



## Integrating Games in Teaching Maritime English: A Collaborative Auto-Ethnographic Inquiry

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### ABSTRACT

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been getting attention as it puts a strong emphasis on specific language needs in various professional and academic settings, meeting the current trend of English education. As a sub-field of ESP, Maritime English (ME) is taught to students who are projected to be involved in the maritime industry. The present study explored the journey of teachers in integrating game-based learning to teach ME. Specifically, it investigated what teachers experienced in teaching ME, how teachers integrated games into teaching ME, and what challenges teachers faced in integrating games into teaching ME. A Collaborative Auto-Ethnographic Inquiry design was implemented in this qualitative study. The data were sourced from the four authors as we shared our experience in teaching from the first time we taught ME. The necessary data were collected through narrative inquiry, photo voice, and semi-structured interviews, followed by a thematic data analysis. The findings revealed challenges that were faced in teaching ME before and after integrating games. Through the discussion, we highlighted how professional teachers should prepare for the class and adapt to the situation in the class.

## INTRODUCTION

During the 19th century, English for General Purposes (EGP) dominated English language learning as it focused on the objective of mastering English for daily communication. In the 1960s, there was a shift in the focus of English learning as the need for more specific English for use in certain fields arose. The shift has led to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) getting attention and recognition. By the late 20th century, ESP had become a well-established field within language education, with a strong emphasis on meeting the specific language needs of learners in various professional and academic settings (Zhang & Cole, 2018).

Maritime English (ME), which is a sub-field of ESP, is taught to students who are projected to be involved in the maritime industry, either onboard or offboard. In vocational institutions whose focus is on the maritime field, ME is taught to students of technical and nautical departments. The objective is to provide them with the necessary communicative skills in preparation for joining the international maritime industry. In delivering ME, teachers are required to do additional preparations compared to what they need to do in teaching EGP. Such preparations include the integration of IMO Model Course 3.17 into the curriculum, careful selection of teaching methods in relation to students' physical and mental situations, and usage of learning media in relevance with maritime topics.

Taking a further look into the ME curriculum, it is generally accepted that the emphasis is on vocabulary. Several studies mentioned that vocabulary is the most important component to learn in ME (Pejaković, 2015; Pritchard, 2011), while others argued that vocabulary mastery serves as the basis for acquiring ME communication skills (Demydenko, 2012; Sumarta et al., 2023). Both claims are correct to some extent, as the minimum requirement for someone to perform in a certain language is the mastery of that language vocabulary at a certain level. Therefore, it is widely believed that mastery of vocabulary should be first and foremost compared to other language components before taking the next steps into mastering language skills.

As an attempt to master or improve vocabulary mastery in English, various teaching methods or media have been proposed. Many of them mention game-based learning as one of the effective means to achieve that particular objective. Game-based learning can be defined as an attempt to incorporate games into any steps of the teaching-learning process (Bado & Franklin, 2014; Ismaizam et al., 2022). Several studies have highlighted the benefit of integrating games in learning. Improved English language components (Fithriani, 2018; Ling & Abdul Aziz, 2022), English language skills (Asih & Halisiana, 2015; Zakaria & Hashim, 2020), and learning motivation (Ahmed et al., 2022; Gamlo, 2019) have been discussed as the results of implementing games in teaching. Based on those articles, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of implementing game-based learning varies greatly. Some factors that might affect the effectiveness include topic selection, focused skills, student's situation, and ultimately teacher's professionalism.

Currently, there is a limited number of studies that focus on the implementation of game-based learning in teaching ME. This is due to the relatively small number of institutions in Indonesia teaching ME to their students. Out of those limited number of studies, there is currently none that analyzes the implementation of game-based learning viewed from the teachers' perspective; the majority of them put the focus on the student's perspective (Diahyleva et al., 2024) or their learning achievements (Limbong et al., 2021; Pindosova, 2023; Sartini, 2020). This gap provides us an opportunity to investigate why teachers choose to integrate games in teaching, what games are selected, and what problems come out as a result of integrating games.

