Research Article

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Job Satisfaction Among Myanmar Seafarers on Ocean-Going Vessels: The Role of Workplace Conditions

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Abstract

Myanmar has become an increasingly important contributor to the global maritime labor market by providing many qualified and disciplined seafarers to international fleets. This study examines the relationships between onboard workplace conditions and job satisfaction among Myanmar seafarers working on ocean-going vessels. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 150 Myanmar seafarers selected through simple random sampling from an initial pool of 350 respondents. A structured questionnaire measured four predictor variables: onboard living environment, onboard working environment, food quality and catering services, and onboard supporting facilities, along with overall job satisfaction. Multiple linear regression analysis revealed that the four workplace factors collectively explained a substantial proportion of variance in job satisfaction. Food quality and catering services emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by onboard living environment and onboard working environment. Onboard supporting facilities showed no significant influence on job satisfaction. These findings suggest that Myanmar seafarers prioritize fundamental workplace conditions, particularly food quality, living quarters, and working environment, over supplementary amenities. Ship management companies should focus welfare investments on catering quality, accommodation standards, and workplace safety rather than recreational facilities to enhance satisfaction and retention among Myanmar seafarers.

Keywords: *Myanmar seafarers, job satisfaction, workplace conditions, maritime welfare, ocean-going vessels.*

1. Introduction

The maritime industry serves as the backbone of global trade, transporting approximately 90% of the world's goods across international waters. This vast and complex system relies fundamentally on seafarers: the men and women who navigate, maintain, and operate vessels under demanding conditions that include prolonged isolation, challenging work schedules, multinational crew dynamics, and extended periods away from home.

Myanmar has emerged as a significant contributor to this global maritime workforce, supplying thousands of skilled and disciplined seafarers to international shipping fleets annually. As competition

for qualified maritime labor intensifies and the industry grapples with chronic retention challenges, understanding the factors that influence seafarer job satisfaction has become increasingly critical for ship operators, maritime authorities, and policy makers alike.

2. Literature review

2.1 Job Satisfaction in Maritime Contexts

Job satisfaction, broadly defined as a positive emotional state resulting from the evaluation of one's work experiences, has been extensively studied across numerous occupational contexts. Locke (1976) established that job satisfaction reflects an individual's cognitive and affective assessment of their employment situation, encompassing elements such as work conditions, compensation, relationships with colleagues, and opportunities for advancement. However, job satisfaction is not a universal construct but rather one that is significantly shaped by cultural contexts, values, and expectations. What constitutes satisfying work conditions in one cultural context may differ substantially from another, as cultural backgrounds influence how individuals perceive and prioritize workplace factors such as authority relations, communication styles, living arrangements, and work-life balance (Hofstede, 2001; Huang & Wang, 2022).

Within maritime settings, job satisfaction takes on unique dimensions shaped by the distinctive characteristics of seafaring work. Unlike shore-based occupations, seafarers experience prolonged separation from families and communities, work in confined spaces with limited recreational opportunities, face potential safety hazards, and navigate complex multicultural team dynamics (Oldenburg & Jensen, 2019; Park & Kim, 2022). In the maritime industry, where crews are increasingly multinational and seafarers from diverse countries work alongside one another, cultural variations in satisfaction determinants become particularly salient. Understanding job satisfaction through culture-specific lenses is therefore essential for developing effective, contextually appropriate welfare strategies and management practices that resonate with seafarers from different national and cultural backgrounds (Kang & Lee, 2023).

Research consistently demonstrates that job satisfaction among seafarers correlates strongly with critical organizational outcomes including workforce retention, operational safety, and overall shipboard efficiency. Yuen et al. (2021) found that satisfied seafarers exhibit stronger commitment to safety protocols and demonstrate greater resilience under stressful conditions. Conversely, dissatisfaction has been linked to increased turnover intentions, burnout, compromised safety performance, and elevated accident risk, particularly during extended voyages (Lee et al., 2023; Jepsen et al., 2017). These findings underscore the strategic importance of seafarer satisfaction not merely as a human resource concern but as a fundamental component of maritime safety and operational effectiveness.

From a theoretical perspective, understanding seafarer job satisfaction benefits from integrating multiple frameworks. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory distinguishes between hygiene factors (such as salary, working conditions, and company policies) that prevent dissatisfaction and motivators (such as achievement, recognition, and advancement) that actively promote satisfaction. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides another useful lens, suggesting that seafarers must first have their basic physiological and safety needs met before higher-order needs for belonging, esteem, and self-actualization can meaningfully influence their job satisfaction. While these frameworks provide valuable conceptual foundations, it is important to recognize that the relative importance and interpretation of these factors may vary across cultural contexts. What constitutes a hygiene factor versus a motivator, or which level of need takes precedence, may differ depending on cultural values and societal norms (Cahoon & Haugstetter, 2022).

