

## Exploring the Work Immersion Experiences of Grade 12 STEM Students in a Local Science Integrated High School: A Narrative Research

Zohail I. Ador<sup>1\*</sup>, Hyacinth Amanda C. Banaag<sup>2</sup>, Claire Angela M. Bombio<sup>3</sup>,  
Daphne Nicole A. Consignado<sup>4</sup>, Marjanna Angelica V. Quinay<sup>5</sup>, Justin Lemuel  
C. Santos<sup>6</sup>

San Pablo City Science Integrated School

**Corresponding Author:** Zohail I. Ador [zohail.ador@deped.gov.ph](mailto:zohail.ador@deped.gov.ph)

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### ABSTRACT

The implementation of the K-12 curriculum in the Philippines brought about changes to the education system. One of which is the implementation of Work Immersion in senior high school. This is a subject that immerses students in different work environments. This narrative research was conducted to explore the experiences of senior high school students from a local science-integrated high school before, during, and after their Work Immersion. A semi-structured interview was held to gather data. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes that emerged from the study. Results revealed that the students' have little to no idea about Work Immersion. Nonetheless, students stated that their experience in Work Immersion helped them enhance and prepare themselves for their careers. Lastly, the learning process gained from Work Immersion helped students for personal growth. The schools may find more partner institutions aligned with students' interests and future careers for a more meaningful experience.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The implementation of the K–12 Basic Education Program by Republic Act No. 10533 (RA 10533), known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, has transitioned from the existing 10-year basic education to 12 years (Estacio, 2015). This implementation brought different strands in senior high school namely: Academic Track (ABM, GAS, HUMMS, STEM), Arts and Design Track, Sports Track, and Technical-Vocational-Livelihood Track (TVL). Different strands are offered, and each track offers various subjects to prepare students before college. One of the specialized subjects offered in senior high school is Work Immersion, which aims to further enhance the quality of education and prepare the K-12 curriculum learners for employment through exposure to the actual field. The Department of Education (DepEd) administered DepEd Order No. 30 s. 2017, which states that it has become one of the course requirements for graduation starting with the 2017–2018 school year.

Work Immersion is a senior high school subject that entails hands-on experience or work simulation in which learners can apply their competencies and acquired skills relevant to their track. Furthermore, it is noted that these students are immersed in actual work environments such as workshops, offices, and laboratories that apply to their previous training. This implementation of this program aims for students to: (1) gain relevant and practical industrial skills under the guidance of industry experts and workers; (2) appreciate the importance and application of the principles and theories taught in school; (3) enhance their technical knowledge and skills; (4) enrich their skills in communications and human relations; and (5) develop good work habits, attitudes, appreciation, and respect for work (DepEd, 2017). This prepares the learners to handle the demands and difficulties of employment in their future careers. If this program is carried out, learners will be competent in their fields of interest. They will be skilled and knowledgeable enough to contribute to the Philippines' economic needs, particularly in the field of human resources (Magno, 2018).

Work Immersion is used in the United States of America (USA) for enriching knowledge and further practice and use of skills. It has been used as a pedagogical tool for people to learn and engage, and its primary focus is on the students' learning process. Three outcomes have been seen after Work Immersion; the first is its ability to help students understand a certain job or topic better due to their interactions with actual people experiencing it. They are given a new perspective on the job that they experienced. Second, they have reported an increase in their practical skills. Some students believed they had enough skills to work however realized they had much room for improvement as they finished. The skills they had before the process increased, such as listening, question-asking, and relationship-building skills. Lastly, they better understood how their classroom knowledge could be applied to different work policies and practices. In correlation, the immersion course has helped them decide what they would want to practice in the future and whom they would want to work with (Robinson, 2018).

In the Philippines, even if the youth are at the right age to be employed, students' lack of experience, knowledge, and abilities are at a disadvantage. To give them more opportunities to put their knowledge and skills into practice, DepEd has made it necessary for them to have hands-on experience through job simulation of their selected track (Putri, 2021). The department issued DepEd Order No. 30 2017, which issues the implementation of Work Immersion as a required subject to graduate for senior high school students where learners will be immersed in different real-life and actual work environments (Deped, 2017). However, due to COVID-19, the program was put on hold. As it reintroduced in-person classes, the reintroduction of physical labor immersion in the ongoing, progressive development of face-to-face classrooms was supported by DepEd to increase active school engagement and preparation for diverse service delivery situations (Deped, 2022). Findings proved that participation in the Work Immersion program helped the students to acquire and develop the skills of teamwork, communication, attendance and punctuality, productivity and resilience, initiative and proactivity, judgment and decision making, dependability and reliability, attitude, and professionalism (Acut et al., 2021). However, the findings from another study showed that even if the students did learn many skills, they still experienced adverse effects. Social interactions and skill development were some of the things the students learned from the actual work immersion. However, every student had burdens like managing their finances, time, and the trip from the location of their work to their homes (Salvador, 2018).

Many researchers have explored the different experiences of senior high school students during Work Immersion. However, these studies focused on the students' experiences during the program's period and evaluated their skills while participating. Work Immersion positively affected the performance and skills of students. However, it gave them a negative view of their future careers (Salvador, 2020). Moreover, the students showed excellence and used their skills throughout the program (Acut, 2021). These studies showed a wide range of observations and research about Work Immersion from different environments, but rarely on the whole experiences of the students. This study specifically aimed to seek the experiences of Grade 12 STEM students at a local science high school, given that the students were assigned to different batches and sectors.

