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CHALLENGES OF TEACHING MARITIME ENGLISH IN ONLINE STUDIES

The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the society, and, consequently, on Maritime Education and Training (MET) as well as Maritime English (ME) cannot be overestimated. The society and educational institutions have demonstrated their exceptional ability to adapt to the rapidly changing environment. In addition, this made the society more robust to the unexpected situations, as certain patterns of reaction to unfavorable conditions were worked out. Of course, it boosted the use of IT in all areas, and especially for educational purposes. But the object of this study is the Maritime English teaching/learning process, teaching being the main focus in this study. The research is aimed at the investigation of changes, challenges and insights the online studies bring to Maritime English teaching/learning process. The distinction between distance studies and online studies has been made. Distance studies have been used in education for a long time, but total reliance on online teaching/learning has appeared just recently, which is quite a new experience for all participants in education. However, nobody can expect the world to be the same as it was and many activities that were regarded as the contact teaching have permanently shifted to the online domain. As Strelkov A. Yu. (2020) puts it, we have to get used to "the new normal" in teaching. The direct contact is replaced by meetings in webinars, and the assignments, assessment and evaluation are carried out online.

The objectives of the article include the analysis of changes to the teaching/ learning process due to online studies, the forms they take and possibilities of their adaptation to online teaching, advantages of online teaching for learning Maritime English, the study of students' exposed to online Maritime English teaching survey and insights into the further development of Maritime English teaching. Findings of the research show, that students developed such personal skills as self-discipline and self-study which are essential for life-long learning. The insights include suggestions for the compensation of lacking components of interaction in communicative teaching as well as the need for further investigation and search for more precise methods and ways of assessing and evaluating the students using online education.

Key words: Maritime English (ME), distance studies, online studies, teaching/learning.

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ВИКЛИКИ НАВЧАННЯ МОРСЬКОЇ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ В РЕЖИМІ ОНЛАЙН

Вплив пандемії Covid-19 на суспільство, зокрема, як наслідок, на морську освіту і навчання, а також на морську англійську мову не можна переоцінити. Суспільство й заклади освіти продемонстрували свою виняткову здатність адаптуватися до умов, що швидко змінюються. Крім того, це зробило суспільство більш стійким до несподіваних ситуацій, оскільки виробилися певні моделі реакції на несприятливі умови. Звичайно, це сприяло збільшенню використання ІТ у всіх сферах, особливо в освітніх цілях. Але об'єктом цього дослідження є процес викладання/вивчення морської англійської мови, причому викладання є основним напрямом цієї статті. Дослідження спрямовано на вивчення змін, проблем та ідей, які онлайн-режим привносить у процес навчання морської англійської мови. Дистанційне навчання використовувалося в освіті вже давно, але повна впевненість в онлайн-навчанні з'явилася зовсім недавно, що є досить новим досвідом для всіх учасників освіти. Однак ніхто не може очікувати, що світ буде таким, як був, і багато видів діяльності, які вважалися контактними, назавжди перейшли в онлайн. На думку О. Ю. Стрелкова (2020), ми повинні звикнути до «нової норми» у навчанні. Безпосередній контакт замінюється зустрічами у вигляді вебінарів, а виконання завдань і оцінювання відбувається онлайн.

Цілі цієї статті передбачають аналіз змін у процесі викладання/навчання у онлайн-режимі, форм, які вони приймають, і можливостей їх адаптації до онлайн-викладання, переваг онлайн-навчання для вивчення морської англійської мови, вивчення студентами морської англійської мови в онлайн-режимі та дослідження подальшого розвитку методики викладання морської англійської мови. Результати дослідження показують, що студенти розвивають такі особисті навички, як самодисципліна і самоосвіта, які необхідні для навчання протягом усього життя. Ці ідеї включають пропозиції щодо компенсації відсутніх компонентів взаємодії в комунікативному

навчанні, а також необхідність подальшого вивчення і пошуку більш ефективних методів та способів оцінювання навчальних досягнень студентів в онлайн-режимі.

