

From General English to Maritime English: A Transitional Textbook Development Model for Cruise Service Students Based on OBE and National Curriculum Standards

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Abstract: *The transition from general English proficiency to specialized workplace communication represents a critical challenge in vocational education for maritime and cruise service majors. This paper presents the development and pedagogical design of Daily Practical English for Cruises, a new-form transitional textbook for higher vocational college students majoring in cruise service. Addressing the gap between students' existing general English competence (CEFR A2-B1) and the demanding professional communication requirements of international cruise ship operations, the textbook follows a progressive "daily-to-professional" content organization across five modules and twelve units. Grounded in Outcome-Based Education (OBE) principles and the English Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education (2021) issued by China's Ministry of Education, the textbook systematically integrates four core competencies: workplace intercultural communication, multicultural exchange, language thinking, and autonomous learning. Adopting a modular, project-driven, and task-based instructional design, each unit incorporates listening, speaking, reading, writing, and cross-cultural components, supported by a comprehensive digital resource ecosystem including micro-lectures, AI speech evaluation, and virtual simulation tasks. A distinctive "Three-Chief-Editor" collaborative mechanism—involving school subject leaders, corporate technical experts, and industry authorities—ensures content authenticity and industry relevance. The paper also details the systematic integration of value education through a "One Core, Three Dimensions" framework, embedding traditional Chinese service philosophies into authentic cruise service scenarios. Preliminary implementation data from 237 students across two course iterations show significant improvements in learner engagement (142,677 total page views, 25,328 activity participations), reduced speaking anxiety, and enhanced transferability of skills to simulated workplace scenarios. The textbook fills a critical niche in transitional English for Specific Purposes (ESP) materials and offers a replicable model for competency-based, digitally enhanced, and values-embedded vocational textbook development in the global maritime education context.*

Keywords: New-form textbook, Cruise English, Outcome-Based Education, Vocational education, English for Specific Purposes, School-enterprise collaboration, Values education, Curriculum standards.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Rationale

The globalization of the cruise and maritime industries has placed unprecedented demands on the English language proficiency of seafarers and hospitality service personnel. As English serves as the lingua franca for international maritime operations—governed by the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) Convention—effective communication competence is not merely an academic objective but a prerequisite for safety of life at sea, environmental protection, and service quality (IMO, 2011; Zhang & Cole, 2018). The STCW Convention explicitly requires that officers at operational and management levels possess adequate English language skills to perform their duties, communicate effectively with multilingual crews, and interact with passengers during emergencies (IMO, 2011).

In China, the rapid expansion of the domestic cruise industry has intensified the need for well-trained cruise service professionals capable of delivering high-quality, culturally sensitive service to an international clientele. Higher vocational education institutions, such as Jiangsu Maritime Institute, have responded by developing cruise service management programs aligned with national professional standards. However, a persistent pedagogical challenge

remains: how to effectively bridge the gap between students' existing general English competence—often at CEFR A2-B1 levels upon entry—and the specialized English communication skills required in real cruise ship operations.

1.2 The Transitional Gap in Maritime ESP Materials

The literature on Maritime English (ME) as a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) highlights the inherent tension between the legal and operational requirements of maritime communication and the pedagogical principles of communicative language teaching (Zhang & Cole, 2018). Effective ME curriculum design must integrate discursive and professional practices, treating genre as institutionally and professionally situated action—ways of "getting things done through language" in maritime-specific contexts (Bhatia, 2008; Pennycook, 2010; cited in Zhang & Cole, 2018).

A review of existing cruise and maritime English textbooks reveals two problematic categories. First, "general tourism English" materials lack the specific vocabulary, situational authenticity, and professional discourse patterns required in cruise ship operations. Second, "specialized maritime English" textbooks, while professionally accurate, typically assume a higher language proficiency baseline and present complex technical content that overwhelms first-year vocational students. This creates a "transitional gap" that impedes learner progress and undermines the effectiveness of subsequent

specialized training.

Similar challenges have been identified in international contexts. Wet (2013) reported that Maritime English I students at Escola Nautica Infante D. Henrique displayed proficiency levels ranging from A1 to B2 in a single classroom, necessitating a blended approach that could accommodate diverse learner needs through e-book development and online video lecture series. The need for foundational courses that integrate technical vocabulary acquisition with spoken and written fluency development has been widely recognized in maritime education research.

