

The Role of English in Professional Identity Construction of Indonesian Seafarers Aboard Multicultural Ships: A Narrative Study

Purnama NF Lumban Batu¹, Wida Cahyaningrum¹, Peter Björkroth²

Research on language and identity in multicultural contexts has gained much attention, including studies on professional identity. This qualitative study examines the role of English in constructing the professional identity of Indonesian seafarers serving on multicultural ships, where none of the crew members are native English speakers. The study includes participants with both apprenticeship experience and experience as ship officers working with culturally diverse crews. Data were analyzed using a combination of inductive and interpretive methods. The study identified challenges in using English as the primary means of communication onboard. Variations in spoken English and strategies for choosing whether or not to use a second language, for example, influence seafarers' identities. The study also highlights the significance of English in professional identity development and career advancement on multicultural ships.

KEY WORDS

- ~ Professional identity
- ~ Indonesian seafarers
- ~ Multicultural ship
- ~ English
- ~ ELF (English as Lingua Franca)

¹ Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Pelayaran – Maritime Institute, Jakarta, Indonesia

² Novia University of Applied Sciences, Vaasa, Finland

e-mail: nancy.lumbanbatu@gmail.com

doi: [10.7225/toms.v15.n01.022](https://doi.org/10.7225/toms.v15.n01.022)

Received: 12 May 2025 / Revised: 1 Nov 2025 / Accepted: 28 Mar 2026 / Published: 20 Apr 2026

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1. INTRODUCTION

Until recently, most research on language and identity has been undertaken in settings where English is the official language. The participants in this research are both learners and speakers of English, the designated contact language; acquiring and mastering the L2 is related to involvement in the multicultural community onboard ships. Thus, this study analyses the creation and negotiation of L1 (native language) and L2 English language identities among Indonesian seafarers from diverse linguistic and cultural (linguacultural) backgrounds.

The importance of a global communication network highlights that English exists for a specific reason: to promote mutual intelligibility worldwide as the lingua franca. The more flexible and free from normative obligations a language is, the better speakers can achieve both global language goals: communicating messages and expressing identity. English, as a lingua franca, fits this framework well. It is a language that allows creativity and appropriation by each speaker, meeting the need for both identity and intelligibility. Motschenbacher (cited in Back, 2014) argues that as a lingua franca, English does not have a fixed standard and allows for the expression of non-Anglophone backgrounds, since the English language is no longer tied to Anglo/American culture. Most speakers should have no difficulty attaching their own cultural identities to a language that is not their first. Current research on English as a lingua franca is characterized by tolerance of these nonnative features and is not usually motivated by the desire to establish a new standard for English (Jenkins 2009). This creates a conceptual space for recognizing that competent ELF speakers can be widely intelligible without sacrificing their sociocultural identities as speakers from various non-Anglophone backgrounds. These ELF features, which do not hinder successful communication, are accepted as potential indexes of speakers' cultural identities.

Kirkpatrick (2017) has provided evidence contrary to the view that English as a lingua franca (ELF) deprives nonnative speakers of their own linguacultural identities. He notes that a possible difference between the use of English as a lingua franca and a variety of English is that the latter will contain code-mixing, including shared vocabulary and local idioms. ELF will not display as many of these features because its primary function is communication. In contrast, a significant function of a variety of English is the expression of a shared identity. However, this does not mean that ELF speakers cannot or do not express identity (Baker 2011), or that speakers of a variety of English do not communicate. It only shows that ELF speakers are positioned closer to the communication end on a continuum between identity and communication, while speakers of varieties are closer to the identity end (Baker in Jenkins et al., 2017). Extensive studies have focused mainly on the communicative side of ELF, with little insight into the identities expressed by ELF speakers.

On the other hand, studies on the relationship between language and identity (Peirce 1995; Arredondo, Rosado, Satterfield 2016; Block 2009; Canagarajah 2004; Capobianco 2017; Darvin, Norton 2016; Gong, Shuai, Liu 2013; Nguyen 2018) have also been conducted. These studies focus on constructing identities related to speakers' ethnicities, and on using and learning English as a foreign language, as a second language, or in classroom settings. Meanwhile, this study will investigate how ELF contributes to the construction and projection of identity, especially in a community of practice such as seafarers working and living together in enclosed spaces at sea. This study will also examine how ELF is used to achieve both goals of ELF speakers – intelligibility and identity – by virtue of its flexibility, tolerance for deviations, and cooperative nature.

