

FROM CLASSROOMS TO GLOBAL CONNECTIONS: THE IMPACT OF EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES ON GMP COMPETENCY BUILDING

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Abstract

In response to the growing complexity and globalization of the maritime industry, the International Association of Maritime Universities (IAMU) introduced the Global Maritime Professional Body of Knowledge (GMP BoK), which outlines a comprehensive framework of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) required for future maritime professionals. This study explores the integration of extracurricular activities as a structured pedagogical strategy for developing soft skills aligned with the Tier A affective learning outcomes of GMP BoK. The research was conducted at Kherson State Maritime Academy and the Maritime Professional College in Ukraine in partnership with international academic institutions. Over the period 2019 – 2025, 553 cadets participated in a series of international and interdisciplinary extracurricular initiatives, including COIL projects, webinars, team-based quests, and poster sessions. A mixed-methods approach was used, incorporating psychometric testing, surveys, self-assessments, and observation. The findings demonstrate that participation in extracurricular activities significantly enhanced cadets' leadership, teamwork, interpersonal communication, ethical responsibility, proactivity, and decision-making. The study offers a structured mapping of all eleven GMP BoK soft skill areas and proposes a new model for evaluating the transition from awareness to action through cadets' reflective and proactive engagement. The research highlights the strategic role of affective learning in maritime education and advocates for the institutional integration of extracurricular programming as a catalyst for developing globally competent and safety-oriented maritime professionals.

Key words: Global Maritime Professional, Body of Knowledge, soft skills, affective learning, extracurricular

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Theoretical Framework

In recent years, the maritime industry has faced growing demands for sustainability, digitalisation, and cross-cultural adaptability. These challenges have shifted the focus of maritime education from strictly technical competence toward the holistic development of future professionals. Recognising this need, the International Association of Maritime Universities (IAMU), in collaboration with the Nippon Foundation, developed the *Global Maritime Professional – Body of Knowledge* (GMP BoK) in 2019 [1]. This comprehensive framework defines the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) required for the formation of a global maritime professional.

A central component of GMP BoK is the development of affective learning outcomes – those which shape values, attitudes, and behaviours. Within this domain, eleven soft skill focus areas are identified, including global technological awareness, leadership and teamwork, interpersonal communication, sustainable development, human resource management, cultural sensitivity, lifelong learning, environmental stewardship, decision-making and proactivity, mentorship, and professional ethics [1].

The BoK underscores that the ability to collaborate, lead, communicate ethically, and respond to intercultural and operational complexity is as essential as technical expertise. As such, the integration of soft skill development into maritime education has become a pedagogical priority. Extracurricular activities, when designed intentionally, represent a promising platform for achieving these affective outcomes. However, empirical evidence supporting their efficacy within maritime institutions remains limited [4].

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

The objective of this study is to evaluate the role of extracurricular activities in fostering affective learning aligned with GMP BoK Tier A soft skill outcomes. It focuses on structured, international, and interdisciplinary extracurricular formats implemented at Kherson State Maritime Academy and its affiliated Maritime Professional College between 2019 and 2025.

This study specifically addresses the following research questions:

1. What motivates cadets of Kherson State Maritime Academy to participate in extracurricular activities?
2. How do these activities contribute to achieving Tier A affective learning outcomes in focus areas such as leadership, teamwork and discipline, effective communication, decision-making and proactivity, and professionalism and ethical responsibility according to GMP BoK?
3. How do cadets assess the personal and professional impacts of their participation in such activities?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Experimental Framework

The present study was conducted at Kherson State Maritime Academy (KSMA) and its affiliated Maritime Professional College, both located in Ukraine. These institutions were selected due to their active participation in international maritime education initiatives and their strategic commitment to implementing the *Global Maritime Professional – Body of Knowledge* (GMP BoK) [1]. The research took place over a six-year period (2019–2025) as part of a pilot programme aimed at integrating Tier A affective learning outcomes into real-world educational environments.

A total of 553 cadets participated in the study. Participants represented various academic levels and specialisations, including navigation, marine engineering, and radio communication. Selection was based on voluntary enrolment in structured extracurricular programmes specifically designed to support the development of soft skills outlined in the GMP BoK. Cadets were not incentivised or graded for their participation, allowing for naturalistic observation of motivation and behavioural change.

