



Implications of Onboard Experiences on Career Development of Filipino Seafarers

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Abstract

Onboard experiences play a crucial role in shaping the professional growth and career trajectories of seafarers. While maritime education provides foundational knowledge, shipboard exposure offers practical learning opportunities that influence competency development, adaptation, and long-term career progression. This study investigated the implications of onboard experiences on the career development of Filipino seafarers. A qualitative research approach with a descriptive phenomenological orientation was used, applying thematic analysis to explore the lived experiences of Filipino seafarers. Fifteen participants were purposively selected based on their shipboard experience and ability to provide rich descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Trustworthiness was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability procedures. Four major themes emerged from the analysis: (1) onboard experiences as foundations of professional competence, (2) supportive work environments as catalysts of career growth, (3) occupational challenges as sources of resilience and adaptation, and (4) personal rewards and aspirations as drivers of career sustainability. The findings revealed that shipboard experiences contribute to the development of technical competencies, safety awareness, leadership capabilities, and professional judgment. Positive workplace relationships supported learning and motivation, while occupational challenges fostered adaptability and resilience. Financial security, family responsibilities, personal fulfillment, and spiritual strength further sustained participants' commitment to their maritime careers. Career development among Filipino seafarers is a multidimensional process shaped by experiential learning, social support, resilience, and personal motivation. The study highlights the importance of strengthening onboard training, mentorship initiatives, and crew welfare programs to support professional growth and long-term career sustainability in the maritime industry.

Keywords: Filipino seafarers; onboard experiences; career development; maritime profession; experiential learning; human capital theory



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INTRODUCTION

The maritime industry remains a critical component of global trade, facilitating the movement of goods and commodities across international markets. The Philippines has long been recognized as one of the world's leading suppliers of seafaring labor, making Filipino seafarers a significant contributor to the global maritime workforce (Galam, 2025). Given the

dynamic and demanding nature of maritime work, understanding the factors that influence seafarers' professional growth and career advancement has become an important area of inquiry.

Career development in the maritime profession is influenced by educational preparation, technical competencies, professional experience, and workplace conditions. Unlike

many land-based occupations, seafaring careers are largely shaped by onboard experiences acquired through operational responsibilities, participation in maritime training, exposure to multicultural work environments, and prolonged engagement with shipboard operations. Such experiences provide opportunities for competency development, leadership enhancement, and professional growth, which may subsequently influence promotion prospects and long-term career outcomes.

Previous studies have emphasized the importance of experiential learning in developing professional competencies. Experiential learning theory suggests that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience into learning and practice (Kolb & Kolb, 2022). Research has shown that workplace experiences promote the acquisition of technical skills, critical thinking, and professional competence, which are essential for career progression (Morris, 2019). Within the maritime sector, career advancement is influenced not only by technical qualifications but also by working conditions, training opportunities, and professional experiences gained onboard vessels.

Maritime studies have further demonstrated that seafarers encounter unique occupational conditions that affect their professional lives. Seafaring is characterized by prolonged periods away from home, social isolation, work-family conflict, occupational stress, and demanding operational responsibilities, all of which have implications for job satisfaction and performance (An et al., 2020). Recent evidence also suggests that training and development opportunities, workplace relationships, and organizational support are significant contributors to seafarer satisfaction and professional development (Glaveli et al., 2026). Furthermore, studies involving Filipino seafarers indicate that opportunities for skills development, professional training, career advancement, and diverse work experiences positively influence career satisfaction and professional fulfillment (Diocos, 2025).

Research Gap. Despite the growing body of literature on maritime employment, seafarer welfare, and job satisfaction, existing studies have predominantly focused on occupational challenges, stress management, working conditions, and employee retention. Comparatively, limited attention has been devoted to examining how onboard experiences contribute to the career development of Filipino seafarers. While prior studies acknowledge the value of work experience and professional exposure, there remains insufficient empirical evidence regarding the specific ways in which onboard experiences support career advancement, professional growth, and long-term career trajectories among Filipino maritime professionals. This gap is particularly important given the Philippines' continuing role in supplying seafarers to the global maritime industry (Galam, 2025).

Given the limited scholarly attention devoted to the relationship between onboard experiences and career development among Filipino seafarers, there is a need to examine how various dimensions of shipboard life contribute to professional growth and advancement. Understanding these relationships may provide important insights for maritime higher education institutions, shipping companies, training centers, regulators, and policymakers seeking to strengthen workforce development initiatives and improve maritime career pathways.

Therefore, this study investigates the implications of onboard experiences on the career development of Filipino seafarers by examining how shipboard training, work environment, operational responsibilities, professional challenges, and experiential learning contribute to career advancement and professional growth. Through this investigation, the study seeks to contribute to the existing maritime career development literature and provide evidence-based recommendations for strengthening human resource development within the maritime industry.

