

## **English Communication Skill Used by Indonesian Seafarer on Radio Communication**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to identify the graduates' perspectives on the usage of English as communication on board vessels, between ship to ship or ship to shore. The identification was made by investigating the maritime institution graduates or maritime alumni perspectives which focused on the language terms of using the English language through radio communication. This research adopted a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis to investigate the language elements. The study sample consisted of 8 Nautical Graduate Students from three Maritime Institutions in Indonesia who had been working at an ocean-going vessel for 2 years or more. The data were collected and generated from their perspective answers on the questionnaires and also from radio communication transcripts. The results showed that the communication that happened on board vessels which were done by the deck department was successful enough but still less in using language components such as good grammar and correct pronunciation. Then, the English language user or skillful communicator must know how to send the message well in order to avoid miscommunication and should consider the English competence in order to avoid accidents and incidents at sea.

Keywords: English, Communication Skill, Seafarer, and Radio Communication

### **INTRODUCTION**

The role of English in Indonesia is as a foreign language. Many people use English only in formal ways, like in education settings, international seminars, international offices, or international companies. English is not used in our daily communication or conversation in delivering messages to our interlocutor or other people surrounding us (Gunantar, D. A. 2016). Therefore, Indonesian people are not competent enough in using the language for everyday communication. On the other hand, English is one of the compulsory subjects to be learned by the students (Cadets). Even though the curriculum in maritime vocational education is adopted by international organizations, the atmosphere of English itself cannot be created well. Moreover, this poor condition also happens in almost every Maritime institution in Indonesia.

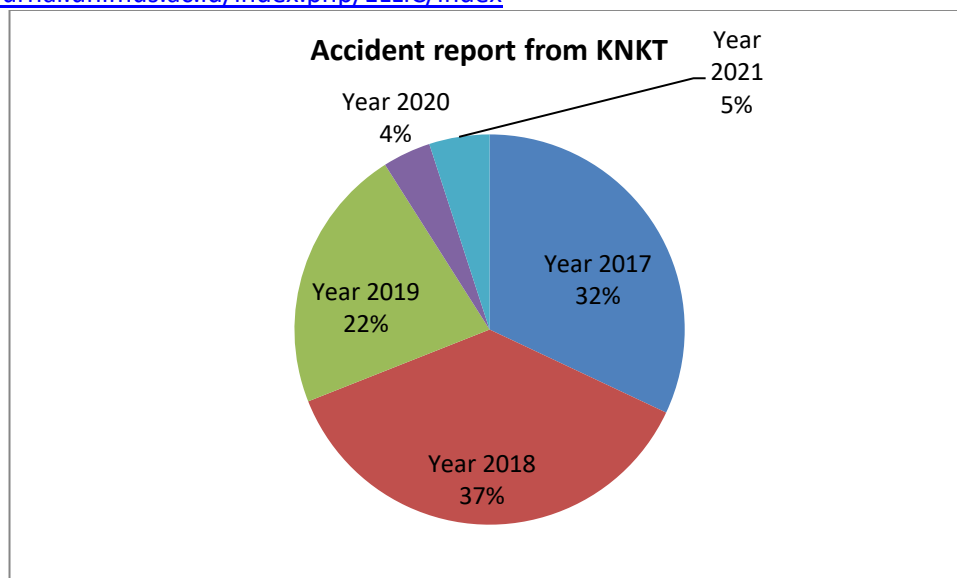
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Nowadays, English becomes one of the most spoken languages that can be used by many people whose job is related to the maritime industry. Moreover, English given in maritime institutions was professional material which is called “Maritime English” (MarEng). MarEng is one of the compulsory subjects that must be studied in all maritime institutions which have become the place for Seafarer’s Candidates to study under the Ministry of Transportation. This MarEng also becomes English for Specific in maritime sectors. Thus, this MarEng must be used by Seafarer’s Juniors in their future jobs field. Moreover, International Maritime Organization (IMO) suggested all maritime education adopt MarEng based 3.17 Curriculum. MarEng has been the main tool for communication at sea, onshore, or in ports. The concept of MarEng is very different from General English. This language is restricted by the demands of the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrase (SMCP) and the IMO Model Course 3.17. Maritime English should be used by the Seafarers and it can enable them to understand charts, meteorological information, messages related to ships’ safety, communicate with other ships and ashore including VTS (Vessel Traffic Service) centers (Tchkonja, N. 2019). Therefore, the students need to recall many specific technical terms in Maritime words or gambits and should be competent in understanding the SMCP and its realization onboard.