The educational setting was particularly well-suited to this research due to KSMA's documented engagement in global partnerships such as the Erasmus+ programme, IAMU student mobility, and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) networks. These partnerships provided the foundation for integrating diverse and contextually relevant extracurricular interventions involving international stakeholders. The framework supports generalisability and replicability for institutions seeking to foster affective learning through similar means.

2.2 Evaluation Instruments

To ensure methodological rigour and generate a comprehensive understanding of cadets' affective development, this study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. This design facilitated the simultaneous collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, allowing for the triangulation of findings and the validation of outcomes across distinct evidence sources. The integration of psychometric, observational, and reflective data sources adheres to established best practices in educational psychology, affective domain research, and maritime pedagogy [5][7].

The assessment framework was developed in close alignment with the Tier A descriptors of the GMP Body of Knowledge [1], ensuring that each tool captured affective competencies across the eleven soft skill domains. The following instruments were selected and implemented in a complementary manner:

Structured surveys: These were designed to capture cadets' self-perceived development in soft skills such as leadership, teamwork, decision-making, ethical responsibility, and communication. The survey employed a 5-point Likert scale for quantitative assessment, alongside open-ended qualitative items to probe deeper reflections and provide narrative data. Items were piloted for clarity and construct validity and administered anonymously to promote candour.

Psychometric profiling tools: Adapted from existing instruments in human factors and behavioural science, these tools assessed interpersonal orientation, emotional regulation, conflict handling, and motivational traits. Notably, the *Soft Skills Profiler* model developed by Green-Jakobsen [2] was tailored and applied under controlled supervision. Results offered insight into latent affective tendencies and helped identify patterns of soft skill readiness among cadets.

Instructor observation checklists: During live activities, trained facilitators completed observation protocols that captured predefined behavioural indicators, such as assertiveness, cooperation, ethical judgment, and initiative. Observation data were subjected to inter-rater calibration sessions to ensure scoring consistency and to minimise subjectivity. These checklists provided real-time, third-party evidence of affective expression in situational contexts.

Reflective essays and learning journals: Collected systematically at the conclusion of each extracurricular cycle, these texts served as rich qualitative sources of internalised affective learning. Thematic analysis was conducted using the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), enabling the identification of recurring codes, thematic clusters, and shifts in self-perception and values over time. Journals often revealed emotional resonance, cognitive dissonance, and evolving professional identity.

Together, these instruments enabled a multi-perspective evaluation of cadets' progress from affective awareness to behavioural engagement and value internalisation. They also provided a robust framework for mapping developmental trajectories across soft skill domains, allowing for consistent cross-comparison and correlation with specific extracurricular interventions. Importantly, the combined data set reflects not only what cadets *reported* learning, but what they *demonstrated* and *reflected upon*, thereby enhancing the validity of the study's conclusions regarding soft skills formation in maritime education.

2.3 Types of Extracurricular Activities

The intervention programme at the core of this study was intentionally designed to operationalise the eleven soft skill domains articulated in Section IV of the GMP Body of Knowledge (BoK) [1]. Recognising that affective learning is context-dependent, the programme incorporated a diversity of activity types to accommodate varied learning styles, cultural contexts, and stages of personal development. Each activity was constructed not only to engage cadets in task performance, but to serve as a *catalyst for affective engagement*, fostering value formation, ethical awareness, and interpersonal growth.

To reinforce reflective learning and support deeper internalisation, each intervention included structured post-activity debriefs, guided peer feedback, and opportunities for self-assessment through journals or surveys. This embedded reflection framework was essential in enabling cadets to transition from participation to introspection, thus supporting the affective taxonomy levels defined as *receiving*, *responding*, and *valuing*.

The following activity formats formed the backbone of the intervention:

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) projects (2 events). These virtual exchanges connected KSMA cadets with peers from international partner institutions. Working in intercultural teams, participants addressed case-based scenarios on maritime ethics, environmental policy, and digital transformation. The COIL format required asynchronous and synchronous communication, fostering intercultural awareness, empathy, and global technological fluency. Cadets were required to co-produce deliverables (e.g., joint presentations), which were followed by reflective essays on collaboration processes and cultural dynamics.

Webinars (12 events). Delivered in partnership with external maritime experts and faculty from international institutions, these thematic sessions focused on contemporary challenges in global shipping. Topics included: psychological safety onboard, effective communication under stress, leadership in multicultural crews, and gender inclusivity. Webinars featured embedded polls and Q&A, ensuring interactive participation. Post-session reflection prompts were issued, and cadets submitted short commentaries highlighting ethical dilemmas or personal insights gained.

