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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Teachers' Lived Experiences in the Implementation of the Senior High School Work Immersion Program in Public Secondary Schools

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Abstract

The Senior High School Work Immersion Program serves as a critical component of the K–12 curriculum designed to provide learners with authentic workplace experiences, practical competencies, and career readiness skills aligned with their chosen academic strands and technical-vocational specializations. This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of teachers in the implementation of the Senior High School Work Immersion Program in public secondary schools of Legislative District IV, Schools Division of Isabela. Utilizing a phenomenological qualitative research design, the study examined teachers' perceptions, supervisory practices, implementation challenges, and professional experiences in facilitating work immersion activities among senior high school learners. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, and field observations involving fifteen purposively selected Senior High School teachers and work immersion coordinators. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework was employed in analyzing the collected data. Findings revealed five major themes: (1) Work Immersion as Preparation for Career Readiness and Real-World Learning; (2) Teacher Roles as Facilitators, Supervisors, and Industry Coordinators; (3) Industry Partnership Challenges and Logistical Constraints; (4) Learner Development, Workplace Adjustment, and Professional Growth; and (5) Teacher Resilience, Adaptability, and Commitment in Program Implementation. Participants emphasized that work immersion significantly enhanced learners' communication skills, work ethics, self-confidence, and career awareness. However, teachers also encountered challenges related to limited industry partners, transportation difficulties, learner monitoring concerns, documentation requirements, and mismatches between learner specialization and workplace placement. Despite these constraints, participants demonstrated commitment and adaptability in sustaining meaningful immersion experiences for learners. The study concludes that effective implementation of the Work Immersion Program requires strengthened school-industry partnerships, institutional support, collaborative planning, and continuous teacher capacity-building initiatives. Findings provide implications for curriculum implementation, technical-vocational education, school-industry collaboration, and educational policy enhancement in Senior High School education.

Keywords: work immersion, senior high school, lived experiences, school-industry partnership, career readiness, qualitative research, K–12 education

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INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the K–12 Basic Education Program in the Philippines introduced significant educational reforms aimed at improving learners' preparedness for higher education, employment, entrepreneurship, and lifelong learning. One of the major features of the Senior High School curriculum is the Work Immersion Program, which provides learners with authentic workplace exposure and practical learning experiences aligned with their chosen academic tracks and technical-vocational specializations.

Work immersion serves as a bridge between classroom instruction and real-world professional environments. Through workplace exposure, learners develop technical competencies, communication skills, professionalism, work ethics, collaboration, and career awareness. The program also enables learners to apply classroom knowledge in actual workplace settings, thereby strengthening experiential learning and career readiness.

Teachers play a crucial role in the implementation of the Work Immersion Program. They function not only as classroom instructors but also as coordinators, supervisors, mentors, and facilitators responsible for preparing learners, coordinating with industry partners, monitoring workplace experiences, and ensuring alignment between learner competencies and workplace assignments. Effective implementation therefore depends heavily on teachers' instructional leadership, organizational skills, adaptability, and professional commitment.

However, despite the educational significance of work immersion, teachers continue to encounter numerous implementation challenges in public secondary schools. Difficulties related to limited industry partnerships, transportation constraints, workplace safety concerns, learner monitoring, documentation requirements, and placement mismatches often affect the effectiveness of immersion experiences. Rural educational settings may experience additional challenges due to limited local industries and geographical accessibility concerns.

The implementation of the Work Immersion Program in public secondary schools within Legislative District IV, Schools Division of Isabela presents unique educational and contextual realities. Teachers managing work immersion programs in these schools navigate diverse learner needs, varying industry partnerships, and institutional limitations while ensuring meaningful workplace learning experiences for senior high school learners.

Although several studies have examined work immersion outcomes and learner experiences, limited qualitative research has explored teachers' lived experiences and implementation realities in facilitating the Work Immersion Program within public secondary schools. Existing literature frequently focuses on learner employability and quantitative program outcomes rather than the perspectives and experiences of teachers directly responsible for program implementation.

Thus, this study explored the lived experiences of teachers in the implementation of the Senior High School Work Immersion Program in public secondary schools of Legislative District IV, Schools Division of Isabela. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers describe their experiences in implementing the Senior High School Work Immersion Program?
2. What roles and responsibilities do teachers perform in facilitating work immersion activities?
3. What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing the Work Immersion Program?
4. How do teachers address implementation difficulties and support learners' workplace experiences?
5. What insights may be drawn regarding effective implementation of work immersion in public secondary schools?

