

Employment Status of the Graduates of De La Salle Lipa's Certificate in Medical Transcription Program: A Tracer Survey and an Assessment

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Abstract—De La Salle Lipa has been offering the Certificate in Medical Transcription since June 2006. It is a 1- year certificate program that blends online transcription, facility- based instruction, and on the job training. The Department's Vision- Mission is to be the leading provider of qualified medical transcriptionists both in local and global healthcare industry. It also aims to produce medical transcriptionists with Lasallian values who are efficient in converting dictated medical records into electronic data.

This tracer study looked into the different aspects of the graduates past and present activities, more particularly in the aspects of education, training and employment. Utilizing a customized questionnaire in gathering vital information for the study, 22 graduates belonging to four batches from AY 2006- 2010 were surveyed.

The study revealed that majority of the graduates are young adults falling on the age bracket 20-30 years old; are single and are female and have attended 1 or 2 years of college and are shiftees from different degree courses. Graduates consider listening skills, competence in Human Anatomy, and transcription practice as most useful in their job. MT graduates are highly employable, mostly are hired as medical transcriptionists, some are call center agents and MT trainer. Strengths that were cited include on-line training, effective and efficient course delivery, the mentors and the school facilities. The non- usage of foot pedals and the length and duration of the training are the perceived weaknesses.

Recommendations on intensifying the marketing strategy for the program and for some modifications in the course flow and design are put forward.

Keywords—Tracer Survey, Program Assessment, Medical Transcription, Employment Status.

I. THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING INTRODUCTION

Medical Transcription is one of the most in demand business process outsourcing industry nowadays. Pertinent, up-to-date, and confidential patient information is converted to a written text document by a medical transcriptionist (MT). This text may be printed and placed in the patient's record and/or retained only in its electronic format. Medical transcription can be performed by MTs who are employees in a hospital or who work at home as telecommuting employees for the hospital; by MTs working as telecommuting employees or independent contractors for an outsourced service that performs the work offsite under contract to a hospital, clinic, physician group or other healthcare provider; or by MTs working directly for the providers of medical and health service either onsite or telecommuting as employees or contractors.

The United States is the world's largest market for medical transcription services. The U.S. market is valued at \$20-\$25 billion and growing 13%-15% annually. However, the U.S. domestic workforce is unable to meet the demand for medical transcriptionists. As a result, offshore MT is increasing 15%-20% per year (<http://www.mtiapi.com/>). Statistics shows that India is the leading offshore provider of MT services to the U.S. (www.imtia.org/). Philippines is next destination of choice of medical transcription accounts that are outsourced (www.researchandmarkets.com/)

The potential for the Philippines to be major player in U.S. MT market is hindered by the following reasons: acute shortage of qualified medical transcriptionists, not enough MT training centers, and not enough schools/universities offering MT training courses (www.citem.gov.ph/...).

Taking the challenge posed by the demand for qualified medical transcriptionists, De La Salle Lipa offered the Certificate in Medical Transcription in June 2006. It is a 1- year certificate program that blends online transcription, facility- based instruction, and on the job training. The

Department's Vision- Mission is to be the leading provider of qualified medical transcriptionists both in local and global healthcare industry. It also aims to produce medical transcriptionists with Lasallian values who are efficient in converting dictated medical records into electronic data as they are equipped with adept knowledge and skills in computer, English language and medical terminology. In the pursuit of realizing the department's vision- mission, it is deemed necessary to know and assess the present employment status of the graduates of the Certificate in Medical Transcription Program of De La Salle Lipa.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study determined the employment status of the graduates of Certificate in Medical Transcription Program of De La Salle Lipa from 2006- 2009.

Specifically, it will answer the following questions:

1. What is the personal profile of the graduates?
 - 1.1 age
 - 1.2 gender
 - 1.3 marital status
 - 1.4 educational attainment before enrolment
 - 1.5 further education after graduation
2. How do the graduates perceive the importance of their training in terms of the following competencies :
 - 2.1 Skills Acquired
 - 2.1.1 Listening Skills
 - 2.1.2 Computer Skills
 - 2.1.3 Language Skills
 - 2.1.4 Editing Skills
 - 2.1.5 Proofreading Skills
 - 2.2 Academic Learning
 - 2.2.1 Human Anatomy
 - 2.2.2 Patho- Physiology
 - 2.2.3 Medical Specialties
 - 2.3 On the Job Training Experience
 - 2.3.1 Transcription Practice
 - 2.3.2 Working Relationship with Co-workers
 - 2.3.3 Working Relationship with Supervisors
 - 2.4 Extra- curricular Activities
 - 2.4.1 Exposure Trip
 - 2.4.2 Convention
 - 2.4.3 Seminar/Workshop
3. What is the employment profile of the graduates?