Indonesian seafarers clearly view English skills as an essential component of being a professional and competent seafarer. Thus, English proficiency contributes to the formation of a positive professional identity among our respondents. Improving English skills is also seen as a way to advance one's career, making these skills even more important. It should be noted that there appears to be a slight conflict between correct, or standard, English and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). This conflict becomes evident, for example, when superior officers have a weaker command of standard English than lower-ranking officers. In such situations, superiors may feel their professional identity is threatened and, to avoid this, may require lower-ranking officers to use a less elaborate form of English, which could be considered ELF. Communication – and, in the maritime context, maritime English – is clearly linked to a positive professional identity, especially on multilingual vessels. It is therefore not surprising that the ability to communicate fluently is central to professional identity in other high-risk professions where teamwork is crucial for success (Fitzgerald 2020). Medical professions, for example, are similar in this regard. Rasmussen et al. (2018) discussed how activities such as providing patient-centered care, problem-solving, multitasking, and clear communication give nurses a sense of empowerment and strengthen their professional identity.

In the context of this study, a multilingual environment, English is the official lingua franca at sea. By consensus and a UN resolution, it is the most common means of communication wherever language barriers may exist in maritime communication. Many studies have examined communication issues and challenges at sea. With crews from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, most issues concern the social aspects of communication (Čulić-Viskota and Kalebota 2013; El, Ahmed, and Halawa 2001; John, Brooks, and Schriever 2017; Lu, Hsu, and Lee 2016; Progoulaki and Roe 2011; Schriever 2009), but none has investigated the relationship between language, bilingualism, and being a professional seafarer.

Recent linguistic discussions by ELF experts consider the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the interactants as factors influencing language performance. According to Hülmbauer, "it appears likely that ELF users develop their own markers of identity." These markers may be of a common 'European' or 'international' nature, or they may be more individual, created online, depending on the community of practice from which they emerge (Seidlhofer 2004). As a result, ELF is multicultural. English serves as a lingua franca at various levels: local, national, regional, and international. Interestingly, the more localized the use of English, the more variation it is likely to show.

The 'identity-communication continuum' explains this. Locally, ELF displays identity markers and is therefore prone to code-switching and explicit nativization. For international communication, speakers tend to avoid local and nativized norms and expressions (Kirkpatrick, 2007). According to the author, language has three functions: communication, identity (signaling the speaker's identity), and culture (expressing the speaker's culture) (p. 10). The author proposes an "identity-communication continuum" (p. 11) representing the connections between identity and communication functions. In this view, formal varieties are better suited for communication, while informal ones are better for expressing identity. It is important to note that ELF interactions focus on function rather than form. Communication efficiency (i.e., conveying the message) takes precedence over accuracy.

Seafarers on multilingual ships must work and live with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. To cope with this environment, they must adapt and negotiate multiple aspects of their identities, such as nationality, culture, age, language, and the power relations across their ranks. Bearing this in mind, language learning and studies on identity are highly dependent on epistemological stances, as identity is not predetermined but constructed through interaction. The process of identity formation involves the use of language. Since crews onboard are multinational and multilingual, the importance of sharing a common language should not be underestimated. Under the STCW Convention (2010), a good command of the English language is mandatory, specifically: (1) all watch officers (navigation or engineering) must speak and write English; (2) managerial officers must also speak and write English; (3) ratings on a navigational watch must obey helm orders in English; (4) crew members assisting passengers in an emergency should speak English or the language of the passengers and other crew members.

