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**Natalia OHORODNYK**

Developing future seafarers' soft skills through maritime English in the context of professional personality growth

NATALIA OHORODNYK. Developing future seafarers' soft skills through maritime English in the context of professional personality growth. *This article argues that a seafarer's professional reliability depends on the synergy between technical knowledge (hard skills) and soft skills, which form the basis of maritime safety and psychological resilience. This study demonstrates the significant linguo-didactic potential of Maritime English for integrated soft skills development. The author proposes a mechanism for this integration by transforming traditional language exercises into scenario-based role-play models. Practical examples for marine engineering cadets illustrate how integrated instructions effectively foster critical thinking and decision-making in high-stress maritime environments.*

Keywords: *soft skills, future seafarers, English language, professional personality.*

1. Statement of the scientific problem

The modern maritime industry is undergoing a global technological and socio-cultural transformation, fundamentally altering the requirements for the professional competence of ship officers. The implementation of high-tech autonomous systems, digitalization of management, and operation within multinational crews are shifting the focus from purely technical expertise (hard skills) to the development of universal soft skills. Today, a maritime professional's reliability is determined not only by their ability to operate complex equipment but also by their level of psychological resilience, situational leadership, and effective communication in stressful situations. (Cicek, et al., 2019; Alop, 2021; Caeiro-Rodríguez, et al., 2021)

However, an analysis of the training process for future marine engineers and electrical engineers reveals a significant contradiction. On one hand, international standards (STCW) and the demands of leading crewing companies require officers to have highly developed "human element" skills to ensure maritime safety. On the other hand, the educational process in maritime higher education institutions is still dominated by a narrow specialization paradigm, where soft skills development is viewed as secondary or isolated from core professional disciplines. (Alop, 2021)

In this context, Maritime English takes on particular importance as a universal tool for professional socialization. Yet, the potential of this discipline as a means of forming a holistic professional personality and integrated soft skills development remains insufficiently explored. Traditional Maritime English teaching methods often focus on mastering terminology and specific professional knowledge, ignoring the development of critical thinking and behavioral models necessary for survival and effective performance in the confined space of a ship. (Kudryavtseva, et al., 2024; Afanasiievska, et al., 2024; Liashenko, 2024)

Thus, there is an urgent scientific problem in substantiating the methodical foundations for integrating soft skills into the English language training of future seafarers, which would bridge the gap between theoretical training and real-world psycho-behavioral professional challenges.

2. Analysis of recent research

Given the multidisciplinary nature of hard and soft skills, they are the subject of study across many scientific fields. Ukrainian and foreign researchers have explored various aspects of this problem. Specifically, the psychological conditions for developing soft skills in future specialists during professional training are highlighted in the works of H. Horska, I. Melnychuk, N. Makhnachova, A. Midliar, N. Dluhunovych, K. Koval, S. Shestakova, and others. Key soft skills contributing to the success of young specialists across industries are analyzed by foreign authors such as L. Lippman, R. Ryberg, R. Carney, and K. Moore.

The linguo-didactic conditions for forming communicative abilities, particularly in foreign language learning, are presented in studies by O. Kurinnyi, T. Cherkasova, and Zh. Didenko. Special attention is paid to the integrative nature of soft skills for maritime professionals, for whom they are not merely an addition to technical knowledge but a catalyst for its effective application in real production situations. This issue is addressed in foreign studies by K. Cicek, E. Akyuz, M. Celik, B. Schulz, M. Wats, R. Wats, P. Rao Fadhil, and others. The specifics of integrating soft skills into the Maritime English teaching process were investigated by I. Afanasievska, N. Pohorletska, V. Kudriavtseva, S. Barsuk, O. Frolova, O. Kolmykova, U. Liashenko, and L. Wang.

Despite the significant volume of theoretical and experimental work, the mechanism of their practical implementation through Maritime English tools within the context of a seafarer's holistic professional personality development requires further clarification.

The aim of the article is to substantiate the feasibility of using scenario-based modeling and integrated communicative tasks in Maritime English classes to form soft (universal) competencies that ensure successful professional self-realization in modern seafaring.

