

E-LEARNING MARITIME ENGLISH COURSE-FINAL RESULTS AFTER PILOTING STAGE

Carmen ASTRATINEI¹

¹Senior Lecturer , PhD „Mircea cel Bătrân” Naval Academy, No.1 Fulgerului Street, Constanta, Romania
c_astratinei@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The shipping industry has become more and more demanding as far as the General and Maritime English are concerned. This is due to the fact that most merchant ships are owned by foreign companies and manned by multinational crews who need to be competent to communicate in English orally and in writing. In this respect, the IMO (International Maritime Organization) and the STCW'95 (Standards of Training Certification and Watch-keeping) convention and code imposed a number of requirements regarding the seafarers' Maritime English knowledge and adequate use. As a result of the international maritime bodies' requirements, the SMCP (Standard Marine Communication Phrases) has become mandatory for the shipping industry worldwide. The SMCP is a comprehensive standardized safety language, precise, concise, simple and unambiguous so as to avoid confusion and error. It consists of a set of terms, definitions, phrases used on board ships, for ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore communication. Therefore, the MET (Maritime Education and Training) teachers have to meet the challenge of designing attractive and efficient courses to motivate their students. It seems that on-line courses are becoming more and more popular with the 21st century students. Last year we piloted the first year deck cadet on-line course. We will present in this paper the final results and considerations after analyzing the students' feed-back commentaries and suggestions. In a learner-centered type of education, the students' involvement in teaching/learning materials development as well as in course design is a must. In this way, the learners become more responsible for the act of learning, more enthusiastic and more determined to achieve success.*

Keywords: *Maritime English; feed-back; data base expansion; authentic materials*

I INTRODUCTION

Whenever a new teaching/learning product is introduced in the education process, the learners' feed-back is very important for the further implementation of that product.

We have experimented an e-learning 1st year ME course for the 2013-2014 academic year. At the end of the first semester we just compared the final results of the experimental and traditional class groups. They were slightly in favour of the experimental groups. By the end of the second semester, a comprehensive course evaluation form was administered to the experimental groups. The purpose of this feed-back was to collect both quantitative and qualitative data meant to improve the existing course format.

First, the content of the evaluation form and the reasons behind selecting particular rubrics will be discussed. Then, the quantitative and qualitative data will be analyzed. Finally, conclusions will be drawn as to advantages and disadvantages of e-learning courses.

II COURSE EVALUATION FORM DESCRIPTION

The course evaluation form was designed as a twofold research instrument: a *questionnaire* referring to the course structure and the *ME lecturer's performance* and a set of additional

free-response questions to be answered objectively and in earnest by the students.

There were six statements addressing the *course structure*:

- The sequencing of the knowledge input and the learning activities is adequate for the topics presented in the course;
- The practice test and the end of unit self-test are meant to reinforce the knowledge acquired throughout the course;
- The tests within the lesson help you consolidate the information presented in the course;
- Diagrams are used to illustrate or clarify information presented in the course;
- The illustrated glossary helps you preview the content of each unit;
- Evaluation is objective and accurate.

For each statement, the students had to choose one out of the following qualifications: Disagree, Undecided, Agree and Strongly Agree.

The information mainly expected was to confirm that the course knowledge recycling structure is helpful for the students' terminology acquisition.

The statements related to the *ME lecturer's performance* were meant to point out the

