

Improving International Cooperation for Maritime Education and Training in Developing Countries with Vietnam as a Case

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Abstract International cooperation for maritime education and training is a very important issue in order to improve the quality of maritime education programs in developing countries. As maritime education and training institutions gradually recognize the profound impact the forces of globalization has made on maritime industries, they have taken measures to improve their education programs by collaborating with higher quality maritime education and training institutions in the developed countries. This is the way to not only further and develop cross-cultural understanding and economic interdependence, but also to provide a better education program for students primarily in the developing countries but indeed also to students in the developed countries. The obstacles to these programs are finance limitations, inadequate English skills of students, lecturers and administrators alike. However, perhaps the most difficult obstacle is the conservative mindset of some educators as well as the lack of support from the government in the developing countries. This paper discusses a number of issues to improve the international cooperation for maritime education which is applicable in Vietnam as an example for other developing countries in Asia and the partners in the developed countries.

Keyword: *Maritime Education, international cooperation for MET, education program*

1. Introduction

In this era of globalization, international cooperation for maritime education and training (MET) institutions is a definite trend and an absolute must. As the economic globalization advances, international cooperation in MET brings many challenges but also advantages to collaborating MET institutions. Similar to globalization, international cooperation in MET will improve the quality of education and enhance the transference of professional skills between nations, as the IAMU Presidents'/Rectors' Forum issued "The Dalian Statement" (2006) which asserted, in part, that "globalization has been progressing rapidly in the international shipping arena" and therefore "passing on maritime skills and knowledge to the following generations needs to be achieved on a global scale." Presently, maritime universities have been attuned to the social, cultural, and political forces of globalization, and organizations such as IAMU work to disseminate ideas within a global arena ^[4].

In developing countries, as maritime education and training institutions gradually recognize the profound impact the forces of globalization has made on maritime industries, they have taken measures to improve their education programs by collaborating with maritime education and training institutions in the developed countries where quality is allegedly higher. This is the way to not only further and develop cross-cultural understanding and economic interdependence, but also to provide a better education program for students primarily in the developing countries but indeed also to students in the developed countries. The two main obstacles to these programs are finance limitations and inadequate English skills of students, lecturers and administrators alike. However, perhaps the two most difficult obstacles to overcome are the conservative mindset of some educators and administrators as well as the lack of support from the government in the developing countries.

This paper discusses a number of issues to improve international cooperation in maritime education with Vietnam as an example of a developing country in Asia with partners in developed countries.

2. Advantages of international cooperation for MET institutions

Globalization is a fact, and a forceful fact at that. Internationalization of an institution and a curriculum does not come by itself. It is the result of deliberate decisions made at institutional and government levels in both developed and developing countries. Indeed difficult decisions but necessary decisions for the institutions that want to stay ahead in the tough and very competitive market that maritime education and training has become.

However, there are many ways to establish an international cooperation for maritime education and training between two MET institutions in two nations in which one of them belongs to a developing country. It might be simply implementing a student/researcher/lecturer/administrator exchange program, or sending students/lecturers/researchers and administrators to MET institutions in developed countries to job-shadow or study on a scholarship program, or collaborate in an education and training sandwich program, or the MET institution in the developing country may invite lecturers/researchers from their partner in the developed country to their institution to give lectures for domestic students or lecturers, etc. Which kind of cooperation would bring more benefit to both institutions depends on each individual institution. Naturally, both institutions will gain advantages or benefit themselves. For example, the exchange student program helps students in both institutions to have the opportunity of studying abroad at different institutions which improve their knowledge of the world which is so important in an ever more global community. Experiencing face-to-face cross-cultural communication will bring them experience to work with other cultures since the maritime field is indeed a global field of work. If they can manage that as students, their future positions - as professionals in the maritime industry - will be vastly improved.

The international collaboration in research allows for systematic scientific knowledge sharing at regional and international levels and constitutes a key instrument for institutional capacity development. Partnerships of long standing can engender a cooperative mindset that is based on the partners' strengths and is beneficial for both sides from a cultural and scientific standpoint. Such partnerships are also an efficient instrument for the promotion of brain circulation. Another key factor in this regard is fostering cooperation between stakeholders in the scientific and business communities, particularly when it comes to public-private partnerships and supporting the establishment of technology and business centres for innovation and technological and/or economic development.