2.2 Determinants of Seafarer Job Satisfaction

Empirical research has identified multiple factors that influence seafarer job satisfaction, with particular emphasis on onboard living and working conditions. Studies examining living environment factors have highlighted the importance of adequate cabin space, privacy, comfort, and cleanliness in promoting seafarer well-being (Haka et al., 2019; McVeigh et al., 2019). Given that seafarers spend months at sea with limited personal space, the quality of living quarters directly affects their ability to rest, recover from work demands, and maintain psychological health. Poor living conditions have been associated with increased stress, sleep disturbances, and interpersonal conflicts among crew members.

The working environment represents another critical dimension of seafarer satisfaction. Rahman et al. (2022) emphasize that effective safety management systems, fair workload distribution, supportive leadership, and positive teamwork significantly enhance seafarer morale and job satisfaction. In multinational crew environments, effective communication and respect for cultural diversity become particularly important (Islam et al., 2022). Studies have shown that seafarers who perceive their workplaces as safe, well-managed, and supportive report higher satisfaction levels and demonstrate stronger organizational commitment (Lu & Kuo, 2016).

Food quality and catering services have emerged as surprisingly influential factors in seafarer satisfaction, though they receive less attention in maritime literature compared to working conditions and compensation. Yuen and Thai (2017) argue that food serves multiple functions for seafarers beyond basic nutrition: it provides psychological comfort, represents cultural identity, marks daily routines, and offers one of the few sources of variety and pleasure during long voyages. The cultural significance of food becomes particularly pronounced in maritime contexts, where dietary preferences, cooking methods, and meal practices vary considerably across different national groups. Poor food quality or inadequate accommodation of cultural food preferences has been linked to decreased morale, health problems, and overall dissatisfaction. Conversely, high-quality catering that offers variety, accommodates cultural dietary preferences, and maintains hygiene standards can significantly enhance seafarer well-being (Kim & Lee, 2019).

Supporting facilities including recreational amenities, communication systems, medical services, and welfare programs also contribute to seafarer satisfaction, though research findings regarding their relative importance vary across different seafaring populations. Some studies suggest that modern communication facilities enabling regular contact with family and friends substantially improve seafarer mental health and job satisfaction (Sharma et al., 2022). Others emphasize the importance of recreational facilities that help seafarers manage stress and maintain physical fitness during extended periods at sea (Chen & Li, 2023). However, research by Fernández-Medina and Lobrigo (2024) suggests that while appreciated, such facilities may function more as supplementary amenities rather than primary determinants of satisfaction when compared to fundamental working and living conditions.

2.3 The Myanmar Context

Despite the growing body of international research on seafarer job satisfaction, studies focusing specifically on Myanmar seafarers remain notably scarce. This gap is particularly problematic given Myanmar's substantial and growing contribution to the global maritime workforce. Over the past two decades, Myanmar's maritime sector has experienced considerable expansion, with the country now ranking among the top ten global suppliers of merchant navy officers (BIMCO/ICS, 2021). The Department of Marine Administration (DMA) and accredited maritime training institutions have worked to align Myanmar's seafarer training and certification systems with the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW). Yet despite these advances in technical training, Myanmar seafarers continue to face significant challenges that may affect their job satisfaction and career retention.

Win and Thein (2022) identified several persistent issues affecting Myanmar seafarers including inconsistent salary scales compared to seafarers from other nations, limited access to welfare services

both onboard and ashore, language and cultural barriers when working with multinational crews, and insufficient career advancement opportunities. Hlaing (2023) further noted that Myanmar's maritime workforce policy framework remains underdeveloped relative to neighboring ASEAN countries, with limited regulatory oversight of onboard welfare standards and crew working conditions. These structural challenges occur within a broader context where Myanmar seafarers often lack strong professional associations or collective bargaining mechanisms to advocate for improved employment conditions.

The absence of empirical research on Myanmar seafarers' job satisfaction presents both a theoretical and practical challenge. From a theoretical standpoint, the lack of culture-specific data limits our understanding of how satisfaction determinants identified in Western or other Asian contexts apply to Myanmar's seafaring workforce, which brings its own cultural values, workplace expectations, and occupational traditions. From a practical standpoint, without evidence-based insights into what factors most significantly influence Myanmar seafarers' satisfaction, maritime organizations, policy makers, and training institutions lack the necessary foundation for developing targeted interventions. Generic approaches that do not account for Myanmar-specific needs, values, and expectations risk being ineffective or even counterproductive, potentially undermining both retention efforts and workforce well-being.

