the data.

3. FINDINGS

After reviewing all 51 student responses to the first question **"How did the readings help improve your maritime vocabulary? Can you give examples?"**, three main themes have been classified:

Table 1. Themes Identified from Question 1

Theme	Description
1. Enriched Vocabulary through Contextual Input	Students reported learning new maritime terms from context, especially via authentic readings.
2. Real-Life Use and Professional Readiness	Students emphasized the value of terms for real-world shipboard tasks and future communication.
3. Cognitive Challenge and Motivation	Some students found the materials difficult or disengaging, yet acknowledged possible learning gains.

For the theme Enriched Vocabulary through Contextual Input, students have stated that they have learned specific technical terms like *dunnage*, *ECDIS*, *starboard*, etc., and noted that repeated exposure has made the terms more memorable. *"The reading exercises were effective for learning technical terms. I became familiar with words like 20ft, 40ft containers, dunnage, and derricks."* (S16) *"I used to communicate with general phrases such as right, left, parking... but this activity contributed to my maritime vocabulary with new words like starboard, port, anchoring."* (S28)

Similarly for the second theme Real-Life Use and Professional Readiness, many students have linked new vocabulary to actual shipboard situations, onboard trainings, or working with international crews. *"It helped improve my terminology. I believe it will help me communicate better with foreign colleagues in the future."* (S32) *"The terms appeared not just in this course but also in podcasts and videos, which helped reinforce understanding."* (S45)

For the last theme Cognitive Challenge and Motivation, some students have mentioned the difficulty due to complex vocabulary or lack of time/motivation, but still saw learning benefits. *"The articles were well above my English level... I learned new words but struggled with the flow."* (S3)

Based on the responses to the second question "Did the articles and online materials help you understand weekly subjects better?", three themes have been identified:

Table 2. Themes Identified from Question 2

Theme	Description
1. Reinforced Comprehension through Practical Content	Students reported better understanding of weekly topics due to the real-world relevance and specificity of the readings.
2. Contextualization and Background Knowledge	Students felt that articles provided context or background that made theoretical topics clearer.
3. Limited or No Impact	Some students reported no significant improvement, citing time issues, difficulty, or repetition.

To support the theme Reinforced Comprehension through Practical Content, Many students highlighted that real-world examples and terminology helped them internalize abstract weekly topics more easily. *"When I read such articles, I could more easily understand*

what the topic was about. For instance, giving examples from MARPOL in the topic on pollution was very helpful." (S12) *"The materials related to the weekly content made it easier to follow. Especially when they were up-to-date and about real maritime situations."* (S21)

Some students emphasized that online resources added perspective or 'filled in the gaps' not always covered by course books. In line with the second theme Contextualization and background knowledge, students have stated the sentences like: *"Reading different sources related to the topic helped consolidate the weekly content. It gave me an advantage compared to just listening to the lecture."* (S6) *"Sometimes the readings explained background concepts that weren't fully discussed in class, which helped me understand better."* (S43)

On the other hand, there are also views indicating 'Limited or no impact' of the assigned texts. These students have written that they did not engage regularly with the materials or found them repetitive or too long, thus perceiving little added value. *"I generally didn't have time. When the readings were long, I lost focus. I thought some topics were repetitive."* (S30) *"I didn't really read all the texts so I can't say they helped me much."* (S49)

Student responses to the third question "Have these readings improved your ability to communicate in maritime settings?" have revealed three central themes:

Table 3. Themes Identified from Question 3

Theme	Description
1. Increased Confidence and Use of Field Terminology	Students noted a boost in their confidence and ability to use appropriate maritime terms in communication.
2. Familiarity with Operational Phrases and Contexts	Students reported that they better understood how language is used in shipboard communication.
3. Limited Impact or Irrelevance	Some students stated the readings did not directly help with communication or they lacked practice.