The collaboration in under-graduate programs may also lead to collaboration in research or higher education programs. This pursues not only development policy goals, but also serves to further the interests of the donor country. A comparison of various international evaluations has shown that the foreign policy establishments of donor countries tend to regard programs for higher education and research as a means to further national interests and promote good international relations. Moreover, donor ministries of education and research mainly tend to view such programs as a way to promote the internationalization of domestic institutions. Universities and research institutions profit from the internationalization of their activities. And above all, development cooperation aims to ensure that the aid granted to partner countries is spent efficiently to strengthen human resource and institutional capacities in these countries. The difficulty of striking a healthy balance between the various interests involved often translates into programs whose design is insufficiently results-oriented^[1]. The cooperating programs also bring chances to researchers in two institutions to exchange their knowledge and collaborate in research work, which is helpful for both institutions.

2.1 Perspectives from MET institutions in developing countries

First of all, by collaborating with other higher quality MET institution in developed countries, MET institutions in developing countries can provide students a higher quality education at a cheaper price than studying abroad. Most collaboration programs are conducted in English, which means that students must master the English language very well which will be very helpful for them in order to get a good job after their graduation. The collaborating MET institutions, therefore, become more attractive and desirable in the students' eyes. Participating in a collaboration program also brings more chances for students who wish to enroll in higher education programs in developed countries after graduation.

Secondly, through the collaboration, MET institutions in developing countries can help their lecturers enhance their motivation, improve their knowledge and educating and teaching skills. The process of transferring knowledge will be happen between two institutions more or less as the programs evolve over time.

Lastly, MET institutions in developing countries may learn from the administration model of their partners in developed countries in order to plan, perform, monitor and audit a school year more effectively.

2.2 Perspectives from MET institutions in developed countries

Beside exchanging knowledge or collaborating research work, researchers or lecturers in developed countries may enjoy visiting their partner institutions in order to collect data and materials for their research, or simply to expand their maritime research network and get a good experience working in a developing country. Lecturers, researchers and administrators also gain a good insight into the needs of the developing countries and opens up for ways in which the expensive MET institutions in the developed world can profit through cooperating with MET institutions in low cost developing countries where the bulk of seafarers are trained and educated today.

3. Challenges in international cooperation for MET institutions in developing countries with Vietnam as a case

3.1 Cost

One of the most difficult issues in the cooperation is the finance limitation of MET institutions in developing countries. With very low budgets from the government and through tuition as well as low incomes on the part of students and lecturers alike, it is hard for them to send students and lecturers to a developed country to study or teach even in a short term exchange program. Usually students and lecturers should obtain scholarships from a supporting organization or from their partner institutions. Vice-versa, when lecturers/students from developed countries visit their partners in developing countries in order to give lectures, they usually complain about poorly maintained facilities, shortages of instructional materials and low living standards. In Vietnam, with a collaboration program of bachelor degree in which professors and lecturers from MET institutions in developed countries in Europe or the US coming to Vietnam to give lectures, students usually find it hard to bear the tuition fee, except when the partner has a priority program for exchange students like a supporting finance program or a scholarship program. Table 1 shows the example of the difference in fee between a domestic bachelor/master program and that of a similar collaboration program carried out in Vietnam.

Professionals	Degree	Domestic Institution	Partner Institution	Domestic program		Collaboration program	
				Duration	Fee	Duration	Fee
Business Management	Bachelor	Hochiminh City University of Transport, Vietnam	University of Sunderland, UK	4 years	US\$1200/course	4 years (3 years in Vietnam, 1 year in UK)	US\$30,000/course
Logistics and Finance	Master	Vietnam Maritime University	University of Nantes	2 years	US\$1200/course	2.5 years (in Vietnam)	EUR 14,000/course

Source: Author collected data from different collaboration programs in Vietnam

Table 1. Difference in fee between a domestic bachelor/master degree program and that of a similar degree of collaboration program carried out in Vietnam

3.2 Academic calendar

Different academic calendars in two collaborating MET institutions may create problems in curriculum schedule and enrollment management for the exchange students or exchange lecturers’ program. For example, most U.S. maritime universities run on a two-semester academic calendar – and sometimes they

run by quarters - from September to December and January to April; The Australia Maritime College's semesters run from February to June and July to November; but in Vietnam the semesters run from August to December and from January to June. If there is an exchange student who studies abroad for one semester, he/she may get conflicting schedules between the two institutions. Missing days or weeks of coursework (especially if it falls at the end of a term) has wave-like detrimental repercussions: missing course work and/or exams can lead to lack of course credit or certification, which in turn may delay graduation. Foreign students wishing to register for courses late or withdraw early at their host institution also place burdens on individual faculty who may not be able to accommodate such flexibility in their curriculum plans. And obviously, many courses are designed for incremental skill-set acquisition with final exams used as assessment tools: to miss the beginning or end – especially if the foreign student must also grapple with a new language and new culture – makes mastery of a given subject nearly impossible^[3].

