

Research Article

Multicultural Crew Communication Challenges and SMCP Utilization in Mixed-Nationality Shipboard Environments: A Qualitative Study Among STIP Jakarta Graduates

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Abstract: The Standard Marine Communication Phrases are designed to provide a shared communicative framework for multinational seafaring crews, yet the adequacy of SMCP training in preparing graduates for the actual linguistic and cultural complexity of mixed-nationality shipboard communication environments remains empirically underexamined from the perspective of those who have experienced both the institutional training and the real-world professional context it is intended to prepare them for. This study investigates multicultural crew communication challenges and SMCP utilization patterns through a qualitative inquiry involving STIP Jakarta graduates currently serving in mixed-nationality shipboard environments, SMCP lecturers, and shipping company safety and communication managers. Data were collected between April 2025 and April 2026 from twenty-seven participants across these three groups through focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis, cross-group comparison, and narrative synthesis were applied. Findings reveal that STIP Jakarta graduates experience four categories of post-training communicative challenge in mixed-nationality environments: SMCP deviation toward informal English, authority-gradient communication suppression, native speaker assumption disadvantage, and SMCP phrase non-recognition among non-training recipients such as non-STCW crew categories. Graduates' retrospective assessment of STIP Jakarta's SMCP training as adequate for exam performance but insufficient for multicultural communicative reality constitutes the study's central cross-group finding and provides the most direct evidence for curriculum reform. The study contributes a graduate-grounded, post-training account of SMCP multicultural communication challenge that institutional-level curriculum assessment cannot supply.

Keywords: Maritime Communication; Multicultural Crew Communication; Shipboard Communication; SMCP Training; STIP Jakarta Graduates.

1. Introduction

The Standard Marine Communication Phrases were developed in direct recognition of a fundamental characteristic of the global maritime workforce: seafarers from different national and linguistic backgrounds must communicate safely and effectively with each other, with shore-based maritime authorities, and with Vessel Traffic Services across the full range of safety-critical operational contexts that shipboard and port approach operations encompass (International Maritime Organization, 2001). The SMCP's foundational design logic is that by providing a standardized, internationally adopted phraseological framework, the

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communicative uncertainty and potential for catastrophic miscommunication generated by multinational crews' diverse English proficiency levels and communicative conventions can be reduced to a manageable level through shared access to a common phrase system. This design logic is elegant and theoretically sound, but its practical realization depends entirely on a condition that the SMCP text itself cannot guarantee: that all parties to a given maritime communication encounter actually use the SMCP phrases the framework specifies rather than the informal, locally varied, or improvisational English that real multilingual professional environments characteristically generate (Bocanegra-Valle, 2013).

Understanding whether and how SMCP training successfully prepares graduating seafarers for this real-world multicultural communication reality—as opposed to the idealized, SMCP-compliant communicative environment that training assessment implicitly assumes—requires direct engagement with the perspectives of those who have navigated both the institutional training context and the actual professional environment. This post-training graduate perspective constitutes a distinctive and empirically valuable data source that existing maritime English and SMCP scholarship has not systematically engaged: it provides access to the specifically comparative assessment—STIP Jakarta's SMCP preparation was or was not adequate for what I encountered—that lecturers assessing their own curriculum and shipping company managers evaluating communicative performance from a distance cannot independently generate. Simanjuntak et al.'s (2026) evaluation of Maritime English literacy among Indonesian maritime institute cadets and graduates established substantial post-graduation variation in Maritime English competency; the present study extends this finding by investigating the specific multicultural communication challenges that Indonesian graduates encounter in mixed-nationality environments and the degree to which their institutional SMCP training equipped them to navigate those challenges effectively.

The multicultural maritime communication literature has established that communication aboard multinational crews is not merely a matter of translating between linguistic systems but a complex social and organizational phenomenon shaped by authority hierarchy, cultural communication norms, and the differential deployment of formal phraseological systems relative to informal communicative conventions that develop organically within specific crew compositions (Progoulaki & Roe, 2011). Horck's (2004) analysis of decision-making in multicultural maritime scenarios established that the cultural and communicative diversity of multinational crews systematically shapes the quality and reliability of the shared operational mental models through which safe watchkeeping decisions are made, identifying SMCP adequacy—or inadequacy—as one dimension of a broader multicultural communication challenge that training designed for idealized monolingual SMCP-compliant contexts may not fully address. Hetherington et al.'s (2006) human element analysis further established that communication breakdown in multicultural maritime professional contexts is a recurring and consequential contributor to maritime incident causation, reinforcing the practical stakes of understanding whether SMCP training produces the multicultural communicative resilience that real mixed-nationality crew environments require.

