

Lived Experiences of Maritime Cadets: Their First Encounter Onboard Multicrewing Vessels

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Programs leading to Bachelor of Science in Marine Transportation and Bachelor of Science in Marine Engineering include On-the-Job Training (OJT) as part of the curricular requirement. This requirement according to Cicek [1] is intended to provide practical experience to would-be seafarers and is supported by recent theories of learning, instruction and cognition which advance the idea that “the best learning environment is the workplace where the apprentices engage in authentic, interactive, and meaningful learning where they can create their mental models”[2]. To comply with this requirement, maritime students are required to undergo shipboard training for a period of 12 months to complete their OJT. During this period, these cadets are exposed to shipboard tasks and real-life situations. Most of them are assigned in multicrewing vessels and since it is their first time to be away from their families and their homeland, their first exposure to actual work on board, and their first encounter to work with other people divided by hierarchy, culture, and language among others, they are exposed to a totally new environment and are vulnerable to various conditions such as accommodation problems, work and crew-related difficulties, problems in communication, and cultural differences among others. These challenges experienced by cadets are validated by Stan & Mitu [3] in their article “Importance of Multinational Crew in Cadets’ Practice.” John B. Lacson Colleges Foundation-Bacolod, a maritime institution in the Philippines known for its quest for excellence to produce competent and world class seafarers, continues to vigilantly keep track not only of the performance of their cadets as evaluated by their superior officers onboard but also to understand in a deeper sense, the kind of life that they experienced after they were deployed in different multicrewing vessels owned by various shipping companies. What did they learn from the training? Had life been easy for them? In the process of performing their tasks and in working with their fellow crew, did they encounter certain problems and difficulties? What did they do to survive and cope with these difficulties? This study seeks to trace valuable information on the realities of life onboard particularly from the point of view of cadets who were exposed to it. Forty-seven (47) first-class cadets who have returned from their 12-month apprenticeship revealed that working onboard has taught them appropriate work values such as flexibility and adaptability, patience and self-control, humility, resilience, stronger sense of responsibility, discipline and perseverance. They were also able to develop practical skills and abilities such as versatility, proper time management, creating a link between theory and practical application, independence, physical endurance as an important tool for survival, and managing their finances. Vulnerability to difficult situations and homesickness were among the prevailing problems of the cadets. It is recommended that clear measures must be done to address issues on discrimination, abuse by authority, emotional and physical harassment, excessive workloads, and unpaid overtime which have been partially revealed in this study. A feedback mechanism is also suggested for shipping companies to allow returning cadets to reveal the quality of their experiences for the purpose of ensuring a fair and honest management of crew in their fleets and the cadets in particular. The maritime industry as well as maritime institutions worldwide should also consider opportunities for improvement on the cadetship program as well as on areas of loyalty, motivation, and work efficiency among their crew.

Keywords: seafaring industry, lived experiences, qualitative research, thematic analysis, Philippines, Asia

1. Introduction

Transport is considered as one of the cornerstones of globalization. For Kumar & Hoffmann [4], it has become an integrated part of the production and distribution system. While transportation comes in different modes, it is transportation by sea, according to Bocanete & Nistor [5] that has tremendously gained momentum and importance across decades. Along with telecommunication, world seaborne trade, having been much improved through the increased efficiency of port and shipping services, has made it easier to buy and sell merchandise and raw materials and transport them in all parts of the globe. But along with this increased demand for sea trade come great challenges. Managing this transportation of goods by sea has become as important and as critical as the process of transporting. The safe transport of goods, not mentioning the safety of life on board these vessels of transportation, requires a group of

highly trained and competent manpower. Developing countries, mostly coming from Asia, have played a vital role in marine transportation as they have been the steady suppliers of seafarers who have greatly helped in terms of poverty alleviation and economic growth. These countries include China, Indonesia, India, and of course, the Philippines.

The Philippines is reported as the largest global supplier of seafarers. In a global crew survey conducted by the Seafarers International Research Centre (SIRC) as cited by Amante [6] in 2003, 28% of this supply of manpower was composed of Filipinos. In 2011, reports reveal that out of almost 1,400,000 seafarers serving onboard international merchant fleets, about 400,000 are from the Philippines [7]. The maritime industry thrives with this workforce who have contributed significantly to the Philippine's socio-economic growth. It was reported that in 2002, an approximate value of \$1.99 billion seafarers' remittances was contributed to the national economy. In 2012, this contribution has grown to US\$4.8 billion. As the industry continues to supply the mechanism and manpower connecting nations for easy transport of cargoes for international commerce and trade, there is also a need to sustain the supply of able and qualified manpower to man seagoing vessels. In support to this idea, Emad & Oxford [8] in their article "*Rethinking Maritime Education and Training*" have expressed a great concern about human factors and mariners' competencies onboard ships.

