

Important factors in selecting Maritime Education in Sri Lanka: Perception of seafarers' professions

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Abstract

Maritime Education and Training (MET) are presently faced with many challenges thus sustaining a pool of qualified and competent marine officers and engineers is a serious issue. Given the very complicated nature of the industry certain grades of seafarers are waiting to be deployed while some categories are invariably short staffed. MET institutes compete with other higher education institutes while improving the overall quality standards of global MET. Also, the demand for seafaring by younger generation is seen declined while the quality of limited applicants also deteriorated. As a result, leading MET institutes are pressurised to be flexible in selection criteria. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to identify the factors that influence students' choice of maritime education. The study has been conducted by obtaining empirical data from past and present seafarers and the findings may be helpful for MET institutes. It explored key factors pertaining to the seafarers' profession such as the professional identity and perception; social impact; the family concerns; and gender issues as influencing the choice of maritime education.

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Keywords

Maritime education; seafarers' profession; challenges for seafarers; higher education

Introduction

The seafarer profession is one of the most lucrative employment from the economic perspectives and this job is coupled with much of adventure too. However, it has become a serious problem in today's context that certain categories of seafaring cannot join ships after completion of primary training at college. This situation has deteriorated the demand for MET by the younger generation on one hand while the quality of applicants also declined. In other words, the MET institutes are compelled to be very flexible in selection criteria. As a result, MET institutes are keen to understand the factors that determine the students' choice of MET institute with special reference to seafaring officers.

The seafarer is a person engaged in sailing or working on a ship. Although called in different identities such as sailor, seaman, mariner, the seafarer is a person who navigates waterborne vessels or assists as a crewmember in their operation and maintenance of ships. Seafarers perform an admirable service to the society by helping move a variety of cargo from one port to the other irrespective whether, it is day or night; dry or rain; wind or calm. 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 (Baylon & Santos, 2011).

Shipping is not a direct demand, but a derived demand of the international trade (Edirisinghe, et al., 2016 b)). It is needless to mention that the carrier actions, and their reactions to various market conditions particularly the demand for shipping have direct impact to supply chains (Edirisinghe, et al., 2016 a). The paradigm of interconnectedness continues to hold command in today's global community. However, countries face many challenges in making it happen competitively given inherent geographic factors as well as resource constraints internally. (Edirisinghe, 2017). Because global supply chains are much varied and complex, the efficiency of logistics depends on government services, investments, and policies. Building infrastructure, developing a regulatory regime for transport services, and designing and implementing efficient customs clearance procedures are all areas where governments play an important role (Edirisinghe & Muller, 2013). Container shipping plays a significant role in global supply chain (Edirisinghe & Jin, 2018). Therefore, sailors are committed to serve the world irrespective of country, religion, or the nationality forever. In

this responsible endeavour, the sailor serves in different types of ships and complying with several regulations and facing dangerous risks such as maritime terrorism and rough weather. Due to globalization every industry started facing new and unexpected challenges that the shipping industry is not excluded. These recurring issues faced by the industry have made seafarers' lives at sea even difficult. Unfortunately, how those issues are being handled by the maritime authorities is quite debatable. The seafarers' life is so distinctive that it is usually impossible for non-seafarers take justifiable decisions on behalf of them. However, such administrative approaches, inter alia, other reasons have led to aggravation of problems which needs to be solved as soon as possible.

Singh, (2016) proposes 5 points out some of the main problems faced by the seafarers namely, Lenient Registries; Mindless Security Measures at Ports; Difficulty to Join Ship; Not Enough Time for Maintenance Work at Ports; and Lack of Proper Training. According to him one of the main issues faced by the shipping industry today is the emergency of registries such as Belize and Marshal Islands. Secondly, with mindless security the freedom of a seafarer to go ashore has been substantially curtailed. The other emerging and growing issue is that the fast loading and discharging rates of the cargo at ports. It has become increasingly difficult for a seafarer to fly out and join a ship in a distant port. This is because by the time the visa is processed, the ship is already loaded and ready to sail. The fourth problem he raises is that the very less time to the seafarers to carry out important maintenance work before the ship starts sailing again loading and discharging of the cargo. Nowadays port authorities insist ships to finish and move out of the ports as soon as possible. Finally, the matter of seafarer training appears to be the most crucial one out of all these facts. Education motivation can be misunderstood as the desire to gain a job and wealth or approval from authority figures in the form of impressive grades (Neto, 2015).