It has been suggested that cultural differences impact initiative, submission to authority, and rule-following. However, the Seafarers International Research Centre (SIRC) (Kahveci, Lane, Sampson 2001) argued that such cultural generalizations are misleading and unhelpful. Many seafarers became aware, over time, of the inapplicability of stereotypes and generalizations to the real people they encountered and befriended on ships and ashore. The occupational hierarchies often observed aboard ships can cause problems and dangers regardless of the crew's national makeup. Junior and sometimes even senior officers were reluctant to challenge Masters. However, there was no evidence to support the view that such reluctance was related to nationality. On several ships, clear examples were found of junior Asian officers properly correcting European senior officers and sometimes Masters.

This study will use the seafarers' multilingual professional community aboard ships as the context where ELF is used not only for effective communication but also as a contributing factor to the construction, negotiation, and expression of identity, as seen in their language practice, language beliefs, and language management (Spolsky 2017). In alignment with this notion, when applied in a community of practice (Wenger 1998), members of the community must have a shared repertoire. Within the community, members use terms, idioms, and communication strategies shared by the community's repertoire, through which their bilingual identity is constructed, negotiated, and expressed.

2. METHODS

This study involves three active seafarers working aboard their ships during data collection. They have one year of apprenticeship experience and have served at least one year as officers on multilingual ships. This requirement ensures that they develop their professional seafarer identity from the apprenticeship period. In addition, these participants are graduates of STIP from two departments: nautical (deck) and marine engineering (engine room). These participants were chosen because they fit the criteria and, most importantly, were willing to participate, as they responded to the invitation sent through social media communication via an online open-ended questionnaire.

The questionnaire is adapted from a previous study (Vasilopoulos, 2015), which aligns with the current study. It is designed to provide a better understanding of the participants' backgrounds, familiarize them with the topic, and prompt them to reflect on their firsthand experiences, beliefs, behaviors, and roles regarding their use of English onboard ships. After completing the invitation and the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews are scheduled and arranged according to their availability; both their spare time but adequate internet coverage are significant considerations in the arrangement. All interviews are conducted and recorded on Zoom.

The data is analyzed using a combination of inductive and interpretive analysis. Inductive analysis outlines information from specific to broad, connecting pieces of data. Interpretive analysis involves "making sense of social circumstances by developing explanations for what is going on within them. Making inferences, gaining insights, assigning significance, improving understandings, and drawing conclusions are all part of the process" (Hatch, 2002, p. 180 in Vasilopoulos, 2015). Data analysis includes transcribing interviews and identifying both the questionnaire and the transcript. The outcome is then interpreted using the guiding theoretical framework, existing empirical literature, and the researchers' interpretation.

The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK). The guidelines facilitate the application of the General Data Protection Regulation (2016/679) (GDPR) of the European Union. Before participating in the research, all participants provided informed consent. Before collecting their personal data, participants were informed of their rights and the processing of their personal data in a straightforward, easily understood, and natural manner.

Participants have access to this information throughout the research process. When personal information is no longer required for research purposes, it is removed from the research database. When personal data is stored for the primary purpose of linking it to other data, the identifiers and information required to link the data are stored separately from the data to be analyzed. Only those with a valid reason for processing the research data have access to it. Novia University of Applied Sciences functions as the research data controller.

3. RESULTS

This section presents the results of data collection and analysis. It highlights the language practices, beliefs, and management that characterize Indonesian seafarers' professional identity. The results also reveal how the use of ELF shapes the participants' professional identity. Several key findings are identified, such as the connection between language practices and power relations, professional identity construction through ELF, and the challenges and strategies in maintaining their professional identity.

Table 1 shows the participants' backgrounds. All participants are young professionals with more than one year of sea-time experience and have worked with crews from a diverse range of nationalities.

Participant (pseudonym)	Age	Rank	Sea-time	Ship's Crews
Akbar	28	Senior Officer	> 7 years	European, American, Asian
Gio	28	Junior officer	> 5 years	European, American, Asian
Rian	25	Junior officer	> 1 year	Asian

Table 1. Participants' background

In addition, Table 2 below shows a brief recapitulation of the data collected from the questionnaire and the follow-up interviews, reflecting their language practice, language belief, and language management as observable constructive elements of their identities (Nguyen 2018) while navigating, hence negotiating within the multilingual seafarers' community.

