Internationalization to Improve Maritime Education and Training in Vietnam

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Abstract Quality of maritime manpower has become increasingly important especially when this industry moves towards higher standards of safety, environmental impact and sustainability. Educating and training qualified manpower with appropriate level of competence for international standards is the key task for all maritime institutions. In Vietnam, the Resolution 09-NQ/TW by the National Assembly on the Ocean strategy for Vietnam towards 2020 and the Prime Minister decision on Vietnam’s sea economy development plan towards 2020 highlighted that Vietnam would make all its efforts to rise the sea economic contribution to Vietnam’s gross domestic product (GDP) up to 55%-60%. In addressing this development, improving the quality of maritime education and training is very important. However, Vietnam is currently in the shortage of seafarers (especially ship officers), both in quantity and quality. Although maritime industry is very internationalised and all MET institutions have internationalized programs with global learning outcomes regulated in the STCW Convention, not many Vietnamese seafarers were ranked qualified due to their weaknesses in English competency, skills and safety awareness. Only a small number is accepted by the international market. Why does the bespoken problem happen though Vietnam has already got a clear national strategy on sea economic development and Vietnamese maritime institutions have been delivering standard MET programs developed by IMO? Studies showed that internationalisation can improve quality of education. Internationalisation helps higher education institutions to provide graduates with inter-cultural and international skills, English competency, and confidence to compete in the global labour market. The aim of this paper is to discuss the current maritime manpower in Vietnam and explores how internationalization can help Vietnamese maritime institutions improve quality of MET.

Key words: internationalization, maritime, education, seafarers, manpower.

1. Introduction

Manpower is always the most important factor of all industries. This factor has become even more important in maritime when this industry aims at higher standards of safety, environment impact and sustainability. It is the maritime education and training institutions (METIs) responsibility to educate qualified human resource for maritime industry.

In dealing with the globalisation, internationalization becomes an inevitable trend of higher education institutions (HEIs) including METIs. Studies showed that internationalisation can improve quality of education [4, 7, 11, 17]. Internationalisation helps HEIs to provide graduates with inter-cultural and international skills, English competency, and confidence to compete in the global labour market.

In Vietnam, in addressing the Government’s Ocean strategy and Vietnam’s sea economy development plan towards 2020, the issue of how to improve the quality of maritime education and training is raised in any debate on maritime improvement [24]. The membership of Vietnam in the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement (TPP) and in the Association of South East Asian Nations Economic Community (AEC) creates both benefits and challenges for Vietnamese HEIs [18]. Although maritime industry is internationalised in addition to the required global learning outcomes for every maritime graduate, Vietnamese METIs are still struggling on how to improve the MET quality and how to enhance students’ capacity to work on board international ships.
2. Maritime education and training in Vietnam

2.1. Current maritime manpower in Vietnam

Maritime manpower in Vietnam is in shortage of both quantity and quality. Among 52.7 million Vietnamese people in working age, only about 0.085% is seafarers [10]. This proportion is very small compared to targeted GDP’s contribution of up to 55%-60% from maritime industry. Also, this small proportion indicates the potential shortage of maritime workers in such an ocean country with more than 3,260 km of coastline as Vietnam.

In relation to the licensed seafarers, counting from the first pilot seafarer training course in 1956 up to now, the number of Vietnamese licensed seafarers has been around 45,000 [24]. Although the number of licensed seafarers in each position increased from 2010 to 2015, as can be seen in Table 1, many licensed seafarers have decided to settle their work on shore, or moved to other fields, besides those getting retired. Therefore, the actual Vietnamese seafarers currently work on Vietnamese and international vessels are only about 27,000, 40% of which is officers [27].

Table 1 Number of Vietnamese licensed seafarers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position/ Rank</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Captains</td>
<td>2,382</td>
<td>3,827</td>
<td>4,045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief officers</td>
<td>1,772</td>
<td>1,593</td>
<td>1,782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deck officers (3rd officers &amp; 2nd officers)</td>
<td>4,285</td>
<td>4,797</td>
<td>4,833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosun &amp; Seaman</td>
<td>13,820</td>
<td>14,809</td>
<td>13,994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Engineers</td>
<td>1,880</td>
<td>3,272</td>
<td>3,506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Engineers</td>
<td>1,259</td>
<td>1,136</td>
<td>1,245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Engineers &amp; 4th Engineers</td>
<td>3,969</td>
<td>4,689</td>
<td>4,715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitters and Oilers</td>
<td>9,375</td>
<td>10,467</td>
<td>9,908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical officers</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricians</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>38,898</strong></td>
<td><strong>45,121</strong></td>
<td><strong>44,720</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Due to the increasing volume of global trade, there is a greater demand for seafarers now and in the future [20]. This demand is not only because of the expansion of the global shipping fleet but also the changing international regulations such as the working time and higher back up ratio. This paper discusses the maritime manpower in terms of educated seafarer resources (i.e. the seafarers receiving maritime education and training in Vietnamese METIs), specifically those who are able to work in competitive global maritime labour market.