Ключові слова: морська англійська мова, дистанційне навчання, онлайн-навчання, викладання/навчання.

Introduction. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the society, and, consequently, on Maritime Education and Training (MET) as well as Maritime English (ME) cannot be overestimated. The society and educational institutions have demonstrated their exceptional ability to adapt to the rapidly changing environment and transferred their educational activities to the online domain due to the Covid-19 quarantine restrictions. The full time studies suddenly were transformed not to the distance ones but to the online ones. Besides this, the actual contact time has remained the same and all study process had to be organized so that it corresponded to the format of day time studies as well. The article deals with this transformation and how it changed the educational process, and, more precisely, teaching and learning of ME. This can be regarded as a significant step towards online studies.

However, nobody can expect the world to be the same as it was and many activities that were regarded as the contact teaching have permanently shifted to the online domain. As Strelkov A.Yu (2020) puts it, we have to get used to “the new normal” in teaching. Much less or no direct contact, meetings in webinars, online assignments, assessment and evaluation are now a must and frequently we cannot revert to full time studies again due to objective requirements of the situations. Being an issue of “easier” studies and possibility to reduce time spent for studying due to the reason of studies being online, full time students now got used to the idea that they have to spend the same amount of time at the computer, performing the assignments they have together with the lecturer and/or with his/her assistance during their contact hours which is no longer a way of making studies “easier”, but that of the similar quality they had them in the real classroom.

In addition, this made the society more robust to the unexpected situations, as certain patterns of reaction to unfavorable conditions were worked out. It has to be said that this experience was useful both for students and lecturers as they now can be more flexible in the organization of the educational process because they feel free to revert to the online mode of the process more easily. This also may lead to a partial transfer of studies online not only in cases when it is necessary, but also in case any other unexpected disturbances of any kind.

Of course, it boosted the use of IT in all areas, the use of it for educational purposes not being an

exception. It was one of the challenges to cope with in the Maritime English teaching/learning process in online studies, which is the object of this study. The aim of the research is the investigation of changes, challenges and insights the online studies bring to Maritime English teaching/learning process. The aim of the research is to analyze challenges the participants of ME teaching/learning process encountered and insights the online studies bring to Maritime English teaching/learning process. In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives were raised: to analyze the constituent parts of communicative ME teaching, advantages of online teaching for learning Maritime English, check the missing parts due to distance teaching mode and look for solutions to fill in the gaps. References to previous research and personal experience with distance studies are made to work out a list of challenges in ME teaching.

Problem statement. The research problem is that the educational process has to be adapted to the online mode with minimum losses and the key challenges in online studies in general as well as in ME teaching/learning have to be detected as well as some suggestions offered how to overcome them have to be proposed, if it is possible.

Recent research and publications. The distinction between distance studies and online studies is the possibility to use a direct contact for initial sessions, tutorials, laboratory works, examinations or other types of final evaluation, etc. while online studies rely purely on computerized connection between a lecturer (further – a teacher) and a student with no direct contact (What’s the difference, 2021). Distance studies have been used in education for a long time, but total reliance on online teaching/learning has appeared just recently, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, which is quite a new experience for all participants in education. Also distance studies were designed to have much more hours for individual work, while the contact hours for online studies remained the same as for day-time students and lecturers had to use this time online efficiently, using video connection.

In a survey conducted by Lithuanian Centre of Quality Assessment in Higher Education (2020) the main challenges for online studies were named the organization of practical training that requires direct contact; the evaluation and ensuring academic honesty during the final evaluations. The problem of practical training shortage was also raised in Ochavillo article, where it is proposed to postpone some subjects

ultimately requiring practical training (Ochavillo, 2020). Another serious problem as an obstacle was mentioned was a lack of computers and poor internet connection service, which almost paralyzed the educational system of that country.

In order to find the differences between face-to-face full time studies in ME teaching/learning, first we have to analyze some aspects of student-teacher interaction in educational process and distinguish challenges that were encountered when reverting to online teaching mode.

