Exploring the Challenges of Work Immersion among Senior High School Learners

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ABSTRACT

Work immersion programs are an important part of the Senior High School curriculum, giving students a chance to apply what they've learned in real-world settings. This hands-on approach helps students explore different career paths and develop key skills like communication, problem-solving, and professionalism, preparing them for future jobs. This study used a qualitative-descriptive research method to explore the challenges faced by Grade 12 Senior High School students at Narvacan National Central High School during their work immersion in S.Y. 2023-2024. The Colaizzi method was used to analyze their experiences and coping strategies.

The results showed that the work immersion experiences of Senior High School students fostered skill development, personal growth, emotional fulfillment, and collaborative relationships, significantly contributing to their academic and professional preparation. To navigate the challenges of their work immersion, students employed coping strategies such as effective time management, organization, building confidence, adaptability, patience, and seeking guidance. Further, this recommends that schools should keep offering work immersion opportunities to help students develop skills, grow personally, and build relationships, while also encouraging them to improve coping strategies like time management, organization, and seeking guidance to handle challenges and prepare for their future careers and studies.

Keywords: Work Immersion experiences, Coping Strategies, Senior High School, Students, Narvacan National Central High School

INTRODUCTION

Stepping out of the textbook and into a professional suit, Senior High School students today are increasingly immersed in the vibrant world of work immersion programs. This essential component of their curriculum, as emphasized by DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2015, is not simply a career exploration exercise; it's a transformative experience where theoretical knowledge takes a practical spin.

In diverse professional settings, students put their skills to the test, mastering industry-specific tasks and honing critical soft skills like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving (Añonuevo & Dela Cruz, 2019). This potent blend of academic learning and real-world application forms the bedrock of professional readiness, a trait increasingly sought after by employers in today's dynamic job market (World Economic Forum, 2023). Recognizing this crucial need, educational institutions are prioritizing work immersion, weaving it into the fabric of the senior high school experience. This intentional integration ensures that graduates enter the workforce not just with certificates in hand, but with the confidence and competence to navigate the ever-evolving professional landscape.

As highlighted by Singh et al. (2020) in their study, work immersion allows students to gain firsthand insights into diverse career paths as they shadow professionals and observe daily tasks. This experiential learning exposes them to potential fields that may have been previously unknown or misunderstood, enabling them to

make informed decisions about their future education and career choices. Likewise, work immersion enables students to actively participate in workplace tasks, honing existing skills like communication and teamwork while acquiring new technical and industry-specific skills. As cited by Mojane et al. (2022), this practical application of theoretical knowledge strengthens critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities, preparing students for the demands of their chosen field. Imagine a student working alongside a graphic designer, learning software programs and design principles that wouldn't be fully grasped in a classroom setting.

Additionally, students develop essential professional skills like punctuality, etiquette, and professionalism through work immersion. They learn to navigate office dynamics, interact with colleagues and clients, and adapt to workplace routines. These valuable experiences, emphasized by Agyemang et al. (2018), build confidence and prepare students for the challenges and expectations of the professional world. A student accustomed to the fast-paced environment of a newsroom will feel more equipped for future deadlines and pressure situations.

However, the researchers believe that students face challenges during work immersion, and these challenges should be identified in a way that allows the school to pinpoint areas where the program isn't meeting their needs. Consequently, by continuously incorporating improvements based on student feedback, the school can build a program that stands the test of time and remains relevant to evolving needs. Furthermore, addressing the current challenges enhances the program's resilience and adaptability.
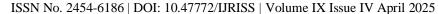
LITERATURE REVIEW

Work immersion is a structured, experiential learning program where students dedicate a substantial period to working in an industry or job aligned with their field of study. This learning approach entails the hands-on application of classroom theory to real-world job situations. Under Dewey's Experiential Learning Theory, acquiring knowledge is deemed crucial through active engagement and interaction with the environment. This theory serves as the foundation for the current study, which aims to explore the challenges of work immersion among senior high school students.

Numerous studies have highlighted the advantages of work immersion. Hagedorn et al., (2019) stated in their study that work immersions provide students with an opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills they have learned in the classroom to real-world work settings. This can help them to develop important professional skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Also, it can help students to learn about different career paths and to make informed decisions about their future. They can also help students to build their resumes and to make connections with potential employers Bhola et al., (2020).