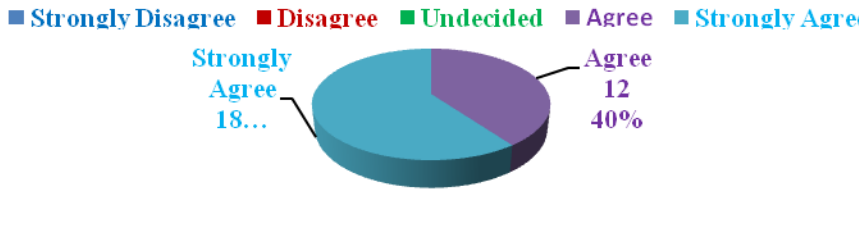
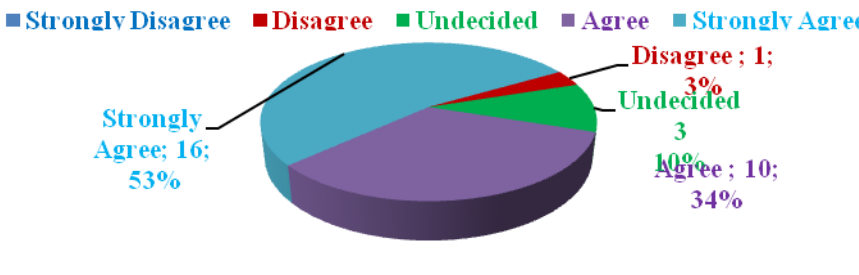
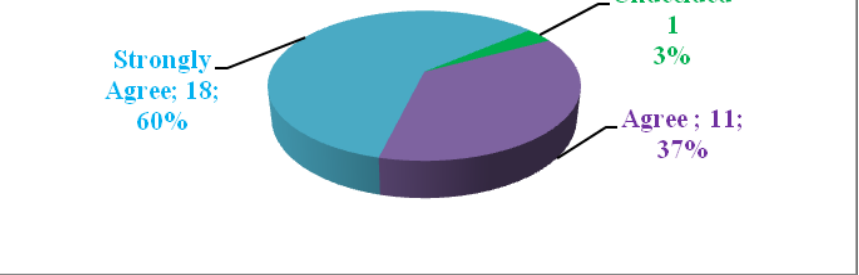
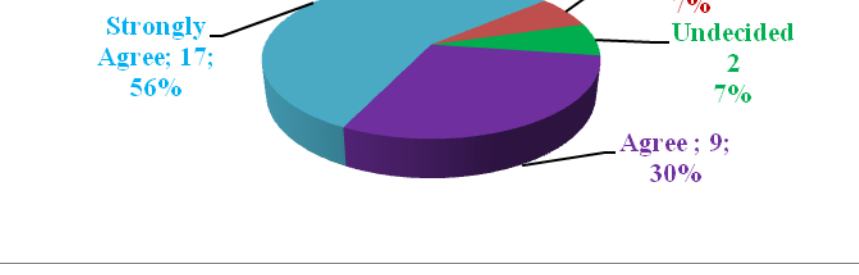
importance of a teacher’s presence within an e-learning environment. They referred to the teacher’s knowledge of the subject matter, their ability to get the message across, to make the students actively participate in the course, to respond well to students’ questions and to establish positive rapport with them. The qualifications the learners had to choose from

were ranging from Satisfactory through Good to Excellent.

The additional questions to be answered freely by the respondents referred to opinions on the main benefit(s) or drawback(s) of an on-line course, suggestions for course improvement in point of both structure and content and opinions about the best achieved units and the less successfully achieved ones.

2.1 COURSE STRUCTURE EVALUATION FORM

<u>Course Offering - Pie Charts</u>					
30 Students answers					
Question 1	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
				12	18
1) - The sequencing of the knowledge input and the learning activities is adequate for the topics presented in the course :	<p>Legend: Strongly Disagree (blue), Disagree (red), Undecided (green), Agree (purple), Strongly Agree (light blue)</p> <p>Strongly Agree: 60% Agree: 40%</p>				
Question 2	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
				11	19
2) -The practice test and the end of unit self-test are meant to reinforce the knowledge acquired throughout the course	<p>Legend: Strongly Disagree (blue), Disagree (red), Undecided (green), Agree (purple), Strongly Agree (light blue)</p> <p>Strongly Agree: 63% Agree: 37%</p>				
Question 3	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
3) -The tests within				12	18

<p>the lesson help you consolidate the information presented in the course :</p>					
<p>Question 4</p>	<p>Strongly Disagree</p>	<p>Disagree</p>	<p>Undecided</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Strongly Agree</p>
<p>4) -Diagrams are used to illustrate or clarify information presented in the course :</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>10</p>	<p>16</p>	
					
<p>Question 5</p>	<p>Strongly Disagree</p>	<p>Disagree</p>	<p>Undecided</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Strongly Agree</p>
<p>5) -The illustrated glossary helps you preview the content of each unit :</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>11</p>	<p>18</p>		
					
<p>Question 6</p>	<p>Strongly Disagree</p>	<p>Disagree</p>	<p>Undecided</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Strongly Agree</p>
<p>6)-Evaluation is objective and accurate:</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>9</p>	<p>17</p>	
					

