Microsoft office specialist and microsoft technology associate certification: An integrated curriculum for technical skills validation

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Abstract

In today’s milieu, the entirety of student experiences occurred in the processes of teaching and learning and translated into meaningful use of educational tools are embedded and integrated into a curriculum. In order to produce industry-relevant and job-ready graduates, higher education institution integrates global technical certification in its curricula such as productivity tools and advanced certifications. This paper reports the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) and Microsoft Technology Associate (MTA) certification result for the higher education students. The researchers employed the quantitative-descriptive secondary data analysis taken from the Certiport certification results of those student examinees from De La Salle University-Dasmarinas, Dasmarinas, Cavite, Philippines. Results show that 34% passed the certification attempts, 63% failed, and there were 3% Incomplete. This examination validates entry-level job skills of the students to advance their careers. MOS and MTA program provides robust tools that help educators drive best-in-class integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into classroom instruction. This certification program is good for both educators and students which empowers and provides support for productivity tools, with easy-to-use Internet-based testing. Educators should advocate the use of productivity tools and technology associate-related activities to promote students skills development.

Key Words: Student Certification, Microsoft Office Specialist, Microsoft Technology Associate, Global Certification, Productivity Tools

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INTRODUCTION

Re-aligning the helm of technological needs of the societies and industries is among the results of legislative and executive moves (Ogena and Brawner 2009). Because of the changing demands of ICT in education and other industries, learning facilitators direction was reshaped when ICT revolutionized educational system in the world. An international skillset and competencies were set forth for teachers by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) partnered with technology and global leaders as well as experts in order that teachers can effectively use ICT in the teaching and learning endeavors. Somekh (2008) exemplified how ICT aids academic institution in the reduction of stress in its workspaces while trying to allude differences issues in access to ICT Ferrari (2012), forming part of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) ICT framework for teachers; an educational reform which highly impacted teachers’ program and preparation (Jimoyiannis and Komis 2007; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2011; Vosniadou and Kollias 2001; Wang 2015; Watson and Prestridge 2001).

In the education ecologies of a developing economy, integrating multilevel evaluation framework has been applied to ICT (Davis, Preston and Sahin 2009; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2011) in preparing their human capital to become relevant and ready for globalization (Tinio 2003). Regionalization also put our human capital into a tank of free competition, especially for The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) ICT as part of the integration factors. ASEAN ICT envisioned creating a global ICT hub in the region according to ASEAN ICT Masterplan 2015 (Heinl 2013). A corollary to these developments, information

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and communications technology was regarded to impact economies in the ASEAN member countries (Irawan 2014) with its pivotal role in education and employment, hence, ASEAN Framework Agreement was endorsed by the ASEAN member states in order to promote cooperation to develop, strengthen, and enhance the competitiveness of the ICT sector in ASEAN (Sang, Lee, and Lee 2009) and bridge the gap of the digital divisiveness (Kaba and Said 2014).

Due to globalization, internationalization, and regionalization, the Philippines need to compete with the rest of the world in the information and communication technology ICT arena (Ramos, Nangit, Ranga, and Trinona 2007). Ogena and Brawner (2009) contribution to National policies and practices on ICT in education emphasized that the current educational system was among the derivatives of legislations and executives passage that led to changes. This educational system scaffolding will provide and develop young Filipinos to become job-ready, life-long learners, and technology-enabled communities. In today’s milieu, the entirety of student experiences occurred in the processes of teaching and learning and translated into meaningful use of educational tools are embedded and integrated into a curriculum. In order to produce industry-relevant and job-ready graduates, higher education institution integrates global technical certification in its curricula such as productivity tools, vendor specifics, and advanced global I.T. certifications.

An increasing statistics of companies opted to develop their talents by providing an internal certification (Pierson Frolick, and Chen 2001) for workforce development and re-aligning skills set to perform their duties and responsibilities (Cantor 2002) and a roster of the competent workforce with up-to-date technical skills (Al-Rawi, Bouslama, and Lansari 2006). According to Robin (2011), quantitative analysis of education, certifications or experience of the applicants, hiring and Human Resources Managers perceived that it was easy to evaluate those with certifications. Gabelhouse (2002) conjectured that the vendor certifications have provided higher Return on Investment (ROI) for “certificants”.