In this present study, Grade 12 STEM students went on an off-campus Work Immersion as a part of their curriculum requirements. Students were divided into three batches; each of them was assigned to the sectors designated by the Work Immersion teacher based on the availability of the partner institutions. These three sectors were (1) agriculture, (2) engineering, and (3) utilities/office. This activity enables the students to adapt to a different environment, face the reality of life, and acquire skills related to their specialization. Since there was a limited time for preparation, the transportation was one of the evident struggles of the students whose houses were far from the work field. The students were not also given the opportunity to select the field that closely aligns with their intended career path and future academic pursuits.

Thus, the main objective of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Grade 12 STEM students from a local science-integrated high school during their Work Immersion. It aimed to determine the students' ideas, experiences, and acquired skills regarding the said program. Additionally, it intended to discover the relevance of this program to STEM students for their future careers.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Work Immersion programs in other countries have led students under the program to gain skills and experiences in the field of work that can aid them in taking on their future courses. In the study by Robinson (2018), students of the Bachelor of Social Work from the University of Missouri School of Social Work spent seven days on their immersion trip. Through the host organizations they visited during the immersion, the students interacted with people who were poor or homeless; one of these interactions involved volunteering at two hospitality centers. The students gained knowledge of how to integrate classroom learning into social work practice through this experience and develop social work practice skills. According to some students, observing social work delivery in action during this immersion course has helped them choose the kind of social work they want to pursue. Through this course, other students who were aware of the target group they desired to work with gained insight into how issues associated with homelessness and poverty are connected with those various identities.

In a study by Garcia et al., (2020), senior high school graduates of Calamba City participated in Work Immersion. They explained and correlated efficiency, Work Immersion program alignment, and career opportunities. The program was discovered to be highly beneficial in terms of employability, skill utilization, employment status, track alignment, and salary. There is a significant correlation between the individual qualities, practical expertise, and job applicability of students, which is correlated significantly with students' preparedness, degree of skill application, job status, track alignment, waiting period, and salary. Students with greater individual qualities, practical expertise, and job applicability are more likely to be hired. It is recommended that academic institutions are driven to continue looking for industries that will match and enhance the abilities of their learners to allow them to be productively immersed and ready for potential employment.

Along with positive outputs, difficulties were still encountered during Work Immersion. As stated in a study by Mapalo-Mina et al., (2022), results revealed the issues students in Iligan City, Lanao Del Norte, faced while implementing Work Immersion into practice. Personal issues were observed as the students had difficulty getting up early, getting ready for school, being patient, and managing time. Students also observed that too much work was being done in a limited time. In addition, they struggled financially due to transportation costs and materials for the program. Furthermore, students found it challenging to finish their activities without an instructor to guide them due to their lack of knowledge of technical skills and prerequisites needed for the

program. Lastly, more tools are needed for their line of work, such as computers for those in the ICT field.

#### *K-12 Work Immersion*

“Work Immersion is a key feature of the SHS Curriculum,” according to the Work Immersion Guidelines under DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2017. These guidelines were implemented in the school year 2017-2018. As stated in the guidelines, the students must participate for at least 80 hours and should at least take four specialized subjects. It has three parts: pre-immersion, immersion proper, and post-immersion. In pre-immersion, the students must attend orientations and prepare some documents. On the other hand, in the Work Immersion proper, they will be responsible for participating in any activities that the offices or partner institutions require. Lastly, the post-immersion part is where they need to make their portfolio and make a report about their whole experience while conducting Work Immersion. One of the main goals of this program is to help the students learn the proper work ethics in certain fields they may pursue in the future and to improve and know their capabilities. The following are some of the objectives of Work Immersion: to become familiar with the workplace, for employment simulation, and to apply their competencies in areas of specialization/applied subjects in an authentic work environment. Furthermore, the guidelines stated that Senior High School students are expected to have acquired different competencies from lower grade levels. By implementing the Work Immersion program, they will be able to test all of those competencies, and this will help them transition from school life to the actual world.

The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) created the Technical Working Group for K to 12 Work Immersion Program (TWG for K12-WIP) to protect senior high school students under the Work Immersion program. This is with respect to Section 6 of Republic Act No. 10533, also known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, and Section 11, Rule II and Republic Act No. 9231, otherwise known as the Special Protection of Children against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act. This is a joint program between the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Department of Education (DepEd), and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to guarantee the safety and relevance of the K-12 Work Immersion Guidelines. Through this, the students will engage in an actual workplace setting. However, as stated by DOLE, Work Immersion should not be considered actual employment but only to fulfill the purpose and goals of the K-12 guidelines.

Work Immersion is currently being implemented in different countries as part of the curriculum to graduate in senior high school and as a preparation for their future. Work Immersion in blended learning faced some challenges since students could not go to the location where the Work Immersion would happen. However, Work Immersion was still implemented. The findings state that the students' challenges are a lack of financial stability to continue immersion, a lack of interest, and insufficient time to supervise their work (Vecino et al., 2020).

The study by Insorio et al., (2023) stated that there were still restrictions in returning to the normal Work Immersion process. However, despite those restrictions, the school could still implement this. The students could choose a workplace aligned with what they want to be in the future. They were given a chance to have an online or limited in-person modality. They were all given an accomplishment portfolio that they needed to accomplish. After the implementation, the results stated that Work Immersion helped them be more interested in improving themselves for their future career. However, there were still lapses in the immersion, such as insufficient online meetings to assess if the students were doing their assigned tasks on time.

#### *STEM Strand*

The study of Wahono (2020) referred STEM education as teaching, learning, and implementing the ethics and skills in STEM courses regarding science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, focusing on learning how to solve real-life problems. The researchers of the study concluded that the enactment of STEM education brought a favorable outcome in the student's learning. Specifically, the effects were shown on the students' learning achievement, higher-order thinking skills, and motivation.