Based on the aforementioned background, the present study attempted to investigate the experience of teachers in integrating game-based learning to teach ME. The questions raised in this study included: (1) What do teachers experience in teaching ME? (2) How do teachers integrate games into teaching ME? (3) What challenges are faced by teachers in integrating games into teaching ME? By answering these questions, we hoped to provide valuable insights for teachers who share the same situation as presented in the current study, specifically regarding the strengths and drawbacks of integrating games into teaching ME. Ultimately, we tried to promote active learning and improve learning achievement in the field of English education.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

In this study, we adopted a Collaborative Auto-Ethnography Inquiry (CAE) design, as proposed by Heewon et al. (2016), to address the research questions. The initial step involved utilizing a Narrative Inquiry approach, which allowed us to collect data through the participants' personal stories, reflections, and observations related to the theme (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). The narrative data provided rich insights, capturing how participants made sense of their experiences. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the narratives, we analyzed the data through the dimensions of temporal, spatial, and social contexts (Clandinin & Caine, 2012).

Given that the four participants in this study also served as co-authors and contributors to the narrative data, we employed an Auto-Ethnographic approach. Auto-ethnography is defined as a research design that blends personal experience with cultural or social contexts, allowing participants to reflect on their own experiences while positioning these within the larger context of a specific phenomenon or culture (Heewon, 2016). In this study, the participants not only shared their narratives but also played an active role in analyzing the data, making the research process inherently collaborative. This distinction is what sets the design apart from Collaborative Auto-Ethnography (CAE).

Both Narrative Inquiry and Auto-Ethnography have been critiqued for their potential biases, subjectivity, and challenges in ensuring data reliability and validity, as the researcher and participants both contribute to the interpretation of the narratives. To address these concerns, we implemented the CAE approach to mitigate these limitations by incorporating multiple perspectives and data sources. The involvement of four participant researchers allowed for the triangulation of data, sources, and analysis, thus enhancing the credibility of our findings. Furthermore, through an iterative process of collaboration and cross-referencing the shared narratives, we ensured a more robust, valid, and reliable analysis, strengthening the overall quality of the research.

### ***Team Members***

All four participants involved in the present study were teachers at Politeknik Maritim Negeri Indonesia (Polimarin). In addition, we shared similarities of having an educational background of English major, teaching ME, and having no previous experience of going on board. We were assigned to different programs, so we taught different students. A key similarity was that all of us tried to integrate games into our teaching-learning process. A further look at the background and experience of the four participants revealed:

- The first author earned his Master's Degree in English Education. He has taught ME to college students for 7 years. Before joining his current institution, he had taught English to college students for 4 years. His prior experience also includes teaching

English for young learners and high school students in private courses, as well as being a professor assistant. In total, he has 16 years of English teaching experience.

- The second author has completed her Master's Degree, majoring in English Education. She has been teaching ESP for 9 years, demonstrating her dedication and expertise in this specialized field of English education. Her teaching experience spans across various educational levels, including kindergarten, junior high school, senior high school, and higher education. Her latest stint is teaching ME in Polimarin, which has been going on for 6 years.
- The third author had started teaching English before she earned her Master's Degree in English Education. She has taught ME ever since she graduated in 2017. Overall, she has 12 years of experience in teaching.
- The fourth author is a graduate of the English Linguistic Science post-graduate program with an interest in teaching both English and Bahasa. She has been teaching ME for over 12 years, with her students mostly at the college level.

### ***Data Collection***

Collecting data from the participants was done in early 2024. The data, in the form of experience in integrating games to teach ME, were drawn starting from the moment we taught ME in Polimarin. Such an extended timeline was applied as the four participants did not use the same syllabus for teaching. Thus, the decision of what, how, and when the games were integrated might vary among us. In collecting the data, we shared our experience through three different media: narrative inquiry, photo voice, and semi-structured interview.