The objective of this paper is to identify factors that influence students' choice of maritime education in Sri Lanka. It generally evaluates fundamental aspects of the profession of a seagoing person who contribute immensely to national and international economy.

Literature Review

The shipping industry has been playing a vital role in sustaining world trade and the economy (Edirisinghe, 2018). Logistics makes a major impact on economic activity in any country (Edirisinghe, 2013). It is said that more than 90% percent of cargo in the world is transported by sea. Shipping is, in economic terms, a derived demand of international trade. International trade refers to the exchange of capital, goods, and services across international borders or territories (Edirisinghe, 2017). Shipping is a derived demand in economic terms (Edirisinghe, et al., 2015). The globalization has increased the need for interconnectedness for the respective countries to cross their borders (Edirisinghe, 2013). Logistics and supply chain cost reduction has become the focus for companies and after containerization the container logistics plays a dramatic role in global supply chain. Transportation is the web that links people, cultures, cities, towns and villages in to a one common network of relationships (Edirisinghe & Rodrigo, 2015). Efficient maritime transportation is heavily dependent on the smooth operation of land transportation (Edirisinghe & Zhihong, 2014).

Unfortunately, this indispensable profession, i.e. Seafaring, has not received its due recognition in the academic arena. The hard-earned Master Mariner qualification is not even considered equivalent to a basic degree in a university. Those who are familiar with the shipping industry is well aware that the Master Mariner or Ship Captain is a highly responsible and distinctive position. The eminent profession of sea fearers was in existence many thousands of years before all other professions that exists today evolved because of development of science, technology, manufacturing, trade, education, living conditions, social values, etc., Art of Maritime Navigation, trade and exploration dates to thousands of years, elaborating its significance. It is quite timely to assess whether the education and training in the maritime sector is faced with certain impediments due its distinctive nature. The education and training of seafarers is an important issue, in order to maintain and develop the level of knowledge and skills in the maritime sector as well as in the interest of maritime safety. Students are driven by social and esteem needs to achieve academically – when an individual has a sense of belonging their self-esteem rises and they become more motivated to perform well (Petty 2014 as cited in Neto, 2015).

The requirements for quality seafarers keep updating, because of the advancement of navigational technology, development of maritime administration systems and higher standards in maritime safety, security and marine environment protection (YU, 2009). Therefore, the approach of the paper has three key facets. Primarily is evaluate the sea fearer profession because any individual first considers what level she or he will end up in the carrier progression unless the aim is clearly to become an entrepreneur. Secondly, it considers the social recognition she or he gets after successful completion of the academic path and become a true practitioner. Lastly it briefly discusses the practical scenario the seafarer may face as far as the family life is concerned.

This study was conducted in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it is vital to assess the relevance of this subject in the context of Sri Lanka. Primarily, sixteen of the top 20 CSLs in the world operate regular services in the busiest commercial port in the country, Colombo, primarily because of the strategic geographic location of port of Colombo in Sri Lanka (Edirisinghe, Jin, & Wijeratne, 2018). As it was revealed by most of respondents the share of seafarers against the population is comparatively higher in Sri Lanka. And Shipping is the most favoured mode of international transportation in Sri Lanka (Edirisinghe, Zhihong, & Wijeratne, 2015). Sri Lanka has the unique advantage of connecting this region to the Western Indian Ocean (Colombage & Edirisinghe, 2018). Sri Lanka is enriched with multiple comparative advantages in the areas of naval, aviation and commercial logistics (Edirisinghe, 2017). Sri Lankas ge-positioning is very strategic. Being at the southern tip of the only land mass extending towards the Indian Ocean between the Arabian and Malayan peninsulas, (Edirisinghe & Gunaruwan, 2013). Sri Lanka (SL) is expected its economic growth achievement through five hubs concept –namely, Maritime, Aviation, Commercial, Knowledge and Energy Hubs (Edirisinghe & Jayathilake, 2014). The main sea route that connects the world from East to West running very close SL and places the nation in a very strategic position from a logistical context. (Edirisinghe & Ratnayake, 2015). Considering these vital factors, it is justifiable to select a sample from Sri Lanka because it contributes to transport 72% of world container capacity (Edirisinghe & Zhihong, 2016 a).

