



## IMO Internship Programme - Opportunity and Challenges for Novice Maritime Researchers

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### ABSTRACT

Internships provide an opportunity to students to imbibe valuable practical experience in addition to the theoretical classroom knowledge. Internships could be either work related or offering research opportunities and aimed at developing respective skills. International Maritime Organization (IMO) offers an internship programme for masters and PhD students focused on research activities. The paper discusses the IMO internship programme considering other such programmes offered by international organizations in the UN system. The challenges in utilizing IMO Internship Programme by students as novice maritime researchers are also examined through a survey conducted of nine universities from seven countries in Asia and discussed.

### 1. Introduction.

There is no universal definition of the term 'internship', though it is recognized that it encompasses a wide range of practices to offer skills, knowledge, and experience in a workplace (Stewart et al., 2018). However, it usually does not include apprenticeships – focused on structured training of vocational skills, and volunteering – primary purpose is supporting a cause rather than gaining skills or experience.

An internship, like other kinds of field instruction, is a form of experiential education. A successful internship is one that facilitates three significant aspects of development: personal, professional, and civic (Sweitzer & King, 2009). The authors also define the five developmental stages of an internship - Anticipation, Disillusionment, Confrontation, Competence, and Culmination - reflecting the phenomenological experience while interns are learning.

In a study about maritime higher education service quality dimensions, industry-aligned and innovative curriculums and industrial exposure were identified as important for students

to gain knowledge about the latest trends and be prepared for prospective jobs after education (Koh et al., 2023). These elements are usually imbibed in any effective internship programme.

Having internships helps students from the pre-internship level on resume writing skills, and also equips students with the relevant knowledge and skills post-internship to meet the industry needs which requires students to be workforce-ready upon graduation (Jamaluddin et al., 2013).

Therefore, internships also help students to achieve higher professional competencies and excellence in their field of interest and so that they can perform better in their future job with full potential knowledge (Mala, Akash, & Jewel, 2020). The impact of internship is in many aspects – personal, interpersonal, academic, occupational and civic (Alnajjar, 2020). The personal aspects relate to students learning to be productive, recognizing their strengths & weaknesses, and applying knowledge into practice. They also improve their interpersonal skills through practice in real settings, unlike in academic settings in university. It also raises academic achievement for some students by improving critical thinking, research skills, and written & oral communication.

Internships focused on research rather than work are also quite common, especially for masters and PhD students. Though, the work internship seems to be a good opportunity to explore

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career possibilities and gain real-world experience, many corporates appreciate the intellectual capacity needed for research, and therefore research internships provide greater benefits (Mallampalli & Sankarankutty, 2022).

Though different types of internships are prevalent in maritime field, the focus of this paper is only on research internships. Therefore, experiential learning in STCW- sea training, student learning visits, short stays, simulators, VR, IR, industrial short attachments, part of curriculum activities – mandatory fixed internship attachments, project based, etc. are beyond the scope of this paper.

The significance of acquiring higher level skills - cognitive, social, behaviour, research, pedagogy, policy, regulations, etc., and international exposure - imperative due to peculiar nature of shipping domain, demands that the students have opportunity to pursue a good research internship. It will also facilitate students to be qualified and skilled for moving to shore-based jobs and thereby enhancing employability prospects.

Internship opportunities in an international organization provides an excellent prospect to a student to engage firsthand with the international policy makers, observe working of organization - international diplomacy & collaborative decision making, and research into various areas of expertise.

There are many internship programmes offered by international maritime institutions. Some of these are mentioned below:

Name of International Organization	Eligibility	Type of Internship
International Maritime Organization(IMO) (IMO, 2023)	Master and PhD Students	Research related
International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) (ITLOS, 2023)	Master and PhD Students & recent graduates	Both research and work related
International Seabed Authority (ISA) (ISA, 2023)	Master and PhD Students & recent graduates	Work related
Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (ICO) of UNESCO (UNESCO, 2023)	Master and PhD Students & recent graduates	Work related

Source: Author.

Incidentally, IMO also has a separate Externship Programme which provides professional development and work experience to students in exchange for credits towards their degree (International Maritime Organization, 2023).

## 2. Research Question.

The paper is focused on the question - What are the challenges in utilizing IMO Internship Programme by students as novice maritime researchers?

Thus, challenges and factors likely to influence subscribing to the programme by students will be identified.

## 3. Method.

The overall analytical framework applied for answering the research question is by broadly applying qualitative research

strategy. The primary data is collected by using a qualitative questionnaire from a sample of universities in Asia. Secondary data from available documents and reports has also been used.