Theoretical Framework. This study is anchored on Human Capital Theory, which posits that investments in education, training, and work experience enhance individual productivity and improve opportunities for career advancement (Becker, 1993). From this perspective, onboard experiences can be viewed as forms of human capital accumulation that contribute to the development of technical expertise, leadership capabilities, operational competence, and professional readiness. As seafarers engage in shipboard operations and workplace learning, they acquire valuable competencies that may influence their future career progression.

Significance of the Study. The findings of this study may benefit maritime educational institutions by providing evidence that can support curriculum enhancement and competency-based training programs. Shipping companies may utilize the findings in designing effective mentoring, training, and career advancement initiatives. Maritime training centers and regulatory agencies may apply the results in developing programs that promote workforce sustainability and professional development. Most importantly, the study may assist Filipino seafarers in understanding the role of onboard experiences in shaping their career trajectories and professional success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Onboard Experiences and Experiential Learning. Onboard experience is widely recognized as a fundamental component of maritime education, training, and professional formation. Unlike many occupations where workplace exposure supplements formal education, the maritime profession relies heavily on shipboard experience as a primary mechanism for developing technical competence, operational readiness, and professional judgment. According to Mori and Manuel (2023), onboard training constitutes one of the most effective forms of practical learning for seafarers because it enables trainees to apply theoretical knowledge within real-life operational environments. The authors further argued that onboard training is theoretically

grounded in situated learning and cognitive apprenticeship, wherein learning occurs through participation in authentic workplace activities and interaction with experienced practitioners.

Similarly, Mori and Manuel (2024) emphasized that onboard training remains a critical element of Maritime Education and Training (MET) because it facilitates competency development through actual shipboard operations, practical problem-solving, and exposure to workplace realities that cannot be fully replicated through classroom instruction or simulation exercises. The shipboard environment enables cadets and junior officers to acquire navigational, engineering, communication, and leadership competencies necessary for maritime career advancement.

Experiential Learning Theory further supports the importance of onboard experiences in professional development. The theory posits that learning occurs through the transformation of experience into knowledge and practice. As seafarers engage in operational tasks, emergency drills, safety procedures, and multicultural workplace interactions, they continuously develop competencies that contribute to professional growth and readiness for higher responsibilities. Consequently, onboard experiences may be viewed as a critical form of human capital accumulation that directly influences career progression.

Shipboard Training and Competency Development. Competency acquisition remains a central requirement for career advancement within the maritime industry. International maritime standards emphasize the importance of sea service, onboard assessments, and practical training in ensuring that seafarers possess the competencies necessary for safe and effective ship operations. Research indicates that the quality of onboard training significantly influences the knowledge, skills, and professional capabilities acquired by maritime personnel.

According to Mori (2025), the acquisition of essential maritime competencies is highly dependent on the quality of both shore-based education and onboard training experiences. The study identified mentorship quality, availability of training opportunities, workplace culture, and practical exposure as major factors affecting the effectiveness of shipboard training. Furthermore, challenges such as limited cadet berths, inadequate mentoring structures, and workplace harassment may hinder competency development and negatively influence professional growth.

The maritime industry increasingly recognizes continuous learning and competency enhancement as requirements for sustainable workforce development. A recent sustainability framework proposed by Caesar (2024) highlighted that training, retention, and skills development are essential for creating a resilient maritime workforce capable of responding to operational and technological changes. The study found that the development of adaptive competencies is necessary for long-term employability and career sustainability among maritime professionals.

These findings suggest that onboard training serves not merely as a licensing requirement but also as a mechanism through which seafarers accumulate professional competencies that support promotion, employability, and career advancement.

Work Environment, Occupational Challenges, and Professional Growth. The maritime workplace presents unique occupational conditions that influence professional experiences and career outcomes. Seafarers operate within physically demanding and socially isolated environments characterized by long working hours, multicultural interactions, safety risks, and prolonged separation from family members. While these challenges may adversely affect well-being, they may also contribute to the development of resilience, adaptability, and professional maturity.

Research examining the attractions and challenges of seafaring careers found that occupational experiences are shaped by both professional opportunities and workplace difficulties. Geron (2024) reported that seafarers viewed family support, career opportunities, and financial rewards as major attractions of maritime employment, while recognizing physical and environmental challenges associated with shipboard work. These experiences influence how seafarers perceive and navigate their professional careers.