For starters, we collected data in the form of personal story inquiry. In this data form, the participants tell their experiences and actions, including the logic behind them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). Each of us shared our story relevant to teaching ME in Polimarin. We started our narrative by introducing ourselves and our past experience in teaching. We proceeded to reveal our preparation before going to class and our first impression when we actually were in the class. Then, we focused on how unique it was to teach ME to students of Polimarin, who were subjected to intense physical exercises compared to regular students. Finally, we recalled

how we came to the idea of integrating games into our teaching, which games we did implement, along with the results and the challenges that ensued. The stories were recorded and shared for others to read through Google Drive.

Our second data form was photo voices. Photo Voices depict a process where the participant identifies, presents, and interprets social rules or practices by using photos (Wass et al., 2020). The photos to express their ideas can be in the form of real photos or metaphors (such as drawings or AI-generated images). However, providing photos was not enough for the data to be interpreted. After specific photos were provided, we narrated the experience relevant to the photos concerning integrating games into teaching ME. These data were then used to support and complement the ones obtained from the inquiry. As often said, not everything can be expressed through words. Overlooked experiences or complicated emotions that might be missed through inquiry might be expressed through photo voices. There are also critical moments that can only be captured through photos and are best depicted through them. In our present study, the photos we used were pictures taken during our teaching, specifically before and after we integrated games into teaching ME to our respective classes.

Semi-structured interviews served as the third technique to collect the data in this study. In an interview session, the data collector directs questions to participants in order to obtain their relevant answers or responses (Alshenqeeti, 2014). In the present study, question stems were provided regarding the reason, the challenge, and the results of integrating games in teaching ME. The authors, who also acted as the participants, went back and forth in directing questions to others, answering ones directed to them, or following up the answers with another related question. In the process, we responded to questions freely instead of providing closed answers. This way of interviewing is categorized as a semi-structured interview (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). The decision to use semi-structured interviews was due to the authors being familiar with the topic of discussion and were capable of identifying the domains. The whole process took place in a WhatsApp group to ensure flexibility regarding 'when' the questions would be responded to. From the interview results, transcripts were created as part of the ongoing narrative and the subsequent data analysis.

### ***Data Analysis***

Even though we used different data collection techniques, all of our data were narrative in nature. Therefore, we employed a thematic analysis. This is done to inductively identify themes or concepts emerging from our data set (Peel, 2020). First, the data analysis was done individually to identify thoughts, assumptions, and conceptualization relevant to the practice of integrating games in teaching ME. After we completed our individual tasks, we conducted a similar analysis collaboratively. This was done to make a confirmation whether our analysis results supported or challenged each other. Both analysis steps were done iteratively and carefully to ensure the state of trustworthiness. The results of our collaborative work were then used to detect the emerging concept from the data set, provide a bigger picture about the emerging concept, and identify feasible implications based on the implementation of the concept.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

In relation to the previously stated objectives, several major themes were identified from data analysis. The following section discusses these themes:

### ***Findings***

#### ***Experience in Teaching Maritime English***

All four authors are experienced in teaching, with differing years of experience. A common ground we share is the fact that we started teaching ME with no prior experience of working in the maritime industry, specifically going on board. This became our first hurdle as we had to design or adapt our syllabus to match a certain standard; IMO Model Course 3.17. The model course is designed to provide prospective seafarers with the necessary proficiency in English, focusing on communication in various operational and emergency situations on board. Its objectives are heavily directed at mastering various technical vocabularies and phrases, specifically known as Standard Maritime Communication Phrases (SMCP).

Consequently, we needed to start from scratch and learn the technical terms or phrases that would be taught to the students. There are a lot of them.

We faced another challenge when we came to the class. Polimarin is an institution that implements a semi-military program. Thus, the students are assigned to dorms, and their activities are strictly scheduled. In such a program, the students are very frequently subjected to physical exercises. In addition, they are also trained to perform night watch duty which results in a lack of sleep. On top of that, they are required to wear a designated uniform in their morning-to-night activity with no regard for comfort. Taking all that into account, it is very usual to see students falling asleep between classes and even during classes, including ME class. Therefore, we had to find methods that forced the students to stay awake during our class, either willingly or unwillingly.