On the first theme, students felt they were more comfortable speaking or writing using technical English related to ship operations. *"Before, I used basic words in communication. Now I can use terms more comfortably."* (S7) *"I feel more confident using maritime phrases and expressions when discussing ship-related issues."* (S18)

About the Familiarity with Operational Phrases and Contexts, several responses indicated that reading realistic texts or situations helped learners anticipate the kind of English needed onboard. *"Seeing phrases or dialogues that could be used onboard boosted my self-confidence."* (S20) *"Thanks to the articles, I'm more aware of the kind of English I'll need to use with international crews."* (S39)

Related to limited impact or irrelevance, some students stated that while the readings were informative, they didn't necessarily offer practical speaking opportunities or immediate improvement. *"I learned some terms in theory, but I don't think it contributed to my speaking skills."* (S11) *"Reading about maritime English doesn't automatically mean I can speak it better."* (S46)

Student responses to the fourth question "Did using real-world resources make the course more meaningful or practical?" have revealed the following key themes:

Table 4. Themes Identified from Question 4

Theme	Description
1. Increased Engagement and Motivation	Real-world content made lessons more relatable and sparked greater interest.
2. Enhanced Practical Understanding	Students felt better prepared for real maritime work thanks to the relevance of examples.
3. Limited Usefulness or Repetition	A smaller group found the content somewhat repetitive or disconnected from their personal learning.

Regarding Increased Engagement and Motivation, students expressed that real-world content gave them a reason to care about lessons and apply them meaningfully. *"Seeing real-life examples instead of just textbook knowledge made the course more interesting."* (S9) *"Using online materials related to current ship operations made me want to learn more. It didn't feel like a usual school task."* (S22)

On Enhanced Practical Understanding, many students commented on better preparation for life on board and real maritime challenges, as the materials mirrored actual ship procedures. *"The texts about real accidents made me take the course more seriously. I understood why safety procedures matter."* (S13) *"It felt like we were already doing an internship. The readings helped me imagine real situations at sea."* (S41)

About limited usefulness or repetition, some students reported that they did not find the materials especially new or useful, or that they lacked time to engage fully. *"Sometimes I think the topics are repeated. They don't always contain practical examples."* (S36) *"Not all readings were useful; some felt too basic or similar to previous lessons."* (S48)

Student responses to the fifth question "Compared to standard SMCP materials, how effective were the additional readings?" have highlighted three dominant themes:

Table 5. Themes Identified from Question 5

Theme	Description
1. Broader and Richer Language Exposure	Many students stated that the additional materials offered more comprehensive vocabulary and context.
2. Complementary to SMCP	Students viewed academic and online readings as useful supplements that gave meaning to SMCP usage.
3. Preference for SMCP or Neutral	A smaller group preferred standardized SMCP or felt the additional texts were harder to follow.

On Broader and Richer Language Exposure, students appreciated that additional readings allowed them to see how English is actually used in the maritime field beyond command language. *"SMCP covers only basic instructions, but these texts reflect the full range of language we'll encounter in the sector."* (S15) *"We learned words and expressions that are not in SMCP but are used in safety reports or navigation guides."* (S40)

Regarding the second theme complementary to SMCP, several students found the materials useful as reinforcement, helping them understand when and why SMCP is used. *"The rigid language of SMCP isn't always enough. The readings help us learn which words fit specific situations."* (S17) *"Articles gave context to the phrases we memorized from SMCP. It made them more meaningful."* (S29)

About the Preference for SMCP or Neutral, some students expressed a clear preference for the structured simplicity of SMCP, while others found the extra readings too long or difficult. *"SMCP is shorter and easier. These readings are sometimes too challenging."* (S33) *"I don't always understand what's useful in the long articles."* (S42)

The sixth question was “Was using both academic and online texts helpful? Why or why not?” and student responses have been clustered around three dominant ideas:

Table 6. Themes Identified from Question 6

Theme	Description
1. Variety Supports Comprehension and Motivation	Students appreciated having different types of texts to reinforce understanding and keep interest.
2. Complementary Strengths of Academic vs. Online	Students compared the structured detail of academic texts with the simplicity and accessibility of online sources.
3. Overload or Inconsistency	Some students felt the range of materials was overwhelming or that quality varied across sources.