Name	The practice	The belief	The management
Akbar	Always prefer using English to communicate, even with fellow Indonesian.	English plays a significant role in his career achievements and advancement.	
		His English has improved greatly since the first time he got aboard with multinational crews.	Arrange some strategies to improve his English skills.
		English has also changed the way he perceives the world happening around him.	Always read English books and watch English movies. Make close contact with fellow senior officers
Gio	Separate the use of English for working purposes only	English should always be used in a multinational setting so as not to alienate speakers of other languages.	
		English plays a role in gaining his position, but it is not the sole reason. English is necessary for working purposes.	No particular efforts are deliberately arranged to maintain or improve his English skills. But still read books and watch movies in English
Rian	Would like to always use English inside and outside of working time but must simplify his English to communicate with other crews or speak in Indonesian to fellow Indonesian crews.	English has always been vital in his life, so the current seafarers' community does not match the ideal community he expected.	To maintain and not lose his productive English skills, he has his thinking aloud and self-talks in English when in private.
		He must preserve and improve his English to fit himself in his ideal multinational community.	Also, always writes personal notes and journal in English.
		English should be used as it is in a multinational context.	

Table 2. Participants' Practice, Beliefs, and Management

3.1. Results of Language Practice, Belief, and Management

This study indicates that language practice in the maritime setting is shaped by hierarchical and power relations among crew members. For example, Rian (25) is a junior officer on a multinational Asian vessel where the senior officers and the captain are from other Asian countries. He has limited access to English and to communication in general. English is used only for work-related matters, and he is instructed to slow his speech and use simplified English.

"Here, I need to adjust when speaking English with the Master and senior officers. I need to use simple words at a slower pace because they don't understand when I speak normal English. ... We occasionally communicate when needed (about work). Socialization happens within crews with the same nationality and culture. With Indonesian, I speak Bahasa Indonesia." (Rian, 25)

This practice is also related to the power-distance dimension in many Asian cultures (as scored by Hofstede [Hofstede Insights, no date]), where people in lower ranks must be aware of their position and maintain respect (distance) with their superiors. This is not ideal for Rian's aspirations, as he had envisioned a different multinational community, and he finds the limited communication to be a barrier to his personal and professional development.

"I am not happy and satisfied with my condition, working aboard the vessel where the authority is Asian people. During my apprenticeship, I was the only Indonesian. It was stressful at the beginning, but the higher ranks made me learn and helped me grow. They really told me and explained what I did wrong."

Here it is different. They just yelled or shouted at me and wouldn't let me know why. I think it's because I'm inferior. So, when they told me to use simple English, I just do it." (Rian,25)

Rian also shares that he is not exposed to ELF except for occasional work matters that require immediate coordination. He speaks English only when needed at work, and he socializes only with fellow Indonesian seafarers, using Bahasa Indonesia. Davis (2006) suggested that a community of practice (CoP) can either inhibit its members from adopting a professional identity or draw them closer to the center of the profession. In this case, when communication among CoP members cannot be achieved, a lack or failure of identity construction is inevitable.

"But now, I am working with Asian people. So, I use their title before their name when I call them. I speak Bahasa Indonesia with other Indonesian crew because I find it not useful, wasting time (to use English). ...I adjust the way I speak when I work here (slower and simplified words). ... I speak Bahasa Indonesia with my friends and English for work. ...I am trying to discuss with other Indonesian crews how to face the culture. I am required to change and adapt my English. Even I have to change my handwriting." (Rian,25)

He is conscious of his identity as an Indonesian working with other Asian people. By using their title before their names, he acknowledges the cultural norms and practices of the community he is working with. Additionally, he mentions trying to discuss with other Indonesian crew how to face the culture on their ship. This attempt indicates language management, focusing on efforts to navigate the challenges of working in a new cultural context and community of seafarers.