- 3.1 nature and length of previous employment before enrolment
- 3.2 nature and length of previous employment after graduation
- 3.3 nature and length of present employment

4. What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the CMT Program of DLSL?

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Conducting this tracer study allowed the researcher to deliberately look into different aspects of the graduates past and present activities, more particularly in the aspects of education, training and employment. It provides the institution a set of data and information to assess the program's standing in its pursuit to mold graduates in response to the increasing demand for competent medical transcriptionists in the country. Likewise, this study assured the students that the institution's services do not end on their graduation day, but extends up to the time they are given a better chance to land on a good job.

Research Paradigm

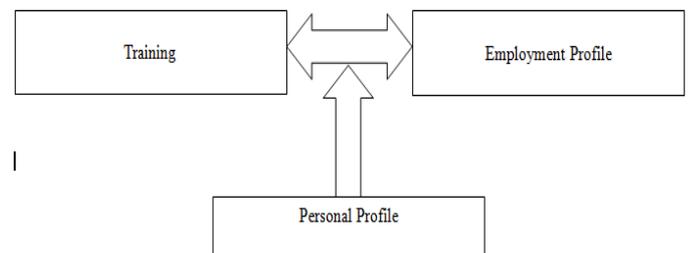


Fig.1: Research Simulacrum

The study operated in the framework shown above. The training was the independent variable and the employment profile was the dependent variable. The personal profile was regarded as the intervening variable.

IV. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Business Process Outsourcing Industry in the Philippines

Business process outsourcing (BPO) is defined by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) as the delegation of service-type business processes to a third-party service provider. The BPO industry in the Philippines is generally divided into the following sectors: contact centers, back office services, data transcription, animation, software development, engineering development and game development (www.piton-global.....).

For the past decade, one of the significant economic developments is the spectacular growth in the global demand for outsourcing and off-shoring in the services sector. The Philippines has become one of the major hosts in business process outsourcing. Certain inherent advantages have helped the country attain its current status in this field but it also appears clear that the Philippines must still take some steps to retain or even increase its share of this expanding market (www.kittelsoncarpo.com.....)

At the end of 2008, there were a total of 618 BPO companies in the Philippines. The contact center sector represents 31 percent of the industry, with 191 companies. The contact center sector consists of inbound and outbound voice operation services for sales, customer service and technical support, among others. Data transcription services (135 companies, 22%), and information technology services and software development (119 companies, 19%) were also well-represented. There were 81 companies offering back office services (sometimes referred to as knowledge process outsourcing or KPO), which refers to services related to finance, accounting and human resource administration, representing a 13 percent share. The bulk of BPO jobs are in the contact center sector, which employed around 227,000 people in 2008. The second largest sector in terms of employment in 2008 was the back office/KPO sector with nearly 69,000 employees. Total BPO employment grew by 24 percent between 2007 and 2008, whereas total employment in the country grew by only 1.6 percent during the same period (www.senate.gov.ph.....)

Over the past decade, the Philippines emerged as a preferred outsourcing destination for a number of companies mainly due to the cheap cost of labor. The 2007 A.T. Kearney Global Services Location Index (2007) ranked the Philippines at 7th place among the 50 top offshore destinations, with India and China at the top. The Philippines placed well in the survey, mainly due to its financial attractiveness, having the lowest telecom costs among the countries in the survey and having one of the lowest wage costs. However, the country scored rather poorly in terms of business environment, which factors in the overall quality of infrastructure, security risks and political, and investment environment (www.atkearney.com.....)

A similar study by the McKinsey Global Institute (2005) compared the Philippines with 15 other off-shoring locations. The Philippines emerged as an attractive destination based on several factors including labor costs (13% of average US wages), strong English proficiency and having a large pool of suitable labor at the entry level. The

www.ijaems.com

same study, however, noted that the Philippines scored poorly in other aspects, including the cost of electricity, high levels of corruption in the government and a “surfeit of bureaucracy” (red tape). The study further noted that while there was a vast amount of entry level talent in the country, there is a scarce supply of manpower with managerial capacity (www.economist.com.....).