The sociolinguistic literature on lingua franca communication provides a further theoretical resource directly relevant to this study's investigation. Jenkins's (2000) and Seidlhofer's (2011) analyses of English as a Lingua Franca establish that communication in English among non-native speakers of multiple linguistic backgrounds does not proceed through adherence to native-speaker norms but through the emergence of communicative conventions adapted to the specific multilingual context and its participants, conventions that may diverge substantially from the formal standard English of SMCP training without thereby constituting communicative failure. Applied to SMCP utilization in mixed-nationality shipboard environments, this framework generates a theoretically important prediction: STIP Jakarta graduates may encounter aboard ship a communicative environment in which formal SMCP usage deviates from training-acquired norms not through ignorance or incompetence but through the emergence of context-specific communicative conventions that the mixed-nationality crew has collectively developed, creating a mismatch between SMCP training assumptions and professional communicative reality that graduates may experience as communicative disorientation even when their own SMCP competency is technically adequate.

Despite the clear theoretical relevance of this multi-framework perspective, the post-training experience of STIP Jakarta graduates in real-world multicultural SMCP

communication contexts has not been empirically investigated. This study addresses this gap through three objectives: first, to identify the specific multicultural communication challenges STIP Jakarta graduates encounter in mixed-nationality shipboard environments that their SMCP training did not adequately prepare them for; second, to characterize the SMCP utilization patterns graduates observe and participate in aboard mixed-nationality vessels, examining how these patterns diverge from the standardized SMCP framework their training instilled; and third, to assess, through cross-group comparison among graduates, SMCP lecturers, and shipping company managers, how these post-training communicative realities should inform STIP Jakarta's SMCP curriculum development priorities. The study's significance extends across communicative competence scholarship, maritime safety, and institutional curriculum development, generating a graduate-grounded, post-training account of multicultural SMCP communication challenge that existing curriculum-facing institutional research cannot supply.

2. Theoretical Review

This study's conceptual framework integrates lingua franca communication theory, the multicultural maritime communication literature, and communicative competence theory as applied to post-training professional communicative practice.

Jenkins's (2000) analysis of English as an International Language and Seidlhofer's (2011) articulation of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) theory together establish that communication in English among non-native speaker communities does not constitute deviation from a native-speaker norm but the emergence of a functionally adapted communicative system shaped by the specific multilingual community's needs, background knowledge, and communicative priorities. ELF communicative conventions may involve systematic departures from formal standard English norms—in phonology, morphosyntax, and pragmatic convention—that do not impair mutual intelligibility among the specific community of practice but that may be experienced as normatively deviant by participants trained in formal standard English frameworks. Applied to shipboard SMCP communication among multinational crews, ELF theory predicts that the formal SMCP framework, representing a codified standard English-based communicative system, will be adapted, abbreviated, hybridized, and supplemented by crew-specific communicative conventions in ways that vary by crew nationality composition, operational context, and established informal communicative relationships within the specific crew—creating the diversity of real SMCP utilization practice that training-context SMCP assessment cannot anticipate or prepare graduates for.

The multicultural maritime communication literature provides the most empirically grounded comparative evidence base for this study. Bocanegra-Valle's (2013) foundational analysis of seafarers' attitudes toward maritime English across multilingual work environments established that non-native English-speaking seafarers experience a significant and professionally consequential disjunction between their classroom SMCP repertoire and the communicative demands they encounter in actual multilingual shipboard and shore-based communication, a finding that directly motivates this study's investigation of post-training communicative reality from the STIP Jakarta graduate perspective. Horck's (2004) multicultural maritime decision-making analysis established that cultural authority hierarchy dynamics systematically shape communication quality in multinational bridge team contexts, creating patterns of communication suppression and circumlocution that SMCP training—designed for idealized dyadic exchanges with equal communicative authority—does not equip participants to navigate. Progoulaki and Roe's (2011) maritime HRM analysis established that multicultural crew management requires deliberate organizational investment in shared communicative conventions that go beyond formal SMCP training, including the development of crew-specific communicative norms through structured interaction rather than assumed SMCP compliance. Hetherington et al.'s (2006) human element analysis identified the gap between formally trained and operationally practiced communicative conventions as a significant source of the communication breakdown patterns that contribute to maritime incident causation, directly establishing the safety stakes of the training-practice disjunction this study investigates. Knudsen's (2009) analysis of the relationship between formal procedure and actual operational practice in maritime professional contexts further establishes the broader organizational phenomenon within which SMCP utilization deviation

