



WORK IMMERSION TOWARD CAREER ASPIRATIONS OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STEM STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study utilized a multiple case approach to examine the work immersion experiences of Grade 12 STEM-Edison students at Santa Fe National High School during the School Year 2024–2025. The aim was to develop an enhancement plan for the immersion program, bridging the gap between professional and real-world settings. Specifically, the study explored immersion experiences of students, identified similarities and differences across them, and proposed notable ways to refine the program based on the findings. Using a multiple case study approach, data was gathered from selected participants and analyzed through thematic analysis to determine recurring patterns, concepts, and themes. Findings revealed that work immersion served as a meaningful experiential learning opportunity that bridged academic learning and professional readiness through real-world exposure and practical skill development. Students reported gaining hands-on skills, workplace discipline, confidence, and a clearer understanding of professional roles. The immersion experience also influenced their career decision-making and readiness for higher education by helping them confirm, reconsider, or clarify their intended career paths. Although participants encountered challenges such as adjusting to fast-paced work environments, unfamiliar tasks, and strict workplace routines, these experiences fostered adaptability, resilience, and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, supportive work environments, mentorship, and positive workplace relationships significantly strengthened students' motivation and commitment to their chosen careers. Despite variations in placements and tasks, the participants shared common experiences in developing practical competencies, career clarity, and professional values. Based on these findings, the study recommended aligning immersion placements with students' intended college programs, expanding partnerships and rotational opportunities, and strengthening mentorship and supervision. These improvements enhanced the relevance, effectiveness, and overall impact of the work immersion program in preparing students for higher education and future STEM-related careers.

Keywords: work immersion, experiential learning, career aspirations

INTRODUCTION

Exposure to students' chosen careers is one of the contributory factors to students' preparedness for work and actualization of work field expectations (Anca, 2024). To accord students this opportunity, the Department of Education (DepEd) included the Work Immersion Program as part of the current curriculum in Senior High School to help them experience the actual work environment and eventually help them make sound decisions towards their higher learning and career aspirations (Sarao, 2024). While the immersion program afforded STEM strand students avenues to experience their prospective fields and translate theories learned inside the classroom to actual realities, there is still relevance in evaluating students' immersion experiences to look into how their chosen career may have been affected by exposure and highlight areas of improvement.

With the constant evolution of industries and rapid technological development, the necessity of early professional immersion has gained more importance (Thompson et al., 2021). Work immersion is aimed at being the first step towards understanding reality outside of school and linking educational activities with future career aspirations (Thompson et al., 2021). For STEM majors, the process could serve as an essential step in exploring whether they chose a suitable field to pursue or may have to reconsider their initial career choices. The most desirable outcome of work immersion was related to shaping students' career aspirations through involvement in corresponding activities, communication with specialists,



and observing workplace processes. Nevertheless, the real impact of this program on the long-term career choices of students is a controversial topic (Insorio et al., 2023).

Despite the numerous advantages offered by such opportunities, some students faced difficulties that prevented them from gaining the necessary insight into their future profession (Anca, 2024). Several factors, including task suitability, mentorship quality, and general work atmosphere, greatly influenced their perception of their experience and overall understanding of the program (Anca, 2024). Sometimes, work immersion encouraged individuals to move ahead with their initial choice; in other cases, it left students feeling uncertain about their career paths.

Considering these factors, it was vital to conduct a research paper on the work immersion experiences of Grade 12 STEM-Edison students at Santa Fe National High School for SY 2024–2025. The study analyzed the influence of the work immersion program on students' academic development. It also highlighted the contributions this work immersion had to the students' preparedness and readiness for a real-world setting. Second, the research examined how experience influenced the career decision-making process of Grade 12 STEM-Edison students. Third, it investigated the problems faced by the students throughout the program. Finally, the research identified the extent to which the environment and colleagues influenced students' career decisions. Thus, by examining their similar and different experiences in relation to their intended courses, the research paper offered insight into scientific innovations, perspectives, and reflections needed to generate an enhancement plan for the betterment of the program.

Accordingly, it was essential to discuss the strengths and limitations of work immersion programs. These strengths and weaknesses were used as groundwork to improve work immersion frameworks and make them as beneficial as possible for the development of STEM students.

Research Questions

This study explored the work immersion experiences of Grade 12 STEM-Edison students at Santa Fe National High School for the School Year 2024–2025, with the goal of developing an enhancement plan for the immersion program. Work immersion served as a significant experiential learning component that informed senior high school students' decision-making processes regarding their pursuit of higher education in STEM-related disciplines. Furthermore, the study examined the essence, similarities, and differences of their experiences in relation to the courses they intended to pursue, giving importance to the scientific insights, reflections, and learning they gained during the immersion program.

