

The Challenges in Philippine Maritime Education and Training

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ABSTRACT

The importance of maritime education and training (MET) cannot be understated particularly with the current global market scenario and implementation of the 2010 revised Standard Training and Certificate Watch keeping (STCW) Convention and Code. Around 80 to 90 percent of maritime accidents are ascribed to human error. Hence, it is critical that seafarers be well-educated and trained, able to follow orders, manage risks, solve problems, and must be psychologically and emotionally happy to ensure safe, secure, clean and efficient operations for safety of life at sea. With this in mind, there are challenges in MET that the seafarers face which may also somehow directly or indirectly affect them, their family and the maritime industry in general. This paper presents the two main challenges in maritime education and training (MET): the global market supply and demand scenario (covering the issues on shortage, recruitment, retention) and the implementation of the revised Standard Training, Certification, Watchkeeping (STCW) Convention and Code (covering the issues on competency of seafarers) and the role of various stakeholders to recruit, train and retain the seafarers for the safe operation of their vessels.

Keywords: maritime education, training (MET) challenges

INTRODUCTION

Recognizing the significance of highly competent human resources at sea, MET should be enhanced in terms of facilities and equipment, curriculum design, learning methodologies, quality of instruction and in all aspects of ensuring a pool of high qualified and competent marine officers and engineers to man the world fleet. On October 15, 2011, during the General Assembly of the International Association of Maritime Universities (IAMU), the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Secretary General Ethimios E Mitropoulos, in his Keynote address said: *"As human element at sea is critical in ensuring safe, secure, clean and efficient operations, it is only feasible to secure, and to preserve, properly qualified human resources for the maritime industries through effective education and training – based on scientific and academic rigor; the development of a clear linkage between practical skills and management techniques; and an unerring focus on quality."*

Indeed, the role of MET institutions is vital for the success of the maritime industry. But in essence, a strengthened and amplified cooperation amongst the different maritime industry sectors – government, MET institutions, and shipping companies is very crucial for the benefit of the seafarers and their family and ultimately for the success of the industry. With these concerns, the challenges in Philippine MET may be summarized into two: Manpower demand and supply (that covers the quantity issues on shortage, recruitment, retention) and amendments in STCW Convention and Code (that covers the quality issues on competency of seafarers) citing various maritime industry scenarios. These challenges in MET have somehow directly and/or indirectly affects the seafarers, who play a vital role in the today's global economy and the maritime industry in general.

BACKGROUND

Maritime education and training holds a key to a successful future for the seafarers, his family, beloved, and the maritime industry in general. In fact, education and training as an important pathway for improving access to employment opportunities of Filipino workers, forms part of the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2011-2016 which is anchored on President Aquino's social contract and central strategy in reducing poverty and in building national competitiveness. The global shipping industry continuously provides an attractive career opportunity with a broad international perspective.

Despite the recent global economic crises, the demand for highly competent officers and ratings to man vessels around the world is still going strong. In fact, the Baltic International Maritime Council (BIMCO) and International Seafarers Federation (ISF) Manpower Report (2010) revealed recurrent shortages for officers especially on ship type such as tankers and offshore support vessels. While seafaring remains to be an interesting and rewarding profession, it requires physical and mental abilities and strengths to be able to withstand the challenges at sea. As emphasized by the BIMCO Report 2005 and BIMCO Report 2010 respectively, suitably qualified and high caliber seafarers are required by the industry to ensure safe, secure, clean, and efficient ship operations. On top of that, the health and morale of seafarers are essential in their success as maritime professionals.

THE CHALLENGES IN MET AND ROLE OF MARITIME STAKEHOLDERS

Currently, the Philippines remain the largest market for crewing, advantaged by a number of factors: (1) High population growth rate in the country; (2) Absence of more attractive employment opportunities; (3) High unemployment rate; (4) Country's geographical position consisting of approximately 7,100 islands; (5) Private sectors are encouraged to develop marine training facilities with the Philippines having the most number of MET institutions (159) with India as second (130), and (6) Fluency of Filipinos in communicating using English (Baylon, 2011). However, with current global shipping market supply and demand scenario and the implementation of the revised STCW Convention and Code, the Philippines must not be complacent. The overseas seafaring industry has been a major contributor to the Philippine economic growth. Data from the Bangko Central ng Pilipinas (BSP) shows that during the first four months of this year, our seafarers have already funneled 1.3B US dollars in remittances, which is 6% higher than the amount remitted during the same period last year. For the whole year of 2010, remittances from Filipino seafarers have reached 3.8B US dollars, accounting for 20% of the total remittances from OFWs that year.

