Jurnal Genesis Indonesia (JGI)
Vol. 4, No. 03, pp. 155-165
journal.iistr.org/index.php/JGI
DOI: 10.56741/jgi.v4i03.1227

Competencies, Challenges, and Opportunities of Trial Court Stenographers in Rinconada Area, Philippines

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history
Received 8 July 2025
Revised 14 September 2025
Accepted 16 September 2025

Keywords
Challenges
Competencies
Opportunities
Stenographer
Trial Court

ABSTRACT

This study determined the Competencies, Challenges, and Opportunities of Trial Court Stenographers in the Rinconada Area. Specifically, it identified the (1) personal and professional attributes of the Trial Court Stenographers, (2) the competencies of the respondents, (3) the challenges encountered, (4) the coping mechanisms to address varying challenges, and (5) capacity building to enhance the competencies of Trial Court Stenographers in Rinconada Area. Interviews and a survey questionnaire employing a 4 4-point Likert scale were used as the primary data-gathering tool in the study. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that most respondents are female, married, between 50 and 59 years old, and working in the Regional Trial Court (RTC), Judiciary of Iriga City. Results disclosed that Trial Court Stenographers are competent in their respective field of specialization. Trial Court Stenographers encountered varying challenges in the field. Results further state that several coping mechanisms were applied and adopted by Trial Court Stenographers to address relevant challenges in the profession. A capacity building was proposed to enhance the competencies of the Trial Court Stenographers in the Rinconda Area.

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Introduction

Keeping abreast of global competitiveness, today's organizations face greater challenges and opportunities. Office Professionals are expected to stay in touch with the contemporary trends of competitive advantage by possessing qualified office skills and competencies. Among those professionals sought after are the court reporters, often called court stenographers, who play a crucial role during trial court proceedings and hearings. A stenographer or court stenographer is a highly trained professional who uses a stenotype, or shorthand machine, to provide real-time transcriptions. They are responsible for keeping written records of government, court, or private legal proceedings. The verbatim documentation in criminal, civil, and other court proceedings requires highly skilled professionals trained in court reporting, which usually involves stenography.

Stenography or Shorthand is not a new concept, and countless shorthand systems have been developed. Stenography is a skilled process of making and transcribing shorthand notes. This is composed of two kinds: written stenography and machine shorthand. It is the rapid way of writing by symbols to represent syllables, words, phrases, or sentences, and the process of transcribing notes using a steno machine, Leslie, 1981 [1]. Depending on the language, a shorthand system may rely on symbols representing specific sounds, concepts, or letters, or on letters with particular meanings. Some shorthand systems are even specially coded for a specific organization or company, keeping sensitive information safe from outsiders, CourtReporterEDU,2015 [2].

Stenography is still considered a conventional method of transcribing notes and dictations in any trial court hearings and proceedings, whether criminal, civil, or administrative. In this field, stenographers are highly required for a trial or deposition. The judge will need to designate the stenographer as the official record keeper of the proceedings. It is common for attorneys in an ongoing litigation to develop a relationship with a particular court reporter or court stenographer and will request their services for trial. Obtaining a qualified stenographer or court reporter for a trial or deposition. With deadlines and upcoming trial and appeal dates looming, the last thing an attorney will have to worry about is when they will receive the transcript.

With the foregoing perspectives cited, it is in this light that the researcher would like to pay particular attention to the performance of trial court stenographers in Rinconada to determine their competencies and skills, which are contributory to the success of every court proceeding and the entire organization, as well. Likewise, through this research study, the researcher will be prompted to recommend the necessary recommendations to further enhance their performance for possible future work and promotional advancement

Material and Methods

A. Research Design

In conducting the study, the researcher will use descriptive research methods to determine the Competencies and Challenges faced by Trial Court Stenographers in Rinconada. As part of data gathering, the researcher will use questionnaires, unstructured interviews, and observation to source relevant information about the study.

