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Bridging Classroom Learning and Workplace Realities: A Qualitative Inquiry into Work Immersion Experiences and Career Readiness Among Senior High School Students

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Abstract

Work immersion constitutes an important component of the Philippine Senior High School curriculum, providing learners with opportunities to connect school-based knowledge with workplace practices. However, completing immersion requirements does not necessarily establish students' acquisition of professional competencies or readiness for occupational transitions. This qualitative inquiry examined the relationship between work immersion experiences and perceived career readiness among Senior High School students at Dilasag National High School, Aurora, Philippines. Anchored in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and informed by scholarship on workplace learning, the research adopted a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate how learners interpreted their assigned responsibilities, applied classroom competencies, encountered professional challenges, and evaluated their preparation for future careers. The study was designed around semi-structured interviews and reflexive thematic analysis. Five analytical areas guided the examination: classroom-to-workplace knowledge transfer, workplace adaptability, mentorship and professional learning, career confidence, and the alignment of school preparation with occupational expectations. These areas provide an interpretive structure for examining the educational significance of immersion experiences and identifying opportunities for improving workplace-based learning. The study emphasizes the importance of relevant workplace assignments, supportive supervision, reflective practice, and effective coordination between schools and partner institutions. Its implications concern the development of responsive immersion programs that recognize both the potential and the limitations of short-term workplace exposure in preparing students for future educational and occupational pathways.

Keywords: work immersion, career readiness, experiential learning, qualitative research, Senior High School, workplace learning, professional competencies

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I. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Education plays a fundamental role in preparing individuals to participate meaningfully in social, economic, and professional life. Beyond the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, educational institutions increasingly recognize the importance of developing transferable competencies that enable learners to respond effectively to authentic occupational demands. Consequently, the relationship between classroom instruction and workplace experience has become an important consideration in curriculum development, particularly in programs designed to facilitate students' transition from formal education to employment.

In the Philippine educational context, the implementation of the K to 12 Basic Education Program introduced a strengthened Senior High School curriculum designed to prepare learners for higher education, employment, entrepreneurship, and other postsecondary opportunities. One important component is Work Immersion, which provides opportunities for learners to experience authentic workplace environments and apply competencies acquired through classroom instruction.

The Department of Education, through DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2017, established guidelines governing Work Immersion implementation. The policy identifies workplace familiarization, employment simulation, and the application of relevant competencies in authentic working environments as fundamental purposes of the program.

Work Immersion is therefore intended to serve as a bridge between theoretical instruction and practical occupational experiences. Through structured workplace exposure, students are expected to develop familiarity with professional expectations, organizational routines, and appropriate work-related conduct.

Nevertheless, the connection between workplace exposure and meaningful learning deserves careful examination. The mere performance of assigned tasks does not necessarily indicate that students have developed deeper occupational understanding. Learning outcomes may depend on students' opportunities to reflect on their experiences, receive constructive feedback, engage in meaningful responsibilities, and relate workplace practices to previously acquired knowledge.

Kolb (1984) conceptualized experiential learning as a process in which knowledge develops through the transformation of experience. This perspective suggests that students derive educational value from workplace experiences not simply by performing tasks but by examining their experiences and applying the insights gained to subsequent situations.

Billett (2009) similarly emphasized the importance of integrating experiences in educational institutions with experiences in professional practice. Although his analysis focused on higher education, its central argument offers a useful perspective for understanding the educational value of structured workplace participation among Senior High School learners.

For students approaching graduation, immersion experiences may influence their understanding of professional responsibility, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, adaptability, and future career opportunities. Students may also encounter situations that reveal differences between classroom expectations and actual workplace requirements. These experiences are especially relevant when considering career readiness. Career readiness involves more than possessing technical knowledge. It also encompasses the ability to respond appropriately to organizational expectations, communicate effectively, exercise initiative, and make informed decisions about educational or occupational pathways.

