THE SECOND YEAR DECK MARITIME ENGLISH COURSE: E-LEARNING MODE VS THE TRADITIONAL PRINTED VERSION

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Abstract: First, there will be emphasised the importance of Maritime English in the shipping industry in the context of the ever growing number of munltinational manned ships. As a result, the demand for Maritime English competences, stipulated by STCW78 and other IMO documents, has become ever greater. Therefore, the MET institutions will have to adjust and harmonise their syllabi in order to obtain the same learning outcome results. The syllabi contents must be endorsed by properly designed courses. This paper proposes to compare the e-learning teaching/learning mode with the traditional face to face class approach focusing on the course outline and content. A description of the course will be provided, then different sections of the units will be illustrated, compared and commented upon. Advantages and drawbacks of the two ME course versions will also be evidenced. Finally, the conclusions will underline the importance of a well structured course material which may greatly facilitate the learners` knowledge acquisition.

1. Introduction

Today`s globalisation has encroached upon the shipping industry as well. More than ninety percent of the global trade is carried by sea. As a result, the decision makers operating in the shipping industry have had to find solutions to cut down costs in recruiting employees and thus enhancing profits. Cheap manpower to be recruited to work on board ships has become a priority. This tendency has led to the multicultural manning of sips. This situation has brought to attention the problem of on board communication among the crew members and external communication with port state control, vessel traffic service, pilot and other port authorities. Under these circumstances there was the need for a common working language on board ships so, IMO developed in 1977 the SMNV and later in 2001 the SMCP (Standard Marine Communication Phrases). The STCW`78 (Standards of Training Certification and Watch-Keeping) Convention stipulates the Maritime English competences required on board ship. The problem is that MET (Maritime English and Training) graduates do not always live up to the levels envisaged. So what should be done? Projects like SEATALK (2013) and DECOMAR (2015) had in view, as object of research, the harmonization of the MET institutions` syllabi in compliance with IMO requirements. On the other hand, Clive W. Cole and Peter Trenkner, who advocate and support ME (Maritime English), have suggested credible yardsticks, an internationally accepted descriptive scale that clearly identifies the ME communication performance required by STCW, against which student performance can be measured. In order to achieve this goal, it is imperative that these harmonized syllabi should be endorsed by properly designed course books, be they printed or on-line versions, meant for traditional face-to-face teaching mode or resource centre computer based one. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the advantages and disadvantages of these two ways of teaching/learning approaches.

2. E-learning vs classroom training

The literature on the subject reveals the debate on the effectiveness of e-learning compared to face-to-face classroom-based education. Most of the research studies have reached the conclusion that both teaching/learning modes have advantages and disadvantages, that it is not a matter of educational approach quality but rather a matter of the learner`s choice of the way they desire to be educated, meaning a way that would suit their needs and learning styles.
We will compare and contrast the two teaching/learning approaches in point of learning environment including location and social interaction, instructional materials and their availability as well as assessment. The considerations will be made from own experience of teaching both the classroom mode and the e-learning one. The teaching subject matter is Maritime English as recommended by IMO and the STCW 78 Convention. Maritime English is the communication language on board multicultural crew ships. Therefore, the learners have to thoroughly acquire the maritime terminology. They have to have good listening and speaking skills in order to be able to communicate on board multinational ships or with other ships or aircraft in cases of emergency. Senior Deck Officers also have to communicate with port authorities, the VTS (Vessel Traffic Service), the Pilot on board or other shore-based operators. As a result, the Deck graduates must be proficient mainly in specialist vocabulary and speaking.

In order that the learners could develop such skills, the teacher must find the right way to get the input across in the most efficient manner. But before that, he/she has to design a meaningful course book in compliance with the harmonized syllabi and the IMO requirements.

After having stated the differences between the two learning modes in point of advantages and drawbacks, the focus will be placed on the learning resources. The same section of a teaching/learning unit will be presented and commented upon from the perspective stated above, i.e. the traditional printed course book and the on-line version of the same course content.

2.1. Learning environment

Probably the main difference between e-learning and classroom based education in point of learning context is the physical location of the learning process and the social interaction between students, as fellow learners, and their teacher/instructor/facilitator.