Medical Transcription Industry in the Philippines

The Philippine medical transcription industry faces busy years ahead after it bagged deals with American companies as a result of its recent participation in American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) exhibition and conference in Philadelphia. It is projected that the Philippine sales for transcription will be at 20 million lines, translating to 1.2 million dollars, and medical coding in 130,000 charts, amounting to 175,500 dollars annually (<http://www.citem.com>.....)

The Philippine’s quality of work, turnaround time, which may reduce to 3 to 6 hours in emergency cases, and client data security, attracted companies who visited AHIMA to work with the country. Aside from transcription and medical coding, a growing number of US companies are also interested to outsource editing requirements to the Philippines. The industry as well, is targeting to hone its capabilities in voice recognition. With a stronger market presence in the US, local medical transcription industry is working to attract countries like Canada, Australia, and United Kingdom in the future. The Philippines relies on its manpower resource, robust government incentives, developed telecommunication infrastructure, low cost office space, and strategic location (www.abs-cbnnews.com/).

The Medical Transcription Industry Association of the Philippines, Inc. (MTIAPI) now named as Healthcare Information Management Outsourcing Association of the Philippines (HIMOAP) has lined up five action points for the industry– Skills Enhancement and Standardization, Technological and Process Innovations, Improvement of Operational Efficiency, and Aligned Business Matching Programs. MTIAPI is prioritizing skills development to produce a bigger pool of qualified transcriptionists for the high-capacity and fast-turnaround requirements of large foreign clients. The country has lost such lucrative opportunities in the past due to the lack of capacity of local companies, 85 percent of which are small with 15- to 50-seat operations (<http://www.mtiapi.com/>).

HIMOAP will enhance the capacity of local MT companies to address global market opportunities by providing training on diversified BPO functions in healthcare like medical

records processing, medical coding, and medical billing. As compliance with the U.S.'s Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) and data protection plays a critical role in raising the customers' confidence level in providing more business to country, HIMOSP will conduct a more aggressive educational campaign especially for its member companies. A survey is also underway to identify areas of focus for the promotion of enhanced operational efficiency, through capability building seminars and sharing of best practices (www.himoap.com).

V. METHODOLOGY

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study included the four batches of graduates of the Certificate in Medical Transcription Program of DLSL from year 2006-2010. A total of 22 graduates served as respondents. The researcher did not include those who just finished the school based training but did not undergo on- the-job training in the industry.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher sought the assistance of the school's admission and guidance offices in getting the addresses and contact numbers of the graduates. The MIS records of the students from the registrar's office were also used to track their addresses. The cooperation of the respective presidents of each batch was also tapped. They were asked to serve as couriers of the research instruments. The use of electronic mails was also employed to ensure 100% retrieval rate.

Research Instrument and Technique

The researcher utilized a customized questionnaire to gather vital information for the study. In getting accurate information for the census, the questionnaire was designed in a way that the respondents could easily understand what was asked of them. Open ended questions were also included in the questionnaire for the respondents to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the program. Informal interview was done to validate the answers of the respondents.

Statistical Analysis

Responses of the graduates were tallied and data gathered were then tabulated and treated statistically. The study used the percentage method as its statistical instrument in quantifying the findings. The number of respondents with similar answer to a given question was divided by the total number of respondents. After which, results were converted in percentage by multiplying it by one hundred. Ranking was also done to identify the relative importance of the training experience based on their perception.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal Profile of Graduates

Table.1:Age of graduates

Age	Number	Percentage
20 and below	5	23
21-25	8	36
26-30	4	18
31-35	3	14
36-40	1	4.5
41 and above	1	4.5

As shown in table 1, the graduates of the CMT program are mostly in the age bracket of 21-25 years old (36%), followed by the age bracket of 20 and below. A very few percentage (4.5%) are from age brackets 36-40 and 41 and above.