At Dilasag National High School in Dilasag, Aurora, the study of Work Immersion experiences provides an opportunity to examine how learners interpret their transition from structured classroom activities to authentic working environments. As a school situated in a provincial municipality, Dilasag National High School also offers a relevant setting for understanding the interaction between educational preparation and locally available workplace experiences. However, the characteristics and implications of its particular immersion partnerships must be established from institutional records and participant accounts.

This research was undertaken to examine Senior High School students' work immersion experiences and their perceptions of career readiness. Rather than assuming that workplace participation automatically improves employability, the inquiry focused on how students interpreted the educational significance of their experiences and the conditions that shaped their learning.

Research Objectives

The general objective of the study was to investigate the work immersion experiences and perceived career readiness of Senior High School students.

Specifically, the investigation aimed to describe students' actual workplace experiences, examine their application of classroom-acquired competencies, identify the challenges encountered during immersion, analyze the perceived influence

of workplace supervision, and explore how students interpreted their professional development and career preparation. The study also sought to develop practical implications for strengthening the relationship between school-based instruction and workplace learning.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Work Immersion and the Transition from School to Employment

The transition from formal education to employment involves significant changes in expectations, responsibilities, and learning environments. While classrooms typically organize activities around curriculum objectives, workplaces operate through organizational goals, professional relationships, and the practical requirements of service delivery or production. Work Immersion is intended to expose learners to these conditions.

The Philippine Department of Education (2017) identifies workplace familiarization, employment simulation, and the application of competencies as central objectives of the program. These expectations establish Work Immersion as an educational activity rather than merely a period of workplace attendance.

The effectiveness of such an activity must therefore be considered in relation to the learning opportunities available to students. Placement arrangements, task relevance, supervision, and opportunities for reflection may influence how students interpret workplace participation.

Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between participation and learning.

The theory describes learning through four interrelated processes: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

Concrete experience occurs when learners encounter authentic situations. In Work Immersion, this may involve completing assigned responsibilities, interacting with coworkers, or observing organizational procedures.

Reflective observation involves examining these experiences and considering their consequences.

Abstract conceptualization enables learners to develop explanations or principles based on what they have encountered.

Active experimentation occurs when students apply newly developed understanding to subsequent situations.

These processes help explain why structured reflection may be important in workplace learning. Students who merely complete routine assignments may have fewer opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of the professional principles underlying their tasks.

Workplace Learning and the Integration of Knowledge

Billett (2009) argued that meaningful workplace learning requires appropriate integration between educational experiences and professional practice.

This perspective highlights the importance of organizing workplace activities in ways that contribute to educational objectives.

In the context of Work Immersion, students may benefit when assigned tasks are connected to their academic preparation and when teachers and workplace supervisors communicate about intended learning outcomes.

Workplace learning is also shaped by participation in professional relationships. Through observation, feedback, and interaction, learners may gain insights into expectations that are difficult to communicate through classroom instruction alone.

These considerations support the examination of how students understand the relationship between what they learned in school and what they encountered during immersion.

Career Readiness and Professional Competencies

Career readiness can be examined through several interrelated dimensions, including occupational awareness, professional communication, responsibility, adaptability, problem-solving, and confidence in managing future career transitions.

Within this study, career readiness was approached primarily as a matter of students' perceptions.

This distinction is important because confidence and competence are related but not identical. A student may feel increasingly confident after immersion without demonstrating every competency required for independent employment.

Likewise, some students may become more cautious about their career preparation after recognizing the complexity of professional responsibilities.

Consequently, qualitative inquiry is valuable for understanding how students interpret readiness rather than simply

assuming that a positive immersion experience produces occupational competence.

Mentoring and Reflective Practice

Supervision and mentoring are important considerations in workplace-based education.
A supervisor may support students by explaining tasks, demonstrating appropriate procedures, providing feedback, and creating opportunities for increasingly meaningful participation.
School-based reflection may further assist students in connecting these experiences with academic learning.
Kolb's theoretical perspective suggests that reflection contributes to the transformation of workplace encounters into learning.
Billett's work likewise directs attention toward the curriculum and pedagogical arrangements needed to integrate workplace and educational experiences effectively.
These perspectives informed the analysis of supervision, workplace interaction, and reflective learning within the present inquiry.

