

Tapping Potential of Global Demand for Seafaring Officers: An Agenda for Bangladesh

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Abstract

The growing shortage of seafaring officers fuelled by the rapid growth of global fleet opened up opportunities to tap the potential of global demand of seafaring officers for populous and unemployment abundance countries like Bangladesh. Besides, the numbers of HSC passed students, having potential of becoming seafaring officers, are also on the rise in Bangladesh every year. By producing more seafaring officers out of these youngsters and marketing them effectively for manning the commercial fleet around the globe, Bangladesh could have reaped benefits of earning huge remittance and thus ensured her socio-economic development. To examine the potential of the global demand for seafaring officers and to formulate agenda for Bangladesh, the researcher looked for the answers of the primary research question as to what is the current status of Bangladeshi Seafaring officers and how she can maximize the accruing from the global demand. The study also examined present manning situation and supply capability of seafaring officers in Bangladesh. Finally, the paper recommends courses of action for Bangladeshi seafaring stakeholders to tap the potential from the global demand for seafaring officers.

Keywords: seafaring, potential, fleet, demand and agenda.

Background of the Study

Bangladesh is a seafaring nation. She, being one of the IMO's white listed countries, has long tradition and reputation of supplying seafarers since the British era. The growing shortage of seafaring officers fuelled by rapid growth of global fleet opened up opportunities for populous and unemployment abundance countries like Bangladesh to tap seafaring potentials. Many developing countries including Philippine, China, Vietnam, Myanmar and India have already started tapping such potential. Though the global supply of seafaring officers is estimated to have increased by 24% since 2010, the current supply-demand situation highlights significant shortage that is expected to aggravate further.

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According to Drewry manning report of June 2015, shipping will require an additional 42,500 officers by 2019. While BIMCO/ICS manpower report of the same year forecasts shortage of 1, 47,000 seafaring officers by 2025. Bangladesh, on the other hand, is capable to produce enough seafaring officers for the global fleet despite meeting her domestic demand. It is presumed that more than 6000 Bangladeshi officers and 3500 ratings are employed on board ships of the global fleet at present.

No denying that now-a-days Bangladeshi seafarers are facing challenges in getting jobs on board foreign ships due to widespread use of false documents, visa problem issues and negative image of the country. Government of Bangladesh (GoB) could have increased her remittance earning from this sector that had been ignored and remained unexplored since her independence like many other underdeveloped countries of the world. However, huge potential human resources, increased volume of maritime trade and commerce, white listing credentials, unwillingness of western youngsters, global growth of shipping, government diplomacy for global marketing, etc. are considered as opportunities for Bangladeshi seafaring. While dynamic matrix of global demand, uptrend of officer supply by neighbouring nations, dependency on foreign vessels for sea placement of cadets, less number of Bangladeshi vessels, country's negative image, owner or ship managers' discretion during recruitment, imposed visa restrictions on Bangladeshi seafarer by some countries, etc. are the cause of concern in tapping the potential of the global demand for seafaring officers. Still, Bangladesh has got higher competitive advantages in regards to her seafaring officers while comparing with many other nations of the world. The domestic push of surplus seafaring officers needs strategic pull through proactive and vibrant seafaring diplomacy by the GoB to tap such global potential.

Review of the Existing Literature

Sampson (2004) believed that supporting MET universities appears as the primary issue for maritime administration and government for fostering MET worldwide. Fadely (2008) argued that STCW provides defined requirements for certification of key competencies for seafarer. Compton (2010) stated that STCW 1978 convention had many limitations. Lane (2000) argued that the manpower crisis has several dimensions and cannot be simply reduced to a question of shortages of key officer personnel. Ahad

(2009) argued that in Europe and UK in particular, there will hardly be any increase of seafarers in future. Ziarati (2011) argued that BIMCO/ISF (2010) figures are similar to those predicted in their report in 2005. Gani (2016) stated that Bangladesh has glorious history in maritime operation all over the world. Bhuiyan (2015) mentioned that it is getting extremely difficult for Bangladeshi seafarers to manage jobs in foreign ships due to widespread use of false documents. Rahman (2017) said that a sound diplomatic relation between Bangladesh and Republic of Panama could open immense opportunity for the Bangladeshi seafaring officers to be employed on board ships.

Hypotheses

After reviewing the existing literature, the researcher conducted Pilot interviews and hypothesized that Bangladesh would get huge potential of producing seafaring officers to market in the global commercial fleet. The principal hypothesis was then translated further into four associative hypotheses that were empirically tested for validation through a perception survey. The associative hypotheses are:

H₁: The more Maritime Education and Training (MET) is promoted, the chances for Bangladesh to tap the potential of global demand for seafaring officers are likely to be increased.

