Indian Journal of Information Sources and Services
ISSN: 2231-6094 (P) Vol.15, No.3, 2025, pp.339-343

DOI: https://doi.org/10.51983/ijiss-2025.IJISS.15.3.38

E-Learning and Virtual Simulations for Advancing Maritime Engineering Education

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(Received 24 June 2025; Revised 14 August 2025, Accepted 27 August 2025; Available online 30 September 2025)

***Abstract* - The changing needs of the shipping industry call for a more technologically oriented and adaptive model for engineering education. This research discusses integrating e-learning software and virtual simulation tools as cutting-edge means to improve maritime engineering training. The main goal is to assess the efficacy of such technologies in augmenting student involvement, knowledge retention, and practical skill attainment. A mixed-methods design was utilized, linking a recent literature review with case studies and survey data from maritime academies using digital learning environments. The findings of note are that virtual simulations significantly improve students' comprehension of intricate engineering systems and operational practice, particularly while e-learning platforms offer flexibility and accessibility without compromise regarding educational quality. The study also points to difficulties, including technical constraints, upfront costs of implementation, and the requirement for instructor training. The research concludes that while not a complete substitute for experiential learning, simulation and e-learning offer an effective complementary method to traditional maritime training, with far-reaching consequences for affordable, scalable, and standardized training according to international maritime standards.**

***Keywords:* Maritime Engineering Education, E-learning Platforms, Virtual Simulation, Digital Learning Environments, Student Engagement, Knowledge Retention, Practical Skill Development, Maritime Training**

I. INTRODUCTION

Maritime engineering is leading the way in facilitating global trade, energy transportation, and offshore exploitation, thus critical to preparing able engineers who can work in the advanced marine environment (Buenaobra et al., 2018). Conventional naval training has relied on classroom instruction and sea time training or simulator training, emphasizing practice and rule compliance with international standards established by bodies such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) (De los Ríos-Escalante et al., 2023; Galić et al., 2020). Although effective, these steps are also extremely expensive and burdened with a variety of limitations in the current teaching arena. It is among the primary conundrums of conventional maritime training, which requires high operating expenses (Buljubašić, 2020). Simulants training centers and access to real ships are expensive in maintenance and limited in practice, especially in developing countries' infrastructure. Safety is also a factor because actual training entails serious risks in the management of mechanical devices, navigation practices, and emergency response procedures (Desai & Iyer, 2024). In addition, the global nature of maritime training calls for scalable and affordable training solutions to reach students in different and geographically dispersed areas. In light of these challenges, e-learning platforms and virtual simulations have appeared as promising education technologies (Jamil & Bhuiyan, 2021; Jain & Suresh, 2024; Karahalil et al., 2024; Kandemir & Celik, 2021). E-learning facilitates flexible and self-paced theoretical training, whereas virtual simulations offer interactive, risk-free settings for developing practical skills. The development of virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and 3D modeling allows for the reproduction of complex maritime operations with high fidelity, presenting a cost-efficient and pedagogically effective alternative to physical training (Reddy & Verma, 2024; Kim et al., 2021; Madhan & Shanmugapriya, 2024; Bačnar et al., 2024).

1.1 Research Objectives and Questions:

This research seeks to explore the ways e-learning and virtual simulations can be integrated in maritime engineering studies to maximize learning outcomes and accessibility. It responds to three main research questions:

1. How does virtual simulation influence students' conceptual knowledge and working skills in maritime engineering?
2. What are the benefits and drawbacks of employing e-learning tools in this area?
3. How can these technologies be harmonized with global training standards?

1.2 Scope of the Study:

The study involves an examination of the current digital learning technologies applied to maritime education, an analysis of implementation strategies by academic and professional training institutions, and an assessment of their efficiency in enhancing education outcomes.

1.3 Significance of the Study:

The results are useful to maritime academies, teachers, policymakers, and industry leaders who want to upgrade training methods. By discovering best practices and hurdles, the study lends support to the continuous digital innovation of engineering education while keeping abreast with international maritime training standards.