Specifically, it addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of the students during their work immersion program?
2. What are the similarities and differences in the experiences encountered by the students during the work immersion program?
3. Based on the students' experiences, how can the work immersion program be improved?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Atheoretical Stance

The research study, *"Work Immersion Towards Career Aspirations of Senior High School STEM Students,"* employed an atheoretical approach since there were no theories on which this study was anchored at the beginning of the study. The study utilized an inductive approach to analyze the data collected since there were no preconceived ideas for the study. It involved allowing information or insight to emerge during the data collection process. The use of an inductive approach made it possible to capture the true perspective of the participants without any bias towards the theories. In addition, it captured the complex nature of the participants' experiences in their own words.

In the data analysis stage, thematic analysis was performed to identify common themes and patterns in the participants' experiences and perspectives on work immersion. The use of thematic analysis made it possible to explore the similarities and differences in the perspectives of the students concerning their experiences. Though there was no theoretical framework guiding the study at the initial stages, the findings were later related to relevant concepts such as Kolb's



Experiential Learning Theory and Super's Career Development Theory to strengthen interpretation.

Philosophical Assumptions

This study was conducted based on certain philosophical underpinnings that supported the methodology used for data collection and analysis.

Ontology

Ontology refers to questions regarding reality and existence (Ylönen & Aven, 2023). Within this study, reality was regarded subjectively and individually by the participants, which meant that work immersion was perceived by students based on their individual experience, environment, and reflection. Therefore, the reality created by the participants was considered subjective, which proved that there could be different realities. Different realities indicated that students had varying interpretations of their immersion environment, which depended on the goals they sought to achieve. Hence, the different perspectives of the students were considered equally valid.

Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the question of the creation of knowledge (Ylönen & Aven, 2023). Within this research, knowledge was gained through the students' experiences and narratives. Interviews with the participants allowed for a deeper understanding of the students' work immersion experiences. Knowledge was generated through reflection, whereas the researcher provided an interpretation of this knowledge.

Axiology

The term 'axiology' entails the place of values in research and its effect on the research process and results (Alele & Malau-Aduli, 2023). In this study, the researcher assumed that there could be some personal values and biases that would influence the process of data gathering and analysis. This was addressed through the practice of reflexivity, which entailed taking into consideration the narratives provided by the students during data analysis. There were also important ethical considerations, including confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent.

Methodology

The methodological approach of this study entailed the use of an exploratory and qualitative research methodology. Thematic analysis methodology was applied to identify emerging themes. It was noted that a qualitative methodology was highly flexible since themes could emerge naturally during data analysis and gathering.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The multiple case design was used in this research to fully examine the work immersion experiences of the Grade 12 STEM-Edison students and to make comparisons among the cases as well as find commonalities among them. The multiple case design was the most appropriate research method to use in this study since it allowed the researcher to focus on examining the experiences of each participant, including the difficulties, successes, and challenges encountered by the individuals within their work environment (Hunziker & Blankenagel, 2021). Since each participant was considered a unique case, it was possible to establish common trends and variations in the way students acquired practical skills, implemented theoretical knowledge, and evaluated their career goals.

The significance of using the multiple case design was the possibility of generating results that reflected the realities of student life while also navigating the similar and different trends of their experiences. It made it possible to conduct a comparative analysis of various cases to identify the strengths of programs and areas that needed improvement. Furthermore, the use of the multiple case design made the research more relevant because any recommendations for



improving programs were made based on the students' experiences and the formulated recommendations. In summary, the multiple case design provided a complete methodology for studying experiential learning, which, in turn, helped create a more effective work immersion program for STEM students.

Respondent /Participants

At the initial phase, the study was expected to have ten (10) Grade 12 STEM–Edison students from Santa Fe National High School who had finished the two weeks of work immersion. The respondents were strategically chosen based on these requirements: (1) the fulfillment of the required hours for immersion and (2) the immersion site that was related to the student's aspiration college program (science, technology, engineering, or mathematics).

Data collection proceeded until the eighth interview, where the data were already saturated. There was no need to conduct more interviews because there were no new concepts or ideas revealed from the responses. Thus, it was pointless to continue the interviews, and it ended with only eight (8) participants instead of the originally planned ten (10).

It was important for the immersion site to be relevant to the students' academic pursuits because it helped the study focus on how immersion in STEM-related work immersion sites affected students' career goals. With the aid of the screening questionnaire, it was easier to choose the students' immersion experience in accordance with the research objective.

Students who were not at least 18 years old during the study period did not qualify to join the experiment, regardless of whether they volunteered for it. The criteria for disqualification for this experiment involved failure to satisfy certain requirements, especially the compatibility of their immersion with STEM-focused higher learning programs.