Current Global Shipping Market Supply and Demand (shortage of marine officer's issues)

In 2005, the joint BIMCO and ISF Manpower Report highlighted the very alarming situation on the projected level of the theoretical shortage of marine officers for the global fleet. As shown in Table 1, a theoretical shortage of 10,000 marine officers and an oversupply of ratings were expected. This report added that unless measures are taken to address the problem, the shortage of marine officers will escalate to 27,000. Likewise, this report stressed the existence of a global shortage of skilled ratings (machinists, filters, welders, and petty officers) which also needs to be addressed. Measures have been implemented to alleviate the shortage problem by the maritime stakeholders including the Associated Marine Officers and Seamen's Union of the Philippines (AMOSUP). In 2008, during 9th Asia-Pacific Manning and Training Conference, MAAP President presented that AMOSUP thru MAAP, has carried out various educational and training programs to address shortage and competency issues among the seafarers in cooperation with shipping and manning companies and the government agencies involved in the maritime industry. These programs include: (1) the

Academic Ramp Program, (2) BSMT and BSMarE Program, (3) Dual Course (BSMTE) Program, (4) Bridging Program for the Marine Engineers, (5) Voluntary Accreditation of Programs, (6) Cadetship Training Program, (7) Leadership Development Program, (8) other Enhancement and Value-Added Program for Faculty/Staff; (9) Establishment of Professional Career Development Center (PCDC) and (10) Graduate Program Thru its Center for Advance Maritime Studies (CAMS). The latter program aims to make the profession more attractive for management level maritime officers who have accumulated experience of more than 10 or 15 years at sea, to pursue various marine-related qualifications at MAAP with no additional entry requirements. This is to address the perception of seafarers that a career in shipping requires committing oneself to a life at sea which deters many young people from considering shipping as a profession. The objective of CAMS is to motivate young people to consider a career in shipping, with some perspectives on the various career (in teaching, management, insurance, maritime law, and finance, for instance) paths they can pursue, after they have reached a certain level of experience and would like to retire from active duty at sea. It is only in MAAP campus that 24 bungalows are being built so that the officers while studying can bring their family in Bataan to have more time with them just like when they are at home. These programs may not solve the problems entirely but have somehow alleviated the effects of these pressing issues in the maritime industry.

Despite efforts exerted by maritime stakeholders, the recent BIMCO/ISF Manpower Update in 2010 noted some shortages for officers, particularly for certain grades and for ships types such as tankers and offshore support vessels. It is, however, positive that the supply and demand for ratings shows to be more or less balanced. The shortage for officers is still felt in spite of the global economic downturn and the dramatic reduction in the demand for shipping services in the past. Also, BIMCO/ISF Manpower Update 2010 revealed that the levels of trainings of new entrants are maintained or even increased in many countries since 2005, notwithstanding the challenging trading conditions in the maritime industry. As revealed in Table 1, the worldwide supply of officers is estimated to be 624, 000 while the demand is 637,000 which implies a shortage of 13, 000 officers in the world fleet.

Table 1. Global Supply-Demand Estimates

Seafarers	2005		2010	
	Officers	Ratings	Officers	Ratings
Supply	466,000	721,000	624,000	747,000
Demand	476,000	586,000	637,000	747,000
Balance	-10,000	+135,000	-13,000	0

Source: BIMCO/ISF Reports in 2005 and 2010 (www.bimco.org)

The BIMCO/ISF Manpower Update 2010 stressed that this report provides a more comprehensive and reliable manpower estimates; however, the results cannot be directly compared with previous studies. The report explained that supply estimates are based on the numbers holding STCW certificates while demand estimates are based on detailed review of the number, size and type of ships in the world fleet and revised estimates of manning levels and back-up ratios currently applicable to different national fleets. The supply estimates in 2010 reflects significant increases in seafarer supply in the Far East notably China, India, and the Philippines, as well as in several European nations. Nevertheless, a future pool of suitably qualified and high caliber seafarers can only be guaranteed with improved and sustained training and recruitment programs.

