DEVELOPING A MARITIME ENGLISH PROGRAMMES FOR MarTEL AND MarTEL PLUS – PROJECT SeaTALK

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Abstract

The SeaTALK project concerns the development a standard International online English language course for seafarers. The course will be in line with IMO requirements and the European Qualification Framework. The project is expected to support the Maritime English standards developed as part of the EU funded MarTEL and MarTEL Plus projects. The course will be incorporated in the EU funded UniMET Project when concluded in 2015. MarTEL and MarTEL Plus developed a set of standards (tests) in English language competency for seafarers and UniMET is a set of complete training programmes for all types and ranks of ship officers. SeaTALK will form the English Language competency development material and tools for UniMET.

Vocational training qualifications and certifications related to Maritime English, although partially regulated by IMO, do not have a common European credit framework and this situation does not allow National Certification Authorities to establish an International standard for Maritime English training, nor for qualifications acquired through non-formal and informal training. SeaTALK aims to develop a Maritime English Training Course to allow mutual recognition and transparency of learning outcomes and competences for Maritime English in Europe. The Course is expected to have a global impact.

This paper reports on the challenges facing SeaTALK to make the course compliant with IMO 3.17 Model Course and the European Qualification Framework as well as the Common European Credit Framework. The main challenge continues to be the development of the course to underpin the MarTEL standards.

Keywords: Maritime English, Maritime English Standards, Maritime English Course Development, Language Competency, English Language Competency.

1. Introduction

This paper describes a new EU funded project called SeaTALK (SeaTALK, 2013) which is expected to develop a course in Maritime English based on recent developments. After a short presentation of project aims it reports on the latest developments with regard to the international and European policies on safety at sea

and the recent efforts in encouraging effective communication at sea. The project is expected to support the Maritime English standards developed as part of EU funded MarTEL (MarTEL, 2007) and MarTEL Plus (MarTEL, 2010) projects (www.martel.pro). The course will follow the IMO 3.17 Model syllabus (IMO 3.17, 2003) and will be in line with European Qualification Framework.

The paper explains, in some detail, the importance of Maritime English and how competence in English language could help mobility of the seafarers in Europe and worldwide. Two recent articles (Ziarati, 2013) have provided samples of several students who concluded the English preparation programme based on Martel standards were accepted in British universities and some concluded post-diploma programmes preparing them for UK's MCA Certificate of Competency and Officer of Watch designation. SeaTALK is expected to replace the English preparation programme and support the recently concluded EU funded UniMET Project (UniMET, 2012). UniMET is a set of complete education and training programmes for all types and ranks of ship officers. SeaTALK, therefore, will form the English language competency development material and tools for UniMET.

SeaTALK would be competence based and for this reason special references are made to issues related to competence development and assessment of competence. SeaTALK specifically aims to develop Maritime English training course to allow mutual recognition and transparency of learning outcomes and competences in the Maritime English in Europe. The Course will be in line with IMO requirements so it is expected to have a global impact.

There are 9 partners in the SeaTALK project. The partners are Piri Reis University (TR), Centre for Factories of the Future Ltd (C4FF), Training Branch of the Malta Maritime Pilots (MMRTC), Nicola Vaptsarov Naval Academy (NVNA), World Maritime University (WMU), University Of Turku – Centre of Maritime Sciences (CMS), Spinaker d.o.o (SPIN), Centre of Development works (OPR), University of Antwerp and Antwerp Maritime Academy (UoA and AMA).

This project aims to:

- Create a comprehensive framework enabling seafarers to undergo common Maritime English training, and allow National Authorities to mutually recognise these qualification levels as well as the levels of training undertaken. This will facilitate workers mobility due to an easier and common qualifications recognition system in the EU.
- Create a standard approach by combining the IMO (International Maritime Organisation) requirements for Maritime English (Training Modules), the highly successful MarTEL Phase tests and the creation of an ECVET system, which could allow National Authorities to mutually recognise and assess such qualifications and levels in a standardised manner.
- Establish the ME ECVET system to allow mutual recognition of seafarers' Maritime English Competence within the Maritime industry directly linked to the CEFR of languages to promote greater mobility of the seafarers' workforce in line with STCW requirements.
- Develop Maritime English Training Modules (linked to CEFR) to facilitate the training and learning of Maritime English. The combination of Training

Module consolidation and incorporation in the ECVET system will facilitate the mutual recognition of competences thus enhancing workers mobility.
- Promote good practice in Maritime English education and training across Europe.
- Up-skill the maritime industry, strengthen the maritime labour market by combating problems of safety caused by poor communication at sea and work towards ending the imbalanced supply of sailors throughout European countries.