B. Respondents

The respondents of this study will be the total enumeration of all the Trial Court Stenographers of Rinconada covering areas of Iriga City, Nabua, Bato, Buhi, Balatan, Baao, and Bula of the 4th District of Camarines Sur in various types of judicial organizations. Considering the distribution of respondents, twenty-three (23) of the respondents are from Iriga City, three. (3) from Baao, three (3) from Buhi, three (3) from Balatan, two (2) from Nabua, and two (2) from Bula, all of which are Trial Court Stenographers within the Rinconada Area.

C. Research Instrument

To determine the personal and professional attributes of the respondents, competencies, and challenges faced by Trial Court Stenographers, this research study will employ a survey questionnaire. Unstructured interviews and observation will be conducted to further support and validate the respondents' responses. A Likert scale will be used to scale responses to quantify data.

D. Statistical Treatment of Data

The data gathered will be analyzed through the use of varied statistical tools. It includes frequency count, weighted mean, and Spearman's Rank Order of Correlation. The statistical data corresponding to the profile of Trial Court Stenographers of Rinconada will be measured through frequency count. The Challenges and Competencies of Trial Court Stenographers will be done through weighted mean, adopting the four-point Likert scale.

Result and Discussion

A. Personal Attributes of the Respondents

This section provides relevant information relative to the personal attributes of the respondents in terms of age, civil status, sex, rinconada area, and judicial type, as shown in Table 1.

In terms of age, most of the respondents are within the age bracket of 50-59 with 12 respondents or 33.33 %; those ranging within ages of 40- 49 with nine respondents or 25 %; those ranging within ages of 20-29 with four respondents or 11.11 %; those within the age bracket of 30-39 with five respondents or 13.89%; and those ranging within ages of 60 and above with six respondents or 16.67 %.

Table 1. Personal Attributes of The Respondents

Demographic Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20-29	4	11.11%
	30-39	5	13.89%
	40-49	9	25.00%
	50-59	12	33.33%
	60 and above	6	16.67%
Civil Status	Single	5	13.89%
	Married	29	80.56%
	Widow/Widower	2	5.56%
Sex	Male	2	5.56%
	Female	34	94.44%
Rinconada Area	Iriga	23	63.89%
	Baao	3	8.33%
	Bato	0	0.00%
	Buhi	3	8.33%
	Balatan	3	8.33%
	Nabua	2	5.56%
	Bula	2	5.56%
Judiciary organization	RTC	18	50.00%
	MTC	11	30.56%
	MCTC	2	5.56%
	MTCC	5	13.89%

With this given result, it only implies that the majority of the trial court stenographers in Rinconada are among those ages ranging between 50 and 59 years old, who may be presumed to have adequate working experience in the field and are well-committed to performing their job functions. After all, with age comes the height of expertise. As Bastien [3] cited, older workers are dedicated to the company. They are dependable, steady workforces with plans to move up and out, but rather keep their career focused and pursue.

Considering sex, female respondents dominated the court reporting profession with a frequency of 34 or 94.44%, and the rest were male, with only a numerical frequency of 2 or 5.56%. From these findings, it can be inferred that females are more likely to do administrative and office work than any other type of job. This was supported by the study of Dorming, 2015 [4], "Women in the Professional Workforce", wherein she stated that women make up more than half of the technical workforce. Hence, while the status of women in the workforce has improved over the last several decades, many women still struggle for equality in many occupations. Women perceive that an individual's work style should be collaborative, where everyone works as a whole. Men, on the other hand, perceive that work should be completed independently without the assistance of others. Women tend to be more supportive managers, whereas men are more direct.

As to civil status, it was noted that most respondents are married, with a frequency of 29 or 80.56%. Nevertheless, in some responses, 5 or 13.89% were single, and 2 or 5.56% were widowed. With these findings, it only manifests that the majority of the Court reporters have to meet the growing demands of their families; hence, the court reporting profession is

presumably considered their bread and butter to sustain their standard of living and be able to provide their families' needs.