In keeping with this thrust of developing the expected competencies of future seafarers who will man international sea-going vessels, programs leading to a degree in Marine Transportation and Marine Engineering include On-the-Job Training (OJT) as part of the academic requirement. This requirement according to Cicek [1] is intended to provide practical experience to would-be seafarers and is supported by recent theories of learning, instruction and cognition which advance the idea that the best learning environment is the workplace where the apprentices engage in authentic, interactive, and meaningful learning where they can create their mental models [2]. To comply with this requirement, cadets, usually in their fourth year, are required to go onboard vessels for a period equivalent to 12 months to complete their OJT where they could serve different tasks as required of them on board. These tasks are described and recorded in their Training Record Book (TRB). During this period, they are exposed to actual work and are assigned to handle hands on responsibilities related to the deck and engine department. Since it is their first time onboard an international vessel, it is also their first experience to be separated from their families, their first exposure to actual work on board as they translate the theories they learned from school, and their first encounter to work with other people divided by hierarchy, culture, and language, among others.

John B. Lacson Colleges Foundation-Bacolod is a maritime institution in the Philippines known for its quest for excellence to produce competent and world class seafarers. While the institution continues to vigilantly keep track of the performance of its cadets as evaluated by their superior officers onboard, it also tries to understand the kind of life they have after they are deployed in different international vessels owned by various shipping companies. Had life been easy for them? Were they able to relate what they have learned in school to their actual tasks onboard? In the process of performing their tasks and in working with their fellow crew, did they encounter certain problems and difficulties? This study could provide valuable information on the realities of life onboard particularly from the point of view of cadets who were exposed to it. As the institution continues to provide a link between theoretical knowledge and practical application, it also considers as important that feedback should be gathered from authentic sources to identify problems, constraints, and difficulties so proper intervention can be made to address such concerns. This feedback gathered from returning cadets could provide insights which could serve as bases in improving specific areas of instruction to produce graduates who are holistically educated and trained as competent seafarers.

1.1 Framework

This study builds on Cicek's [1] notion of "*traditional apprenticeship*." Traditional apprenticeship provides for future seafarers to go onboard ships in order to gain practical on-the-job experience. Collins, Brown & Newman [9] further discuss that an on-the-job training is "generally held to be the best part of their training in developing the competencies that they need, to act successfully in their jobs." According to them, apprenticeship through on-the-job training (OJT) promotes learning skills and knowledge in the cadets' social and functional context. When at work however, a person may be faced with factors which could affect the way he performs his job. These factors could be personal or

job-related. Examples of personal issues could be problems with relationships as well as emotional or financial problems affecting his life at work. Professional issues are those that relate to one's performance at work in relation to his co-workers. Another factor which could affect people at work is social or racial discrimination. A seafarer who is assigned in a vessel composed of crew who are divided by race and other socio-cultural underpinnings will be more likely to experience unfair treatment and lesser opportunities than those who establish themselves as superior; hence, his chances for professional growth may be hampered. This kind of treatment could lead to poor self-esteem and low morale. Such issue, which is cited by Gregorio [10] as a state of "*demoralization*", is due to perceived double standards of treatment favoring European crews who allegedly have better working conditions and regular work shifts. Furthermore, Gregorio cites that seafarers hurdle work-related challenges such as loneliness, boredom, overwork, and injuries due to hazardous working environment just to support their loved ones. These factors are supported by the study of Chirea-Ungureanu & Rosenhave [11] which identified sadness, loneliness, homesickness, idealizing the home culture, sense of isolation, feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, overwhelming and irrational fears, irritability and resentment among others, as manifestations of a serious disequilibrium within the stranger's psyche. These result from the absence of connection between the self and the new cultural onboard environment. In addition to these factors, Feldman [12] explains that problems such as lack of sleep, inadequate salary, difficulty in adjusting with others, the feeling of being insignificant and inadequate knowledge and skills demanded by the job can also be a problem at work.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The aim of the study was to gather a better understanding of the life of Deck and Engine cadets of a group of shipowners and a specific shipping company who had worked on board international seagoing vessels during their On-the-Job Training. Specifically, it was designed to find out what they learned from the experience, the problems and difficulties they had encountered during the training, and how they tried to overcome them.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study utilized the phenomenological research design whose central concern is to gather experiential meanings which aim for a fresh, complex, rich description of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived. It involves gathering 'deep' information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions and participant observation to discover the meaning of people's lived experiences.