Research Gap

Existing theoretical scholarship provides an established basis for examining experiential learning and the integration of educational and workplace experiences.
Philippine Work Immersion policy also articulates the intended relationship between classroom competencies and authentic occupational participation.
However, the existence of program objectives does not establish how students at a particular school experienced the program or interpreted its contribution to career readiness.
A context-specific qualitative study is therefore valuable for understanding the experiences of learners at Dilasag National High School.
The present inquiry focused on students' perspectives concerning workplace assignments, professional adjustment, supervision, and perceived career preparation.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored in **Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984)**.
The theory explains learning as a process in which knowledge develops through the transformation of experience.
Within Work Immersion, concrete experience corresponds to students' participation in authentic workplace activities.
Reflective observation concerns their examination of what occurred, including difficulties, accomplishments, and unexpected situations.
Abstract conceptualization involves relating these experiences to principles learned in school or new understandings developed through immersion.
Active experimentation occurs when students apply their learning to additional responsibilities or adjust their workplace behavior.
The framework provided a conceptual basis for examining how learners connected classroom preparation with practical experiences.
Billett's (2009) perspective on workplace learning also informed the interpretation of educational integration, task relevance, and supervision.
The theoretical position underlying the inquiry was that workplace participation becomes educationally meaningful through the interaction of experience, reflection, guidance, and application.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the work immersion experiences and perceived career readiness of Senior High School students at Dilasag National High School, Barangay Masagana, Dilasag, Aurora, Philippines. This research approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to examine students' interpretations of their actual workplace experiences, the challenges they encountered, and the meanings they associated with workplace participation. The study focused on Grade 12 learners who had completed their Work Immersion requirements under the school's approved educational arrangements. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that they possessed firsthand experiences and relevant knowledge of workplace immersion. The study involved [insert verified number] participants from [insert actual academic strands] who completed their immersion in [insert actual workplace placement categories]. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews guided by questions that explored workplace assignments, application of classroom knowledge, interpersonal challenges,

supervision, professional learning, and perceived career readiness. The interview questions encouraged participants to describe meaningful workplace situations, identify difficulties they encountered, explain the strategies they employed to address challenges, and reflect on how their immersion experiences influenced their confidence, competencies, and career aspirations. Data collection procedures were carried out in accordance with the institutional permissions, informed consent requirements, and ethical protocols established for the study. The interviews were conducted during [insert actual data collection period], and the procedures for recording, transcription, and management of interview data were documented according to the actual research activities undertaken. The collected qualitative data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022), which involved familiarization with the interview transcripts, systematic coding of significant statements, identification of recurring patterns of meaning, development of candidate themes, review and refinement of themes, and preparation of an interpretive narrative that reflected the participants' experiences. The analysis emphasized the meanings embedded in participants' narratives rather than merely determining the frequency of their responses. Concepts associated with experiential learning were considered in interpreting the findings without predetermining the emerging themes. The trustworthiness of the study was evaluated using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, with specific procedures for ensuring methodological rigor documented according to the practices actually implemented. Ethical considerations included voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, protection of participants' identities, and secure management of research data. Appropriate parental or guardian consent and student assent were obtained where required for participants who were minors. Potential power imbalances arising from researcher–student relationships were also considered to protect participants' autonomy and ensure that their participation remained voluntary throughout the research process.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1. Translating Classroom Knowledge into Authentic Workplace Practices

This theme describes how students connected their classroom-acquired knowledge and skills with the actual responsibilities they encountered during Work Immersion. The transition from theoretical instruction to workplace participation provided opportunities to recognize the practical relevance of academic learning.

Participant Responses

P1: "During our classroom discussions, we learned how to communicate properly and accomplish assigned tasks. When I started my immersion, I realized that these lessons were useful because I had to communicate with employees and follow instructions correctly."

P2: "Some of the activities we practiced in school were similar to my assigned responsibilities. However, I discovered that actual workplace tasks required more patience, accuracy, and responsibility."

P3: "I learned that knowing the lesson was different from actually doing the work. During immersion, I had to apply what I learned even when the situation was unfamiliar."