#### *Work Immersion Experiences*

In the study of Breakay et al. (2013), immersion in tourism had a two-way learning exchange as a key positive experience for the students. The immersion participants felt that they were sharing knowledge and helping the industry, as opposed to only performing front-line operational tasks for the organization. Additionally, students reported learning from immersion hosts, such as small skills like communication, to add to their current knowledge as they had experienced dealing with people from different backgrounds.

According to a study by Acut et al., (2021), Grade 12 STEM students who participated in Work Immersion were asked which department they would prefer to be assigned to at two different companies, namely: KNOWLES Electronics (Philippines) Corporation and the Department of Agriculture, wherein students were immersed for a minimum of 80 hours. Students reported to the designated company during the Work Immersion within the scheduled time frame. They were given an orientation on the business' nature, the scope of its products and services, the target market, the organizational structure, and the company's rules and regulations. Furthermore, students completed exercises that correlate to the abilities required in their selected sector of specialization and provided a report on their experiences.

In the Work Immersion of another study about STEM students in a carriageenan production company, a full-service structural engineering firm, engineering office, and agency responsible for the conservation, management, and monitoring of natural resources' safety and protection showed there are needed soft and hard skills to work with these partner institutions according to the study of Montes and Paño (2020). Basic communication, initiative, professional, and reliability skills are the soft skills required to achieve satisfactory student performance. Hard skills such as mathematics, numeracy,

and ICT are needed to complete daily tasks using computers and be able to read and interpret mathematical information and perform basic operations.

According to the study by Bustamante (2019), Grade 12 GAS students underwent Work Immersion in three different workplace immersion venues chosen by the school, namely Jugan Barangay Hall, Jugan Elementary School, and McDonald's Mandaue. The students adapted to immerse since the schedule differed from what they were used to. Their regular schedule in school started after lunch until 6:00 in the evening in contrast to the given schedule that started at 8:00 in the morning. Due to this situation, the students were pushed to improve their time management ability and practice mindful awareness of time.

Moreover, this study showed that based on the interviews of the students during the Work Immersion, they found it hard to deal with different people visiting the office with various concerns. It made the students realize their routine in school, which involves dealing with their classmates and teachers, was like their experience in Work Immersion although they noticed that in their workplace, they are overwhelmed by the variety of people they meet. Due to this circumstance, students admitted that they had become more patient in dealing with various situations and that their communication skills had greatly improved when responding to inquiries from people. Their Work Immersion experience allowed them to develop their interpersonal abilities regarding customer service and human relations satisfaction.

ABM and TVL students that underwent Work Immersion described it as a challenging but pleasant experience according to the study by Amper (2022). According to their interviews, it was hard as they were looking after a business while studying. One of the students felt intimidated as learning new platforms was needed to conduct the business successfully. Despite these hardships, the students felt satisfied as their experiences gave them learning. For instance, students learned strategic approaches to advertising, like online marketing. This experience also taught the learners to budget properly as they use their own money to run their businesses.

#### *Challenges in Work Immersion*

According to the study of Matabang et al., (2019), it is challenging for TVL students to continue engaging in civic action and interpersonal communication after immersion experiences. However, these experiences lead to enduring patterns of civic engagement that go beyond their everyday activities. Many students need help dealing with the complexity and realistic entirety of the social issues during their immersion. In the study of Cabansag (2021), one of the issues encountered by HUMSS, GAS, and ABM students during Work Immersion is the non-alignment of the assigned venue with their interests and field of study. Despite some partner institutions offering limited training relevant to the objectives of the Work Immersion program, the overall results of the students' performances are still impressive.

Similar to the study of Mahaguay and Mahaguay (2020), it has been observed that the tasks given to ICT-Computer Programming students were not all directly relevant to their course. This leads to a lack of coherence in their

learning and impedes their ability to grasp fundamental concepts. Additionally, while Work Immersion students demonstrated commendable work ethics, their volunteer inclination needs improvement. Furthermore, students faced difficulties in troubleshooting software and hardware issues with computers, which is a crucial aspect of their field of study.

As Mapalo-Mina and Sermona (2022) specified, students experienced issues during the Work Immersion program. Students struggled to get up early to go to school and had poor time management which led them to feel restricted due to time constraints. In addition, students struggle to allocate their expenses to different needs such as transportation, food, savings, and costs for immersion. Some also find it hard to finish tasks due to a shortage of tools.

#### *Benefits of Work Immersion*

In the study of Bustamante (2019), the Work Immersion program provided an opportunity for students to apply the concepts they learned in the classroom to actual work situations. It also helped the students to shape their character and values. The program aligns with the DepEd's goal of preparing senior high school students for college, employment, or entrepreneurship. GAS Students who participated in the program found it to be valuable and worth their time. It gave them numerous realizations, including the challenges of working in the industry, the unique learning opportunities, and the confidence they gained from participating in the program.

Based on the study of Salvador (2020), students who participated in the Work Immersion program developed various skills and competencies, such as computer and technological skills, social interaction skills, time management, and discipline. This program is a great way to prepare students for the workforce and equip them to interact with diverse individuals. The Work Immersion experience was found to be advantageous in enhancing social interactions, skills, and knowledge acquired from school. Nonetheless, students faced challenges such as expenses, time management, and commuting time from the Work Immersion venue to their homes. As a result, the course positively and negatively impacted each student.

Based on the study of Robinson (2018), Work Immersion has been used as a pedagogical tool for learning to help students sharpen their skills and knowledge while experiencing activities related to their future jobs. This program resulted in three outcomes. First, the students could understand the job more due to their interaction with the environment in which they were immersed. Second, students improved their practical skills and saw room for improvement as they thought their skills were enough. Skills that improved included their listening and question-asking skills. Lastly, they can realize the importance of educational and classroom knowledge due to its application to different practices and work policies. The program helped in the deciding factor of students if they would want to continue in this line of work or not.

