



Between Tradition and Communication: Realigning Indonesian Maritime English Education with ELF Principles

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ABSTRACT

Maritime English (ME) is fundamental to ensuring safety in maritime operations and is recognized by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) as the official language at sea, serving as a lingua franca (ELF). To standardize ME instruction, the IMO has developed Model Course 3.17, advocating for an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching approach. This study examines Indonesian maritime teachers' perceptions of ME and their integration of ELF and ESP principles into their teaching practices. Utilizing an online questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions, the research uncovers a preference among teachers for adhering to native-speaker norms, despite a theoretical acknowledgment of the advantages of ELF. The findings highlight a discrepancy between the recognized needs of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners—who predominantly use English to communicate with other non-native speakers—and current teaching practices. This study calls for an alignment of ME instruction with the linguistic realities faced by mariners, advocating for the inclusion of ELF in pedagogical strategies to better prepare seafarers for global communication challenges.

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INTRODUCTION

Maritime English (ME) has emerged as a pivotal element in the realm of maritime communication, essential for the safety and efficiency of international maritime operations. Recognized by the United Nations and institutionalized as the lingua franca of the maritime trade, ME's significance is indisputable in ensuring effective communication among seafarers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This paper focuses on ME's role and the perception and

practice of teaching it within Indonesian maritime academies.

Effective communication is crucial in the maritime industry. Studies, such as the investigation of miscommunications between ships and Japanese Vessel Traffic Service officers[1], have highlighted that challenges in maritime communication often stem from accent diversity rather than a lack of English language skills per se. This finding challenges the traditional emphasis on 'native speaker' English, suggesting the need for a

more inclusive approach to ME that accommodates non-native accents and linguistic variations.

Maritime English, as a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), has seen scholarly debate regarding its pedagogical focus. Zhang & Cole[2] discuss the updates to the Maritime English Model Course 3.17, emphasizing ME as a coded ESP. Contrarily, Dissanayake[3] argues for a perspective shift towards English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), considering the diverse English varieties in maritime settings. This study aims to bridge the gap in current literature by exploring how Maritime English is perceived and taught in Indonesian maritime academies, a context not extensively covered in existing research.

The methodology of this study involved distributing an online questionnaire to maritime English teachers in Indonesia, focusing on their pedagogical practices and perceptions of ELF in their teaching. The questionnaire was designed based on "typical errors" identified by Seidlhofer[4] and aimed to assess the frequency of correction and emphasis on these errors in teaching settings. While a detailed methodology will be discussed later, it is pertinent to note that the study's participants comprised ten female teachers with varied teaching experience in Maritime English, providing a diverse range of insights.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on ME teaching methodologies and teacher perceptions in a non-native English-speaking context, specifically Indonesia. By examining the intersection of ME as ESP and ELF in teaching practices, the study sheds light on the evolving landscape of maritime communication and education.

English, as the most widely used lingua franca [5], [6], enables communication between speakers of different native languages, especially in contexts beyond geographical boundaries. ELF's fluidity and transitory nature involve speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds, including native and post-colonial contexts[7]. Jenkins[8] and others [4], [9], [10] highlight the necessity for empirical studies on ELF, emphasizing its dynamic character, which contrasts with the rigidity often associated with traditional language forms. ELF is characterized by its variability in social and linguistic groups, a feature particularly pertinent in the maritime industry where diverse English varieties converge.

Key to understanding ELF is the Lingua Franca Core (LFC), an outcome of Jenkins's research. The LFC differentiates essential phonological characteristics for comprehensible pronunciation from those non-essential, often misinterpreted as 'errors' by native speakers but not

detrimental to mutual intelligibility in ELF communication [11]. The VOICE corpus, a collection of ELF interactions, supports this redefinition of accurate pronunciation and grammar, challenging conventional norms in the context of global English usage [3].

Maritime English, as a subset of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), is tailored for communication within the international shipping community and maritime safety (Model Course 3.17 Maritime English, 2015). The International Maritime Organization's (IMO) Model Course 3.17 outlines standardized ME curriculum, aligning it with legal frameworks and communicative language teaching approaches [2], [12]. The 2010 Manila Amendments to the STCW Convention further emphasize the importance of ME, detailing the "Knowledge, Understanding & Proficiency" (KUP) requirements for seafarers.