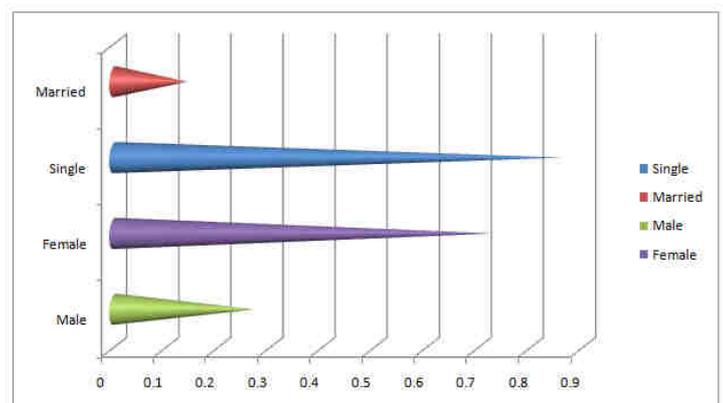


Fig.2:Gender and marital status of graduates

Figure 2 shows that majority of the graduates are female (73%) and single (86%). Consequently, only 27 % are male and only 14% were married. Of the male respondents, all are single. Out of the 16 female respondents, only 3 are married.

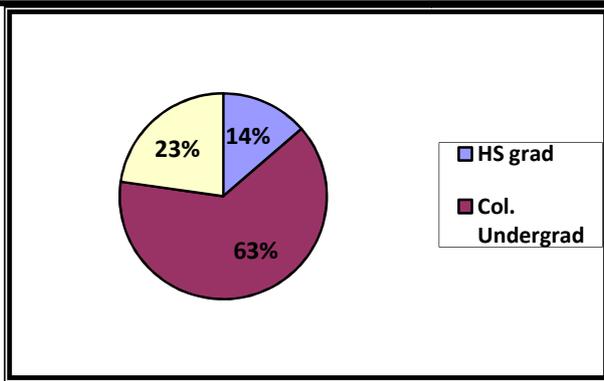


Fig.3: Educational attainment before enrollment

As shown in Figure 3 above, majority of the enrollees in the CMT program (63%) are shifttees from different degree programs of the DLSL and from other schools while some are returnees to school. Of the 23% who are college graduates, they come from different fields both from allied medical profession and non-medical allied profession. They have earned a degree either in BS Physical Therapy, Nursing, Botany and Commerce. A total of 14% accounts for the fresh high school graduates.

Graduates’ Perceived Importance of Training

Table.2: Perception of graduates on importance of training experience

Key Areas	Competencies/Activities	Mean	Rank
Skills	Listening Skills	4.00	1
	Computer Skills	3.59	3
	Language Skills	3.68	2
	Editing Skills	3.5	4.5
	Proofreading Skills	3.5	4.5
Academics	Human Anatomy	4.00	1
	Patho-Physiology	3.55	3
	Medical Specialties	3.77	2
OJT	Transcription Practice	4.00	1
	Work Relationship w/ Co-workers	3.5	2.5
	Work Relationship w/ Supervisors	3.5	2.5
Extracurricular	Exposure Trip	3.73	1
	Convention	3.05	2
	Seminar/ Workshops	2.91	3

Table 2 shows that in terms of skills gained from the training, the respondents perceived that listening skill, ranking as 1, is the most important with a mean score of 4.00 which translates as extremely useful. This is followed by

Language skills which ranked 2, with a mean of 3.68. Of moderate importance as perceived by the respondents are editing and proofreading skills, both with mean value of 3.5. As to academics, the most important competency as perceived by the respondents is Human Anatomy as it ranks 1 with a mean value of 4.00 which means they regard as extremely useful. Lessons on Pathophysiology are regarded as moderately useful as it ranks 3 with the lowest mean value of 3.55.

As regards their OJT experience, respondents are one in saying that transcription practice is extremely useful as it ranks 1 with a mean value of 4.00. Work relationship with both the co-workers and supervisors are regarded as moderately useful as they share the same mean values of 3.5. Extracurricular activities generally are perceived as moderately useful especially the exposure trips ranking as 1 with mean value of 3.73, followed by attendance to convention and seminars, respectively.

