

The Role of English Personnel Care (EPC) in Developing Cadets' Practical English Skills at the Merchant Marine Polytechnic of Makassar

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Abstract

The ability to communicate effectively in English is essential for maritime cadets due to the international nature of the maritime industry. However, many cadets experience difficulties in applying their classroom knowledge to real-life communication situations. This study investigates the role of English Personnel Care (EPC) in developing cadets' practical English skills at the Merchant Marine Polytechnic of Makassar. Employing a qualitative case study design, the study involved two EPC mentors and three cadets as interview participants, while observations were conducted with twenty-four cadets participating in the program. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings revealed that EPC plays a significant role in enhancing cadets' practical English skills by providing continuous language practice, increasing confidence in communication, and creating opportunities for authentic English interaction. Furthermore, the mentoring approach adopted by EPC encourages active participation and supports the development of communicative competence in maritime contexts. The study concludes that EPC serves as an effective support system for improving practical English skills among maritime cadets and contributes positively to English language learning in vocational maritime education.

Keywords: *Cadets, Communicative Competence, English Personnel Care, Maritime English, Practical English Skills*

Introduction

The maritime industry operates in an international environment where effective communication is crucial for ensuring operational efficiency and safety at sea. English has been recognized as the official language of maritime communication and is widely used among multinational crews, port authorities, and shipping companies. Maritime cadets are expected not only to possess theoretical knowledge of English but also to demonstrate practical communication skills that can be applied in real professional situations. The ability to communicate effectively in English has become an essential competency for future maritime officers who will work in multicultural and multilingual environments.

The recognized importance of Maritime English, many cadets continue to experience difficulties in using English effectively in authentic communication situations. Previous studies have reported that cadets often struggle with communication anxiety, lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and insufficient opportunities for meaningful interaction (Horwitz et al., 1986). These challenges frequently prevent learners from transferring theoretical knowledge acquired in classrooms into practical communication skills required in professional contexts (Khoiruman et al., 2026). Furthermore, maritime education is commonly characterized by regimented systems, strict schedules, and hierarchical structures that may limit opportunities

for spontaneous communication practice. As a result, many cadets possess adequate theoretical understanding of Maritime English but remain hesitant to use the language actively and confidently in real-life situations (MacIntyre, 2007).

Despite receiving formal English instruction, many maritime cadets continue to face challenges in using English for practical communication purposes. They often demonstrate adequate knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but experience difficulties in expressing ideas, participating in conversations, and responding appropriately in authentic communication situations. These challenges may limit their readiness to perform professional duties that require effective communication in English. Maritime education institutions are required to provide additional support mechanisms that facilitate the development of practical English competence beyond the traditional classroom setting.

To address these challenges, the Merchant Marine Polytechnic of Makassar implements the English Personnel Care (EPC) program. EPC is designed as a mentoring-based learning initiative that provides cadets with additional opportunities to practice English through informal interactions and guided communication activities. Unlike conventional classroom instruction, EPC emphasizes continuous practice, personalized guidance, and supportive communication between mentors and cadets (Zainuddin et al., 2019). Through these activities, cadets are encouraged to use English more actively and confidently in various learning situations.

Several studies have investigated the development of English communication skills in maritime education and emphasized the importance of practical language use in preparing future maritime professionals. Scenario-based and practice-oriented instruction has been reported to support maritime learners' communicative competence by providing more realistic and profession-related learning experiences (Abimanto et al., 2025). Such approaches highlight the importance of contextualized learning experiences that allow learners to apply their linguistic knowledge in realistic professional situations (Pritchard, 2019).

A needs analysis of Maritime English for vocational education also reported that many maritime cadets possessed adequate grammatical knowledge but lacked confidence in oral communication. Their findings suggested the necessity of providing additional learning support that focuses on practical communication rather than merely linguistic accuracy (Dirgeyasa, 2018).

Research on language learning environments has also demonstrated the importance of psychological factors in language acquisition. Learners are more willing to participate and take communication risks when they feel psychologically safe (Edmondson, 1999). In educational settings, supportive learning environments can encourage learners to practice a target language without fear of criticism or failure.

Informal learning spaces in maritime academies were also found to contribute positively to language development, as students who participated in voluntary English activities outside formal classrooms demonstrated greater fluency and pragmatic competence than those who relied solely on classroom instruction (Borovica, 2024). The study emphasized the value of informal and non-graded learning opportunities in language development.