However, Dissanayake [3] critiques the Model Course for perpetuating the native/non-native speaker dichotomy, notably in its emphasis on minimizing 'first language interference' with English. This focus contrasts with the reality of multilingual, multicultural seafarers and teachers, necessitating a broader, more inclusive approach to English language teaching in maritime contexts.

The intersection of ME with ELF theory is critical. Unlike the pursuit of a universal language or accent neutralization, ELF acknowledges the multiplicity of English varieties and their role in effective communication among seafarers[7]. This perspective is evident in maritime contexts, where diverse Englishes blend, creating a unique linguistic environment that incorporates elements from various first languages [13]. Choi and Park [11] underscore the importance of integrating ELF research findings into ME pedagogy, raising essential questions about phonological factors, accent tolerance, and practical teaching approaches to enhance global intelligibility.

Surveys on teachers' attitudes towards ELF in various contexts reveal a general preference for teaching 'standard' English over ELF features [14], [15]. This trend is evident across different cultures, with native-speaker norms often being favored despite the growing relevance of ELF in international communication [16].

METHOD

This study, conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, adapted its research methodology to the constraints posed by the situation. Utilizing online questionnaires facilitated data collection while adhering to safety protocols. The target participants were teachers of Maritime English (ME) from

various regions of Indonesia, reached through the author's professional networks.

The questionnaire, influenced by the works of Seidlhofer [4] and Jenkins [8], [17], focused on identifying English grammar and pronunciation aspects that do not significantly hinder understanding or communication. It was divided into three sections:

1. Closed-Ended Statements and Questions: These items aimed to gather data on the extent to which teachers incorporate ELF knowledge into their ME teaching practices and their perceptions of ELF in this context.
2. Perception of ELF: This section contained items originally intended for interviews but adapted to the questionnaire format due to the pandemic. The questions sought deeper insights into teachers' views on ELF.
3. Typical Errors Assessment: Drawing from a list of "typical errors" identified by Seidlhofer, the questionnaire included seven items, each related to a grammatical issue commonly observed among Indonesian EFL learners. Participants rated the frequency with which they correct or emphasize these errors, using a scale from 1 (never or seldom) to 4 (always or almost always). This section aimed to understand the practical application of ELF principles in teaching contexts.

The questionnaire was disseminated widely, but voluntary participation led to a final sample of ten respondents. All participants were female teachers of ME, with their teaching experience ranging from 1 to over 10 years. This distribution of experience levels offered a varied perspective on the subject matter. The responses were analyzed to discern patterns in teaching practices and perceptions regarding the use of ELF in Maritime English instruction. The analysis focused on how frequently teachers address specific linguistic errors and their attitudes towards ELF, aiming to draw connections between theoretical knowledge and practical application in ME teaching.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's findings, as depicted in Figure 1, reveal a notable discrepancy between the teachers' professed acceptance of ELF features and their actual teaching practices. While the participants generally acknowledged the validity of using local accents in English communication, their responses

indicate a predominant tendency to correct certain ELF characteristics in classroom settings.

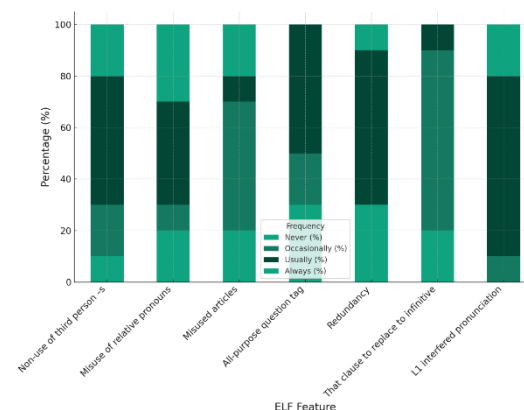


Figure 1. Frequency of ELF Features Used by Teachers

In the exploration of teaching practices regarding Maritime English in Indonesia, a pronounced trend was observed in the correction of pronunciation. Despite a theoretical embrace of the diverse accents that characterize English as a Lingua Franca, a substantial majority of teachers, amounting to 70%, still prioritize standard pronunciation in their classrooms. This inclination suggests a dichotomy between the acknowledged value of local accents in the international maritime context and the pedagogical emphasis on conforming to native English pronunciation standards.

