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# Transportation Research Part A

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## Assessing the seafaring intention of maritime students in Hong Kong

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### ARTICLE INFO

**Keywords:**  
Seafaring intention  
On-board  
Knowledge  
Attitude  
Intention

### ABSTRACT

Seafaring as a matter of human resources is one of important shipping policies in a country. Many developed countries are facing the problems of shortage of qualified and skilled seafarers for their maritime industries. Although previous researches tried to unravel the scarce seafarer dilemma, there are very few studies especially in the discussion of the factors affecting the intention to work on-board or go seafaring. This research investigates the effects of shipping knowledge, attitude and reference group opinions on the intention of maritime students to work on-board basing on the knowledge, attitude and intention (KAI) model. Using questionnaire surveys collected from 243 students studying in the maritime and logistics related departments at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) and Maritime Services Training Institute (MSTI) in Hong Kong. This research finds that the attitude and reference group opinions positively influence students' intention to work on-board. Although the research hypothesis of the direct influence of shipping knowledge on the intention to work on-board was not supported. Specifically, this research finds the indirect influence of shipping knowledge and reference group opinions on students' on-board intention through attitude. This research provides a comprehensive insight to understand the determinants of students' on-board intention. Managerial and theoretical implications from the research findings are discussed in this research.

### 1. Introduction

More than 80% of world trade is carried by seagoing vessels (UNCTAD, 2016). However, many developed countries are facing a shortfall of qualified and skilled officer seafarers to serve in the maritime industry (Guo et al., 2006; Lewarn, 2009; Thai and Balasubramanyam, 2013). Hong Kong is the world's fourth largest ship register port (Hong Kong Trade Development Council, 2016), the shipping and logistics industry is a traditional pillar industry of Hong Kong. While the shortage of local seafarers becoming a critical problem in developed countries, Hong Kong is inevitable to suffer this issue. As shown in Fig. 1, the number of newly registered ocean-going seafarers has decreased between 1998 and 2006. The number of seafarers in Hong Kong has remained generally a steady trend since 2007. This reflects the problem of seafarer shortage in Hong Kong (Tai, 2016). There are numerical previous studies discussing why the seafarer shortage exists. According to Chen's (2001) research on Taiwan maritime graduates, the lack of social cognition about the seafaring industry was a factor influencing university graduates' intention to work on-board. In addition, the encouragement and cultivation of maritime knowledge from educational institutions is one of important determinants of seafaring intention.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2017.10.007>

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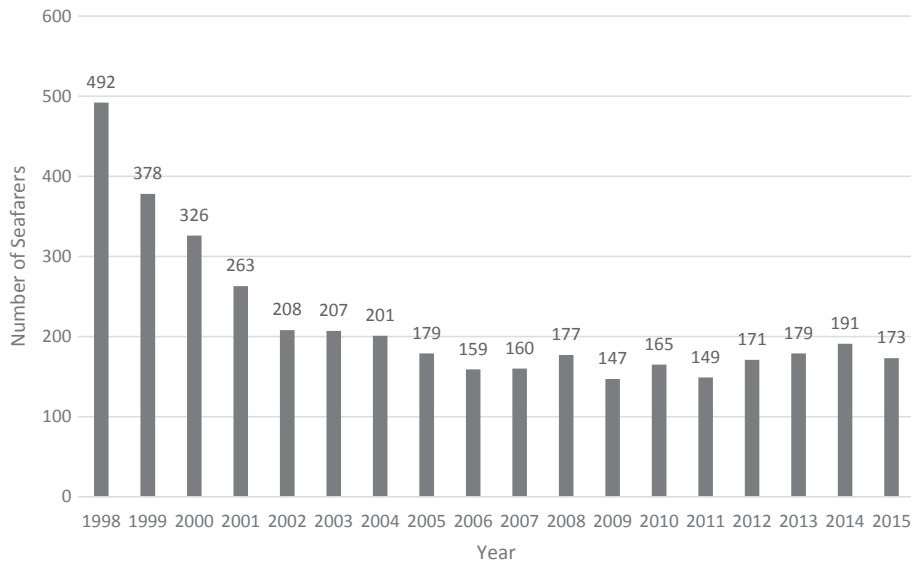


Fig. 1. Ocean-going vessels registered seafarers.  
Source: Marine Department of Hong Kong (1998–2015)

Tai (2016) revealed that ship owners had difficulty to recruit enough local seafarers to manage their ships, especially ocean-going vessels since late 1980s. When the economy of Hong Kong became better and better, young people would like to work on land rather than at sea. On the other hand, when the costs of employing Hong Kong seafarers were high (Gorski, 2007), Hong Kong ship owners would prefer to employ foreign seafarers from developing or less developing countries to reduce their ship operational costs.

Previous studies have identified the key factors affecting the seafaring decision. Lin et al. (2015) indicated that having self-motivation and developing opportunities in the career played significant roles in job consideration. Thai and Balasubramanyam (2013) conducted a case study in Singapore seafaring market. They found that seafaring-related works needed to be marketed more effectively to enhance their images and then attract more employees. Thai and Latta (2010) also indicated that building brand strategy and improving industry unique characters to distinguish from other careers were important to overcome the seafaring shortage. Yu et al. (2013) revealed that a positive feedback from the social network of maritime vocational students was a critical factor affecting their on-board decision. This reflected that public perception on seafaring image, especially impression from the reference group such as family and friends, could significantly affect seafaring decision.

Wang's (2005) study demonstrated four major reasons that the maritime related graduates were willing to work on-board include: higher salaries; personal interest; experiencing different cultures and applying the professional training. However, the negative factors influencing the career choice of maritime graduates include concern of living and working away from home and society, tough environment and less attractive salaries and opportunities. Chen (2001) found that the graduates with a higher fulfillment of personal need and social need, showed a higher intention of working on-board. However, the previous studies did not consider graduates' attitude and shipping knowledge in their decision to work on-board. To fill this gap, this research proposed the model of knowledge, attitude and behavioral intention (KAI) and reference group opinions to explain the seafaring intention of students at maritime related departments.

This research is organized as follows. First, the paper begins with an introduction. Section 2 discusses the theoretical background and the research hypotheses. The research methodology is demonstrated in Section 3. Section 4 describes the results and findings from the exploratory factor analysis, structural equation model and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Conclusions from the research findings, limitations, and future research are addressed in the final section.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Knowledge, attitude and intention (KAI)

This study is drawn on the notion of KAI which is widely adopted in the medical research (McCaffery et al., 2003) and public health discipline (Herzog et al., 2013; James et al., 2005; World Health Organization, 2007). The KAI model was used to identify factors influencing behavior and the relationships between knowledge, attitude and behavior change (McCaffery et al., 2003; World Health Organization, 2007). McCaffery et al. (2003) addressed the knowledge of colorectal cancer and its relationship with attitudes to cancer, and the intention to engage in early detection behaviors in the UK. To increase the knowledge could reduce the negative public perceptions of cancer which would positively affect the intention to participate in screening. Herzog et al. (2013) analyzed the relationships between the healthcare workers' knowledge, attitudes about vaccines and their intention to vaccinate people based on a systematic review. They found that higher knowledge about vaccines and more favorable attitudes toward vaccines are related to

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