Seafarer profession is noble like any other profession but stands out as a challenging, rewarding and a profession essential to national and global

IMPORTANT FACTORS IN SELECTING MARITIME EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO SEAFARERS' PROFESSION

interests, safety and security of mankind. Seafarers coming from multi nationalities but there are few countries leading in the list. It is important to note the diversified participation of the profession worldwide as illustrated in the Table 1.

Table 1: Nationality of non-UK officers holding Certificates of Competency, 2015

2014 Rank	Country	Numbers ¹	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1	India	9,600	69.2	69.2
2	Pakistan	1,050	7.6	76.8
3	Bangladesh	790	5.7	82.5
4	Sri Lanka	570	4.1	86.6
5	Nigeria	390	2.8	89.4
6	Republic of Ireland	120	0.9	90.3
7	Republic of China	110	0.8	91.1
8	Brunei Darussalam	100	0.7	91.8
9	Ghana	90	0.7	92.5
10	Australia	90	0.6	93.1
	Rest of World	960	6.9	100.0
	Total	13,870	100.0	100.0

(Notes: Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10. Source: Maritime & Coastguard Agency data. Last updated: 27 January 2016)

According to Table 1 the country ranks at no 4 thus may give a good reflection about the profession. In view of the critical importance of this valuable profession, countries that have reached developed status today did recognize sea fearers to be in their national interest development mechanism and curriculum especially after the world wars. This early recognition has paid rich dividends today to all developed nations identified as maritime, industrialized and economic leaders of the world. Even land locked countries like Switzerland had the vision to develop a large merchant marine fleet which is helping in their sustainability today. Therefore, sea fearer profession and the related industry which is globally common must be absorbed to the National priorities in order to raise the standards to meet the global challenges within and outside the profession. Deep feelings of empathy and positive affiliation with

human beings are important components of self-actualisation (McNeill, 2015), where Maslow (1970) suggests individuals who have self-actualised have a greater capacity to identify with others and form stronger friendships (Neto, 2015).

According to Maslow, (1943) there are 5 sets of goals (basic needs) which are related to each other and are arranged in a hierarchy of pre-potency. When the most pre-potent goal is realized, the next higher need emerges. Maslow (1970) deliberates on the notion of the intertwining relationship between intrinsic factors and self-actualisation, as he suggests self-actualisation complements processes that have been internalised. Learning motivation inherently has a component of curiosity surrounding the purpose of learning; this means if an individual is engaged in academic activities they are engaged in higher needs of self-actualisation (Melnic & Botez, 2014). Esteem needs centre around achieving goals and establishing a career. In any education stream, one of the key influencers is the job opportunities and the status of the rank. A ship's crew can generally be divided into four main categories: the deck department, the engineering department, the steward's department, and other. Maritime Safety Administration of the People's Republic of China (China MSA) Chapter 2 Certificate of Competency Article 8 Capacities of seafarers: 1. masters; 2. deck department: chief mate, second officer, third officer, able seafarer deck, rating forming part of a navigational watch; The chief officer, second officer and third officer are called deck officers; and 3. engine department: chief engineer officer, second engineer officer, third engineer officer, fourth engineer officer, electro-technical officer, able seafarer engine, rating forming part of an engineering watch, electro-technical rating, of which the second engineer officer, third engineer officer and fourth engineer officer are called engineer officers; (China MSA, 2016). Fundamental cultural bias in favour of males. The widespread operation of patriarchal systems of social organisation; of customary early marriage; of the incidence of early pregnancy (in and out of marriage); of heavier domestic and subsistence duties of females (especially in rural areas); a generally lower regard for the value of female life, all combine though differentially in each case, to adversely affect the participation of girls and women in formal education. (Brock & Cammish, 1997)

