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LEARNING ACTUAL INDUSTRY SKILLS: EXPERIENCES IN WORK IMMERSION OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The findings of the study revealed that the extent of implementation of senior high school work immersion program in selected public schools in the Division of Davao Schools was evident or fully implemented as a whole and according to the category of school, school location, and designation of the implementer. The findings also revealed that the most encountered challenges in the immersion implementation were limited partner industries, students' working attitude, limited time tracking student's progress, inadequate supervision time for immersion teachers, and not sustainable learners' financial support. Furthermore, the major insights on effective immersion implementation were to tap additional partner institutions, increase immersion hours, weekly conference reporting of student's progress, and enough supervision and monitoring time for immersion teachers and allocate immersion budget. Implementers have major responsibilities in establishing a process that turns policies into actions critical in carrying out the work immersion guidelines by providing proof of implementation evidence. Therefore, it implies that they are the key persons that ensure the delivery of the immersion program despite the challenges encountered. Likewise, they are also responsible for establishing the authenticity of documents that need further rigid onsite validation by the internal and external stakeholders in the school and division levels. In conclusion, the immersion program was implemented based on the document pieces of evidence. Practical Value of the Paper. The study contributes significantly to the limited literature on the extent of the work immersion implementation in public senior high schools. Additionally, the findings of the study provided baseline information to the school personnel in designing a proposed work immersion curriculum.

Keywords: Work Immersion, Senior High Students, Experiences, Challenges, Insights.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Senior High School (SHS) Work Immersion Program is a vital component of the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum in the Philippines, designed to prepare learners for higher education, employment, or entrepreneurship by providing them with practical, real-world experience in actual work environments. This immersion allows students to apply acquired competencies in authentic contexts and is seen as a crucial bridge between academic learning and professional life (DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2017). In recent years, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation of work immersion has faced numerous disruptions and challenges that have significantly shaped how schools adapt and deliver this requirement (Alvarez & Yango, 2021).

The shift to flexible learning, reduced access to partner institutions, and socioeconomic constraints among learners have affected the extent and quality of immersion experiences. In particular, public senior high schools often struggle with limited industry linkages, inadequate supervisory support for teachers, and a lack of sustainable funding mechanisms for student participation (Mateo & De Jesus, 2022). Moreover, recent findings underscore the growing concern over the alignment between immersion placements and the students' academic tracks, highlighting gaps in ensuring relevance and quality outcomes (Sison & Ramos, 2023).

Given these challenges, the role of school implementers such as immersion coordinators, focal persons, and school heads has become even more critical in translating policies into actionable programs. Their ability to secure partnerships, monitor learner progress, validate documentation, and uphold compliance with guidelines determines the success of the immersion program (Villanueva et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding the extent of immersion implementation and the challenges encountered from the perspective of these implementers is essential for improving program delivery and ensuring that students reap the full benefits of work immersion.

This study investigates the extent of implementation of the SHS Work Immersion Program in selected public schools in the Division of Davao, focusing on how implementation varies across school categories, locations, and implementer designations. It also explores the prevailing challenges and practical insights from implementers to inform future policy and program improvements. By documenting these experiences, the study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on work immersion and to serve as a baseline for developing a more responsive and contextually grounded immersion curriculum.

The implementation of work immersion programs has gained global recognition as a crucial mechanism in bridging the gap between formal education and the demands of the workforce. According to the OECD (2020), strong

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education-to-employment pathways, such as vocational and immersion programs, equip students with relevant skills while exposing them to real-life work environments. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021) emphasized that structured school-to-work transition programs are essential in addressing youth unemployment, particularly in developing countries where practical training opportunities are limited. Similarly, UNESCO (2022) underscored the need for a renewed education system that includes experiential learning to empower learners as active contributors to society.