#### *Feedback from Work Employers*

The findings in the study of Pang et al., (2019), state that the following competencies such as: willingness and ability to learn, teamwork, hard-working,

analytical, and self-control are the following characteristics that employers think are beneficial in a real workplace environment. The said employers recommended that universities make different work-oriented programs that can increase the likelihood of students learning these competencies.

Robie (2021) stated that employers consider different competencies, such as communication, as an essential factor in the workplace. Thus, they expected that students would learn these competencies after the Work Immersion. At the end of the Work Immersion, there is no significant difference between the employers' expectations and the students' executed performances in most competencies.

#### *Plans for Work Immersion*

Favila et al., (2019), proposed a study of a knowledge-sharing model for the Work Immersion of senior high school students. They assess different students through a focus group and end up having five aspects of improvement: standard, readiness, commitment, discernment, and fulfillment. Given these themes, they made a model called the UGNAYAN Model. The Filipino word "ugnayan" means "connection" and "interaction". This proposed model's purpose is to improve and build healthy and effective knowledge sharing among the participants of the Work Immersion program.

Meanwhile, Recto and Lasconia (2018) conducted a study about agriculture students and had findings about the different challenges they have encountered, such as preparation, distance, financial problems, farm tools, and the number of participants. Using these data as a basis, the authors developed an action plan consisting of the Tips on Work Immersion. This was developed to give students, teachers, parents, and training centers more information for preparation before the Work Immersion proper. Furthermore, this will be used in activities like PTA meetings, school learning action cells (SLAC) sessions, senior high school orientation, and training centers.

#### *Research Questions*

This research aimed to interpret the stories and experiences of the participants about their Work Immersion. The following three questions focused on the experiences before, during, and their view on the future. This included the challenges, opportunities, and preparations. It specifically aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How did the participants describe Work Immersion before it happened, in terms of:
  - a. participants' expectations;
  - b. preparations;
  - c. possible challenges; and
  - d. its importance
2. How did the participants generalize the whole experience during the Work Immersion, in terms of:
  - a. the challenges;
  - b. the opportunities; and

- c. the learning process in the work environment
3. How will the participants' experience with Work Immersion help them to have an idea of their possible future careers, in terms of:
  - a. acquired skills;
  - b. deciding what the final future will be; and
  - c. challenges in the participants' future field.

## METHODOLOGY

This study applied a qualitative research method, specifically a narrative research since this was the most effective method as it will address the experiences of each individual they observed and lived over time (Faizin, 2020). This study explored the experiences of participants before, during, and after engaging in the programs. Using purposive sampling, three students who met the criteria qualified to be participants of the study. Specifically, they (1) must have undergone ten days of Work Immersion; (2) must have come from different sectors (agriculture, engineering, and utilities/office); (3) must be recommended by the Work Immersion teacher.

The main instrument for this study was a semi-structured interview that underwent expert validation from one Work Immersion teacher for any suggestions that could aid the revision of the questions appropriately to the study context. In-person interviews were conducted at the most convenient time of the participants. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data were coded and categorized. Then, inductive thematic analysis was employed for themes to emerge from the data.

This study practiced proper ethical considerations. Each participant received informed consent. Participation in this study was voluntary, and no monetary compensation was provided. Confidentiality of the whole interview and anonymity of the participants was guaranteed as the researchers provided pseudo names for every participant.

## RESULTS

### 1. Participants' Description of Work Immersion Before It Happened

#### a. Participants' Expectations

##### *Theme: Work Immersion is crucial for future career and work Preparation*

The goal of Work Immersion programs is to aid the students to learn proper work ethics and improve their capabilities in a certain field they may pursue in the future (DepEd, 2017). Due to this, this program is also expected to be helpful in preparing students in the future and for them to know what to expect once they are placed in a work field. In correspondence with this given information, the majority of the participants expected that Work Immersion would be crucial to help them prepare for their future careers and work, while the other participant mentioned being excited and nervous about their Work Immersion. They also expected that they would be able to choose their own sector in Work Immersion that is suitable for their future career.

*Participant 1: "Very essential naman po sa mga graduating students especially kapag magcollege ka na...parang mas maganda if tayo yung makakapili kung saan natin gusto."*

*Participant 2: "Kami yung una uli na nag-immersion, So naexcite kami. Then, syempre kinakabahan din kasi bago kami, hindi naming alam kung pa'no."*

*Participant 3: "Yung in-expect naming, para siyang OJT po."*

Graduates from the K-12 curriculum have been evident to be adequately prepared for employability since it indicated that their overall skills are within the range of high and very high (Atienza & Herrera, 2020). This study shows that the expectation for Work Immersion to be able to help them prepare for their future careers can be attained as a K-12 graduate. Through Work Immersion, senior high school students are anticipated to be exposed to a work environment related to their field of specialization to improve their competence (Bustamante, 2019), and based on this study, in Work Immersion students are expected to be placed in a Work Immersion sector related to their future career however, the school chose the participants' Work Immersion sector despite their interest in a different field of work.

Therefore, Work Immersion is expected by the participants to assist in developing the necessary skills and work ethics that are crucial for their future careers and will help them to have the experience for their work in the future. Additionally, they expressed a desire to choose a sector aligned with their future career interests. However, a notable limitation identified in the study is that the school assigned the participants' Work Immersion sectors, disregarding their interest in a different field of work. This misalignment between students' preferences and assigned sectors affects the students' expectation of Work Immersion being a crucial aid for their future careers as it will not give them the experience and skills related to their chosen field in the future.

#### ***b. Preparations***

***Theme: There is almost no preparation needed aside from the documents needed***

In order for the participants to completely immerse in a work experience, each Work Immersion partner requires students to submit pertinent documents for application as a worker in their field. As part of their Work Immersion, students were asked to submit a résumé, which will be included in their portfolio.