Usually, it is common to note the MET is highly dominated by men. This is even worst in seafaring. Aggrey, (2000) stated that by looking at seafaring, it

could be that perhaps some men traditionally have gone to sea to get away from women or expect women to stay at home and depend on men. Since the education is usually aimed at a professional as the destiny the women may obviously considering the practical problems in the home front after marriage. Together with the fundamental socio-cultural bias in favour of males, the economic factor, especially in terms of grinding poverty and hunger, is probably the most influential in adversely affecting female participation in education, especially in rural areas (Brock & Cammish, 1997). Many professional women are faced with the conflict of how to deal with the problem of profession and family (Aggrey, 2000). Health condition and resilience on rough life at sea is yet another problem. Boys may get preferential feeding, while girls (who have a heavier domestic workload) are more likely to be undernourished. Even if they get to school, this adversely affects their performance and therefore retention rate. (Brock & Cammish, 1997)

Methodology

This research administered primary data collection through interviews using convenient sampling method. The study was carried out through interviews with seafarers that includes those who retired after long years' service, those currently at sea, those who graduated and waiting to be employed and those who are engaged in maritime education. Total thirty-two seafarers had been interviewed and discussions were unstructured as to obtain more refined data from their own experience. Senior officers in the regulatory body for seafarers in Sri Lanka namely the Merchant Shipping Secretariat which is the shipping administration arm of Sri Lanka that has the overall responsibility for overseeing maritime concerns. In this qualitative research secondary data were gathered from the publications of International Maritime Organization, Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Department of Examination, Board of Investment of Sri Lanka, and Sri Lanka Customs.

The interview data were transcribed and identify the themes for reflecting the factors influencing the students' choice of Maritime Education. The study is mostly describing such factors as the outcomes of the analysis.

Analysis and Discussions

The section explains the component derived from the insights obtained by thirty-five respondents. The authors focus on critical factors pertaining to this profession such as the professional identity and perception; social impact; the family concerns; and gender issues in the article. This study identified five major factors that influence students' choice of maritime education in Sri Lanka based on the perception of seafarers' professionals in Sri Lanka. These factors consist Challenges in seafaring, impact of social belonging, self-actualization, being a family man, and the gender issue.

Challenges in Seafaring

A senior marine engineer stated that the actual contribution and the sacrifices made by a seafarer is not properly communicated to the society in general. The sea fearer profession is a physically; mentally and socially challenging profession that requires high standards of loyalty, self-discipline, moral courage, initiative, integrity, character, conduct, commitment and accountability. Absence of above essentials at sea will risk lives, colossal wealth, material, money, environment, national economy and global trade. Considering these challenges most of students and their parents perceive that seafaring is not the best choice for their tertiary education. However, some people who chose the sea may like the challenge and the adventure behind the work. It is different from any kind of job on the land. Therefore, mitigating the social distractions and other challenges faced by sea fearers with sound training, awareness, education, compensatory incentives and most importantly recognition and acknowledgement at all levels of social fabric, education and national curriculum is of paramount importance.

The social belonging

This phenomenon refers to the living or preferring to live as part of a community or colony rather than alone. In other words, relating to the way in which people in groups behaves and interacts. Unfortunately, the seafarer must sacrifice this factor in order to sustain in the job. This is another factor that negatively impact students choose seafaring education. A cadet on a maritime school aspires to become a good seafarer someday. Deep feelings of empathy and positive affiliation with human beings are important components of self-actualisation, where Maslow (1970) suggests individuals who have self-actualised have a greater capacity to identify with others and form stronger friendships (Neto, 2015). During the interviews a Chief Executive of a company (ex. seafarer) that this job provides greater remuneration at sea. However, it