In the Philippine context, the Department of Education institutionalized the Senior High School Work Immersion Program through DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2017, which outlines guidelines to ensure that students acquire contextualized and meaningful work experience aligned with their chosen track. However, national studies revealed persistent implementation issues. Alvarez and Yango (2021) found that during and after the pandemic, many public schools struggled with limited access to partner institutions, financial challenges among learners, and a lack of supervisory time for teachers. Mateo and De Jesus (2022) further noted regional variations in the quality of immersion implementation, with some schools failing to align immersion placements with students' specializations. At the local level, Villanueva, Santos, and Labrador (2021) conducted a study in Mindanao which echoed these concerns, highlighting logistical challenges, weak industry linkages, and limited monitoring resources as major barriers faced by rural public schools. These findings collectively emphasize the urgent need for strengthened administrative support, expanded partnerships, and policy adjustments to ensure that work immersion is fully implemented and responsive to both national standards and local contexts.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Globally, work immersion and experiential learning have been emphasized as essential components of preparing students for future employment and life skills. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) highlighted that education systems must strengthen links between academic learning and real-world experiences through well-structured vocational and immersion programs. Similarly, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021) stressed the importance of school-to-work transition strategies in addressing youth unemployment, noting that such programs develop soft and technical skills required by modern industries. Reinforcing this, UNESCO (2022) advocated for a new social contract for education that prioritizes experiential, inclusive, and collaborative learning as central to educational reform and lifelong learning readiness.

In the Philippine context, the Department of Education institutionalized the Work Immersion Program under DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2017, requiring Senior High School students to undergo practical training aligned with their respective tracks. This initiative was designed to enhance learners' competencies and improve their readiness for employment, entrepreneurship, or higher education. However, challenges in implementation persist. According to Alvarez and Yango (2021), public schools during the pandemic experienced difficulties in securing industry partners, supervising learners effectively, and supporting students financially. These issues were compounded by the shift to flexible learning, which disrupted the traditional delivery of work immersion. In another study, Mateo and De Jesus (2022) reported that many public senior high schools struggled to align immersion assignments with student specializations, often due to the unavailability of partner institutions and weak coordination among stakeholders. These gaps resulted in a disconnect between classroom learning and practical application.

At the local level, Villanueva, Santos, and Labrador (2021) explored the work immersion experiences of rural public schools in Mindanao. Their study revealed similar problems such as limited access to suitable industry partners, inadequate monitoring by school personnel due to high teacher loads, and the absence of sustainable budget allocations for immersion-related needs. These findings stress the need for strengthened partnerships, improved monitoring mechanisms, and policy adjustments that consider geographic and socioeconomic disparities among schools. Overall, the literature supports the view that while the work immersion program is a promising initiative, its successful implementation depends largely on the active role of school implementers, collaborative partnerships, and adaptive strategies suited to local realities.

The global education landscape continues to emphasize the role of experiential learning and real-world applications in preparing students for future employment and lifelong learning. According to Schuetz and Lawton (2021), integrating workplace-based experiences in secondary education enhances students' motivation, skill development, and career readiness, particularly when aligned with their academic tracks. In support of this, Symonds et al. (2022) highlighted that high-quality work-based learning initiatives foster adaptability and resilience among learners facing complex and evolving labor market demands. Meanwhile, Anderson and Brown (2023) advocated for expanded industry-school partnerships to address the global shortage of skill-based training, citing work immersion as a tool for educational equity and economic development.

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In the Philippines, the Department of Education has long recognized the value of the Senior High School Work Immersion Program as a tool for developing 21st-century skills. The implementation of DepEd Order No. 39, s. 2018 introduced flexible modalities of immersion to accommodate learners in underserved areas, including virtual and school-based models. However, despite these adjustments, challenges remain. A study by Dela Cruz and Mangahas (2021) revealed that several schools still struggle with inconsistent implementation due to limited partner industries and insufficient training among teachers. Similarly, Llamas and Barcela (2022) observed that many immersion programs fail to match students with institutions relevant to their career tracks, limiting the benefits of applied learning. Bautista (2023) emphasized the need for clearer monitoring frameworks and increased supervision time among immersion implementers to ensure authentic work engagement and compliance with program standards.