H₂: By building the capacity of the marine academies/institutes and Department of Shipping (DoS), the chances for Bangladesh of producing more seafaring officers and their global market are likely to be increased.

H₃: The more Bangladesh can market her seafaring officers in the global fleet; the chances of her tapping potential of global demand for seafaring officers are likely to be increased.

H₄: The present efforts by all the seafaring stakeholders of Bangladesh are fair enough to maximize her potential in the global seafaring officers market.

Conceptual Framework

The study is an exploratory research into a relatively less researched area in Bangladesh. However, the key concepts of the study are as under:

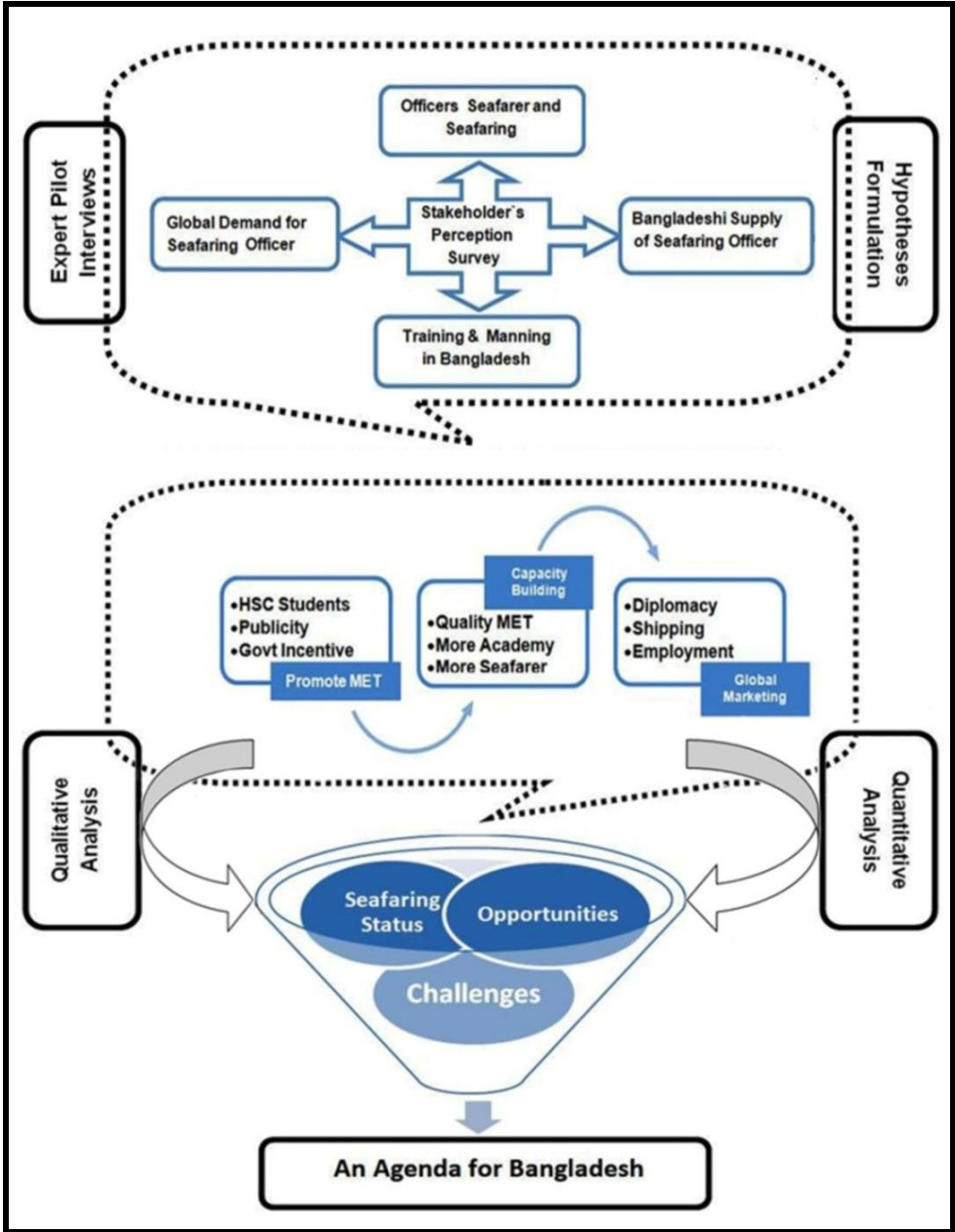


Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework of Seafaring Agenda

The key concepts used in the study have been operationalized under the following basic elements and steps illustrated as under:

