

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS AND STUDENTS DURING IN-SCHOOL WORK IMMERSION

Maria Christina Mapalo – Mina & Nivea Louwah D. Sermona

University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines, Cagayan de Oro City, Philippine

For correspondence: mariachristina.mina@deped.gov.edu.ph

ABSTRACT: *The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted practically every aspect of life. Education is one system that has been affected by COVID-19 restrictions. Different teaching and learning schemes were introduced at various levels of the education sector to ensure learning continuity during this challenging situation. Relevant to the Department of Education's (DepEd) thrust that "learning must continue," the department released a guideline for work immersion during the pandemic. Work immersion is considered a Senior High School feature under the K to 12 Basic Education Program. The guidelines for work immersion issued by DepEd in June 2020 provided various schemes and options for work immersion delivery, including home-based, community-based, school-based, and a combination of school-industry partnerships. This qualitative study focused on the challenges encountered by work immersion teachers, coordinators, and students as implemented in one public secondary school during this health crisis, specifically in the TVL tracks. A total of seven teachers and coordinators and twenty-one students of different TVL tracks were interviewed. They reported the range of activities during in-school immersion from pre-immersion activities like implementing rules and regulations in various workplaces and practical exercises relevant to the specialization. Results revealed that teachers struggled to create and improve learning modalities that met the objectives of the industrial immersion. For one, materials and equipment available in schools are not comparable to those in the industry. Another primary concern was students' readiness to perform the expected tasks of the work immersion program. Teachers spent a lot of time reviewing the technical concepts of the various specializations. Another challenge is the multiple tasks assigned to teachers. From the students' end, the difficulties were more focused on their unpreparedness to perform the functions since the major courses were taken during the first year of the pandemic, before immersion. With these challenges, it is seen that it is vital to prepare and follow a training plan for work immersion that is aligned with the competencies of the specialization. The in-school work immersion should only be transitory, and it is highly recommended that students be exposed to the real world of work.*

Keywords: COVID19 pandemic, immersion, school-based immersion, educators/coordinators

1. INTRODUCTION

Work immersion is one of the Senior High School Curriculum features under the K to 12 Basic Education Program. In its initial implementation, the Department of Education (DepEd) released a Curriculum Guide (CG) for Work Immersion. Grade 12 students are expected to undergo an 80-hour hands-on work simulation experience to expose them to the workplace and enhance their competencies. In light of the pandemic, one affected sector was the education bureau, and in response to this health crisis, Online and Modular Learning Modalities were introduced. Specific to work immersion implementation, the Department of Education issued the Guidelines for Work Immersion Implementation During Crisis Situation or the Memorandum DM-CI-2020-00085. In the said memoranda, DepEd emphasized that learning should be continuous and not stop amidst crises. The guidelines provided different schemes for work immersion delivery, including home-based, community-based, school-based, and a combination of school-industry partnerships. Other options for the work immersion implementation were also stipulated in the guidelines, such as the development of micro-scale proposals or feasibility studies. Schools were allowed to have activities other than the ones presented in the DepEd Order [1]. This shows the requirement of having the work immersion for Grade 12 students and how it can be conducted in different schemes. Work immersion is a

crucial graduate course requirement. Each student undergoing Senior High School is required to participate in Work Immersion related to the fields they want to pursue in their future careers. Students are exposed to and get familiar with work-related topics through Work Immersion. They must work in an environment linked to their chosen specialization to improve their expertise. In work immersion, students are expected to: (i) learn practical and relevant industry skills under the supervision of industry professionals and workers; (ii) understand the value of ideas and theories and also their application (iii) improve their technical skills and knowledge; (iv) widen their skills in areas not covered in school; (v) cultivate positive attitudes, work habits, and appreciation; and (vi) show progress in communication and interactions. These show how work immersion meets the needs of the students to take on employment challenges or proceed to higher education after graduating [2].

The pandemic impacted practically every aspect of people's lives, from their lifestyles to their educational pursuits. During this challenging time, different schools, teachers, and immersion coordinators may have faced various challenges and used varied techniques to perform the industry immersion. Thus, this study explored the challenges encountered by work immersion teachers and coordinators. The primary purpose of this study was to provide possible suggestions and solutions to which areas in

the school-based immersion may have fallen short in its implementation during the COVID19 pandemic.