## 4. Internship Programme of IMO

The internship programme of IMO is focused on research and does not provide opportunities for students to obtain work or practical experience (IMO, 2023). It is solely designed for students undertaking research in activities relating to the work of the IMO, for the main purpose of writing their dissertation or to further their own research. However, interns will also have the opportunity to observe and gain insight into the functioning of IMO. Therefore, interns may meet IMO experts and observe the proceedings of committees or governing bodies of the Organization, when appropriate.

The programme is open only to students enrolled in a master or PhD degree and at the request of governments, appropriate governmental authorities (if the country concerned is a Member State of IMO), universities and institutions of higher education. The research internship could be for a duration of two weeks to a maximum of three months.

Incidentally, these internships are unpaid and interns or their sponsoring institutions are responsible for all the associated costs.

During the internship, the interns are based at Maritime Knowledge Centre (MWC) at IMO and are provided access to IMO resources and archives. They are also offered the opportunity to observe IMO meetings, meet with relevant IMO technical officers and delegates, as well as receive continuous support and guidance from the External Relations Office (ERO) of the IMO, which administers the internship programme.

According to the data shared by the ERO of the IMO, in the period from 01 January 2022 to 30 April 2023, a total of 33 interns (researchers, Master's, and PhD students) comprising of 15 female and 18 male students participated in the IMO Internship Programme. The programme garnered great enthusiasm within the domestic (UK) and international student community and 117 applications were handled during this period.

## 5. Internship Programmes of UN Organization.

A host of international organizations in the United Nations (UN) system offer various internship programmes. Some of these internship programmes include work experience while a few also offer research opportunities for students in respective organizations (United Nations, 2023). A review about these programmes by United Nations Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) in 2018 mentions 28 such organizations or offices of international organizations, including the IMO (Cazeau, 2018).

The first such review of the internship programmes in UN system in 2009 reported that 59 percent of the interns were from developed countries and only 5 percent were from the Least Developed Countries (LDC)(Wynes & Posta, 2009). It highlighted that this under-representation of non-developed countries is not in line with the principles of the United Nations charter. Recognizing the challenges to students in financial support for the internships, it recommended that providing a daily meal ticket, a

transportation pass, and/or contributing towards insurance costs for interns lacking financial sponsoring or to interns not from the local area could be considered by the international organizations.

The review in 2018 addressed the role of internships in the broader context of youth empowerment and the role of young women and men as core actors of the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development (Cazeau, 2018). A significant increase in the number of internships by various organizations was reported. However, a large percentage of interns were still from developed countries.

Interestingly, it also compared the internships administered by other international organizations, such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Organization of American States (OAS), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the World Bank Group, to draw good practices.

While nine agencies in the UN system offered paid internships and 3 were in the process of finalizing them, the balance majority of 16 organizations, including the IMO, did not provide any compensation to interns. The review recommended that organizations should establish suitable mechanisms to facilitate the availability of resources to cover the living expenditures of interns, such as project resources, ad hoc trust funds and partnerships for voluntary contributions of funds.

Thus, it was again recognized that funding presents a major challenge for students to utilize the opportunity for such internships. It also recommended mechanisms for greater awareness about internship programmes to attract suitable candidates.

## 6. Participation in IMO Internship Programme from Universities in Asia.

The sample for collection of the research data for the research study for this paper consisted of nine universities in seven countries in Asia – Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Sri Lanka. These countries were selected as they provided approximately one-third (32 percent) of supply of seafarers in the world in 2021 (UNCTAD, 2021). Thus, the pool of maritime students presumably was higher in these countries and inputs from these countries, therefore, could provide a glimpse of opportunities available to them for internship at IMO.

Initially, it was attempted to source the sample of universities from the list of members of the International Association of Maritime Universities (IAMU) to ensure uniformity and consistency. However, it was observed that no universities from Indonesia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were members of IAMU (International Association of Maritime Universities, 2023). Interestingly, Indonesia was the second largest supplier of seafarers in the world in 2021 (UNCTAD, 2021) and no Indonesian university is a member of IAMU. Therefore, it was decided to use random sampling from information available through online resources.

The sample included both dedicated maritime universities providing maritime education exclusively and conventional universities with a separate faculty or department of maritime studies. This was because all the countries do not have dedicated maritime universities but provide opportunity for higher education in maritime related subjects in conventional or normal universities. However, only those universities were included in the sample for this study, which run master or PhD courses, as the IMO Internship Programme is aimed at only these students.

A qualitative questionnaire was used to obtain relevant data and thereafter the responses were analyzed. The questionnaire was designed based on inputs from preliminary research about analysis of internships in the UN system and maritime higher education opportunities in Asia.