from training-acquired norms sits: the tendency of professional maritime practice to adapt formal procedure systems to operational context in ways that official procedure documentation cannot anticipate and training programs designed around that documentation cannot fully prepare practitioners for.

Canale and Swain's (1980) communicative competence framework provides a further theoretical resource for interpreting this study's findings, specifically through its strategic competence dimension—the communication strategies used to compensate for communication breakdowns and to enhance communicative effectiveness. In multicultural SMCP contexts where the formal SMCP framework is not consistently used by all parties, strategic competence—the ability to negotiate meaning, manage communication breakdown, and adapt to non-standard communicative conventions from interlocutors—becomes the critical competency dimension that standard SMCP training, focused predominantly on phraseological form and procedural sequence, may not adequately develop. Simanjuntak et al.'s (2025) multiliteracy framework for maritime English communication instruction provides the most directly relevant institutional context, establishing that effective maritime English competency requires integration of multiple literacy dimensions including the strategic and contextual competencies that ELF theory and the multicultural communication literature identify as central to real-world maritime communicative effectiveness. These theoretical threads collectively establish the conceptual position this study occupies: examining the post-training multicultural communication reality through which STIP Jakarta graduates must translate their formal SMCP training into effective professional practice, generating the graduate-grounded, practitioner-perspective evidence that curriculum development research requires but that institution-facing studies cannot supply.

3. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research design combining semi-structured focus group discussions with individual semi-structured interviews, selected because the study's objectives require rich, experience-grounded accounts of multicultural communication challenge and SMCP utilization divergence that survey-based self-report or abstract curriculum analysis cannot adequately capture, particularly regarding the specific communicative episodes and recurring pattern observations that constitute the empirical texture of graduates' post-training professional communicative experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Focus group format was specifically chosen for the graduate participant group to enable the comparative, collectively validated discourse through which participants' shared and divergent experiences of the same phenomenon—SMCP utilization in mixed-nationality environments—could be systematically surfaced and cross-examined within the discussion context.

The study population comprised twenty-seven participants across three purposively selected stakeholder groups. The first group comprised twelve STIP Jakarta Nautika and Teknika graduates currently serving aboard mixed-nationality vessels in deck or engine officer roles, recruited through STIP Jakarta alumni networks. Selection criteria required current or very recent sea service aboard mixed-nationality vessels to ensure that participant accounts reflected current professional communicative experience rather than dated recollection. The second group comprised eight Maritime English and SMCP lecturers at STIP Jakarta, selected for their institutional curriculum vantage point and capacity to reflect on the adequacy of current SMCP training for the multicultural communicative challenges their graduates describe. The third group comprised seven shipping company safety and communication managers responsible for crew communication training and SMCP compliance oversight, selected for their organizational vantage point on SMCP utilization quality across the mixed-nationality crews they oversee.

Data were collected between April 2025 and April 2026 through separate focus group discussions with the graduate and lecturer groups, supplemented by individual semi-structured interviews with the shipping company manager group and with four graduate participants whose accounts warranted individual follow-up for depth and sensitivity. Interview and discussion protocols addressed post-training multicultural communication challenges, SMCP utilization patterns observed aboard mixed-nationality vessels, comparisons between STIP Jakarta SMCP training and professional communicative reality, and curriculum improvement

recommendations. Sessions were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed for analysis.

Thematic Analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase procedure was applied to the full transcript corpus, generating thematic categories organized around the ELF theory, multicultural communication, and strategic communicative competence dimensions specified by this study's theoretical framework. Cross-group Comparison was systematically applied to identify convergence and divergence in perception and experience across the graduate, lecturer, and shipping company manager groups. Narrative Synthesis integrated these findings into the coherent interpretive account presented in the Results and Analysis section, with credibility strengthened through member checking with four participants and a reflexive analytical record (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Four Categories of Post-Training Multicultural Communicative Challenge

Thematic analysis of graduate focus group data generated four principal categories of post-training multicultural communicative challenge that participants described as insufficiently anticipated by their STIP Jakarta SMCP training.