2. BRIEF LITERATURE

This section presents relevant studies on work immersion, including legal provisions, particularly of the Department of Education.

Work/Industry Immersion in Crisis Situation in other Countries.

"What is the effect on employment results of college graduates who were not able to complete an internship, those who completed an internship, and also those graduates who completed an internship as part of a formal, career center internship program?" discovered statistically essential findings through a study showing that graduating students who participated in the internship program of career centers was working at a higher rate (83.24%) than graduating students who participated in internships (78.33%) and those graduating students who did not participate in any internships (70.54 %). The percentages for those who completed training (8.83%) were nearly identical in the pursuing work outcome group to those who participated in the career center internship program (8.09%). Several conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study: graduating students who completed either a paid or unpaid internship were more likely to get employed within six months after graduation; graduating students who achieved either a paid internship or did not complete an internship were more likely to be employed with a higher average starting salary than a graduating student who was able to complete an unpaid internship; graduating students who completed either a paid internship or had undergone no internship were more likely to get employed at a higher average starting salary than a graduating student who was able to complete an unpaid internship, and graduate students who took part in a formal internship were more likely to get hired and start at a higher average salary than those who were unable to take part in any internship [3].

Another study found that students who had undergone immersion for two weeks of psychology courses performed better academically than those in conventional psychology courses for 16 weeks. Students in the immersion courses constantly rated their teachers and courses higher than students in the courses in both studies for 16 weeks. Contrary to critics, immersion courses can be helpful and successful when teaching psychology, based on the findings [4].

In contrast, a study found that work immersion has a positive impact on student's academic achievement. It provides the students with the necessary work experiences to prepare them for a better future. The students must be guided by the school authorities and their teachers in the immersion setting that fosters their development and propels them toward academic greatness. Parents are also essential in helping the children during their job immersion [5].

The findings of a similar study led to the following conclusions, which were drawn. Students struggling to choose a career path can use their experiences and skills during their Work Immersion as a foundation for evaluating their career decision-making to feel more fulfilled in the subsequent courses. To make their future careers easier, students must assess their ability to work. The work principles students have learned from their Work Immersion teachers and employers must be implemented. Finally, students must grow as people while participating in Work Immersion [6].

Patients diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus have been isolated due to the global health emergency, which has led to the closure of centers and the transition of face-to-face classes into online classes. Teachers had to adapt to these changes at a breakneck speed, not just to the new methodological methods but also to their isolation, resulting in increased stress levels. This research aims to develop a concept that improves the work of educators amidst the pandemic by incorporating information and communication technologies (ICT) into a novel approach that includes neuroeducational contributions in managing emotions and motivating processes; this would result in more meaningful learning for students. The combination of neuroeducation and ICT can significantly contribute to the current paradigm shift [7].

Work/Industry Immersion in Crisis Situation in the Philippines

An action plan was proposed that will include a concrete program to solve the issues in the Work Immersion Delivery Model and develop and retain a specific procedure to meet the needs identified during the evaluation of the work immersion program. In this aspect, the researcher evaluated the work immersion program and its associated variables and eventually suggested an intervention program to attend to the needs of students, teachers, and industry stakeholders in the Division of Pasay City to improve the work immersion program.

The proposed intervention plan was planned and built to meet the three classes of respondents' needs for implementing the job immersion program. The following results are based on the findings: 1) The three classes of respondents gave the Work Immersion Program an Excellent rating. 2) In the Work Immersion Program, instructors, business partners, and students receive the same evaluation. 3) The proposed Intervention Program is designed to enhance and provide a detailed process for addressing the needs identified during the job immersion program's evaluation. 4) According to the three classes of respondents, the suggested Intervention Program is strongly appropriate [8].

3. METHODOLOGY

This section discusses clear-cut procedures or systems of research methods that were considered in the conduct of the study.

The study used a case research design employing qualitative data. Primary data were gathered through an interview in one of the mega schools in Iligan City. A school is considered a mega school with more than 101 teachers. Iligan City is a lone city located on the Northern coasts of Mindanao, Misamis Oriental in its North, the province of Lanao del Norte in the South, and Bukidnon as Lanao del Sur in the East.

