

Impact of COVID-19 on Maritime Education and Way Forward

Introduction:

Maritime transport is amongst the most vital modes of transport and conveyance used worldwide. It has been around for centuries supporting people to meet their traveling and commercial enterprise requirements. According to the International Chamber of Shipping, an estimated 90% of world trade is transported by sea. The role of seafarers is critical to make this possible.

The coronavirus outbreak is first and most importantly, a human tragedy, affecting millions of people. According to the worldometer, almost thirteen million instances have been demonstrated throughout the globe, resulting in more than 576,400 deaths. This pandemic is having devastating outcomes on the world economy.

The covid19 pandemic not only affecting world trade, but it is also affecting seafarers. They are facing problems like discontinuation of crew repatriation, not getting wages in time, inability to attend maritime education, etc. Many developing countries and underdeveloped countries do not have an education structure to continue the maritime courses and certification amidst the pandemic. Education institutes are shut down and the certification for new seafarers has stopped. Every year new seafarers complete their certification and join the ships. Maritime crew repatriation is all but stopped, but there is some movement. However, if the maritime education cannot continue it is likely that there will be fewer new seafarers, resulting in a shortage of seafarers on demand.

I am Md Ikramul Hossain, AMNIS, final year undergraduate student of Bangladesh Marine Academy, have tried to focus on the present supply and demand of seafarers and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on it followed by the measures that can help to way forward.

Global Supply and Demand for Seafarers:

According to the International chamber of shipping, currently, more than 1.5 million human beings are employed as seafarers. If the global economic system continues to grow, more well trained and certified seafarers will be needed. If the global fleet will increase in dimension by 70% between now and 2030 (as has been extensively predicted, based totally on the increase rate of the last 5 decades), the present number of 500,000 officers needs to be accelerated to 850,000. If half of the current officers retire with the aid of 2030, which indicates 600,000 new officers will need to be recruited and trained. This equation provides us the annual requirement for new officers around 40,000 in number. Even if Covid19 slows trade, there is an ongoing requirement for trained and competent seafarers.

Further effort ought to be made to deliver new generations into seafaring as a profession. This includes looking at the changes in the maritime industry, and the skillsets for seafarers. Seafaring has to be viewed as attractive to new generations as a beneficial and gratifying career.

COVID-19 and Maritime Education:

The impact of COVID-19 is very miserable in developing countries. Like other sectors, maritime education is experiencing an arduous time. After the commencement of crew repatriation in full swing, there will be an obvious demand for many new officers and crews in this profession but the awareness of this demand is still not yet recognized. Different countries have taken good steps to run courses and training via online coordination. But there are challenges for simulation-based training. New maritime professionals are facing problems such as lack of arrangement for the online conduct of simulation-based ancillary courses (GMDSS, ECDIS, and ROC & ARPA, etc.), limited guidelines to conduct written and Oral competency examination using virtual tools, difficulties on certifications of the completed courses, courses that required the physically attended practical session cannot be completed, etc. These challenges are creating barriers on the path of new seafarers to obtain their certification and get them ready to join this profession despite demand. If maritime education remains inactive then there will be a big gap between this supply and demand.

Way forward:

The COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak has pressured us all to rethink how we work. In maritime education and training, it has led to distance learning and, as a result, the maritime training zone has taken a massive step ahead in embracing the digital revolution. Online training has greater flexibility. It often combines a combination of on-line tutorials, self-work, and one-to-one teaching, backed up by way of verification processes.

Even the U.S. Coast Guard - a regulator customary for strict adherence to procedure - has adapted its mariner credentialing policies to include far-flung options. The USCG's National Maritime Center introduced electronic examination alternatives for license renewal exams. In a self-proctored domestic test, the mariner completes the solution sheet for each module and returns it to NMC via email, permitting license renewals to continue even while exam centers are closed. Maritime nations are trying to enhance their maritime education with regulatory and technology development. The following are some keys that can be organized to open the lock of the pathway for the new maritime professional.

1. Preparatory courses for competency examination can be conducted via online classes. Department of shipping must monitor these online classes with great emphasis as chances of misuse of the system.

2. Oral examination for competency exam applicants can be conducted via online video calling with necessary safeguards. To enhance security, the necessary provision must be introduced against misconduct.
3. Ancillary courses (AFF, PSCRB, PMFA, etc.) can be conducted online. The practical session of this course can be suggested to be scheduled as a regular interval with a necessary arrangement having limited participants maintaining a physical distancing.
4. For a simulation-based training, including ancillary course like GMDSS, ECDIS, ROC, etc. new software-based training facilities can be introduced that can allow learners to operate the simulated equipment as a distance learner and can have the practical knowledge to develop competency. This course can also be conducted with a small group of people physically attending maintaining social distancing wearing suitable PPE.
5. Authorities must continue the process of issuing new CDC, COP, COC, SID, and the revalidation of it. As passport is a vital document for seafarers to travel. Shipping Department must consult with the appropriate authority to run their activities, especially for seafarers, recognizing them as a Keyworker.

Conclusion: Enhancement of maritime education is a very old challenge. Amidst this pandemic, this has become more challenging. Proper steps are required to develop the capacity to maintain the supply of new seafarers. It is important to facilitate their journey as a seafarer with the necessary adaptation of training options in line with the challenges now, and into the future. Along with this, the rights of the seafarer are also key, declaring the seafarer as a key worker. When the whole world is stopped because of the pandemic, seafarers are working 24/7 week in and week out to continue the global trade. They think of others and others should think of them.

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