Vignette DH:

*“When I was handed the syllabus for ME, I read it and thought to myself that there was a lot to prepare, to learn. I tried to self-taught the vocabularies, the terms, the SMCPs, with the help of Google. I was more than ready when I entered the class, only to see all of my students turned their heads down in fatigue. That was around 10 in the morning. I inquired them to explain and I got the answers, the reasons for their lack of energy. Nothing I did that day could spark their interest in learning ME”.*

Vignette DWS:

*“When I was appointed to teach ME, I needed to recall my knowledge about its vocabularies. Some vocabularies sounded familiar to me but I needed to discover more about SMCPs. I wasn't surprised to see my first class since I had experienced this before. The students' characters were almost the same. They were neat, well-pressed, and worn with precision. When I looked around them, their heads were down. Some of them looked sleepy and were not enthusiast in learning ME.”*

Vignette MM:

*“Honestly, my first teaching was challenging as it was also my first teaching experience. I took a lot of preparation, because I didn't know anything about ME. The first was to look for several references related to the material, and prepare a syllabus as a guideline for me in delivering material in my class. Luckily there was a senior lecturer that helped me about especially SMCPs. In addition, I also got material with the help of Google. As time goes by, I became more prepared to provide my class. It was such a challenging moment for me to make students interested in learning English in my class as they were so*



*often tired from exercises. I was required to create a pleasant learning atmosphere in the classroom to motivate them.”*

#### Vignette MERN:

*“I taught ME in the Nautical study program during my first year of teaching. I therefore browsed for materials, downloaded books by the IMO Model Course 3.17, read the terminology, and carefully prepared the lesson plans before my teaching sessions. I was quite nervous in my first session. However, my confidence returned since I realized of the students' low proficiency in English. I also noticed that I had to motivate my students due to the passive classroom setting.”*

#### *Integrating Games in Teaching Maritime English*

At different points in our career in teaching ME, we came to the conclusion that we needed to do things differently in our class. Our similar reasoning was that we had to keep the students awake for a positive reason. We achieved this, to some extent, by integrating games into the class. There were a few games we tried to use, either offline or online. They included traditional ones (such as Pictionary, scrabble, and jumbled words), online-based games (such as Kahoot!, Quizziz, Polimarlish), or game-natured methods.

In implementing this, all of us did differently, as games can be integrated differently into teaching. Before diving into the main topic, games could be used as brainstorming to pique the students' interest. It was more challenging for us to integrate games in the middle of the lesson as a part of the teaching steps. The reason was that not all teaching methods allow us room for integrating games. More fittingly, they could be used at the end of the lesson as a form of evaluation or assessment. However, putting games at the end of the lesson would mean that during the actual lesson, the students were not as enthusiastic as they were during the quiz. We also needed to manage our time well, as too much of a game component could potentially reduce the amount of learning taking place.

#### Vignette DH:

*“It was probably the third or fourth meeting, of my first semester teaching ME, that I attempted to insert games during class. I opened the class with a pictionary games, with the vocabularies taken from the topic in that meeting. It worked well to trigger my students' interest. Only I ended up spending too much time in game session it cut my topic delivery short. From that day, I tried to integrate games in my*

*teaching, whenever possible. Also, I experimented on various games to integrate to my teaching sessions, with varying success. My personal favorite is Kahoot!, as it can be used at the beginning as ice breaking or at the ending as assessment, not to mention it has its ways with teenagers as they play it by using smartphones.”*

#### Vignette DWS:

*“Since I had experienced in teaching ME in semi-military school before, I had known how to handle them. I needed implementing game as a teaching strategy to motivate them in learning ME. Sometimes, I applied lively board games with them. In another time, I applied ice-breaking game such as “Simon Says” to deliver ME material. I also implemented Kahoot! to evaluate their understanding regarding material given. But, since the first-year students in my institution were restricted using smart phone, I sometimes faced difficulty to integrate technology in teaching ME in a classroom. Moreover, it was such a challenge for me. I developed my own game-learning media to teach my students. I named it “Say it Loud Board Games”.*