On the first theme Variety Supports Comprehension and Motivation, students generally stated that they liked the mix of styles, tones, and formats, which helped maintain focus and made the lessons more dynamic. Some of the responses associated with this theme are: *“Reading from different sources helped me grasp the subject better. Blogs were simpler, academic texts were more detailed.”* (S25) *“It kept me more engaged. If all the materials had been like textbooks, I would have lost interest.”* (S10)

On the Complementary Strengths of Academic vs. Online, students often pointed out that academic sources gave credibility and detail, while online sources provided real-world, digestible information. *“Academic sources provided theory, while online materials supported it with practical examples.”* (S31) *“Reading both types helped me see different perspectives — formal and informal — which I think is important.”* (S50)

Regarding the third theme, Overload or Inconsistency, a minority of students found the switching between styles confusing or the amount of content too demanding. *“Sometimes I think too many texts were given. It takes a lot of time to read them all.”* (S2) *“Some sources were unnecessary or not suitable for my level.”* (S46)

The seventh question was “Did the readings help you reflect more on maritime operations, safety, or ethics?” and students’ reflections have revealed the following major themes:

Table 7. Themes Identified from Question 7

Theme	Description
1. Increased Awareness of Safety and Operational Risks	Students stated the materials helped them understand and reflect on real-life maritime hazards.
2. Ethical and Environmental Responsibility	Some responses emphasized how readings raised awareness of ethical and environmental issues.
3. Limited Reflection or No Clear Impact	A few students reported no substantial impact on their thinking.

On the first theme Increased Awareness of Safety and Operational Risks, many students expressed that the readings prompted them to consider safety not just as a rule but as a lived necessity in maritime life. *“The readings about real accidents affected me. They made me see what a single mistake can lead to.”* (S12) *“Now I realize how even routine tasks involve risks, and why procedures matter.”* (S34)

Concerning Ethical and Environmental Responsibility, students highlighted that articles concerning pollution, waste management, and maritime ethics broadened their awareness of the consequences of professional decisions. *“The readings on ethics and environmental issues made me think. I better understand the importance of MARPOL now.”* (S8) *“It helped me consider not just what to do, but why we do it — and the consequences of neglecting responsibilities.”* (S36)

The last theme identified is Limited Reflection or No Clear Impact and some students felt they were not strongly influenced by the readings, or they couldn’t relate the content to their own responsibilities yet. *“It didn’t really interest me. I was already familiar with ethical topics.”* (S19) *“Some of the texts were too general. They didn’t make me think differently.”* (S46)

Student responses to the eighth question “Can you describe a situation where you would apply something you learned from the readings?” were grouped into three key themes:

Table 8. Themes Identified from Question 8

Theme	Description
1. Application in Safety and Emergency Situations	Students envisioned applying what they learned in real-life risk, accident, or emergency contexts.
2. Professional Communication and Procedures	Students connected readings to how they would communicate or operate aboard ships.
3. Vague or No Concrete Examples	Some students gave general answers or could not specify any real-world application.

On the first theme, Application in Safety and Emergency Situations, many students described how specific content related to safety drills, communication during crises, or pollution response would guide their behavior onboard. *“The reading about fire situations was really helpful. Now I know what I should do in such a situation.”* (S14) *“Readings about MARPOL and accident prevention made me more alert about what mistakes to avoid when work onboard.”* (S35)

Related to Professional Communication and Procedures, students cited specific phrases, expressions, practices they could apply when giving instructions, writing reports, or engaging in teamwork. *“I learned how to write an emergency report in English from the readings. I would use that in port procedures.”* (S3) *“I now feel more ready to explain shipboard operations clearly in English when asked by a foreign colleague or officer.”* (S23)