In a classroom based education, the teacher is there all the scheduled time to organize and manage the class activities, to answer the learners` questions and clarify input of the lesson they have problems to understand. The learners can interact with each other working in groups or in pairs solving tasks given by the teacher. The question is: will the learners revise their notes, if they have taken any notes, until the next scheduled class? This might be a drawback of the traditional classroom learning mode.

The general idea is that in an e-learning environment, learners mostly work on their own being deprived of the presence of a teacher in the same room. It is true that in this learning mode learners work on their own, at their own pace, which is an advantage, but from my experience and observations, they are not at all isolated. They collaborate, they help each other solving the tasks. If they still have problems, they resort to the teacher who is always there for them to make clarifications and give them more explanations if necessary. The advantage of the e-learning mode is that the learners can work on the different tasks at home as well, providing they have a PC and an internet connection.

2.2. Learning resources

In a classroom based education, learners use printed textbooks and printed handouts for supplementary activities. They may also have scheduled listening and video activities with tasks designed by the teacher who gives instructions and helps learners carrying them out successfully. But unless the printed course includes a cd or dvd for listening and video activities, the learners will have to resort only to their notes, if they are diligent enough to take them down into their notebooks, ultimately to be revised before the recurrent term tests and for the final term one. The availability of the learning resources is indeed a serious drawback of the traditional teaching mode.

In comparison with the face-to-face classroom teaching, the e-learning mode provides the learners with the possibility of accessing the learning resources at all times. Therefore, the learner can revise the input material whenever they need to. They can download information they want to preserve, they can copy sites they find interesting for their future profession, they can watch the videos as often as they want to. So, in this respect, e-learning mode has the upper hand on the traditional teaching style.

2.3. Assessment

In the traditional face to face traditional classroom mode, the assessment might be rather subjective. Although the syllabus states that two recurrent term tests and a presentation account for 100% of the final mark, the class teacher may not be 100% objective in granting the final mark, because he/she may have affinities with some students more than with others due to the temperament and personality of the parties involved in the teaching/learning process.

In comparison with the traditional teaching process, the e-learning mode seems to be more objective, since it is the computer programme that assesses the students` performance. The final pass mark is made out of the score the learners obtain at the end of each unit, which accounts for 60% of the final mark, and the final term test, which accounts for 40% of the final mark. Therefore, there is no subjectivity in grading the students` performance. However, the teacher may appreciate full attendance and observance of deadlines scheduled activities. So, he/she may still have a say in the final mark giving a bonus to the diligent students.

3. Printed course book vs on-line course

We have chosen a section from unit 06 related to lights and signal flags from the course which addresses second year deck students. The structure of the unit is the same. The difference is that the e-learning unit is much more comprehensive including lots of supplementary information as well as visual and video teaching aids.

3.1 The printed course book structure and unit section presentation

The unit starts with a lesson followed by the specialist vocabulary. Then there is a Vocabulary Practice test for terminology consolidation. Next,

there is grammar theory, followed by a Grammar Practice test. The last sequence of the unit is the Self-Test which combines vocabulary knowledge with grammar exercises.
Here is the lesson and vocabulary:

Unit 6.

NAVAL EQUIPMENT: SIGNAL LIGHTS, FLAGS, AND BELLS

1.   Most of the equipment for signalling short distances is located on or near the *signal bridge* on the superstructure of the ship. Lines called *halyards* extend from the *yardarm*. On them are found *signal flags.* These are flags representing letters of the alphabet, numbers, or complete meanings. If they are not square they are called *pennants.* They are read from top to bottom. They are *bent on* (attached) to the halyards and hoisted to the *yard.*

On or near the signal bridge are *signal searchlights.* These are hand-operated blinking lights which send code messages.

On the outboard end of the yard are two small lights called *yardarm blinkers* used for sending messages over short distances. These are operated by a special switch called a *key* similar to a telegraph key.

Another signalling device is the *ship's bell.* This is mainly used to notify personnel on the ship of the time. Using the bell is an old navy custom. Time is, to this day, expressed in "bells" on a ship. Traditionally time at sea is divided into 4-hour periods called watches. There are six watches.