*Participant 1: "Wala naman talaga akong prinepare aside dun sa mga mga need na resume. 'Yun lang yung mga prinepare ko, yung mga para sa portfolio mismo ng school."*

*Participant 2: "Ang preparation ko wala. Parang nag-ready lang ako ng mga need talaga dalhin doon."*

*Participant 3: "Wala po kaming preparation kasi na-assign kami sa field...Isa pa pala, iyon (résumé) na natutunan namin kung paano gawin kung mamamasukan ka."*

Due to the curriculum still being developed, the majority of senior high school students are not yet ready for or aware of the preparations needed for their Work Immersion. With this information, a preparatory Work Immersion scheme was made to enable the teachers to assist learners to be aware, prepared, and ready for their Work Immersion in consideration of their skills (Aguspina & Bondad, 2019). However, based on the conducted interview, these preparations were not executed as the participants only prepared a résumé for their Work Immersion. A well-crafted résumé holds significant importance in the job application process, as indicated by feedback from interviewees. Recruiters form mental images of applicants based on their résumés, and these detailed descriptions assist in envisioning potential employees who would perform with exceptional efficiency. However, the effect of a résumé depends on the details included, recruiter, and applicant. While creativity can be beneficial, it should be balanced with a focus on skills and qualities, unless applying to media or artistically-oriented industries (Uskaurs, 2018).

All things considered, the preparation for Work Immersion based on the participants is lacking, with the focus primarily on the preparation of a résumé. Even though a well-written résumé is necessary for their future job application process, the impression of a recruiter varies depending on the information provided. The students' lack of awareness and preparedness for Work Immersion can be attributed to the curriculum still being developed and the limited exposure to the value of Work Immersion among senior high school students. To ensure a more comprehensive and effective Work Immersion experience, it is important to implement a preparatory scheme that assists learners in becoming aware, prepared, and ready for their immersion by considering their skills and providing guidance on various aspects of the work environment. By providing a more holistic approach to Work Immersion preparation, students can fully immerse themselves in the work experience and maximize the benefits gained from the program.

**c. Possible Challenges**

***Theme: There is lack of knowledge and understanding in the immersion environment***

Understanding the work environment is a fundamental requirement for individuals to excel in their professional endeavors. In the context of Work Immersion experiences of students, the immersion environment offers a valuable opportunity for hands-on learning and practical application of knowledge. However, there is a notable concern about students' lack of knowledge and understanding within these immersion settings. Based on the interview conducted among student participants, the majority of the participants acknowledged a lack of prior knowledge or

familiarity with the tasks and responsibilities assigned to them within their respective sectors during the Work Immersion course. On the other hand, one participant stated that the challenges encountered relate to the lack of self-discipline.

*Participant 1: "Lack of understanding and interest sa mga ituturo sa'min since unrelated doon 'yung gusto kong course for college."*

*Participant 2: "Challenge mo lang is sarili mo kasi pag tinamad ka, hindi ka makakakuha ng requirements mo. Hindi ka makakapag-work immersion."*

*Participant 3: "Hindi kami prepared at hindi namin alam kung anong mangyayari sa workspace."*

The students-participants' statements coincide with the research by Massingham (2018) which revealed that: (1) knowledge loss in the work environment has a significant negative impact on organizational problems, including reduced morale, capability gaps, resource cuts, decreased work quantity and quality, customer mistrust, longer learning time and slower task completion, (2) an increased sense of risk, decreased risk management capacity, (3) and decrease in the organizational knowledge base, which is unlikely to be replenished over time.

The findings imply that the participants' limited knowledge of their immersion environment had a significant impact on their job performance within their assigned sectors. Due to their lack of familiarity with the tasks, responsibilities, and expectations of the immersion environment, they encountered difficulties in carrying out their duties effectively. Therefore, by addressing this issue through job orientation and training, work immersion partner institutions can ensure that their employees are well-prepared for success and exhibit strong job performance. This approach allows employees to become acquainted with the work environment, acquire essential knowledge, and enhance their skills, ultimately enabling them to excel in their respective roles.

#### **d. Its Importance**

##### ***Theme: Work Immersion contributes to future work preparation***

Work immersion has provided a vital role and objective in administering work preparation in its program proper. Thus, it has helped in the improvement of students' awareness and knowledge of future job opportunities, making such the main goal and importance of work immersion for the students. All participants have expected that work immersion will give them prior experience, etiquette, and skills needed for their future careers.

*Participant 1: "Makakatulong naman s'ya kasi hindi lang naman yung mismong work d'on, parang yung mga conduct din, parang yung proper behavior sa mga workplace and kung paano nga ba nagwowork yung mga professionals."*

*Participant 2: "Makakatulong siya kasi pinakuha kami ng mga kailangan"*

*namin 'pag kukuha ka talaga ng trabaho."*

*Participant 3: "Siyempre mas makakatulong 'yon since makapagbigay siya ng good experience...may matutunan kang mga skills – kung ano ginagawa sa office, kung anong mangyayari pag nagtrabaho ka na."*

These results were reflected in a similar study by Dela Cruz and Permejo (2020); students have reported having a satisfactory performance leading to the emergence and improvement of skills they have learned from school. Results have shown that learners who were exposed to this program performed and exhibited efficiency in completing tasks. In addition, the learners became more prepared and equipped due to the skills and competencies they need in an actual work field. These results align with a study by Alcobendas (2022), tackling Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM) students and their performance in terms of personality, work ethics, and job skills. In terms of their work ethics, the students developed a strong sense of this when interacting with superiors and peers, as evidenced by their trustworthiness, discipline, reliability, initiative, and loyalty. In terms of their personality, they have gained and adapted the needed work attitude and a personality suitable for a future employee, as seen from the results of always being in complete uniform, having a positive attitude towards work, and self-confidence in accomplishing tasks. Lastly, the students acquired skills that are necessary for an employee and were able to demonstrate competence in their specified areas.