Instruments of the Study

The main tool employed during data collection involved a semi-structured interview. This tool was formulated to investigate the placement experience of Grade 12 STEM–Edison students in connection with their career goals. The interview questions included open-ended questions designed to elicit answers from the respondents regarding their immersion experiences, the relevance of such experiences to the STEM-related college course they hoped to pursue, as well as the scientific discoveries or inventions they discovered from such experience. In this manner, the respondents were able to freely express their ideas concerning their work immersion, while at the same time ensuring relevance to the research goals. This specifically highlighted the similarities and differences among multiple cases.

Throughout the process of the interviews, the current study adhered to essential principles of qualitative research to ensure that the results would be credible and trustworthy. These principles included open-mindedness towards the participants' narratives, responsiveness to developing themes, and ethical consideration during data collection.

Trustworthiness - Trustworthiness means the reliability of data collected in the study (Lietz & Zayas, 2021). Trustworthiness was achieved using multiple sources for collecting data, such as the narratives of the participants.

Credibility - Credibility means the validity and accuracy of the results obtained (Korstjens & Moser, 2020). Credibility of the findings was ensured by conducting member checks, allowing participants to confirm the results of their interviews.

Dependability – Dependability relates to the reliability and consistency of data over time (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2020). The process of collecting and analyzing data was carefully recorded to ensure that there was always a consistent interpretation of the interviews.

Confirmability – Confirmability pertains to the objectivity of a study that ensures that findings are based on the data and not the bias of the researcher conducting it (Laforest & Simard, 2021). It was done through keeping a reflective journal wherein all personal opinions and biases were recorded.

Transferability – Transferability concerns the applicability of findings outside of the study's context (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2020). Contexts, participants, and processes involved in the research were thoroughly described so that people



would know whether it could be applied in other scenarios.

All these principles were considered in the study to ensure its credibility, meaning, and relevance.

Procedure

The process of gathering data in this research adhered to a systematic process to guarantee consistency and accuracy. The following steps were involved:

Pre-data Gathering. Before the collection of data, the research process started with the recruitment of participants, involving ten senior high school students belonging to the Grade 12–Edison class at Santa Fe National High School, after completing their two-week work immersion program under the STEM program. These participants were selected using predetermined criteria, which included having completed the work immersion requirement in an environment suited for their future academic pursuits.

After the selection of participants, the researcher sought the consent of each adult participant, thus making them fully aware of the aims of the study and their responsibilities.

Actual Data Collection. In the data collection stage, the researcher carried out semi-structured interviews with the respondents, either face-to-face or virtually, employing an interview guide that was formulated to elicit responses regarding the respondents' work immersion experiences. The questions were meant to determine how such work immersion experiences had affected their academic preparedness and career choices as far as joining the STEM programs in universities is concerned. These semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to delve deep into the responses provided by the respondents, all the while remaining within the study's purview. Audio recordings of the interviews were made with prior consent from all the respondents involved.

Post Data Collection. Once the data collection was complete, the researcher went ahead and analyzed the transcripts for any inaccuracies in the recording process. Then the researcher started with the process of organizing and coding the data collected.

To maintain the validity of the collected information, member checking was conducted through feedback from the participants by sending back the transcripts of the interviews, ensuring that the respondents would validate their answers and add any clarification or additional remarks if required.

The data collected were analyzed based on the thematic approach suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006). It aimed at exploring themes associated with the career aspirations of the interviewed individuals and the role of their work immersion experience in forming such aspirations. A detailed report was prepared based on the findings obtained. The before–during–after approach ensured a structured and ethical method of gathering meaningful data that contributed valuable insights into the role of work immersion in shaping the career aspirations of STEM students.

Data Analysis

The thematic analysis approach introduced by Braun & Clarke (2006) was employed in this research to explore the impact of work immersion on the career goals and higher education preparedness of Senior High School STEM students. The use of thematic analysis was appropriate since it enabled the researcher to capture recurring themes, common meanings, and important incidents that emerged from the participants' accounts about work immersion (Naeem et al., 2023). Given that this research explored the lived experiences, similarities, and differences of the students, as well as the potential improvement of the work immersion program, the thematic analysis approach was ideal.

The process of data analysis adhered to the six steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Initially, the researcher became acquainted with the data through transcription and thorough examination of the interview responses. In the second step, the researcher created initial codes by selecting statements that were related to tasks, challenges, learnings, and



reflections about future careers associated with work immersion among the respondents. In the third step, codes that were similar were grouped into potential themes. The fourth step involved reviewing and refining the themes to make sure they were congruent with the codes as well as with the aim of the study. In the fifth step, the researcher defined and named the themes by providing clear definitions for each. Finally, in the sixth step, the researcher produced the report by presenting the final themes and supporting them with relevant data extracts.

Coding was employed for organizational purposes, whereby key statements were coded and grouped based on their similarity to more generalized themes (Social Sciences, 2023). The procedure enabled the researcher to recognize patterns in the participants' experiences in relation to their aspirations both academically and professionally.