At the local level, Reyes and Tumolva (2022) conducted a study in Davao Region, which revealed that rural public schools face additional hurdles such as lack of transportation, low parental support, and financial constraints among learners, all of which affect immersion attendance and completion. Despite these limitations, the study found that school heads and coordinators who maintained regular communication with stakeholders and conducted weekly progress reviews achieved higher immersion success rates. Collectively, these studies stress the importance of leadership, stakeholder partnerships, and contextual flexibility in delivering an effective work immersion program.

3. METHODS

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive-evaluative research design**,** which combines the strengths of both descriptive and evaluative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the Senior High School Work Immersion Program. The descriptive component of the design enabled the researcher to systematically collect and analyze data regarding the current status, processes, and practices of work immersion implementation in selected public schools in the Division of Davao. Through this approach, the researcher was able to capture factual information on the extent to which schools adhere to DepEd guidelines and how implementation varies across different categories, such as school type (stand-alone or integrated), school location (urban, semi-urban, rural), and the designation of the implementer (principal, coordinator, or teacher). This aligns with Creswell and Creswell's (2018) assertion that descriptive research is useful for portraying an accurate profile of individuals, events, or situations.

The evaluative aspect of the design added depth by allowing the study not just to describe the implementation, but also to assess **its** quality and effectiveness. It enabled the identification of both strengths and gaps in the immersion process, including areas related to supervision, industry partnerships, documentation, and learner support. Moreover, it provided a framework for analyzing the challenges encountered by school implementers and the insights and best practices they shared for program improvement. According to Fraenkel et al. (2021), evaluative research focuses on determining the merit, worth, or value of a program, which is particularly relevant in this study as it seeks to inform future policy adjustments and curriculum planning. By integrating both descriptive and evaluative methods, the study ensured a holistic and evidence-based analysis grounded in the real-world experiences of those directly involved in the work immersion program.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected public Senior High Schools within the Division of Davao, deliberately chosen to represent a wide range of geographic and institutional contexts. These included schools located in urban, semi-urban, and rural areas, ensuring that the findings would reflect the diversity of conditions under which the Work Immersion Program is implemented. Both stand-alone Senior High Schools and integrated schools (those offering both junior and senior high levels) were included in the study to examine how school structure influences program delivery and management. The selected schools were known for their **active implementation** of the Work Immersion Program, as verified through coordination with division offices and initial school profiling.

Moreover, these schools were identified based on the presence of documented practices**,** existing partnerships with industry and community institutions**,** and varying degrees of challenges encountered during program execution. By selecting schools with such characteristics, the researcher was able to gather rich and meaningful data that captured both the commonalities and distinctions in how the Work Immersion Program is carried out across different educational settings in the division. This variation provided a well-rounded basis for analyzing trends, identifying implementation gaps, and proposing targeted improvements responsive to the local context.

Participants and Sampling

The participants of this study consisted of key work immersion implementers**, s**pecifically school heads, work immersion coordinators, and teachers who were directly responsible for overseeing, managing, and monitoring the

implementation of the Senior High School Work Immersion Program in their respective schools. These individuals were selected based on their active involvement in the program and their ability to provide accurate, experience-based information on how immersion activities were carried out on the ground. Their roles ranged from planning and establishing industry linkages to supervising learners and ensuring compliance with Department of Education guidelines.

To select the participants, the researcher employed a purposive sampling technique, a non-probability method ideal for studies requiring expert perspectives on specific phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This method ensured that only those with firsthand immersion-related responsibilities were included, thereby enhancing the validity and relevance of the data gathered. A total of 200 participants from public senior high schools in the Division of Davao were selected. The schools were chosen to represent varied categories such as school type (stand-alone vs. integrated) and school location (urban, semi-urban, and rural) to capture a diverse range of experiences and implementation contexts. This sampling strategy was crucial in gathering insights reflective of the broader implementation realities in the division.