Studies on seafarer welfare similarly indicate that occupational health conditions, workplace environment, safety concerns, and psychosocial stressors significantly affect professional development and work performance. Recent bibliometric evidence suggests that improving working conditions, strengthening occupational safety, and enhancing training opportunities are essential for supporting seafarer well-being and long-term career sustainability.

From a career development perspective, exposure to workplace challenges may facilitate the acquisition of coping mechanisms, leadership skills, decision-making abilities, and adaptability, all of which are important competencies for advancement into higher shipboard positions.

Career Development and Advancement among Seafarers. Career development refers to the continuous process through which individuals acquire competencies, pursue professional opportunities, and advance toward higher occupational roles. Within the maritime industry, career progression typically follows a structured pathway characterized by increasing responsibilities, sea service requirements, certification achievements, and leadership development.

The concept of maritime career development extends beyond promotion to encompass professional fulfillment, employability, and lifelong learning. Research exploring seafarers' motivations and aspirations suggests that

career advancement is influenced by opportunities for professional growth, skill acquisition, financial stability, and personal achievement.

Human Capital Theory provides a useful framework for understanding maritime career development. The theory argues that investments in education, training, and workplace experiences increase productivity and improve career prospects. Within the maritime context, professional competencies acquired through onboard experiences represent forms of human capital that enhance employability and opportunities for advancement. Consequently, career progression may be viewed as an outcome of accumulated knowledge, skills, and experiential learning obtained throughout a seafarer's professional journey.

Leadership development likewise plays an important role in maritime career advancement. Seafarers aspiring to officer and managerial positions must acquire not only technical competence but also communication, team management, conflict resolution, and decision-making skills. These leadership competencies are often developed through actual shipboard responsibilities, mentoring relationships, and operational experiences.

Career Sustainability and Retention in Maritime Employment. Career sustainability refers to an individual's capacity to maintain long-term employability, professional growth, and adaptability within changing occupational environments. In the maritime industry, workforce sustainability is increasingly influenced by technological advances, digitalization, environmental regulations, and evolving competency requirements.

Recent maritime workforce studies have highlighted the importance of continuous learning, professional development, and organizational support in sustaining long-term careers. The increasing complexity of maritime operations requires seafarers to continuously update their skills and adapt to emerging

industry demands. Workforce resilience is therefore dependent on strong training systems, supportive organizational practices, and opportunities for ongoing career development.

Moreover, talent management research indicates that retention and career sustainability among seafarers are strengthened when organizations provide clear career pathways, competency development opportunities, mentoring programs, and welfare support. These initiatives not only improve employee satisfaction but also contribute to workforce stability and organizational performance. Thus, career sustainability in maritime employment may be enhanced through positive onboard experiences that foster competency development, professional satisfaction, and commitment to the profession.

Career Development of Filipino Seafarers. The Philippines remains one of the world's leading sources of maritime labor, making Filipino seafarers a critical component of the international shipping workforce. According to Galam (2025), the employability and global competitiveness of Filipino seafarers are shaped by maritime education, training systems, certification standards, and workplace experiences. The study emphasized that international requirements and industry stakeholders significantly influence the development of Filipino maritime professionals.

Research focusing specifically on Filipino seafarers indicates that opportunities for skills development, career advancement, professional training, travel experiences, and multicultural interactions contribute positively to job satisfaction and career fulfillment. Diocos (2025) found that opportunities for ongoing learning, advancement, and diverse workplace experiences were significantly associated with higher levels of job satisfaction among Filipino seafarers.

Similarly, studies conducted among Filipino maritime personnel suggest that career

satisfaction is enhanced when organizations provide developmental opportunities and clear pathways for advancement. Filipino seafarers often view maritime employment as a means of achieving financial stability, professional growth, and long-term career success.

Despite the substantial contribution of Filipino seafarers to the global maritime workforce, relatively few studies have directly examined how onboard experiences influence their career development. Most existing research focuses on welfare, job satisfaction, retention, and labor migration rather than the specific mechanisms through which shipboard experiences contribute to professional advancement.

Literature Gap. The reviewed literature highlights the importance of onboard training, experiential learning, competency development, workplace conditions, and career sustainability in maritime employment. Studies have consistently demonstrated that shipboard experiences facilitate professional learning, technical competence, and occupational adaptation. Likewise, investigations involving Filipino seafarers have emphasized the importance of training, employability, welfare, and professional development.

However, the literature reveals several gaps. First, most studies examine onboard training primarily from an educational or competency-development perspective rather than its contribution to long-term career advancement. Second, existing research tends to investigate maritime welfare, job satisfaction, and retention independently, with limited attention given to their connection with career development. Third, studies specifically focusing on Filipino seafarers generally emphasize employability, labor migration, and job satisfaction while overlooking the career implications of actual shipboard experiences. Finally, few empirical studies have integrated multiple dimensions of onboard experiences, such as training, workplace environment, operational responsibilities, and occupational challenges, into a single framework for explaining career development outcomes.

