

DESIGNING A DIGITAL MARITIME ENGLISH COURSE WITH A FOCUS ON SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Yurzhenko A.¹, Kononova O.², Bevzenko Yu.²

¹Kherson State Maritime Academy

Ukraine

²Separated Structural Unit “Maritime Applied College of Kherson State Maritime Academy”

Ukraine

The challenges posed by the war in Ukraine, economic changes and labour market dynamics require professionals to be more flexible and adaptable. Changes in the world of work, including new professions and technologies, increase the need for extra-professional skills.

Maritime education in Ukraine has a rich tradition and substantial experience in preparing future seafarers. However, in today’s dynamic global environment, the expectations regarding seafarers’ qualifications have evolved significantly. The complexity of seafarers’ roles continues to grow, necessitating an expansion and modernization of the professional competencies they must acquire. Modern maritime education must therefore emphasize not only technical expertise but also the development of soft skills such as teamwork, persuasion, compromise, and the ability to make rapid and sound decisions under pressure.

Soft skills research highlights the critical role these competencies play in achieving success in leadership and professional contexts. The Cambridge Dictionary defines soft skills as the abilities that enable individuals to communicate effectively and collaborate harmoniously with others. The Collins English Dictionary offers a broader perspective, describing them as desirable attributes for various types of employment that are not solely based on technical knowledge. These include qualities such as common sense, interpersonal skills, and a positive, adaptable attitude. Similarly, the International Bureau of Education identifies *soft skills* as encompassing empathy, leadership, a sense of responsibility, integrity, self-esteem, self-management, motivation, flexibility, sociability, time management, and decision-making abilities.

In the maritime industry, employers regard *soft skills* as a crucial indicator of a candidate’s alignment with the core values and requirements of crewing companies and shipowners. These competencies are also viewed as essential for fostering teamwork and establishing effective cooperation within multicultural crews (Dictionary, 2021).

The ongoing societal and technological changes present significant challenges for educational institutions. In the era of digital transformation and globalization, teaching and learning approaches are undergoing profound shifts. It is imperative that the experiences students gain throughout their education equip them with the resilience and adaptability needed to navigate complex and unpredictable situations in their future professional lives (Didenko & Sybirko, 2022).

Today, critical thinking, information and digital literacy, communication, technical skills, social skills, collaboration, and conflict resolution remain essential for effective learning. These soft skills are the foundation for a successful career in the XXI century. The growing influence of social media and the availability of information on the Internet are forcing future professionals to master the skills of processing and analysing large volumes of data. This is especially true for the maritime sector, where the introduction of “smart” ships creates a demand for highly qualified maritime professionals with flexible skills, a high level of digital literacy and social adaptability. This emphasises the need to study and develop soft professional skills by future ship engineers (Afanasiievskia & Pohorletska, 2024).

Ship engineers operate in a highly complex and often isolated environment, where technical proficiency is paramount. However, with increasing automation and the demands of modern shipping, soft skills are becoming equally, if not more, crucial for success, safety, and career advancement.

While teaching English, we often focus on developing technical skills such as grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. However, developing students’ soft skills is also essential. For

example, teamwork, creativity and critical thinking are important for both learning and student development. Critical thinking forces students to think, exchange ideas and foster teamwork, which encourages them to succeed in leadership. Collaboration fosters skills such as trusting others, supporting each other and taking responsibility. Creativity involves developing ideas, thinking, and being creative.

Soft skills activities for students in English lessons

Team tasks: developing tasks to be solved in a team, for example, solving a case study using clues.

Planning: creating a project that will help illustrate decision-making, team management and practice.

Paraphrasing ideas: critical thinking forces students to think, exchange ideas.

Modeling situations: debates, problem solving, or even role-playing are all great ways to engage students in responsibility, decision-making, and problem-solving. Also improve their teamwork.

Using the LMS Moodle teachers create tasks for group work, discussions, and the development of real life topics (Diahyleva et al., 2025; Yurzhenko et al., 2025).