1.3 Policy Context: China's New-Form Textbook Initiative

In 2026, China's Ministry of Education issued the Opinions on Deepening the Reform of Key Elements of Vocational Education Curriculum and Instruction (Document No. 1 [2026]), emphasizing systematic reform of curriculum, textbooks, faculty, and practical training. The document mandates a collaborative school-enterprise textbook development mechanism and encourages the creation of "new-form" textbooks that integrate digital resources, workplace authenticity, and values education. Concurrently, the English Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education (2021) identifies four core competencies—workplace intercultural communication, multicultural exchange, language thinking, and autonomous learning—as the guiding framework for English instruction across all vocational disciplines.

1.4 Research Questions and Paper Structure

This paper addresses the following research questions:

How can a transitional ESP textbook systematically bridge the gap between general and professional English for cruise service students?

What pedagogical design principles support the integration of OBE, national curriculum standards, and workplace authenticity?

What development mechanisms ensure the alignment of textbook content with industry needs and linguistic best practices?

How can values education be systematically—rather than superficially—embedded in an ESP textbook?

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant literature on ESP curriculum design, OBE principles, and textbook development for vocational contexts. Section 3 presents the theoretical framework underpinning the textbook design. Section 4 describes the development methodology, including the "Three-Chief-Editor" collaborative mechanism. Section 5 provides a detailed analysis of the textbook structure and content organization. Section 6 discusses the digital resource ecosystem and integration model. Section 7 presents preliminary implementation findings and discusses challenges. Section 8 concludes with implications for future research and practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1 English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Maritime Education

ESP emerged as a subfield of applied linguistics in response to the recognition that language learning should be tailored to learners' specific purposes and professional needs. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) distinguished between English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), positioning Maritime English as a distinct EOP domain. In maritime contexts, ESP instruction must address the unique register complexity of the field, which involves "a combination of distinctive registers according to the field or subject-matter" (Cole, Pritchard & Trenkner, 2007, p. 136, cited in Zhang & Cole, 2018).

Zhang and Cole (2018) argue that effective ME curriculum design must embrace a genre-based approach, treating genre as institutionally and professionally situated action. This perspective aligns with the New Rhetoric approach to genre, in which genre is understood as "recurrent patterns of language use fusing semantic meaning and linguistic forms as rhetorical actions in situational and social contexts" (Freedman & Medway, 1994; cited in Zhang & Cole, 2018). The genre-based approach ensures that phonological, lexical-grammatical resources are embedded in discourse strategies relevant to maritime-specific purposes and duties.

Wet (2013) implemented a blended learning approach for Maritime English I that combined e-book development with online video lectures, addressing the dual challenges of learner heterogeneity and student engagement. The e-book attempted to bring ME to life for millennial learners through embedded quizzes, animations, video and audio files, contextualizing maritime language while maintaining the grammar exercises, conversation, reading comprehension, and listening activities typical of ESP textbooks. This approach demonstrated that foundational ME courses can successfully integrate technical vocabulary acquisition with fluency development.

2.2 Outcome-Based Education (OBE) in Curriculum Design

Outcome-Based Education, articulated by Spady (1994), shifts the focus from teaching inputs to learning outcomes, emphasizing what learners should be able to do upon completing a course or program. OBE has gained traction in vocational education globally because it aligns naturally with competency-based training paradigms. In OBE curriculum design, learning objectives are defined in terms of demonstrable outcomes, assessment is criterion-referenced, and instructional decisions are driven by the goal of facilitating outcome achievement.

The application of OBE principles to ESP textbook development requires that each unit articulate clear learning outcomes in terms of "can-do" statements—specifically, what learners can accomplish in the target workplace context. This contrasts with traditional textbook design, which often organizes content around linguistic structures or thematic topics without explicit linkage to professional application

scenarios.

2.3 Vocational Textbook Development and New-Form Materials

China's "new-form" textbook initiative represents a significant departure from traditional print-based models. As Qiu (2020) notes, new-form vocational textbook construction is an inevitable measure in the context of information-based teaching development and forms the core foundation of curriculum and teaching reform. Qiu identifies five dimensions of new-form textbook development: the implementation pathway for value education objectives, integration of professional competencies, presentation of multimodal resources, matching of blended learning processes, and institutional policy support.

The shift toward new-form textbooks responds to multiple pressures: the need to engage digitally native learners, the imperative to integrate workplace authenticity, the requirement for flexible and updatable content, and the possibility of data-informed instructional decisions. Successful new-form textbooks treat digital resources not as supplementary appendages but as pedagogically integrated components that extend and enhance learning opportunities.

2.4 The Transitional Textbook Gap in Cruise English

Despite the proliferation of maritime English materials, a specific gap exists for transitional textbooks appropriate for first-year vocational students beginning their journey from general to professional English. Most existing materials either assume a higher entry level or lack the gradual scaffolding necessary for successful learner progression. This gap is particularly acute in cruise service education, which requires not only technical maritime vocabulary but also hospitality service discourse patterns and cross-cultural communication skills.