rarely compensates what they sacrifice in life. The age you become a senior officer in a ship is a critical juncture in the life as well. You must be away from the family as your kids have to attend college. The seafarer, irrespective he is an ordinary seaman or a Captain, compelled to keep his children at a time they want him most desperately. They do their job in a more difficult environment as they seldom see the land but see the same person every day that tend to develop a psychological agony after some time. They are compelled to work with different types of people in different countries, and usually under pressure. Therefore, in most cases the need of money for own interest or for the wellbeing of the family act as the driving force of being in the sea. Usually, working onboard the ship for more than 6 months or even up to 1 year after obtaining the cadet training at college gives him a chance to upgrade his profession and for possible promotion as an officer. However, after a few years of working onboard the ship some cadets suddenly decide to stop and start to work on land. Unless, they find a satisfactory alternative that their knowledge and experience pay enough compensation, such individuals regret the hard-earned education and training. Unfortunately, is too late for them to reverse their lives. Humanism rests on the principles of human relatedness, the inherent good nature of humans, and the pursuit of self-actualisation (Neto, 2015). Homesickness is worse than seasickness. Another respondent mentioned in the interview that some seafarers have quitted from the sea due to various social and work-related reasons that lead them to leave the offshore job. They were either homesick or their family members do not want them to work onboard anymore. Some people mentioned that they quitted the seafarers' job because they didn't want their children to grow up without the proper upbringing of their father.

Some of the seafarers that were interviewed think that the work routine on board is not so difficult but the main reason for the conflict is something pertained to the psychological conditions that possibly affect their work and socializing with the persons onboard. Some of them had very bad experiences onboard their previous ship. From the positive side, some of them were managed to find an alternative job in land with almost the same salary of his job on the ship or find jobs related to shipping and maritime industry. The common factor that keeps many people away from the seafaring is the fatherhood. According to many seafarers the need for being with children may supersede the money factor. They simply did not want to miss the experience of childhood because it cannot be brought back once they are grownups. One sailor said that he quitted as he wanted to be with them when they had their first teeth, when

they began to lose their baby teeth, to bring them to school every day, when they began graduating from Elementary, High School and then College. Intrinsic and extrinsic factors are most effective when accompanied by a collective goal, as opposed to being individually focused (Neto, 2015). The key factor that need to be focus here is that whether the MET candidate would like to sacrifice the “belonging” stage in order to reach the “esteem” stage because the age between 20-35 years is more attracted towards love, affection and being part of the “group”. This “group” may be hardly found at sea. Therefore, reaching the esteem at the expense of belonging is a critical decision that necessarily to be taken at the age of early twenties.

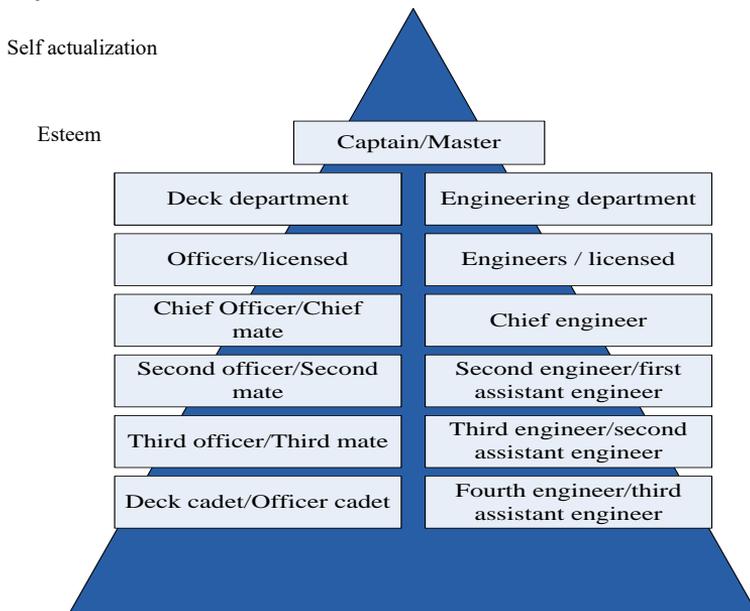
A retired seafarer stated that the loneliness is a negative impact on attracting students for maritime sector however with the modern-day audio-visual communicating systems the effect has been negated to a certain extent. He further stated that the actual contribution and the sacrifices made by a seafarer is not properly communicated to the society. Another ship captain who is presently working as a lecturer in maritime training mentioned that the impact of Isolation is generally more serious on multinational crew than on a ship manned by a single nationality. Traditionally, seafarers have various socialising mechanisms to overcome this loneliness. However, on a paradoxical note a senior captain who still sail occasionally mentioned that during the past decade or so onboard socializing and welfare is known to have drastically reduced, decayed as most of ships saloons, smoke room, bars and other common areas are now more or less empty. Very much less or zero evening gatherings depending on company’s and or ship’s lately developed culture. One young ship Captain said that the seafarers have various options to overcome the isolation from the society in today’s context. However, the seafarers’ job is still perceived isolated by the general society due to lack of recognition of its importance and reality of the employment process by the government. A retired marine engineer while agreeing the impact of being isolated on a ship stated that with the modern-day audio-visual communicating systems the effect has been negated to a certain extent.