Considering the type of judiciary where the respondents are attached to, it was observed that there was almost a break-even distribution between those court reporters or stenographers assigned to Regional Trial Courts (RTC) having a frequency of 18 or 50% and that of Municipal Trial Courts (MTC) with 11 or 30.56 % and two (2) from Municipal Circuit Trial Court (MCTC) with 5.56%.

B. Professional Attributes of Trial Court Stenographers

Apart from determining the personal attributes of the Trial Court Reporters in Rinconada Area, the professional qualities were also considered, as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Professional Attributes of the Respondents

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Highest Educational Attainment	Master's degree	3	8.33%
	Master's units	4	11.11%
	Bachelor's degree	29	80.56%
Status of Employment	Permanent Contractual	33	91.67%
		3	8.33%
Length of Service	Less than 1 year	2	5.56%
	1-5 years	7	19.44%
	6-10 years	1	2.78%
	11-15 years	1	2.78%
	16 – 20 years	1	2.78%
	21 – 25 years	9	25.00%
	26 years & above	15	13.89%
Eligibility/License	Civil Service Eligibility	33	91.67%
	PRC License	3	8.33%
Salary Range	25,001- 30,000	25	69.44%
	20,001 – 25,000	11	30.56%

Concerning the highest educational attainment earned by the respondents, it is worth noting that most of the respondents are Bachelor's degree holders, with a frequency of 29 or 80.56%. However, 4 or 11.11 % are pursuing a Master's education, and 3 or 8.33% have a Master's degree. With this, it only infers that a degree holder Stenographers are perceived to be skilled and competent in their respective court reporting profession. Hence, they possess exceptional capacities in the discharge of duties and functions. This is supported by the Article of Becton Loveless entitled" Benefits of Earning a College Degree," which states that, aside from training every individual in an expert field, college education trains you to think analytically, understand complex subjects, and communicate your own critical ideas about them. College can open up unexpected opportunities that aren't always there for those who haven't engaged in higher education. It also instills crucial skills like organization, self-discipline, and the ability to complete tasks from start to finish. In other words, college helps mold you into a more professional individual.

It was noted that most respondents are permanently employed with a frequency of 33 or 91.67% while 3 or 8.33 % were contractual. The foregoing only implies that Permanent-Trial Court Stenographers are less susceptible to possible layoffs and seem to be protected with security of tenure, having all the rights and privileges appurtenant to their service employment. As stipulated in the Philippine Constitution (Article II, Section 18) and the Labor Code (Article III), all workers are guaranteed the right to security of tenure. This means they can be validly terminated from service only for a valid cause supported by substantial evidence, after due process, or after the workers can be heard and present their defense.

Considering the length of service rendered by Trial Court Stenographers, 15 or 13.89 % have been in service for almost 26 years. It was succeeded by several nine stenographers (25.00%) working between 21 and 25 years, and 7 or 19.44 % in service within the 1-5 years range. However, along with the findings, the following ranges were also noted: 2 or 5.56% working for less than a year, 1 or 2.78 % were distributed between ranges 6-10 years, 11-15 years, and 16-20 years, respectively.

This finding presupposes that long-term Court Stenographers are a stable workforce and an invaluable organizational support system, considering their productive performance. In the article by Ferguson [5], she has cited that long-term employees being with the company for several years reflect a stable work environment, improving morale. Henceforth, long-term employees indicate a secure work environment in an economy where jobs are scarce. High turnover can create uncertainty in existing employees, who wonder whether they'll be next.

Based on career eligibility, it was found that most of the Trial Court Stenographers are Civil Service Eligible with a frequency of 33 or 91.67% while 3 of them hold a PRC license with a percentage of 8.33%. This finding reveals that government judiciaries recruit and hire employees in consonance with the policies and regulations underlying Government mandates. More so, specific research shows that employees without eligibility or relevant licenses are less susceptible to greener pastures and broader opportunities. Thus, far better off economically and professionally.