It is emphasized here that the survey does not attribute the results to the efficiency of the universities, their administration or running of the educational programmes.

## 7. Results and Discussion.

### 7.1. Type of Courses.

Most of the universities are focused on providing primary maritime education and therefore conduct Bachelor courses in Nautical Science and Marine Engineering. These courses conform to the STCW requirements and prepare the students for a career at sea. However, masters' courses are also conducted on a few subjects. These include shipping management, port management, transportation and logistics, maritime law, marine sciences, coastal management, etc. The PhD courses are more flexible and usually available in broad areas of research related to a variety of maritime fields. Incidentally PhD courses are less frequent than masters' courses.

### 7.2. Information about IMO Internship.

It was found that only three of the nine universities were aware of the availability of the IMO Internship Programme for master and PhD students. The other universities learnt about the programme during the research survey for this paper. Though all the universities considered this internship to be very useful and relevant to the students, the dissemination of information about the internship programme seems to be sub optimal. Thus, the targeted population for the internship i.e., the maritime students, do not have any opportunity to know about the programme through the universities.

Consequently, it was obvious to find that no students from any of the universities had attended the IMO internship programme.

### 7.3. Existing Internship Programmes in Universities.

The availability of internship programmes to students in various universities was also explored. Some universities had local arrangements for internships in shipping companies, while others did not have any such programmes for their students. All such internships were providing work experience or on-the-job training and were not focused on research opportunity.

However, no overseas internships were available in any of the universities for the students.

#### 7.4. Interest in IMO Internship.

All the universities indicated their interest in sending their students to attend the IMO Internship. It was a common view that it would be useful for the students in providing international exposure and also to learn about IMO.

#### 7.5. Constraints expected in availing IMO Internship.

The universities were asked about the constraints they expected in availing the IMO Internship Programme for their students.

The primary constraint was found to be financial support or funding for the internship. The universities were unequivocal in their views that due to financial constraints; the students cannot be supported for any such opportunities. In addition, it is also unlikely that the students themselves can fund the costs due to very high expenditures associated with the internship programme. Most of the suggestions for funding were that IMO can consider financial support for the students. No information about any national scholarships or funding options was provided during the survey.

In a few cases, it was also pointed out that the curriculum may also pose a constraint in the students being away from their studies. This could be more relevant for masters' students than PhD students as they have a more structured course curriculum. The universities may have to consider providing some credits for the internship to the students in their course.

In one case, cultural difference was also mentioned as a constraint for students to attend the IMO internship. Though it was interesting to know about the sensitivities of students in traditional and ethnic values for choosing to attend an educational programme, it could be an important issue in some cases. This also indicates concerns related to language as those not fluent in English language may not be able to avail this internship programme.

In one case, the administrative difficulties, and challenges in international deputation of students was identified as a challenge while in another case, the international political environment was quoted as the main constraint expected for utilizing the IMO internship for their students.

#### 7.6. Summary of Discussions.

The research study revealed many interesting findings. As most of the universities are focused on providing bachelor's courses to educate students for maritime career, the efforts are more devoted towards these activities. Very few master's courses and few PhD courses are offered to students and therefore, the information about IMO Internship Programme for these students is not available. The opportunity for internships for students locally is limited to industry-related programmes and no overseas internships are available.

A high interest was found amongst the universities to avail IMO internship for their students. However, funding for the internship was a main constraint and financial support was recommended for students to avail themselves of the opportunity. In addition, curriculum may need to be redesigned to facilitate students being away from their studies for prolonged period.

The cultural and language issues could also limit the students in using the internship.

#### Conclusions.

Internships are a great enabler for students to build up their professional competence. The IMO Internship Programme is a good opportunity for the maritime students to refine their research skills and also learn about the IMO. However, the programme is self-funded by students.

The most important constraints about financial support or funding of students to attend the IMO internship, and dissemination of information about the internship, were also identified by the UN JIU reports mentioned in Para 5 above. Thus, following measures could be considered for facilitating enhanced participation of students in the IMO internship programme: -

(a) Implementation of the UN JIU recommendations about covering the living expenditures of interns, through project resources, ad hoc trust funds and partnerships for voluntary contributions of funds.

(b) Improve dissemination of information about the IMO Internship Programme through distribution of pamphlets to delegates attending various meetings, annual online workshops by ERO or MWC, and specialized campaigns.

(c) IAMU may consider using its forum to disseminate information about the IMO internship. Being an important organization with consultative status at IMO, IAMU may also encourage universities from countries, which are not represented presently, to become members.

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