In the next decade, the number of ships in the world's fleet is projected to moderately increase. Given this scenario, the current shortage of officers is expected to become more severe unless measures are taken to reduce wastage rates from the industry. This further underscores the

importance of MET at this time and the years to come. International multifarious or diverse issues faced by seafarers also affect the recruitment and retention. These varied issues include *stress, fatigue, workloads, training standards, safety, security and environmental protection*. Also, one of the motivations in entering into a seafaring career is financial rewards. However, after acquiring sufficient funds in seagoing, many seafarers opt to take land-based jobs to be with their families. Nevertheless, seafarers should not worry as the maritime industry recognize the significant roles that they are playing and that stakeholders such as the ship-owners, government agencies and international organizations like IMO are doing their best to ensure their safety and security at work. Benefits and privileges are also provided to encourage seafarers to continue in pursuing their seagoing career.

The global shipping community has the power and vision to implement positive measures that can alleviate, if not resolve, this imbalance between the supply and demand of skilled seafarers. The shipping companies in an attempt to recruit and retain seafarers are doing their best to make the profession more attractive by conducting the following : (1) Invest in public awareness campaigns to improve the industry's image particularly on issues related to social responsibility and environmental regulations; (2) Implement innovative incentive; implement tax rationalization programs and ensuring that tax obligations are rationalized for seafarer; (3) Upgrade living conditions onboard vessels including provision of VSAT technologies (installation of internet connections on board using VSAT technology because existing technologies on vessels do not support social networking applications such as Face book, Skype and Twitter);(4) Provide financial rewards and enhance or increase compensation and social benefits packages and programs of seafarers that are consistent with international norms related to compensation, social benefits and training;(5) Adopt an employment practice in which consecutive months at sea have been significantly reduced, such as the approximately four to six months for crews of tankers; (6) supplement the academic training of their employees through dedicated training centers equipped with expensive technology and advanced simulators or through seminars offered by some of the well-established protection and indemnity (P&I) clubs, classification societies and specialized computer-based training (CBT) companies; (7) Fair treatment among crews particularly on compensation, wages set above international norms should only be done in instances where the quality, qualifications and innovative thinking of crew members justify higher wages; (8) Invest in identifying and developing more defined career paths for their employees including more professional options for experienced seafarers that will enable them to transition successfully to life on shore after fulfilling their commitment at sea; (9) Ensure that corporate identity and culture should take precedence over nationalities so that crew members act as "one team"; (10) Introduce greater flexibility on national requirements for crew composition with the goal of achieving a 'transnational' crew that operates cohesively and independently of nationalities; adopt latest human resources management techniques to better understand the needs of seafarers, and; (11) Strengthen the image or 'brand,' communicating corporate culture and core values and demonstrate respect for human capital, that is, the seafarers that operate their vessels.

As listed above, in the light of financial resources, political will, and collaboration to encourage the recruitment and retention of competent seafarers to the shipping profession, the shipping industry is striving to make a career in the field more attractive to young people thru increasing compensation and excellent career prospects, but faces numerous challenges including the separation from friends and family while at sea with opportunities to travel and visit exotic places disappeared, as ships now only make short calls in port – often for only 24-36 hours – or indeed remain outside the port for their commercial operations, compared to some years ago when stays could range from one week to 10 days, leaving more time for crew members to get a break from life at sea. It came as no surprise that women (potential maritime officers at sea) are vastly under-represented in a profession that entails much time away from home. Currently, the global marine industry does not employ women

onboard tankers and dry bulk carriers. Women are better represented in the cruise industry and in land-based positions in the shipping industry. This clearly speaks to a lifestyle choice as women balance their family needs with professional decisions.