Concerning the salary or compensation received by Trial Court Stenographers, it was revealed that 25 or 69.44% of the respondents received a salary ranging from ₱25,001 to ₱30,000 monthly, while 11 or 30.56% earn between ₱20,001 and ₱25,000. This distribution suggests that the majority of stenographers fall within the mid-level salary bracket of public sector employees in the Philippines, reflecting a relatively stable, though modest, income scale compared to other legal professionals such as lawyers or judges. While the compensation may provide financial security, it may not be fully commensurate with the level of technical expertise, cognitive demand, and stress involved in stenographic work. Studies have shown that court reporters and stenographers often operate under high-pressure conditions,

managing multiple hearings and deadlines, yet compensation packages do not always reflect these challenges [6]. The relatively narrow range of salaries also highlights limited differentiation based on seniority or professional advancement, suggesting that promotion may rely more on tenure and institutional policy rather than performance or skills specialization. Furthermore, literature indicates that fair compensation is a critical factor influencing job satisfaction, retention, and productivity among judicial employees [7]. Hence, while most stenographers appear to be compensated at a sustainable level, the findings underscore the importance of periodic salary reviews, opportunities for merit-based increases, and incentives linked to professional development or advanced certifications to ensure motivation, retention, and long-term career satisfaction [8].

C. Competencies of Trial Court Stenographers

In terms of competencies, Table 3 presents the Competencies possessed by Trial Court Stenographers in the Rinconada Area. As gleaned on the table, trial court stenographers are affirmed to be highly competent considering the following indicators, re: Transcribes dictation at least 225 words per minute (WM =3.74), Possesses exceptional listening skills and proficient conception of legal and technical terminologies (WM =3.74), Capture spoken dialogue with specialized equipment such as audio recorder and covered microphones (WM =3.94), Maintain and safekeep records of produced transcripts (WM =3.88), Prepare orders/ minutes of the proceedings (WM =3.71), and Transcribes shorthand notes into encoded longhand transcripts with haste and precision (WM =3.94).

However, on the other hand, few which were also interpreted as competent considering the following indicators, re: Reads back dictation with confidence and precision (WM=3.44), Produces a clean, consistent and conflict-free transcript (WM= 3.36), Creates and provides same-day or next day final transcripts (WM=2.97), Capture testimonies at 99% accuracy (WM = 2.71), Mark transcripts and exhibits (WM=3,41), Identify names of speakers and other parties involved in the proceedings (WM=3,41), Excellent grasp of English language, grammar, punctuations, spelling and other technical components of transcription (WM= 3.14).

From the foregoing, it can be inferred that the Trial Court Stenographers are generally competent in their respective field of profession, particularly in stenography per se. However, capacity building was seen as an essential tool enabling them to search for greener pastures and get promoted professionally. Continuing education and advanced certifications, such as specialized shorthand speed training, real-time reporting, and legal terminology workshops, have been linked with increased credibility and better job opportunities for stenographers [9]. Moreover, embracing new technologies and diversifying into related services, including real-time transcription, captioning, and translation services, are considered effective strategies to

broaden skill sets and open alternative career paths [10]. Finally, networking and membership in professional associations are highlighted as crucial for career growth, as they provide access to resources, peer learning, recognition, and opportunities for advancement [11].

Table 3. Competencies of Trial Court Stenographers in Rinconada Area

No	Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1.	Transcribes dictation at least 225 words per minute.	3.74	Highly competent
2.	Possesses exceptional listening skills and a proficient understanding of legal and technical terminologies.	3.74	Highly competent
3.	Reads back dictation with confidence and precision.	3.44	Competent
4.	Produces a clean, consistent, and conflict-free transcript.	3.36	Competent
5.	Creates and provides same-day or next-day final transcripts.	2.97	Competent
6.	Capture testimonies at 99% accuracy.	2.71	Competent
7.	Mark transcripts and exhibits.	3.41	Competent
8.	Identify names of speakers and other parties involved in the proceedings.	3.41	Competent
9.	Capture spoken dialogue with specialized equipment such as an audio recorder and covered microphones.	3.94	Highly competent
10.	Maintain and safely keep records of produced transcripts.	3.88	Highly competent
11.	Prepare orders/minutes of the proceedings.	3.71	Highly competent
12.	Excellent grasp of the English language, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and other technical components of transcription.	3.14	Competent
13.	Transcribes shorthand notes into encoded longhand transcripts with haste and precision.	3.94	Highly competent
	Average Weighted Mean	**3.49**	**Competent**