The project will allow the consortium to work towards these goals, which are in line with the 'Europe 2020' priorities. By standardising the quality of Maritime English education and training, the project will make the European MET sector stronger, resulting in more competent trained seafarers. This may well contribute to a reduction in the number of accidents at sea and make the European shipping industry safer and more competitive. During the recent Costa Concordia accident, poor communications between the crew and the passengers was evident. If a standard Maritime English training and assessment approach is established, the communication ability of the crew would be higher and more effective in such emergency situations.

2. Why SeaTALK

2.1 European Policies

The promotion of mutual recognition of qualifications between EU Member States and the implementation of the ECVET framework on a European scale is high on the list of priorities in Europe as laid down in the Bologna Process, Copenhagen Process and Lisbon Treaty. The project's objectives are directly linked to Europe the 2020 objectives to support the mobility of labour, European Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP) 2018 and Marine Knowledge 2020. The expected results of this project are directly linked to the planned objectives of EU MARE as stated by the Commissioner Damanaki (Ziarati, 2011).

2.2 IMO Policies on Safety at Sea

Apart from the above European policies, SeaTALK is also in line with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Comprehensive review of the STCW Convention and the STCW code, 41st session, STCW 41/7/9, 5th October and EU (2009) on Communication on the strategic goals and recommendations for the EU's maritime transport policy from 2009-2018, Brussels. Ziarati (2009) cites several serious accidents caused by communication failures within the shipping industry. During the recent Costa Concordia accident, poor communications between the crew and the passengers was evident. The sea will be safer if the EU supports SeaTALK to overcome the problem in International Maritime English language competence. The project results will also lower costs of the European shipping community and enable them to compete against the low cost Far East (Asia) whilst providing the European seafarers with a competitive advantage.

2.3 Greater Mobility of Labour

SeaTALK will increase mobility in the European Maritime Sector both horizontally and vertically providing transferable language skills and qualifications to all seafarers across Europe. International recognition through a BTEC/Edexcel qualification will be achieved on completion of the Training Module. BTEC/Edexcel is the UK's largest awarding body offering academic and vocational qualifications. Edexcel operates in over 110 countries, offering the widest range of academic and vocational qualifications. The project will promote the transfer and recognition of competences and qualifications between the UK and Europe to promote greater seafarer mobility. SeaTALK will create opportunity to improve their English and work onboard vessels of countries where there are severe shortages in the workforce (OECD, 2007, BIMCO/ISF, 2005).

The EU support will enable C4FF, Piri Reis University and the partners to engage in developing a harmonised and comprehensive framework for Maritime English training in MET. It will establish a standard approach to teaching, learning, assessment and transparency of Maritime English qualifications throughout Europe. Thus these will up-skill workers in the maritime industry, strengthen the maritime labour market by combating the problems of poor communication at sea, and work to end the imbalanced supply of sailors throughout European countries.

3. The Expected Impact

The project's impact will be multiplied by the strength and influence of the partners. They have extensive knowledge of the ECVET programme, and combined with the fact that each partner has access to a wide network of people and organisations within European Maritime sector means that the consortium will also be able to disseminate these programmes extremely effectively. Target groups all over Europe will be addressed.

3.1 The target groups

The target groups of the SeaTALK project are:

- Seafarers/students
- Maritime English Lecturers
- Vocational education and training providers in Maritime VET centres who are offering Maritime Training programmes
- Maritime Universities offering MVET courses.
- Shipping companies providing cooperative training.
- Labour market authorities who are promoting employment possibilities on the sector and rely heavily on European workforce mobility and recognition.
- MVET associations and their members such as IMEC (International Maritime English Conference), IMLA (International Maritime Lecturers Association) and IAMU (International Association of Maritime Universities) etc.
- Political decision makers on international, European, national, regional and local levels who are planning future policies for Maritime sector on different geographical and political level and are significantly influencing the Maritime industry development.