As it is shown in Figure 1, the teaching/learning process requires an interaction between a student and a teacher. Students are active participants of the teaching/learning process, especially in the stages of practice and assessment where their involvement is essential and they are in reproductive stage in ME teaching/learning process, while teacher's role is to define the conditions for a reproductive stage of students' communication. In the case of input, a teacher is more active in input and evaluation while in practice and assessment stages a student plays an important role, as acquisition of knowledge is not possible without active student's efforts. A proactive student's position can be shown by his/her participation in the common class activities and discussions. So in case of online studies, the active student's involvement is crucial.

Personal qualities of a student come to the stage as well – he/she has to be able study individually and be able organize his/her time and work, and have great self-discipline, as he/she can get easily distracted by other activities at home, he has much less control from the teacher.

According to Popescu C. et al., “maritime universities are evaluated every year by naval authorities” (Popescu et al., 2012), and one of the documents the authorities refer to is the Model Course 3.17 – Maritime English by International Maritime Organization (further – the Model course), which reflects the requirements set for the qualification of seafarers in Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW), as amended. According to the Model

course, a syllabus defines the goals and materials have to be selected so that they assisted in reaching the goal of students being able to understand and use Maritime English in oral and written form in maritime context. The goals of the course syllabus usually define the material selected by the lecturer as well as the practical assignments that are designed by the teacher for students to perform in order to achieve these goals. As the Model Course puts it “It is the teacher, not the computer, who does the teaching” (Model Course, 2015: 189). The role of a lecturer (further – a teacher) and his/her support in teaching/learning process is an issue to be taken into account in online teaching and students are supposed to receive a sufficient amount of teacher's support in his/her learning process.

The Model course regards online resources as good additional means to the main course material. This can be online language learning systems, language testing systems, the use of web-based corpora for educational purposes, online dictionaries, radio programmes, maritime-related websites, social media tools. Online teaching, according to the Model Course, can be used in order to motivate students, but the possibility to rely purely on the online course is not regarded as an option: “If teaching an “online class”, be flexible: an alternative task/activity may be necessary in the event of technological problems” (Model Course, 2015: 189). The reason for an “alternative assignment” is technical issues. So another challenge met in online teaching is technical hindrances to overcome.

This idea is also supported talking about computer-aided language learning (CALL) which is regarded as a “remedial tool to help learners who require additional support” (Model Course, 2015: 187). However, during online studies, no reference to online or web based or computer-aided teaching as an additional one can be done. It is the ultimately only means of communication. So the question arises how to organize the study process online.

According to the Model Course, “Teacher talking time (TTT) became undesirable and ways were devised to reduce it through group work. <...> Pair

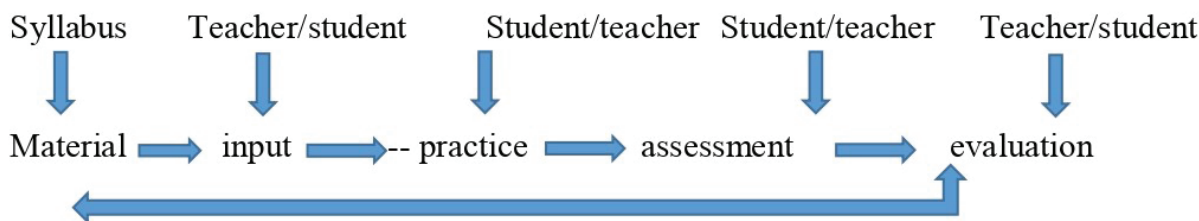


Figure 1. The model of teaching/learning process. (by the author)

and group work maximizes student participation and student talking time (STT) in communication activities” (Model Course, 2015: 118-119). Certainly this communication can also take place in the ME classes online dividing students to chat rooms for the speaking assignments. It is an advantage for students because “less confident students get the chance to put their knowledge of new language into practice in a non-threatening environment away from the critical eye of the teacher” (Model Course, 2015: 119). However, as the text suggests, “monitoring of the group work is critical. <...> The teacher should move quietly around the room...” (Model Course, 2015: 119-121). But the method of walking around does not work in online studies. Therefore, a possibility to check chat rooms where students communicate among themselves is a necessity in order to monitor the progress of activities carried out by students in online studies.