D. Challenges of Trial Court Stenographers

Table 4 presents the Challenges faced by the Trial Court Stenographers in the Rinconda Area, considering the following indicators. As reflected, a few of the indicators were interpreted as highly challenging considering the following variables: re: Keeps track with varying languages and dialects of court, counsels, witnesses, and other parties involved (WM 3.58), Unable to capture speeches.

Table 4. Challenges of Trial Court Stenographers in Rinconada Area

No	Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1.	Keeps track of varying languages and dialects of court, counsels, witnesses, and other parties involved.	3.58	Highly challenging
2.	Unable to capture speeches due to soft-spoken and inaudible words.	3.88	Highly challenging
3.	Stops proceeding for clarification due to accent, speed, soft spoken words, multiple voices, mumbling sounds, etc.	1.73	Seldom challenging
4.	Finds difficulty in identifying individual names of speakers.	2.38	Challenging
5.	Sustains long hours of proceedings while on attentive writing, full concentration, even under extended periods.	3.59	Highly challenging
6.	Finds difficulty in identifying correct word conjugation, grammatical errors, and misuse of punctuation.	3.18	Challenging
7.	Unable to get up and attend to personal concerns such as wrist stretching, back aches, going to the restroom, etc.	3.59	Highly challenging

8.	Reads back dictation for clarity and confirmation of the counsel.	3.59	Highly challenging
9.	Presence of multiple speakers or parties involved.	3.41	Challenging
10.	Immediate request for stenographic notes.	3.00	Challenging
11.	Incomplete transcript details due to technical (topical error) and mechanical failure (inaudible recording).	2.94	Challenging
12.	Intense emotions and arguments were witnessed among witnesses and counsels during court proceedings.	3.15	Challenging
13.	Anxiety and apprehension during the reading back of testimonies.	3.63	Highly challenging
	Average Weighted Mean	**3.20**	**Challenging**

Due to soft-spoken and inaudible words (WM=3.88), the proceedings sustain long hours. At the same time, on attentive writing, full concentration even under extended periods of time (WM=3.59), Unable to get up and attend personal concerns such as stretching of wrist, back aches, go to restroom and the likes (WM=3.59), Reads back dictation for clarity and confirmation of the counsel (WM=3.59), Anxiety and apprehension during reading back of testimonies (WM=3.63).

Nevertheless, the following variables were noted as challenging, re: Finds difficulty in identifying individual names of speakers (WM=2.38), Finds difficulty in identifying correct word conjugation, grammatical errors and misuse of punctuations (WM=3.18), Presence of multiple speakers or parties involved (WM=3.41), Immediate request of stenographic notes (WM=3.00), Incomplete details of transcript due to technical (topical error) and mechanical failure (inaudible recording) (WM=2.94), Intense emotions and arguments witnessed among witnesses and counsels during court proceedings (WM=3.15). However, one indicator affirmed to be seldom challenging is Stops proceeding for clarification due to accent, speed, soft spoken words, multiple voices, mumbling sounds, etc. (WM= 1.74).