Midnight –0400	Middle Watch	Noon-1600	Afternoon watch	
0400-0800	Morning Watch	1600-2000	Evening Watch	
0800-noon	Forenoon Watch	2000-midnight	First Watch	

The evening Watch can be divided into two short watches.

1600-1800   First dog watch   1800-2000   Second Dog Watch

Each watch is in the charge of an officer. The traditional pattern is as follows:

	12-4	4-8	8-12
a.m.	Middle Watch	Morning Watch	Forenoon Watch
p.m.	Afternoon Watch	Evening Watch	First Watch
Deck	Second Officer	Chief Officer	Third Officer
Engine	Third Engineer	Second Engineer	Fourth Engineer

Traditionally the passage of time at sea is marked by bells. Bells are struck throughout each watch as follows:
After ½ hour   1 bell   After 2 hours   4 bells   After 3½ hours 7 bells
After 1 hour   2 bells   After 2½ hours   5 bells   After 4 hours   8 bells
After 1½ hours   3.bells   After 3 hours   6 bells
During the Second Dog Watch the bells strike 1 2 3 8.
1 bell is struck 15 minutes before each watch is due to change.

1.2.   For safety during peacetime, all ships that go to sea are required by international law to have *running lights.* These consist of a white *masthead light* usually on the upper part of the bridge superstructure or on an area forward of the *foremast.* Abaft and above the masthead light is a white *range light* located either on the foremast or *mainmast.* To either side *side lights* are found. There is a green one on the starboard side, and a red one on the port side.

Often a *searchlight* used to view nearby objects is found in the signal bridge area. It should not be confused with signalling equipment. It's important for the seaman to become familiar with all of these items.

2. VOCABULARY

Words and phrases:

Signal bridge = punte de semnalizare
Halyard = fungă, saulă de pavilion
Yardarm = capăt de vergă
Signal flags = pavilion de semnalizare
Pennant = flamură
To bend on = a fixa, a ataşa
Yard = vergă
Signal searchlight =lumină de semnalizare
Yardarm blinker = lumină de capăt de vergă
Running lights = lumini de marş/navigaţie

Masthead light = lumină de catarg (la navele cu propulsie mecanică)
Foremast = catarg prova, arborele trinchet
Range light = lumină de aliniament, lumină de catarg pupa
Sidelights = lumini distinctive din borduri (roşie sau verde)
Searchlight = proiector cu faşcicul dirijat
Mainmast = arbore mare, catarg principal

The drawback of a printed course book is that it cannot be upgraded all the time. It may become obsolete over the years until another new edition can be updated and issued. It is true that the learner, enrolled in a traditional teaching/learning mode, can have the physical printed material to be studied in their hands. It is also true that they do not depend on the ups and downs of the internet connection to access the information to do their tasks. But, on the other hand, the information they get is frozen in time until the next to date edition is issued.

3.2. The structure of the e-learning course and the same unit section presentation

The structure mainly respects the sequencing of the printed course book one, the main difference being that the on-line course is much more comprehensive, the format permitting to include supplementary materials like sites to be accessed,as well as audio and visual teaching aids. An undisputable advantage of the e-learning mode, is the possibility offered to the course designer to upgrade the information and increase the data base at all times both in point of knowledge information and assessment questions.
 Here is the counterpart of the printed course book version of the same unit section :

Part 1
1. Signalling equipment for SHORT distances

- *signal flags* - Most of the **equipment for signalling short distances** is located **on or near** the *signal bridge* on the **superstructure** of the ship. Lines called *halyards* extend from the *yardarm*. On them are found *signal flags* which are a **set of flags** of different colours, shapes and markings. These are flags representing **letters of the alphabet**, **numbers**, or **complete meanings**. If they are **not square** they are called *pennants*. They are **read** from **top to bottom**.

When used singly or in combination, **signal flags** have different meanings. There are **26 square flags** which depict :

    the **letters of the alphabet**,
    ten numeral pendants, and
    three substitutes or repeaters.