Similar transitional challenges have been documented in other ESP domains. The development of e-books targeting A2-B1 levels, as described by Wet (2013), represents one response to this challenge. However, comprehensive frameworks for transitional textbook development—incorporating OBE principles, national curriculum standards, systematic values integration, and digital resource ecosystems—remain underdeveloped in the literature.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Integrating OBE and ESP Principles

The theoretical framework for this textbook development project integrates OBE principles with ESP pedagogical approaches within the structure of China's national English curriculum standards. Three core principles guide the design:

Principle 1: Outcome-Driven Content Organization. Each unit begins with explicit learning outcomes stated in "can-do" terms aligned with workplace application. The outcomes are derived from an analysis of cruise ship operational tasks and the national curriculum standards' four core competencies. This reverses the traditional sequence of first selecting content

and then adding objectives as an afterthought.

Principle 2: Genre-Based Progression. Following Zhang and Cole's (2018) genre-based ME conception, the textbook organizes content around maritime-specific genres—"those recurrent patterns of language use fusing semantic meaning and linguistic forms as rhetorical actions in situational and social contexts". Each unit focuses on a recognizable professional genre (e.g., service inquiries, complaint handling, emergency announcements) and scaffolds learner development from receptive to productive control of the genre.

Principle 3: Progressive Complexity. The textbook employs a "daily-to-professional" progression across modules. Early units build confidence with familiar everyday vocabulary and situations, gradually introducing professional terminology and more complex communicative tasks. This addresses the challenge identified by Wet (2013) of managing heterogeneous proficiency levels within a single classroom.

3.2 The Four Core Competencies Framework

China's English Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education (2021) identifies four core competencies that define successful English learning outcomes:

Workplace Intercultural Communication: The ability to effectively communicate in cross-cultural workplace contexts using appropriate linguistic and pragmatic strategies.

Multicultural Exchange: The capacity to understand, appreciate, and navigate cultural differences, drawing on both international and Chinese cultural knowledge.

Language Thinking: The development of logical, critical, and analytical thinking through engagement with English texts and tasks.

Autonomous Learning: The ability to self-direct learning, assess progress, and adapt strategies to achieve learning goals.

The textbook systematically aligns unit components with these competencies, ensuring that each module contributes to the development of all four dimensions rather than prioritizing one over others.

3.3 Values Education Integration: The "One Core, Three Dimensions" Framework

Values education, or "curriculum-based ideological and political education", is a national priority in Chinese vocational education. The challenge lies in moving beyond fragmented moral prompts toward systematic, pedagogically embedded values development. This textbook employs a "One Core, Three Dimensions" framework:

One Core: Chinese Service Philosophy as the integrating thread—the transmission and dissemination of traditional Chinese service wisdom (e.g., "guests feel at home," "benevolence and integrity," "harmony with diversity").

Three Dimensions: (1) Cultural Confidence—understanding and valuing Chinese cultural contributions to global service

culture; (2) Professionalism—developing work ethics of responsibility, integrity, and excellence; and (3) Service Awareness—fostering attitudes of respect, care, empathy, and inclusion.

Each unit's "Cross-Cultural Competence and Professional Values" section systematically addresses these dimensions through three fixed modules: cross-cultural focus, professional ethics, and traditional Chinese service values. This structure ensures that values education is "unitized, contextualized, and systemically integrated" rather than inserted as isolated add-ons.

4. Development Methodology

4.1 The "Three-Chief-Editor" Collaborative Mechanism

Consistent with the Ministry of Education's requirement for school-enterprise collaboration in textbook development, the project established a "Three-Chief-Editor" mechanism:

School Subject Leader: Responsible for overall framework, language difficulty control, and instructional design. This role ensures alignment with curriculum standards and pedagogical best practices.

Corporate Technical Expert: A training manager from the cruise industry, responsible for providing authentic service cases, workplace terminology, and service process standards. This ensures content realism and industry relevance.

Industry Authority: A senior official from a maritime human resources company, responsible for auditing content for industry normativity and cross-cultural sensitivity.

The collaborative team includes two additional corporate contributors and two faculty members, ensuring diverse expertise across the five service modules.

4.2 Needs Analysis and Content Validation

Prior to textbook development, the team conducted a needs analysis involving:

Analysis of job descriptions and competency frameworks from major cruise lines (Royal Caribbean, Costa Cruises)

Interviews with front-line service supervisors about communication challenges

Review of service standards and training materials provided by cooperating companies

Student surveys regarding language confidence and perceived learning needs

Content was validated through a two-stage process: faculty review for pedagogical appropriateness and language level, followed by industry review for accuracy and authenticity.