Table 1 presents these four challenge categories alongside their endorsement rates across the three stakeholder groups and their relationship to the theoretical framework dimensions this study specified.

Table 1. *Post-Training SMCP Multicultural Communication Challenge Endorsement by Stakeholder Group (N = 27)*

Challenge Category	Graduates (n=12)	Lecturers (n=8)	Company Managers(n=7)	Total	Theoretical Link
SMCP deviation toward informal English	11/12	6/8	6/7	23/27	ELF theory
Authority-gradient communication suppression	9/12	4/8	5/7	18/27	Multicultural comm.
Native-speaker assumption disadvantage	8/12	3/8	4/7	15/27	ELF + strategic comp.
SMCP non-recognition among non-training recipients	10/12	5/8	6/7	21/27	ELF + comm. breakdown

The *SMCP deviation toward informal English* theme, endorsed by twenty-three of twenty-seven participants, constitutes the most broadly convergent and analytically central finding. Eleven of twelve graduate participants described finding that formal SMCP phraseology was not the de facto communicative standard aboard their mixed-nationality vessels: crew members from diverse national backgrounds had, in practice, developed informal English communicative conventions for routine operational exchanges that drew selectively on SMCP phrase elements but were not governed by SMCP procedural structure, creating a communicative environment for which graduates' training had prepared them in SMCP form but not in the navigation of SMCP-informal hybrid practice. This finding directly confirms ELF theory's prediction regarding the emergence of crew-specific communicative conventions diverging from formal standard norms without constituting communicative failure, and directly challenges the implicit assumption of STIP Jakarta's training—and of

SMCP training generally—that the communicative environment into which graduates enter will be consistently SMCP-governed.

The *SMCP non-recognition among non-training recipients* theme, endorsed by twenty-one of twenty-seven participants, documented a specific and practically significant communicative challenge: ten of twelve graduates described encounters in which their use of formal SMCP phraseology with port authority personnel, non-STCW-trained shore-based service providers, or non-officer crew members produced communicative breakdown because these interlocutors did not share the SMCP phraseological framework, creating situations where graduates' most formal, training-derived communicative resource generated confusion rather than clarity. This challenge category is particularly significant because it identifies a specific structural gap in SMCP training's preparation scope: training that prepares graduates to communicate within an assumed community of SMCP-trained receivers does not equip them to communicate effectively with the substantial proportion of their professional communicative encounters that occur outside this assumed community.

Figure 1 presents the cross-group endorsement distribution of these four challenge categories as a visual comparison matrix.

