

A comparative Review between the English Language Programs of Maritime Institutes in Korea and Europe

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ABSTRACT : This paper compares the English language programs of two maritime institutes in very different parts of the world, South Korea and Belgium. It will show that although both institutes comply with the minimum standard set by the STCW Code issued by the IMO, requirements for entry and graduation can vary greatly. Method of class delivery, choice of learning tools and testing systems will also be examined to illustrate these differences. It will also shown that in order to train new seafarers in the best possible ways that will fulfill the IMO mandate of Safer Shipping and Cleaner Oceans, examination of course curriculum at any maritime institute should be an ongoing process so that cadets are encouraged to communicate in a targeted, efficient and professional way within a nautical context.

KEY WORDS : Maritime English, Safety, Communication, Life-long learning, Practical Skills

1. Introduction

This paper will review the pressing need for all trainers of seafarers to consider the heavy responsibility of providing quality instruction to young cadets who are preparing for time at sea.

It will show how despite satisfying international standards there is still a disparity between maritime training institutes especially in the field of maritime English and particularly the practical application of essential skills. This will be achieved by an analysis on the approaches used for teaching language and the expected outcomes from training in two countries using Mokpo National Maritime University in Korea and the Antwerp Maritime Academy in Belgium as models.

Recent comparative studies between Korean maritime institutes and other Asian academies have been published that compared the entire curriculums to illustrate the social climate of two countries and the attitude of the maritime community in relation to the programs offered (Dimailig et.al., 2010). In furtherance of this work the following sections will highlights one very important aspect of the curriculum, Maritime English, as well as providing empirical data through the use of survey results for support of the conclusions made.

The various methods of Maritime English training suggest

that certain regional conditions may affect the perception of how and why maritime English is being taught in such ways.

2.. Literature Review

It is widely known within the maritime industry that some 93% of accidents and incidents are directly related to the human element and that 40% of these are related to problems in communication (Kluijven, 2009). According to the principle author of IMO SMCP, Professor Peter Trenkner, more than 86% of all SOLAS vessels are presently crewed with multilingual personnel who, for diverse reasons, are frequently unable to render the Maritime English Skills required” (Trenkner, 2007). All personnel within the maritime industry have a responsibility to ensure these figures continually decrease but it is the trainers of seafarers who must shoulder the greatest responsibility and who are in the best position to remedy this situation.

3. Case Studies

In order to illustrate some of the differences in maritime English programs, two academic schools were chosen. One is Mokpo Maritime University in South Korea and the other is the Antwerp

Maritime academy in Belgium. They were chosen because they are both STCW compliant and include Maritime English in their programs of study and in both institutes English is not the first language of the cadets.

4. Survey results

Although it is clear that the Belgium training philosophy of Maritime English and other practical human-related nautical skills is more in-line with the conventions of the IMO, it must also be recognized that the Korean maritime educational system also has its strengths. Also, if the present systems are already providing well-qualified seafarers to the Asian shipping industry and the cadets in training are satisfied with their programs of studies then maintaining the status quo may be in its best interests. However, if deficiencies are found by the shipping companies and if cadets are not satisfied about the level of their training it would be prudent and cost-effective to examine areas where improvement can be made.

To this end the author would like to present some data that was compiled and presented in the authors master thesis paper that was accepted in July 2011.

Here are some relevant results that were collected after analyzing the data of over 200 surveys that were filled out by senior cadets that had already undergone at least 6 months of onboard training with a shipping company:

Unlike HZS, MMU cadets receive English Conversation classes by native speakers that have no maritime background and possibly no formal qualification for teaching EFL. Item 16 on the survey asked students to agree or disagree with the following statement: the English conversation lessons I took while at university were very helpful for my on board life. At present the maritime institute offers English conversation lessons from native speakers with no maritime experience or education. These are credit courses available to freshmen and sophomores. The respondents had already completed these courses prior to their on board training. 29% said that they “strongly disagreed” with the above sentence along with another 28.1% who also “disagreed”. The respondents that neither agreed nor disagreed were also 28.1%. Of those that agreed with the above sentence, 7.1% “agreed” and 6.3% “strongly agreed”.

The Null (Ho) hypothesis used for this item was that the English conversation lessons that were taken while at university were perceived as helpful for life on board. As can be seen in Table 4.15 the Test Value was set at 4. This represents the opinion that “agrees” with the statement in Item 16. As can be seen from the p value of <0.05, there is a statistically significant difference of opinion between the Null hypothesis and from the cadets themselves. This means that Ho can be rejected and it can

be confidently stated that the English conversation classes provided at the institute are not perceived as being helpful for life on board.

5. Conclusion

Using two maritime institutes from different locations in the world and comparing the methods of maritime language training has provided us with insights into the extent that there are differences in educational methods throughout the maritime industry. Although both schools are STCW compliant and regularly undergo auditing it has been shown the emphasis at AMA is towards the practical and life-long learning philosophy whereas the MMU chooses to favour written tests with less practical application. It was shown that the possible reasons for this maybe be cultural and include the impact of a test known as TOEIC which presently consumes much time and resources despite its limited intrinsic value to the development of good seamanship.

By reviewing the data from MMU senior cadet surveys it also seems that the students themselves desire a change away from the present system to one that empowers them to be fully qualified for the work that they must do.

Whether or not the stated competencies of AMA are in fact developed in all the graduating cadets would need to be the subject of further independent research. However, it can be clearly seen from the course details that the skills learnt during the 3 year training period are certainly valuable and very much in line with IMO ideals. This may be due to the fact of being in close proximity to the IMO and having more contact as well as a longer tradition of maritime education than Korea. Whatever the reasons, a comprehensive program of practical maritime English must surely be the ultimate goal for all maritime institutes as the continually apply themselves to providing the industry with competent and experienced seafarers.

References

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