3. Main material presentation

the development of a future seafarer's professional personality is a complex transformation from a cadet into a specialist capable of not just performing technical functions but living and acting effectively in the specific environment of a closed society and high danger. Considering today's realities, industry experts identify competence, psychological resilience, and professional identity as key factors influencing this process. (Cicek, et al., 2019)

These factors are multicomponent, combining both professional (hard skills) and social (soft skills). Technical skills in a professional context involve not only the ability to use equipment but, for marine engineers and electricians, include diagnostics, maintenance, and repair of ship systems. This is general professional competence: specialized knowledge, personal experience, and practical skills required for specific tasks. They are measurable, teachable, verifiable, and confirmed by certificates or diplomas. They typically form the basis of safe ship operation. (Caeiro-Rodríguez, et al., 2021; Cherusheva, 2023).

The other two factors – psychological resilience and professional identity – represent a complex of social, personal, and psychological qualities that are universal and responsible for job success, career growth, and effective interaction. A seafarer's professional identity involves internalizing corporate values and is based on self-discipline, conscious responsibility for safety, and readiness for constructive interaction within a mixed crew. (Cicek, et al., 2019; Alop, 2021; Kovalska N., 2024)

Psychological resilience (resilience) in future seafarers is interpreted in scientific discourse as a dynamic set of cognitive and emotional qualities that ensure functional reliability in extreme situations, a high level of emotional self-regulation, and adaptability to confined spaces and relative social isolation.

If hard skills ensure the effective operation of ship equipment, soft skills determine how to survive and work effectively at sea. According to active seafarers, universal soft skills form the "framework" of a modern seafarer's professional personality. Moreover, being transversal (transferable), soft skills can be applied in any field of activity and private life, making them critical in the modern world. (Schulz, 2008; Cicek, et al., 2019)

The actualization of soft skills development is driven by profound transformations in professional, technological, and social spheres. Today, they are no longer just a "pleasant addition" to hard skills but a vital condition for professional success. Statistics show that 72% of employers believe soft skills are more important than purely technical knowledge. It is also estimated that 85% of career success depends on social skills, and teams with well-established internal communication work three times more effectively. (Wats, et al., 2009; Dluhunovych, 2014; Caeiro-Rodríguez, et al., 2021; Horska & Melnychuk, 2023)

Seafarers with "interdisciplinary universalism" can operate at the intersection of disciplines and with diverse people. In the context of

the modern technosphere, this involves an integrative development of cognitive and behavioral qualities combining systems engineering thinking, cross-cultural competence, and situational leadership.

Soft skills are significantly harder to "transfer" into practice and cannot be taught by traditional methods. Practitioners believe non-traditional methods are necessary – those involving emotional engagement, reflection, interactive interaction, and practice. Only this approach stimulates real behavioral change.

The role of English in the maritime industry is paramount. Today, it is a core competence and a universal tool ensuring ship safety and successful transportation. Modern approaches to teaching Maritime English allow for combining professionally oriented communicative tasks with the formation of valuable social skills, enhancing a future specialist's competitiveness. (Rao, 2019; Malykhina, et al., 2024; Nernere, 2025)

Maritime English, integrating a competency-based approach with content-language and communicative methods, makes it possible to achieve additional goals in developing socially and professionally significant qualities. Soft skills formation should be an integral part of the educational process, embedded in the development of professionally oriented English communicative competence through speaking, listening, reading, and writing. (Kudryavtseva, et al., 2024; Afanasiievskaya, et al., 2024; Liashenko, 2024)

The tool for implementing this approach is the task instruction, and the method is shifting the emphasis to additional speech actions that prompt cadets to use social interaction skills and critical analysis. To integrate soft skills, instructions must transform from simple language tasks (e.g., "Read and answer") into scenario-based role-play models. For example, to develop analytical skills: *"Read the failure report. Working in pairs, identify the three most critical safety risks arising from this situation. Justify why these factors are the highest priority for reporting to the Chief."*

For emotional management and conflict resolution: *"Role-play the situation: a cadet systematically ignores PPE rules. The Chief Engineer should provide feedback that avoids triggering anger but ensures the danger is understood. Use 'I-statements' for constructive feedback."*

For decision-making under stress: *"You are in a time-limited emergency – engine room fire. Formulate a clear and concise message for the coastguard. Then, change the input data (e.g., VHF failure) and propose an alternative plan using only visual/audible signals."* Unlike traditional writing tasks, this immerses cadets in the work environment and trains rapid decision-making under stress.