Therefore, there remains a need to investigate how various onboard experiences influence the career development of Filipino seafarers, thereby addressing a significant gap in maritime career development literature.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design. The study adopted a descriptive phenomenological orientation while employing thematic analysis as the analytical strategy. Phenomenology is concerned with understanding and describing individuals' lived experiences regarding a particular phenomenon. This design was considered appropriate because the study sought to gain an in-depth understanding of how seafarers perceive and interpret their onboard experiences and how these experiences influence their professional growth, career advancement, and overall career development.

Through semi-structured interviews, participants were encouraged to share their personal experiences, insights, and perspectives regarding the opportunities and challenges encountered during their maritime careers. The qualitative approach enabled the researchers to capture rich and detailed descriptions that may not be obtained through quantitative methods. The themes that emerged from participants' narratives provided a deeper understanding of the relationship between onboard experiences and career development among Filipino seafarers.

Key Participants and Sampling Technique. The study involved fifteen (15) Filipino seafarers. Of these, eight (8) were ship officers and seven (7) were ratings. Participants had between 3 and 25 years of seafaring experience, reflecting both early-career and highly experienced maritime professionals. With ages between 23 to 52, they were assigned to various vessel types, including container ships, bulk carriers, and oil tankers. The diversity of rank, experience, vessel assignment, and age enabled the researchers to gather varied perspectives regarding how onboard experiences influence career development in the maritime profession.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. This sampling technique was employed because it enabled the researchers to identify individuals who possessed direct experience and relevant knowledge regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Inclusion criteria required participants to be active Filipino seafarers with a minimum of three years of onboard experience and willingness to participate voluntarily in the study.

Research Instrument. The primary research instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researchers based on the objectives of the study and relevant literature on maritime career development. The interview guide contained open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' experiences regarding shipboard training, work environment, operational responsibilities, workplace challenges, and their perceived influence on career development.

To establish content validity, the interview guide was subjected to expert review by a maritime education and industry specialist. The comments and recommendations of the expert were incorporated into the final version of the instrument to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the objectives of the study.

Data Gathering Procedure. The researchers secured the necessary permission to conduct the study prior to data collection. Potential participants were identified based on the established inclusion criteria, specifically active Filipino seafarers with relevant onboard experience and willingness to participate in the study. Eligible participants were contacted and informed about the nature, objectives, and significance of the research.

Before the conduct of the interviews, the researchers explained the purpose of the study and obtained informed consent from all participants. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without

any consequences. The researchers also assured the participants that all information shared during the study would be treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using a researcher-developed interview guide. The interview questions were designed to elicit participants' experiences regarding shipboard training, work environment, operational responsibilities, workplace challenges, and the influence of these experiences on their career development. Individual interviews were conducted at mutually convenient times and locations or through online communication platforms when face-to-face interaction was not feasible. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information gathered. Field notes were also taken to document significant observations and contextual details that may assist in data interpretation. Following each interview, the recordings were transcribed verbatim to facilitate systematic analysis.

After transcription, the researchers reviewed the transcripts repeatedly to ensure familiarity with the data and to verify the accuracy of the recorded responses. Participant identities were protected through the use of codes or pseudonyms during transcription and reporting. All digital files, audio recordings, and interview transcripts were stored securely and were accessible only to the researchers.

The collected data were subsequently organized and prepared for thematic analysis. The interview transcripts served as the primary source of data for identifying recurring patterns, themes, and insights regarding the implications of onboard experiences on the career development of Filipino seafarers.

Data Analysis. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). The recorded interviews were first transcribed verbatim to facilitate familiarization with the data. The researchers then repeatedly reviewed the transcripts and generated initial codes based on recurring ideas and meaningful statements.

Subsequently, similar codes were grouped into broader categories, which were organized into potential themes. The themes were reviewed, refined, and defined to ensure that they accurately represented participants' experiences and responses. Finally, the themes were interpreted and presented in relation to the study objectives concerning the implications of onboard experiences on career development among Filipino seafarers.

Trustworthiness of the Study. The trustworthiness of the findings was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through member checking and careful review of interview transcripts. Dependability was strengthened through consistent application of interview procedures and documentation of the analysis process. Confirmability was ensured through maintaining an audit trail and minimizing researcher bias during data interpretation.

Ethical Considerations. The researchers adhered to established ethical principles throughout the conduct of the study. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose, nature, and objectives of the research. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before the conduct of interviews.