#### Vignette MM:

*“The main reason I had to implement interactive learning was because most of the students had lack of interest in learning and some were even sleepy and fell asleep in class. Then I started to integrate some games and quizzes so that students enjoy it more and the class atmosphere becomes more fun. I sometimes rewarded my students who participated well on answering or winning the game. I considered it worked pretty well and also gave a positive impact on students’ engagement and motivation. Due to the students were not allowed to have their gadget with them at that time, so I often provided my students with the ‘real game’, such as Pictionary, spelling bee, role play, jumbled words, etc.”*

#### Vignette MERN:

*“During my teachings, I attempted to utilize games since I had read in a research paper that they may significantly promote second language acquisition. Games might help students learn vocabulary, which is helpful for acquiring a second language. My students enjoyed a lot integrated games, such as Call My Bluff / Two Truths and a Lie, and Words Jumble Race. Their English productive skills were stimulated by these games.”*

### *Challenges Faced in Integrating Games in Teaching Maritime English*

As we experimented with integrating different games into teaching ME, we gained new knowledge and experience stemming from the challenges occurring during our classes. Firstly, in integrating games into teaching, the first and foremost thing to consider was learning objectives being met by the end of the session. Most of our students did not care

about the learning objectives that needed to be achieved for every session. They only wanted to get enough scores to pass the class. Consequently, they focused on the fun and happiness when the game session took place. As teachers, we needed to ensure that integrating games would help achieve learning objectives instead of hindering them.

Secondly, we realized that some games fit really well into the lesson as they efficiently support achieving our learning objectives. Some others, however, were not so facilitating for some reasons. We concluded that in selecting games to integrate, we needed to consider whether the games require easy preparation, have simple rules, use up short duration, provide an equal chance of participation, and be played individually or in teams.

Lastly, incentives to the winning individual or team (such as extra scores or snacks) could trigger positive or negative responses depending on the characteristics of the class. Therefore, we had to understand the students' motivation drive. The class started by integrating games into teaching ME with no incentive. When the situation remained conducive, a low-stake incentive could be introduced. We proceeded to give bigger rewards if we could keep the class in an orderly session. We stopped the reward when the class became too hard to manage. In general, we tried to increase their motivation by giving out rewards and it could be seen from their improved learning achievement.

Vignette DH:

*“Integrating games in teaching does sound fun, but it is by no means easy. My first problem was how to allocate times for games during the lesson; enough time to attract the students but not too much that we did not achieve learning objectives. I faced another challenge when I added a little incentive to the winning individuals or teams; snacks. My students were put in dorm with their food provided by catering service. So, snack is a luxury for them. They became too competitive with the hope of winning the prize. Consequently, the classroom situation was harder to control, overly noisy, as they shouted and yelled in response to winning or losing a round.”*

Vignette DWS:

*“Teaching ME using games strategy was fun. I did enjoy it. Students tended to love it. But, somehow, I feel that implementing games in teaching learning needs a strict rule. My class needed more than I teacher to keep it running well as per the game-rule. When they broke the rules, I could not achieve the learning goals. Second, the fun and joyous moment in teaching ME could lead into uncontrollable class and exceeded time schedule. Lastly, the biggest challenge was to keep the students' motivation in learning*

*ME without rewarding. I admitted that giving reward to them as an appreciation could lead into disaster. If I didn't give them a reward, they tended to be sluggish or unmotivated in gaining the material. So, I concluded that implementing game-strategy to teach ME is a good alternative but it needs some reward management."*

#### Vignette MM:

*"One such challenge in integrating games in teaching Maritime English for me was how to design an effective game in every session. Another was the potential for gamification to distract from the learning goals, that's why a balance of the gamification with the main subject in teaching was needed. This underscored the necessity for me to comprehend its compatibility with students' learning needs in order to attain better learning outcomes."*

#### Vignette MERN

*"When I used games to help students learn ME, I needed to make up for misplaced time in finishing the current lesson plan. The main challenge derived from the idea that the primary element in implementing games in ME required skipping some steps of the lesson plan. Additionally, integrating games really depleted my energy. Moreover, my students' limited vocabulary hindered their capacity to perform in the sessions, requiring them to open the dictionary which was extremely time-consuming."*