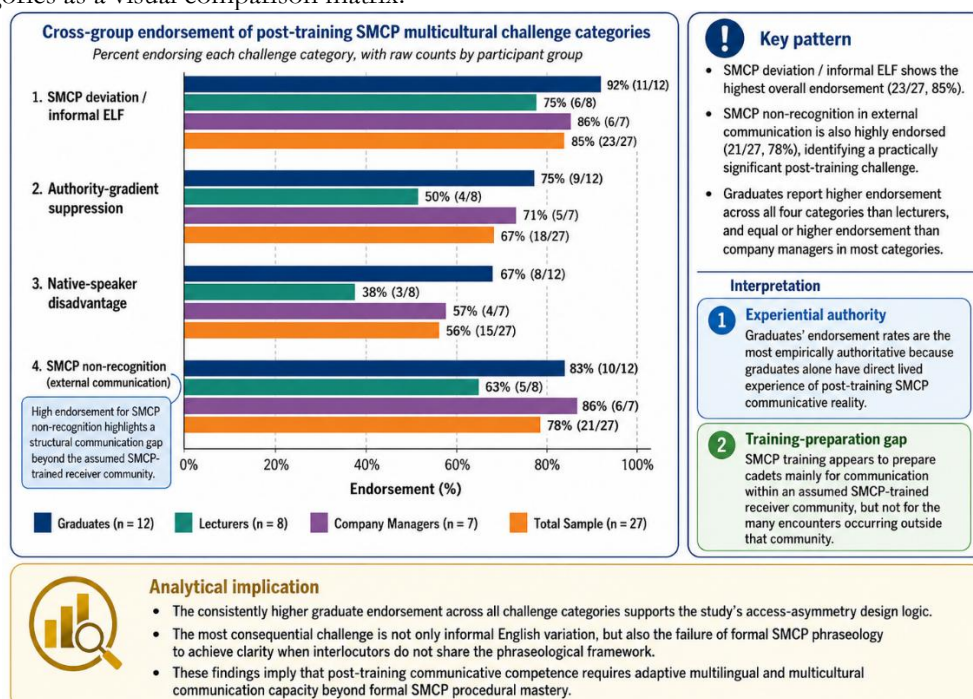


Figure 1. Post-Training SMCP Multicultural Challenge Cross-Group Endorsement

The consistently higher endorsement rates among graduates across all four challenge categories, relative to lecturer and company manager participants, reflects the access asymmetry that motivated this study's design: graduates are the only participant group with direct, lived experience of post-training SMCP communicative reality, making their endorsement rates the most empirically authoritative basis for the study's diagnostic conclusions.

4.2 Graduate Retrospective Assessment of STIP Jakarta SMCP Training Adequacy

Qualitative analysis of graduates' retrospective assessment of STIP Jakarta's SMCP training generated a convergent and institutionally significant evaluative pattern: ten of twelve graduates assessed their SMCP training as having been adequate for exam performance and certification purposes while explicitly describing it as insufficient for the multicultural communicative reality they encountered upon entering professional service. The specific inadequacy most frequently articulated—offered by eight of twelve graduates without direct prompting—was the absence of training exposure to SMCP communication with interlocutors using informal, non-standard, or incomplete SMCP conventions, a preparation gap directly corresponding to the SMCP deviation and non-recognition challenge categories identified in Section 4.1.

This exam-versus-practice adequacy divergence constitutes the study's central cross-group finding, provided its sharpest analytical value by comparison with the lecturer group's assessment: six of eight lecturers characterized their current SMCP curriculum as adequate for developing the communicative competency STCW certification requires, a self-assessment not challenged by the certification assessment evidence available to them but substantially challenged by their own graduates' retrospective account of professional communicative reality. This lecturer-graduate perception gap is the study's most directly actionable finding for curriculum reform purposes: it identifies a specific self-assessment blind spot in institutional curriculum quality judgment that only graduate post-training experiential feedback can correct, reinforcing the broader value of systematic graduate outcome tracking as a curriculum quality mechanism that maritime higher education institutions, including STIP Jakarta, should institutionalize rather than rely upon as a research-generated supplement.

4.3 Strategic Communicative Competence Deficit: The Common Thread

Narrative synthesis across the four challenge categories revealed a common underlying thread: all four categories reflect, at their core, a deficit in strategic communicative competence—the capacity to manage communication breakdown, adapt to non-standard interlocutor communicative conventions, and negotiate meaning in contexts where the formal SMCP framework is not providing the shared communicative scaffold that training has assumed. Graduates who encountered informal ELF conventions, authority-gradient suppression, native-speaker assumption challenges, or non-recognition from external parties all described feeling insufficiently equipped with the adaptive communicative strategies these situations required, despite feeling well equipped with the formal SMCP phrase knowledge their training had developed. This finding directly confirms Canale and Swain's (1980) communicative competence framework's prediction that strategic competence—the adaptive, breakdown-repair dimension of communicative capability—is a distinct and independently necessary component of full communicative proficiency, one that formal phrase instruction develops only incidentally if at all.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide the first systematic, graduate-grounded empirical account of the post-training multicultural SMCP communication challenges that STIP Jakarta graduates encounter in professional mixed-nationality shipboard environments, generating evidence that directly addresses curriculum development questions while also making broader theoretical contributions to the maritime English and communicative competence literatures.