With this, it can be inferred that trial court stenographers usually face perennial factors such as varying languages and dialects, soft-spoken voices, extended hours of proceedings, and the frequent requirement to read back testimonies and transcripts, all of which directly affect the efficiency and accuracy of stenographic transcription. These challenges are not unique to the Philippine context but are common in judicial systems worldwide, where the complexity of oral communication in diverse linguistic settings often leads to increased cognitive load for stenographers [12]. The difficulty of accurately capturing testimonies when speakers use low vocal tones or rapid speech has also been identified as a significant barrier to transcription fidelity, sometimes resulting in errors or omissions that can compromise the legal record [13]. Additionally, prolonged hearings place stenographers under physical and mental strain, as continuous listening, concentration, and shorthand writing are highly demanding tasks that can lead to fatigue, decreased accuracy, and slower turnaround time [14]. Reading back portions of transcripts during ongoing proceedings further intensifies these pressures,

requiring stenographers to balance both real-time reporting and immediate verification requests. Hence, addressing these challenges must be prioritized through institutional support, such as the provision of assistive technologies, continuous training in linguistic and auditory recognition, and policies that promote reasonable workloads and adequate rest periods. Doing so not only safeguards the quality of judicial transcripts but also enhances the overall efficiency and fairness of the justice system.

Table 5. Coping Mechanisms of Trial Court Stenographers in Rinconada Area

No	Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1.	Intervenes in the middle of the proceedings for further clarifications and elaboration of identified misconceptions.	3.84	Highly applied
2.	Identify the speakers' names before the proceedings start.	3.75	Highly applied
3.	Request an extension on the transcript submission or orders.	3.18	Applied
4.	Consult fellow court reporters and/or editors for further proofreading and editing when finalizing the transcript.	3.20	Applied
5.	Devise a personalized dictionary to simplify and hasten shorthand transcription.	3.72	Highly applied
6.	Uses audio recorders and other specialized recording devices to capture spoken words.	3.79	Highly applied
7.	Attends and arrives early in court at least 20-30 minutes before the proceedings start.	3.88	Highly applied
8.	Communicate with the witnesses to confirm the spelling of their names; hence, do not assume that a familiar name is spelled just as expected.	3.71	Highly applied
9.	Accomplish a n immediate transcript within 2-3 days upon hearing.	3.12	Applied
10.	Attend external court reporting opportunity trainings, conventions, and relevant undertakings.	3.15	Applied
11.	Avails membership to relevant professional organizations such as the Philippine Association of Court Employees (PACE), Court Reporters of the Philippines (COSTRAPHIL), National Court Reporter's Association (NCRA), and the like.	3.71	Highly applied
12.	Takes home orders for transcription and immediate submission.	3.00	Applied
13.	Portrays confidence and composure even under stressful circumstances.	3.12	Applied
	Average Weighted Mean	**3.20**	**Challenging**

Conclusion

With the foregoing projections, it can be observed that among the above-indicators, seven of which were interpreted as highly applied considering the following indicators, re: Intervenes in the middle of the proceedings for further clarifications and elaboration of identified misconceptions (WM= 3.84), Identify the names of the speakers prior to the start of proceedings (WM = 3.75), Devise personalized dictionary to simplify and hasten shorthand transcription (WM=3.72), Uses audio recorders and other specialized recording devices to capture spoken words (WM=3.79), Attends and shows up early in court at least 20-30 minutes prior to the start of the proceedings (WM=3.88), Communicate with the witnesses to confirm

the spelling of their names, hence, do not assume that familiar name is spelled just as expected (WM=3.71), Avails membership to relevant professional organizations such as Philippine Association of Court Employees (PACE), Court Reporters of the Philippines (COSTRAPHIL), National Court Reporter's Association (NCRA) and the likes (WM=3.71).

On the other hand, most of the indicators were somehow interpreted as applied considering the following, re: Request for an extension on the submission of transcript or orders (WM=3.18), Consult fellow court reporter and/or editor for further proofreading and editing in the finalization of transcript (WM=3.20), Accomplish immediate transcript within 2-3 days upon hearing(3.12), Attend external court reporting opportunity trainings, conventions and relevant undertakings (WM=3.15), Takes home orders for transcription and immediate submission (WM=3.00), Portrays confidence and composure even under stressful circumstances (WM=3.12). With the given findings, it can be inferred that the Trial Court Stenographers are flexible, buoyant, and resilient in overcoming challenges that come along their way, thus finding opportunity in the middle of every difficulty.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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