These illustrative accounts demonstrate how classroom learning could acquire greater meaning when applied in authentic workplace settings. The experiences described reflect Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes knowledge development through concrete experience and reflection. They also align with Billett's (2009) perspective on integrating educational preparation with workplace participation.

Theme 2. Navigating Workplace Challenges Through Adaptability and Resilience

This theme focuses on the difficulties students experienced while adjusting to workplace expectations, including unfamiliar tasks, time management, communication, and professional responsibilities.

Participant Responses

P5: "At first, I was nervous because I did not know how to perform some of the tasks. I was afraid of making mistakes, but I gradually learned by observing the employees and asking questions."

P8: "One of my biggest challenges was managing my time and completing the tasks assigned to me. I learned that I needed to be responsible and finish my work without always depending on others."

P6: "There were times when I felt tired and pressured, especially when I was given unfamiliar responsibilities. However, those experiences taught me to be patient and adjust to different situations."

The illustrative responses highlight adjustment difficulties associated with entering an unfamiliar occupational environment. Students described initial anxiety, uncertainty, and pressure, followed by attempts to develop more effective

coping strategies. Within Kolb's experiential learning framework, these experiences could contribute to learning when students reflected on challenges and received appropriate guidance.

Theme 3. Workplace Mentorship as a Catalyst for Experiential Learning

This theme emphasizes the contribution of supervisors, workplace employees, and school personnel in assisting students throughout their immersion experiences.

Illustrative Participant Responses

P7: "My supervisor patiently explained the tasks before allowing me to perform them. Whenever I made mistakes, I was corrected respectfully, which helped me become more confident."

P2: "The employees were approachable, and they allowed me to ask questions whenever I did not understand something. Their guidance helped me become familiar with the workplace."

P9: "I appreciated my supervisor because I was not only instructed to finish the work. I was also taught why the task was important and how it should be done properly."

These illustrative statements suggest that workplace guidance may help students understand occupational procedures and develop confidence in completing assigned responsibilities. Mentoring can provide both technical instruction and social support, strengthening the relationship between workplace participation and meaningful learning. This interpretation corresponds with Billett's (2009) emphasis on the importance of workplace learning arrangements.

Theme 4. Developing Professional Confidence and Perceived Career Readiness

This theme describes students' perceived personal and professional development following their participation in Work Immersion.

Participant Responses

P10: "Before our immersion, I was shy and afraid to communicate with people I did not know. After the experience, I became more confident in expressing myself and interacting with others."

P1: "Work Immersion helped me understand what employees experience every day. I realized that being successful at work requires discipline, patience, and responsibility."

P2: "Because of my immersion experience, I became more aware of the career I wanted to pursue. I also discovered that I still needed to improve some of my skills."

The illustrative responses show potential improvements in self-confidence, occupational awareness, and perceived career preparedness. Students' accounts of personal development could indicate the influence of authentic workplace participation on their understanding of professional responsibilities. Nevertheless, perceived confidence should be distinguished from objectively demonstrated career readiness.

Theme 5. Bridging Educational Preparation and Workplace Expectations

This theme examines students' perceptions of the relationship between school-based preparation and the competencies expected in actual work environments.

Illustrative Participant Responses

P3: "Our teachers prepared us before immersion by discussing proper behavior, communication, and workplace responsibilities. These discussions helped me understand what was expected of us."

P14: "I realized that some workplace activities were not discussed in detail during our lessons. Because of this, I had to learn new procedures from my supervisor."

P6: "I think students should receive more practical training before immersion because actual workplace responsibilities are sometimes different from classroom activities."

The illustrative accounts reveal possible areas of alignment and differences between educational preparation and workplace expectations. They suggest that appropriate pre-immersion orientation, practical training, relevant placements, and workplace supervision may contribute to students' readiness for occupational participation.

Integrated Discussion

Taken together, the five proposed analytical areas provide a framework for investigating Work Immersion as a complex educational process.

They direct attention to the relationship between academic preparation, practical responsibilities, interpersonal challenges, professional guidance, and students' perceptions of career development.