The study's respondents are 7 Senior High School immersion teachers/s/coordinators and 21 Grade 12 students. The number of Grade 12 students specifically includes three students per TVL specialization offered by the said school, such as Aquaculture, Food Processing, Automotive, EIM (Electrical Installation and Maintenance), SMAW (Shielded Metal Arc Welding), Tourism 1, and Tourism 2. The interview questions were subjected to validation by a licensed psychometrician. The psychometrician, as mentioned earlier, critiqued the interview questions for content validity. The psychometrician specifically recommended interviewing the immersion.

The study followed specific steps of data collection, which were performed accordingly. At the outset, a letter request was sent to the school principal to seek approval to conduct the study. After obtaining permission, the researcher interviewed the study's respondents separately. The data were sorted and interpreted after that.

Thematic content analysis was utilized to organize data collected from the interviews. The results of the thematic coding were explored to establish meaningful themes.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges Experienced by Immersion Teachers and Coordinators

Teachers discussed the issues they faced in putting work immersion into practice. Results revealed that teachers struggled to create and improve learning modalities that met the objectives of the industrial immersion. For one, materials and equipment available in schools are not comparable to those in the industry. For example, the availability of beds and liners was pointed out in housekeeping. The mentioned materials are one of the basic needs in practicing housekeeping.

Another primary concern was students' readiness to perform the expected tasks of the work immersion program. The teachers noticed that the students lacked the technical knowledge and skills to perform the expected activities. It could be associated with the pandemic starting during the student's first year in senior high school when they took the major courses or subjects before work immersion. These major courses were conducted via modules during the period. Indeed, it affected students' learning. As a result, Teachers spent a lot of time reviewing the technical concepts of the various specializations before the students performed the hands-on activities.

Another challenge encountered by teachers is the multiple tasks assigned to them. During the pandemic, aside from the work immersion tasks and the usual reports that teachers

prepare and submit, they were also given other assignments such as distributing and retrieving modules and home visitations.

One of the researcher's observations is that 4 out of 7 teachers did not prepare a training plan. On the other hand, the three teachers followed the suggested activities stipulated in DepEd Order No. DM-CI-2020-00085 in their training plans, which are primarily generic activities. The researcher indicates highly that immersion teachers and coordinators prepare and follow a training plan for work immersion aligned with the specialization's competencies.

Challenges Experienced by Students

The difficulties the students encountered while immersed were also gathered. Their concerns ranged from personal, financial, activity engagement, environmental, and a lack of appropriate equipment. Students struggled with personal issues such as getting up early, getting ready for school, being patient, and time management. They felt that there was too much work to do with limited time. Additionally, they struggle to pay for their transportation costs to the school, their "baon," and the costs associated with purchasing the materials they need for immersion, such as prerequisites, equipment, and ingredients. Some students find it challenging to complete their assignments, such as erecting dikes and cleaning fish ponds in aquaculture, giving massages in tourism, bending hard steels in SMAW, and completing activities in BPP without an instructor to provide guidance. The issue of a non-conductive working environment is related to environmental challenges. The final problem is a shortage of the tools they require for their line of work, such as computers and laptops for ICT students.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the sectors that were greatly affected is the Department of Education. Nonetheless, the said department was able to provide guides and protocols to provide education to learners while observing the IATF guidelines. This study was able to dig deeper into the school-based immersion program of one mega school in Iligan City and gather data on the challenges Senior High School teachers and students experiencing work immersion in terms of conducting and experiencing the immersion program within school grounds. In summary, teachers mentioned that they have difficulties with the tardiness of students during the lockdowns.

On the other hand, the students pointed out that they have challenges revolving around their personal problems, financial difficulties, performing activities, their immersion environment, and the lack of appropriate equipment. They also provided ways to address their difficulties, like sleeping early, working part-time jobs, practicing, and self-discipline.

Recommendations

Teachers were asked to share their ideas on performing work immersion better after learning about their experiences managing it, particularly during the pandemic.

One of the suggestions is the adaptation of the real-world workplace, notably emphasizing the necessity of reintroducing industry-based immersion following the pandemic. If protocols prevent complete immersion, it is suggested that students be given the opportunity to tour real workplaces and engage in hands-on activities. Another recommendation is to provide the students with an orientation or pre-immersion activities before actual work immersion. It is also suggested that the chosen educators submit their training and development plans.

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