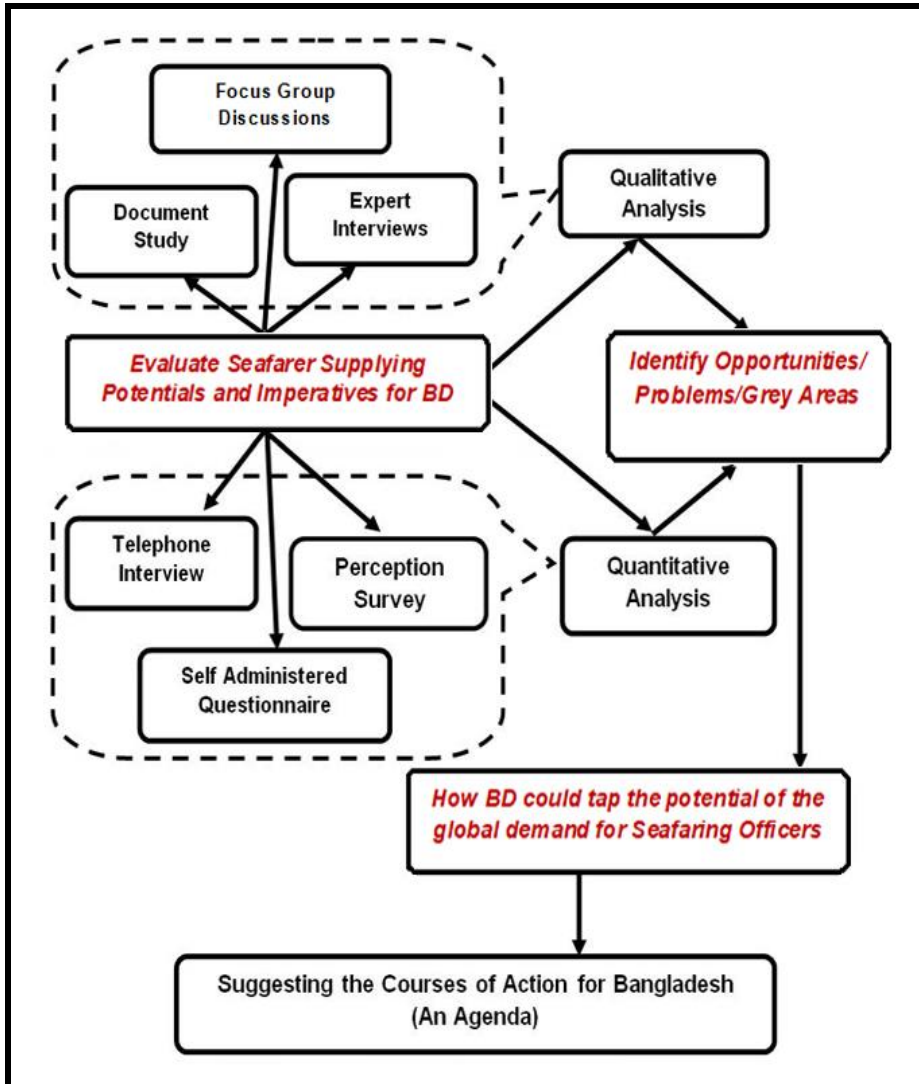


Figure 2: Operationalizing key concepts used in the Study

Research Methodology

Pilot interviews gave the researcher insights to formulate hypotheses and guidance for conducting further in-depth interviews and FGDs with seafaring stakeholders (Table-1). Besides, a small scale Perception Survey was also conducted to test the validation of the hypotheses. However, sample size and sampling methods are depicted bellow:

Table 1: Sampling Details, Data Collection Tools and Techniques

Data Collection Tools	Sample Size and Sampling Methods	Means for Data Collections
Pilot Interviews	04 x MET Experts Purposive and Judgmental.	Face to face Interviews
Sample Survey	08 x BPMA as Sample Purposive and Judgmental.	Semi-Structured Questionnaire to BPMA.
Perception Survey	350 x MET Stakeholders Random sampling	Semi-Structured Questionnaire to Stakeholders.
Interviews	06 x MET Examiners/ Veterans/Commandants Purposive and Judgmental.	Self administered Questionnaire sent through both E-Mail and hand delivery.
In-depth Interviews	09 x MET Experts /Policy Makers Purposive and Judgmental.	Face to face Interviews with Interview Guide
FGDs	24 x Nautical /Engine Cadets Purposive	Confidential discussions in group with FGDs Guide

The Seafaring Stakeholders and Status: Bangladesh Perspective

The Maritime Administration of Bangladesh i.e. DoS is responsible for supervising and monitoring the requisite international standards of the public and private maritime institutes regularly. It works under the Ministry of Shipping (MoS). By 2014, DoS approved 20 private marine academies/institutes beside the lone public marine academy that had been producing seafaring officers since 1962. After the independence, the government established Bangladesh Shipping Corporation (BSC) in 1972. There are more than 73 Bangladeshi national flag careers including 60 privately owned oceangoing vessels at present.