2.2 Respondents

Forty-seven (47) cadets in their fourth year under the program Bachelor of Science in Marine Transportation and Bachelor of Science in Marine Engineering were invited to take part in the study. They were composed of 31 cadets of a group of shipowners and 16 cadets of a particular shipping company. These cadets had completed their OJT for a total of 12 months onboard international vessels owned by different shipping companies with fleets transiting worldwide. They had been exposed to technical work related to the deck and engine department. These cadets are averagely 18-20 years old, and this period of apprenticeship marks their first year away from their families and outside the country.

2.3 Instruments

Two types of research instruments were employed in gathering the data: a researcher-made survey checklist and an interview guide that were both presented to a set of experts for face and content validity. The checklist was used to determine which specific problems and difficulties were experienced by the cadets during their OJT. The interview guide on the other hand, was used in the conduct of small group interviews separately conducted to the respondents. The purpose of the interview was to gather authentic responses and statements specifically on the actual learning the cadets acquired from the OJT experience, their own testimony of the kind of life they had on board as a whole, the problems and difficulties they had encountered, and their coping strategies. The interviews were conducted in a closed door setting with a research assistant who was in charge of audio-recording and note-taking. Guide

questions were used to encourage interactive discussion. Probing questions were also given to allow a fuller discussion with the respondents on specific responses which needed further elucidation. Guided by the questions, each cadet narrated and described his experiences. All conversations which transpired during the interview were audio-recorded and were later transcribed for further analysis. The interviewees were instructed to avoid dropping names of their officers and shipping companies to protect the identities of those concerned. Extracts from the cadets' statements expressed in the native tongue were provided English translations.

2.4 Data Analysis

To determine the problems and difficulties encountered by the respondents during their OJT experience, responses in the survey checklist were tallied, and results were shown in frequencies. Answers were encoded, in addition to those indicated in the checklist, and thematic grouping was employed to allow the issues and concerns presented to emerge. Thematic grouping was done by first reading through the data, getting a feel for what is being said, and identifying key themes and issues in each text. This type of analysis was also employed by Gregorio [10] in his study "The Filipino Seafarer's Lived Experiences aboard International Shipping Vessels: A Basis for Health Promotion Intervention."

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 What the Cadets Learned from the OJT Experience

3.1.1 Work Values. Life on board has taught the cadets values which they consider as essential especially during his first time on board international sea-going vessels. Data gathered from the interview fell into the following categories of values which the cadets consider as a must.

Flexibility and Adaptability. According to them, it is important that one should know how to get along with his crewmates. They highlighted the importance of "*pakikisama*", a Filipino trait which means that as part of the workforce onboard, a cadet must be able to share with others and manifest a spirit of camaraderie, unity, and working for a common goal. This value was also emphasized by Muega [13] who claimed that Filipinos cooperate for a common goal through the spirit of "*pagkakaisa*". Flexibility and adaptability enable a person to weather all challenges in life. According to Upton [14] a flexible person is able to change or react with little effort and could readily face new situations with an open mind. To quote a statement from one of the respondents,

"I learned how to get along with others. We were a full-Filipino crewing vessel and I had experienced being maltreated at several times. There was a time when I was angrily shoved by...who got the rag I was holding while he shouted at me saying, "This is how you should do it!" He gave me the same treatment for the first three months."

Patience and Self-Control. Patience is the capacity to endure hardship, difficulty, or inconvenience with calm self-control, and even delight. According to Cheung & Cheung [15], individuals with low self-control tend to be impulsive and lack patience, prefer easy and simple tasks over complex ones that demand persistence, and have a self-centered or insensitive orientation to the interest of others. They also prefer physical activities over cognitive ones that require skills and planning, have a propensity for risk-taking, and lose their tempers easily because of their lower tolerance to frustration. According to the cadets, everyday onboard entails hard work. The first four months is usually the most difficult because it is when they are forced by circumstances to adjust to their new environment. It is important then that a cadet must be able to control his temper, maintain his composure, and endure all forms of strain. How he behaves and how he responds to people and situations during this adjustment period creates an impression and shapes the way he will be treated by his crewmates for the rest of his stay onboard.