The central finding—SMCP deviation toward informal ELF communicative conventions as the dominant post-training challenge—provides direct empirical confirmation of ELF theory's prediction regarding the emergence of crew-specific communicative practices diverging from formal standard norms in mixed-nationality professional language communities (Jenkins, 2000; Seidlhofer, 2011). Crystal's (2003) analysis of English as a global language provides important contextual support for this finding, establishing that the functional diversity of English use across non-native-speaker professional communities generates systematic variability in register adherence that cannot be resolved through instruction in any single standardized variety—a theoretical position directly applicable to the SMCP context, where the formal standard that training instills is, in the majority of real communicative encounters, operating alongside rather than governing informal ELF conventions. House's (2002) distinction between English as lingua franca use and English-medium institutional communication further illuminates why SMCP training, designed for the regulated institutional communication context of formal radio exchange, may inadequately prepare graduates for the informal lingua franca communication contexts that constitute the majority of shipboard English use: the pragmatic conventions, error tolerance norms, and communicative repair strategies of ELF interaction differ systematically from those of institutionally regulated SMCP exchange.

The SMCP non-recognition among non-training recipients finding, endorsed by twenty-one of twenty-seven participants, extends Horck's (2004) multicultural maritime communication analysis in an important direction that his intracrew-focused framework does not directly address. Cogo and Dewey's (2012) empirical analysis of ELF communicative competency across professional contexts established that the most consequential

communicative challenges in ELF environments arise precisely at encounters between parties with different institutional communication frameworks—encounters where one party's formal standard competency creates expectations of procedural compliance that the other party's informal ELF conventions do not fulfill. The Indonesian graduates' non-recognition experiences with external interlocutors represent exactly this cross-framework encounter dynamic, where formal SMCP competency—the institutional standard graduates' training developed—creates communicative assumptions about interlocutor behavior that the non-SMCP-trained parties to these encounters do not share.

The authority-gradient communication suppression challenge, endorsed by nine of twelve graduates, extends Progoulaki and Roe's (2011) maritime HRM framework with specific communicative behavior evidence documenting how national hierarchical communication norms shape SMCP utilization in practice. Hofstede et al.'s (2010) cross-cultural management analysis established that high power-distance cultural orientations—characteristic of many Southeast Asian maritime labor supply nations including Indonesia—systematically generate communication suppression and circumlocution in hierarchical professional relationships, a cultural communication pattern that the SMCP system's prescriptive phraseological framework does not address and that maritime communication training programs developed primarily within lower power-distance cultural frameworks may not have been designed to counter. This cultural communication dimension of SMCP utilization adequacy has not previously been documented empirically from the graduate experience perspective, making this study's finding particularly significant for informing the development of culturally responsive maritime English communication pedagogy at institutions such as STIP Jakarta.

The exam-versus-practice adequacy divergence—most graduates describing training as adequate for certification but insufficient for professional communicative reality—extends this research program's recurring pattern of policy-practice gaps across maritime governance domains into the Maritime English education domain specifically. Mauranen's (2012) analysis of English as an Academic Lingua Franca established that even highly proficient non-native English users, trained in formal standard English academic registers, experience systematic communicative adjustment demands when entering authentic ELF academic communities; the parallel maritime finding this study documents is that SMCP-trained Indonesian graduates experience comparably systematic adjustment demands when entering authentic ELF shipboard communicative communities. This parallel suggests that the SMCP-ELF transition challenge is not a maritime-specific anomaly but an instance of the broader phenomenon of formal-standard-to-ELF communicative adjustment that affects all formal-register-trained non-native English users upon entry into authentic ELF professional communities, a framing that invites productive methodological and theoretical exchange between maritime English education research and the broader ELF scholarship.

Future research should pursue comparative investigation of post-training SMCP multicultural communication experiences across multiple Indonesian maritime academy graduate populations, experimental evaluation of ELF-navigation and strategic communicative competency curriculum enhancements, and development of a validated post-training communicative adequacy tracking instrument enabling longitudinal monitoring of STIP Jakarta graduates' real-world SMCP utilization effectiveness.

6. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that STIP Jakarta graduates encounter four systematic post-training multicultural SMCP communication challenges—informal ELF deviation, authority-gradient suppression, native-speaker assumption disadvantage, and non-recognition from non-training recipients—that their institutional SMCP training, adequate for certification exam performance, did not specifically prepare them to navigate. The exam-versus-practice adequacy divergence, combined with the strategic communicative competence deficit as the common underlying thread across all four challenge categories, constitutes the study's central institutional and theoretical contribution. These findings extend ELF theory, communicative competence theory, and the multicultural maritime communication literature into the post-training graduate experience domain, providing STIP Jakarta with a graduate-grounded, curriculum-actionable evidence base for developing the adaptive multicultural communicative

competency that professional maritime English use in real mixed-nationality environments demands.

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