Ships had been used by mankind as a means of transportation for goods and passengers around the globe since the ancient era. Shipping carries more than 90% of the world trade. Seafaring is one of the prestigious, professional, courageous and adventuring well-paid careers of the world. A seafarer is an especially skilled manpower who is employed in any capacity on board a ship to which the MLC 2006 applies. Put simply, seafarers are the crews including ratings, cadets and officers on board a ship. Seafaring officers are broadly classified as deck/nautical officer or engineer officer. The history of Bangladeshi seafaring dates back to British Colonial period when they earned good reputation in British and other foreign flag vessels for their hard work, professionalism and sincerity.

Global Demand versus Domestic Supply

The rapid economic growth of the world fuelled the commercial fleets' growth since 2005 despite being constrained by factors like cancellations of new building, acceleration of scrapping aged ships, lay-up, low speed operation, etc. According to Lloyd's Register-Fair play, the number of ships as of January 2010 stood 35,623. Therefore, North America, Western Europe, Australia and other developed countries needed huge number of seafaring officers to run their shipping industries. According to BIMCO/ICS Man Power report 2015, the size of world merchant fleet was defined as 68, 723 different types of ships. Such trend of shipping growth warranted huge demand of seafarers from around the world. As a result, the growing shortage of seafaring officer has become an issue of global concern. The global supply and demand matrix of seafaring officers based on BIMCO/ISF/ICS study report is shown below:

Table 2: Global Supply-Demand Matrix of BIMCO/ISF/ICS

Ser	Updated Year	Global Supply	Global Demand	Global Shortage	Shortage Forecast (10 Years)	Projected Year
a	1995	409,000	427,000	18,000	45,000	By 2005
b	2000	404,000	420,000	16,000	46,000	By 2010
c	2005	466,000	476,000	10,000	27,000	By 2015
d	2010	624,000	637,000	13,000	32,153	By 2020
e	2015	774,000	790,500	16,500	1,47,500	By 2025

According to BIMCO/ICS report, the global supply of seafarers in 2015 was estimated to be 774,000 officers against the demand of 790,500. The global shortage of seafaring officers in 2015 was estimated to be 16,500 which were estimated to aggravate further to 147,500 by 2025. Again, the uptrend of global shortage of seafaring officers is depicted below:

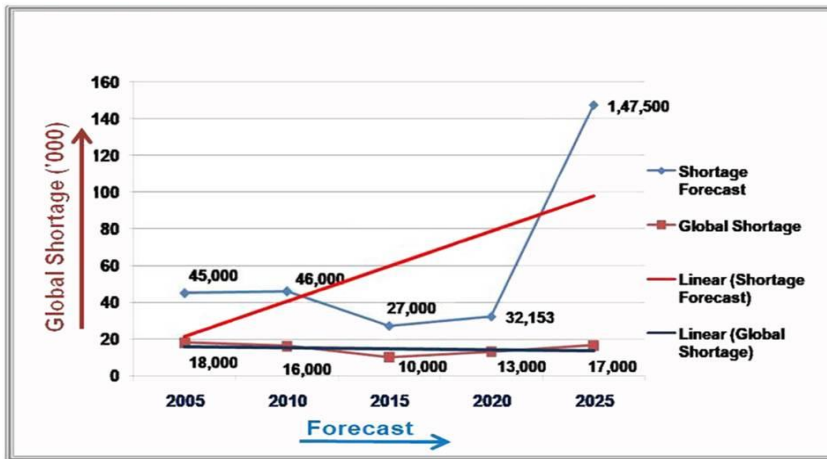


Figure 3: Projected Trend for Global Shortage of Seafaring Officers

The global fleet is manned by approximately 1.5million of registered seafarers including 624,000 seafaring officers from over 150 countries of the world. According to BIMCO/ICS Man Power report of 2015, the top five officer supplying countries are China, Philippines, India, Indonesia and Russian Federation. China, though has increased her seafaring officer supply, is primarily meeting her domestic requirements of Chinese fleet. Myanmar, following the suit of other neighbouring countries, has also increased her supply of seafaring officers. However, the total global supply of seafaring officers is depicted below:

Table 3: Seafaring Officer Supplying Area/Continent

Area /Continent / Sub Continent	Global Supply of Seafaring Officer	
	(1000's)	(%)
OECD Countries	184	29.4
Eastern Europe	127	20.3
Africa/ Latin America	50	8.0
Far East	184	29.5
Indian Sub-Continent	80	12.8
Total Summery	624,000	100%

At present, most of the OECD officers are about to retire and their youngsters are not interested in seafaring any more. Therefore, looking towards developing countries is the only option to run the large shipping industry of western world. Bangladesh could tap such potential of supplying seafaring officers. No study has been carried out yet to ascertain the total number of Bangladeshi seafaring officers. After the independence of Bangladesh, only 1,776 out of about 10,328 registered seafarers were employed on board national and foreign flag vessels. According to DoS, only 5951 Bangladeshi seafaring officers and 3687 ratings are serving on board ocean going vessels around the globe at present. Out of them, some 600 seafaring officers are employed by all 73 Bangladeshi national flag careers and the rest are serving on board foreign vessels. Besides, it is estimated from the questionnaire of the study that Bangladesh is capable to produce approximately 700 new seafaring officers out of her marine academies/institutes every year. According to DoS, as of 30 April 2017, a total of 1,497 cadets passed out from 15 private marine academies/institutes that were in operations. Out of them only 902 passed out cadets were fortunate to join ships and rest 594 are still waiting for sea training. By contrast, the lone public marine academy produced 806 cadets and 380 of them could join ships for sea training since 2014. So, considering the present infrastructure and employment situation, it is expected that the supply of Bangladeshi seafaring officers will be around 9,000 by 2020 with a capacity to produce more than 500 seafaring officers per annum.

Empirical Analysis

Most of the respondents of the perception survey strongly agreed that a good number of students pass H.S.C examination from science group every year and many of them have the potential for becoming seafaring officers (Figure-4).

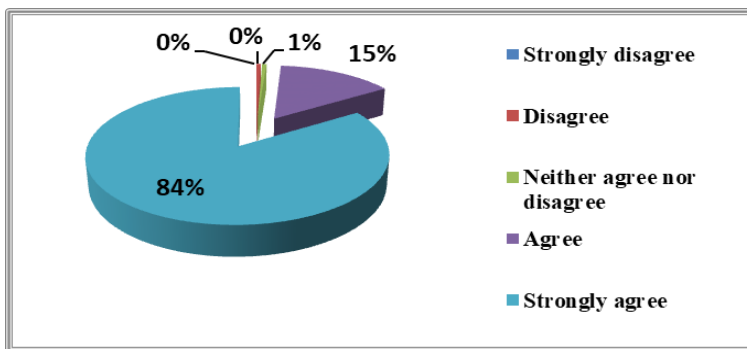


Figure 4: Potential of HSC Passed Students to become Seafarers

On the other hand, 236 out of 350 respondents did not agree that H.S.C passed potential female students from science group might be encouraged to choose seafaring as a profession. However, all the respondents (350) agreed that certificate issued by DoS should have the provision to be checked online anytime to avoid fraudulent certification in the name of Bangladesh Administration (Figure-5).

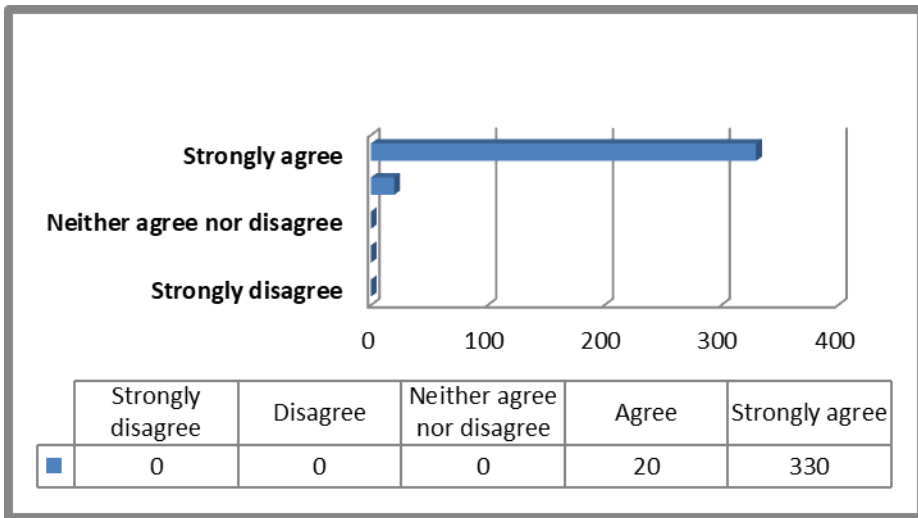
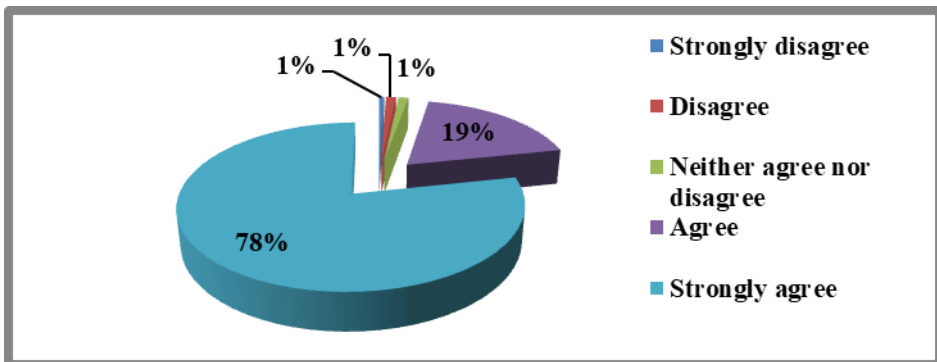