Humility. Humility is the willingness to admit mistakes and seek out guidance. A humble person is one who recognizes his own inadequacy, qualities, and abilities, and presses them into service, doing good without attracting attention or expecting the applause of others. The respondents had the following to say during the interview:

"We need to lower down our pride and control ourselves because sometimes when we make some mistakes, some crew, especially those who are already experienced, will say words that really make you feel so small. I remembered being called the worst names when I was onboard."

Resilience. Resilience, according to Arcelo [16] is the ability of an individual to adapt quickly to changes brought about by misfortune, illness or a change of job or social status. A person is said to be resilient when he does not subject himself to long periods of depression or wallow in self-pity in the face of adversity. He is resilient if he can get back on his feet and continue to face life as a wiser and stronger person. The following are some extracts taken from the cadets' testimonies:

"There were times when I wanted to give up and go home. But then, after a while, I would be fine again. I just continuously prayed that I will be able to survive each day until the time I disembark."

Sense of Responsibility. According to the cadets, among the virtues that they learned to develop onboard is becoming more responsible. Members of the crew are expected to perform their respective roles and must assume responsibility over their own actions, and so with the cadets. Sense of responsibility for them is equivalent to accountability and conscientiousness in performing all the tasks assigned to them accurately, so whether they do it right or not, they should be accountable for the consequence. This idea is supported by Rutter [17] who defines resilience as a relative resistance to the adverse effects of risk experiences. According to him, a resilient person is able to positively respond to all manners of stresses and adversities.

Discipline. Bist [18] explains that the presence of a disciplined and organized environment suggests the existence of safety and inspires confidence in the ability of others. According to him, in merchant ships, discipline is tantamount to punctuality, diligence and order in the discharge of duties."The cadets claimed that discipline is a key factor for survival onboard. To them it means departing from one's immature ways and taking control of himself to ensure that he does everything right and correct. On this note, the respondents had the following to say:

*"In school you can just go home if you feel f**ckd up. There onboard, you cannot. You can only see the sky and the sea...This act of being disciplined is not new to me. I am thankful that I was trained to become one during my dormitory days. I am already accustomed to it. It is really very important onboard to be disciplined in all your ways."*

Perseverance. Wilkinson [19] explains that perseverance can help a person in the workplace. For instance, if one has a low-skilled job where he gets little appreciation for his efforts, having this quality will make him persevere when things go wrong, as he is bound to be the one who gets the blame, even when it is not his fault. According to the cadets, they were able to learn to persevere more as they struggled for survival. Consider the following comments:

"I had developed perseverance. Back home, I can be absent from my class for a simple fever. Onboard, I still had to work even when I was sick...The workload was too heavy. If a cadet does not have a strong will to persevere, he will not last a week there."

3.1.2 Practical Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities. More than the knowledge and skills that they had learned in school, the cadets claimed that they were able to acquire practical skills onboard. These skills are themed as follows:

Versatility. The cadets had called this term as "diskarte"—the ability to respond to various situations by making use of whatever resources are available without making a fuss about it. Consider the following comments:

"I learned to dismantle and assemble different types of machinery even if, at first, I did not know how. I was able to discover ways to do them under the guidance of my senior officer...I learned to do a lot of work which I did not learn at home because there was always somebody to do chores for me. Onboard I washed by own clothes, cleaned my own cabin, took care of myself when I was sick, and a lot more. There you had to do it all by yourself. You learn to become independent."

Time Management. A person who values and sees time as gold plans how he or she can spend his or her time well. According to the cadets, time is a serious matter on board especially the issue of punctuality. They explained that punctuality must form part of a seafarer's habit, not something that is imposed by others. It should be self-imposed.

"There were those onboard who were fond of malingering. Maybe it was their way of escaping from work so they could rest more. So they got scolded most of the time for not being punctual in reporting to duty...There is no way one can be late in reporting to duty...In school, we were given a 15- minute time to report to class during the first period. On board, you have to be there 15 minutes before time."

Creating a Link between Theory and Practical Application. For the cadets, there are a lot of theories that you cognitively learn in school while there are those you can only understand better when experienced onboard. During the interview, the cadets shared that there seemed to be a gap between the theories that they learned in school and the actual application of these theories into their work on board.