Team-based quests and scenario challenges (6 events). These in-person simulations involved cadets in time-sensitive, scenario-based exercises requiring collaboration, task delegation, and ethical decision-making. Example scenarios included: emergency response planning, conflict resolution within multicultural crews, and prioritisation during environmental incidents. Observers rated participants using behavioural checklists, and group feedback sessions enabled cadets to reconstruct team processes and recognise patterns in their leadership and communication styles.

Poster sessions and exhibitions (4 events). Organised at the institutional level, these visual presentation forums encouraged cadets to distill complex human element topics into accessible formats. Themes included: bridge resource management failures, communication breakdowns, and cultural tension in shipboard life. Cadets prepared both content and presentation strategies in teams. Peer and instructor feedback focused on message clarity, professional tone, and ethical depth. Exhibitions fostered public speaking confidence and self-awareness of professional identity.

Interactive workshops (5 events). Facilitated by trained instructors, these sessions followed experiential learning cycles (Kolb, 1984) and focused on targeted soft skills such as assertiveness, emotional intelligence, constructive feedback, and cross-cultural negotiation. Workshops included role-playing, group diagnostics (e.g., Johari Window), and small-group coaching. Cadets completed pre- and post-workshop reflection templates, which were analysed for evidence of value formation and behavioural intent.

Innovation sprints / hackathons (2 events). These events positioned cadets as problem-solvers in sustainability and digitalisation domains. Working in time-constrained teams, they designed solutions for challenges such as waste management at sea or promoting ethical reporting culture. Each team presented to a jury of academic and industry experts. The innovation format demanded creativity, role flexibility, and persuasive communication. Cadets reflected on team dynamics, problem-solving under pressure, and value alignment of proposed solutions.

Across all formats, the design logic was underpinned by two key assumptions: (1) that soft skills are best developed through emotionally salient, socially embedded experiences; and (2) that reflective processing is required for lasting affective transformation. The activities thus served not merely as training events but as structured opportunities for cadets to engage in the cognitive-affective synthesis essential to becoming a Global Maritime Professional.

Table 1. Types of Extracurricular Activities Conducted During 2019–2025

Activity Type	Number of Events	Participants	Average Hours per Cadet
COIL projects	2	54	20
Webinars	12	198	10
Team-based quests and challenges	6	132	16
Poster sessions / exhibitions	4	96	14
Interactive workshops	5	115	12
Innovation sprints / hackathons	2	78	18

Source: Author's research

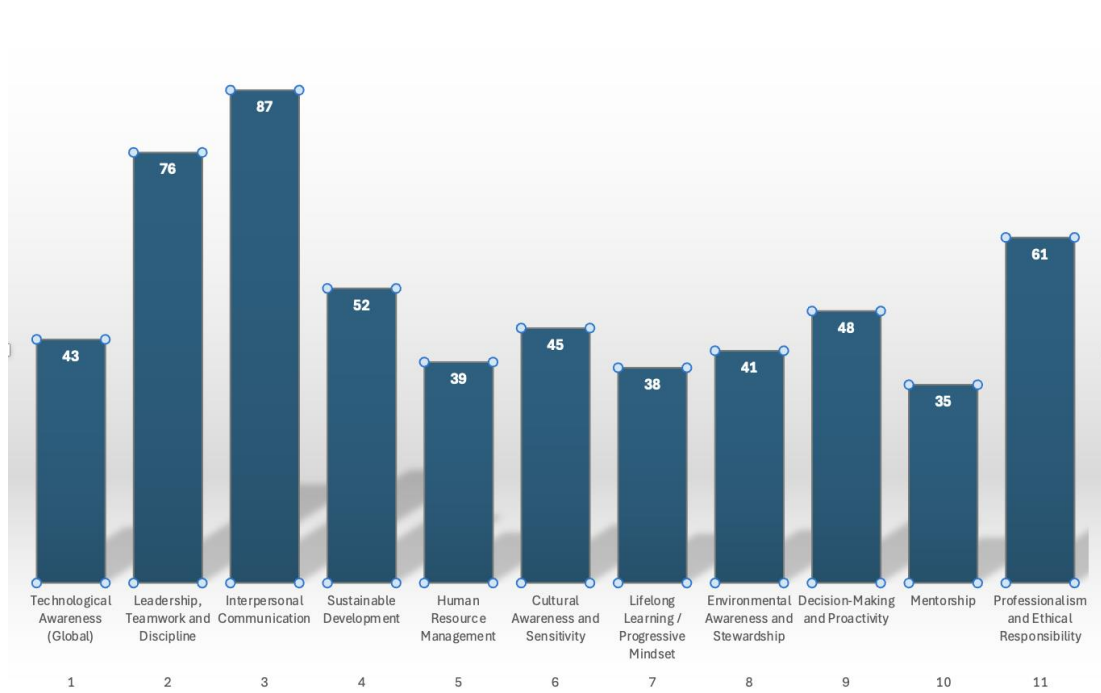
Each activity was purposefully linked to one or more soft skill domains from the GMP BoK. Collectively, these activities provided cadets with experiential learning opportunities that were emotionally engaging, socially interactive, and cognitively demanding – conditions proven essential for effective affective learning [5][6].