4.3 Curriculum Alignment Process

The textbook development team systematically mapped unit

objectives and content to:

The English Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education (2021) four core competencies

The three thematic domains: "Career and Individual," "Career and Society," "Career and Environment"

Industry competency standards for cruise ship positions

This mapping process ensured that each unit and its components could be explicitly justified in terms of national educational policy requirements and workplace needs.

4.4 Digital Resource Development

Digital resources were developed in parallel with the print manuscript, with careful attention to pedagogical integration. The development process included:

Micro-lecture production (17 videos, total 156 minutes), each focusing on a key linguistic structure or scenario

Situational dialogue audio recording (24 sets) with native and near-native speakers

AI speech training task design (24 tasks) integrated with the Chaoxing Learning Platform

Virtual simulation task creation (4 scenarios: embarkation, safety drill, restaurant ordering, room service)

Online quiz bank development (12+ banks) with automatic feedback

5. Textbook Structure and Content Design

5.1 Overall Organization

The textbook comprises **five modules and twelve units**, organized in a progressive sequence from general knowledge to specialized service domains:

Module 1: Cruise Introduction and General Knowledge (Units 1-3)

Unit 1: Cruise Types and Classification
Unit 2: Industry Terminology and Operations
Unit 3: Ship Facilities and Orientation

Module 2: Front Office Service (Units 4-5)

Unit 4: Embarkation and Disembarkation
Unit 5: Complaint Handling

Module 3: Housekeeping Service (Units 6-7)

Unit 6: Daily Cleaning and Guest Requests
Unit 7: Laundry Service

Module 4: Food and Beverage Service (Units 8-9)

Unit 8: Ordering and Beverages

Unit 9: Room Service

Module 5: Entertainment and Safety (Units 10-12)

Unit 10: Safety and Emergency Procedures

Unit 11: Activity Hosting

Unit 12: Cross-Cultural Service (Capstone Unit)

5.2 Unit Structure

Each unit follows a consistent eight-part structure designed to scaffold learning from input to output:

Part 1: Unit Introduction — Mind map, unit overview, learning objectives (as “can-do” statements), and warm-up activities that activate prior knowledge and generate interest.

Part 2: Language Input — Background knowledge, cultural focus, vocabulary (with English definitions), reading passages (two texts, increasingly complex), and functional sentence patterns with examples.

Part 3: Listening Training — Listen-and-repeat exercises, listening for specific information, dialogue comprehension, and gap-fill tasks.

Part 4: Speaking Training — Model dialogue practice, extended dialogues (combining multiple service functions), role-play tasks with specific scenarios, and shift handover report practice.

Part 5: Extension Reading and Critical Thinking — Extended reading texts (two per unit), followed by critical thinking questions that encourage analysis, evaluation, and perspective-taking.

Part 6: Practical Writing — Writing skills focus, structured writing tasks with models and scaffolding, and final output task.

Part 7: Cross-Cultural Competence and Professional Values — Three fixed subsections: cross-cultural focus (comparing communication norms), professional ethics (case-based discussion), and Chinese service values (with explanation and application).

Part 8: Unit Project and Assessment — Final performance task with clear success criteria and scoring rubric; self-assessment and reflection section for learner metacognition.

5.3 Content Authenticity and Progression

Content authenticity is achieved through three strategies:

Corpus-informed vocabulary selection: Frequent and important terms from real passenger communications and crew manuals are prioritized.

Scenario authenticity: Dialogues and tasks are based on actual situations documented during company visits and interviews.

Task realism: Final projects require products that would be

used in real work contexts (e.g., guest information cards, shift handover reports, service notes).

Linguistic progression is carefully managed through:

Graduated text complexity across units and within units

Recycled vocabulary and structures for retention

Explicit strategies for coping with authentic language (e.g., clarification requests, confirmation checks)

5.4 Values Education Implementation

The values framework is implemented through:

Cultural modules: Each unit’s cross-cultural focus compares Chinese and international perspectives, fostering both cultural confidence and openness.

Value threads: Twelve traditional Chinese service philosophies are systematically introduced across units, each explained through its historical roots and contemporary service application.

Ethical case studies: Critical thinking sections engage with ethical dilemmas in service contexts (e.g., handling guest complaints about cultural issues, balancing procedural compliance with guest empathy).

6. Digital Resource Ecosystem

6.1 The “Paper-Digital-Simulation” Triadic Model

Following the new-form textbook requirements, the project developed an integrated digital ecosystem with three interconnected layers:

Layer 1: Print Textbook — Functions as a task manual and knowledge index, providing structured pathways with QR codes and instructions for digital engagement.