With the proliferation of the technical certification requirements in employment, some of the universities and colleges boarded to curriculum revision to prepare their students for vendor-specific, vendor-neutral (Montante and Khan 2001), and specialized certifications by the third party providers. Countermine and Pfeiffer (2000) reported in their study “implementing an IT concentration in a CS department: content, rationale, and initial impact”; the positive comments of prospective employers since IT skills are being met by the graduates by having been professionally certified. Aside from global market penetration of the certified professionals, McGill and Dixon (2005) postulated that for vendors, this is a good way to promote the use of their products, services, and technologies. Taking the certifications is a “self-assessment of your strengths and weaknesses in information technology”, Adelman (2000) said; and a skills validation on the student’s technical credentials and portfolio (Sireci, Fitzgerald, and Xing 1998).

Years ago, the College of Science and Computer Studies of De La Salle University-Dasmarinas had integrated the MOS and MTA to its curriculum. This paper reports the Microsoft Office Specialist and MTA certification result for the higher education student “certificants” since the program has been deployed as technical skills validation. According to the certifying body, Certiport;

“MOS certification is the premier credential chosen by individuals seeking to validate their skills and advance their careers. Microsoft Office is a powerful service designed to unleash the best ideas, get things done and stay connected on the go. And MOS shows the world that you have the skills to tap the full features and functionality of Microsoft Office. You can demonstrate your increased performance, individual differentiation and personal confidence. With three certification levels, the MOS credential allows individuals to validate their skills and progress toward their career goals.”

MOS has certification examinations for the following productivity tools; Word, Excel, Powerpoint, Access, Outlook, Sharepoint and OneNote applications. Another certifications program of the college is the MTA. Based on the Certiport website, MTA is the way to differentiate technology competency and explore academic and career options. Getting certified makes the “Certificants” Becoming certified demonstrates to customers, peers, and employers that you are committed to advancing your skills and taking on greater challenges. In addition, certification provides you with access to exclusive Microsoft Certified Solutions Developer (MCSD) resources and benefits,
including opportunities to connect with a vast, global network of MCPs. Starting with MTA is a great way to validate your understanding of the key IT building blocks, then move on to more advanced certifications such as MCSA and MCSD, which will validate your skills and experience with Microsoft products and IT solutions developed using Microsoft technologies. Microsoft Certifications recognize and reward your abilities and expertise as your career develops.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The influence of an IT certification on student’s success relies mostly on the education levels at which students attain a certification. Several scholarly works presented the influence of IT certification on a student’s success.

Rob (2014) stated that IT certification offers an avenue for promotions, salary increases, and new positions and it can increase a new graduate’s profile as an advantage over the other graduates. The study reported the steps of incorporating numerous IT certification in the MIS curriculum of U.S. University to bring IT departments at par with IT industry standards.

Buzzetto-More (2012) mentioned that labor force has changed vividly as outcomes of technological progress. Maryland instigated an effort to upgrade the quality and academic integrity to prepare students for the admission into the 21st-century labor force. The study concentrated on the development of the curriculum to be aligned with the Microsoft training certification program (Buzzetto-More, 2012; Dyah et al. 2017).

Randall and Zirkle (2005) stated the IT certification programs is a grown development in secondary and tertiary institutions as instructional vehicles to provide students with necessary skills needed by the workforce. On the other hand, certification programs convey numerous significant issues and implications for the educational institutions such as IT teachers, administrators, students and the IT workforce (Basoglu, 2017).

Zeng (2005) addressed the significant benefits of Microsoft Office Specialist Certification in three major components such as Microsoft Windows operating systems, Microsoft office suite software and Microsoft office suite software integration. The study presented a comprehensive method to incorporate the three components into an existing curriculum for Computer Information Systems program to assist students to achieve and develop their applied technical skills while earning the academic degree.

Al-Rawi, Lansari, and Bouslama (2005) proposed a curriculum that offers graduates with an IS degree, and opportunity to attain IT certification before graduation. Certification programs were incorporated in their IS degree. The designed curriculum delivers an opportunity for certification exam after completing the course series primary to that certification program.

Zeng (2004) presented a recently designed curriculum for the computer information system to identify the fundamental courses for computer information system programs that integrate the characteristics and categories of IT certifications acknowledged by industries. The designed curriculum was a three-step curriculum that contains fundamental courses, other related courses clustered into numerous focus programs and the last was bridging courses in the academic field to specialized training programs that are offered by the certified training and testing center.