2.4 The purpose of this study

This study aims to address this critical gap by systematically examining the determinants of job satisfaction among Myanmar seafarers employed on ocean-going vessels. Specifically, the research investigates how four key factors (onboard living environment, onboard working environment, food quality and catering services, and onboard supporting facilities) influence overall job satisfaction levels among Myanmar's maritime workforce.

The study pursues three specific objectives. First, it seeks to assess Myanmar seafarers' perceptions regarding their onboard living conditions, working environment, food and catering services, and supporting facilities. Second, it aims to determine which of these factors most significantly predict job satisfaction within this specific cultural context. Third, it examines the relative importance of different workplace dimensions in shaping overall satisfaction levels among Myanmar seafaring professionals.

3. Method

3.1 Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to investigate the relationships between onboard workplace conditions and job satisfaction among Myanmar seafarers. Four predictor variables were examined: onboard living environment, onboard working environment, food quality and catering services, and onboard supporting facilities. The criterion variable was overall job satisfaction. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to determine the relative contribution of each predictor to job satisfaction.

3.2 Participants

Participants were Myanmar seafarers currently employed on ocean-going vessels in domestic and international shipping operations. Purposive sampling was used to recruit seafarers across diverse professional ranks, including deck officers, marine engineers, electro-technical officers, and ratings. The initial data collection yielded 350 complete responses. To ensure validity and generalizability while maintaining optimal statistical power and a manageable dataset size, a simple random sample of 150 cases was selected from the initial pool using SPSS's random case selection function. This approach

eliminated potential selection bias by ensuring that each participant had an equal probability of inclusion in the final analytical sample. The sample size of 150 was deemed sufficient to detect medium to large effect sizes ($f^2 \geq 0.15$) in multiple regression analysis at $\alpha = .05$, which is appropriate for exploratory research in underexamined populations. Furthermore, this sample size satisfies conventional guidelines for regression analysis by exceeding the recommended minimum of 10-15 cases per predictor variable.

3.3 Instrument

A structured questionnaire was specifically designed by the authors for this study. While the instrument drew upon established theoretical frameworks and incorporated items adapted from validated scales used in prior maritime job satisfaction research, the final questionnaire was tailored to address the unique context of Myanmar seafarers and the specific research objectives of this investigation. The instrument consisted of six sections. The first section collected demographic and professional information including age, rank, educational qualification, monthly salary, and years of sea service. The subsequent five sections measured the four predictor variables and the criterion variable using multi-item scales.

All items in the substantive sections were assessed using 5-point Likert-type scales anchored at 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicated more positive evaluations. The onboard living environment scale assessed perceptions of cabin conditions, including space, comfort, cleanliness, and privacy. The onboard working environment scale measured workplace safety, teamwork, workload management, and supervisory support. The food quality and catering scale evaluated meal variety, nutritional adequacy, hygiene standards, and responsiveness to dietary preferences. The onboard supporting facilities scale assessed recreational amenities, communication infrastructure, medical services, and welfare provisions. The job satisfaction scale measured overall work satisfaction, occupational motivation, and career continuation intentions.

3.4 Procedure

Data collection was conducted between July and September 2025 using two distribution methods. The questionnaire was made available online through Google Forms and disseminated via seafarer professional networks, maritime training institutions, and crewing agencies. Simultaneously, paper-based surveys were distributed at maritime training centers, seafarer recruitment offices, and shipping company facilities in Yangon. All prospective participants received written information detailing the study's aims, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality assurances, and their right to withdraw without penalty. Completion of the questionnaire constituted informed consent. No personally identifiable information was collected, ensuring participant anonymity. The questionnaire required approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

3.5 Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS Version 25. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were computed for all variables. Scale reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to ensure adequate internal consistency. Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated to examine bivariate associations between predictor variables and job satisfaction.

The analysis involved multiple linear regression with job satisfaction as the dependent variable and the four workplace condition variables as simultaneous predictors. Prior to regression analysis, all assumptions were evaluated. Multicollinearity was assessed through variance inflation factors (VIF) and tolerance statistics. Independence of residuals was examined using the Durbin-Watson test. Linearity, homoscedasticity, and normality of residuals were verified through visual inspection of scatterplots and P-P plots. Statistical significance for all tests was set at $\alpha = .05$.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at the International Executive School, Strasbourg, France. Additional clearance was secured from the Department of Marine Administration (DMA), Republic of the Union of Myanmar (Letter No. DMA/clearance/811, dated May 12, 2025), ensuring compliance with both international research ethics standards and national regulatory requirements.