“Being the best in class or getting the highest grade does not really guarantee efficiency on board. Putting what one learns into practice is the real challenge...We were familiar with the theories taught to us in the classroom but it was only on board that we actually learned.”

Independence. Life onboard has taught the cadets to be independent. For them, it was like “you against the world”. Everyday was a “battle for survival”. They reasoned out that on board, nobody will really stick with you to teach you what to do every step of the way since everyone is also very busy attending to his own duties and responsibilities. On this note, the cadets had the following to say:

“They (their senior officers) will teach you the first time but after that, they will leave you to do it by yourself. So you need to learn fast. They easily get irritated if you cannot easily get it...Common sense and initiative is very important. You cannot expect them to be there for you all the time. So once you learn the routine, you are expected to do it regularly then with less or without supervision except for those critical operations where you really need the supervision of a senior officer.”

Physical Endurance as a Necessary Tool for Survival. A cadet needs to be physically fit and should have a high threshold for physical activity. If he is not used to heavy work, then there onboard, he should learn to cope with it. The importance of this attribute is emphasized in the ISM Code 2010, Section 6.2 which says that the company should ensure that each ship is manned by qualified, certified, and medically fit seafarers in accordance with national and international requirements. On this note, one of the comments was:

“When the tools are on the deck and you are working down the engine room, you need to walk up and down through the stairs. You need stamina. You need to climb up the deck and run back to the engine room every time you are ordered to do something.”

Financial Planning. When still a cadet, one does not earn yet so he must learn how to manage his monthly allowance very well. The following are some of their comments:

“There are a lot of temptations on board so it is also about self-control... It is also about financial management...Money easily drains out if you do not know how to manage it...We have crewmates who borrow money from us. They don't pay what they owe us.”

3.1.3 Stronger Safety Culture. Although awareness and implementation of safety culture has been taught in school, according to the cadets, it was only onboard that they realized why this has been given much emphasis. The following were some of their comments extracted from the interview:

“Safety awareness is a company policy especially when dealing with chemicals and heights...One must always wear complete personal protective equipment especially when dealing with heights. One must wear a safety harness...In our ship, there were some incidents of falling...When you see the environment, you will be conscious about safety...In school we listened to our instructors lecturing us on the importance of safety. We used to just take it for granted. Onboard, that was where we really realized the value of safety. On board a chemical tanker, it must be a way of life.”

3.2 The Cadets' Life onboard

The second concern of this paper was to find out from the respondents how they can describe their life onboard during their OJT. Their responses to this question were grouped into the following themes:

Life on board as a continuous learning process. During their OJT, the cadets realized that learning does not stop in school. Even onboard, they were still required by their officers to keep on reading. At specific times, for instance, they were assigned topics to read and then the following day they would be asked about it. These topics were always about the different systems in the deck and engine department and on safety procedures. According to them, their officers were very particular that they should know about the technicalities of the job and that they should augment their shortage of knowledge through reading.

Life onboard as a difficult but honorable job. For the cadets, life onboard was difficult. There were a lot of times when they were deprived of sleep especially during bunkering operation and

emergency drills. Some of their crewmates were difficult to deal with. There were also instances when their officers would insult them for making mistakes and then associate these mistakes with the reputation of their school. Sometimes they would be compared with cadets produced by other maritime institutions while pointing at their inadequacies. Yet despite these difficulties and challenges, they felt honored because even just as cadets they had become part of the entire workforce onboard.

Life onboard as preparation for the future. The cadets pointed out that life onboard is also preparing for what is ahead. They are aware that they have to return to the school for another year to complete their Bachelor's degree and to acquire their professional license as officers.

3.3 Problems and Difficulties the Cadets Had Encountered during Their OJT

The fifth concern of this study was to find out the actual problems and difficulties experienced by the cadets during their OJT. Results on this problem are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Problems and Difficulties encountered by the cadets during their OJT

| Problems and Difficulties | Group of Shipowners (N = 31) | Specific Company (N = 16) | Total (47) | |
|--|---------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|----------|
| | f | f | f | Rank |
| Homesickness | 17 | 9 | 26 | 1 |
| Boredom | 15 | 7 | 22 | 2 |
| Inadequate rest hours | 16 | 5 | 21 | 3 |
| Verbal/Emotional insult by their senior officers And crewmates | 14 | 4 | 18 | 4.5 |
| Voluminous/multiple work tasks | 12 | 6 | 18 | 4.5 |
| Irregular work schedules | 12 | 4 | 16 | 6.5 |
| Difficulty in adjusting with others | 12 | 4 | 16 | 6.5 |
| Unfamiliarity with the use of certain tools/ Equipment | 14 | 2 | 16 | 8 |
| Inadequate knowledge/ skills on certain topics Related to the job | 12 | 2 | 14 | 9 |
| Language Problems | 9 | 2 | 11 | 10 |