Research Instrument

The main data-gathering tool used in this study was a researcher-made survey questionnaire specifically developed to align with the objectives of assessing the extent of implementation, identifying challenges, and gathering insights related to the Senior High School Work Immersion Program. This instrument was crafted based on a thorough review of DepEd policies, such as DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2017 and relevant literature on work immersion practices. It was designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data from immersion implementers who have firsthand experience with program execution.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part included closed-ended items using a five-point Likert scale, which enabled the participants to rate the degree of implementation (from "Not Implemented" to "Fully Implemented") and the severity of challenges (from "Not a Challenge" to "Severe Challenge"). These items focused on key domains such as compliance with existing DepEd guidelines, effectiveness of coordination mechanisms**,** supervision practices**,** industry partnerships**,** and quality of documentation**.** The second part contained open-ended questions**,** allowing respondents to share personal insights**,** observed best practices**,** and practical recommendations for improving immersion implementation. This qualitative portion was essential in enriching the quantitative data by offering context-specific suggestions and capturing nuanced experiences from the field.

To ensure the instrument's validity, it underwent content validation by three experts in the fields of education management**,** curriculum implementation**,** and program monitoring and evaluation**.** Their suggestions were incorporated to improve clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. Following this, the revised questionnaire was pilot tested with a group of ten (10) immersion implementers from a school that was not part of the actual study. The pilot test aimed to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the tool. Statistical analysis using Cronbach's alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.89**,** which, according to Taber (2018), indicates a high level of reliability and suggests that the items within the instrument were consistently measuring the intended constructs.

The combination of expert validation, pilot testing, and dual-format questioning ensured that the instrument was both robust and appropriate for gathering credible and meaningful data from the target respondents.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to the actual data collection, the researcher secured formal approval from the Schools Division Superintendent of the Division of Davao through a written request, outlining the purpose, scope, and ethical safeguards of the study. In addition, separate permissions were obtained from the principals or school heads of each participating public senior high school. These approvals ensured that the conduct of the research was in line with institutional protocols and respected the operational schedules of the schools involved.

Once authorization was granted, the researcher initiated the data collection process by coordinating directly with the identified work immersion implementers in each school. Before administering the survey, each participant was provided with an informed consent form, which clearly explained the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to refuse or withdraw at any time without penalty, and the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were encouraged to ask questions and were assured that their responses would be used solely for academic and research purposes.

The survey questionnaires were personally distributed by the researcher, allowing for immediate clarification of instructions and ensuring higher response quality. The retrieval of completed questionnaires was done within a two-week period, providing ample time for participants to reflect on both the quantitative and open-ended items. For responses that required elaboration particularly those in the open-ended sections the researcher conducted brief follow-

up interviews either in person or via phone, depending on availability and convenience. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the implementers' insights and ensured the richness and completeness of the qualitative data gathered.

The entire data gathering process was carried out with full consideration of ethical standards, institutional procedures, and participant well-being, thereby enhancing the validity and credibility of the study's findings.

Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adhered to the ethical standards set by the Department of Education (DepEd) and complied with the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) to ensure the protection of participants' rights and personal information. Prior to participation, all respondents were provided with a comprehensive informed consent form that outlined the study's objectives, scope, and procedures. The form also clearly stated that participation was voluntary, and that individuals had the right to refuse or withdraw from the study at any point without incurring any form of penalty or negative consequence.

To uphold confidentiality and anonymity, no personal identifiers (such as names, employee numbers, or specific school designations) were included in the final reporting of data. Responses were coded to protect the identity of participants, and only the researcher had access to the raw data. The gathered information was stored securely in password-protected digital folders and hard copy documents were kept in locked storage, accessible only to the researcher. These measures ensured that all data were handled responsibly and used solely for academic and research purposes**.**

Moreover, participants were informed that the insights they shared whether through survey responses or follow-up interviews would be reported in a way that aggregates findings rather than highlighting individual statements, thereby minimizing any risk of indirect identification. These ethical safeguards were implemented to foster trust, transparency, and respect throughout the research process, in alignment with accepted ethical standards in educational research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fraenkel et al., 2021).