The last identified theme was Vague or No Concrete Examples and some responses were general or noted that the student had not encountered a real opportunity to apply what was learned. *“I haven’t had the chance to apply it yet, but I will in the future.”* (S6) *“I think it helped me in general, but I can’t name a specific example.”* (S48)

The ninth question in the questionnaire was “Has your ability to understand documents like charts, manuals, or maritime regulations improved?” and student responses were categorized into the following major themes:

Table 9. Themes Identified from Question 9

Theme	Description
1. Improved Document Literacy and Familiarity	Students reported clearer understanding of navigational, regulatory, and operational texts.
2. Better Navigation of Technical Language	Some focused on learning how to interpret complex terminology and structure in maritime documentation.
3. Limited Exposure or Difficulty	A smaller group mentioned they didn’t engage deeply with such texts or struggled with them.

Regarding Improved Document Literacy and Familiarity, students noted increased comfort with interpreting manuals, safety instructions, charts, and procedural documents. *“Reading charts was difficult before, but now I understand some of the symbols and abbreviations better.”* (S20) *“The articles helped me understand safety manuals and ship rules more clearly.”* (S17)

On the Better Navigation of Technical Language, responses pointed out that exposure to real documents trained them to understand how maritime texts are structured and worded. *“The language of regulatory texts is very formal, but I’ve started to understand these expressions now.”* (S45) *“I learned new abbreviations and phrases from IMO and SOLAS-related readings.”* (S5)

About the Limited Exposure or Difficulty, some students stated that they didn’t find the document-based content sufficient or struggled due to its density and formality. *“It was too technical for me. I didn’t understand everything, but I did learn some terms.”* (S33) *“I didn’t engage much with documents. I focused more on the article content.”* (S11)

The last question in the questionnaire was “Would you recommend this reading-based method in future Maritime English courses? Why or why not?” and student responses were grouped into three broad categories:

Table 10. Themes Identified from Question 10

Theme	Description
1. Strong Endorsement with Pedagogical Justification	Students praised the method for enhancing vocabulary, comprehension, and realism.
2. Conditional Support with Suggestions for Balance	Some supported the approach but recommended better pacing, more visuals, or varied material.
3. Negative Feedback or Preference for Traditional Methods	A small group found the method too challenging, boring, or less effective than other formats.

The first theme determined as Strong Endorsement with Pedagogical Justification and most students supported continuing the method, stating that it enriched their learning experience and reflected industry expectations. *“I definitely recommend it. Reading real materials is very helpful for preparing for the industry.”* (S26) *“It helped improve not just my English, but also how I think about my job in the future.”* (S13)

On Conditional Support with Suggestions for Balance, these students liked the method but noted that the workload, text difficulty, or presentation style could be improved. *“The texts were useful but sometimes too long. It would be better to have shorter or visual-supported content.”* (S38) *“Reading-based teaching is good, but it should be supported with discussions or videos.”* (S16)

The last theme identified is Negative Feedback or Preference for Traditional Methods and some learners stated that they preferred simpler formats like direct instruction, vocabulary lists, or SMCP-only practice. *“This method didn’t work for me. I prefer more speaking and practice-based lessons.”* (S2) *“Too much reading made the course feel like a literature class.”* (S50)

4. CONCLUSION

The qualitative analysis of student responses to ten open-ended questions demonstrates considerable support for the integration of academic journal articles and maritime-related online resources into Maritime English instruction. The majority of students reported meaningful improvements in vocabulary acquisition,

topic comprehension, professional communication, and preparedness for real-world maritime operations. Key themes included the acquisition of technical terminology, contextualized understanding, and increased awareness of safety procedures. While a few students found some materials challenging due to length or complexity, most appreciated the authenticity and practical value of the readings. Several students specifically mentioned feeling more confident and better prepared for their future professions. Neutral feedback largely stemmed from issues such as limited time or unfamiliarity with academic texts, while negative responses were minimal and typically came from the students who preferred more traditional language learning models. Overall, the findings suggest that supplementing Maritime English courses with diverse, real-world materials can enhance students’ linguistic competence and occupational readiness.

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