3.3 English skills of students, lecturers and administration staff

Poor English skills is one of the most frequent challenges in the collaboration program seen in the developing country, like when the students have enough financial ability but their English skills are not good enough in order to study in the program. The cooperation between lecturers and administration staff may also run into troubles because of poor English skills, so it may take a long time to discuss every tiny issue for the collaboration. Eventually also the support staff need to improve their English skills if the university is to receive foreign students, lecturers and researchers for more than just a short visit.

Faculties	Navigation and Ship Engine	Maritime Transport Economics	Ship Electricity – Maritime Infrastructure	Ship Building - Information technology
Total students	831	682	629	695
Maximum TOEIC Score	500/990	800/990	805/990	805/990
Average TOEIC score	250-300	300-350	280-320	250-300

Source: Khiem, N.K (2009) "Evaluating and Establishing a English Evaluating system for students in Vietnam Maritime University", *Journal of Maritime Science-Technology (in Vietnamese)*^[4]

Table 2. Average English level of fresh year students in Vietnam Maritime University (VIMARU) based on TOEIC test taken in September 2009

3.4 Governmental procedures in application for educating collaboration

When setting up an international collaboration agreement between two MET institutions in two countries, even if it is a rather simple program such as an exchange program for students or lecturers, the two institutions can make decisions about that and design and implement the program themselves. However, it is not easy to go through all procedures like Visa application for students in developing countries. For example, in case of Vietnam, it may take about 6 months or more to process the Visa application and go through all other procedures in order to go to the US for an exchange student or an exchange researcher. If two institutions collaborate in a Bachelor program or Master program, the procedure is even more complicated. In Vietnam, the MET institution should submit the application to the Ministry to which they belong and the Ministry of Education and Training. It takes minimum one year for the Ministries to go through the content of the program and give the decision to allow the course to be opened or not. The MET institution should prove not only that the program has a good and adaptable content, but also the good finance program for students and good plan for running the schedule as well as a good program in order to internationalize the domestic institution.

3.5 Others challenges

1/. Two quality levels of curricula in collaborating MET institutions

In MET institutions in developing countries, the problems incurred would be those of the lack of equipment, outdated teaching methods, unmotivated students, and so on. Students might find that the academic success is not an important issue in order to contribute meaningfully to their country's social and economic advancement. However, in case the collaboration program has been conducted here, the curricula might not be oriented toward local situations and there might be little connection only between the academic environment and the working world.

2/. Program evaluation

Even though many collaboration programs have been successful in many approaches, it is still hard to evaluate the academic result of each program by both MET institutions. Some collaboration programs did not fit to domestic market orientation after all.

3/. Conservative mindset of some domestic educators

This is one of the most difficult obstacles for many collaboration programs. Some domestic educators assume that it is not necessary to set up any collaboration agreements because the foreign educating programs may – in their eyes - not be all that much better and indeed they have no way to meet the domestic market orientation. They believe that only domestic education programs may train and provide the suitable human resource for the local labor market. This conservative mindset of some educators may exist in any MET institution or even in governmental system and will no doubt create a huge dilemma for any collaboration program, not only in the maritime education and training field. Indeed the same mindset can be found in MET institutions in developed countries where some lecturers and administrators may believe that their programs are the best and that there is nothing to be learned by cooperating internationally.

4. Issues to improve international cooperation for MET in developing countries

4.1 Institutional issues

The first issue, that both MET institutions should pay attention to, is setting up the right program for the collaboration. In the education field, this program can be in any field of the maritime sector such as training seafarers or educating for off-shore jobs. However, the collaboration program should satisfy some of the issues below:

1/. Demand orientation and ownership: The programs should be clearly linked to the needs of the target partner, means government or institutions, and cooperation should be based on clearly and jointly defined partnership principles.