If the number of seafarers employed by foreign fleets is a criterion to evaluate education quality of a developing country, there is an evident for the shortage of Vietnamese seafarers in both quantity and quality. The number of Vietnamese seafarers contracted to work for foreign shipping companies is approximately 3,200 people [15, 24]. It is a very modest number compared to Vietnam’s neighbour maritime countries, such as the Philippines. The Filipino sea-based workers employed by foreign companies was 401,826 people in 2014, of which 23% was officers [23]. The difference in the numbers of Vietnamese and Filipino seafarers working for foreign ships raises a big question for Vietnamese stakeholders on why this happens while both Vietnam and Philippine are ocean countries with long maritime tradition. The strict recruitment regulations of foreign companies limit the number of Vietnamese seafarers recruited. Studies show that the major reasons for this problem are the seafarers’ incompetence in English language, especially Maritime English, health condition, lack of personal transferable skills, and working experiences [15, 20, 24]. Consequently, many Vietnamese seafarers are not selected by maritime recruiters [20, 24, 28].
In a survey conducted in 2013 on recruiters’ satisfaction with maritime graduates’ competence (both national and international recruiters), only 10.6% of recruiters were pleased or completely pleased with applicants’ ability while the majority were not happy [28], as shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1 Distribution of recruiters’ satisfaction with applicants’ ability](image)

In brief, Vietnamese seafarers are currently in shortage both in quantity and quality, especially the highly skilled ones. Improving education quality and increasing the number of well-trained seafarers are the key tasks of the Vietnamese Government, authority agencies, and METIs for the goal that maritime industry will contribute to increase Vietnam’s GDP and bring other values added to social and cultural development. The next part of this paper will review the maritime education and training at Vietnamese institutions to give a picture of how a seafarer is educated and trained.

2.2. Maritime education and training institutions in Vietnam

Vietnamese seafarers are mainly educated and trained in six METIs: two universities and four colleges. All METIs have seafarer training centres [16] that provide basic safety, professional and special training. The two leading maritime universities are Vietnam Maritime University (VIMARU) in the North and Ho Chi Minh City University of Transport (UT-HCMC) in the South of Vietnam. Both of these METIs are managed by two ministries: Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and Ministry of Transport (MOT). Therefore, the training programs of these institutions are designed to meet the regulations of International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watch-keeping for seafarers (STCW 2010) and in compliance with MOET’s academic requirements (Figure 2).

As can be seen in Figure 2, maritime students spend much time in their first 2 years studying foundation subjects including political and communist relating courses. Noticeably, maritime students have little sea time training, it is only a few months during their study. As a result, after graduating from universities, Bachelor degree holders are not awarded with the certificate of competency (COC) by the Vietnam Maritime Administration. They have to spend more time for sea training to become officers. In total, it takes nearly 6 years to educate a maritime officer for all ships.
At maritime colleges, students are educated at 3 levels: primary, secondary and college. At primary level, students study 3 months for basic knowledge, 3 months internship on board ship, and another 3 months of advance training to obtain elementary certificates to work on board as ratings. It takes 2 years to complete secondary level and 3 years to complete college programs. After completing the education programs, students of college and secondary are awarded with college diploma and secondary education diploma respectively. After graduating, these students need more sea time training (normally less than 12 months) to obtain COC and become officers, as can be seen in Figure 3.

Many maritime graduates from METIs in Vietnam lack the work experience due to limited practice training [20]. In addition to the lack of sea time training and hands-on experiences, the time allocated for English and transferable skills for safety or international and intercultural skills is limited [19, 28]. A study on students with internationalisation at Ho Chi Minh City University of Transport shows that nearly three fourth of the lessons were delivered in Vietnamese language. Only 3.01 % lecturers used English in teaching [19]. Both lecturers and students are still weak in English. 80.59% of the responded students expressed their expectation of learning more English and soft skills. It can be seen that though
the MET curriculum is internationalised, the course delivery methods are not internationalised. This causes challenges for graduates to compete in the global labour market. Many graduates have not been confident in applying for jobs in international maritime companies [28] because they know that they are not good at English, lack skills and good health condition, and importantly, their love to the sea is not much.