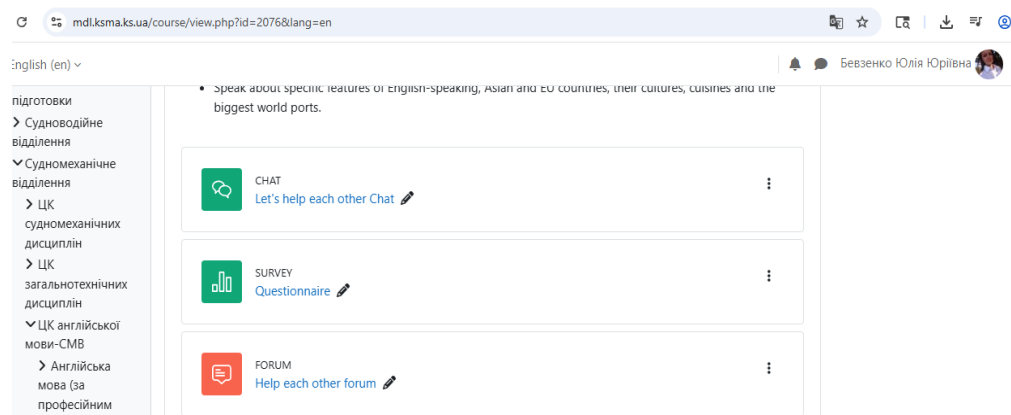


Figure 1 – LMS Moodle online course

In the context of maritime education and training, the development of soft skills has become as important as technical knowledge and competencies. Effective communication, teamwork, leadership, empathy, time management, and decision-making are essential qualities for seafarers working in multicultural and dynamic environments on board ships. The following activities are designed to enhance these soft skills while simultaneously improving Maritime English proficiency. Each exercise provides cadets with opportunities to practice authentic communication, collaborate in problem-solving scenarios, and reflect on their interpersonal abilities in situations similar to those they may encounter at sea. Integrating such activities into the curriculum supports the holistic preparation of future marine engineers and officers, equipping them to perform effectively and confidently in diverse professional settings.

For example, the objective of the activity *Message Relay* is to develop clear and concise communication, active listening, and attention to detail Procedure: 1) divide students into small teams (5–6 cadets). The first person in each team receives a written maritime instruction (e.g., “Prepare the lifeboat for launch following SOLAS regulations” (Yurzhenko et al., 2024; Yurzhenko et al., 2025);

2) the student must whisper it to the next cadet, who then passes it along the chain;

3) the last person writes down what they heard. Compare the original and final versions.

Another activity’s objective is to strengthen leadership, situational awareness, and decision-making under pressure. It is called *Emergency Simulation*.

Procedure: 1) one participant acts as the ship’s Chief/ Second Engineer during a simulated emergency (fire/spillage /flooding/ loss of power in the engine room);

- 2) the rest are crew members;
- 3) the Chief/ Second Engineer must assign tasks, make decisions, and manage panic;
- 4) crew members receive role cards with attitudes (e.g., nervous, stubborn, proactive).

This activity develops such skills as leadership, decision-making under stress, crisis communication.

Next activity *Prioritizing under Pressure* helps to develop time management, prioritization, and stress management, critical thinking, risk assessment.

- Procedure: 1) divide the group into 3-4 subgroups;
- 2) each subgroup receives a list of 10 urgent shipboard tasks (e.g., close engine room ventilation fans, stop fuel pumps supplying, close fire flaps and dampers, activate fixed firefighting systems, fight the fire with portable equipment, etc);
 - 3) teams must prioritize 5 tasks within 5 minutes and justify their decisions.

One more activity *Lifeboat Drill Planning*. It helps to build problem-solving skills and resilience. Procedure: students plan and execute a simulated lifeboat drill, ensuring all safety procedures are followed. They must solve unexpected problems (e.g., a missing lifejacket, an injured crew member, etc).

By applying soft skills in the classroom, we promote students' development during their learning, which will not only create a more dynamic environment and confidence in the language, but also make them better prepared for the challenges of the future.

REFERENCES

1. Afanasiievskaya, I., & Pohorletska, N. (2024). Developing professional soft skills of future marine engineers in Maritime English course. *Актуальні питання гуманітарних наук*, 75(1), 225–230. <https://doi.org/10.24919/2308-4863/75-1-34>
2. Cambridge Dictionary. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>
3. Diahyleva, O., Kononova, O., Yurzhenko, A., & Svyryda, V. (2025). Development of professional competence of future specialists in the operation of shipboard technical systems and complexes using LMS MOODLE. *Scientific Bulletin of Mukachevo State University. Series "Pedagogy and Psychology"*, 11(1), 51–59. <https://doi.org/10.52534/msu-pp1.2025.51>
4. Dictionary (2021). *Soft skills*. In *Dictionary.com*. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/soft-skills>
5. Didenko, M. O., & Sybirko, O. S. (2022). Ways to develop future seafarers' soft skills at ESP classes. *Наукові записки Національного університету «Острозька академія»: серія «Філологія»*, 13(81), 193–197. [https://doi.org/10.25264/2519-2558-2022-13\(81\)-193-197](https://doi.org/10.25264/2519-2558-2022-13(81)-193-197)
6. International Bureau of Education. *Soft skills*. In *Glossary of curriculum terminology*. UNESCO-IBE. <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/glossary-curriculum-terminology/s/soft-skills>
7. Yurzhenko, A., Diahyleva, O., & Kononova, O. (2025). Interactive module "Maritime Security" of Maritime English course on LMS Moodle for future ship engineers. *Journal of Digital Security and Forensics*, 2(1), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.29121/digisecforensics.v2.i1.2025.39>
8. Yurzhenko, A., Diahyleva, O., & Kononova, O. (2024). Overcoming barriers to effective online maritime English teaching. In *Materials of the 4th International Scientific and Practical Conference Problems of Sustainable Development of the Maritime Industry (PSDMI – 2024)* (pp. 223–224). Kherson State Maritime Academy. <https://ksma.ks.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/PSDMI-%D0%97%D0%91%D0%86%D0%A0%D0%9D%D0%98%D0%9A-2024.pdf>
9. Yurzhenko, A., Kononova, O., & Diahyleva, O. (2025). The use of the Callan method in maritime English teaching. *Educational Challenges*, 30(2), 126–140. <https://doi.org/10.34142/2709-7986.2025.30.2.10>