Data Analysis

The data collected from the survey questionnaires were processed and analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to comprehensively address the research objectives. For the quantitative component, responses were encoded and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. These statistical tools provided a clear picture of the extent of implementation of the Work Immersion Program and the degree of challenges encountered by the implementers. The use of these measures helped summarize large volumes of data into understandable patterns and allowed for comparison across key areas of the immersion program.

To further explore the data, inferential statistical tests were employed to determine whether there were significant differences in the responses based on selected variables such as school category (stand-alone or integrated), **school location** (urban, semi-urban, or rural), and designation of the implementer (school head, coordinator, or teacher). Specifically, t-tests were applied for comparing the means between two groups, while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used for comparisons among more than two groups. These tests helped identify whether observed variations in responses were statistically meaningful or occurred by chance, thereby offering insights into how contextual factors influence program implementation.

For the qualitative data gathered from open-ended survey responses and follow-up interviews**,** the researcher utilized thematic analysis to extract recurring ideas, categories, and patterns. Following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-step framework, the process involved familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of themes, reviewing and refining those themes, and producing final thematic interpretations. This allowed for the emergence of rich, contextual insights regarding best practices, implementation gaps, and suggestions for program improvement, which complemented and deepened the understanding drawn from the quantitative results.

By integrating both statistical analysis and thematic interpretation**,** the study ensured a balanced and holistic approach to data analysis, providing both measurable outcomes and meaningful narratives grounded in the experiences of the work immersion implementers.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the results of the study on the extent of implementation, the challenges encountered, and the insights of implementers regarding the Senior High School Work Immersion Program in selected public schools in the Division of Davao. The results are organized according to the study's main objectives and are supported by relevant literature to provide a deeper understanding of the findings.

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Extent of Implementation of the Work Immersion Program

The data revealed that the overall extent of implementation of the Senior High School Work Immersion Program in the selected public schools was rated as **"**Fully Implemented**"** with a grand mean of 4.31 on a 5-point Likert scale. This indicates that most schools have institutionalized immersion practices in accordance with DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2017, including partnerships, documentation, orientation, and supervision protocols.

When categorized by school type, stand-alone SHS showed a slightly higher mean (M = 4.35) than integrated schools (M = 4.27), suggesting that organizational focus and resources may contribute to better immersion delivery. Schools in urban locations had higher implementation scores (M = 4.42) compared to those in rural areas (M = 4.19), aligning with Reyes and Tumolva (2022), who emphasized that geographic context influences access to industry partners and logistical resources.

ANOVA results showed significant differences in implementation level across a**s** school locations ($F = 4.65$, $p < .05$), indicating that geographic challenges continue to affect the depth of immersion experiences. However, no significant differences were found based on the implementers' designation ($p > .05$), suggesting that school heads, coordinators, and teachers share a consistent understanding of the program's requirements.

These findings support the conclusion of Schuetz and Lawton (2021), who argue that strong implementation is closely linked to institutional readiness and alignment with national guidelines.

Challenges Encountered in Implementation

Table 2: Summarized the top five challenges experienced by implementers:

Rank	Challenge	Mean	Description
1	Limited partner industries	4.61	Very Challenging
2	Students' working attitude and behavior	4.39	Very Challenging
3	Limited time to track student progress	4.28	Challenging
4	Inadequate supervision time for teachers	4.17	Challenging
5	Lack of sustainable financial support for learners	4.10	Challenging

The most pressing challenge was the limited number of partner industries, especially for schools in rural areas. This aligns with Bautista (2023), who noted that immersion programs in less developed localities often struggle to secure aligned placement opportunities for learners.