The results imply that the participants have prior knowledge about the importance and objectives of the Work Immersion program. Work Immersion has been known to students about how this program can help in the enhancement of proper behavior needed in the workplace. In addition, students are aware that the emergence of new skills and its enhancement could be one of the effects of this program on the individual. Lastly, it could give them adequate work experience that they could use for their future careers.

## **2. Participants' Generalization of the Whole Experience During Work Immersion**

### *a. The Challenges*

*Theme: The environment and personal factors contribute to the challenges in accomplishing the task*

Work Immersion is a subject that requires learners to learn authentically from real-life setting. It is important because it helps the students be prepared and have prior experience that can help them in their future work. However, this subject has also given different challenges to the students.

In this study, the main challenge experienced by the participants was mostly concerned with the environment and personal factors, such as difficulty in communicating to higher-ups, understanding concepts, comprehension of information, and the harsh weather. The majority of the

participants cited the following challenges they had which were mostly concerned with the environment and the personal factors. However, one participant stated that they did not have challenges and the immersion process was smooth.

*Participant 1: "During that work immersion paiba-iba kami ng unit [engineering sector] like una ay mag-a-accounting, then, meron kaming sales tapos lumipat kami ng project development, project monitoring. Parang within 10 days, i-aabsorb mo lahat ng information from that. Parang medyo mahirap siyang intindihin"*

*Participant 2: "Siguro yung transpo kasi depende kung saan ka rin nadala. Pero sa 'min naman is madali since malapit lang naman sa bayan yung water district....Sa water district? Wala. Wala namang challenges na hindi ko kayang lagpasan ganon parang ano lang."*

*Participant 3: "Since nagtatrabaho kami [agriculture sector] sa arawan ngayon, may ilang nagkakasakit din"*

Working place diversity has started to increase as the generation starts to evolve more. Diversity has the potential to result in higher productivity and competitive advantages, it is crucial that organizations pay attention to diversity and investigate comprehensive inclusion. Some of the possible challenges that can be experienced in a workplace are lifestyle choices, workplace communication, work environment, and generation gaps (Cletus et al., 2018). Conversations that come from difficulty in communication may cause discomfort or cause a negative impact on the person and can cause harm to productivity at work (Kippist & Duarte, 2016). Situational restrictions, which include elements like noise, workplace supplies, ventilation, and light, are the primary work environment conditions that have an adverse effect on job performance (Al-Omari & Okasheh, 2017).

This implies that before students were able to learn and enhance skills, there were challenges the majority of participants observed. Different challenges that are usually concerned with the workplace environment and personal factors were observed by the participants. Thus, the following findings proved the possible challenges encountered by the participants during the immersion, which can also be experienced in a real workplace.

**b. The Opportunities**

***Theme: Immerses have acquired new skills for future work***

Immersion gives learners an opportunity to experience working at jobs that give them chances to learn new skills. The recent work immersion, which gave a new opportunity to learn, has given the students new skills that are beneficial and helpful in their future work.

The acquired new skills for future work had become a source of opportunity as to having another work substitute in the future. All of the

participants agreed that the work immersion gave them opportunities to learn new skills that will be beneficial for their future work or for another work opportunity.

*Participant 1: "Meron syang project monitoring office... parang ayun yung sabi ko "bakit parang magandang opportunity 'to in the future na parang pwede ko s'yang gawin"...maganda syang option, maganda syang opportunity."*

*Participant 2: "Natuto ako pa'no maging isang accountant. Then, alam ko paano magcompute, paano magkaroon ng mas magandang system doon. Then, meron sa mga technical naman, doon matututo ka rin...pwede rin siguro siyang maging part noon kung magkakaroon ng innovation."*

*Participant 3: "Matututunan mo rin yung teamwork since kunwari nag-work ka sa office, dapat makipagtulungan kayo; dapat ano on-time ka lagi kasi mapapatalik ka sa office 'pag lalagi ka late. At creativity din, kunwari sa mga lupa namin, same applies don sa mga kagamitan namin na lagi ang sira, yun nagagawa namin lagi ng paraan."*

Courses like Work Immersion give students the opportunity to practice accessing the knowledge they need to solve problems swiftly and decisively, which helps them to be developed as professionals. Additionally, through discovering their ability to effect change, students gain a sense of responsibility (Heiskanen et al., 2015). Acquiring experience in the workplace as a student, whether through an internship, or a part-time job, can be extremely beneficial. After completing one's education and entering a job, the students will have a variety of essential useful abilities (Philphott, 2021). Not only were the students able to learn practical skills, but they were also able to learn social and leadership skills. Work Immersion results in effectiveness on senior high school graduates' social development is seen as being extremely positive in terms of their communication, leadership, and self-efficacy abilities (Besa et al., 2022).

Work Immersion supports and has served its purpose in teaching students different new skills that can help them in their future careers. The different findings from different kinds of literature have supported the idea that immersion in a real workplace can indeed help prepare students to be more prepared for their future work. The participants were also able to learn social skills and practical skills from the recent immersion. It implies that the recent Work Immersion was successful in serving its purpose.

### ***c. The Learning Process in the Work Environment***

#### ***Theme: Immersing to actual experience gives authentic learning***

The country's education system offers different strategies to teach students, depending on the subjects or courses and the lessons that correspond to it. One of these strategies is when students gain knowledge and skills by experiencing the different lessons first-hand.

In the present study, students were able to gain relevant knowledge through immersion to authentic learning, the majority of the participants stated that they learned information through experience during their work immersion proper. Moreover, one participant said that the learning process can be described as fast-paced.