The role of mentoring and scaffolding in technical English instruction has been shown to support learners in mastering professional communication skills more effectively than independent learning approaches through personalized guidance and continuous support (Wang, 2024). Such guided support is consistent with the sociocultural perspective, in which

learners develop through interaction and assistance from more knowledgeable others (Lantolf et al., 2006).

Although previous studies have highlighted the importance of practical communication, psychological support, informal learning environments, and mentoring in language education, differences remain in their research focus. Scenario-based instruction has been emphasized to improve communicative competence (Pritchard, 2019). Maritime English needs analysis in vocational education has focused on cadets' communication needs (Dirgeyasa, 2018). Psychological safety has been highlighted as an important factor in encouraging learners' participation (Edmondson, 1999). Informal learning spaces have been shown to contribute to language development (Borovica, 2024). Mentoring and scaffolding have also been examined as approaches to support learners in technical English instruction (Wang, 2024). More recent studies have focused on communication needs in Maritime English education (Sartini et al., 2025). Studies have also examined Maritime English communication learning models (Simanjuntak et al., 2024). Other research has focused on professional skill development among maritime cadets (Liashenko, 2024).

Despite these valuable contributions, limited attention has been given to structured mentoring-based language support programs that operate outside formal classroom instruction and simultaneously provide continuous English practice, communication confidence, and practical language development among maritime cadets, particularly in the Indonesian maritime education context.

The novelty of this study lies in examining English Personnel Care (EPC) as a structured mentoring-based support program that complements formal Maritime English instruction by providing continuous language practice, personalized guidance, and authentic communication opportunities. This study investigates how EPC contributes to the development of cadets' practical English skills at the Merchant Marine Polytechnic of Makassar. Specifically, the study explores how EPC facilitates English language practice, supports communication confidence, and contributes to the development of practical English competence among maritime cadets. Accordingly, the research is guided by the following question: *How does English Personnel Care (EPC) contribute to the development of cadets' practical English skills at the Merchant Marine Polytechnic of Makassar?*

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate the role of English Personnel Care (EPC) in developing cadets' practical English skills at the Merchant Marine Polytechnic of Makassar (Creswell et al., 2018). A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of EPC as a unique educational program operating within the context of maritime education. The study focused on exploring participants' experiences, perceptions, and interactions within the EPC program and how these contributed to the development of practical English skills (Yin, 2018).

The study was conducted at the Merchant Marine Polytechnic of Makassar, Indonesia. The institution was selected because it has implemented the English Personnel Care (EPC) program as an additional language support initiative for cadets. The participants consisted of two EPC mentors and three cadets who had direct experience with the program. In addition, classroom and program observations involved twenty-four second-semester cadets participating in EPC activities. The two mentors and three cadets participated in the interviews, while the twenty-four second-semester cadets were involved in the observation activities. The selected participants

were considered information-rich cases capable of providing detailed insights into the implementation and impact of the EPC program.

Data were collected using three research instruments: semi-structured interview guides, observation sheets, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the two mentors and three cadets to explore their experiences and perceptions regarding the role of EPC in developing practical English skills. The interviews provided information concerning participants' experiences and perceptions of the EPC program. Observations were conducted during EPC sessions to examine communication practices, mentor–cadet interactions, and language learning activities. The observation activities involved twenty-four second-semester cadets participating in EPC. Documentation, including program records and institutional materials related to EPC, was also reviewed to support the findings.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014). The analysis consisted of three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were organized and coded to identify recurring themes related to the development of practical English skills. The condensed data were then displayed to facilitate the identification and interpretation of patterns emerging from the collected data. The emerging themes were subsequently interpreted and linked to relevant theories and previous studies. Through these stages, the analysis was used to examine the role of EPC in supporting the development of cadets' practical English skills.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, triangulation was employed by comparing data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. This comparison was used to examine the consistency of information obtained from the different data sources. Member checking was also conducted to verify the accuracy of participants' responses and interpretations. These procedures enhanced the credibility and dependability of the research findings.

Results

EPC Creates a Supportive Learning Environment

The findings revealed that English Personnel Care (EPC) provides a supportive learning environment that encourages cadets to use English more actively and confidently. Observation data showed that EPC sessions were characterized by relaxed and interactive communication between mentors and cadets. Unlike formal classroom settings, the activities conducted during EPC sessions allowed participants to engage in English conversations, discussions, and speaking practices in a less pressured atmosphere. Mentors frequently provided encouragement, constructive feedback, and language assistance whenever cadets encountered difficulties in expressing their ideas. This supportive interaction created opportunities for cadets to participate more actively in communication activities.