The purpose of the research. The research is aimed at the investigation of the general and Maritime English teaching/learning process adaptation to the online studies.

Methodology. The review of scientific literature and survey analysis were used in the study. A questionnaire survey of Marine Engineering and Navigation department full time students (56) was analyzed. All of students had already had at least two semesters of ME courses, taught using online study mode. The web-based questionnaire made by the author was delivered to students at the end of their ME course. The questionnaire comprised a part on their attitudes towards online studies in general, the second part was about ME teaching/learning. The permission from the higher education institution authorities was received for the survey. The students were informed about the purpose of the survey and they answered the questions anonymously. The academic group the students belonged to was known to the surveyor. Personal data about the students were not collected, as the groups were quite homogeneous. Most students were male, aged 19-23 years, with few exceptions (3 students older than the said age, 1 female student).

Challenges of online studies

1) The layout and organization of online classes

Referring to experience, several “layouts” of online classes can be organized based on the layout of a typical face-to-face class. A theoretical lecture is teacher-dominated, students follow teacher’s speech and possibly some visual aids, power-point presentations, drawings, etc. A student is a passive listener. Another type of lecture is when a student listens to the input half of the time and another half is devoted to the application of the received theoretical knowledge in practice by performing specific assignments,

connecting his own experience with the knowledge he/she received, summing up the material that has been provided, etc. This type of lecture can also be based on some practical tasks but a teacher can interfere in the process, explain things, check the answers, give feedback on what needs to be done differently, etc. Yet another type of a lecture could be based on more individual way of studying, when the lecturer explains the assignment and allows his/her students to work on their own for a significant part of the lecture, returning to them at the end and commenting on the work done. In this case students have more freedom exploring the subject individually, finding answers themselves, and feeling less constrained by the teacher’s supervision. And finally there can be an individual type of study when students are given the assignment and do the work on it on their own. According to the Model Course, the interaction in communicative activities is essential part of ME teaching/learning process, so the more interactive classes with less individual work should be preferred in an ideal case. The interaction of “teacher to student, student to teacher and student to student” should be promoted (Model Course, 2015: 114). So the students require strong support from their lecturers, and feedback on their activities and it can be hypothesized that students would require teacher’s support in their online studies.

Table 1. Students’ preferences on the layout of the classes, % (by the author)

Class layout	Students’ preferences, %
50/50 time for a teacher and students doing practical tasks with a possibility to receive feedback and assistance at all times	48.3
Individual assignments in writing and teacher's consultations	26.7
Individual work with the assignments and discussion with a teacher	12.5
15 minutes teacher’s talk and then individual work on the assignment	12.5

As it could have been expected, almost half of the students prefer a close supervision of a teacher when they have an opportunity to address their teacher for consultation, support, receive feedback immediately, etc. By the way, one of the groups had a few elder students than the average age and this group preferred to have an individual work with the assignments and a discussion with a teacher class layout (44 %). It seems the higher the course of the students, the more independence in study process they prefer (which is logical – more experience in individual studying,

older and grown up, more motivated, requiring more flexible schedule due to other activities and duties they take on in their course of lives). This also can be illustrated by the number of students who selected such statements as “I could study at my own pace” – this was important for 42 per cent of students in total, but looking at the results group by group, this was the least important issue for the first year students (27.3 percent).

2) Advantages and disadvantages of online studies

Students were given several statements to agree or disagree with. The most positively evaluated statements are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Students’ attitude towards online classes (by the author)

No.	Statements	Positive, %
1.	I could study at my own speed	53.6
2.	I could study when and where I wished	60.7
3.	My self-discipline skills improved	42.9
4.	I gained more self-study skills	58.9
5.	It is easier to pass examinations this way	33.9
6.	I communicated with my groupmates on the study subjects	57.1
7.	I received feedback from lecturers about my assignments done	41.1

It is worth noting, that 5th statement is reversed: “It is easier to pass examinations” means that negative answer has a positive meaning. So the result is positive, as 66 percent of students disagreed with the statement.