### **Discussion**

We took this opportunity to share our journey as teachers in the English Education field. Our combined narrative discussed the sense of responsibility as we are required to perform Tri Dharma, especially teaching, about how we experienced the transition from teaching EGP to ESP. From our personal experience, we reflected on what we did, what we experienced, and what challenges we faced in our teaching. We would like to think that our stories would serve as examples for fellow teachers to take advantage of and improve their own teaching. In the end, each one of us possesses a unique set of experiences and faces different challenges depending on our respective situations. Therefore, it is how we negotiate with the situation that decides whether we can thrive over the challenges.

All of us, educators bear the same responsibility of teaching. In its practice however, we are faced with different situations that need different solutions. The first highlight from our narrative is that we had to adapt our way of teaching as we dived into ME. With no prior experience regarding the subject matter, we researched our way into readiness. As mentioned

by Lunenberg et al. (2014) and Tateo (2012), professional teachers are those who prepare everything before coming to classes. In terms of preparations, we were successful as we entered the class ready and confident. This emphasis that all teachers must put efforts into teaching preparation before actually teaching.

Our narrative then proceeds to say that we had to deal with our students in a less-than-ideal physical condition. Even with a lot of effort put into preparation, the teaching session did not run well for the first few meetings, as the students could not maintain their focus and interest for too long due to fatigue. We realized that we needed to find a way to get their attention longer and motivation higher. In order to do that, we researched various kinds of games (offline and online), the rules, how to play them, and how they would be applied in the classroom. By integrating games into our teaching, we managed to achieve what we wanted to do. This was possible as games are engaging, provoking, and raising motivation for the students to take part in the teaching-learning process (Ahmed et al., 2022; Diahyleva et al., 2024; Gamlo, 2019).

Even after the class had become more active, we still faced challenges in our teaching. Our experience in integrating games showed that an active class did not always mean a good thing. We struggled to meet all learning objectives during our initial meetings in integrating games as they can be time-consuming and even distracting from our actual objectives. To overcome this, we experimented with several different games and adapted the games to our lesson plans, not the other way around, for better learning achievement. This specific experience highlights that good method selection and good preparation do not mitigate all problems. Therefore, it is necessary for professional teachers to learn from mistakes (Özer et al., 2016) and be adaptive to whatever situations they are in (Schipper et al., 2023). By continuous learning and adapting, we can further improve our way of teaching and, subsequently, our teaching results.

In the present research, we employed CAE inquiry as a reflection of our growth as professional teachers, emphasizing the importance of self-reflection and self-improvement. Reflective practice in teaching has been recommended by many experts (Dincer, 2022; Faghihi & Sarab, 2016) as it is by understanding one weakness that we can find room for

improvement for us and provide strengths for others. This completes a cycle where we learn from others, perform self-reflection on what we did, find our way in teaching, and ultimately offer insights for other teachers with similar challenges for the betterment of English education.

## **CONCLUSION**

As explored in this study through CAE-Inquiry, transitioning from teaching EGP to ESP (specifically ME) can be helped by putting some effort into preparation before going into class. In order to capture students' interest and improve their participation during ME class, games can be integrated. Finally, the games to integrate need careful selection and often adaption by the teacher. These additional efforts would ensure that learning objectives would be met without being distracted by the competitive nature of games. It is by understanding the dynamic relationships between teachers and students that informed decisions can be made to optimize the students' ME learning experience and, subsequently, learning achievement.

The results of our study have provided some insights regarding the topic under discussion. However, we need to acknowledge the limitations of our design. As the data of this study were sourced from four teachers from the same institution, we might not fully capture the various perspectives and practices existing in other institutions. To mitigate this limitation, we recommend further studies involving a wider range of data, a larger number of teachers, and a bigger number of institutions. This could open up possibilities of identifying different challenges unique to different institutions. Other topics of ESP can also be explored to see if integrating games can be as effective as we did here. Ultimately, we hope that our results could contribute to the field of education by providing valuable insights for teaching method selection and future studies.

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