For confidentiality and easier presentation of the findings, each participant was assigned a core participant code (CP), a moniker, and a corresponding color during the coding process. The identifiers used in the study were: CP1 – Anna the Hardworking (Red), CP2 – Bea the Resilient (Blue), CP3 – Charles the Determined (Green), CP4 – Diane the Dedicated (Purple), CP5 – Ella the Aspirant (Yellow), CP6 – Faith the Persevering (Black), CP7 – Grace the Purposeful (Orange), and CP8 – Hannah the Motivated (Dark Green). These identifiers helped preserve anonymity while making individual cases easier to distinguish during the analysis.

In summary, it can be stated that through the thematic analysis conducted by Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher was able to undertake the process of analyzing the work immersion experience of Grade 12 STEM-Edison learners from Santa Fe National High School during the School Year 2024–2025. In this approach, the study was successful in identifying some themes associated with the influence of work immersion on career intentions, similarities and dissimilarities among the students, and possible improvements in the program.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the guidelines outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013). Approval was obtained from the Research and Ethics Committee of the University of the Visayas. Furthermore, the study involved adults who voluntarily participated in a face-to-face or online interview. Prior to completing the questionnaires, participants received an informed consent form detailing the study's purpose, procedures, risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, voluntary participation, and contact information. No financial incentives were offered for participation.

RESULTS and DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings and analysis of the study, focusing on the eight cases of work immersion among Senior High School STEM students. It examines the similarities and differences across the cases and presents the program matrix as a basis for the proposed enhancement plan for work immersion. Overall, the findings are interpreted in relation to the objectives of the study.

The Eight Work Immersion Cases

This section presents the eight individual cases of Grade 12 STEM-Edison students at Santa Fe National High School who participated in the work immersion program for School Year 2024–2025. As a multiple case study, each case was examined to describe the students' work immersion experiences, identify their similarities and differences, and provide insights that may contribute to the proposed enhancement plan for the work immersion program

Case 1: Anna the Hard Worker

Anna, the Hard worker, participated in a two-week work immersion in a diagnostic lab corresponding to her future college course in Medical Technology (MedTech). At first, she worked with patients at the reception desk. In the second week, Anna was doing laboratory jobs, including urinalysis, complete blood count (CBC), preparing samples for fecalysis, blood drawing, and helping with clinical chemistry analysis. She got acquainted with the laboratory equipment as well, which includes microscopes, centrifuges, and micropipettes.



According to Anna, her work immersion provided an opportunity to gain skills beyond the scope of her classes. Anna was learning how to use laboratory equipment and do certain procedures while becoming more disciplined, responsible, and confident – qualities that helped her succeed in her future college course. Moreover, this immersion helped her choose the right career path. Initially, she wanted to study Nursing or Psychology; now she knows that she wants to be a MedTech.

She encountered difficulties when it came to keeping up at a fast pace and handling various tasks at once. Anna dealt with these issues through questioning, instruction, adherence, practice, and guidance from staff members and other students. This helped improve her learning process and gave her the confidence to pursue higher education.

Moreover, Anna learned how to manage pressure in a professional setting by staying organized and focusing on one task at a time. She also developed time management and adaptability skills as she became more familiar with the workflow in the laboratory environment. These experiences allowed her to become more independent in performing tasks and more confident in dealing with new challenges during immersion.

In addition to her personal experiences, Anna recommended that students should be assigned to establishments that match their future college major. She emphasized that this makes students more motivated, helps build relevant skills, and contributes to meaningful immersion.

From the case study analysis, it can be concluded that work immersion, which matches the educational program, fosters the development of skills, career decision-making, and academic achievement in the chosen profession.

Case 2: Bea the Resilient

The Resilient Bea participated in a two-week work immersion in a medical laboratory corresponding to the college course she plans to take, namely Medical Technology. During the first week, she was involved in performing laboratory tasks and doing clerical work. In the following week, she acquired more experience as she learned complete blood count, urinalysis, fecalysis, and serology.

Bea stated that immersion provided her with practical skills not covered in academic theories. It helped her learn the proper way of analyzing specimens, extracting blood samples, looking at microscope slides, and following laboratory processes. This made her more disciplined, responsible, and confident in handling laboratory tasks. It helped her greatly during her first year of college.

Before attending immersion, Bea was unsure of what career she wanted to pursue despite her interest in pursuing Medical Technology. However, the immersion program helped her realize what her career should be and motivated her to study harder. This is because she was able to learn how to manage her time well, become more detail-oriented, and handle tasks under pressure.

Bea proposed making modifications to the program through increased collaboration between the institution and other organizations, the surveillance of companies to ensure students are guided effectively, and making sure tasks are relevant to the program that students wish to join.