The other two respondents shared that they use English daily not only for work-related matters but also for socializing with current crewmates or with crewmates from previous voyages:

"I don't speak 24/7 English when I join a vessel where most of the crews are Indonesian, and the senior officers are foreigners.... But... I speak English 24/7 when I join an international vessel where all the officers are foreigners. (Gio, 28)

"I can say always, because I'm living in a special world, the seafarers' world. We are all friends (fellow seafarers) and now they mostly are coming from the different country, ... And I do still communicate with them. So that's why probably I'm still having contact with them regularly. And sure, how you can say it. I cannot say 'always' just say like most of the time." (Akbar,28)

Aboard their multinational vessels, Akbar and Gio share that speaking English daily can improve their communication skills. They also admit to enjoying conversations with native English speakers for various reasons. Gio finds it more comfortable because he does not need to simplify his English or process different English accents. In contrast, Akbar has exposed himself to a broader range of English varieties and can tolerate the diversity, but he explicitly expresses his desire to acquire US English. He has also accepted and internalized some views and values from non-Asian cultures, which he perceives as more appropriate to help him navigate his life personally and professionally.

"My chief is an American. I think his accent is cool, and I told him I wanted to sound American, like him. I try to imitate him. At first, it was kind of awkward because I was trying to be someone else. I was not ashamed, although he laughed at me at first, but after that, he actually helped me. That's what I like about foreigners; they really help you grow and develop yourself." (Akbar,28)

In the context of a multilingual ship, language management refers to how members of the community use languages depending on the interlocutor and circumstances, including how they try to preserve and improve their English. Unlike Akbar, who prefers to always use English as his means of communication, Gio prefers to adjust his language depending on the interlocutors and location. If he is with non-Indonesians or senior officers, he will speak in English. Yet, many times he finds English words more accessible for expressing himself when he speaks in Indonesian.

"Many times, when I talk about something and the word is not available in Bahasa Indonesia, so I describe it in English. ...

"I spoke English 24/7 when I joined an international vessel where all the crew and officers were foreigners. After six months, at the end of my contract, I spoke fluent English. But, when I went back home to Indonesia, I found it difficult to speak in Indonesian. I needed some time to adjust my Indonesian. My siblings laughed at my Indonesian because I spoke in formal Indonesian. It was not fun" (Gio,28)

With their varied communicative experiences on multilingual ships, it is expected that they develop different perspectives on their language abilities, which require deliberate effort to maintain and improve. Akbar believes he is part of the transnational seafarers' community, and his view of the world changes accordingly. He is aware that he still needs to achieve a higher level of English proficiency. For him, this means acquiring US English. He is confident that this accent will help him fit in better globally. Therefore, he exposes himself to US English media, such as American movies, TV shows, books, and magazines. Gio approaches his English differently. He is satisfied with his English skills and current career and does not feel the need to make deliberate efforts to improve or maintain his English proficiency. He prefers to balance his first language (Indonesian) and his second language (English). As a relatively new officer at sea, Rian still aspires to work with a mix of European seafarers, as he did during his apprenticeship. He hopes to work not only as a seafarer onboard but also in the international job market ashore, where English is the primary means of communication. He even hopes to work with other international community offices. He aspires to be a member of a global community where English is the main language. Therefore, he makes efforts to preserve and improve his English proficiency.

3.2. Results on the Role of ELF in Indonesian Seafarers' Identity Construction

Professional identity is characterized by several dimensions: self-image, social recognition, job satisfaction, social relations within the department, attitudes toward change, and professional competence. The analysis reveals that ELF use significantly influences how seafarers perceive and perform their professional roles, as reflected in the dimensions of professional identity. The participants view English as the common language aboard the ship, used for both work-related and daily communication among crew members.

"Since English is the common language while at sea, I need to learn and be able to speak English. Also, having a multinational crew on board the ship requires us to socialize in common languages." (Akbar,28)

The participants describe the self-image of seafarers as they perceive the profession is characterized by practical skills and language skills to define a competent seafarer:

"I can see that now my friends rarely contacted me first. They said they were afraid to bother me, as I must have been busy with work. Apparently, because I work for an international fleet. You know, in Indonesian, they say 'seگان' (reticent). Well, more reason I like connecting with my foreign seafarer-friends" (Akbar, 28)

"My friends always know I'm into English, and it is expected that I will work for an international fleet. But, after this contract, I will try to find another position with more European officers on board" (Rian, 25)

Not only Rian, but all participants also relate the language to the expectation of their future professional goals. It implies that the participants tend to prefer joining a CoP where English is used daily to maintain and advance in their profession as seafarers.