3. RESULTS

The empirical data collected from 553 cadets over a six-year period (2019–2025) demonstrates substantial and multi-dimensional development of soft skills in accordance with Tier A affective learning outcomes outlined in the GMP Body of Knowledge [1]. The cadets showed measurable progress across all eleven soft skill domains, including interpersonal communication, leadership and teamwork, ethical responsibility, cultural sensitivity, sustainable development, environmental awareness, human resource management, mentorship, technological awareness, decision-making, and a progressive learning mindset. These gains were evidenced through a combination of self-assessments, reflective journals, instructor observations, and psychometric diagnostics.

Graph 1 provides a comprehensive visualisation of cadet-reported growth across all soft skill categories. Interpersonal communication emerged as the most significantly developed area, with 87% of cadets indicating notable improvement, particularly through COIL activities and multilingual engagement. Leadership and teamwork followed closely at 76%, driven by team-based simulations and interactive workshops. Professionalism and ethical responsibility also demonstrated strong results at 61%, supported by reflective essays and ethical discussion sessions. Sustainable development achieved 52%, associated with cadet involvement in eco-focused hackathons and webinars.

Moderate but meaningful progress was reported in decision-making and proactivity (48%), cultural sensitivity (45%), and technological awareness (43%), primarily as a result of role-based learning and digital collaboration platforms. Meanwhile, growth in areas such as environmental awareness (41%), HR management (39%), lifelong learning mindset (38%), and mentorship (35%) reflected cadets' emerging behavioural adaptations rather than fully internalised values. These domains were more commonly expressed in longitudinal feedback and peer support practices.



Source: Author's research

Graph 1. Reported Development Across 11 GMP BoK Soft Skill Domains (2019–2025)

Overall, these findings confirm that a well-structured and thematically diversified extracurricular programme can facilitate progressive development of all GMP BoK soft skills. Notably, cadets who engaged in multiple types of activities (e.g., both collaborative and reflective) displayed broader and more sustained affective engagement, supporting the link between varied experiential exposure and deeper learning [5].

In addition to self-reported progress and observational data, the affective development of cadets was further examined using a structured analytical framework based on the three-tier taxonomy proposed in the GMP BoK: *awareness (receiving)*, *reflection-in-action (responding)*, and *value internalisation (valuing)* [1]. This framework allowed for the categorisation of cadet engagement according to progressively deeper levels of affective learning, as manifested in their behaviours, reflections, and task performance during extracurricular activities.

Table 2 presented selected examples of soft skill progression across all eleven focus areas identified in the GMP BoK. Each domain was mapped to a corresponding affective learning tier, with activity-based indicators drawn from cadet participation in COIL projects, workshops, poster sessions, innovation sprints, and reflective journaling. The model demonstrated how cadets progressed from conceptual recognition of soft skill importance to consistent value-driven behaviour aligned with professional standards.