Figure 5: Opinions on “DoS should take measures to avoid fraudulent Certification”

A total 244 respondents agreed that lack of required qualified manpower for supervision, monitor, audit and evaluation is one of the major challenges for DoS to ensure the global quality MET. Even though 340 out of 350 respondents agreed that Bangladesh has the potential to produce world class seafarers for marketing them to the global fleet (Figure-6).



Figur 6: Potentiality of Bangladesh to produce world-class seafarers

By contrast, 83% respondents agreed that Bangladeshi seafarers are losing their global market gradually as they are facing immigration difficulties in some countries. As such, Bangladesh government should solve the visa problem faced by her seafarers diplomatically (Figure-7).

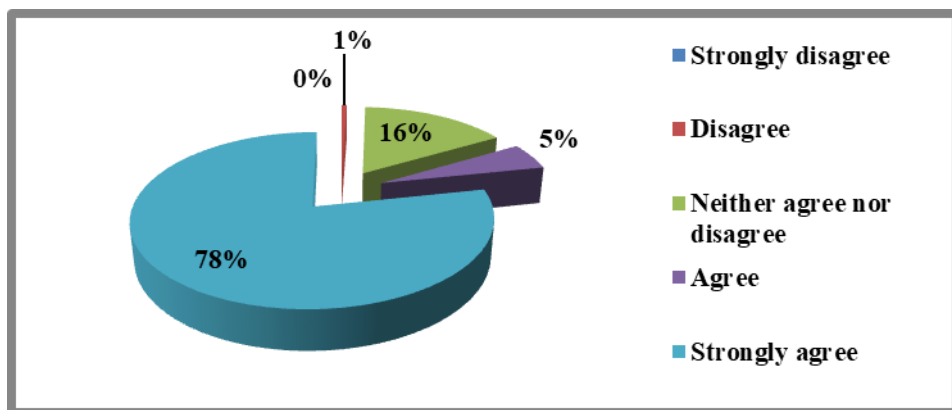


Figure 7: Government diplomacy to solve the visa problem

All the participants of the FGD-1 (nautical cadets) and FGD-2 (engineering cadets) chose seafaring profession as they knew that it takes shortest possible time to become a seafaring officer and it too is considered as one of the highest paid global profession. It also provides opportunities to see the world. Most of them strongly agreed that government efforts in pursuing their employment in the global market are highly desirable. Besides, DoS should ensure e-governance including online certificate checking system to avoid fraudulent seafarers who are tarnishing the image of Bangladesh and thus tap the potential of the global demand for seafaring officers.

Most of the seafaring veterans agreed that Bangladesh has huge potentials of producing seafaring officers and market them into the global fleet. Bangladesh government should pursue officer scarce countries and shipping companies around the world. It is argued that though global demand for seafaring officers are on the rise, yet, Bangladesh needs to build her image and brand her seafaring officers to compete with other seafarer supplying nations in the global market. Many of them opined that all the public and private marine academies/institutes should be regulated and administered through the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University, Bangladesh (BSMRMU) for ensuring global quality of MET.

Most of the DoS officials think that their offices are under-staffed and they need to build up their capacity as the numbers of cadets, marine academies, merchant ships are increasing day by day. The government policy makers argued that considering the global demand for seafaring officers and the potential of Bangladeshi youngsters, DoS already approved number of marine academies/institutes. The maritime affair secretary of MoFA argued that most of the visa issues of seafarers received by them often turned out to be faulty CDC or other insufficient documentation cases. However, they are ready to assist seafarers who are facing visa problems abroad.