One of the major problem stressing seafarers and the industry in general is the piracy and armed robbery at sea that greatly affect the seafarers and consequently their families. International maritime issues such as piracy, armed robbery against ships, kidnapping, torture and murder at sea have prevalently affect the shipping industry most notably but not exclusively off the coast of Somalia, in the Gulf of Aden and the wider Indian ocean. It is a given fact that a strong government commitment is required to curtail this problem. In reference to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), it is the task of contracting governments – and other governments who may wish to contribute – to protect the freedom of navigation on the high seas. However, the current commitment by states to anti-piracy forces, is insufficient to curtail, let alone solve the piracy problem, says BIMCO, in its position on piracy issues as seen and read on the BIMCO website. In the light of continued piracy attacks on international vessels and the growing trend for the need of armed security personnel on board ships, the call to strengthen the Philippine anti-piracy training program for seafarers becomes all the more urgent.

The presence of armed security personnel on ships must also be taken into account and how they could impact on the psycho-social wellbeing of the seafarers. This piracy issue can only be resolved through significant international capacity building. Thus, everyone is summoned to take part in the anti-piracy movement in support to our seafarers. As this piracy is continually threatening global trade and most importantly affects the safety and security of seafarers, everyone is invited to visit www.saveourseafarers.com and be part of the international anti-piracy movement. This campaign was initiated as one of the biggest ever maritime industry groupings comprising of 25% of the world's largest maritime organizations to raise awareness on the human and economic cost of piracy. The campaign advocates committed action and pushes for governments around the world to prioritize six key actions: (1) Reducing the effectiveness of the easily identifiable mother ships; (2) Authorizing naval forces to hold pirates and deliver them for prosecution and punishment; (3) Fully criminalizing all acts of piracy and intent to commit piracy under national laws, in accordance with their mandatory duty to co-operate to suppress piracy under international conventions; (4) Increasing naval assets available in the affected areas; (5) Providing greater protection and support for seafarers ; and (6) Tracing and criminalizing the organizers and financiers behind the criminal networks.

In addressing the retention problem, apart from giving up-to-date trainings and assessments to address quality and competency issues, companies recognize that seafarers to be stable, contented, and safe should give attention to their families. As the inevitable separation from family and home affects the health and morale of seafarers, the vital role of their families should be enriched to ascertain healthy, competent and productive human resources at sea. SIRC Study (2002) suggested the following ways to reduce the strain of a seafaring life: “ (1) Shorter trips (preferably no longer than four months); (2) Paid leave of a comparable length to sea time; (3) Continuous employment, rather than employment by voyage; (4) Training time to be added to leave period; (5) Opportunities for partners (and children where possible to sail; (6) Improved access to cheaper communication; (7) Increased contact between seafarers’ partners and their employers; and (8) Opportunities for seafarers’ families to make contact with each other while crew at sea. Most of these, if not all, are availed by seafarers especially those with management positions”.

On Implementation of the Revised 2010 STCW Convention and Code (competency issues)

On competency issues, maritime accidents prompted by human error as well as results of various studies or assessments triggers issues on competency of seafarers and the importance of standards. Competency and standards are embodied in the STCW Convention and Code. It stimulates challenges in the MET sector which holds the key in ensuring highly competent seafarers to man international vessels.

Since 2005, the Philippines have been a regular beneficiary of IMO's Technical Assistance on MET. Hosted by MAAP in Mariveles Bataan campus, IMO conducted a seminar -workshop on the Quality Standards System (QSS) which has greatly contributed to the improvement of the country's system in the administration of MET and certification. Furthermore, Year 2010 in June is considered as a special year in the world of MET as it shall always be associated with the diplomatic adoption of the historic amendments to the STCW Convention and Code under the auspices of IMO in Manila. It is collectively been named the Manila Amendments which is set to be enforced on January 1, 2012 under the tacit acceptance procedure. It is aimed at bringing the Convention and Code up to date with developments since they were initially adopted in 1978 and further revised in 1995; and to enable address issues that are anticipated to emerge in the foreseeable future. It sets an international benchmark for the MET of seafarers as it has been devoted to raising the profile of seafarers and improving as well their conditions. It includes important changes to each Chapter of the Convention and Code which is significant in shaping the MET of seafarers and their respective careers at sea. The Manila conference was also put at the epicentre of the highlights of Year 2010, *"Year of the Seafarers"*, as the IMO has also designated June 25, 2010 as the *"Seafarers Day"*, to pay tribute to global seafarers for their unique contributions to society and in grateful recognition of the crucial role they play in the smooth running of the international trade in a hazardous environment for the global economy. It is also interesting to note that on June 25, 2010 at the Philippine International Convention Center (PICC) in Manila, the IMO Secretary General Mr. EE Mitropoulos in his closing statement of congratulations and gratitude addressed to the IMO delegates of the diplomatic conference for the concerted efforts undertaken, had also made special mention about his visit on June 22, 2011 at MAAP campus in Mariveles Bataan Philippines and he cited to wit, *"I will always remember my visit on Tuesday at the Maritime Academy of Asia and the Pacific in Bataan (the same Academy that has provided the uniformed cadets, who brightened with their presence, style, discipline and excellent manners the corridors of this Conference Hall."*