Table 1 reveals that the cadets indeed have experienced different forms of problems and difficulties onboard during their OJT and these are topped by homesickness, boredom, and inadequate rest hours. The rest were experienced by less than 50% of the respondents and they include verbal/emotional insult by senior officers/crewmates, voluminous/multiple work tasks, irregular work schedule, difficulty in adjusting with others, unfamiliarity with the use of certain tools/equipment in the deck and engine department, and inadequate knowledge/ skills on certain topics related to the job. Language barrier is the least among their problems.

3.4 Other Problems and Difficulties Reported by the Cadets

In addition to the factors specified in the survey, the cadets narrated that they were pitted against other schools regarding their performance and compared to previous batches of cadets onboard. There was also the matter of peer pressure on spending their allowance over things which are not expedient. They also recounted that they were sleepy most of the time because they would spend excessive working hours, like working 72 hours per week and sometimes spending the night without any amount of sleep at all. There were also reports of unpaid overtime dues. Moreover, they recalled how their seasickness would worsen when their vessels were transiting across rough seas, causing them to vomit excessively. Some of the respondents also narrated that they were affected by unhygienic practices of their crewmates. Moreover, they expressed their concern on the cost of communication from sea to coast when making calls to their families back home. They also narrated that since they were just cadets, most of the time their opinions and suggestions were ignored and when they would ask for clarifications or assistance, they were answered in a sarcastic and insulting manner. They were also emotionally affected by family problems reaching them. According to them, this added to their feeling of despair.

In addition to the factors reported above, the engine cadets, in particular, also expressed their difficulty due to their inadequate knowledge and skills on certain topics related to the job, like for instance, starting the purifier, preparing the main engine, and steering gear operations and maintenance. It was more through their familiarization with the actual equipment and machinery in their respective vessels that they were able to really learn how to do things. This predicament is explained in the ISF 2011 which states that “Seafarers who are newly assigned to a ship should take full advantage of every opportunity provided to become familiar with the shipboard equipment, operating procedures and other arrangements needed for the proper performance of their duties. Immediately upon arriving on board for the first time, each seafarer has the responsibility to become acquainted with the ship’s working environment, particularly with respect to new or unfamiliar equipment, procedures or arrangements. Seafarers who do not promptly attain the level of familiarity required for performing their duties have the obligation to bring this fact to the attention of their supervisor or to the attention of the crew member designated (in accordance to the mandatory company responsibilities explained in Section 2 of STCW guide) and to identify any equipment, procedure or arrangement which remains unfamiliar.”

3.5 The Cadets’ Ways of Coping with Problems and Difficulties onboard

On how the cadets had dealt with these problems and difficulties, the following themes evolved from their answers during the interview:

Training their bodies to adapt to the system. This includes adjusting their time so as not to be late, spending time at the gym to be physically fit, and letting their bodies adapt to the strenuous assignments.

Expanding their understanding in dealing with harsh words and insults. Even if the impact of this experience was too great on their emotions, they just tried to make more room for more understanding. They thought that perhaps it was all because of the work stress that heightened and charged the atmosphere with tension onboard. When the attack seemed to be too personal, they would just keep their distance and wait until the coast is clear. This may be similar to what Perry et al. [20] calls as “self-regulated learning”, a highly effective approach that is associated with success in and beyond school. It is the ability to regulate one’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in order to reach a goal. This goal might be academic (improving reading comprehension, becoming a better organized writer, learning how to multiply, and asking relevant questions) or they might be socio-emotional, like controlling one’s anger and getting along with peers.

“So when my officer gets mad at me and hurt my feeling by throwing at me unkind words, I don’t really take it against him. I understand why he had to be like that or why he is acting that way. It’s mostly all about work and some personal problems each one of us has to carry while we are away from home.”