All the target groups listed above are significantly influencing and determining ~~the~~ Maritime English Education in Europe and are influencing the quality and Image of the European Maritime industry. In this project, the target groups and the impact aims will be reached by the following approaches:

- Direct involvement of the target groups in the project meetings and dissemination strategy where they will be made fully aware of the project's objectives and plans.

- MET providers, maritime English lecturers and students will be contacted on the latest progress of the product development and be encouraged to use the product (Training modules, Learning Materials, ECVET system).

- A top-down approach, through which information flows from policy makers in a 'downward' direction to a target group. During the project, partners will submit papers to, and attend maritime conferences such as IMEC, IMLA, IAMU, etc. which will also be attended by key policy makers in the maritime field. Since the project is being carried out in response to the deficiencies in MET, it is expected that the policy makers will respond by becoming involved and addressing the issues that are highlighted.

4. Issues related to Competence Development and Assessment

SeaTALK will avoid re–inventing the wheel and make use of what has already been developed. To this end, competence issues are partially resolved by agreeing to use Definitions for Learning Outcome and competence already developed in the EU funded SOS project (Ziarati et al. 2006) as follows:

Competence is a demonstrable ability to apply a skill or a set of skills in order to do a task according to a given, or a set of, standards.

A **Learning Outcome** is a clear statement of the expected outcome from a given learning activities/experience. Learning outcomes can be expressed or constructed to include learning that lead to acquiring the skill, or set of skills, to become competent for carrying out a specific task or set of tasks.

Both of the above definitions are in accordance with the document titled ' **Get to Know ECVET better - Questions and answers'** found in (http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/ecvet_en.htm). This is the first guidance document on ECVET concepts and principles and allows the freedom for interpretation and use of ECVET concepts and principles. The document defines:

 Learning outcomes as: Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.

Competence as: The proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal abilities in work or study situations and in professional and personal development - this definition has been adopted as part of EQF Recommendation. Both of the definitions are in line with Ziarati's definitions (ibid).

What these definitions imply is that all SeaTALK learning outcomes should be statements of the expected outcomes from given learning activities/experiences and that every skill should be in form of a demonstrable ability for doing a real task according to a, given or, set of standards.

For these to be applied correctly, there is a need to describe the outcomes and for each outcome to describe the assessment criteria according to the definitions presented for Competence above. As well as the need for assessment to have a set of grading/marking criteria to ensure the assessment is fair and consistent.

Sample learning and assessment materials need to be developed and/or gathered from previous relevant projects with clear assessment and grading/marking criteria and these should be tested in real terms, which require piloting sites to be selected. The intention is to pilot while implementing the course in at least one MET centre.

4.1 Plans for Piloting SeaTALK

The number of METs expected to pilot SeaTALK content is over 30. The number of cadets and officers involved with evaluation at the first selected pilot site (Piri Reis University) will be 48. The overall model will be presented at IMEC and to major awarding bodies in Europe.

5. Conclusions

The challenges set by the project aims and deliverables are substantial. Considering the core of the SeaTALK consortium ~~was~~ have been involved in previous and successful EU funded Maritime English learning and assessment materials development such as the MarTEL, MarTEL Plus, CAPTAINS, MarEng and MarEng Plus projects, this gives some indication that despite its challenges the project will be successful.

The main tasks of developing an online course for Maritime English in line with IMO 3.17 model course syllabi and in compliance with the European Qualification Framework as well as the Common European Credit Framework requirements require a high level of knowledge in several key subject matters and technology areas. These areas include expertise in online course developments, full knowledge of IMO language competence requirements and, how such courses can be competence based and developed within both the European Qualification Framework as well as the Common European Credit Framework.

The key task of developing the SeaTALK course to underpin the MarTEL standards remains the main challenge.

A great deal of work has already been carried out and two successful group meetings have already taken place. The progress has been satisfactory to date. The intention is to hold the third project group meeting in parallel with IMEC 25 conference in Istanbul.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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