

Distance Learning for Egyptian seafarers: a critique

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Abstract

Maritime industry is one of the most important international industries as the majority of the global cargo is transferred onboard ships. It encompasses more than 50 professions such as; shipping, agencies, ship chandlers, and crewing agencies, to list a few, and it depends mainly on three elements; ports, ships, and personnel. Also, the maritime industry is organized through a group of international instruments such as; Conventions, Resolutions, Decrees, and Codes that give great cares for the three elements. Even though, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) prove statistically that more than 80% of the marine casualties occur because of human errors, which gives more emphasis to the importance of human element engaged on jobs either at ports or onboard ships (IMO, 2000).

This paper will focus on seafarers, the most important element of the maritime industry, from the education and training point of view. As, seafarers need to update their certificates (Mandatory Courses) every 5 years, in addition to the upgrading studies for the officers, and of course all of these courses should be done, otherwise the seafarer will not be able to renew their seaman book or Certificate of Competency (COC) to get a job onboard. And, to highlight the problem, seafarers usually work for about 5 months onboard and about 2 months off and in the period where they need to update their certificates they may need about 2 months to complete the courses and issue the certificates from the administration, as the case occurred in EGYPT. Moreover, the fees for these courses are often slightly high, not only the course fees, but for seafarers who do not live in the same city they have to spend extra expenses to pay transportation and accommodation.

Thus, time and expenses represent tow major problems facing seafarers, as they should attend these courses in person at a maritime institute or Academy. Some countries like NORWAY considers the Computer Based Training (CBT) where seafarers can take the courses in their place without attending the courses physically in any institute, but this system is not applied in many countries like EGYPT. This might suggest a real need to solve this problem which may require using Distance Learning (DL) as a tool for all seafarers registered or graduated from EGYPT or from other ARAB States. Students may be asked then to attend the training sessions and exams to fulfill the administration requirements and also comply with all international regimes, saving most of the expenses for their transportation and accommodation.