When it comes to grammatical accuracy, teachers demonstrate a significant focus on rectifying certain errors. Specifically, the non-use of the third person singular *-s*, incorrect use of relative pronouns, and instances of redundancy were areas of concern, with 70% of the educators regularly addressing these issues. This high level of attention reflects a strong adherence to grammatical norms typically associated with standard forms of English.

Conversely, the approach to articles represents a departure from this pattern of rigorous correction. Only 30% of teachers actively corrected the misuse of articles, indicating a more relaxed stance toward this particular grammatical feature. This suggests that while certain grammatical norms are upheld stringently, others, like article usage, are afforded more flexibility in the instructional environment of Maritime English, perhaps due to their lesser perceived impact on comprehension and communication at sea.

3.1. Teachers' Perception of ELF

The data presented in the summary of participants' responses sheds light on the

perspectives of teachers regarding the teaching of Maritime English and the incorporation of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) principles. Each bar represents the number of participants who agreed with each statement regarding the teaching and perception of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in the context of Maritime English (ME).

Responses to multiple-choice and open-ended questions (summarized in Figure 2) provided insights into teachers' perceptions of ELF. The majority recognized the primary goal of teaching Maritime English (ME) as fostering effective communication. However, there was a notable divergence in views regarding the application of ELF in teaching, with some teachers still adhering to the notion of 'Standard English' despite acknowledging the practicality of ELF in diverse linguistic interactions.

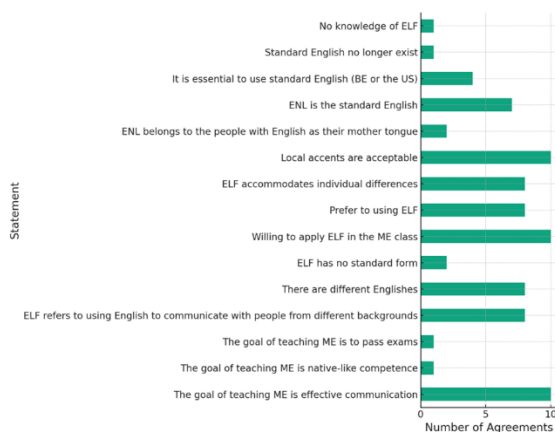


Figure 2. Summary of Participants' Responses

The most unanimous view among the participants is that the primary objective of teaching Maritime English is to facilitate effective communication. All teachers align with this goal, indicating a universal recognition that the utility of language in the maritime context transcends grammatical perfection, focusing instead on the pragmatic ability to convey and understand messages clearly.

However, when delving into the specific aspects of language teaching, the consensus becomes less pronounced. While a majority acknowledges the diversity of Englishes and the legitimacy of using English to communicate across different cultural backgrounds, the acceptance of ELF's flexible nature is less wholehearted. Some educators continue to harbor reservations about completely relinquishing the established norms of standard English.

Interestingly, all participants express a willingness to apply ELF in the Maritime English classroom, which suggests a theoretical openness to integrating ELF features into teaching practices.

Yet, when it comes to the acceptance of local accents, we observe a tangible commitment, with all respondents agreeing on their acceptability. This could reflect a practical understanding that in the real-world maritime environment, interactions are predominantly among non-native English speakers, making the acceptance of varied accents a necessity.

Despite this apparent readiness to embrace ELF, the responses reveal an underlying tension between innovation and tradition. A significant number of teachers still uphold the primacy of English as the standard language and believe in the essentiality of adhering to standard English norms. This indicates a reluctance to fully commit to an ELF-centric approach and highlights the complexity of redefining linguistic standards in educational settings.

A striking point of contention is the perception of who 'owns' English. A few teachers maintain that English belongs to native speakers, suggesting a persistent influence of native-speaker models in shaping beliefs about language ownership and authority.