Participants were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning codes or pseudonyms instead of using participants' real names. Audio recordings, transcripts, and other research materials were securely stored and accessed only by the researchers.

The researchers ensured that no physical, psychological, social, or professional harm would result from participation in the study. All information obtained from participants was used solely for academic and research purposes and was treated with confidentiality.

RESULTS

The thematic analysis of the interviews with Filipino seafarers generated four major themes that describe how onboard experiences influence career development. These themes include: (1) Onboard Experiences as Foundations of Professional Competence, (2) Supportive Work Environments as Catalysts of Career Growth, (3) Occupational Challenges as Sources of Resilience and Adaptation, and (4) Personal Rewards and Aspirations as Drivers of Career Sustainability. These themes collectively illustrate how professional learning, workplace interactions, occupational adversities, and personal motivations shape the career trajectories of seafarers.

Theme 1: Onboard Experiences as Foundations of Professional Competence. Participants consistently described onboard experiences as essential opportunities for acquiring practical competencies and professional knowledge that cannot be fully learned in academic settings. Through daily responsibilities, operational exposure, and safety-related activities, seafarers developed the technical and behavioral competencies necessary for career progression.

Three subthemes emerged under this theme: (a) discipline and safety consciousness, (b) practical skill development, and (c) professional maturity and leadership preparation.

Discipline and Safety Consciousness. Participants emphasized that compliance with safety procedures and effective time management were among the most valuable lessons learned onboard. These experiences enabled them to cultivate discipline, accountability, and awareness of workplace risks.

One participant shared:

"Time management and safety practice." (P3)

Another participant stated:

"Learning basic standards helps your safety onboard." (P7)

These responses suggest that onboard experiences promote the development of professional habits that are critical in ensuring both personal and organizational safety.

Practical Skill Development. Participants reported that exposure to actual shipboard operations enabled them to strengthen technical competencies and problem-solving abilities. Practical engagement allowed them to translate theoretical learning into workplace performance.

As one participant explained:

"Applying knowledge helps improve problem-solving skills." (P8)

Another participant noted:

"You gain experience by performing actual tasks onboard." (P11)

These findings indicate that experiential learning contributes significantly to competence development and career readiness.

Professional Maturity and Leadership Preparation. Several participants viewed their onboard experiences as preparation for future leadership roles. Exposure to operational responsibilities allowed them to understand the demands associated with higher positions.

One participant remarked:

"I also started as a rating, and through experience I learned what is needed to become an officer." (P6)

The findings demonstrate that onboard experiences serve as a developmental pathway that prepares seafarers for increased responsibilities and career advancement.

Theme 2: Supportive Work Environments as Catalysts of Career Growth. Participants highlighted the importance of interpersonal relationships and supportive workplace environments in facilitating professional development. Positive interactions with colleagues and supervisors fostered learning, motivation, and adaptation to shipboard life.

Three subthemes emerged: (a) teamwork and camaraderie, (b) mentorship and guidance, and (c) motivation for continuous improvement.

Teamwork and Camaraderie. Participants consistently described harmonious relationships among crew members as important sources of support. Positive social interactions reduced workplace stress and encouraged productive collaboration.

One participant stated:

"Good camaraderie onboard removes stress." (P4)

Another participant added:

"Working together helps us accomplish tasks more effectively." (P10)

These experiences demonstrate the role of collaborative environments in promoting both professional efficiency and personal well-being.

Mentorship and Guidance. Several participants acknowledged the influence of experienced officers and senior crew members in developing their knowledge and confidence.

One participant shared:

"Senior officers guide us and teach us proper procedures." (P9)

Mentorship allowed participants to navigate workplace challenges while enhancing their professional competence.

Motivation for Continuous Improvement. Participants noted that encouragement from colleagues and supervisors inspired them to pursue personal and professional development.

As one participant explained:

"The support I receive motivates me to perform better and learn more." (P12)

These findings suggest that positive workplace environments contribute significantly to career growth by creating opportunities for learning and self-improvement.

Theme 3: Occupational Challenges as Sources of Resilience and Adaptation. While participants acknowledged the benefits of shipboard work, they also identified various occupational challenges that affected their professional journeys. Rather than hindering development, many of these challenges became opportunities for growth and adaptation.

Three subthemes emerged: (a) family separation, (b) work-related pressures, and (c) coping with workplace difficulties.

Family Separation. Participants frequently described prolonged separation from family members as one of the most difficult aspects of their profession.

One participant stated:

"Being away from family is one of the hardest parts of the job." (P5)

The emotional impact of separation required participants to develop coping mechanisms and emotional resilience.

Work-Related Pressures. Participants reported that long working hours, demanding responsibilities, and high-performance expectations created significant challenges.