Students also admit having improved the skills necessary for life-long learning and autonomous learning: self-discipline and self-study skills (49 and 58 percent, respectively).

In addition, students could provide more advantages and disadvantages in an open-ended question. Their generalized advantages are similar as in the table above: freedom to study anywhere anytime and time saving (24 answers), studies at their own speed (11), also the efficiency of studies (2) and safety (1) were mentioned. The disadvantages listed were more different, e.g.: getting distracted and hard to concentrate (7) because of different reasons, lack of communication and/or group work (5), too much work (3), instructions unclear (2), lack of teacher’s feedback (2) and lack of interactivity and communication (2). Single disadvantages were “it is easier to cheat”, “not enough practical work in simulators”. Not all students selected to answer this open-ended question,

so the percentages cannot be counted. So students were quite positive about their experience of online studies and the amount of advantages outweighed the disadvantages not to mention the fact that 5 students noted no difference between face-to-face and online learning.

3) Technical and software challenges

As of December 2020, average download speed of fixed internet connections in Lithuania was at approximately 121.96 Megabits per second (Mbps) (Average download speeds, 2020) which far less not the worst result worldwide. Also students had sufficient technical means to connect to the online studies. Despite this, almost 63.5 percent of students reported having some kind of technical issues in their study process. Only 8 percent of students claimed that they have learnt the material worse while studying online compared to 14 percent maintaining they have learnt the material better. Most of the students were unable to self-evaluate their progress (78 percent) and selected not to answer the question as they felt they could not compare. Only two students (1.12 per cent) mentioned technical issues as a disadvantage of online studies. Although it seems students do not regard technical hindrances as essential ones, some assistance has to be provided for students having problems in this area, as about 63.9% of them reported having some technical issues during the online courses. Also teachers have to adapt to the different pace of a class online, make sure nobody has technical issues, it is recommended to receive feedback if all is understood properly more frequently, as in online mode it is much easier to “get off track” both for a teacher and students and have miscommunication or teacher talking to himself. This is also related to the roles of a teacher and a student in the teaching/learning process.

4) Teacher’s role and students’ involvement

Students reported they had sufficient amount of teachers’ support (58.9%). Only about 41% of students indicated they received feedback on their works done. Also in the comments and open-ended questions 2 students mentioned a lack of feedback from the teachers, therefore consultation hours additional to the courses are necessary. Also the feedback depends on timely performance of a student and timely checking of student’s work by the teacher, giving him feedback on the work he/she has done. This is a huge amount of work for both sides, so the planning of assignments has to be done very carefully in order not to overload neither a teacher nor a student.

Students actively participated in online webinars and classes, as 75% of them claimed that they took a part in class discussions. Students have to be encouraged to participate, e.g. by providing a list of ques-

tions to be answered at the end of the class, or by giving their own examples on the study material, setting a requirement to report back the knowledge they received during a class, etc.

5) The development of communication skills

According to the Model course, equal development of four communication skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) is necessary in ME teaching. A special attention can be paid to the speaking skill which seems to be the most difficult to develop having online studies.

Speaking is divided in monologue speaking and dialogue speaking. Many phrases in in SMCP for making dialogues are devoted to radio communication both on board and ship to ship or ship to shore. In case of online teaching, the IT communication means become an advantage rather a disadvantage: a real situation of radio conversation can be recreated by two students using online connection without a view of another speaker. What is a difficulty to ensure, that the text is not read from the notes. In order to avoid this, a lecturer shall be able to extend the dialogue introducing additional information that is not known for the both parties of the conversation so that they had to react to the situation using the appropriate SMCP vocabulary and format of a radio conversation.

It seems this goal was achieved as majority of students self-evaluated the development of their communicative language skills positively (strongly agree or agree that their language skills improved more than 60 percent of students – see Figure 2). Interestingly, reading skill was valued lower (positive self-evaluation – 51.9 percent) despite the fact that reading assignments were given in abundance but frequently incorporated in task-based activities. Possibly the teachers did not emphasize the skill in content-related tasks as a separate one taking it for granted because it

seems to be developed easily even in online ME studies and students did not recognize it as being developed or students might feel a lack of reading skills that require special attention from ME teachers.