The observation also indicated that cadets demonstrated a higher level of engagement during EPC activities. Many participants voluntarily responded to questions, initiated conversations, and interacted with their peers in English. The use of informal communication practices enabled cadets to experiment with language without excessive concern about grammatical accuracy. The learning environment appeared more conducive to language practice and communication development.

Interview data further supported these observations. Most participants described EPC as a comfortable and enjoyable learning environment that differed significantly from their formal

English classes. Several cadets explained that they felt less anxious when speaking English during EPC sessions because mentors adopted friendly and approachable attitudes. One participant stated that the supportive atmosphere encouraged him to express ideas more freely without fear of being criticized for making mistakes. Another participant noted that the absence of formal assessment reduced pressure and increased motivation to participate in English communication activities.

Participants also emphasized the importance of mentor support in facilitating their learning experiences. Cadets reported that mentors not only corrected language errors but also provided encouragement and practical guidance that increased their confidence in using English. The presence of mentors was perceived as helpful in overcoming communication difficulties and maintaining motivation throughout the learning process.

Overall, the findings suggest that EPC contributes significantly to the creation of a positive learning environment that supports English communication practice among cadets. Through supportive interactions, reduced anxiety, active participation, and continuous mentor guidance, EPC provides conditions that encourage cadets to engage more frequently in meaningful English communication activities. These findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the importance of psychologically safe learning environments and informal learning spaces in encouraging active participation and language development (Borovica, 2024).

EPC Supports Practical English Development through Mentoring

The findings demonstrated that English Personnel Care (EPC) contributes significantly to the development of practical English skills through continuous mentoring, guided practice, and scaffolding. Observation data revealed that mentors consistently employed supportive instructional strategies that encouraged cadets to participate actively in communicative activities while receiving appropriate guidance and feedback. Rather than emphasizing grammatical accuracy as the primary learning objective, EPC focused on meaningful communication and practical language use. This approach enabled cadets to express their ideas more freely and gradually develop confidence in using English for authentic communication purposes.

During EPC sessions, mentors frequently provided explanations, examples, vocabulary assistance, and corrective feedback when cadets encountered communication difficulties. The support offered by mentors helped learners overcome linguistic barriers and maintain participation in communicative tasks. Observation data further indicated that mentors encouraged cadets to continue speaking even when they made grammatical or pronunciation errors. Instead of immediately correcting mistakes, mentors often guided learners toward self-correction or provided alternative expressions that facilitated successful communication. Such practices created a learning environment where language development occurred through interaction and active participation rather than through formal instruction alone.

The findings also revealed that mentors adapted their instructional approaches according to the cadets' individual needs and levels of English proficiency. Cadets with lower proficiency received additional explanations, simplified language input, and more intensive support, whereas those with higher proficiency were encouraged to engage in more complex communicative tasks. This flexibility allowed learners to participate in activities that were appropriately challenging while remaining achievable with mentor assistance.

EPC provided cadets with various opportunities to practice English through simulations, role plays, group discussions, question-and-answer activities, and contextualized communication tasks related to maritime operations. Observation data showed that many activities reflected

authentic situations that cadets might encounter in their future professional environments, such as giving instructions, responding to operational questions, describing procedures, and engaging in professional conversations. These activities enabled participants to apply classroom knowledge in realistic communication contexts and strengthened their ability to use English for practical purposes.

Interview data supported these observations. Participants consistently reported that mentor guidance played an important role in improving their confidence and communication abilities. Several cadets explained that mentors helped them understand how to use English more effectively in real-life situations rather than focusing solely on textbook exercises. Others noted that the continuous encouragement provided by mentors motivated them to participate more actively and reduced their hesitation when speaking English. Many participants also perceived that the practical activities conducted during EPC helped them become more familiar with communication situations relevant to maritime education and future professional responsibilities.

Overall, the findings indicate that EPC functions as an effective mentoring and scaffolding mechanism that supports practical English development among cadets. Through continuous guidance, individualized support, contextualized communication activities, and opportunities for authentic language use, EPC helps learners bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge acquired in formal classes and the practical communication skills required in maritime contexts. These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing the role of mentoring, scaffolding, and guided interaction in supporting practical language development and communicative competence (Wang, 2024; Vygotsky, 1978).

EPC Enhances Professional Confidence and Communication Readiness

The findings further revealed that EPC positively influenced cadets' professional confidence and readiness for future maritime communication. Many participants reported that the materials and activities provided through EPC were directly related to their field of study and future professional responsibilities. As a result, they perceived the program as highly relevant to their preparation for work in the maritime industry.