All participation in this study was voluntary. Prospective participants received comprehensive written information describing the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as research participants. The information sheet emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary, that participants could withdraw at any time without penalty or consequence, and that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. Completion and submission of the questionnaire constituted informed consent, as explicitly stated in the introductory section of the survey instrument.

To protect participant confidentiality and anonymity, no personally identifiable information was collected. The questionnaire did not request names, identification numbers, vessel names, or employer details. All data were stored securely in password-protected digital files accessible only to the research team. Participants were informed that their responses would be aggregated and reported only in summary form, making individual identification impossible. The research adhered to data protection principles consistent with international standards, ensuring that participant information was used solely for the stated research purposes and would not be shared with third parties, including employers or maritime authorities.

4. Result

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(4, 145) = 121.45$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .77$. The four workplace condition variables collectively predicted 77% of the variance in job satisfaction. As shown in Table 1, food quality and catering services emerged as the strongest predictor ($B = 0.39$, $SE = 0.05$, $\beta = .47$, $t = 7.28$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.28, 0.49]), indicating that for every one-unit increase in food quality ratings on the 5-point scale, job satisfaction scores increased by 0.39 points. Onboard living environment was also a significant predictor ($B = 0.18$, $SE = 0.05$, $\beta = .23$, $t = 3.34$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.29]), as was onboard working environment ($B = 0.20$, $SE = 0.07$, $\beta = .22$, $t = 2.69$, $p = .008$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.34]). Onboard supporting facilities was not a significant predictor of job satisfaction ($B = 0.04$, $SE = 0.06$, $\beta = .04$, $t = 0.79$, $p = .43$, 95% CI [-0.07, 0.16]).

Table 1: Regression Model Predicting Job Satisfaction from Workplace Conditions.

Variable	B	SE	LL	UL	β	t	p
(Constant)	*0.85*	*.234*	*0.39*	*1.31*		*3.63*	*.001*
Living Environment	*0.18*	*.054*	*0.07*	*0.29*	*.23*	*3.34*	*.001*
Working Environment	*0.20*	*.074*	*0.05*	*0.34*	*.22*	*2.69*	*.008*
Food Quality & Catering	*0.39*	*.053*	*0.28*	*0.49*	*.47*	*7.28*	*.001*
Supporting Facilities	*0.04*	*.056*	*-0.07*	*0.16*	*.04*	*0.79*	*.43*

Note. N = 150. Job satisfaction measured on 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). All workplace condition variables measured on 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit.

5. Discussion

The present findings reveal a striking pattern: food quality and catering services emerged as the dominant predictor of job satisfaction among Myanmar seafarers, surpassing even living and working environment factors that maritime research has traditionally emphasized. This result challenges conventional assumptions about seafarer welfare priorities and carries important implications for an industry facing unprecedented crew retention challenges. While Western maritime research has acknowledged food quality as relevant to well-being (Yuen & Thai, 2017; Kim & Lee, 2019), the magnitude of this relationship in the Myanmar context (where food quality accounted for the largest unique variance in satisfaction) suggests something deeper is at play. For Myanmar seafarers navigating months at sea on international vessels, food may serve as far more than sustenance. It represents cultural continuity, psychological comfort, and tangible evidence of employer care in an environment where workers have limited control over most aspects of their daily experience.

These findings diverge meaningfully from patterns documented in other maritime contexts, revealing important cultural specificity in what drives seafarer satisfaction. While Malaysian and Philippine studies have similarly identified living conditions and safety as significant factors (Ismail et al., 2021; Islam et al., 2022), the dominant role of food quality distinguishes Myanmar seafarers from their regional counterparts. More notably, European seafarer populations consistently prioritize career development opportunities and communication technology access (Sharma et al., 2022), factors that appear secondary for Myanmar seafarers who emphasize immediate, tangible workplace conditions. This divergence matters precisely because the global shipping industry increasingly relies on mixed-nationality crews, yet welfare strategies often follow one-size-fits-all approaches derived from Western research. The present findings suggest such approaches may systematically miss what actually matters to non-Western seafaring populations, potentially undermining retention efforts at a time when the industry faces critical labor shortages.