SMCP is very essential for a Nautical or Deck Officer and the other Seafarers who work in the deck department. In doing their job, the communication which will be done through radio communication is compulsory during the vessel’s berthing, unberthing, anchorage, and also during the trip while communicating with another vessel or ashore.

In addition, good communication on board vessels in using radio communication must become the most important part of avoiding accidents and incidents at sea. The number of accidents that have happened in Indonesian water while the last five years is really significant. There are many reasons this one happened, but some of them are caused by communication breakdown and failure in engine performance. The data on the vessel accident was derived from the report of KNKT (Komite Nasional Keselamatan Transportasi) year 2022, and the writers put it into the following charts in order to ease the understanding of the information:

Chart 1: The percentage of accidents based on KNKT reports.



(Source: [http://knkt.dephub.go.id/knkt/ntsc\\_maritime/maritime\\_investigation\\_report1.htm](http://knkt.dephub.go.id/knkt/ntsc_maritime/maritime_investigation_report1.htm))

KNKT reports that there are many accidents of vessels that have been happened from 2018 until 2021. The problems are caused by some reasons like the sink, collision, explosion, fire, capsized, aground, main engine failure, and others. In 2017, the number of accidents is in 32%, in 2018 been significantly increased become 37%, in 2019 is 22%, in 2020 4 %, and in 2021 is in 5%. Based on the various reasons for the accidents, communication takes the most important part in avoiding that occurrence.

Therefore, someone must have competence in communication to make his/her communication successful, because it is dealing with linguistic or grammatical rules and social rules. Besides, being able to communicate well and being able to appreciate other peoples' messages are also other requirements needed.

Communication is a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior, and exchange of information, and a technique for expressing ideas effectively (as in speech). (or the various methods of sending information through radio, etc. Furthermore, communication is an important aspect of behavior; human communication is affected by all factors that influence human behavior. Communication through words is called verbal communication; communication through other symbols is called non-verbal communication. The skills of verbal communication are writing, reading, speaking and listening. Communication plays a foundational role in the development of any healthy relationship. It can strengthen a mutual sense of commitment; it also helps to bridge the gap between people who have misunderstandings. Indeed, communication plays a critical role in all phases of interpersonal relations, from creating a relationship to the maintenance of relationships. (Rai, U. 2010).

Communication which has been done by the nautical officer on board vessel is mostly verbal. Therefore, the officers themselves must be skillful in using the English

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language as a means of communication for the external and internal domain. Communication skill is compulsory for all Seafarers in the world, in order to ease comprehension of the various language derived from different crew nationality. Successful communication is a difficult thing that needs the mastery of various different kinds of knowledge or competencies (Clark, R.A & Delia, J.G. 1979). First, to communicate well, people must be aware of the linguistic or grammatical regulations that enable them to create and comprehend sentences in a particular language; such as English and Chinese. Second, to be a successful communicator must know the social regulations that govern the suitability of language for different situations and groups of people. Third, to be a successful communicator must also know how to generate and process messages in ways that enable them to fulfill their personal and social goal efficiently and effectively. Moreover, skill and competence have the same definition of the ability to do an activity, job, or something well. There is an additional explanation of skills that it has gained because it has been practiced.

In line with the issue above, the researchers have two research questions that would be discussed: 1) How are the graduates' perspectives on using English as communication on board vessels, between ship to ship or ship to shore, and 2) How is English communication skill used by Indonesian seafarers on radio communication. Moreover, the purpose of doing this research is to find out the problems faced by Indonesian Seafarers in doing English communication on board vessels.