One cadet stated that participation in EPC increased preparedness for future maritime communication because the learning materials were closely connected to the maritime profession. Another cadet explained that although speaking English had initially been difficult, participation in EPC helped transform theoretical knowledge into practical communication ability.

The data also indicated the emergence of stronger professional identity among participants. Through repeated exposure to Maritime English, communication simulations, and supportive mentor interactions, cadets began to view English not merely as an academic subject but as an essential professional tool. This transformation reflects the development of communicative competence and vocational identity, both of which are critical for future maritime officers.

Overall, the findings suggest that EPC plays a significant role in developing cadets' practical English skills by creating a supportive learning environment, facilitating meaningful communication practice, and enhancing professional confidence. These findings indicate that EPC serves as an effective complementary learning program that bridges the gap between theoretical English instruction and practical communication demands in maritime education.

These findings are consistent with recent Maritime English research emphasizing the importance of communicative, learner-centered, and needs-based approaches in maritime

education. The study suggests that mentoring-based programs such as EPC can complement formal Maritime English instruction by providing continuous language practice, confidence-building opportunities, and authentic communication experiences that support professional communication readiness. These findings are also consistent with previous studies emphasizing the importance of authentic communication practice and communication-oriented instruction in preparing cadets for professional maritime contexts (Pritchard, 2019; Sartini et al., 2025).

Discussion

EPC as a Supportive Learning Environment for Language Development

The findings demonstrate that EPC functions as a supportive learning environment that facilitates language development through positive social interaction. The relaxed atmosphere observed during EPC activities appears to reduce barriers that often prevent learners from actively participating in English communication. This finding supports Krashen's Affective Filter Theory, which argues that anxiety, fear, and low self-confidence can hinder language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). When learners experience lower levels of anxiety, they become more receptive to language input and more willing to engage in communication.

The present study found that cadets perceived EPC as a safe environment where making mistakes was accepted as part of the learning process. Such conditions may encourage learners to take communication risks, which are essential for language development (Richards, 2020). This finding is consistent with previous studies emphasizing the importance of emotionally supportive learning environments in promoting second language acquisition (Edmondson, 1999).

The findings also align with Edmondson's concept of psychological safety. Psychological safety refers to an environment in which individuals feel comfortable expressing ideas, asking questions, and making mistakes without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). Within EPC, the supportive relationship between mentors and cadets appears to foster such an environment, thereby facilitating active participation in English communication activities.

EPC as a Mentoring-Based Approach to Practical English Development

Another important finding of this study is the role of mentoring in supporting practical English development. Unlike traditional classroom instruction that often focuses on linguistic knowledge, EPC emphasizes continuous interaction, guidance, and practical communication experiences. This finding suggests that mentoring serves as an effective mechanism for bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and actual language use.

The mentoring practices observed in this study reflect Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, particularly the concept of scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978). Through guidance provided by mentors, cadets were able to perform communicative tasks that might have been difficult to accomplish independently. The gradual support provided by mentors enabled learners to gain confidence and develop communicative competence over time.

This finding is also consistent with research in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which emphasizes the importance of contextualized language learning (Richards et al., 2014). Maritime English requires learners to use language in highly specific professional situations (Ellis, 2020). Therefore, opportunities to practice language through authentic and profession-related communication activities are essential for developing practical competence. EPC appears to

provide such opportunities by creating communication experiences that are relevant to the maritime context.

The findings of this study are also consistent with recent developments in Maritime English education. Communication-oriented Maritime English instruction has been found to significantly enhance learners' ability to use English in authentic maritime contexts (Simanjuntak et al., 2024). Likewise, practical communication activities have been shown to strengthen communicative competence and professional identity among maritime cadets (Ohorodnyk, 2024). These findings support the present study, which demonstrates that EPC provides meaningful opportunities for practical communication and active language use.

EPC and the Development of Professional Communication Readiness

The findings further indicate that English Personnel Care (EPC) contributes significantly to the development of professional communication readiness among cadets. The interview data revealed that participants increasingly recognized the practical importance of English for their future careers in the maritime industry. Many cadets explained that participation in EPC helped them understand that English is not merely an academic subject required for classroom assessment but a professional tool that will be used in real workplace situations. Through regular communication activities, cadets became more aware of the linguistic demands associated with maritime professions, including giving instructions, responding to operational information, interacting with multinational crews, and participating in professional discussions. This increased awareness appeared to strengthen their motivation to improve their English communication skills and prepare themselves for future professional responsibilities.