For Myanmar's rapidly expanding maritime sector, these findings arrive at a critical juncture. As Myanmar has ascended to become one of the world's top ten suppliers of merchant navy officers, the nation faces both opportunity and risk. The opportunity lies in leveraging this growing workforce to enhance Myanmar's position in global maritime labor markets. The risk is that without attention to the specific factors driving Myanmar seafarer satisfaction, the country may struggle with retention and reputation issues that undermine this potential. The non-significant relationship between supporting facilities and job satisfaction deserves particular attention from ship management companies and crewing agencies. This finding suggests that investments in gyms, entertainment systems, or other amenities (while appreciated) do little to enhance satisfaction if fundamental concerns about food, accommodation, and workplace safety remain unaddressed. In practical terms, a ship operator might achieve greater satisfaction gains by upgrading catering quality and living quarters than by installing expensive recreational facilities.

Ship management companies employing Myanmar seafarers should reassess their welfare investment priorities in light of these findings. Specific actions warranted include conducting regular catering quality audits with crew feedback mechanisms, ensuring menu variety that accommodates Myanmar dietary preferences and cultural food practices, maintaining rigorous hygiene standards in galley operations, and allocating sufficient catering budgets rather than treating food as a cost-minimization target. For living environments, companies should prioritize cabin cleanliness, privacy, and basic comfort over aesthetic upgrades. For working environments, emphasis should fall on tangible safety improvements, fair workload distribution, and effective leadership rather than superficial initiatives. These recommendations carry particular weight given current maritime labor market

dynamics, where crew retention has become a competitive differentiator and reputation among seafarer communities influences recruitment success.

At the policy level, Myanmar's maritime authorities face an opportunity to translate these findings into competitive advantage. The Department of Marine Administration could establish minimum welfare standards that reflect Myanmar seafarers' documented priorities, creating expectations that differentiate Myanmar crew from other nationalities in ways that benefit both workers and employers. Maritime training institutions should incorporate welfare literacy into curricula, ensuring graduating seafarers understand their rights regarding food quality, accommodation standards, and workplace safety. This preparation would enable seafarers to make informed employment decisions and advocate effectively for adequate conditions. Additionally, establishing a feedback system where returning seafarers report on employer welfare practices could create accountability mechanisms that pressure shipping companies to prioritize the factors this research identifies as most consequential. Such systems would benefit from coordination with regional maritime authorities, potentially establishing ASEAN-level standards that reflect shared cultural priorities while respecting national differences.

6. Limitations and Future Research

This study's cross-sectional design prevents definitive causal claims: we cannot conclusively determine whether workplace conditions drive satisfaction or whether satisfied seafarers perceive conditions more favorably. Self-report measures introduce potential biases, though the strong relationships observed and the consistency with qualitative maritime research suggest these biases do not invalidate core findings. The Myanmar-specific focus, while addressing a critical research gap, means these results may not generalize to other Southeast Asian seafaring populations without empirical verification. The sample's occupational diversity is a strength, yet it may underrepresent seafarers on specialized vessel types where workplace dynamics differ substantially from conventional merchant vessels.

Future research should pursue several directions to build on these findings. Longitudinal studies tracking seafarers across multiple contracts would clarify how satisfaction evolves over careers and how changes in workplace conditions influence retention decisions. Particularly valuable would be natural experiments examining what happens when shipping companies implement the food quality and living environment improvements this research identifies as consequential. Qualitative research exploring why food quality matters so profoundly to Myanmar seafarers could uncover cultural or psychological mechanisms that quantitative analysis cannot reveal, potentially identifying additional intervention points. Comparative research examining satisfaction determinants across multiple Southeast Asian nations would clarify whether patterns observed here reflect Myanmar-specific cultural factors or broader regional trends. Finally, research examining how satisfaction determinants interact with demographic factors such as age, rank, or years of experience would enable more targeted welfare strategies that account for within-group diversity.

7. Conclusion

This study provides the first quantitative examination of job satisfaction determinants among Myanmar seafarers, revealing that food quality and catering services, onboard living environment, and onboard working environment significantly predict satisfaction, while supporting facilities do not.

These findings demonstrate that Myanmar seafarers prioritize fundamental workplace conditions over supplementary amenities, suggesting that satisfaction is driven primarily by basic needs fulfillment rather than aspirational factors. The results challenge assumptions about universal satisfaction determinants in maritime employment and underscore the necessity of culturally informed approaches to seafarer welfare. For ship management companies, maritime authorities, and policy makers, these findings indicate that effective welfare strategies for Myanmar seafarers should emphasize tangible improvements in daily living and working conditions, particularly food quality,

rather than focusing resources on auxiliary facilities that show limited relationship to actual satisfaction levels.

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