



# Challenges in Learning and Teaching Maritime Law in Sorong Merchant Marine Polytechnic: A Linguistic Perspective

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**Abstract.** This study examines the linguistic challenges in learning and teaching maritime law at Sorong Merchant Marine Polytechnic, focusing on students' difficulties in understanding complex legal terminology and maritime English. Non-native English speakers face significant barriers due to specialized maritime law vocabulary, which hampers comprehension and engagement. The research, conducted through surveys, interviews, and observations, reveals that current teaching methods and materials are insufficient to meet these linguistic needs, often leading students to rely on external resources. The findings indicate that the complexity of legal texts, combined with inadequate teaching support, complicates the learning process. A curriculum redesign is recommended to provide clearer explanations, more comprehensive materials, and more interactive teaching methods. By addressing these issues, educators can better equip students to navigate the complexities of maritime law and improve their academic and professional readiness. The study emphasizes the importance of linguistic support in maritime education to ensure students are adequately prepared for the legal challenges of the maritime industry.

**Keywords:** Learning and teaching maritime law, Linguistic Challenges, Curriculum Development.

## 1 Background

Learning and teaching maritime law is a crucial component of training institutions like Sorong Merchant Marine Polytechnic, which is dedicated to producing skilled professionals for the maritime industry. As the maritime sector continues to evolve, there is an increasing need to equip students with the knowledge and skills required to navigate the complexities of maritime law and regulations [1]. This specialized education ensures that students are well-versed in the legal frameworks governing maritime activities, enabling them to address legal challenges that may arise in the industry [2].

The international law of the sea encompasses various legal norms and precedents governing the rights and obligations of coastal states and other maritime actors [3]. Understanding maritime law, including creditor-debtor relationships under specific national laws such as those in the UAE, is essential [4]. Maritime Education and Training (MET) must align with industry expectations, particularly in terms of legal competencies needed to manage new technologies and ensure safety and sustainability in maritime operations [5]. Educational institutions are also urged to adapt their curricula to meet the demands of a multi-generational student population and the evolving maritime sector, including legal aspects [6].

The maritime industry has transformed significantly, requiring professionals with a blend of technical, business, and legal skills [7]. One foundational element of maritime law is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which provides the legal framework for maritime boundaries, territorial seas, and exclusive economic zones (EEZs) [8]. The delimitation of maritime boundaries, often a contentious issue due to overlapping claims and historical rights, illustrates the need for effective legal frameworks to resolve such conflicts [9], [10]. For example, disputes between Indonesia and Australia highlight the complexities of territorial claims and the necessity for robust legal mechanisms [8], [11]. Additionally, the enforcement of maritime law can be fragmented due to the involvement of multiple authorities and agencies, as seen in Indonesia's approach to maritime security [12], [13]. The rise of autonomous vessels further underscores the need for continuous legal innovation and adaptation within maritime law [14].

Despite the importance of learning and teaching maritime law, students at Sorong Merchant Marine Polytechnic often face significant linguistic challenges. Maritime law encompasses a broad array of international regulations, national laws, and specialized terminologies that can be difficult to navigate. These challenges are exacerbated by the international nature of maritime law, influenced by organizations such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) [15]. The complexity of maritime English, including a multitude of abbreviations and specialized terms, adds to these difficulties [16].

The maritime law curriculum at Sorong Merchant Marine Polytechnic aims to give students a thorough grounding in regulations and legal practices. However, students often face challenges understanding the material due to the complexity of legal language and specialized terms. Research suggests that cadets struggle with the abstract aspects of maritime law, which could be improved by incorporating more practical applications into the curriculum [17]. Additionally, incorporating environmental perspectives and intercultural understanding into maritime education can enhance the learning experience and alleviate some difficulties [18].

Language barriers present a considerable challenge, as many students may not be proficient in maritime English, which is essential for understanding legal texts and regulations [19], [20]. The dynamic nature of maritime law, influenced by international treaties and environmental regulations, necessitates that students stay updated with current legal frameworks [3], [21]. The integration of frameworks like UNCLOS into the curriculum can help clarify students' legal responsibilities and the practical implications of maritime law [22], [23].

The specialized vocabulary and formal style of legal texts pose additional challenges. The use of complex nominal phrases and lengthy sentences can make legal writing appear awkward or inaccessible, especially to those unfamiliar with legal conventions [24], [25]. Machine translations often fail to capture the nuances of legal texts, highlighting the need for a deep understanding of both source and target legal systems [24]. The inherent ambiguity and discord in legal texts further complicate the learning process, necessitating a thorough comprehension of legal principles and critical analysis of legal documents [26].