To translate the revised STCW requirements into national regulations with the aim of expediting their implementation in the Philippines, on July 19-23, 2011, hosted once again by MAAP in Mariveles Bataan, the Maritime Training Council (MTC) organized a 5-day national seminar workshop on familiarization with the Manila Amendments to the STCW Convention and Code with Hon. Danilo Cruz, Undersecretary of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) as Keynote speaker. The lecturers and facilitators were: the IMO Head of Maritime Training and Human Element Section. Capt. Ashok Mahapatra; Chief Examiner from Sri Lanka C/E Leslie Hemachandra, and Director and Principal of Anglo Eastern Maritime Training Center from India Capt. Deboo. The occasion was graced by MARINA Deputy Administrator for Operations Atty. Gloria V. Banas, IMO Regional Coordinator Atty. Brenda Pimentel, and MTC Executive Director Ms. Liberty Casco and participated by representatives from various government agencies, concerned private sectors and maritime associations.

The national seminar provided the stakeholders in the maritime industry with better understanding on the requirements and implications of the Manila Amendments on MET of Seafarers. In summary, there are 16 major amendments to the STCW that were thoroughly discussed: (1) One administration

to issue COC and endorsements ;(2) Common medical standards for seafarers in all countries; (3) Revalidation requirements rationalize for the benefit of the seafarers; (4) Training on modern technology introduced; (5) Engineering training updated to include emergent and modern engineering concept; (6) Training and certification requirements for electro technical officers introduced; (7) Training and certification requirements for able seafarers and engine was introduced; (8) Leadership training requirement for seafarers; (9) Competency standards for personnel serving on board different types of tankers introduced; (10) Training guidance for personnel serving on Board Ships operating in polar waters; (11) Training Guidance for personnel operating dynamic positioning systems ;(12) Safety and security training requirements separated to avoid confusion ;(13) Training guidelines for seafarers relating to action; (14) Introduction of Modern training methodology in distance learning and web-based learning; (15) Hours of rest harmonized with the requirement of Maritime Labor Code (MLC) to reduce fatigue ; and (16) Requirements introduced to avoid alcohol and substance abuse.

As emphasized, STCW convention is concerned about the seafarers' common standards, trainings requirements, certification requirements with only one administration responsible to oversee, assess and issue COC and endorsement. On the revised STCW, the challenges in today's Philippine MET may be summarized into two parts: meeting the requirements of international maritime regulations and upgrading of MET. On one hand, in meeting the requirements of international maritime regulations, the STCW Convention and Code stipulate standards which should be complied by the maritime stakeholders. Government thru MTC has already established a National Quality Standard System (NQSS) that integrates the quality system of all government agencies involved in MET of seafarers, certification and endorsement and revalidation of certificates. The agencies include the Philippine Regulation Commission (PRC) for marine deck and engine officers, Technical Education Skills Development Authority (TESDA) for ratings, and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) for Bachelor of Science in Marine Transportation (BSMT) and Bachelor of Science Marine Engineer (BSMarE) courses and National Transmission Commission (NTC) for radio operators. Raising the quality of MET can be challenging especially for the Philippines being the major supplier of maritime manpower to foreign shipping. Training institutions are considerably pressured to meet the requirements of international maritime regulations to ensure quality and competency of seafarers. On the other hand, in upgrading MET, this demands strong commitment amongst all maritime stakeholders especially that this entails focus on quality, and sufficient fund to be able to acquire the much needed physical and technical aspects of improvement. Quality improvement in MET entails economic constraints. It is for this reason that all government agencies are currently working hand in hand in cooperation with other private organizations on the development and upgrading of courses required under the STCW Manila Amendment.