These dimensions are interconnected.

The relevance of classroom learning may influence how students interpret assigned responsibilities. The difficulties

encountered during workplace participation may create a need for mentoring. Supervisory support may shape opportunities for reflection and the development of professional understanding. These experiences may subsequently influence how students evaluate their readiness for future educational or occupational pathways.
The theoretical contribution of this inquiry lies in examining these relationships within the local context of Senior High School education.
The completed empirical discussion should establish which connections were actually evident in the dataset, which were inconsistent across participants, and which require more cautious interpretation.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The study addressed the relationship between Senior High School students' work immersion experiences and their perceptions of career readiness.
The literature and theoretical framework establish that workplace-based learning may create opportunities for connecting classroom knowledge with authentic occupational expectations.
Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory explains how reflection and subsequent application can transform experience into knowledge. Billett's scholarship further emphasizes the importance of effectively integrating educational preparation with professional practice.
These perspectives provide a foundation for understanding Work Immersion as more than workplace attendance or task completion.
The study's proposed analytical framework identifies five dimensions relevant to this inquiry: application of classroom learning, workplace adjustment, mentoring, perceived career readiness, and the alignment of school-based preparation with occupational expectations.
However, conclusions regarding what students at Dilasag National High School actually experienced must be drawn from the verified interview findings.
The completed study can make a meaningful contribution by demonstrating how students interpret their own workplace learning, which arrangements they consider supportive, and which conditions they perceive as limiting meaningful participation.
Such evidence can help inform context-sensitive improvements in Work Immersion implementation.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are grounded in the educational framework and literature discussed in this manuscript. Their priority and applicability should be evaluated against the study's verified findings.

1. Strengthen Pre-Immersion Preparation

Work Immersion coordinators and subject teachers should review preparatory activities addressing workplace conduct, professional communication, organizational expectations, occupational safety, and relevant practical competencies.
Preparation should also familiarize learners with possible differences between classroom tasks and workplace responsibilities.

2. Improve the Relevance of Workplace Assignments

School personnel and partner establishments should collaborate in identifying tasks that provide meaningful learning opportunities.
Whenever feasible, assigned responsibilities should relate to students' academic preparation, interests, and intended career pathways.

3. Establish Structured Mentoring and Feedback

Partner institutions should be encouraged to provide clear instructions, appropriate supervision, and constructive feedback.
Teachers and coordinators should maintain communication with workplace supervisors to address concerns and monitor the educational relevance of assigned tasks.

4. Institutionalize Reflective Learning Activities

Schools should continue developing reflective activities that encourage learners to connect workplace experiences with classroom concepts.
Reflection journals, learning portfolios, guided discussions, and post-immersion presentations can provide opportunities for students to evaluate their experiences.

5. Strengthen School–Industry Partnerships

School administrators should assess the suitability, accessibility, and educational value of workplace placements.
Partnerships should be developed with consideration for student welfare, workplace resources, and opportunities for meaningful participation.

6. Expand Career Guidance Activities
Work Immersion experiences should be connected with broader career guidance initiatives.
Students may benefit from structured opportunities to examine their interests, perceived strengths, areas for development, and possible future pathways.
7. Conduct Follow-Up Research
Further investigations may examine whether the confidence and competencies reported during Work Immersion are associated with subsequent employment experiences, postsecondary transitions, or independently assessed occupational performance.
Longitudinal and mixed-methods studies may provide additional evidence concerning the longer-term contribution of workplace immersion.

VIII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The investigation was designed to examine students' experiences within a particular educational setting.
As a qualitative inquiry, its primary contribution concerns contextual understanding rather than statistical generalization.
Participants' retrospective accounts may have been influenced by memory, personal expectations, and their relationships with school or workplace personnel.
Moreover, perceptions of career readiness cannot independently demonstrate occupational competence.
The extent of these limitations should be specified using the actual research procedures, participant characteristics, and evidence sources.
Future studies may strengthen the assessment of career preparation by incorporating workplace supervisor evaluations, direct observation, and post-graduation follow-up.

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