In general, Bea's experience demonstrates how effective immersion can develop practical skills and career readiness among students.

In addition, Bea emphasized that proper guidance and structured supervision during immersion play a crucial role in shaping students' confidence and competence, as these allow learners to fully maximize the learning opportunities provided in the workplace environment.

Case 3: Charles the Curious

Charles the Curious conducted a two-week internship in a healthcare institution related to his intended program, Medical



Technology. In the first week, he helped with receptionist-related activities, including patient interaction, answering their questions, and assisting in filling out forms. In the second week, he was tasked with helping conduct laboratory tests like urinalysis, CBC, fecalysis, blood withdrawal, and laboratory preparation.

In his own words, Charles said that immersion provided him not only practical knowledge but also gave him more confidence than schooling could have done. Immersion provided him with actual hands-on training with laboratory machines and equipment. He was able to acquire hands-on training in conducting urinalysis, fecalysis, CBC, blood withdrawal, and other laboratory-related duties. Moreover, the immersion program also taught him about laboratory safety and etiquette.

Prior to immersion, Charles was undecided between studying nursing or psychology, which changed once he got immersed. His exposure to laboratory tests convinced him of his passion for medical technology. The immersion made him more confident in pursuing studies and his profession, and he believes that immersion is also important in preparing one for tertiary education.

The problems he faced were adjusting to the hectic atmosphere and learning how to use new gadgets. He overcame these problems by asking questions, focusing hard, and trying to repeat the activities until he gained confidence in the lab.

According to Charles, some changes that can be introduced to improve this internship program include aligning students with the course they need, offering practical experience, and guidance from strict yet encouraging mentors.

In conclusion, Charles' work immersion shows how beneficial it is to have practical exposure while helping one make career decisions and acquire professional attitudes.

Case 4: Diane the Dedicated

Diane the Determined undertook a two-week work experience at an electricity company in line with the college curriculum she would be pursuing in Electrical Engineering. In the first week, she went through orientation classes where she understood the company, studied the equipment, and learned the operating processes. In the second week, she obtained practical experience through maintenance processes, documentation, and handling of the day-to-day operations of the firm.

Diane stressed that the work experience enabled her to make connections between the theory she was studying and its application in the real world. Diane learned how to read technical diagrams, practice safety measures, and carry out maintenance processes, among other things, which she could not have done without undergoing the experience.

At first, Diane was unsure about what to choose between Electrical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. After experiencing the operations in the electrical department, she was interested in Electrical Engineering and found out what career path she would like to follow in the future. Learning about the operations on equipment maintenance helped Diane make sure that she had chosen the right career path. The challenges were related to adjusting to routine and operating within the professional setting successfully. To deal with them, she watched, asked many questions, followed instructions, and repeated procedures over and over again. This way, Diane could fully understand the professionalism needed for engineering.

To improve the program, Diane suggested that the rotations be provided through all departments to make students familiar with all operations. Diane stressed the role of mentors and practical exposure to skill development.

In general, from Diane's immersion experience, one can see that such a structured approach helps gain technical competency, learn discipline, make the right career choices, and prepare for college and career life.

Case 5: Ella the Observant

The observant Ella took part in a two-week-long work immersion at a healthcare facility related to her chosen college



course in Nursing. In the first week, Ella participated in front office work, organizing patient flow, handling routine questions, and arranging things like cotton balls. The second week was devoted to observations and assistance in office matters. Any hands-on procedures like measuring blood pressure or testing urine samples were out of the question, which is why the immersion was mainly observational.

Ella believes that through her immersion experience, she gained an understanding of the work processes of healthcare professionals as well as the skills necessary in the field. She saw how healthcare professionals handled large volumes of patients, kept a clean workplace, and adhered to safety measures. These observations showed Ella the importance of professionalism and patience in healthcare that would prove crucial in the future while studying nursing.

Prior to immersion, she was looking forward to becoming a nurse, but she had uncertainties regarding what the profession would entail. This immersion helped to affirm her decision as she witnessed the reality of being a healthcare professional that includes facing difficulties and challenges alongside rewards. Difficulties include dealing with too many patients at once, adhering to rules and regulations, and minimal participation in the practice aspect.

In her opinion, the best way to improve the internship would be through task distribution and guidance during the execution. She further advises including exposure to various departments or health facilities. Her advice is important and worth considering.

Generally, Ella's experience is an example of how immersion experiences in actual working environments help individuals to make informed career choices.

Additionally, Ella emphasized that even observational roles in immersion are valuable, as they still provide meaningful insight into workplace culture, professional behavior, and the responsibilities expected in a healthcare setting.