Self-actualization

Seafarers hold a variety of professions and ranks. Students and parents who wish to be self-actualized in a specific time frame in a clear-cut progression path will positively attracted to the maritime education. Almost all seafarers that were interviewed have had the determination of reaching the topmost rank with

least time frame and that has been the primary influencer for them to follow maritime education as a cadet officer or marine engineer. Neto, (2015) suggests a correlation between educational motivation and self-actualization. Kim and Kim (2015) suggest the most academically motivating factors are intrinsic factors associated with self-actualisation, suggesting that instant gratification is crucial to the learning process. A close view of the progression path of a student reaching the level of captain is intrinsic and crystal clear. In many other managements or technical employments, the progression path usually tends to face variations and limitations, this factor is very much evident in many Asian countries in particular. However, given the limited number of employees and well established highly disciplined nature that is inculcated in the standard progression path of seafaring officers the students can visualize the attainment of goal. Given the cognitive mental predisposition of prospective students about the social recognition and incomparable financial rewards this carrier may provide the authors suggest an overlap of the carrier progression and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This combination is illustrated Figure 1. This is one of the key outcomes of the analysis of this study.

Figure 1: The overlap of the seafarers' carrier progression and Maslow's hierarchy of needs



Source: Authors ©

It was made to understand that despite the study time a person spends from a basic cadet trainee to the level of competent ship Captain there is no formal

academic recognition. Award of a suitable global and Nationally recognized non-sea fearer postgraduate professional qualification in recognition of the credit values of the programs should be investigated. A senior captain highly appraised this proposal and stated that it is a very good opportunity for seafarers to expose and to find a land base job. Another seafarer mentioned that; it will contribute largely towards opening more opportunities. Seafarers have traditionally ventured into many jobs ashore after their sailing careers have lapsed. Another young ship Captain stressed that having an added qualification will make the seafarer the preferred one for the shore job. and will be beneficial without doubt or second thoughts, an officer issued with a Certificate of Competence (CoC)in the form of a Degree (and therefore which may include certain other areas of study as well) is sure to have a positive impact and by making them recognized for various other vocational choices. A former Captain presently in the maritime education field said that most seafarers like to earn good money save and then retire from active sea life and enjoy their time with the family. For this a recognized qualification on land which will portrait the abilities and the highly diverse experience and expertise of a seafarer should be afforded. In the past many Master Mariners used to follow a degree in Maritime Law, to get an attractive combination to come ashore. a sea fearer is usually considered a much superior all-round individual as it is a rare chance only a brave individual could secure in the life. Therefore, it is fundamental that such person claims a self-actualization through this distinctive profession. Seafaring exposes individuals to a plethora of situations which results in gaining experience in multiple areas a senior ship Captain said. A successful seafarer has never failed in life as seafaring itself being a unique qualification. They become capable of doing almost everything by themselves and therefore to have developed strong self-confidence according to a retired ship Captain. According to another your ship Captain, a seafarer is exposed control to physical and mental stress, and he puts up with it. In the different fields of operations on board the seafarer will gain experience and become a specialist in his or her own field. This is the same case on land but the levels of endurance in most aspects are far superior to that of most human beings operating on land, he added.