Behavioral issues among students during immersion were also flagged, particularly regarding punctuality, professionalism, and adaptability to workplace culture. Implementers expressed concerns about learners not taking immersion seriously, thereby diminishing its intended purpose. Additionally, teachers' workloads and the absence of additional funding constrained their ability to conduct regular monitoring and home visits, echoing the findings of Dela Cruz and Mangahas (2021).

Insights and Recommendations from Implementers

Qualitative responses from open-ended survey questions and follow-up interviews were analyzed thematically. Three main themes emerged:

1. Strengthening Partnerships with Local Institutions

Many implementers emphasized the need to expand industry networks beyond national companies and include local businesses, LGUs, and NGOs that can accommodate immersion learners. This suggestion is supported by Anderson and Brown (2023), who advocate for localized partnership models that are more sustainable and context-sensitive.

2. Enhancing Supervision and Tracking

Participants recommended the institutionalization of weekly progress monitoring, use of digital tracking tools**,** and provision of supervisory incentives or reduced teaching loads during immersion months. These were seen as critical to improving program quality and student accountability.

3. Allocating Dedicated Immersion Budgets

Implementers consistently pointed out the importance of allocating a specific budget for immersion-related expenses such as transportation, meals, and supervision. Some schools have started proposing immersion budgets through MOOE or seeking community sponsorships to address this gap.

These insights reinforce the findings of Mateo and De Jesus (2022), who stressed that immersion success depends not only on compliance but also on continuous support mechanisms at the school and division levels.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study revealed that the Senior High School Work Immersion Program is generally well-implemented in selected public schools within the Division of Davao. Despite this overall positive implementation rating, challenges persist—particularly in schools situated in rural areas, where access to partner institutions, supervision logistics, and financial support remain limited. Implementers consistently identified concerns such as the shortage of partner industries, the lack of sustainable financial aid for students, limited time for monitoring learners, and student behavioral issues in the workplace setting. Nonetheless, the presence of strong commitment among implementers and their proactive suggestions, such as enhancing partnerships and allocating dedicated immersion budgets, highlights opportunities for continuous improvement.

For the Department of Education, it is recommended to reinforce support mechanisms for public schools implementing the immersion program, especially those in geographically isolated or under-resourced areas. This includes allocating specific funding for work immersion under the division's MOOE, creating centralized databases of accredited partner institutions, and providing capacity-building activities for immersion implementers to strengthen supervision, documentation, and evaluation procedures. DepEd should also revisit and revise policy provisions to accommodate the unique challenges encountered in different school contexts.

For teachers and implementers, the study recommends the institutionalization of regular monitoring tools and feedback mechanisms to track learner performance and address behavioral issues during the immersion. School heads and coordinators are encouraged to establish and maintain strong partnerships with local industries and government units that align with the students' academic tracks. Furthermore, advocacy for adjusted workloads during immersion periods may help improve supervision quality and ensure that teachers have ample time to guide students effectively.

For students, the study emphasizes the importance of understanding the relevance of immersion as a preparatory stage for future employment or higher education. It is recommended that students be oriented not only on the technical aspects of their immersion tasks but also on appropriate workplace values, such as professionalism, accountability, and adaptability. Engaging students in reflective activities during and after immersion may enhance their learning and personal growth.

For future researchers, it is suggested to explore longitudinal studies that examine the long-term outcomes of immersion participation on students' career paths, academic motivation, and employability. Comparative research across regions or divisions may also reveal systemic factors influencing program effectiveness. Additionally, future studies may include the perspectives of students and industry partners to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the program's impact.

In conclusion, while the implementation of the Work Immersion Program shows commendable progress, ensuring equity and relevance across all contexts requires sustained support, innovation, and collaboration among stakeholders. With strategic improvements, the program can continue to empower senior high school learners with the skills, attitudes, and experiences necessary for meaningful engagement in the world of work.

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