Case 6: Faith the Engaged Learner

Faith the Engaged Learner participated in a work immersion experience that lasted two weeks in relation to the program she wants to take up in Civil Engineering at college. During the first week, she attended lectures and viewed equipment used in generating electricity and its distribution process. In the second week, she engaged in doing actual work involving simple maintenance and equipment monitoring, as well as writing relevant documents.

Faith noted that the immersion experience helped her prepare for higher education as she was taught how to be disciplined, responsible, and detail oriented. Following strict schedules, putting on appropriate PPE, and complying with processes gave her insights into efficient and safe task management. She learned how to handle professional duties and how engineers perform their respective tasks. She felt encouraged to become an engineer in the future because of her immersion. Witnessing engineers' work and conducting simple maintenance activities made her understand more about engineering as a career and fueled her determination to become one in the future.

The problems that Faith encountered included having to follow schedules, safety measures, and travel distances. To address these challenges, she was able to comply with instructions and seek clarification where necessary, work cooperatively with other students, and adapt to the situation. Being guided effectively by mentors and staff facilitated the acquisition of appropriate attitudes and competencies in a technical area.

Faith recommended that the company should find solutions to problems of distance and traveling time, provide rotations in different departments or facilities, ensure effective task assignment, and provide guidance through proper mentoring from the staff. In summary, the case study reveals that structured on-the-job training is essential in building skills, confirming career choices, and cultivating necessary qualities.

Additionally, Faith emphasized that continuous exposure to real workplace environments strengthens students' confidence and better prepares them for the transition from academic learning to professional practice.

Case 7: Grace the Purposeful



Grace the Purposeful finished off the immersion by participating in a laboratory and office environment. Here, she was able to get hands-on as well as observational experiences. While on an internship, she helped with sorting laboratory supplies, participated in basic experiments, coded, did reports, and watched professionals conduct technical work. In this way, Grace was able to learn about the process and activities involved in the job.

Immersion, according to Grace, helped prepare her for university. It helped her become a responsible individual who is disciplined in terms of meeting deadlines. As such, she felt more confident than ever about joining college with the aim of pursuing a STEM-related course. Skills such as communication, time management, and problem-solving were enhanced through the internship. The immersion allowed Grace to have an insight into the area she wants to study. She got to see how the scientific concepts learned in school could be put into practice.

Grace encountered such difficulties as adapting to work settings, acquiring knowledge about new technical tasks, and working under time pressure. She managed to overcome those problems by observing and asking questions, as well as repeating certain activities and taking advice from mentors. It was possible for Grace due to the encouraging work setting.

On the whole, the period of work immersion contributed greatly to improving Grace's career decisions, preparedness for studying at college, and professional qualities.

In addition, Grace emphasized that structured guidance and meaningful task assignments during immersion can further enhance students' learning experiences and better prepare them for real-world professional environments.

Case 8: Hannah the Diligent

Hannah the Diligent finished work immersion in the professional setting, including laboratory and office. There, she got both observational and practical experience. Her responsibilities included assisting in doing simple things, being instructed, watching how professionals do things, and participating whenever possible. Despite the simplicity of these tasks, she was able to learn about the organization and performance of work in real-life situations.

According to Hannah, work immersion played a big role in preparing her for further studies. It taught her to be more responsible, confident, and conscious about requirements in the educational and professional worlds. Moreover, it taught her many new skills that cannot be learned in the classroom, such as effective communication, collaboration, patience, time management, and problem-solving.

Work immersion made it easier for Hannah to understand her career direction better. She could watch the practical realization of theory and see the skills necessary for successful careers in her field of study.

There were several issues encountered by Hannah while getting used to the environment and performing new tasks. These included the ability to ask questions, observe, and repeat procedures, which were instrumental in overcoming these problems.

Generally, work immersion contributed to Hannah's preparedness for university studies and future careers. She underscored the need for responsibility and patience in her activities. A longer period of immersion and the inclusion of more practical tasks together with a broader range of duties was suggested as additional means of improving the results.

Thus, Hannah the Diligent's experiences illustrate how useful guidance, involvement, and persistence in work immersion are in the development of important skills, confirmation of career preferences, and future success in academia and profession.

Similarities and Differences of their Experiences

Differences in Tasks. The tasks performed by the participants depended on their placement site. Students working in the health care sector or laboratories (Cases 1, 2, 3, 5) performed certain medical procedures like urine tests, full blood count



tests, fecalysis, blood extraction, and basic laboratory preparations. Ella performed mostly administrative tasks and watched how patients were treated without being directly involved. On the contrary, students placed in the engineering/STEM sector (Cases 4, 6, 7, 8) did technical and administrative tasks, including watching machines, performing maintenance tasks, preparing reports, and working in labs. Grace and Faith both did administrative and laboratory assistant tasks.