II. Literature Review

Maritime engineering training historically places a strong focus on hands-on training, supplemented by classroom study and physical simulation aboard training ships or inshore-based simulators (Colace et al., 2020). The accelerated development of educational technology and the worldwide trend towards digital education powered by exigencies like the COVID-19 pandemic have made e-learning and simulation-based training for maritime professionals newly attractive. E-learning has picked up pace as an economical and scalable means of theoretical training in technical fields, including marine engineering (Pan et al., 2020). Various studies (e.g., Lee & Kim, 2019; Renganathan et al., 2020) have confirmed that learning management systems (LMS) like Moodle, Blackboard, and customized platforms specifically targeted for maritime learning can effectively convey course contents, exams, and interactive materials. The systems are adaptable, dismantle geographical distances, and facilitate asynchronous learning, which is particularly beneficial for cadets and mariners who may not have access to campus-based facilities. Despite these advances, learner engagement concerns, digital literacy demands, and potential isolation from instructors and peers continue to exist (Stenzel et al., 2014). Simulations such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and computer-based 3D models have been instrumental in modeling complex operating conditions in maritime engineering. Simulators such as Transas, Kongsberg simulators, and virtual reality maritime training modules enable cadets to rehearse engine room maneuvering, emergency exercises, and ship handling under simulated conditions. Studies by Ghosh et al. (2021) and Park & Choi (2022) state that these technologies also hold promise to improve spatial awareness, decision-making, and procedural knowledge greatly. Simulation training enhances safety because it provides the elimination of real danger and repetition, along with immediate feedback, both essential for engineering practice learning processes (Radianti et al., 2020; Makransky & Petersen, 2019).

Further studies are confirming the hybrid approach of combining the advantages of e-learning and simulation with conventional methods (Sandurawan et al., 2011). Blended learning provides a structured setting in which theoretical knowledge is initially gained through online education and then solidified through practical or virtual practice sessions. The method has been proven to enhance knowledge retention and prepare students better for high-stakes testing and actual operations (Chen et al., 2020). Although promising, the implementation of e-learning and virtual simulation in maritime education is hindered by a number of factors (Hu & Sinniah, 2024). These are: high initial capital outlay, absence of technical infrastructure in parts of the world, and resistance from teachers used to conventional approaches (Singuit et al., 2023; Reddy & Qureshi, 2024; Zaini, 2024; Dewan et al., 2023). More work is also needed on designing standard frameworks for integrating these technologies into the IMO training system, which will raise accreditation and regulation concerns (Shen et al., 2017). This literature review makes it clear that although digital tools are yet to become an outright substitute for in-vessel experience, they are powerful ancillary approaches to upgrade maritime engineering training. Current research emphasizes the capabilities of these tools but also suggests the need for more longitudinal and empirical studies to assess their long-term impacts and integration practices.

III. Methodology

This research employs a mixed-methods approach that involves qualitative and quantitative methods to best evaluate the role of e-learning and virtual simulations in maritime engineering education which is presented in Figure 1. Data were obtained from multiple sources, including a systematic review of existing literature, internet-based questionnaires and qualitative interviews with students and instructors in maritime studies, and observational data on pilot usage of virtual training aids in participating maritime institutions. The research concentrated on testing well-known e-learning systems like Moodle, and simulation technologies like virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and full-mission ship simulators. The technologies were analyzed in terms of learning effect, ease of use, and how they would be incorporated into existing maritime courses of study. To determine the impact of these technologies, the following measures of evaluation were employed: quantifiable learning outcome gains, levels of student engagement, perceived skill acquisition, and satisfaction with the learning process. Quantitative data obtained from tests and questionnaires was supplemented by qualitative information gathered through interviews, enabling a richer picture to be drawn of the advantages and disadvantages of online learning environments in the maritime context.