"My goal is to have an easy life, and I believe English helps me a lot to achieve it. Talking to a nonnative speaker is too tiring. That's why I prefer communicating with native speakers." (Gio,28)

"I really hope I can speak English as fluent as formal American. It sounds convincing when you can speak like the US English helps me to look classy while talking (referring to communication with friends and family)." (Akbar,28)

Their responses also indicate that being able to speak English affects their social relations in the way how they want people to see them, and it helps them to connect with crews coming from diverse cultures:

"Whenever I have problems with work, I am not shy to approach my European or American seniors asking for help because I know it's the right thing to do, and I know I can communicate with them. I noticed that many Indonesian seafarers tend to avoid contact with senior-level officers. That's what hinders them from progressing in their seafaring career. Too afraid to express what they want, too afraid to have ambition. My senior used to tell me to focus on developing myself, and you see, I got promoted to senior level at quite a young age." (Akbar, 28)

Having to face regular changes, especially in the crew-list, all three participants have a positive attitude towards change. They must and are able to continually adapt and adjust their English accordingly as required in their CoP.

"I don't follow Indonesian tradition, calling them sir/ma'am. Learning English changes my perspective on how to respect people better." (Akbar,28)

"Yes, when I work, I change myself to be ready to work and use English. Seafarer is a tense job; I have to cope with it." (Gio,28)

However, another participant experiences limitations when speaking English with crews from a country where English skills are not as good as his. Though he can adapt, he feels unsatisfied with the change, which causes his English not to improve.

"Here, I need to adjust when speaking English with the Koreans. I need to use simple words at a slower pace because they don't understand when I speak normal English. ... We occasionally communicate when needed (about work). Socialization happens within crews with the same nationality and culture. With Indonesian, I speak Bahasa Indonesia." (Rian, 25)

The analysis above highlights how ELF contributes positively to professional identity development, as reflected in the exploration of the dimensions of professional identity. However, the study also reveals a case in which a participant experienced challenges in professional identity development. Despite possessing strong English skills, the participant encountered limitations when communicating with crew members from countries with lower English proficiency. Although adaptable, this participant expressed dissatisfaction with these communication challenges, which hindered further English language development.

3.3. Challenges and Strategies in Using English as Lingua Franca

Through the exploration of ELF use above, its use depends on nationality, culture, and the language spoken aboard the ship. In addition, maintaining individual and group identities while ensuring effective communication presents another challenge. To adapt, one participant emphasized the importance of mastering language skills as the key to socializing and improving work and life within the multilingual crew.

"I speak English with all crew. It helped me to get where I am now. I use English even with the ratings" (Akbar, 28)

Another participant described different challenges and strategies in using English in a multicultural setting. Aboard ships where higher-ranking officers do not have sufficient English skills, communication is limited. Other crew members are expected to use simple words and speak more slowly, so English is used only occasionally for work matters. Consequently, crew members often form their own circles based on shared nationality and culture.

Meanwhile, another interviewee pointed out that he often speaks English with fellow seafarers who are native speakers. As explained above, the acceptance and internalization of Western culture while learning English affects his perspective and how he interacts to reach people more effectively.

"I speak Indonesian with my Indonesian friends and always speak English with my foreign friends.... But most of the time, because sometimes people mix the languages in Jakarta. So, I'm still doing it anyway.... I can always say (speaking English), but because I'm living in the world, Seafarers world, which my friends now mostly are coming from the different countries, ... And I still communicate with them. ..., currently, I speak more to foreigners because I just like how their minds what's inside their heads instead of our local people. ... (I like speaking with foreigners because) the topics that you're talking about are the work and the passion and stuff instead of the love stories." (Akbar, 28)

Overall, it highlights the complexities of ELF use on ships, emphasizing the influence of nationality, culture, and individual proficiency. Effective communication and maintaining cultural identities in this diverse environment require adaptability and strong language skills. Language is clearly an important aspect of working and living in a multilingual seafarers' community.