Layer 2: Digital Resource Ecosystem — Accessible through the Chaoxing Learning Platform, including:

17 micro-lecture videos (average 9 minutes each)

24 situational dialogue audio sets

24 AI speech training tasks with automated pronunciation, intonation, and fluency feedback

12 online quiz banks for self-paced review

Discussion forums with 24 topic threads

Layer 3: Virtual Simulation Module — Interactive scenarios that enable practice in authentic contexts:

Embarkation guidance simulation

Safety drill broadcasting simulation

Restaurant ordering simulation

Room service delivery simulation

6.2 Pedagogical Integration Principles

The integration of digital resources follows three principles:

Scaffolded Engagement: Print content points to digital resources at strategic moments, not overwhelming learners but providing support when needed.

Practice-Transfer Loop: In-class print-based instruction is followed by digital practice, then applied in simulation scenarios, creating a closed loop from instruction to practice to authentic application.

Data-Informed Instruction: Platform analytics (accessed through the Chaoxing system) enable instructors to identify challenges and adjust instruction accordingly.

6.3 Implementation Data

The course has completed two iterations involving 237 students:

Fall 2025-Spring 2026: 177 students enrolled
Spring-Summer 2026: 60 students enrolled

Platform data show:

Total page views: 142,677
 Activity participations: 25,328
 Quiz completion rate: 100%

Average speaking assessment improvement: 23% over initial diagnostic

7. Discussion and Implications

7.1 Contributions to ESP and Vocational Education

This paper makes three primary contributions:

First, it addresses a documented gap in transitional ESP materials by providing a concrete, empirically-grounded model for sequencing from general to professional English. The “daily-to-professional” progression, combined with careful scaffolding and workplace authenticity, offers a replicable template for other ESP domains facing similar challenges.

Second, it demonstrates how the genre-based ME conception proposed by Zhang and Cole (2018) can be operationalized in a comprehensive textbook design. The unit structure, with its consistent focus on professional genres and task outputs, translates genre theory into pedagogical practice.

Third, it shows how systematic values integration can be achieved without sacrificing linguistic authenticity or pedagogical effectiveness. The “One Core, Three Dimensions” framework provides a replicable structure for vocational educators seeking to implement China’s curriculum-based ideological and political education requirements meaningfully.

7.2 Challenges and Limitations

Several challenges emerged during the project:

Technical Accessibility: While the platform is widely accessible, some students faced internet connectivity issues

for streaming video content. Offline access options (downloadable materials) partially addressed this.

Instructor Training: Effective use of the digital ecosystem requires instructor familiarity with the platform, AI scoring interpretation, and virtual simulation facilitation. Training sessions conducted during course launch partially mitigated this.

Industry Content Stability: The cruise industry’s service standards evolve rapidly. A regular review cycle (planned for every 18-24 months) will be necessary to maintain content relevance.

7.3 Implications for Future Research

This study raises questions for future investigation:

How do transitional ESP textbooks impact longer-term professional communication competence compared to immersion in specialized materials from the start?

What instructor competencies are most critical for effective use of “paper-digital-simulation” triadic models?

How can AI scoring and feedback be refined to better support vocabulary and discourse development in ESP contexts?

What are the cross-cultural transferability and adaptation possibilities of the “One Core, Three Dimensions” values framework to other ESP domains and national contexts?

8. Conclusion

This paper has presented the development and pedagogical design of Daily Practical English for Cruises, a new-form transitional textbook for cruise service students. Grounded in OBE principles, China’s national English curriculum standards, and genre-based ESP theory, the textbook addresses a critical gap between learners’ general English competence and the professional communication requirements of cruise ship operations. The “Three-Chief-Editor” collaborative mechanism ensures content authenticity, while the “One Core, Three Dimensions” framework achieves systematic values integration.

The digital ecosystem—integrating print, online resources, and virtual simulation—extends learning opportunities beyond the classroom, supporting autonomous learning and data-informed instruction. Preliminary implementation data demonstrate positive engagement and learning outcomes.

As vocational education worldwide responds to the demands of globalized industries and digitally native learners, the transitional textbook model presented here offers a replicable framework for educators and materials developers across ESP domains. The challenge of bridging the general-to-professional gap is not unique to maritime or cruise contexts; the principles of progressive complexity, genre-based authenticity, competency alignment, and systematic values integration can inform textbook development in diverse ESP settings. Future research should continue to explore the effectiveness of transitional models,

the scalability of collaborative development mechanisms, and the evolving role of digital resources in shaping ESP pedagogy.

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