As one participant noted:

"The workload can be physically and mentally exhausting." (P2)

These experiences required seafarers to strengthen their adaptability and commitment to professional responsibilities.

Coping with Workplace Difficulties. Participants identified various strategies used to overcome

job-related challenges, including maintaining positive attitudes, focusing on goals, and relying on social support systems.

One participant explained:

"I learned to stay positive and focus on my responsibilities despite difficulties." (P13)

These findings indicate that occupational challenges contribute to the development of resilience, emotional regulation, and professional perseverance.

Theme 4: Personal Rewards and Aspirations as Drivers of Career Sustainability. Participants described various intrinsic and extrinsic rewards that motivated them to remain in the maritime profession. These rewards provided purpose, satisfaction, and long-term career commitment.

Three subthemes emerged: (a) financial security, (b) family aspirations, and (c) personal fulfillment and spiritual strength.

Financial Security. Participants commonly identified economic benefits as a primary motivation for pursuing and sustaining maritime careers.

One participant shared:

"The salary helps provide for my family's needs." (P1)

Financial stability enabled participants to achieve personal goals and improve their families' living conditions.

Family Aspirations. Participants viewed their careers as opportunities to support and secure better futures for their loved ones.

As one participant explained:

"Everything I do onboard is for my family." (P14)

Family responsibilities served as a strong source of motivation and career commitment.

Personal Fulfillment and Spiritual Strength. Several participants emphasized the

importance of personal satisfaction, faith, and a sense of purpose in sustaining their careers.

One participant remarked:
“Faith gives me strength whenever I experience challenges onboard.” (P15)

These findings suggest that personal values and spiritual beliefs contribute to persistence and long-term engagement in the maritime profession.

Table 1
Summary of Themes

Major Theme	Subthemes
Onboard Experiences as Foundations of Professional Competence	Discipline and Safety Consciousness; Practical Skill Development; Professional Maturity and Leadership Preparation
Supportive Work Environments as Catalysts of Career Growth	Teamwork and Camaraderie; Mentorship and Guidance; Motivation for Continuous Improvement
Occupational Challenges as Sources of Resilience and Adaptation	Family Separation; Work-Related Pressures; Coping with Workplace Difficulties
Personal Rewards and Aspirations as Drivers of Career Sustainability	Financial Security; Family Aspirations; Personal Fulfillment and Spiritual Strength

Table 1 presents the overarching themes and subthemes that emerged from the analysis. Overall, the findings reveal that onboard experiences influence career development through the acquisition of professional competencies, exposure to supportive workplace relationships, adaptation to occupational challenges, and motivation derived from personal aspirations and rewards. Collectively, these experiences contribute to the professional growth, resilience, and long-term career sustainability of Filipino seafarers.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the implications of onboard experiences on the career development of Filipino seafarers. The findings revealed that career development is shaped by four interrelated dimensions: the acquisition of professional competence through onboard experiences, the role of supportive work environments in facilitating growth, the development of resilience through occupational challenges, and the influence of personal rewards and aspirations in sustaining career commitment. Taken together, these themes suggest that career development among

Filipino seafarers extends beyond technical skill acquisition and encompasses social, psychological, and motivational processes that contribute to long-term professional advancement.

Onboard Experiences as Foundations of Professional Competence. The findings demonstrate that onboard experiences serve as a primary mechanism through which seafarers develop professional competence. Participants emphasized that discipline, safety consciousness, practical skill acquisition, and leadership preparation are developed through direct exposure to shipboard operations. These experiences enable seafarers to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge acquired through formal education and the practical demands of maritime work.

This finding supports the assertion of Mori and Manuel (2023) that onboard training constitutes one of the most effective components of maritime education because it provides opportunities for experiential learning and competency development. Likewise, the participants' emphasis on discipline, time management, and continuous performance improvement aligns with Gusyev (2021), who argued that effective time management and sustained focus are essential factors in maximizing professional growth and operational effectiveness in maritime settings. Through repeated engagement with operational tasks and safety procedures, seafarers gradually acquire the competencies required for career progression and leadership responsibilities.

The findings also reinforce the experiential nature of professional development within the maritime industry. Unlike many occupations where advancement is primarily determined by academic credentials, maritime career progression depends heavily on accumulated operational experience. Participants viewed onboard assignments as opportunities not only to improve technical expertise but also to cultivate professional judgment, decision-making abilities, and leadership potential.

Consequently, onboard experiences function as a developmental pathway through which novice seafarers prepare for higher-ranking positions and expanded responsibilities.