An indispensable Profession

More than ninety percent of goods are being transported through seas, rivers and therefore ship's hence well-trained and tested professional seafarers is a necessity. Cargo transportation is highly sensitive with respect to the timely delivery of the goods being shipped (Edirisinghe, et al., 2019a). on the other

hand, sea transportation is considered most economical mode in international trade. If transport and logistics costs are brought down, the price of goods and services are expected to reduce (Edirisinghe, et al., 2019). Logistics cost plays a key role in attracting foreign investments to a country as well (Edirisinghe, 2019). Therefore, the seafarers' job is indispensable by all means. These pros & cons of this profession, therefore, should be made aware to the public highlighting the importance and responsibilities and professionalism carried in seafarers. One your ship captain stated that shipowners now go for the low paying (usually associated with cheap quality as well) seafarers instead of high-priced seafarers from developed countries. However, this could challenge when remote, semi-auto and autonomous ships are phased-in in the future. Another senior marine chief engineer stated that Most seafarers are jacks of all trades. It may be Deck, Engine and Catering departments that come in to play most of the time. On modern ships Electrical and Electronic expertise are very important. It is a unique feature that is portrayed by seafarers, that a Deck or Engine member can cook. Cooks and stewards can do some electrical work and repair his own motor bike or some broken piece of machinery at home, some engineers make their hobby boating, sailing and cruising and they do their own navigation. Many seafarers have an excellent level of general knowledge and an idea of the rest of the world having physically been and seen places which others have not and only dreamt of. Starting from a very young age it is a profession that makes men out of boys and make a set of human beings very useful to the world who in addition to running ships are well worst with energy saving, environment protection and even areas such as renewable power and energy harnessing methods. Therefore, this is a profession that should be given the place and priority it deserves and also the degree of recognition it deserves.

The family man

Being away from the family is one of the key determinants. It was noted in interviews that one of the seafarers who have been with the family for 20 years since he stopped seafaring mentioned that he wanted to go back to seafaring and earn the money that he missed at the expense of being a family man. He was happy to look back to see that his family has matured and truly bonded together as one family as he managed to take the right decision at right time. According to him the children and wife has no objection of his revived career. This was possible as the person had his second mate's License. Therefore, the seafarer carrier does not mean that the employee has no family life. This is another reason for parents not encourage their children for maritime education. It is

always possible to balance the job and the family with proper planning and good understanding with the family. However, many seafarers have declined to be at sea due to many other reasons. Some people were given a chance to work in a shipping company and after some negative feeling at sea the now opportunity would have encouraged them to work ashore. Some seafarers had a problem with their wife that leads to divorce and could not handle the problem, which leads to the decision of stopping his profession as a seafarer. There were some isolated cases that a member of their family died while they are still onboarding the ship, and this became a very bad experience that they can never erase from their minds.

A young Captain who presently doing a shore job mentioned that leaving the family for a reasonable period of time is a concern as the family life is becoming more complicated within the young generation. On contrary, a senior seafarer stated that modern lifestyle maybe a factor in some instances where students may perceive a carrier in sailing as restrictive while others may perceive it as an opportunity to challenge oneself while being able to 'see the world' Another retired Captain said that it was even before the modern era leaving the family for a long period had been a concern, but the attraction was the better wages and the respect and recognition of the profession. A senior marine engineer presently engaged in marine training stated that the family of a seafarer should be properly educated on the pros and cons of any employment thus distinctive characteristics of a seafarer's job has no exception. the outcome of the sacrifice usually brings the advantages financially and otherwise and supersedes all its negative factors. A senior Captain who currently engage in maritime education mentioned that the majority of today's fresh applicants seeking training and employment aboard ship tend to lack in modern lifestyles behaviour, (not all) besides the existence of strongly built up protection by parents, and loved ones namely over the question of their children soon after leaving school, whether or not the children get exposed to undesired habits such as drugs in the first place. Parents are on close watch from behind, and such children may also become "Mama's boys" and for the slightest illness such as a cold/cough the parents when become aware tend get much disturbed.