The findings of the study may contribute to improving work immersion practices, strengthening school-industry partnerships, enhancing teacher support systems, and informing policy development related to Senior High School curriculum implementation.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

Work Immersion and Experiential Learning

Work immersion is an experiential learning component designed to expose learners to actual workplace environments where they can apply acquired knowledge, skills, and attitudes. According to Kolb (1984), experiential learning occurs through concrete experiences, reflection, conceptualization, and practical application. Work immersion programs therefore provide learners with meaningful opportunities to engage in authentic workplace learning and professional development.

Experiential learning strengthens learners' problem-solving abilities, communication skills, workplace ethics, and career awareness. In Senior High School education, immersion experiences bridge the gap between theoretical instruction and practical workplace competencies.

School-Industry Partnerships in Education

Effective work immersion implementation requires strong collaboration between schools and industry partners. School-industry partnerships facilitate learner placement, workplace supervision, skills development, and career exposure opportunities. According to Billet (2020), workplace learning becomes more meaningful when educational institutions and industries collaboratively support learners' professional development.

Teachers serve as coordinators and mediators between schools and workplace institutions, ensuring alignment between curriculum competencies and workplace experiences.

Teacher Roles in Work Immersion Implementation

Teachers managing work immersion programs perform multiple roles including learner preparation, workplace coordination, documentation, supervision, monitoring, and learner evaluation. They also provide emotional support, guidance, and professional mentoring throughout immersion activities.

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), teachers' professional commitment and adaptability significantly influence the quality of experiential learning programs and learner engagement.

Challenges in Work Immersion Implementation

Several studies have identified implementation challenges related to transportation, limited workplace placements, industry coordination, learner safety, and administrative workload. Rural schools often experience limited access to industry partners and workplace opportunities, affecting placement quality and learner exposure.

Teachers also encounter challenges in balancing classroom responsibilities with immersion supervision and documentation requirements. Effective institutional support and collaborative planning are therefore essential in sustaining successful immersion programs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was anchored on Experiential Learning Theory developed by David Kolb, which emphasizes learning through concrete experiences, reflective observation, and practical application. The study also utilized Situated Learning Theory proposed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, which explains that learning occurs through active participation in authentic social and professional contexts.

These theories guided the interpretation of teachers' implementation experiences, learner workplace engagement, and school-industry collaboration practices in the Work Immersion Program.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences, implementation practices, and challenges encountered by teachers in facilitating the Senior High School Work Immersion Program. Phenomenology was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to gain deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions, professional experiences, and implementation realities within actual educational contexts.

The study was conducted in selected public secondary schools in Legislative District IV, Schools Division of Isabela. The locale was selected because of its active implementation of the Senior High School Work Immersion Program and diverse school-industry partnership experiences.

The participants consisted of fifteen Senior High School teachers and work immersion coordinators selected through purposive sampling. Participants met the following criteria: currently involved in work immersion implementation, possessing at least three years of teaching experience, directly supervising work immersion learners, and willing to participate in interviews and focus group discussions.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, field observations, and document analysis of immersion records, partnership agreements, learner monitoring forms, and implementation reports. The interview guide focused on teachers' implementation experiences, supervisory practices, workplace coordination, learner support strategies, implementation challenges, and professional reflections regarding work immersion.

Ethical considerations including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and respect for participants' experiences were strictly observed throughout the research process.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. Interview transcripts, field notes, and immersion documents were coded and categorized to identify recurring themes and patterns related to work immersion implementation experiences. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and prolonged engagement within the research setting.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Theme 1: Work Immersion as Preparation for Career Readiness and Real-World Learning

Participants consistently described work immersion as an important opportunity for learners to develop workplace competencies, professionalism, and career awareness.

One participant shared:

"Malaking tulong ang immersion para ma-expose ang learners sa totoong work environment."

Another participant stated:

"Mas nagiging responsible at confident ang learners pagkatapos ng immersion."

Teachers observed improvements in learners' communication skills, time management, interpersonal relationships, and professional behavior during immersion experiences.

These findings support Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory emphasizing the importance of authentic experiences in strengthening learning and professional development. Similar findings were discussed by Billet (2020), who emphasized that workplace learning promotes career readiness and practical skill acquisition.

Theme 2: Teacher Roles as Facilitators, Supervisors, and Industry Coordinators

Participants highlighted their multiple responsibilities in implementing the Work Immersion Program. Teachers served as facilitators, workplace coordinators, mentors, supervisors, and learner support providers.