Supportive Work Environments as Catalysts of Career Growth. The second theme highlights the importance of supportive workplace environments in facilitating career development. Participants reported that teamwork, camaraderie, mentorship, and encouragement from colleagues and supervisors positively influenced their professional growth. These findings suggest that the social environment onboard vessels play a significant role in promoting learning, motivation, and adaptation.

The results are consistent with Setiawan et al. (2021), who reported that continuous learning is more likely to occur when seafarers feel supported within their work environments. Positive interpersonal relationships encourage knowledge sharing, enhance confidence, and create opportunities for collaborative problem-solving. Similarly, Meštrović et al. (2024) emphasized that a healthy and supportive workplace environment is increasingly important as maritime operations become more technologically advanced and operationally complex. Supportive environments allow seafarers to develop competencies while maintaining positive work attitudes and psychological well-being.

The findings further underscore the significance of mentorship in maritime career development. Participants recognized senior officers and experienced crew members as important sources of guidance and professional knowledge. Such relationships facilitate the transfer of tacit knowledge that may not be formally taught through training programs. This indicates that workplace relationships constitute an important form of informal learning that complements formal maritime education and contributes substantially to career advancement.

Moreover, positive workplace environments appear to strengthen motivation for continuous improvement. When seafarers experience mutual respect, teamwork, and recognition of effort, they become more willing to engage in ongoing learning and professional development activities. Thus, career growth is influenced not only by individual capabilities but also by organizational and interpersonal factors that create opportunities for learning and achievement.

Occupational Challenges as Sources of Resilience and Adaptation. The findings further revealed that career development is shaped by occupational challenges inherent in seafaring life. Participants identified family separation, heavy workloads, emotional strain, and workplace pressures as significant difficulties encountered throughout their careers. However, rather than viewing these challenges solely as obstacles, participants described them as experiences that fostered resilience, adaptability, and professional maturity.

These findings support Carotenuto et al. (2012), who identified isolation, prolonged separation from family, and repetitive work routines as common occupational stressors experienced by seafarers. The maritime work environment places unique psychological demands on individuals due to the extended periods spent away from social support systems and familiar environments. Participants' accounts demonstrate that successful adaptation to these conditions requires emotional regulation, perseverance, and effective coping strategies.

The findings also corroborate the work of Zhang et al. (2019), who emphasized the importance of self-reliance and decision-making capabilities in addressing maritime emergencies and challenging operational situations. Participants reported developing greater confidence and independence through exposure to demanding work conditions. These experiences contributed to their ability to remain focused despite adversity and strengthened their commitment to professional responsibilities.

From a career development perspective, occupational challenges appear to function as developmental experiences that promote personal growth. Participants learned to manage stress, adjust to changing circumstances, and maintain performance under demanding conditions. Such adaptive capacities may be considered essential professional competencies within the maritime industry, where unpredictable operational and environmental conditions frequently require rapid and effective responses.

Personal Rewards and Aspirations as Drivers of Career Sustainability. The final theme highlights the role of personal rewards and aspirations in sustaining long-term career engagement. Participants consistently identified financial security, family welfare, personal fulfillment, and spiritual strength as motivations for pursuing and maintaining maritime careers. These findings suggest that career development is influenced not only by workplace experiences but also by broader personal and familial goals.

The findings align with Adonis (2022), who reported that seafarers are motivated by both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. Financial benefits were viewed as an important means of improving family welfare and achieving long-term life goals. Participants frequently described their families as a primary source of motivation, reinforcing the central role of family-centered aspirations within the Filipino cultural context. This orientation toward familial responsibility appears to strengthen commitment to the profession despite the challenges associated with prolonged absences and demanding work conditions.

Participants also highlighted the importance of personal fulfillment and spiritual strength in maintaining career sustainability. These coping resources provided purpose, emotional stability, and motivation during difficult periods onboard. This finding is consistent with Ahearn (2024), who argued that discipline should be understood not as mere restriction but as a mechanism that enables long-term success,

self-regulation, and fulfillment. The maintenance of routines, self-discipline, and positive coping strategies allowed participants to preserve both their well-being and professional effectiveness.

The findings suggest that career sustainability among Filipino seafarers is largely supported by the interaction of personal values, family aspirations, and professional goals. These motivational factors enable individuals to remain committed to their careers despite the occupational challenges commonly associated with maritime work.

The findings also support Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993), which posits that investments in education, training, and work experience enhance productivity and career opportunities. The competencies, leadership abilities, adaptive capacities, and professional knowledge acquired through onboard experiences represent forms of human capital that improve career advancement prospects among Filipino seafarers. The findings therefore demonstrate that onboard experiences function not only as occupational requirements but also as mechanisms for human capital accumulation and career development.