2/. Enable partner country organizations to define their needs according to their strategies and capacities, as well as local situations: Ownership can be strengthened by transferring to the partner country or institution the responsibility of identifying and explaining their demand, and of planning, defining and implementing their programs and projects on their own. Program structures and regulatory frameworks should be designed along these lines.

3/. Curriculum development: Syllabuses should focus on skills development, based on local needs, and designed accordingly and integrate innovative content and methods;

4/. Harmonization and complementarities: The programs should be coordinated at the national and international levels according to the requirements of the donor organizations. In order to ensure that the MET institutions in the developed countries can play an active role in the collaboration, domestic strategies and programs should encourage and promote their participation. This in turn necessitates reciprocal harmonization of the policies of the relevant ministries in the partner countries.

The second issue is in relation to the need for the collaboration program to implement and maintain high quality standards with regard to teaching and learning methods, as well as research. Therefore relevant

personnel in both MET institutions should receive training like the integrated training as well as English language skills for all staff (academic, technical and administrative) to improve institutional capacity development.

As for the exchange student/researcher/administrator programs, it should be mandatory to put in place a system for quality assurance and quality enhancement including English skills enhancement. The following measures will eventually improve educational quality in partner countries like support via consulting, information sharing, training, reforming, planning and conceptualization of education, science and research systems, or promoting quality management and governance.

As for the scholarship programs scholarship programs alone cannot improve the quality and efficiency of educational and research institutions but they allow academic personnel to be trained in a higher MET institution in order to participate more efficiently in the collaboration. The benefits and relevance of scholarship programs for development policy overall and their institutional impact in particular can be enhanced if the following criteria are met:

- 1/. Training needs are set out in the strategic development plans of the institutions concerned;
- 2/. The benefits of a training course have a visible impact beyond the individuals concerned;
- 3/. Educational and training measures are realized as sandwich or joint degree programs;
- 4/. Educational and training measures produce a substantial and convincing multiplier effect;
- 5/. Subject-specific follow-up activities are offered on the basis of scheduled tracer studies.

The last issue is in relation to an evaluating system, which both MET institutions should set up in order to evaluate the measures and targets of the collaborated program. If the program does not meet the requirements, both MET institutions should discuss necessary methods either to improve the quality of the program or to terminate the program.

4.2 Governmental issues

The support from government is always a dominant factor for any international collaboration to succeed. If the government has a strategy to improve the maritime sector nationally and internationally, the demand for high quality human resources will become apparent in any cooperation with the aim of improving the education quality. This will then eventually create favorable circumstances for the collaboration in maritime education and training too.

In any collaboration, the finance issue is always the most important one for both MET institutions to consider before entering a collaboration agreement in maritime education and training. Different from many other fields, the maritime field requires a huge investment in facilities for education and training. Normally the MET institutions in developing countries depend on the government budget or aided funding projects from developed countries in order to invest in training facilities. Therefore the support of the government is a major impact to the quality of maritime education and training program.

Another governmental issue concerns to the administrative procedures when setting up an education collaboration program for undergraduate or graduate/post graduate students in a developing country. The longer time and the more complicated the procedures are, the less chances the program has of getting off the ground. Consequently, if the program meets the requirements of quality, self-finance issues and domestic market orientation, the government should permit it to be applied into the domestic MET institution as soon as possible.

The last issue involves to the human resource. The ministry in charge of the MET institutions in developing countries may apply a 'release- system' which has measures and instruments to move 'backward' educators and administrators (ie those with a conservative mindset) into other and more suitable positions in order to improve the education system institutionally, nationally and internationally by opening up the thus vacant positions to more qualified persons.

5. Conclusions

Improving international cooperation in maritime education and training is a very important issue in order to improve the quality of maritime education programs in developing countries. Facing obstacles like finance limitations, inadequate English skills of students, lecturers and administrators alike, lack of support from the government or a conservative mindset of some educators and administrators, international cooperation in maritime education and training is obviously an uphill –but necessary and inevitable - battle for any MET institution in developing and developed countries alike. This paper discusses all obstacles which a developing country may face with Vietnam as an example and introduces a number of institutional and governmental issues in order to proceed successfully with a collaboration program between two MET institutions in two countries bearing in mind that globalization will be there and evolving rapidly no matter what we do in MET. Internationalization of a MET institution on the other hand requires deliberate and determined – and difficult – decisions and actions.

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