Here are the meanings of some **basic signal flags**:

    D(Delta*)"Keep clear of me; I'm manoeuvring with difficulty"*;
    G(Golf) *"I require a pilot"*,
    H (Hotel) *"I have a pilot on board"*;
    O (Oscar) *"Man overboard"*;
    Q(Quebec*)"My vessel is healthy and I request free pratique (permission to enter and use foreign port"*;
    U(Uniform) *"You are running into danger"*;
    V (Victor) *"I require assistance"*;
    W (Whisky) *"I require medical assistance"*;
    Y (Yankee) *"I am dragging my anchor";*
    Z (Zulu) *"I require a tug"*.

Signal flags are **bent on (attached) to** the **halyards** and **hoisted to** the *yard*.
For further information on signal flags please go to
http://www.boatsafe.com/nauticalknowhow/flags.htm

- *signal searchlights* - On or near the signal bridge are *signal searchlights.* These are **hand-operated blinking lights** which **send code messages**.

On the outboard end of the yard are **two small lights** called *yardarm blinkers* used for **sending messages** over **short** distances. These are **operated by** a **special switch** called a *key* similar to a telegraph key.

- **ship's bell** - Another signalling device is the *ship's bell*. This is **mainly** used **to notify personnel** on the ship of **the time**. Using the bell is an old navy custom. Time is, to this day, expressed in "bells" on a ship. **Traditionally** time at sea is divided into **4-hour periods** called **watches**. There are **six** watches.

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0800-noon	**Forenoon** Watch
Noon-1600	**Afternoon** watch
1600-2000	**Evening** Watch
2000-midnight	**First** Watch

The **evening Watch** can be divided into **two** short watches.

1600-1800	**First dog** watch
1800-2000	**Second Dog** Watch

Each watch is in the **charge of** an **officer**. The **traditional pattern** is as follows:

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a.m.	Middle Watch	Morning Watch	Forenoon Watch
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Deck	**Second** Officer	**Chief** Officer	**Third** Officer
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Traditionally the **passage of time** at sea is **marked** by **bells**. Bells are struck throughout each watch as follows:

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During the **Second Dog** Watch the bells strike 1 2 3 8.
1 bell is struck **15 minutes before** each watch is due to change.

2. **For safety** during **peacetime**, all ships that go to sea are **required by international law** to have *running lights*. These consist of a **white** *masthead light* usually **on the upper part** of the **bridge superstructure** or on an area f**orward of the** *foremast*.
Abaft and above the masthead light is a **white** *range light* located either on the **foremast** or **mainmast**.
To either side   *side lights* are found. There is **a green** one on the **starboard** side, and a **red** one on the **port** side.
Often a *searchlight* used **to view nearby objects** is found in the **signal bridge area**. It should **not be confused** with **signalling equipment**. It's important for the seaman to become familiar with all of these items :
- **yardarm blinker** lights -used for sending messages over short distances
- **ship's bell**-another signalling device used to notify personnel on the ship of the time.

- signal **halyards** -lines which extend from the yardarm. On them are found signal flags
- **signal searchlight**-These are hand-operated blinking lights which send **code messages**'
- **green sidelight**-is placed on the starboard side and must be exhibited at night whether the vessel is underway or at anchor.
- **searchlight**-used to view nearby objects at night. It shouldn't be confused with signalling equipment,
- **masthead light**-it's a white light on the upper part of the bridge superstructure or on an area forward of the foremast. This light must be exhibited at night.

Mention should be made that all the on-line units start with an illustrated glossary of terms, unlike in the traditional course book in which the vocabulary comes after the text.
Here is an example of an illustrated glossary term:
Pennant
Pennants are signal flags which are **not square** representing **numbers**.
= fanion, flamură de semnalizare, care **nu** este **dreptunghiulara** si reprezinta **numere**

Conclusions
We have tried to demonstrate, from own experience, that both teaching/learning modes have advantages and drawbacks. That in fact, it is the learner`s choice to enrol into one mode or another according to their needs and learning styles.
Another subject for further debate would be: what if the learner has no choice as to the teaching/learning mode they would prefer?

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