Another challenge arises from the discrepancy between the language of instruction and the local language. At Sorong Merchant Marine Polytechnic, English is the primary language of instruction, while Indonesian or the local language is used in everyday communication. This gap can hinder students' understanding and application of maritime law principles. The International Maritime Organization's Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping (IMO-STCW) emphasize the importance of English proficiency for effective communication in the global maritime industry [18]. Therefore, educational institutions must facilitate a smooth transition from local languages to English to prevent misunderstandings of critical legal concepts [27].

The integration of English language instruction tailored to maritime contexts is essential for developing the competencies required in the industry [27]. This includes focusing on maritime English to enhance student's ability to navigate legal and practical aspects of their profession [18]. Continuous curriculum development that addresses both language training and learning and teaching maritime law is crucial for overcoming these challenges [28].

This study aims to explore these linguistic challenges in learning and teaching maritime law at Sorong Merchant Marine Polytechnic. By examining the difficulties related to language and terminology in instructional materials, the research seeks to offer recommendations to improve the teaching and learning experience. Understanding and addressing these challenges is essential for ensuring students acquire the necessary knowledge effectively. The findings will provide insights into the impact of language on learning and contribute to the development of more inclusive and adaptive teaching methods at Sorong Merchant Marine Polytechnic and similar institutions.

## **2 Method**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a focus on linguistic analysis to explore the challenges faced in learning and teaching maritime law. The research design is a case study concentrated on Sorong Merchant Marine Polytechnic to gain an in-depth understanding of linguistic challenges within this specific educational context. The research population includes students and lecturers involved in the maritime law classes at the institution, with a purposive sample of 30 students and 4 lecturers. Data collection involves in-depth interviews with lecturers and students to explore their experiences related to understanding legal terminology and teaching methods; a survey using questionnaires to gather quantitative data on the language difficulties experienced by students; and direct observation of the teaching process and interactions in maritime law

classes. Data analysis is performed using thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for quantitative data, with methodological triangulation to ensure the validity and reliability of findings. Research ethics are maintained through obtaining participant consent and ensuring the confidentiality of collected data.

### **3 Results and Discussion**

#### **3.1 Research Results**

Based on the survey involving 30 students, several significant findings emerged. First, students showed considerable difficulty understanding maritime law terminology, with an average score of 3.8. This indicates that the complexity of legal terminology often presents a major obstacle in the learning process. Second, with a score of 3.5, students also experienced difficulty reading legal documents in English, which requires additional time and effort to comprehend the complex language structure. Although the clarity of the lecturers' explanations was generally rated as satisfactory with an average score of 3.7, some students still struggled to understand the material after explanations were provided. The teaching material was considered adequate with a score of 3.6, but students felt that additional material or references would be beneficial. The use of supplementary resources such as legal dictionaries and online materials, with a score of 3.9, indicates that students frequently seek external help to understand maritime law. Teaching support was rated as adequate with a score of 3.8, although students felt that more support was needed. The effectiveness of teaching methods was rated as fairly effective with a score of 3.6, though there was variability in perceptions regarding the success of these methods in addressing language challenges.

From interviews with 4 lecturers and 10 students, several key findings were revealed. Lecturers acknowledged that students often have an insufficient understanding of legal terminology and frequently require additional clarification, while students complained about the lack of detailed explanations regarding legal terms. Language difficulties were identified as a major issue, with students struggling with technical terms and complex legal language. Various teaching methods, such as case studies and discussions, are used by lecturers to explain maritime law terms, but some students felt these methods were not entirely effective. Lecturers provide additional explanations and reference materials to assist students, but this support is not always consistent. Students reported seeking additional help outside of class hours.

Observations in class and during guidance sessions revealed several findings. The delivery of material by lecturers was generally clear, but the use of technical terms was often not accompanied by adequate explanation. Visual aids were sometimes used but not always with clear explanations of terms, leading to difficulty for some students in understanding the material. Interaction between students and lecturers was limited, with students appearing reluctant to ask questions or seek further clarification. Student involvement in class discussions varied, with some students actively participating and others less engaged. Students frequently sought additional resources outside of class, indicating a reliance on external materials.