Collier and Wilson (2018) emphasized in their study that work immersions often necessitate students to think outside the box and devise creative solutions to problems. This process aids in the development of their problem-solving and critical-thinking skills, which are invaluable assets in any workplace. Furthermore, these experiences can foster relationships with professionals in their field, serving as valuable sources of information and advice. Such connections can also enhance students' prospects of securing jobs after graduation (St. John & Xu, 2023).

Additionally, work immersion can help students to see what they are capable of and to build their confidence in their abilities. This can lead to increased motivation and a more positive attitude towards work (Jones & Bailey, 2024). Further, it can also give students a chance to experience different work environments and cultures. Likewise, it can help them to develop a broader understanding of the world and to prepare for working in a globalized economy (Akhtar & Choudhary, 2022).

As mentioned in the study conducted by Parsons & Jackson (2019), work immersion can help students to learn more about different career options and to narrow down their interests. This can make it easier for them to choose a major and to plan for their future. In the same vein, it often requires students to work with others in

teams. Hence, this can help them develop their communication and teamwork skills, which are essential for success in any workplace (Bhattacharya & Sahu, 2020). Similarly, it is also emphasized in the study conducted by Park & Choi (2021) Students who participate in work immersion are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs and to have successful careers. Moreover, students enable themselves to apply their academic knowledge to real-world problems. This can lead to improved academic performance and research skills (Lee & Yoo, 2022).

Nonetheless, multiple studies have underscored the significance of identifying the challenges students encounter during work immersion. According to Cagas and Abulencia (2022), identifying challenges helps assess the program's effectiveness in preparing students for the workforce. Addressing these challenges can enhance the program's relevance and quality. Similarly, Santos (2020) revealed that understanding challenges reveals mismatches between academic learning and industry expectations. This allows for curriculum adjustments and partnerships with companies for better practical exposure.

Balderama & Balagtas (2020) mentioned that pinpointing challenges highlight areas where students need additional support or skill development. This may involve implementing pre-immersion training, mentorship programs, or assigning targeted tasks during the immersion period. Consequently, this helps students make informed decisions about their future paths (Abcede, 2019). Furthermore, understanding common challenges, like social integration or workload, allows for interventions to promote student well-being and manage stress during immersion (Cabrera et al., 2023). Additionally, identifying challenges faced by students with disabilities or those from disadvantaged backgrounds helps develop targeted support systems and ensures inclusivity in the program (Singson & Abella, 2018).

Research Questions

This study aimed to explore the experiences of Senior High School learners in work immersion.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the work immersion experiences among Senior High School learners?
2. What are the coping behaviors employed by Senior High School learners during their work immersion?

Scope and Limitation

The scope of the study explored the challenges of work immersion among the grade 12 Senior High School students of Narvacan National Central High School, S.Y. 2023-2024.

This study utilized a Qualitative- Descriptive research method. This aimed to generate data that describe the 'who, what, and where of events or experiences' from a subjective perspective (Kim et al., 2017). In the present study, it explored the challenges of work immersion among Senior High School students at Narvacan National Central High School.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed in the selection of the key informants. Kyngas et al. (2011) stated that the most commonly used method in content analysis studies was purposive sampling. In this method, the researchers aimed to communicate with individuals who were most knowledgeable about the subject of the study. A total of 20 Senior High School students were included in the study. The key informants interviewed for this research were Grade 12 students. They were chosen as key informants due to the experiences they had gained from work immersion.

Data Collection

To acquire the necessary data, the researchers prepared an interview guide questionnaire, which underwent validation by four (4) research experts and one (1) language expert and yielded a validity index of 4.90, described as "Very Highly Valid." After, the researchers made the necessary preparations for face-to-face interviews with the key informants. The researchers gathered the key informants and provided them with a proper orientation regarding the interview's purpose for the completion of the research. Subsequently, the researchers handed the written consent forms to the key informants for review. They were asked to indicate their approval or rejection of participating in the interview. Once their consent was obtained, appointments were scheduled based on their availability. Additionally, the key informants were prompted to choose a location where they felt more at ease and undisturbed. This approach allowed the researchers to create a friendly atmosphere that inspired the key informants to provide detailed narrations.

To capture any crucial details that might have been missed during the process, all interviews were videotaped using a smartphone with the consent of the key informants. Note-taking was employed to record non-verbal responses. The interviews continued until data saturation was achieved, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter. The recorded responses were transcribed and checked by the key informants to confirm that all information was accurately captured. Afterward, the key informants were asked to sign the transcribed verbatim after reading and verifying their responses. Finally, the data collected was interpreted to draw a conclusion.