Thematic Analysis

In the study, the strategic observations based on SWOT analysis on tapping the potential of global demand for seafaring officer versus domestic supply are depicted below:

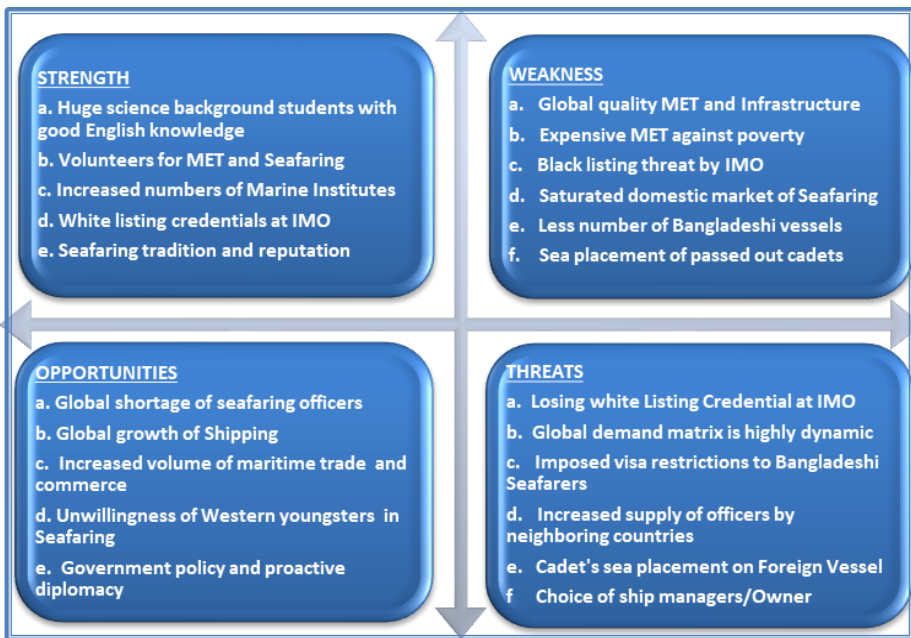


Figure 8: SWOT analysis of Bangladeshi Seafaring

Besides, the key findings of the Porter's Diamond Model analysis on global demand versus Bangladeshi supply of seafaring officers are deduced below:

- a. Bangladesh has got higher competitive advantages in regards to her seafaring officer while comparing with many other nations on a global scale.

- b. Bangladesh has the capacity to meet her domestic demand of seafaring officers besides being capable of supplying surplus seafaring officers against their global demand.
- c. The domestic push of surplus seafaring officer needs strategic pull through proactive and vibrant seafaring diplomacy by Bangladesh government.
- d. Bangladesh needs to adopt a comprehensive marketing strategy to reap benefits of uprising global demand for seafaring officers.

Hypotheses Test

Likert Scale was used to evaluate the score of the questionnaires duly filled up by the respondents of the perception survey. All the associated hypotheses were tested and all but H₄ were accepted. The summary of the statements attributed, score details and test result are represented below:

Table 4: Summary of Associated Hypotheses Test

Associated Hypothesis	Number of Statements attributed	Half of highest possible Score (Parameter)	Average Mean Value	Hypothesis Test Result
H ₁	7	17.50	29.23	Accepted
H ₂	12	30	53.06	Accepted
H ₃	10	25	45.67	Accepted
H ₄	7	17.50	17.38	Rejected

From the table above, it can be deduced that H₁, H₂, and H₃ are accepted as their weighted average mean value were more than half of their highest possible score i.e. the set parameter. While H₄ i.e. 'The present efforts by all the seafaring stakeholders of Bangladesh are fair enough to maximize her potential in the global seafaring officers' market' which could not qualify the test and, therefore, been rejected. However, the bar chart below depicts the result of the hypotheses test:

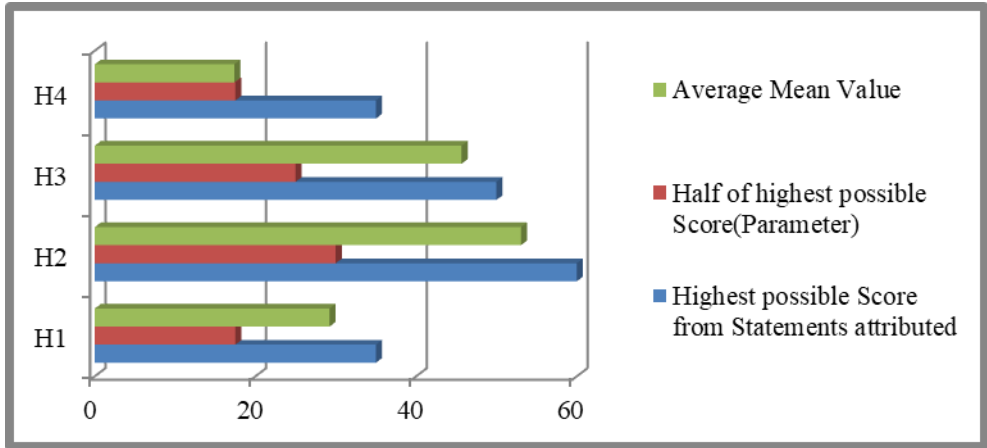


Figure 8: Result of Associated Hypotheses Test

Suggested Courses of Actions

The government should promote MET in Bangladesh by executing following agendas:

- a. Bangladesh government should raise awareness on seafaring among H.S.C. passed potential students. It may be ensured through both print and electronic media and by introducing chapters on sea and seafaring in the textbooks.
- b. The government may also offer scholarship to the poor but talented students of marine academies so that more numbers of poor students from the rural area are encouraged for becoming seafaring officer.

The existing capacity of the marine academies/institutes, DoS and BSC including private shipping companies need to be built by executing the following concern agendas:

- a. The Bangladeshi marine academies/institutes should ensure global quality MET conforming to STCW 2010 amendments to retain the white listing credentials at IMO.
- b. Every Bangladeshi marine academies/institutes should give more emphasis on developing communications skills including English language proficiencies for the better prospect of their cadets in the global market.
- c. The capacity of DoS should be strengthened with both qualified manpower and infrastructure for supervision, monitor, audit and

- evaluation of the quality standards of MET imparted by marine academies of Bangladesh.
- d. DoS should ensure e-governance including on-line certificate verification system to avoid fraudulent certification in the name of Bangladeshi Administration.
 - e. All the public and private marine academies/institutes should be regulated and administered through Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University, Bangladesh for ensuring global quality standards of MET.

All seafaring stakeholders should try to build the image of Bangladesh and explore global market for Bangladeshi seafaring officers by executing the agendas below:

- a. Efforts should be undertaken by MoFA to build the image of Bangladesh as a whole and Bangladeshi seafaring in particular.
- b. MoFA missions abroad may take up cases to solve visa problems/immigration difficulties faced by Bangladeshi seafarers abroad diplomatically and with due priority. Bangladesh may also raise the visa issue faced by her seafarers at IMO for international solutions.
- c. Bangladesh may also utilize her white listing credentials for branding herself and fostering seafaring diplomacy.
- d. Bangladesh government should pursue for the employment of her seafaring officers in the officer scarce countries and shipping companies around the world.
- e. MoFA mission abroad may also take up cases for exploring seafaring officers market and negotiate for the employment of Bangladeshi seafaring officers.
- f. Countries like Panama, Liberia, and Malta, etc. succeeded attracting ships' owners around the globe for registration facilities. Bangladesh may also follow the same and thus increase the chances of employing Bangladeshi seafaring officers on board those ships.
- g. Multipronged efforts have to be undertaken by DoS, MoS, MoFA, marine academies and other stakeholders so that Bangladesh may tap the potential of global demand for seafaring officers effectively through global marketing.

Conclusion

Bangladesh, being a seafaring nation, has a long tradition and reputation of supplying seafarers around the globe. She has the capacity to meet her domestic demand of seafaring officers besides being capable of supplying surplus seafaring officers against the global demand. Bangladesh has got higher competitive advantages in regards to her seafaring officers while comparing with many other nations on a global scale. Even though, Bangladeshi seafarers are losing their global market gradually as they often face immigration difficulties in some countries. As such, Bangladesh government should solve the visa problem faced by her seafarers diplomatically. Besides, e-governance including on-line certificate verification system has to be used by DoS to avoid fraudulent certification in the name of Bangladeshi Administration. MoFA missions abroad may also take up cases for exploring seafaring officers market and negotiate for the employment of Bangladeshi seafaring officers. They may also take diplomatic efforts to brand Bangladeshi seafaring and pursue for the employment of her seafaring officers in the officers scarce countries and shipping companies around the world. She being a white listed country may also raise the visa problem issue at IMO for International solutions. Bangladesh needs to uplift her image by ensuring global quality of MET imparted by her marine academies. In this regard, all the public and private marine academies/institutes should be regulated and administered through Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University. Multipronged efforts have to be undertaken by DoS, MoS, MoFA, marine academies and other stakeholders so that Bangladesh may adopt a comprehensive marketing strategy to tap the potential of global demand for seafaring officers effectively.

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