Synthesis of Findings. Overall, the findings indicate that onboard experiences influence career development through a dynamic interaction of learning, social support, resilience, and motivation. Professional competence is strengthened through practical experience and operational exposure, while supportive workplace relationships facilitate learning and adaptation. Occupational challenges contribute to the development of resilience and coping capacities, and personal aspirations provide the motivation necessary to sustain long-term career engagement.

These findings support the view that career development among Filipino seafarers is a multidimensional process shaped by both professional and personal experiences. The study contributes to the growing body of maritime literature by demonstrating that the

implications of onboard experiences extend beyond technical competency development and include social, psychological, and motivational factors that collectively influence career progression and sustainability. Consequently, maritime institutions and shipping organizations may benefit from strengthening onboard training programs, mentorship initiatives, psychological support mechanisms, and crew welfare policies to promote both professional growth and long-term career success among seafarers.

Study Limitations. This study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the findings are based on the experiences of a relatively small group of Filipino seafarers and therefore reflect context-specific perspectives rather than statistically generalizable conclusions. Although phenomenological research prioritizes depth of understanding over broad generalization, the experiences reported by participants may not fully represent all Filipino seafarers working across different vessel types, ranks, routes, and shipping companies.

Second, the study relied solely on self-reported interview data. Participants' recollections and interpretations of their onboard experiences may have been influenced by memory, personal perceptions, or selective reflection. As a result, certain experiences may have been emphasized while others may have received less attention.

Third, the study focused primarily on the perceived career implications of onboard experiences. Other dimensions of seafaring life, such as organizational policies, technological transitions, cultural diversity within multinational crews, and long-term career trajectories, were beyond the scope of the investigation. These factors may also influence professional development and merit further examination.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into how onboard experiences contribute to the career development,

resilience, and professional growth of Filipino seafarers.

Future Research Directions. Future studies may expand the investigation by including larger and more diverse samples of seafarers from different ranks, vessel classifications, and maritime sectors to provide a broader understanding of career development experiences across the industry. Comparative studies may also be conducted to examine differences in onboard experiences among cadets, ratings, officers, and senior management personnel.

Additionally, future researchers may explore the influence of organizational support systems, leadership practices, crew welfare programs, and mental health interventions on career development outcomes. Given the increasing digitalization of maritime operations, further investigations may also examine how technological advancements and automation affect learning opportunities, professional competencies, and career progression among seafarers.

Longitudinal research is likewise recommended to examine how onboard experiences shape career development over time. Such studies could provide deeper insights into how professional competencies, resilience, career aspirations, and organizational commitment evolve throughout different stages of a seafarer's career. Finally, mixed-methods approaches may supplement qualitative findings with quantitative evidence, thereby generating a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence maritime career development.

Conclusion. This study explored the implications of onboard experiences on the career development of Filipino seafarers through a phenomenological examination of their lived experiences. The findings revealed that onboard experiences contribute significantly to career development by fostering professional competence, nurturing supportive workplace relationships, strengthening

resilience in the face of occupational challenges, and sustaining motivation through personal aspirations and rewards.

The study demonstrated that shipboard experiences serve as critical learning environments where seafarers develop technical skills, safety awareness, discipline, leadership capabilities, and professional judgment. At the same time, positive interpersonal relationships and supportive work environments facilitate continuous learning, adaptation, and professional growth. The findings further showed that occupational challenges, including family separation and demanding working conditions, contribute to the development of resilience and coping capacities that are essential for long-term career success. Moreover, financial security, family responsibilities, personal fulfillment, and spiritual strength emerged as important motivational factors that sustain commitment to maritime careers.

These findings suggest that career development among Filipino seafarers is a multidimensional process influenced by professional, social, psychological, and motivational factors. Beyond technical competency development, onboard experiences shape the attitudes, values, and adaptive capacities necessary for professional advancement and career sustainability within the maritime industry.

The study contributes to the growing body of maritime and career development literature by providing a holistic understanding of how onboard experiences influence the professional trajectories of Filipino seafarers. The findings emphasize the importance of strengthening onboard training programs, mentorship initiatives, crew welfare mechanisms, and supportive workplace practices to promote both seafarer development and organizational effectiveness. Ultimately, creating learning-oriented and supportive shipboard environments may enhance not only individual career progression but also the long-term

sustainability and competitiveness of the maritime workforce.

DISCLOSURES

Author contributions. Ronald R. Paquiz: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing | Gary C. Maligaya: Conceptualization, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing | John Cedrick D. Merlan: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software | Mark Daniel A. Pabulayan: Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Writing – review & editing | Carl Andrie C. Pillas: Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis | Jc Kleo L. Porcalla: Software, Writing – original draft.

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