Ethical Issues

Since the study required the participation of human respondents, various ethical considerations were implemented to ensure the study was conducted properly. To protect the key informants' privacy and safety, the researchers took into account specific ethical considerations. The researchers went over all the pertinent information about the study, including its goals and objectives, to obtain the key informants' agreement. The relevance of their contribution to the completion of the research was made clear to the key informants by elaborating on these crucial points. By withholding their names from the research, the key informants' privacy was also guaranteed. Only pertinent information that aided the researchers in addressing the research questions was provided.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data gathered from the interviews was analyzed using the Colaizzi method. This method of analysis is a rigorous and robust qualitative approach that ensures the credibility and reliability of the results. It allowed the researchers to reveal emergent themes and their interwoven relationships. Researchers using a descriptive phenomenological approach are encouraged to consider Colaizzi's method as a clear and logical way to explore the experiences of others (Polit & Beck, 2018). In this study, this method was used to understand the work immersion experiences and the coping behaviors employed by Senior High School learners during their work immersion.

The initial phase involved thoroughly reading and rereading the transcribed interviews to become familiar with the learners' experiences, recognizing the diverse aspects of their work immersion journey, including challenges, coping strategies, and significant learning moments. Noteworthy remarks regarding their hurdles, aspirations, and coping mechanisms were then identified and extracted to accurately represent their real-life professional experiences. These significant statements were grouped into thematic clusters, uncovering recurring patterns and shared experiences, which highlighted the learners' challenges, coping strategies, and growth opportunities.

A comprehensive and holistic description was crafted to encapsulate these challenges, behaviors, and insights, providing a thorough understanding of their work immersion journey. Researchers then delved deeper into the essence of the identified challenges and coping mechanisms, unraveling their underlying meanings and

implications for a nuanced understanding of how learners navigated the demands of their work immersion. The findings were validated through member checking or peer review to ensure precision, credibility, and alignment with the learners' actual experiences. Finally, the insights were synthesized into a cohesive narrative that highlighted the key aspects of their work immersion experiences and coping behaviors, offering a meaningful conclusion to the analysis. Data saturation was achieved with the 14th participant, but interviews continued to gather additional valuable insights.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Work Immersion Experiences of Senior High School students. Regarding the work immersion experiences of Senior High School students, the responses gathered during the interviews varied. However, the findings highlighted predominant themes, including Skill Development and Practical Learning, Personal Growth and Emotional Fulfillment, and Collaboration and Building Relationships.

Skill Development and Practical Learning. Skill development and practical learning refer to the process of acquiring and honing specific skills, knowledge, and competencies through hands-on experiences and real-world applications. In the context of work immersion, this involves engaging in tasks, activities, and responsibilities that allow individuals to apply theoretical concepts in practical settings, thereby enhancing their proficiency, adaptability, and readiness for professional environments. In support to these, the following responses were taken during the interview.

Respondent 1: "During my work immersion, I gained hands-on experience, learned new skills, and observed how things work in a real-world setting."

Respondent 2: "Madami akong natutunan sa work immersion, tulad ng proper tying techniques sa BFP."

Respondent 9: "My experience was good because I was helping and assisting people during their checkups."

Respondent 11: "I learned new tasks, entertained guests, and saw how a hotel works."

This underscores that during their work immersion, the Senior High School students gained valuable firsthand experience that bridged the gap between theoretical learning and practical application. As noted by Guadalupe and Acut (2024), students shared that the immersion allowed them to apply classroom concepts in real-world settings, enriching their learning experience. Moreover, the hands-on activities during the immersion contributed to the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are essential for their future careers (Acut, 2024).
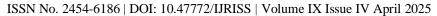
Personal Growth and Emotional Fulfillment. Personal growth and emotional fulfillment refer to the process of self-improvement and the attainment of a sense of satisfaction or contentment through meaningful experiences. In the context of work immersion, personal growth involves developing self-confidence, resilience, and a deeper understanding of one's strengths and potential. The following significant statements were shared by the participants during the interview.

Respondent 4: "It was such an incredible experience that I didn't want to return to school. It reminded me of my potential and the dreams I once had."

Respondent 8: "I navigated through excitement, nervousness, dedication, and fulfillment as I realized teaching is not easy."

Respondent 13: "I felt great and ecstatic when I arrived at Narvacan North Central School and experienced the love and respect from students."