4. DISCUSSION

Working at sea is considered a high-risk profession. Seafarers frequently face unpredictable weather and situations where crew collaboration is critical. On multilingual and multicultural ships, collaboration becomes more complex because it requires communication in a second language and within a culturally diverse context. The construction of professional

identity is characterized by self-image, social recognition, job satisfaction, social relations, attitude toward change, professional competence, and expectations about the profession's future (Nelly et al., 2020). The results describe how Indonesian seafarers use English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and how it reflects and influences their professional identity.

English has been identified as a set of varieties spoken by people in the maritime industry, particularly seafarers, where crews from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds interact. It is characterized by features that require crews to be familiar with specific phonological and lexico-grammatical structures of English used and understood by speakers whose first language is not English (Dissanayake, 2017). Dissanayake also explained that English is distinguished by the various varieties used and borrowings from the native languages of its speakers. Negotiation occurs when several varieties of English merge, and frequently used words and expressions enter the discourse of stable and long-established crews. In general, there appears to be a strong link between the seafaring profession and English. As indicated, participants consider language an important aspect of working and living aboard a multilingual ship.

Professional identity develops through the socialization process and rhetoric in which individuals receive information about the meanings associated with a profession (Fine, 1996; Hall, 1987). In this context, seafarers are considered a prime example of a community of practice (CoP). Wenger (1998) defines CoPs (Communities of Practice) as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it as they participate in regular activities." Full participation in the practice is required, with new members needing access to ongoing activities or work, information, resources, and opportunities for participation to become full members of the community and develop a sense of identity as expert practitioners (Day, 2002 in Vasilopoulos, 2015).

Based on the results above, English is recognized as a shared language on board multilingual ships and is used daily for work-related communication and socialization. Furthermore, Brenker et al. (2017) described English as a common language aboard ships, which is sometimes not anyone's native language. The English used enables crew members to collaborate successfully and efficiently in a variety of activities on board. In other words, the use of English itself characterizes the seafaring profession.

All participants agree that their English proficiency has given them the opportunity to work and achieve their current ranks and positions. However, not everyone is eligible to be an officer on multinational, ocean-going ships, and English proficiency is one of the primary considerations. From the beginning of their apprenticeship, this understanding has motivated them to learn and acquire English as an essential skill. Almost all seafarers aspire to join an international fleet, which offers more opportunities, higher pay, and improved socioeconomic status.

In summary, several factors discussed above influence seafarers' language identity. Additionally, the participants perceive that practical skills and language skills define competency in seafarers. They consider language skills, specifically English, relevant to and necessary for career advancement. This implies that they believe a higher position on the ship is linked to English proficiency, particularly spoken English. They emphasize the importance of English because it is the common language among crew members from various countries. English can reflect status or position aboard a ship, where a higher position should have better proficiency than any position below it.

In contrast, it has been found that English use is limited on ships where the highest-ranking officers do not have sufficient English skills. As a result, those in lower positions are required to use simple words at a slower pace, which affects their language skills and negatively impacts collaboration. Successful communication on board is essential. Brenker (2017) suggested that inadequate communication can disrupt the flow of information and negatively affect crew collaboration, potentially endangering everyone involved. They also noted that crew members get to know each other better when they communicate effectively, which strengthens social cohesion on board and ultimately leads to more efficient collaboration. In this context, the professional identity of seafarers is influenced by nationality, culture, and language, which affects the community of practice collaboration aboard the ship.

In a multilingual ship, the role of English, its challenges, and strategies for its use are more complex. One challenge seafarers encounter is the lack of shared linguistic and cultural knowledge among crew members. Seafarers must collaborate on complex tasks while using a lingua franca that is often not anyone's native language (Marcom 1999; Sampson and Zhao 2003). Interview results indicate that the use of English depends on nationality, culture, and the language used aboard the ship. Crew members may have different proficiency levels in English and various accents, which affect their relationships (Sampson and Zhao, 2003) and make understanding each other more difficult. Furthermore, the cultural backgrounds of crew members may influence their communication styles and expectations, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts.