The findings suggest that EPC supports not only language development but also professional identity formation among maritime cadets. Throughout the program, participants were exposed to communication activities that reflected authentic professional contexts. These experiences enabled them to envision themselves as future maritime professionals who must communicate effectively in English. Several participants reported that the program helped them develop a greater sense of responsibility toward improving their communication skills because they recognized the importance of English in ensuring effective workplace interaction and professional performance. Consequently, EPC appears to function as both a language-support program and a professional preparation mechanism that assists cadets in developing competencies required in maritime workplaces.

From the perspective of communicative competence, effective communication extends beyond the mastery of grammatical structures and vocabulary. Communicative competence encompasses grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence (Canale et al., 1980). The findings of the present study indicate that EPC provides opportunities for cadets to develop these competencies simultaneously through meaningful communication activities. By engaging in discussions, simulations, presentations, and interactive speaking tasks, cadets learned not only how to produce grammatically acceptable language but also how to use English appropriately and effectively in different communication situations. Repeated participation in such activities enabled them to become more familiar with communication patterns commonly encountered in professional maritime environments.

The development of communication readiness was also evident in the increasing confidence demonstrated by participants throughout the program. Observation and interview data suggested that cadets became more willing to initiate conversations, express opinions, ask questions, and respond to others using English. This growing confidence is particularly

important in maritime professions where communication failures may result in misunderstandings, operational inefficiencies, or safety-related issues. The opportunity to practice English regularly within a supportive environment allowed participants to reduce communication anxiety and gradually develop greater readiness to use English in professional settings. As a result, EPC appears to facilitate the transition from passive language knowledge to active communicative performance.

The present findings also support recent studies in Maritime English education. Effective Maritime English instruction should be aligned with the communicative demands encountered in professional maritime settings (Sartini et al., 2025). Similarly, maritime cadets require additional opportunities to practice English beyond classroom instruction in order to meet workplace communication expectations (Manurung et al., 2025). The findings of the current study extend this body of research by demonstrating that a mentoring-based support program such as EPC can provide the additional practice opportunities necessary to strengthen communication readiness and professional confidence. Through continuous guidance and authentic communication experiences, EPC enables cadets to connect theoretical knowledge acquired in formal classes with the practical communication skills required in real maritime contexts.

The findings are also consistent with recent research highlighting the importance of experiential and communication-oriented learning in Maritime English education. Communication-based learning models enhance learners' ability to use English in authentic professional situations (Simanjuntak et al., 2024). Likewise, simulation-based training contributes positively to communication confidence and intercultural communicative competence among maritime cadets (Sulistiono et al., 2025). The communication activities implemented within EPC share similar characteristics because they encourage active language use, interaction, and contextualized communication practice. Consequently, EPC serves as an effective platform for developing both linguistic competence and professional communication readiness.

Overall, the findings suggest that EPC plays a crucial role in preparing cadets for future professional communication demands. By increasing awareness of workplace communication requirements, strengthening communicative competence, fostering professional identity formation, and providing continuous opportunities for authentic language practice, EPC contributes substantially to the development of communication readiness among maritime cadets. These findings reinforce the value of mentoring-based language support programs as complementary components of Maritime English education and highlight their potential contribution to the preparation of competent and confident maritime professionals.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the role of English Personnel Care (EPC) in developing cadets' practical English skills at the Merchant Marine Polytechnic of Makassar. The findings confirmed that EPC contributes significantly to supporting English language development through a supportive learning environment, mentoring-based learning practices, and the improvement of professional communication readiness among cadets. The results showed that EPC helps reduce communication anxiety and encourages cadets to actively participate in English communication activities. Through continuous mentoring, guidance, feedback, and interactive practices, cadets gained more opportunities to apply English in meaningful contexts related to their academic and maritime professional needs. Furthermore, EPC supports the

development of confidence and awareness regarding the importance of English communication skills for future maritime careers. These findings indicate that EPC functions as a complementary program that bridges the gap between theoretical Maritime English instruction and practical language use.

The practical implication of this study is that mentoring-based English support programs can strengthen formal language instruction by providing additional opportunities for authentic communication practice. Such complementary learning approaches are also relevant to broader efforts to strengthen English language learning through additional learning supports (Hambali et al., 2023). However, this study has limitations, as it was conducted in only one maritime education institution with a limited number of participants. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted within the specific context of the Merchant Marine Polytechnic of Makassar. Future research is recommended to investigate similar mentoring-based English programs in other maritime institutions and explore their effectiveness across different educational contexts.

Acknowledgment

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