The results reveal that work immersion served as a transformative experience for the participants, fostering both personal growth and emotional fulfillment. Furthermore, this reflects that work immersion goes beyond

skill acquisition, providing students with opportunities for self-discovery, emotional enrichment, and a deeper understanding of their personal and professional aspirations. Research supports this idea, with Wang et al. (2024) noting that work immersion allows students to engage in real-world tasks, prompting critical reflection and mindset shifts essential for personal development. Additionally, participants reported enhanced self-efficacy and a clearer vision of their career paths, emphasizing the strong connection between immersion experiences and the realization of personal aspirations (Ador et al., 2023). Moreover, emotional dynamics play a vital role in personal development; students often experience a wide range of emotions that significantly contribute to their learning (Růžičková et al., 2023). Additionally, positive emotional experiences, such as joy and fulfillment, were common, reinforcing the emotional benefits of work immersion programs. Together, these findings highlight the integral role of both cognitive and emotional growth in the work immersion experience.

Collaboration and Building Relationships. Collaboration and building relationships refer to the process of working together with others to achieve common goals while fostering positive, supportive, and effective interpersonal connections. In the context of work immersion, it involves students engaging in teamwork, sharing responsibilities, and learning to communicate effectively with colleagues, supervisors, and clients. To support these, the following statements were shared by the participants during the interview:

Respondent 5: "I witnessed the hard work of officers in the field, which helped me set my mindset into a different viewpoint."

Respondent 10: "I interacted with and taught younger students while also handling office work, making the experience enjoyable and productive."

Respondent 12: "I experienced meeting new people and learned the importance of teamwork."

The results imply that work immersion provided students with valuable opportunities to engage in teamwork and build relationships within a professional environment. This highlights how work immersion fosters collaboration and enhances students' ability to form meaningful, productive relationships in the workplace. As noted in previous studies, work immersion programs, such as the Fjord/Parsons initiative, offer students hands-on experience in collaborative environments, where they contribute to service design teams (Sebek & Jones, 2019). Similarly, students in healthcare professions have reported improved interprofessional teamwork skills during immersive study abroad experiences, underscoring the importance of collaboration across various fields (Manspeaker et al., 2019). These findings reinforce the idea that work immersion not only equips students with technical skills but also plays a pivotal role in developing their interpersonal and collaborative abilities.
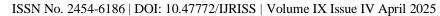
Work Immersion Coping Strategies of the Senior High School Students. Regarding the coping strategies employed by Senior High School students during work immersion, the following themes emerged: time management and organization, building confidence, and adaptability, and patience, and learning and seeking guidance.

Time Management and Organization. Time Management and Organization refer to the ability to plan and allocate time effectively to complete tasks while maintaining an organized approach to responsibilities. In the context of work immersion, time management and organization are crucial for balancing multiple tasks and ensuring that responsibilities are completed efficiently. Participants shared how they used different strategies to stay organized and manage their time effectively:

Respondent 6: "I set my schedule so I can manage my time."

Respondent 10: "I employed several coping strategies like prioritizing tasks, creating a schedule, and maintaining to-do lists to stay organized."

Respondent 11: "I wrote notes to remember tasks and made sure to rest so I had energy."

This shows that the participants recognized the importance of time management and organization in successfully navigating their work immersion experiences. By using various strategies such as setting schedules, prioritizing tasks, creating to-do lists, and taking breaks, the students were able to manage their workload effectively. These practices helped them stay on track, reduce stress, and maintain the energy needed to meet their responsibilities. Ultimately, the ability to plan and stay organized allowed them to balance multiple tasks and perform efficiently in their professional settings. Research supports this, with students who create structured schedules reporting improved time management behaviors, which are positively correlated with academic performance (Kelly et al., 2022). Additionally, understanding priorities helps students allocate their time more effectively, reducing feelings of overwhelm and boosting productivity (P et al., 2021). Regularly updating to-do lists also aids in tracking tasks and maintaining focus on immediate responsibilities (Vortherms & Neal, 2022). Together, these strategies highlight the key role of effective time management in both academic and professional success.

Building Confidence, Adaptability, and Patience. Building confidence, adaptability, and patience refer to the development of key personal qualities that enable individuals to handle challenges, cope with change, and foster effective interactions with others. In the context of work immersion, building confidence involves gaining self-assurance in one's abilities, while adaptability is the ability to adjust to new or unexpected situations. Patience is the capacity to remain calm and composed when facing difficulties or delays. These qualities are essential for managing the demands of the workplace and interacting positively with colleagues and supervisors. Respondents shared how they applied these qualities to navigate their work immersion experiences:

Respondent 3: "Tibayan lang ang puso." (Be strong-hearted.)