One participant explained:

"Hindi lang kami teacher kundi coordinator, taga-monitor, at minsan counselor din ng learners."

Another participant remarked:

"Kailangan talagang hands-on sa coordination at monitoring para maging maayos ang immersion."

Teachers coordinated with industry partners, prepared learners for workplace expectations, conducted monitoring visits, and ensured completion of immersion requirements and documentation. These findings indicate that teachers play central organizational and supervisory roles in sustaining effective immersion implementation.

Theme 3: Industry Partnership Challenges and Logistical Constraints

Participants encountered challenges related to limited workplace partners, transportation difficulties, learner placement concerns, and industry accessibility.

One participant stated:

"Minsan kulang ang industry partners kaya nahihirapan kaming maghanap ng placement."

Another participant shared:

"Problema rin minsan ang transportation lalo na sa malalayong immersion areas."

Teachers explained that rural locations and limited local industries affected learner placement opportunities and workplace accessibility.

These findings align with previous studies emphasizing that logistical and partnership challenges significantly affect immersion implementation in rural educational contexts.

Theme 4: Learner Development, Workplace Adjustment, and Professional Growth

Teachers observed significant learner growth during immersion experiences. Participants noted improvements in confidence, communication skills, responsibility, workplace discipline, and adaptability among learners.

One participant explained:

"Mas nagiging mature at independent ang learners habang nasa immersion."

Another teacher remarked:

"Natututo silang makisama at maging professional sa workplace."

Teachers also observed that workplace exposure strengthened learners' career aspirations and understanding of professional expectations.

These findings support Situated Learning Theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs through active participation in authentic social and professional environments.

Theme 5: Teacher Resilience, Adaptability, and Commitment in Program Implementation

Despite implementation challenges, participants demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and commitment in sustaining meaningful immersion experiences for learners.

One participant stated:

"Kahit maraming challenges, ginagawa namin ang best para matulungan ang learners."

Another participant remarked:

"Kailangan talagang flexible at resourceful sa pag-manage ng immersion."

Teachers utilized flexible coordination strategies, community networking, collaborative planning, and continuous communication with industry partners to address implementation difficulties.

These findings demonstrate teachers' professional dedication and adaptability in implementing experiential learning programs despite contextual limitations.

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that the Senior High School Work Immersion Program significantly contributes to learners' professional growth, workplace readiness, and practical skill development. Teachers viewed immersion as an important experiential learning opportunity that prepares learners for employment, higher education, and career decision-making.

Teachers' experiences demonstrated the complex and multifaceted nature of immersion implementation. Participants performed supervisory, organizational, mentoring, and coordination roles while simultaneously addressing logistical, institutional, and learner-related challenges.

The study further revealed that strong school-industry partnerships, collaborative planning, and continuous communication are essential in sustaining effective immersion experiences. However, rural educational realities, limited industry opportunities, transportation concerns, and administrative demands continue to affect implementation quality.

Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated resilience, flexibility, and professional commitment in ensuring meaningful workplace learning experiences for learners. Their adaptability and dedication played significant roles in sustaining the success of the Work Immersion Program within public secondary schools.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that teachers implementing the Senior High School Work Immersion Program in public secondary schools of Legislative District IV, Schools Division of Isabela experience both meaningful professional fulfillment and significant implementation challenges.

Teachers emphasized that work immersion enhances learners' career readiness, workplace competencies, communication skills, confidence, and professional awareness. However, participants also encountered challenges related to industry partnerships, learner placement, transportation, monitoring, documentation, and logistical coordination.

Despite these difficulties, teachers demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and strong professional commitment in sustaining meaningful immersion experiences for learners. The findings further suggest that successful implementation of work immersion requires strengthened institutional support, collaborative school-industry partnerships, and continuous teacher capacity-building initiatives.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings imply the need for strengthened school-industry partnerships and institutional support systems for work immersion implementation. Educational leaders and policymakers may develop collaborative agreements with industries and local institutions to expand learner placement opportunities and improve workplace accessibility.

Teacher professional development programs may also focus on workplace supervision, industry coordination, learner mentoring, and experiential learning management.

Schools may strengthen transportation support systems, learner safety protocols, and monitoring mechanisms to improve immersion implementation quality.

Future studies may further explore learners' immersion experiences, industry partner perspectives, and comparative implementation practices across different educational settings.

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