In Vietnam, METIs have limitations on institutional autonomy and have to cope with pressures from different directions, as can be seen in Figure 3 [18].

Figure 4 Different pressures on METIs in Vietnam

Figure 4 shows that Vietnamese METIs are under the authority of more than one government body: Ministry of Transport (MOT), Vietnam Maritime Administration (VMA) which belongs to MOT, Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) or Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). On one hand, MOT governs all the METIs in terms of organization, structure, and state budget while the MOET/MOLISA controls the teaching and learning activities. On the other hand, VMA controls education quality and certificates for seafarers. Besides, tuition fee framework which controls the budget of the institutions, is set by the ministries. At the same time, the university suffers from bottom up pressures including students’ expectation to receive high-quality teaching and learning with opportunities of employability in international labour markets; the lecturers who ask for higher salary and better working conditions; and the employers who want to recruit well-qualified workers with good skills for employability.

In addition, the side pressures are from international trends, especially when Vietnam becomes a member of AEC and TPP. This integration brings both benefits and challenges for Vietnamese education. Fierce competition in ranking and reputation among maritime institutions are foreseen while Vietnamese METIs are still short of qualified academic staff, innovations in curriculum design, teaching and learning activities, and limited infrastructure [5, 18, 24].

Being aware of the shortage of seafarers in quantity and quality, Vietnamese government and METIs have made considerable efforts to improve the current situation. The Resolution 09-NQ/TW by the National Assembly on the Ocean strategy for Vietnam towards 2020 and the Prime Minister decision on Vietnam’s sea economy development plan towards 2020 highlighted that Vietnam would make all its efforts to rise the sea economic contribution to Vietnam’s gross domestic product (GDP) up to 55%-60%. In response to these targets, METIs have some solutions to improve the quality and quantity of the students. Enhancement of the partnership between institutions and industries and international cooperation are highlighting points. Some joint ventures between Vietnamese and international METIs were established and operated effectively. The best practices are the Center for Training and
Improvement of Maritime Professions (VINIC) between VIMARU and the Nippon Steel Company; and the Human Resource Education and Development (UT-SCC) between UT-HCMC and the STC Group-the Netherlands. These centres are the incubating innovation in teaching that helps to improve training quality, increasing incoming and outgoing students and lecturers, especially providing highly skilled seafarers for domestic and international shipping companies.

Vietnamese Government has issued several legal documents creating opportunities for HEIs to be innovative and internationalized. In order to deal with these changes, internationalisation of higher education is an effective way to improve the institutional educational quality and competition.

3. Internationalization to improve MET in Vietnam

3.1. What is internationalization?

Internationalisation is not a new concept and it has become popular in education sector since the early eighties [13]. Internationalization is defined as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education” [11]. In other words, internationalisation is a way to enhance the quality of education, research and services to society [6]. Moreover, this process incorporates international, intercultural and global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods and support services of a programme of study [14]. However, different HEIs use different definitions which support their own overall strategic vision and mission [22].

There are two dimensions of internationalization: ‘internationalization at home’ and ‘internationalization abroad’ [9, 12]. The former mainly focuses on curriculum, and the teaching and learning process while the latter is transnational education or cross border delivery of higher education in response to the increasing competition in higher education [8]. In higher education, internationalization is programs or policies that governments and HEIs use to meet the trend of globalization [1].

3.2. Why should Vietnamese METIs internationalize?

There have been various reasons for internationalisation. First of all, the challenges of globalization with an increasingly integrated world economy, the rise of English as the dominant language, and the ever-increasing development of modern technology have influenced higher education and become over the control of HEIs [3]. The globalization process has substantially influenced higher education, affecting the institutional reputation, quality, income, and survival [7, 9]. Internationalization has even become a proxy indicator for METIs because of the internationalised characteristics of the maritime industry.

Secondly, the global labor market requires graduates having international knowledge, foreign language and intercultural skills [21]. METIs have been challenged to deal with providing well-qualified maritime human resources with both professional knowledge and skills. In addition, students’ expectation of what to learn, how to learn, and when to learn have been changed together with the development of high technology.

Thirdly, internationalisation strengthens linkage between METIs and maritime industry all over the world. Under the increasing pressure of globalization in politics, economics, socio-cultural, and education, internationalization is considered a key driver to improve the institutional status to deal with globalization. Internationalization supports governments and HEIs to strengthen international partnerships towards prestige and quality improvement as well as other added values [9]. This partnership will enhance the employability for Vietnamese maritime graduates, hence, increase the number of seafarers for the industry.
Finally, more engagement with the world is also an essential way to adding value to the institution, including to its quality, revenue, prestige, and competitiveness [21]. Via international cooperation such as student exchanges, international projects, and transnational education delivery, the universities have gained added values that can support them in two international dimensions: competition and cooperation [2,8].