During the opening ceremonies on July 19, 2011, for the national seminar on the Manila Amendment of STCW at MAAP campus, the DOLE Undersecretary Danilo Cruz in his message cited that: *"the courses for able deck and engine seafarers have been completed by TESDA and adopted by MTC early this year. A long list of basic and advanced courses for maritime professionals is also in the pipeline for development, review and upgrading in line with the requirements of the Manila Amendments. Beyond the development and review of courses, the government is also committed to improve the administration of MET system and resolved to conduct regular inspections to accredited training providers.* On the other hand, during the closing ceremonies on July 23, 2011, Capt. Ashok Mahapatra emphasized that: *"the seafarers must be guided and they must be informed of the government's action plan for them, as what concerns them also concerns their family and loved ones. However, all these can only be accomplished by the government upon creation of one maritime administration responsible for the issuance of certificate of competency (COC) and endorsements."* As stated by Capt. Mahapatra, only one administration should be in-charge in the issuance of COC and endorsements; in the assessment procedure, and in the overall overseeing, monitoring and evaluation of the STCW

implementation as amended in June 2010. This administration as an independent body may authorize training institutes to issue COC mainly under Chapter VI of the Convention. However, with this authority comes corresponding responsibility for the training institutes to ensure that proper assessment is carried out within quality standard system with procedures and processes and those regular audits may be conducted by the administration at any given time without notice. As the new STCW is known as Manila amendment, it would be prudent for the Philippines to be the first country to complete and submit the requirements of the Convention on or before the implementation on January 1, 2012. Furthermore, during the same closing session, the Philippine Association of Maritime Training Centers, Inc (PAMTCI) President C/E Alfredo Haboc on behalf of the private sectors who participated on the said national seminar-workshop had read a Resolution, institutionalizing one administration responsible for the issuance of COC and endorsements for the Philippines to be compliant and not jeopardize its stand as the premier supplier of seafarers with 4 recommendations summarized as follows: (1) a unified stand for the Philippine government to designate one administration on or before January 1, 2012; (2) all government agencies to unite and agree among themselves; (3) the Office of the President to prioritize a Bill designating one administration tasked to oversee the various concerned government agencies for the implementation of the STCW as amended, and; (4) to recommend to House and Congress the immediate passing of the Bill into a Law not later than January 2013. Further, In the article of Yul Malicse (2011) published at the Philippine national publication and on-line publication, he reported that the participants led by Capt. Victor S. Del Prado MM, C/E Alfredo G. Haboc MM; Dr. Angelica Baylon and Merle Jimenez-San Pedro, read a resolution on July 22, 2011 at the end of the seminar-workshop, calling the attention of IMO that *"under the current regime, the implementation of STCW Convention in the Philippines is 'fragmented' into various government agencies, and therefore, "do not conform with the STCW Convention which requires only 'one' Administration responsible for 'all regulations of the STCW as amended."* Further emphasized on the report that the participants before the Associated Marine Officers' and Seamen's Union of the Philippines (AMOSUP) Exec VP Vice Admiral Eduardo Ma. R. Santos (AFP, Ret.), who is also MAAP President; and other prominent maritime industry stakeholders, had clearly stressed that: *"the standing of the Philippines as a leading seafarer-supplying country in the world, as well as the employment of Filipino seafarers on board international registered vessels may be "jeopardized," if the STCW requirements cannot be complied with".*