3.2. Contradictions in Teaching Approach

A critical finding is the contradiction between teachers' theoretical acceptance of ELF and their classroom practices. For instance, while recognizing the acceptability of local accents, many teachers actively correct pronunciation elements like the initial [θ] sound. This suggests a gap between theoretical understanding of ELF and its practical application in teaching, possibly stemming from a lack of comprehensive ELF-oriented teacher training, as highlighted by Sifakis (2007).

Those who advocate ELF almost certainly have the best of intentions and are correct when they say that many ELF features (such as omitting third person -s or misusing relative pronouns or articles, even in some cases in pronunciation) have little effect on intelligibility [13], [18], [19]. Furthermore, it is difficult to argue with the common sense of simplifying and regularizing some of the problematic areas of English (such as the complicated question tag conventions). There is also no doubt that ELF is used to good effect to achieve understanding in a wide variety of situations. However, the fact that ELF is used in real sea-life communicative contexts [9], [20] should have been taken into consideration.

It is possible that these negative attitudes toward ELF are changing and may continue to change, as Jenkins [8], [21] suggests the case when she claims there is 'a growing receptivity toward ELF.' However, judging by previous research

evidence and the recent study reported in this article, this is far from the current situation, where expanding circle respondents were emphatically in favor of ENL norms, which are seen as aiding communication. The Model Course is intended for EFL learners. ELF is logically relevant to EFL learners. For EFL learners, the reality of interactions is that they use English mainly, although not exclusively, to communicate with other non-native speakers of English. Indonesian cadets and future seafarers are EFL learners. They will mainly use English in its lingua franca form, either at sea or on land, with non-native speakers of English, mostly Chinese, Filipino, Russian, and Ukrainian [22]. Thus, incorporating ELF into EFL teaching in practice is an issue that needs to be considered by curriculum designers in the future.

Jenkins and Leung [23] argue for a shift from a monolithic understanding of language competence regarding native-speaker norms and practices. In today's linguistic context, the old-fashioned monolingual approach cannot meet students' needs to utilize language to build communities of practice [24], especially in a multilingual setting. The reality that language is complex, and lingua franca use is even more complex, renders the attempt to impose a current template on contingent use in varied English contexts pointless. It leads to the claim that traditional English teaching and assessment approaches cannot be applied to contextual language use. We must address how traditional English assessment can be adapted to actual language use. Conventional standardized testing can only assess basic English proficiency. The ELF paradigm should focus on performance-related tasks and communication methods instead of measuring language in a vacuum [25]. The planners, designers, and teachers of EFL curricula should consider including ELF in their approach.

This study reaffirms the persistence of native-speaker norms in Maritime English (ME) teaching, despite the growing recognition of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in multilingual and multicultural maritime contexts. The findings illustrate a notable discrepancy between teachers' stated preferences for ELF and their adherence to English as a Native Language (ENL) standards in practice. This gap highlights the complex dynamics of implementing ELF in educational settings, where traditional views of language correctness still exert a strong influence.

While the study's participants acknowledged the practicality of ELF features in enhancing intelligibility, their teaching practices largely reflected a preference for ENL norms. This contradiction underscores the challenge in teaching

ELF, primarily due to its perceived lack of standardized norms. However, the reality of maritime communication, predominantly among non-native English speakers, necessitates a reevaluation of these teaching approaches. Indonesian cadets and future seafarers, as EFL learners, will predominantly use English in its lingua franca form in diverse international settings. Therefore, it is imperative for curriculum designers to integrate ELF into ME teaching practices, aligning with the actual communicative needs of seafarers.

CONCLUSION

The study advocates for a shift from a monolithic view of language competence based on native-speaker norms to a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the complexities of lingua franca usage. Traditional English teaching and assessment methods must evolve to address the practical realities of language use in varied contexts, especially in multilingual environments like maritime operations. This shift requires a reimagining of performance-related tasks and communication strategies in EFL curricula, moving beyond conventional standardized testing to assess language proficiency in context. In conclusion, the study calls for a transformative approach in ME education, one that embraces the diversity and practicality of ELF in preparing future maritime professionals for effective communication in the global maritime industry.

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