2.2 ME lecturer`s performance EVALUATION FORM

<u>The Maritime Teacher - Pie Charts</u>															
	30 Students answers														
Question 7	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent												
	1	8	21												
1) - Knowledge of the subject matter:	<table border="1"> <caption>Data for Question 7 Pie Chart</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Count</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Satisfactory</td> <td>1</td> <td>3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Good</td> <td>8</td> <td>27%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Excellent</td> <td>21</td> <td>70%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Category	Count	Percentage	Satisfactory	1	3%	Good	8	27%	Excellent	21	70%
	Category	Count	Percentage												
Satisfactory	1	3%													
Good	8	27%													
Excellent	21	70%													
Question 8	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent												
	2	6	22												
2) - Ability to get the message across:	<table border="1"> <caption>Data for Question 8 Pie Chart</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Count</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Satisfactory</td> <td>2</td> <td>7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Good</td> <td>6</td> <td>20%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Excellent</td> <td>22</td> <td>73%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Category	Count	Percentage	Satisfactory	2	7%	Good	6	20%	Excellent	22	73%
	Category	Count	Percentage												
Satisfactory	2	7%													
Good	6	20%													
Excellent	22	73%													
Question 9	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent												
	0	7	23												
3) - Ability to make the students actively participate in the course:	<table border="1"> <caption>Data for Question 9 Pie Chart</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Count</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Satisfactory</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Good</td> <td>7</td> <td>23%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Excellent</td> <td>23</td> <td>77%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Category	Count	Percentage	Satisfactory	0	0%	Good	7	23%	Excellent	23	77%
	Category	Count	Percentage												
Satisfactory	0	0%													
Good	7	23%													
Excellent	23	77%													
Question 10	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent												
	1	4	25												
4) - Responded well to student questions:	<table border="1"> <caption>Data for Question 10 Pie Chart</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Count</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Satisfactory</td> <td>1</td> <td>3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Good</td> <td>4</td> <td>14%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Excellent</td> <td>25</td> <td>83%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Category	Count	Percentage	Satisfactory	1	3%	Good	4	14%	Excellent	25	83%
	Category	Count	Percentage												
Satisfactory	1	3%													
Good	4	14%													
Excellent	25	83%													

Question 11	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
	0	8	22
5) - Established positive rapport with students:	<p> ■ Satisfactory ■ Good ■ Excellent Excellent 22, 73% Good 8, 27% </p>		

III. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

We have had 30 respondents out of 49 course attendees, which mean 75% of the students who participated in the course.

Firstly, we will comment on the quantitative data. As far as the structure of the course is concerned, most respondents strongly agreed with the actual sequencing and knowledge recycling system of activity organization, diagrams and tests included. The Strongly Agree qualification ranged from 53% (statement 4-Diagrams) to 63% (statement 2-Practice and unit self-test).

The ME Lecturer’s performance was evaluated by most of the respondents with the qualification Excellent ranging from 70% (statement 1-Knowledge of the subject matter) to 83% (statement 4-Responded well to students` questions).

The additional questions revealed precious information about the students` objective opinion both on the course structure and possible improvements. They had to reflect and have a say on the benefits and drawbacks of on-line courses, course accessibility, question database, meaningfulness for their future career.

The overall opinion as to the benefits of on-line courses was that “an on-line course gives you the opportunity to work on your own pace and to cover more information in a shorter time”; “we can

insist on things we don`t know and if we still don`t understand teacher gives us necessary explanations”; “You can see after finishing a test where you were wrong”. Most students emphasized the importance of the diagrams, pictures and video clips in “visualizing and understanding ship structure” even suggesting scheduling the Maritime English class after the Seamanship Fundamentals specialty course ; “The course totally lived up to my expectations”.

The only drawback, detected by the majority of respondents, referred to the computer evaluation system which was not always accurate. “Some of the answers are correct but not marked” so, in this respect the students suggested “extra answers should be added to the computer`s answer grid” and “punctuation should not affect the correct answer”. Another problem was that “some questions are ambiguous” so they will have to be replaced or rephrased.

Here are some suggestions made by the students for course improvement: “...go to the simulator and learn the consoles by its English name”; “more videos showing the operations that happen around the ship”; “I suggest you should make a summary at the end of each unit for better learning”; “grammar questions should be extended while the knowledge ones should be decreased as they are too many to be dealt with in rather a short time”.

CONCLUSIONS

As we have already stated, in a learner-centered form of education, the students` involvement in learning/teaching materials and even course design is very important. It increases their motivation and responsibility for the learning process. The fact that they can express freely their opinions and suggestions is benefic for both parties involved, i.e. course designer and learners.

After analyzing thoroughly the respondents` feed-back, we started a sustained remedial work for course improvement having in view the students` observations and suggestions.

We were somewhat amazed that none of the respondents signaled the absence of the speaking skill in the economy of the course. This indeed is an aspect to be dealt with in future. We will have to find the right technology to add a speaking component to the course as well.

Because during the piloting stage there was only one teacher (the author of this paper) involved in teaching the experimental groups, we do not have a formal teacher course evaluation form. However, I will try to give

an informal account of my apprehensions and tribulations as to managing an on-line course. At first, I was worried about the students` feeling estranged and isolated while working on their own. I was completely wrong since the act of learning was absolutely collaborative peers trying to work at the same pace in order to be able to help each other with solving the tasks correctly. On the other hand, I was there for them at all times. Whenever they had comprehension problems, they would ask for my help. This demonstrates that the role of the teacher in an on-line environment is as important as the one performed in a traditional class. All in all, I was happy to see that the students really enjoyed working in the Resource Center, which resulted in an unexpected full attendance throughout the whole course.

Starting with the academic year 2014-2015, the on-line course will be taught by three teachers, so, the end-of-course feed-back will include the teachers` opinions and suggestions as well.

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