Table 2 Soft Skills Competency Progression Based on GMP BoK Tier A (Selected Examples)

Focus Area (GMP BoK)	Awareness (Receiving)	Reflection-in-Action (Responding)	Value Internalization (Valuing)
<i>Technological Awareness (Global)</i>	Awareness of the role of technology in global shipping	Use of digital tools in learning projects	Initiating technical improvements to enhance efficiency
<i>Leadership, Teamwork and Discipline</i>	Understanding of leadership, teamwork, and discipline	Participation in group projects with role allocation	Taking leadership roles and mentoring others in teams
<i>Interpersonal Communication</i>	Identifying principles of effective communication	Practicing strategies for professional communication	Demonstrating active listening and managing communication barriers
<i>Sustainable Development</i>	Understanding the goals of sustainable maritime development	Attending webinars on sustainability	Integrating sustainability into personal academic or volunteer projects
<i>Human Resource Management</i>	Awareness of the role of HR in safety and performance	Participating in delegation of responsibilities	Supporting collaborative communication and task delegation
<i>Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity</i>	Recognition of cultural diversity	Engaging in intercultural case discussions during COIL projects	Respecting cultural nuances in decision-making and communication
<i>Lifelong Learning / Progressive Mindset</i>	Awareness of the need for continuous education	Active involvement in informal learning	Promoting self-learning and encouraging the growth of others
<i>Environmental Awareness and Stewardship</i>	Understanding of ecological challenges and impacts	Designing extracurricular eco-projects	Leading sustainability-oriented initiatives
<i>Decision-Making and Proactivity</i>	Realization of the importance of responsible decisions	Engaging in debate and analysis of alternatives	Making quick and responsible decisions during simulated crisis scenarios
<i>Mentorship</i>	Understanding the mentor's role in professional growth	Conducting onboarding or peer guidance activities	Inspiring and motivating younger cadets through informal leadership
<i>Professionalism and Ethical Responsibility</i>	Understanding professional ethics and standards	Participating in ethical discussions and applying codes of conduct	Demonstrating ethical leadership even in the absence of formal rules

Source: Author's database and adapted from the GMP Body of Knowledge (IAMU, 2019) [1].

This table highlights that cadet not only acquired knowledge of soft skills but also transitioned through observable phases of application and internalisation. For instance, in the domain of interpersonal communication, cadets evolved from identifying communication principles to actively applying strategies in multilingual contexts, and ultimately to demonstrating empathic listening and barrier mitigation. Similarly, in the domain of ethical responsibility, cadets moved beyond awareness of professional codes to autonomous ethical decision-making even in the absence of explicit guidance.

Such evidence confirms that a well-structured and thematically diversified extracurricular programme can facilitate progressive development of all GMP BoK soft skills. Notably, cadets who engaged in multiple types of activities (e.g., both collaborative and reflective) displayed broader and more sustained affective engagement, supporting the link between varied experiential exposure and deeper learning [5].

To further contextualise this progression, **Table 3** synthesises the learning environments and formats most closely associated with the reported development in each of the eleven soft skill domains. This mapping provides insight into which types of extracurricular interventions are most effective in promoting specific competencies, offering practical guidance for programme design and pedagogical alignment.

Table 3 Learning Contexts Associated with Reported Soft Skill Development

No	GMP BoK Soft Skill Domain	Learning Contexts and Activity Types
1	Technological Awareness (Global)	Use of digital tools during international teamwork and collaborative platforms
2	Leadership, Teamwork and Discipline	Team-based quests, group role assignments, workshops on leadership
3	Interpersonal Communication	Gains in cross-cultural and multilingual communication, COIL projects
4	Sustainable Development	Participation in hackathons and webinars on sustainability and environmental topics
5	Human Resource Management	Group facilitation, responsibility delegation, role dynamics in simulations
6	Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity	Engaged in COIL-based multicultural tasks and reflection on cultural differences
7	Lifelong Learning / Progressive Mindset	Voluntary participation in webinars, self-directed learning behaviour
8	Environmental Awareness and Stewardship	Eco-projects, sustainability poster sessions, innovation sprints
9	Decision-Making and Proactivity	Crisis simulations, quests involving strategic planning and action under time limits
10	Mentorship	Peer support, onboarding activities initiated by senior cadets
11	Professionalism and Ethical Responsibility	Reflections on ethical codes, decision-making integrity in uncertain contexts

Source: Synthesised from author's activity reports and qualitative coding of cadet reflections (2019–2025)

4. DISCUSSION

The present study provides substantive evidence that extracurricular programming, when aligned with the GMP BoK affective framework, can serve as a strategic mechanism for developing the soft skill competencies expected of global maritime professionals. Rather than reinforcing cognitive outcomes alone, the implementation of structured, thematically coherent extracurricular activities enabled cadets to engage in value-based learning experiences that extend beyond formal instruction. This confirms the critical role of affective learning in maritime competence formation and challenges traditional views that such learning is peripheral or informal.