## METHOD

This research adopted a qualitative method to investigate the language elements. In this research, the researchers need samples for their study. The sample is a limited member of elements from a population, and a good sample is representative of the population from which is selected (Arikunto, S. 1993). Therefore, the study sample consisted of 8 Nautical Graduate Students who had been working at ocean-going vessels for 2 years or more. The respondents came from 3 maritime educations in Indonesia like Politeknik Ilmu Pelayaran (PIP), Politeknik Bumi Akpelni (PBA), and BP3IP Jakarta. Each respondent has different vessel names, and also the type of the vessel. The way of collecting the data was by distributing questionnaires through google forms to Maritime graduates who are still active in sailing. After that, the researchers continue to analyze the data by content analysis. Furthermore, the data of respondents can be seen in the following table:

Table 1: The detail of the respondents

No	Initial Name	Name of Vessel	Rank	Duration of working	Institution
1	GA	MV. Sora 2	Captain	More than 10 years	PIP
2	RA	MT. Angle Blue	3rd Officer	More than 3 years	PBA
3	YD	Fusion Energy	-	2 years	PBA
4	AE	Tug Boat	Chief Officer	2 years	BP3IP
5	MJ	MV.Kejora Salvo	Captain	2 years	PIP

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6	SA	MV. Gold Eagle	3rd Officer	2 years	PBA
7	HS	RT. Leader	Captain	More than 10 years	PBA
8	AP	MV. Glory Explorer	3rd Officer	2 years	PBA

Besides, the data were collected and generated from their perspective answers on the questionnaires and also from radio communication transcript, in order to know the topic of communication that they used most, and also about the language elements such as grammar and pronunciation.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

From the result of the discussion, it could be seen that the respondents did some radio communications which had different topics from each vessel. The language that they used on the bridge was English as it's mandatory. But if they pass a domestic vessel, they will use Bahasa Indonesia or Malay language to ease the sender and receivers' understanding. On the other hand, the Seafarers also found difficulties when their vessel passed another vessel and the crew was coming from India and China. The existence of dialect differences and pronunciation becomes another part of the main reason for understanding the meaning of communication.

### 1. The graduates' perspectives on using English as communication on board vessels.

Based on the respondents mentioned earlier, the data was taken from three different respondents, such as graduates of Politeknik Ilmu Pelayaran (PIP), Politeknik Bumi Akpelni (PBA), and BP3IP Jakarta. All the graduates came from the Nautical Study Program and already got a job for about two years or more on board a vessel. The Nautical Graduates were familiar with the regulation on board, as well as the communication that must be used on the bridge. Radio communication was usually done by second or third officers. This communication is always occupied while the vessel would do berthing or unberthing or even anchorage. On a large scale, communication through radio also must be done while the vessel enters the port and faces the vessel traffic system. The communication that will be used by the seafarers must be in line and follow standardization of communication like on IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrase. The communication could be categorized into three parts, they are:

Table 2: Types of communication onboard vessel

No	Types of communication & Phrases	Topics	Sub-topics
1	External Communication Phrase	Distress Traffic	Distress communication, Fire, explosion, Flooding, Collision, Grounding, List danger of capsizing, Sinking, Disabled and adrift, Armed attack/piracy, Undesignated distress, Abandoning vessel, and Person overboard.

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		Search and rescue communication	SAR communication, Acknowledgment and/or/ relay of SAR message, Performing/coordinating SAR operation, Finishing with SAR Operation.
2	Safety communication	Meteorological and hydrological condition	Winds, storms, tropical storms, sea state, Restricted visibility, Ice, Abnormal tides.
		Navigational Warning	Land or sea - marks, Drifting objects, Electronic navigational aids, Sea-bottom characteristic, wrecks, Cable, pipeline, and seismic/hydrographic operations, Diving, towing, and dredging operations, Tanker transshipment, Offshore installations, rig moves, Defective locks on bridges, Military operations, and Fishery.
		Environmental protection communication	-
3	On-board Communication Phrase	Standard wheel orders	-
		Standard engine orders	-
		Pilot on the bridge	Propulsion system, Maneuvering, Radar, Draught and air draught, Anchoring, Tug assistance, Berthing and unberthing.