4. Recommendations

Internationalisation can support Vietnamese METIs to improve quality and quantity and so is the employability ratio, institutional competitiveness, income generation, and other value added.

Recommendations to METIs

First of all, in the prevailing environment of fierce competition for outstanding staff, students and resources, strategic planning is important as Vietnamese METIs need to develop internationalisation strategies which identify their position, needs, expectation, future focus, decisions, and actions. However, internationalisation is not an ‘one size fits all’ [13] so each institution should make a careful international assessment on its internationalisation.

Secondly, improving administrative and management system is necessary. Effective education management is the core issue. A transparent system which includes more autonomy, accountability, better quality assurance and policy to attract qualified staff and more students. Maritime is very internationalised because of the standard model courses issued by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and regulated in the STCW Convention that all METIs must follow. In other words, METIs have already got global learning outcomes. This is a great advantage that never happens in other sectors. If this advantage is fully taken, it will facilitate METIs with lecturer and student mobility, classroom diversity, intercultural development, language acquisition, and global citizenship development.

Thirdly, the curriculum should be redesigned to meet the international standards of IMO. METIs should reform the existing educational system which proves to be unable to meet the demand for highly skilled seafarers. A work-based learning model can be applied in Vietnamese METIs so that students can experience the real working environment. They also have chance to improve their awareness of safety issues on board ship. Students should be provided with more soft skills especially international and intercultural skills. Lack of these skills may lead to the large number of seafarers leaving companies every year.

The ocean is of all people in the world and issues of ocean like safety, security, and environmental protection are the concern of the world. Students should be educated with not only professional knowledge but also skills and ethical behaviour. A working culture of Vietnamese seafarers, such as good disciplines or loyalty, should be created. This culture will position Vietnamese maritime manpower in the international labour market.

Next, Vietnamese METIs should increase lecturer and student mobility to create a more international teaching and learning environment. In this environment, English is used more often and there are more English teaching materials and textbooks. This helps to improve English competence of both lecturers and students. In addition, international teaching and learning environment help students to learn intercultural skills. They will be prepared for an internationally social life in their future career.

More practice and sea time training for students are needed. The traditional teaching methodology should be changed into more active. This improvement can be made when METIs improve the institution-institution partnerships to improve teaching pedagogy of maritime lecturers. Active teaching methods can be shared among METIs in the world. Thus, soft skills can be incorporated with active teaching to produce more effective lessons.
In order to increase the number of seafarers, METIs should be more active in promotion campaigns to publicize the advantages of maritime works and lives. Seafarers should be the jobs that deserve more respects from society. University-industry partnerships should be strengthened and developed in order to get more internship places for students. Moreover, the partnership helps to create jobs which attract more graduates and seafarers to apply for, hence maritime manpower retention can be improved.

Last but not least, METIs needs more investment in technology and modern facilities for teaching and learning activities. It is understood that good maritime education is costly. Besides the state budget, dynamic international activities can increase revenue for institutions via grants or international projects. In response to the government’s direction, METIs should be more active in privatisation or ‘socialisation’ of MET and research activities in order to create more revenue for effective operation. Such models as joint ventures or self-funding training centres can become incubators for Vietnamese METIs in internationalisation.

Recommendations to the Government authorities

In relation to the policies, the government should develop a better welfare policy for maritime jobs which are particularly characteristic. Also, there should be policies to encourage ship owners to be responsible for crew training, skills development for seafarers and potential graduates. A real Vietnam maritime labour union should be set up, not just in name but in effective action, to protect seafarers’ rights and support them in any flag ship countries.

The government should create favourable conditions for crew export. Specifically, joint venture companies and international maritime training centres should be allowed to export seafarers. As the joint venture and international maritime companies have good relationship with international shipping companies and international maritime associations, they are able to find more recruiters and do better manning. Hence, the seafarers have more chance to work on board foreign shipping.

5. Conclusions

Maritime industry with the increasing growth of the world fleet is in high demand for highly skilled seafarers. Vietnamese sea economy is aimed to contribute more for the development of the country. This goal requires Vietnamese METIs to improve education and training quality and increase the number of maritime students and seafarers. Internationalisation and appropriate internationalisation strategies will improve quality of maritime teaching and learning, and produce qualified and competent seafarers.

References