The gender issues

Seafaring is a predominant "men job" The fact that keeps women away from

MET is the female perception about the seafarers' life. Accordingly, one common problem facing women at sea is that of sexual harassment, which makes some women live in isolation on board and some drop out of their career. More than 80% of women made mention of it in some form (Aggrey, 2000). The own experience with many those who were contacted in the study was that many attempts by the MET institutes were miserably failed in Sri Lanka. It is not difficult to understand that the parents usually object even if their daughters are interested joining the sea given the general perception in the society. Another Captain who is involved in the maritime training said that majority of female seafarer dropout on the way as the Asian culture also does not help this industry. One retired Captions mentioned that only a very small number of lady seafarers existed, existing or currently being trained. The current culture and attitudes in Sri Lanka are such that it hardly approves a young woman for a seafaring profession. A young seafarer agreed that the gender matter comes in to play specially in the Indian subcontinent as they are still fairly "primitive" in the way of thinking when it comes to venturing out and have to face heavy work load and mainly in an atmosphere where they have to survive and work in equal terms with males. Even in other parts of the world this problem does exist but at varying degrees. A very senior marine chief engineer stated that the gender matter does come in to play specially in the Indian subcontinent as they are still fairly " primitive " in the way of thinking when it comes to venturing out and have to face heavy work and mainly in an atmosphere where they have to survive and work with males. Even in other parts of the world this problem does exist but at varying degrees. A senior Captain stated that gender is an issue in the Asian context, but he sees it is better than a few years back but still there are no substantial increase. Also, most female seafarers work in cruise ships or ferries and in the global context is only about 2%. As for joining as Cadets there still is a social concern that is not conducive for higher numbers of females to join in the Asian context.

Conclusions

Maritime is the most economical transport mode for cargo transportation; and shipping cannot be improved without efficient and effective sea farers. Sri Lanka has clearly identified the importance of maritime industry under diverse contexts. For example, the successive governments have been focusing on the maritime hub concept given the geographic location advantages. Addressing

such significance and the contextual need the study examine the key factors influencing the students' choice of maritime education in Sri Lanka. The study revealed that the professional status is one of the most influential factors that shows a positive relationship to attract the candidates, however there are reasons due to social impact of being isolated. This finding is somewhat paradoxical as the society is highly connected through virtual means today. The demanding family concerns due to complexity in modern lifestyle was another negative factor. The gender issue has continued to be playing a negative role despite females are becoming more independent in the modern world. MET institutes may implement new enrolment strategies to create a balance between supply and demand. Sri Lanka is not only strategically positioned proximity to the East-West main sea route, but it is very close to the economic giants, India. Given the ability to handle very large ships in the port of Colombo because of deeper draught. Sri Lanka is an island thus it is a sea friendly nation. All these external factors have a great influence in shipping and maritime sector thus seafaring. If the barriers caused by the factors pertaining to professional, social, family pressure and gender biasness could be systematically eased the seafarers' profession will receive its due recognition. It is admired that the Department of Education in Sri Lanka incorporated twenty school periods of logistics in the school curriculum. This would help to provide social awareness about transport modes that the logistics is dependent on.

The findings may be useful to design a comprehensive research about the same question using quantitative data analysis to obtain further insight. The insights from the students that would be taken by the future scholars will extend the findings from the current study. Award of a suitable global and Nationally recognized non-sea fearer postgraduate professional qualification as an exit qualification for sea fearers could dispel all misgiving "as sea fearer" after many years of service at sea. This unique experience would make a sea fearer a much superior all-round individual who has been exposed to many challenges in an exclusive global environment. This is a stark contrast to other professions where exposure and knowledge is very limited. Sea fearers are indispensable. Hence this profession must be hailed, nourished, improved and popularized.

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