### 3.2 Discussion

The study's findings underscore several pivotal challenges in learning and teaching maritime law at Sorong Merchant Marine Polytechnic, particularly from a linguistic perspective. The survey results reveal that students grapple significantly with understanding maritime law terminology, as evidenced by the low average score of 3.8. This difficulty is magnified for non-native English speakers, who must not only decode complex legal language but also navigate the intricacies of English. The specialized vocabulary required in maritime law, encompassing areas like navigation and ship handling, presents a formidable challenge for students whose first language is not English [29]. This linguistic barrier not only hampers comprehension but also diminishes student engagement with the subject matter, necessitating more robust educational support.

The complexity and multifaceted nature of maritime law terminology create additional challenges for students, making the learning process even more difficult. Research into the typology of these terms reveals a systemic structure that students must navigate, demanding a deep understanding of legal language to effectively communicate and apply maritime law concepts [30]. Moreover, the presence of borrowed terms within maritime law emphasizes the importance of understanding the origins and meanings of these terms to engage fully in legal discourse [31]. This linguistic challenge is compounded by the divergence between legal English and students' native languages, making the translation and comprehension of legal documents even more difficult [32]–[34].

The study also highlights the inadequacy of current teaching methods and materials. Although the teaching materials received a score of 3.6, indicating they are somewhat sufficient, the demand for additional references is evident, as students frequently resort to external resources. This reliance on supplementary materials suggests that the curriculum may not fully address the linguistic needs of the students. Educational institutions must therefore reassess and enhance their curricular offerings to ensure they are comprehensive and responsive to student needs, potentially integrating technology and e-learning platforms to fill these gaps [35], [36].

Interviews with lecturers and students further illuminate these challenges. Students' struggles with legal terminology often require additional clarification, which is not always consistently provided. The complexity of legal terms, particularly in translation contexts, and the variability in legal systems contribute to these difficulties [37], [38]. The inconsistency in the effectiveness of teaching methods, such as case studies and discussions, highlights the need for more effective and contextualized pedagogical approaches.

Classroom observations reinforce the notion that the use of technical terms without adequate explanation leads to confusion among students. The historical interchangeability of technical and scientific terms adds another layer of complexity, blurring distinctions that are crucial for educational clarity [39]. The transition to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, further complicating students' ability to comprehend technical terminology due to inadequate pedagogical frameworks [40].

The study points to the need for more active and participatory teaching methods to enhance student engagement. Research suggests that fostering trusting relationships between students and instructors and implementing student-centered learning approaches significantly boosts engagement and comprehension [41]–[43]. Active learning strategies, such as collaborative projects and peer discussions, have been shown to mitigate off-task behaviors and foster a deeper understanding of the material [44].

Finally, the study emphasizes the importance of providing more comprehensive and accessible in-class materials to reduce students' reliance on external resources. The use of high-quality in-class materials is essential to support all learners effectively and ensure equitable access to learning resources [45]. By focusing on creating a rich array of in-class materials and fostering an environment of structured support, educational institutions can significantly enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

In conclusion, while the current teaching methods and materials for learning and teaching maritime law at Sorong Merchant Marine Polytechnic are somewhat adequate, there is a clear need for improvement. Enhancing the clarity of explanations, providing more detailed teaching materials, and ensuring consistent support are crucial steps in addressing the linguistic challenges faced by students. By doing so, educators can better equip students to navigate the complexities of maritime law and improve their overall learning experience.

## 4 Conclusion

This study has identified several significant challenges in the learning and teaching of maritime law at Sorong Merchant Marine Polytechnic, particularly from a linguistic perspective. The difficulties students face in understanding complex maritime law terminology and legal English are pronounced, especially for non-native speakers. The specialized vocabulary required in this field presents substantial barriers, underscoring the need for more robust educational support. The findings also highlight the inadequacies in current teaching methods and materials, revealing a reliance on external resources by students, which suggests that the existing curriculum may not fully address their linguistic needs. The need for more comprehensive teaching strategies and materials is evident, as is the importance of incorporating more active and participatory teaching methods to enhance student engagement. Ultimately, this study calls for a re-assessment of the curriculum and teaching approaches in learning and teaching maritime law at Sorong Merchant Marine Polytechnic. By enhancing the clarity of explanations, providing more detailed and accessible teaching materials, and ensuring consistent educational support, educators can better equip students to overcome linguistic barriers and navigate the complexities of maritime law effectively. These improvements are essential for fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter and improving the overall learning experience for students.

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