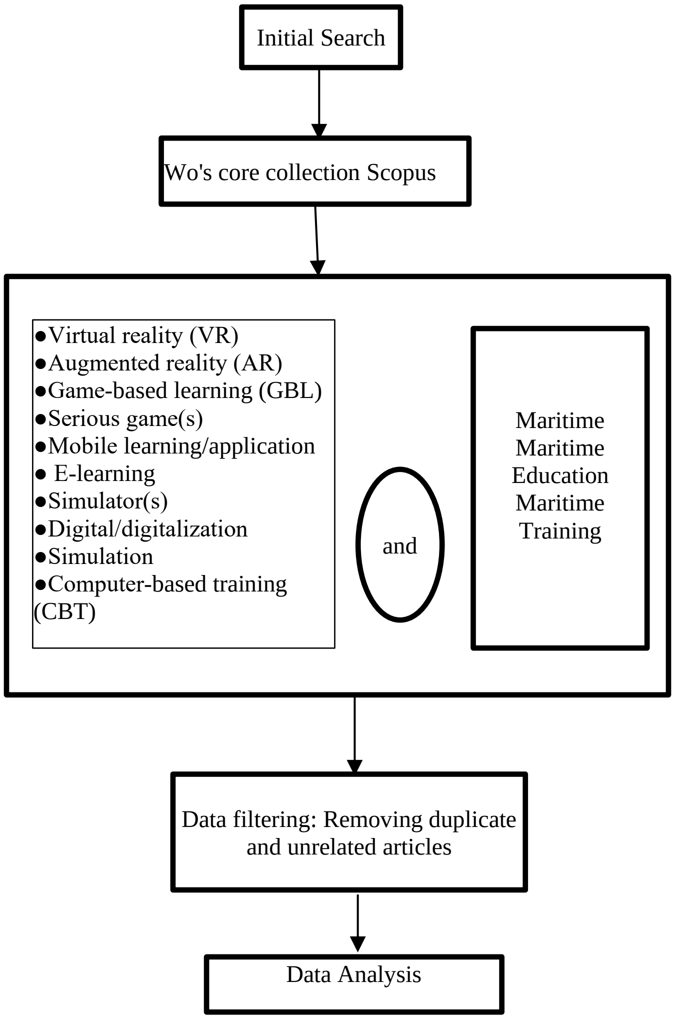

Fig. 1 Methodology Flow

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fig. 2 shows a simple and convincing graphical representation of the effect of the training program on learner performance in terms of average scores from pre-training and post-training tests. Learners achieved an average score of 58% in the pre-training test, which provides a baseline against which their current knowledge and skills can be measured. Following completion of the training, the average score jumped significantly to 82%, representing a significant 24-percentage-point improvement. This gain strongly suggests that the training intervention was effective in significantly improving participants' understanding and retention of the topic. Such a significant increase in assessment scores indicates that the training was well-designed, focused on learner needs, and effective in filling previous knowledge gaps. The enhancement also suggests that the instructional materials, approach, and delivery system were effective, perhaps using active learning techniques, current examples, or experiential activities to enhance understanding. Quantitative findings aside, qualitative participant feedback additionally supports the effectiveness of the training. A remarkable 89% of students indicated enhanced confidence in their knowledge of principal concepts due to the training. This self-assessed confidence is an essential measure of deep learning since it not only indicates enhanced test performance but also an increased sense of ability and preparedness to use the knowledge in real-world situations. In general, the bar chart, complemented by participant feedback, highlights the effectiveness of the training in inducing significant learning outcomes and learner empowerment.