Similarities in Tasks. While there were some differences, each of the participants performed certain tasks, which included observation and practical involvement in them. Following instructions, helping staff members with the work, keeping documents, and applying theory in practice were common features of each student's work. Even simple or observational tasks (Ella's and Faith's experience) improved time management, sense of responsibility, discipline, and communication skills.

Differences in the Work Environment. The work environment differed from one placement to another. In healthcare facilities, the work environment was fast paced since it involved engaging patients and handling delicate biological materials, as illustrated by Anna, Bea, and Charles, where performing different activities at once was a major concern. The engineering/STEM-related placements featured rigid protocols, stringent guidelines, and standard procedures, such as maintenance observations, machine supervision, and wearing PPEs, according to Diane's and Faith's accounts. Grace and Faith viewed the work environment positively since it was conducive and collaborative; however, it took time and concentration to adjust to the new workflow and maintain professionalism.

Similarities in the Work Environment. All work environments were professional, offering real-world insight into professional requirements. Every placement had mentorship where staff members guided the students through their struggles and helped them complete tasks effectively.

Development of Skills Through Differences. The skills learned through immersion depended on the difference between the tasks and settings. Students majoring in healthcare obtained technical skills specific to their field, such as specimen handling, test procedures, microscopic slide analysis, and clinical practice procedures, while STEM students received skills related to working with equipment, its maintenance, analyzing technical information, and applying scientific principles to practical settings. Grace and Faith focused on improving organizational and administrative skills through report writing, helping with laboratory work, and communicating with staff members and clients. Ella the Observant acquired observation skills as well as interpersonal skills even without hands-on experience.

Transferable Skills Developed Similarly. At the same time, each student managed to learn and develop transferable skills, including managing time effectively, communication skills, working as part of the team, solving problems independently, being responsible, and demonstrating appropriate behavior. All students stressed the necessity of learning how to use theoretical knowledge in practice in order to understand how useful academic learning is in relation to their profession.

Difference in Challenges Experienced. The challenges experienced by the participants depended on the area involved and the type of task performed. Healthcare students were challenged by the need to cope with many patients, learn technical procedures, and perform in a fast-paced environment, whereas engineering students had to contend with stringent safety policies, technical aspects of the work, and rigid schedules, which took some getting used to. Grace and Faith found it difficult to cope with the new demands of working in a professional setting, while Ella the Engaged Learner found herself facing the added challenge of long commutes and stringent scheduling

Similarities in Challenges Experienced. While there were challenges in these areas of study, the commonality between the four individuals was that they were able to cope with these challenges by watching, asking questions, repeating procedures, and seeking advice from mentors and peers.

Differences in Career Effectiveness. The effect of immersion on the participants' career choices was different among them. Those participants who did not have career goals in mind like Anna, Bea, and Charles found that the immersion gave them insights into what they wanted to do in the future, particularly with regards to Medical Technology. Meanwhile, Diane, Ella, Grace, and Faith already knew what they wanted for their futures before taking part in the immersion experience.



Similarities in Career Effectiveness. All participants agreed that immersion helped them stay motivated in achieving their goals and provided them with clarity regarding professional expectations and daily duties in their professions. All students felt ready to continue higher education and pursue a profession.

Differences in Reflections and Recommendations. The reflections and recommendations made by the students depended on the type of experience they had. The healthcare students recommended that the placements be in line with the desired programs, more hands-on activities, and mentorship in the technical aspect of the field. On the other hand, the engineering/STEM students recommended that there be rotations through various departments, logistical consideration, and longer periods of immersion to ensure exposure to various techniques.

Similarities in Reflections and Recommendations. All participants believed that immersion should focus on practical experience, mentorship, skill acquisition, and professional experience. This was because all these aspects were necessary to prepare students for academic and professional challenges in their respective fields.

The Themes

The following are the themes that emerged from the analysis of the eight work immersion cases

Theme 1. Work immersion bridges academic learning and professional readiness through real-world exposure and practical skill development.

Theme 1 is on the importance of work immersion in helping bridge the gap between classroom learning and practical experience. Work immersion allowed the students to build practical skills, professionalism, and self-confidence required for success in their future careers and further studies. The students felt that through participating in practical activities, witnessing processes performed by professionals, and working according to work norms, they were able to use theory constructively. They were able to develop discipline, time management, communication, and problem-solving skills while building confidence and self-reliance in the professional world. Extracts are provided below:

CP1: *"We did a lot of things that really helped me build my knowledge in MedTech. And those kinds of knowledge are something that I cannot get in a school setting."*

CP2: *"Work immersion is extremely important because it bridges the gap between theory and practice."*

CP3: *"Traditional classes provide basic knowledge, but immersion exposes students to real work environments, equipment, and procedures."*

CP4: *"In school, we learned theory about electricity and basic engineering concepts, but at Isla Norte, I gained hands-on understanding of equipment, basic maintenance procedures, and operational workflows."*