Crucially, the study reinforces the pedagogical validity of using a three-tier affective learning taxonomy – comprising *awareness*, *reflection-in-action*, and *value internalisation* – to scaffold the progression of soft skills. The mapping of cadet responses within this framework not only reflects measurable change in behaviour but also suggests a deeper integration of values, such as ethical reasoning, intercultural empathy, and collaborative discipline. These findings substantiate prior theoretical assertions that affective outcomes emerge not merely through exposure, but through *intentional structuring* of emotionally resonant, socially interactive, and professionally contextualised experiences.

The differentiated impact of activity types – such as COIL projects fostering intercultural communication, or scenario-based quests enhancing decision-making – highlights the need for deliberate activity – outcome alignment. In this regard, the study affirms the principle of *pedagogical specificity*: that no single format develops all soft skills equally, and that multimodal exposure is essential to comprehensive affective formation. Institutions should thus design portfolios of extracurricular interventions mapped to precise affective goals, rather than offering generic “soft skills training” without curricular integration.

Beyond the pedagogical domain, the study also reveals implications for institutional leadership. Maritime academies that aim to meet GMP BoK standards must move toward embedding soft skill development across their educational ecosystems, including in instructor training, assessment systems, and quality assurance frameworks. Doing so will not only align institutional outputs with international standards but also foster a more responsive and ethically grounded professional culture among graduates. The proposed mapping model offers a scalable template for such strategic integration and could inform accreditation protocols or internal programme reviews.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to reframe maritime education as a domain that synthesises technical proficiency with moral agency and humanistic intelligence. In contrast to conventional training models that prioritise compliance and procedural accuracy, this research illustrates how affective learning fosters adaptive professionalism, ethical reflexivity, and psychosocial maturity – attributes that are increasingly indispensable in a global, uncertain, and high-stakes operational environment.

In sum, the findings position affective learning not as supplemental, but as *foundation* to 21st-century maritime education. They call for an intentional realignment of curricular priorities, instructional methods, and institutional policies around the integration of soft skills as core competencies. Only through such a comprehensive paradigm shift can maritime institutions prepare officers who not only navigate ships, but also navigate the complex moral, cultural, and interpersonal landscapes of the maritime world.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that extracurricular activities, when systematically aligned with the Global Maritime Professional Body of Knowledge (GMP BoK), are a viable and impactful method for cultivating affective competencies in maritime cadets. The integration of diverse, interdisciplinary, and reflective learning formats significantly contributed to the development of soft skills across all eleven GMP-defined domains, including leadership, ethical responsibility, intercultural communication, and decision-making.

By adopting a mixed-methods research design – combining surveys, psychometric profiling, self-assessment, and direct observation – the study captured both observable behaviours and internalised values. The structured application of a three-tier affective taxonomy allowed for detailed tracing of cadet progression from initial awareness to value-driven actions. This evidence base not only validates the pedagogical effectiveness of such interventions but also underscores their strategic relevance in the context of global maritime standards.

A key outcome of the study is the demonstration that affective learning is neither incidental nor spontaneous; rather, it must be intentionally embedded within the educational design. The cadets' sustained affective engagement and behavioural transformation were most evident in programmes that combined collaborative, intercultural, and ethically challenging dimensions. This highlights the critical need for differentiated purpose-driven extracurricular formats mapped to specific soft skill domains.

From a managerial and institutional perspective, the findings call for a reconfiguration of how maritime training institutions conceptualise and implement soft skills development. The mapping framework developed through this research offers a practical tool for curriculum designers and administrators to plan, evaluate, and scale affective learning interventions in line with the GMP BoK framework.

In theoretical terms, the study contributes to a growing body of literature that situates affective competence at the heart of professional maritime education. It advances the understanding that truly global maritime professionals are not only technically skilled but also ethically grounded, culturally competent, and socially adaptable.

Therefore, maritime education providers should prioritise the systematic integration of soft skill outcomes – such as those demonstrated in this study – into both formal curricula and institutional strategy. Doing so will ensure that graduates are not only operationally effective, but also capable of contributing to the sustainability, safety, and ethical leadership of the maritime industry in the decades to come.

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