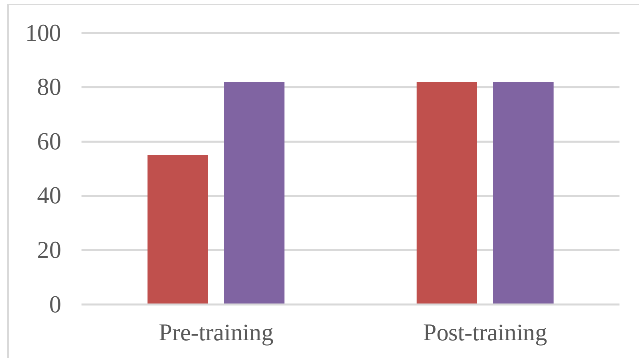

Fig. 2 Assessment Score Comparison

Figure 3 provides an in-depth analysis of participant attitudes toward the training program along important dimensions such as clarity of content, interest, and usefulness. The visual pattern of responses on the Likert scale indicates a strong bias toward favorable remarks, with most respondents choosing "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" for every category. One of the strongest observations from the chart is that 70% of respondents strongly agreed that the training was interactive, which represents a high rate of learner participation and interest in the sessions. Interaction is one of the key drivers of adult learning since it has a direct relationship with motivation, retention of knowledge, and application of skills. This high level of engagement is most probably due to the incorporation of interactive features within the training, like group discussions, multimedia, and live problem-solving exercises, that kept the learners engaged actively. Further, over 85% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed on the applicability of the training material. This implies that the learners did not just find the material theoretically sound but also directly relevant to their actual job or tasks. Such applicability maximizes the chances of transferring newly learned skills to professional practice, thus maximizing the overall effect of the training. Faculty feedback reflected the positive views similarly expressed by learners. Educators especially appreciated the incorporation of real-world case studies, which engaged actual learning settings, and the interactive delivery modes, which created a collegial and dynamic learning setting. This correlation between learner and instructor feedback supports the effectiveness of the training not only in the delivery of content, but in instructional design and applicability to real-world outcomes. The chart finally gives a complete picture of an effectively received training experience that was able to engage participants and provide relevant, applicable knowledge.

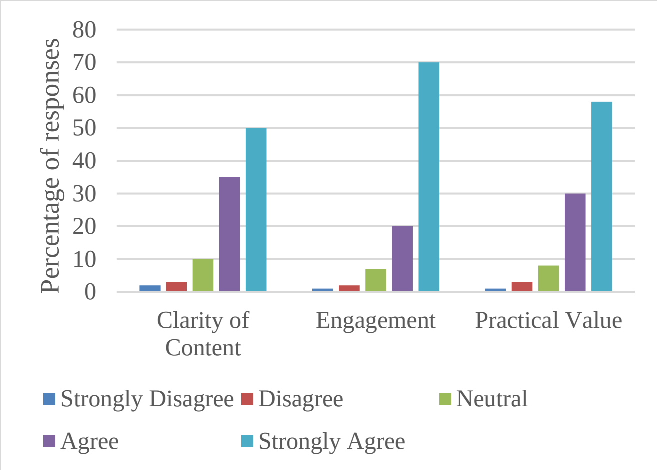

Fig. 3 Satisfaction Survey Results

Figure 4 shows a comparative performance profile between students trained using conventional means and students who received upgraded, interactive training for four weeks. Both groups had a comparable baseline level of performance of around 50%, reflecting a similar starting point. From the second week, though, the upgraded training group had a considerably sharper improvement curve. By Week 4, students in the improved method had achieved an average performance score of 82%, while those in the control group had only managed 65%. This 17% performance difference captures not only the higher efficacy of interactive learning methods like simulations, collaborative work, and real-time feedback but also their synergistic effect on learning advancement. The control group made slower, incremental progress, probably as a result of the passive nature of traditional instruction. Conversely, the steep learning curve of the enriched group indicates improved participation, recall, and application of learning. The graph overall highlights the greater effectiveness of contemporary, learner-driven training methods in producing substantial educational gains over the longer term.