Another challenge is balancing effective communication with maintaining individual and group identities. Crew members may have strong attachments to their native languages and cultures, and using English may feel like a loss of

linguistic and cultural identity. Therefore, strategies are needed to ensure that using English does not undermine crew members' sense of identity and belonging. To address these challenges, crew members can adopt various strategies, such as simplifying their language, using visual aids, and allowing time for clarification. They can also build a shared language repertoire by learning key vocabulary and expressions from each other's languages. Additionally, crew members can develop intercultural competence by learning about each other's cultural norms and communication styles. This is where English shapes the seafarer's identity, determining how they think and act with the language they use.

The results also indicate that communication challenges are prevalent on ships where higher-ranking officers have limited English language skills. Other research, such as Branker et al. (2017), identifies several English-related challenges aboard multilingual ships. First, crews tend to associate with those who share the same culture and language, influencing the flow of information. Crews outside these circles may not receive valuable shared information, which can hinder work collaboration. Next, the use of English is often limited to work matters. Some crew members are not motivated to use English outside work or to interact with colleagues from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, indicating that those who do not share a language remain distant. These challenges indicate a weak Community of Practice (CoP) and hinder multilingual crew members from successfully developing their identity as seafarers, as they rarely use English as a common language on board.

Language barriers make working and living together more complex, and a lack of interaction may lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness. English is the designated working language on many ships, but crew members' knowledge and willingness to use it vary greatly. As a result, onboard communication is often almost entirely focused on work. On ships where officers and decision-makers lack sufficient English skills and are unwilling to learn, communication is scarce in private, non-work-related contexts. Branker et al. (2017) point out that someone who does not understand the language spoken onboard may miss potentially critical information and be excluded from decision-making and activities. This isolation causes stress and difficulties, negatively affecting work performance. Consequently, in circumstances where English is used minimally, effective communication cannot be achieved, again reflecting a weak CoP.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings of this study highlight the complex interplay between English language use and professional identity formation among Indonesian seafarers on multicultural vessels. Through careful exploration of language practices, identity construction, and communication strategies, several crucial insights emerge with significant implications for both maritime education and workplace practices. The research reveals that English proficiency serves not only as a communication tool but also as a fundamental component in shaping professional identity and career trajectories in the maritime industry.

The success of developing a professional identity is influenced by strong communities of practice (CoP), high solidarity among crews from different nations and cultures, and the extensive use of English as the lingua franca. In other words, the collaboration and cohabitation of seafarers are shaped by nationality, culture, and language within the CoP. This study shows that English is essential for enhancing the professional identity of seafarers. Several factors influence the construction of their professional identity, including self-image, professional competence, future expectations, social relations, and attitude toward change. Additionally, self-image and future expectations are interconnected with professional competence, involving both practical and language communication skills. The study indicates that the onboard community is mutually connected to the development and improvement of seafarers' English proficiency, which aligns with the development of their professional seafarer identity.

This study suggests that educational institutions can better prepare students for success in an international workplace by implementing strategies that support the use of English as a lingua franca in multicultural settings, practical skills acquisition, cross-cultural competence, and positive attitudes toward change. Educational institutions should integrate English and multiculturalism into their language education programs, given the paramount importance of English in developing seafarers' professional identities. Such measures can help students develop the language communication skills necessary for success in multicultural and multilingual workplaces. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of practical skills in shaping seafarers' self-image and future expectations, indicating that educational institutions should prioritize experiential learning and practical experiences alongside language training, enabling students to acquire the practical skills required for their future careers. Additionally, the success of communities of practice and solidarity among crews from different nationalities and cultures is critical to professional identity development. Therefore, educational institutions may offer intercultural communication training and activities that equip students with the social skills needed for effective collaboration with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Finally, fostering positive attitudes toward change is pivotal, as attitude toward change emerged as a key factor in professional identity development. Educational institutions could encourage students to embrace change and adapt to new situations, cultivating the resilience necessary for success in a rapidly evolving globalized workplace.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest to declare by the authors. All co-authors have read and approved the manuscript, and there are no financial conflicts of interest to disclose. We certify that the submission is original and has not been submitted to another publication for consideration.

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