Adelman (2000) conducted a parallel study between the systems of traditional higher education and the new system of credentialing from corporate vendors and professional associations in IT sectors. One of the findings stated in the study that certifications can be achieved if the students had practical technical skills.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed the quantitative research design to quantify data and generalize results of the total population of examinees. A descriptive secondary data analysis was conducted using the data taken from the Certiport certification results of those “certificants” from De La Salle University-Dasmariñas, Dasmarinas, Cavite, Philippines. The total population, both from MOS and MTA of the examinees is five thousand six hundred ninety-six (5,696). The study used percentage method which is one of the most frequent ways to represent statistics.
Percentage = \frac{\text{No of Examinees}}{\text{Total Population}} \times 100 \quad (1)

RESULTS

There are five thousand six hundred ninety-six (5,696) examinees who took the technical examinations for the Microsoft Office Specialist and MTA certifications from the Certiport. Table 1 describes the percent (%) distribution of the certificants by the program.

Table 1: Certificants’ distribution by program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Name</th>
<th># of Certificants</th>
<th>% Contributions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Microsoft Office Specialist</td>
<td>4913</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTA</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 presents the certificants’ distribution of MOS with four thousand nine hundred thirteen (4913) examinees.

Table 2: Certificants’ distribution by MOS certification program and remarks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Microsoft Office Specialist</th>
<th># of Certificants</th>
<th>% Contributions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passed</td>
<td>1685</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed</td>
<td>3146</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 presents the certificants’ distribution by MTA Certification Program with seven hundred eighty-three (783) examinees.

Table 3: Certificants’ distribution by MTA certification program and remarks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MTA</th>
<th># of Certificants</th>
<th>% Contributions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passed</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 presents the overall results of all examinees of certificants’ programs.

Table 4: Certificants distribution by MTA certification program and remarks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Results</th>
<th># of Certificants</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION

According to Zeng (2005), Microsoft Certification suits the international standard of certification distinguishing a high level of proficiency in computing skills. Microsoft Certification has been shaped to support employees and employment seekers to demonstrate with confidence that they have attained a high level of proficiency in using Microsoft software tools which Microsoft recommends.
As illustrated in Table 1, eighty-six percent (86%) which is equivalent to four thousand nine hundred thirteen (4,913) students, challenged the MOS, while there are only fourteen percent (14%), which is equivalent to seven hundred eighty-three (783) students, who took the MTA certification exam.

Table 2 illustrated the certificants of MOS. There are thirty-four percent (34%) equivalent to one thousand six hundred fifty-eight (1,658) out of four thousand nine hundred thirteen (4913) examinees who obtained a passing mark and were certified as Microsoft Office Specialist, while there were sixty-four percent (64%) equivalent to three thousand one hundred forty-six (3,146) out of four thousand nine hundred thirteen (4,913) examinees. Also, two percent (2%) of the examinees equivalent to one hundred nine (109) out of four thousand nine hundred thirteen (4,913) examinees have had Incomplete marks which are attributed to students still being able to re-attempt the exam within the prescribed duration of the examination schedule or failed to submit within the prescribed period of submission.

The data and results in Table 3 show that out of seven hundred eighty-three (783) examinees who took the MTA program examination, there are thirty-five (35%) equivalent to two hundred seventy-six (276) out of seven hundred eighty-three (783) examinees who obtained a passing score and got a remark of PASS. On the other hand, the higher than the passing percentage of examinees got failing remarks to about fifty-eight percent (58%) equivalent to four hundred fifty-three (453) out of seven hundred eighty-three (783), and seven percent (7%) equivalent to fifty-four (54) out of seven hundred eighty-three (783) examinees had an Incomplete attempt which is attributed to student still being able to re-attempt the exam within the prescribed duration of the examination schedule or failed to submit within the prescribed period of submission.

Table 4 depicted that thirty-four percent (34%) passed the certification attempts, sixty-three percent (63%) failed, and there was three percent (3%) Incomplete. This examination validates entry-level job skills of the students to advance their careers. MOS and MTA programs provide robust tools that help educators drive best-in-class integration of ICT into classroom instruction.


CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This certification program provides the good platform for job security and graduates confidence. However, based on the results, it was consistent with both programs having higher percentage rate of failed examinees. This program provides silver lining on the student’s technical preparedness, especially for a Microsoft-based application; however, the findings resonate that examinees should be provided a carefully designed program to raise the bar of passers. Hence, MOS and MTA are accounted to be contributory to both educators and students which empower and provide support for productivity tools, with easy-to-use Internet-based testing. Educators should
advocate the use of productivity tools and technology associate-related activities to promote students skills development. The results reported in this study may be considered by the college as the basis of crafting a program or an improvement plan to the curriculum, facilities or training geared towards these certifications schemes considering the spectra of the rudimentary and precepts of MOS and MTA.

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