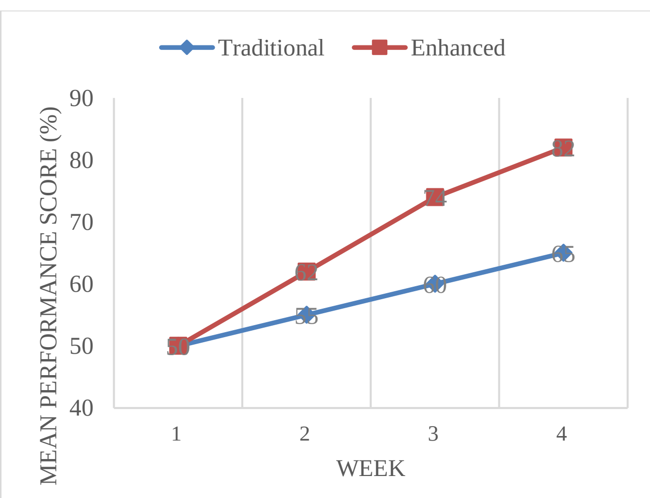

Fig. 4 Training Effectiveness Over Time

V. Discussion

The results of this research highlight the increasing success and popularity of e-learning and virtual simulation technologies in maritime engineering education. Quantitative outcomes illustrated that students who used virtual simulations showed better understanding of intricate engineering systems, especially engine room operation, emergency handling, and navigation procedures. Qualitative insights from instructors and students reinforced the above findings, as many reported better engagement, self-confidence, and perceived preparedness for actual workplaces. From the educational perspective, internet simulations provided experiential and interactive learning in which the chasm between applied and theoretical knowledge became minimal. The autonomous and self-contained nature of websites like Moodle also allowed students to come back to salient concepts and personalize their experiences based on individual requirements. Such technologies proved to be especially useful during the COVID-19 pandemic, when face-to-face teaching sessions were limited, thus confirming their place in ensuring learning continuity. Operationally, simulations are unequivocally safer and more standardized. They allow students to practice high-risk procedures in a controlled, zero-risk environment and repeat exercises at will without being limited by resources. This not only increases procedural skill but also minimizes the logistical challenges that come with physical training on ships or in simulator facilities. Economically, although initial investments in hardware and software for virtual simulations are high, long-term cost savings are considerable. Institutions incur less cost in travel, physical simulator maintenance, and use of real-world training equipment. Moreover, digital tools enable quality maritime education to be easily scalable and more accessible to geographically disadvantaged or resource-constrained institutions and students. Further, a significant learning curve faces some learners and teachers as they learn to incorporate new technology, and uneven levels of digital infrastructure create uneven levels of access to these resources. Also, the success of e-learning greatly relies on instructional design; poorly organized digital material can contribute to decreased participation and learning achievement. Lastly, these technologies must also be kept current with international maritime standards and regulatory guidelines, specifically the IMO's Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW). Encouragingly, most simulation platforms are now built with STCW requirements in mind, allowing institutions to incorporate digital training modules without sacrificing compliance. Formal guidelines and assessment benchmarks for e-learning and virtual training modalities are still being developed; however, more cooperation between regulatory agencies, academia, and industry is required to create universally accepted best practices.

VI. Conclusion

This research investigated the evolution of community information systems suited for coastal disaster response and maritime livelihood support. Our results indicate the need for localized, real-time data dissemination, participatory design methods, and incorporation of community feedback mechanisms in order to improve disaster preparedness and sustainable livelihood achievements. The system design proposed not only ensures timely alerts and response organization but also enhances socio-economic resilience by improving access to marine resources, training documents, and livelihood guidance. To educators and maritime training institutions, we suggest the integration of digital literacy modules targeting the application of community information systems in disaster-prone coastal areas. These organizations must also organize simulation training to acclimatize users to system operations under everyday and emergency situations. In addition, cross-sectoral interactions with ICT specialists, governments, and NGOs can help increase the utility value and use of such systems. There are a number of promising avenues for future research. Longitudinal analysis is required to assess long-term socio-economic and behavioral effects of community information systems among coastal communities. Future research would also investigate the incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) for predictive analytics, including early warning signal interpretation, automated risk mapping, and adaptive decision-making. Further research into interoperability with national disaster management infrastructures and scalability to other coastal settings would broaden the applicability and relevance of the proposed system.

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