All the topics and subtopics mentioned above were being used by them when the vessel faced such a certain condition. Therefore, English as the means of international communication had a big role in seafarers' jobs. Based on the result of getting the data by questionnaire, most of the respondents argued and gave a perspective that using English as communication on board vessels while having watch-keeping duty found some difficulties, like:

- a. Sometimes the receivers were not familiar with and understood using Standard Marine Communication Phrase (SMCP).
- b. Difficult to catch the idea and understand the English language due to the different accents especially while meeting with the crew from China, Taiwan, Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- c. Feel nervous because they rarely practice using the language every day.
- d. The pronunciation of each crew was quite bad.
- e. Misspelling and sometimes blank.
- f. The communication was not clear due to hard rain and foul weather.

## 2. English communication skills used by Indonesian seafarers in radio communication.

From this mini-research, it was found that mostly the respondents implement their English skills through communication with the external side by using the radio. If the crew in one vessel is mixed (Indonesian & other countries), the language that they use is English. But even though the vessel was an ocean-going vessel, and the crew are from the same nationality (Indonesia), so they will use Bahasa Indonesia. This becomes

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the weakness of Indonesian seafarers when entering the international ocean and their English skill is not fully competent.

In doing communication via radio and English was the means of communication, the Seafarers found many difficulties, and the topics of communication being used are General exchange of information ship-to-ship, General exchange of information ship-to-shore, Communication with VTS station, Distress communication, Urgency communication, safety communication, Communication using standard GMDSS message, pilotage, Search and Rescue / SAR, and Requesting Medical Assistance.

Moreover, a Captain or Officer demanded to have competence in radio communication especially using English as the means of communication. The English communication skills are implemented through the 10 topics below, and the result of the finding can be seen in the following table.

Table 3: The result of the finding

No	The Topic of Communication	Very often	Often	Rather Often	Not Often	Rarely	Never	Total
1	General exchange of information ship-to-ship	25%	62%	0%	13%	0%	0%	100%
2	General exchange of information ship-to-shore	25%	50%	25%	0%	0%	0%	100%
3	Communication with VTS station	50%	37%	0%	0%	13%	0%	100%
4	Distress communication	0%	0%	25%	25%	25%	25%	100%
5	Urgency communication		12%	37%	13%	13%	25%	100%
6	Safety communication	12%	25%	38%	25%	0%	0%	100%
7	Communication using standard GMDSS message	12%	25%	25%	25%	13%	0%	100%
8	Pilotage	12%	63%	0%	25%	0%	0%	100%
9	Search and Rescue / SAR	0%	37%	12%	13%	38%	0%	100%
10	Requesting Medical Assistance	0%	25%	0%	12%	63%	0%	100%

From the table above, it could be elaborated that “General exchange of information ship-to-ship or ship to shore” had been often or 62% & 50% were being used. “Communication with VTS station” was very often or 50%, and followed by “distress communication and Communication using standard GMDSS message” have equal in number, “Urgency communication and Safety communication” were rather often or in 37% & 38%, “pilotage” is 63% often used, and about “SAR and Requesting Medical Assistance” were rarely and the number were 38% & 63%. In another word, it can be said that the communication used while the vessel entered vessel traffic system was the highest percentage. Mostly the communication was about information service, navigational warning, traffic and route information, navigational assistance service, meteorological information, clearance, anchoring, arrival, berthing, and departure.

## CONCLUSION

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Having good communication skills by using English on radio communication must become the most important part of avoiding accidents and incidents at sea. This is because the use of English by seafarer candidates or professional seafarers also put on the IMO standard Marine Communication Phrase (SMCP) so they have standardized language while approaching another vessel, and doing communication via radio communication on board. Therefore, these seafarers must be skillful in using that language whether in written or oral form especially in Maritime sectors and fields, for the sake of avoiding misunderstanding between the different crew and different nationalities.

From those two findings, it could be concluded that the perspective of maritime graduates and their English communication skills while they were having duty on the bridge, could be implemented through various topics of communication as well as in different vessel types and could do it in a successful way, but still weak in using language components such as good grammar and correct pronunciation.

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