*Participant 2: "Hindi siya technical, more on experience..."*

*Participant 3: "Para siyang hands-on na. Kasi nasa field nga kami."*

These statements support the study of Giamellaro (2014), which is about science learning through immersion. The findings of the study stated that (1) significant learning was gained from the immersion experiences, (2) the students showed improvement regarding their degree of contextualization and learning, (3) situating information in time and place and gathering distinct visual or embodied evidence for scientific concepts were among the basic contextualization procedures that were included. Another study by Obispo (2023), states that joining in a community immersion program gave pre-service teachers motivation and inspiration to pursue teaching. This also gave them ideas on what they may actually experience in the field of teaching such as classroom management and the variety of students they may encounter.

Work Immersion is implemented to create a lifelong learning process for senior high school students. It is to help them to learn, not only academically, but also to know and experience different possible careers in the future. Immersing in the actual workplace reached the objective of the given course, it also has been a big help because the students learned all the tasks and acquired different skills and information firsthand. Thus, learning from actual experience is really an effective way for students to learn and it must be further *implemented in the future*.

### **3. The Help of Work Immersion Experience to Participants' Experiences in Having an Idea of Their Possible Future Careers**

#### ***a. Acquired Skills***

##### ***Theme: Work Immersion enhances of soft and hard skills***

The enhancement of skills during a work immersion holds immense importance in shaping an individual's professional growth and future success. Work immersion provides a valuable opportunity for individuals to enhance their soft and hard skills in a real-world, professional setting. Soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, are essential for effective collaboration and adapting to diverse work environments. On the other hand, hard skills, including technical expertise and specific job-related knowledge, equip individuals with the necessary tools to perform their tasks competently. Through work immersion, individuals can immerse themselves in practical experiences, gain hands-on knowledge, and refine their abilities in both soft and hard skills, setting a solid foundation for their future career success. Based on the interview conducted among student participants, all of them stated

experiencing skill enhancement across various domains following their participation in the Work Immersion program.

*Participant 1: "Nakatulong siya in a way na kailangan mong maging punctual; yung respect din sa other people...listening and comprehending...communication skills...critical thinking skills ko and yung creative."*

*Participant 2: "Yung problem solving skills ayon...may mga life skills din kaming natutunan do'n...kung pa'no mo makipag communicate professionally sa mga tao, yung proper etiquette."*

*Participant 3: "Natuto kami wag maging late...na-develop din yung teamwork namin. at kailangan rin ng pasensya sa agriculture. Ang pinaka-importante is creativity."*

The statements given by the student participants concur with the research by Sharma and Raghuvanshi (2020) that informal learning occurs naturally within the workplace setting and serves as an innovative method for employee development. Various avenues of informal learning, such as engaging in colleagues' tasks, offering training to others, and interacting with staff and students, contribute to trainers' enrichment of their technical, soft skills, and interpersonal proficiencies. Likewise, in the study by Fergusson (2022) found that Work-Based Learning (WBL) presents participants with multiple opportunities to acquire knowledge, develop skills, and attain qualifications. It fosters learning through diverse approaches, drawing upon reflective practice and leveraging the individual's existing knowledge and skills. Moreover, WBL needs to be flexible and inclusive, capable of accommodating learners from diverse backgrounds, embracing diversity, adapting to change, and incorporating research that is relevant to future requirements.

Work Immersion is a valuable opportunity for students to enhance both their soft and hard skills through hands-on experience. By immersing themselves in real work environments, students have the chance to apply theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom to practical situations. This practical immersion enables the development of essential soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability. Additionally, participants stated that they acquire and refine hard skills specific to their chosen field, gaining practical expertise and industry-specific knowledge. Overall, work immersion serves as a transformative experience that helps students bridge the gap between academia and the professional world, equipping *them with the skills and experiences necessary for future success.*

**b. Deciding What Final Future Field Will Be**

*Theme: Students adhered to their current choice of career*

As Work Immersion is a subject integrated into the 12th grade, it seeks to help students to strengthen the path and course they would like to take in the near future. Its aim is to give an idea of what a certain path will

be like in order to help the student contemplate and decide whether they would pick one or the other. As this program is set to take at least ten days as implemented by the participants' school, it gives students a chance to rethink and reorganize their thoughts about the career that they would like to partake in. All three participants stated that Work Immersion has not affected and changed their career choice. However, a participant expressed that they gained an interest and new point of view about the sector they partook in during the program.

*Participant 1: "Sa'kin, hindi nagbago kasi yun talaga yung gusto kong eh. Pero naging interested ako kasi may time na nagcareer orientation kami...nadagdag sa aking point of view, pero nonetheless yung gusto kong career ay within the med field pa rin."*

*Participant 2: "Hindi naman siya naka-apekto since desidido nako do'n sa pinili kong course."*

*Participant 3: "Sa dentistry pa rin kasi parang hindi para sa akin ang ganong trabaho. Like, hindi ako sanay sa ganon...yung skillset ko puro more on computer and...marami na rin din akong alam sa dentistry."*

Students have claimed that the program had a large influence on their career choices. A study by Alcantara (2019) tackled the perceptions of senior high school sports track students toward their work immersion. Results show that it has further helped them gain more interest and certainty in their chosen field. All nine participants stated that the acquired knowledge and skills have further helped them to decide whether to consider the sector they were immersed in. The participants' responses were heightened in the study of Bayona and Campanano (2019), addressing the effect of agri-business immersion on the chosen career of senior high school students. It has been perceived that some students are interested in this field but have inadequate knowledge, skills, courage, and experience in order to argue that they could build and stay in this kind of business. Overall, all strategies produced a positive effect on the career decision of the participants.