83 percent of students considered the ME courses were successful, useful and efficient.

6) Assessment and evaluation

As it was mentioned before, fair assessment and evaluation as well as ensuring the principle of academic honesty are very important in online studies. This problem does not seem to be very large in the case of this research field, as only 14.3% of students agreed with the statement “I had a possibility to copy-paste answers from textbooks or peers”. However, 33.9% of students agreed with the statement that “It is easier to pass examinations this way”. This does not necessarily mean cheating during the examination. As one of the students formulated it in its answers to the open-ended questions, “not all knowledge can be evaluated this way [online]”. The solution could be the task for the teachers to formulate the assignments and examination tasks in such a way that students would not have a chance to copy-paste the answers, but instead they would compare ideas or solve a problem using the gained knowledge. The time for final evaluation should be limited. It corresponds to the real-life situation nowadays, as nobody requests an employee to know things by heart but rather to be able to solve problems at work using all information and means available in a fast and efficient way. Also self-evaluation techniques can be used and the students’ consciousness has to be raised in terms of academic honesty.

Conclusions. The research results showed that challenges each country and even institution encounter in its transit to online studies can be different. For some it can be infrastructure (lack of comput-

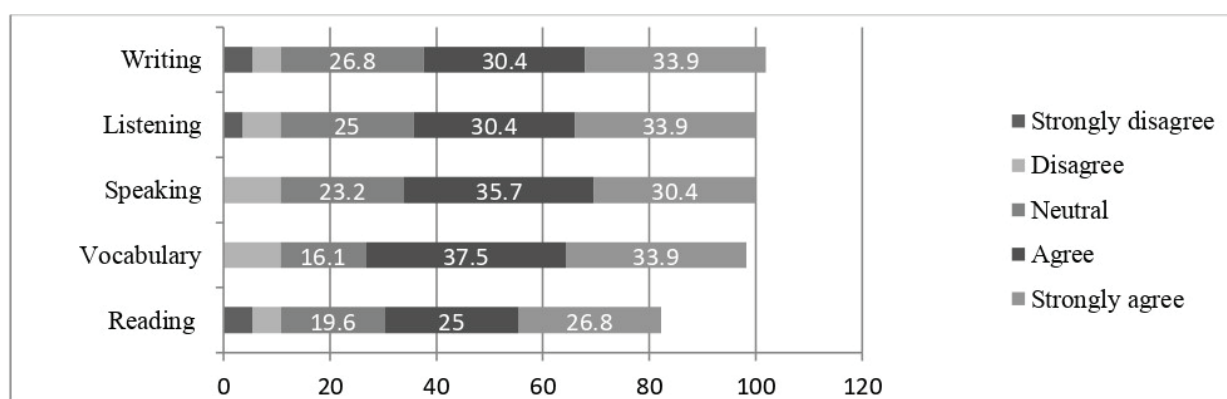


Figure 2. Self-evaluation of students’ progress during ME online course in different communication skills and vocabulary (by the author)

ers, internet connection), others encounter problems with the organization of practical training, the use of software or other issues. ME teaching/learning can be conducted online and it can even be an advantage in case of teaching radio communication. It is essential to organize group work in chat rooms so that the teacher had a possibility to control the learning process in these rooms. Timely performance of students and timely feedback from teachers are crucial for a successful ME teaching/learning process. Students find it quite comfortable to study online as it saves their time and gives freedom when and where to study, they developed their self-study skills and improved

their self-discipline. Despite this, some issues have to be solved even if infrastructural questions are not problematic. Students require both technical and educational support, sufficient and high quality feedback from teachers. Teachers have to pay more attention to the feedback which frequently takes much more time due to the use of computer-based technologies, and develop all communicative skills equally as well as to reconsider their assessment and evaluation tasks in order to avoid academic dishonesty. The research did not take into account the psychological aspects of the restricted social interactions, the situations of uncertainty and rapid changes due to the pandemic.

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