FUTURE EMERGING TRENDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In connection with the MAAP hosting of the 19-23 June 2011 national seminar workshop on familiarization with the Manila Amendments to STCW Convention and the emerging issues that the maritime industry is confronted with, the MAAP Director for Research and Extension Services interviewed various private stakeholders during break time on what the national government's development plan should consist for the STCW implementation. The following have been suggested for the proposed actions by the Philippine government: (1) Make significant investments in establishing and supporting MET programs; (2) Recognize certificates from maritime universities and academies as equivalent to bachelor degree; (3) Identify and develop career paths (example: banking, insurance, law, and operations to increase professional mobility and enable experienced seafarers to transition back on shore upon reaching a certain level of age and experience, or for specified periods during their commitment; (4) Build greater awareness of the maritime profession among young people; (5) Reduce personal taxation or eliminate them on seafarers' income; (6) Enhance social benefits for employees such as compensation for illness and coverage of repatriation expenses; (7) Provide partial coverage of the social security contributions; (8) Ensure that the STCW certificates issued in the Philippines are recognized in other countries; (9) Standardize MET programs and credentials so that degrees and graduates are accepted across borders, (10) Expand maritime curricula to meet the needs of individuals operating in a complex global environment, incorporating courses in decision-making, ethics, multi-cultural relations and foreign languages, and; (11) Enhance

access to quality MET by encouraging partnership of the public and private sectors. It would be prudent that the various issues, comments and suggestions from the private sectors be validated from various maritime government agencies to get their viewpoints and respective action plans for the implementation of STCW.

The participants are one in saying that the national government should give appropriate emphasis and must demonstrate stronger commitment to this task through a well-developed plan. Further, as technology rapidly transforms the shipping industry, MET institutions must collaborate with shipping industry, the end users of graduates to ensure that their MET programs are current and relevant to the industry. MET institutions are challenged to update training programs and educational methods. The pressing problems for MET institutions include having : (1) Latest technology in terms of facilities and equipment like simulators and other supporting technologies; (2) Highly qualified and experienced instructors; (3) Well-designed and updated curriculum, and other requirements (e.g. support time on modern vessels to gain first-hand experience with current technologies; (4) Encourage a more practical orientation in teaching, not only on the theoretical aspects of the profession because practical learning is favoured over theoretical learning in marine degree programs, with access to current simulation technologies and opportunities to obtain work experience serving as a cadet. To ensure that students or trainees will obtain the knowledge and skills necessary in their maritime profession, it is the role of MET institutions to empower the seafarers or future seafarers to be competent and able to operate modern ships which are designed and built to the highest technical standards. Moreover, closer cooperation among MET institutions should also be strengthened to establish programs on faculty/staff exchange, to share of expensive facilities and equipment, and to undertake trainings of instructors. On the other hand, ship-owners or shipping companies are encouraged to support improvement plans in MET to ensure that they will employ qualified seafarers who will man their vessels.

While seafaring profession is no doubt a lucrative career, it requires rigorous educational trainings and genuine interest in this very challenging field. Even after taking up a degree in BSMT or BSMarE, aspiring ship officers are mandated to undertake various competency trainings and assessment as well as to upgrade their licenses. While on vacation from on-board jobs, seafarers are troubled with having to take various trainings instead of spending their time with their loved ones or families. To assist seafarers upgrade their skills and competency levels even while onboard, various training schemes have been developed such as e-learning, computer-based training, and other related techniques. Therefore, they are encouraged to avail of these opportunities, for them to develop their skills and competencies worthy of trust and confidence by their employers. Officers are compensated significantly higher than ratings due to the more demanding and challenging educational requirements they must satisfy and the greater responsibility they bear for the safe operation of a seagoing vessel. On one hand, families should be understanding of seafarers when they undertake the relevant trainings and assessments required to ensure their competency as these competency requirements aids in reducing the potential of maritime accidents. Also, families, especially the spouses, should ensure that communication line are open at all times, must take good care of home of family matters, and ascertain proper and wise management of family finances to reduce the burdens of seafarers and encourage their sons to enter the maritime world.

CONCLUSION

The quality of MET varies significantly by country, lacking universal degree standards for MET to be recognized across borders. However, with the challenges in today's MET and with all the maritime stakeholders joining hands so that MET would be supplemented by more onboard training, more of practice-oriented and enhanced by current technologies and simulators with competency to be assessed against the industry's standards, we are positive that MET qualifications and certifications

would be more broadly recognized by other countries and that there would consistency in the competency of officers from various parts of the world. This would ensure safe, secure, clean, and efficient ship operations of life at sea, hence prevent maritime accidents. This would promote the maritime profession, making the Filipino seafarers in demand by shipping companies to manage their business resulting to continuous work opportunities, promotion, better pay which will all be beneficial for the seafarers' family and the maritime industry in general.

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