Communicating with their families and loved ones back home. The cadets were thankful that electronic communication is now available to let them stay connected. When they felt so down or when they wanted to give up, they communicated with their families and loved ones. According to Bist [18], a ship has always been a place of work from where persons cannot go and be with their families at the end of the day. Everyone appreciates how contact (or loss of it) with family far away can instantly inflate or deflate the morale of the individual.

Socializing with their crewmates. During socializations, they would grab the microphone and sing with their crewmates as a way of venting out their emotions. They cracked jokes and even cooked food for their officers to diminish their feeling of sadness and to develop camaraderie with them. When the ship was at port, they would go fishing. Supporting this idea, Bist [18] explains that “good communication between individuals onboard is as important as in any field. When it exists, there is smooth exchange of information which contributes to safe running of the vessel. Interaction among those onboard stimulates communication. A modern vessel with her small crew and work environment where every person has a vital part to play in routine and where operation is an endless chain of watches shared by members of the crew is a place where tension can take root. In this atmosphere grudges may worsen to create conditions that prevent harmony on board.”

Strengthening Their Spirituality. The cadets recalled that listening to gospel music had served as a healing balm to their wounded feelings and enabled them to stay spiritually fit. On this, they made the following comments:

“On my seasickness, I prayed. It is in your mind. If you think you will vomit then you will. If you control your mind not to vomit, then it helps. Sometimes after working too hard, I would be allowed some rest. When the ship was rolling so hard, I couldn’t sleep. I had to get used to it. If there was an internet connection, I communicated with my loved ones back home. Hearing their voices made me feel better. There were times when I wanted to give up. It’s the thought of my family that strengthened me.”

All data that were analyzed and presented above emerged from the survey and small group interviews personally conducted by the researchers with the cadets who have actually undergone on-the-job training onboard international sea-going vessels for 12 months. Responses to the interview that were reported in their native language were translated in English for the sake of global readership. Responses that have touched on confidential and sensitive matters had been selected out of the data. It is but proper to point out then that whatever conclusions were formed in this study were based on the data gathered and may not necessarily reflect the experiences of cadets of other maritime institutions who have also undergone their OJT in other vessels. To further validate the findings of this study, more research along this line with other groups of respondents is advised.

4. Conclusions

The cadets’ first year onboard requires a great deal of courage and positivism. At a very young age and as they are just starting on their career, they are bombarded with multiple strenuous responsibilities which require a great deal of physical stamina, mental alertness, and emotional stability. They are also exposed to various people and circumstances which could create a serious impact on their psychological and emotional development. Most of their responses during the interview seemed to suggest that they have been academically prepared to possess the required competencies for an engine cadet, but there are still specific skills they have not been sufficiently trained to develop. It also appeared that some of them have not been thoroughly prepared to face the harsh realities that go with their chosen career. Based on the testimonies gathered, it appears that the quality of experiences they would have onboard is highly dependent on the senior officers who will be assigned to handle them. The luckier they get, the better is the experience. The varied testimonies of the respondents are reflective of the absence of standard norms of action in dealing with the working crew onboard particularly those in relation to cadet apprentices. Findings of this study imply that the contributions of many for the betterment of the cadetship program or on-the-job training program can still be achieved. The reports made by the cadets do not only point to the importance of knowledge and skills acquisition but also on the internalization of the right attitude and values fit for a cadet and a future officer.

5. Recommendations

By looking at the findings and taking the recommendations made in a constructive manner, collaborative efforts can be made to address the issues brought about by this investigation. The school is in the advantage position to spearhead in addressing and looking for strategic ways to better prepare the cadets for the actual test onboard. With its mission to satisfy stakeholders’ expectations, the institution could consider the reports made by the cadets and look for solutions to address specific areas so weaknesses and inadequacies could be filled in. Values formation and internalization must be placed on top of its priorities. This issue has become a critical issue in the maritime industry and it is high time that maritime institutions should take it seriously. Moreover, the maritime industry needs to be vigilant in instituting regulations that would prevent discrimination, abuse of authority, emotional and physical harassment, excessive workloads, and unpaid overtime issues which have been partially revealed in this study. A feedback mechanism can also be implemented by all shipping companies to allow returning cadets to reveal the quality of their experiences for the purpose of ensuring a fair and honest management of crew in their fleets and the cadets in particular. The maritime industry as well as maritime institutions worldwide should also consider opportunities for improvement on the cadetship program as well as on areas of loyalty, motivation, and work efficiency and professionalism among their crew.

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