Work Immersion has proven that it has helped students decide their course and path for college. It has provided them with a basis to assess whether their pre-chosen course is suited for them and have enough skills to pursue this track. The participants are able to conclude that some career choices are not suitable for them due to their skills and interests that are more fitting in certain courses. It may have given them a chance to think and contemplate but it may not be enough to state that the sector of an individual in Work Immersion will be their chosen career in the future.

**c. Challenges in the Participants' Future Field**

**Theme: Personal challenges may be faced in the future**

There are many different challenges that students may face in their future careers. It can be challenges brought by external factors and challenges that they may encounter within themselves.

In this study, all participants claimed that personal challenges, such as punctuality, *critical and decisive thinking, and patience, that they have experienced in work immersion may also be encountered in their future fields.*

*Participant 1: "Dapat alam mo yung gagawin pag nagkaroon ng issue. So yun nga decisiveness, critical thinking skills."*

*Participant 2: "Siguro meron... kasi mapipilitan kang gumising kapag ganon."*

*Participant 3: "Well...magiging challenges pa rin ng patience and pagpasok nang maaga since late din ako lagi."*

According to the study of Halicioglu (2015), which is a study about the challenges of teachers that are new to teaching in schools overseas, they experience a variety of challenges depending on their past experiences, personality, and individual's context. Aside from the new environment that they will have to adapt to, their challenges will also relate to their personal approach while working. While a study by Wilkins-Yel et al., (2022) focused on the impact of personal challenges and advisor support on the STEM persistence of women of color graduates. Based on their findings, personal challenges faced by the students include financial difficulties, family challenges, romantic relationship difficulties, personal health challenges, adjustment to U.S. culture, and challenges related to pregnancy and childcare. These challenges can either help or discourage them from continuing their academic and career progress.

This implies that students see personal challenges as one of the main challenges that they will encounter in the future in terms of their careers. Therefore, it shows that they may be ready when it comes to their acquired skills and knowledge but they are lacking in personal development. Hence, students such as educational institutions should pay more attention to this aspect to avoid difficulties related to personal challenges. *Resolving such problems and improving the personality of the incoming future employees will help them, as well as the employers or company, to show great performance when it comes to working.*

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This narrative research aimed to explore the lived experiences of senior high school students that underwent a Work Immersion program. The study identified significant themes pertaining to the students' preparations and their overall encounters before, during, and after the program. Drawing upon the findings, the following conclusions were reached:

1. Four core themes related to the participants' description and preparation for their Work Immersion were acquired from the study. One of the themes

generated was that Work Immersion is crucial for future career and work preparation. The participants expected Work Immersion to be a program that would help them develop skills needed for their future work and prepare them accordingly. This highlights the perceived importance of Work Immersion as a valuable learning experience. The next theme of the study focuses on the participants' preparation, revealing that there was almost no preparation besides the documents needed as they were only required to submit a résumé for their Work Immersion portfolio. The third theme indicates that a lack of knowledge and understanding in the immersion environment was a possible challenge that the participants had expected to face during their Work Immersion. Lastly, the fourth theme discusses the importance of Work Immersion in contributing to future work preparation. It also reveals that the participants already had prior knowledge about this program. The themes generated show that the participants had a brief understanding of Work Immersion before experiencing it. However, they did not have much preparation despite being aware of the benefits and challenges they might encounter during their Work Immersion;

2. Three core themes related to their whole experience during the Work Immersion period were gathered from the study. The first theme tackles how the environment and personal factors contribute to the challenges that the participants experienced while accomplishing tasks. The challenges encountered by the respondents included communication, transportation, and students getting sick, implying that this would be a possible challenge to their future workplace. The second theme stated that the skills they have gained can be helpful for future opportunities and work. These skills can help students gain a new work substitute in the future if this is needed. Work Immersion has impacted most students with their social and practical skills needed for job opportunities and applications. Lastly, the third theme was observed to be that immersion in an actual experience gives authentic and true learning. It has been observed that it helps give them ideas on what they need to expect in a real-life workplace. In conclusion, the Work Immersion program has provided a lot of preparation and enhancement of themselves, along with battling challenges, job opportunities, and the learning process of the whole program. It has helped students to have lesser problems with challenging situations and to work with the use of the knowledge they gained from the immersion program; and
3. Three core themes related to their experience in having an idea for their possible future career were obtained from the study. The first theme focused on the enhancement of both soft and hard skills. Through work immersion experiences, students had the opportunity to develop and refine their communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and technical abilities. The second theme explored how Work Immersion influenced the students' commitment to their current career choice. By immersing themselves in the actual work environment, students gained a deeper understanding of the realities and demands of their desired profession. This exposure helped

them solidify their career aspirations and provided them with a realistic view of what their future might hold. The third theme revolved around the personal challenges that students may encounter in their future careers. Work immersion allowed students to confront and overcome obstacles in a supportive and guided environment. They experienced the pressures, time management constraints, and decision-making dilemmas that professionals often face. Overall, work immersion provided students a valuable opportunity to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application. By immersing themselves in the work environment, students were able to enhance their skills, strengthen their commitment to their chosen career path, and gain insights into the personal challenges they may encounter in the future. This immersive learning experience undoubtedly contributed to their professional and personal growth, equipping them with the tools and mindset necessary for a successful career journey.

In light of the recent findings of the current study, the researchers recommend to schools to consider providing students the choice to be immersed in their preferred sector that is aligned to their future career (e.g., health-related sector, engineering sector, etc.) for a more meaningful experience. It may also be possible to contact more work immersion partners to increase the number and diversity of the sectors for the program.

#### **FURTHER STUDY**

Future researchers may explore on the same research topic; however, they may consider exploring the experiences of students who are assigned to their preferred sectors/work environment.

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