4. Conclusions

In the modern maritime industry, developing a seafarer's professional personality goes beyond technical training. Professional reliability is determined by the synergy of technical knowledge and soft skills, which form the basis for safety, teamwork, and resilience.

The shift toward universalization and interdisciplinarity demands creative integrative approaches in maritime education. Maritime English possesses powerful linguo-didactic potential for soft skills development. The key mechanism is transforming methodical tools, specifically task instructions, into scenario-based role-plays. This allows for simultaneous improvement in language competence and the development of critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and situational leadership.

Future research should focus on developing a comprehensive system of integrated case studies for marine engineering and electrical engineering cadets, bringing the English learning process as close as possible to the real-world operating conditions of modern high-tech vessels.

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The Author

Natalia OHORODNYK
*PhD, Associate Professor,
Head of the Department of English
in Marine Engineering,
Kherson State Maritime Academy,
Kherson, Ukraine
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1831-2275>
E-mail: marinemarine321@gmail.com*

Abstracts

НАТАЛІЯ ОГОРОДНИК. Розвиток м'яких навичок майбутніх моряків через морську англійську мову в контексті професійного особистісного зростання. У статті обґрунтовано, що професійна надійність сучасного моряка визначається синергією фахових знань (*hard skills*) та розвинених м'яких навичок (*soft skills*), які становлять базис безпеки мореплавства та психологічної стійкості в екстремальних умовах. Акцентовано увагу на парадигмі універсалізації морської освіти, що висуває запит на фахівців з високим рівнем адаптивності та ситуативного лідерства. Доведено значний лінгводидактичний потенціал дисципліни «Maritime English» для інтегрованого формування м'яких навичок. Автором запропоновано механізм такої інтеграції через трансформацію традиційних мовленнєвих вправ у сценарно-рольові моделі. На прикладах для курсантів механічних спеціальностей продемонстровано ефективність використання інтегрованих інструкцій для розвитку критичного мислення та навичок прийняття рішень у стресових ситуаціях.

Ключові слова: м'які навички, майбутні моряки, англійська мова, професійна особистість.

NATALIA OHORODNYK. Rozwój kompetencji miękkich przyszłych marynarzy poprzez język angielski morski w kontekście rozwoju osobowości zawodowej. W artykule uzasadniono, że niezawodność zawodowa współczesnego marynarza zależy od synergii wiedzy specjalistycznej (*hard skills*) oraz rozwiniętych kompetencji miękkich (*soft skills*), które stanowią fundament bezpieczeństwa

żeglugi oraz odporności psychicznej w warunkach ekstremalnych. Zwrócono uwagę na paradygmat uniwersalizacji szkolnictwa morskiego, który generuje zapotrzebowanie na specjalistów o wysokim poziomie adaptacyjności oraz zdolności przywództwa sytuacyjnego. Wykazano znaczący potencjał glottodydaktyczny przedmiotu "Maritime English" w zakresie zintegrowanego kształtowania kompetencji miękkich. Autorka proponuje mechanizm takiej integracji poprzez transformację tradycyjnych ćwiczeń językowych w scenariuszowe modele odgrywania ról. Na przykładach kursantów kierunków mechanicznych zademonstrowano skuteczność zastosowania zintegrowanych instrukcji w rozwijaniu myślenia krytycznego oraz umiejętności podejmowania decyzji w sytuacjach stresowych.

Słowa kluczowe: kompetencje miękkie, przyszli marynarze, język angielski, osobowość zawodowa.