Respondent 8: "Patience, dedication, and adaptability were my key strategies."

Respondent 12: "I'm a shy person, but I tried to be confident and socialize with the people I was working with."

These statements highlight how students utilized patience, confidence, and adaptability to overcome challenges and improve their ability to work effectively in different situations. Confidence plays a pivotal role in this process and can be cultivated through self-awareness and positive reinforcement, such as setting realistic goals and engaging in positive self-talk (Westover, 2024). Organizations further support confidence-building by offering mentorship and constructive feedback, which help create a nurturing and empowering work environment (Westover, 2024).

In dynamic work environments, adaptability becomes essential, enabling individuals to embrace change and perceive challenges as opportunities for growth (Katsumata & Teixeira, 2024). Coaching plays a significant role in fostering adaptability by providing emotional and cognitive tools to navigate stress and uncertainty effectively (Jouali et al., 2024).

Similarly, patience is a key attribute for maintaining composure during setbacks. It can be developed through resilience training and emotional intelligence enhancement (Pronk et al., 2017). Individuals who practice patience often navigate workplace dynamics more effectively and build stronger relationships with their colleagues, contributing to a more harmonious and productive environment (Jouali et al., 2024).

Learning and Seeking Guidance. Learning and seeking guidance refer to the willingness to be teachable, open to acquiring new knowledge, and proactive in seeking assistance when necessary. In the context of work immersion, these strategies are essential for personal and professional growth, as they allow individuals to learn from others, improve their skills, and navigate challenges effectively. Being open to learning and asking for guidance demonstrates humility and a commitment to self-improvement, which is crucial for success in any professional environment. Respondents shared how they applied these strategies during their work immersion:

Respondent 1: "I stayed open to learning, asked for guidance when needed, and respected the professionals I worked with."

Respondent 13: "I watched videos, applied my teachers' advice, and motivated myself with sayings like, 'Set yourself as a role model for the youth.'"

Respondent 9: "Be polite to the people around you, listen actively, and collaborate with colleagues."

These statements highlight the importance of being receptive to learning, seeking guidance when needed, and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships to succeed in a work environment. According to Isah and Abdullah (2023), actively seeking guidance from experienced professionals enhances learning motivation and academic performance, as evidenced by studies on guidance interventions.

Equally significant is collaboration with colleagues, which fosters a supportive environment where individuals can share knowledge and strategies, leading to collective growth (Omar et al., 2023). Central to these interactions is the adoption of a growth mindset, which encourages individuals to see intelligence and skills as qualities that can be developed through effort and continuous learning—an essential perspective in professional settings (Midttun, 2023). Respondents reinforced this idea, highlighting the value of openness to new ideas and feedback, which aligns with the growth mindset's emphasis on continuous improvement (Bellantonio & Dipace, 2023).

Furthermore, maintaining respectful and polite interactions with peers is crucial for creating a positive and conducive learning environment, as noted by respondents (Prajogo et al., 2023). Complementing this is the role of effective communication and active listening, which are key to successful collaboration and highlight the significance of interpersonal skills in any professional context (Omar et al., 2023).

Summary

This study aimed to explore the challenges of work immersion among the grade 12 Senior High School students of Narvacan National Central High School, S.Y. 2023-2024. This study utilized a Qualitative-Descriptive research method.

The following were the salient findings of the study:

1. The work immersion experiences of Senior High School students primarily fostered skill development, personal growth, emotional fulfillment, and the building of collaborative relationships, significantly contributing to their academic and professional preparation.
2. The Senior High School students employed coping strategies such as effective time management and organization, building confidence, adaptability, patience, and seeking guidance to navigate the challenges of their work immersion experience.

Based on the findings of the researchers, the following conclusions were derived:

1. The work immersion experiences of Senior High School students helped them develop important skills, grow personally, feel emotionally fulfilled, and build strong relationships, all of which prepared them for their future careers and studies.
2. The Senior High School students used helpful coping strategies like time management, staying organized, building confidence, being adaptable, being patient, and asking for guidance to handle the challenges during their work immersion. These strategies helped them succeed and grow throughout the experience.

Implications and Recommendations

1. Schools should continue to provide work immersion opportunities to help students develop essential skills, gain personal growth, and build relationships that will prepare them for future careers and studies.

2. Students should be encouraged to use and improve coping strategies like time management, organization, and seeking guidance to better handle challenges during their work immersion. Schools can offer support in developing these skills.

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