Employment Profile of Graduates

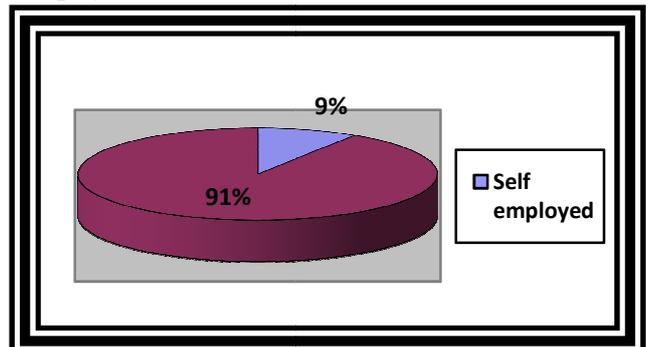


Fig.4: Employment profile of respondents before enrollment

Out of the 22 respondents, only 2 (9%) were self- employed before their enrollment to the program. They were both physical therapists who were providing home-care rehabilitation service. All the rest (91%) are unemployed, the 3 married female respondents were plain housewives and the others were students.

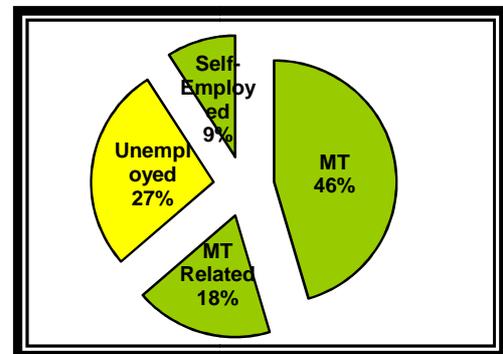


Fig.5: Employment profile after graduation

Shortly after their graduation or upon completion of OJT requirements, 46% of them were either absorbed by the company where they had their on- the- job- training or they get hired by another MT production firm. One out of the 10 practicing MTs became a home-based transcriptionist. One emerged as an MT trainer.

However, after 2 years of being medical transcriptionists, 2 graduates have left the country and are now working abroad both as office secretaries. The rest are in their first, second and third year in their jobs as medical transcriptionists, and have no plans of seeking a different job. The reason for staying in the job that they stated was that they are enjoying the challenge that they get from the job despite the fact that they are not that well paid.

Some of the graduates (23%) landed to an MT related job as they were hired call center agents handling medical related accounts. Two among the 22 respondents (9%) were self-employed. One ventured into business and the other one continued her home-care PT service. Of the 27% who were unemployed after graduation, majority are students who are pursuing different degree programs like BS HRM, Financial Management and Nursing.

Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses of the Program

Most of the respondents said that the strengths of the program include its being an online training provided by a well known MT company which is Total Transcription Solutions, Inc. Delivery of training was efficient since all activities were done online. Web-based lessons were reinforced with actual lectures and discussions. They also noted that feedback mechanism was fast and effective as they were provided with immediate quizzes and transcripts results.

Respondents also considered their mentors both in the lecture and in the laboratory as strength of the program as they are both holders of National Certification, which they learned from OJT is a certification that is hard to earn. Another strength that they consider is the MT laboratory where they had their training. Facility and materials wise, they were all satisfied.

On the other hand, the respondents consider the non-usage of foot pedal as one of the weaknesses of the training program that DLSL offers. Since the audio-files being used in the online transcription do not require a foot pedal, only key combinations or the use of mouse, they were not so much trained on the use of foot pedal. This became a major issue when they had their OJT since most of the MT companies require the use of such.

Some of the respondents also cited that the length and duration of the training as another weakness. According to

them, classes could have been scheduled for the whole day instead of a morning or an afternoon session, so as to make one finish the course in a shorter period of time.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the foregoing findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Majority of the graduates are young adults falling on the age bracket 20-30 years old; are single and are female.
2. Majority of enrollees have attended 1 or 2 years of college and are shiftees from different degree courses.
3. Except those high school graduates who pursued a degree program after graduation, no other graduates pursued further education.
4. Graduates consider listening skills, competence in Human Anatomy, and transcription practice as most useful in their job.
5. MT graduates are highly employable, mostly are hired as medical transcriptionists, some are call center agents and MT trainer.
6. Strengths that were cited include on-line training, effective and efficient course delivery, the mentors and the school facilities.
7. The non- usage of foot pedals and the length and duration of the training are the perceived weaknesses.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

With the apparently high employability of CMT graduates, the Marketing Department of the school must double its effort in selling the program to its clientele since the number of enrollees has been declining over the years. Seminars and career talks need to be organized to make the public know the potentials of this certificate program.

As regards the use of foot pedals, extra time must be devoted for the students to practice transcribing using it, specifically during the later part of the training before they are deployed for OJT. The possibility of shortening the program duration by increasing the number of class hour on a daily basis is worth exploring.

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