CP4: *"Work immersion is extremely important because it gives students practical exposure to their chosen field. Observing equipment, maintenance procedures, and the workflow of a power facility allowed me to see how engineering concepts are applied in real life."*

CP6: *"The immersion teaches responsibility, discipline, and hands-on skills that make the transition to college much easier."*

CP7: *"Yes, it helped me develop skills that I did not fully gain in the classroom. For example, I improved my communication skills by interacting with staff and clients."*

From the statements above, students view work immersion as an important connection between academic knowledge gained in classrooms and applied knowledge in the real world. It is evident that school is the place where one gains theoretical knowledge, but through work immersion, one gets practical knowledge from direct interactions with tools, processes, and procedures related to one's field of study. Furthermore, gaining experience helps one acquire skills, professionalism, and discipline that help one understand concepts better, as well as prepare for future educational levels and career life.

The responses suggested that while it is relevant that we learned theories written in books and principles introduced by



scientists and inventors, real-world application of such theories is still considered the best when learning.

According to Sato (2025), approaches such as problem-based learning, simulation, internships, and community connections can play a role in helping students become better thinkers, problem solvers, collaborators, and communicators. In the same way, the respondents in this study have noted that engaging in work immersion, such as carrying out procedures in laboratories, helping patients, and engaging in the workplace, helped them learn practical skills and become more professionally equipped with knowledge regarding their careers.

Consistent with this, an investigation carried out by Simamora et al. (2025) showed that involvement in discussion, role play, and physically interactive task activities creates a vibrant learning atmosphere. The use of equipment and physical activity greatly improved the learning experience of the learners and their implementation. This evidence confirms the findings of the current study, showing that activities related to work immersion enable learners to build practical skills and communication abilities for their future careers in STEM areas.

Theme 2: Work immersion influences students' career decision-making and readiness for higher education.

The theme portrayed how being involved in actual work influences the students' decisions and preparation for university studies. As revealed by the students, being exposed to the workplace through observing and working on actual work-related activities helped them identify their interests and develop career objectives. The students gained practical skills, including time management, responsibility, communication, and collaboration, which enabled them to gain confidence in carrying out professional activities. The following are some of the utterances:

CP1: *"My work immersion helped me understand my career choice better because I saw how the job works in real life, especially in the laboratory setting where I was assigned. It showed me both the easy and difficult parts of the work."*

CP2: *"It kind of awakened me to things like that, and it pushed me to actually pursue the course. I ended up being decided after it."*

CP3: *"Yes, it clarified my choice. Seeing the real work in a lab helped me understand both the challenges and the rewarding parts."*

CP3: *"...it actually helped me appreciate the professionalism required in the field and strengthened my desire to pursue this career."*

CP5: *"While the large number of patients and diverse cases initially scared me, it also made me realize the importance of nurses and the impact they have on patient care. Observing both the challenging and routine aspects of healthcare made me more confident in pursuing nursing."*

CP6: *"This experience gave me practical knowledge and made me more excited and surer about pursuing Civil Engineering."*

These statements revealed that the students' engagement in work immersion was influential in defining their career choices. Being exposed to the realities of the workplace, either through laboratory or health care, made the students see firsthand the pros and cons of their chosen careers. By seeing the pressures, duties, and effects of their profession, the students had a better idea of what they wanted to do, thereby increasing their determination and conviction to follow through on their chosen careers.

Most of the responses pointed out that being exposed to the work immersion setting helped them familiarize themselves better with the industry they will be joining in the coming years. It made them see reality, not just fantasy. They saw the future.

As stated by Husain & Mahfoodh (2021), internships help the intern gain practical experience and knowledge about the professional setting, providing them with insights on the workplace's expectations and duties. In this regard, the current study's participants shared that work immersion helped them engage in realistic activities related to their careers, confirming or revising their career decisions while developing their confidence and autonomy in preparation for further education.



Conversely, work immersion programs were found to enhance leadership capabilities, self-efficacy, and communication skills amongst senior secondary school leavers, according to Borling et al. (2023). The above-mentioned literature is important since it helps to buttress the current study and shows that hands-on experience through work immersion has an impact on the development of professional and personal skills and plays a critical role in career decision-making.

Work immersion played an important part in influencing the choice of careers and preparing learners for future academic pursuits. Work immersion allows students to gain first-hand experience and become more confident and independent.

Theme 3. Challenges during work immersion foster students' adaptability and resilience.

It was because the theme highlighted how the problems the learners experienced when working on the job led them to become adaptable and resilient. The need to adjust to new settings, learn new skills, follow tight timetables, or manage rapid work pace forced them to find solutions and seek help. Such situations helped the learners understand how to deal with stress, adapt to new workplace conditions, and have faith in their capabilities.

CP1: *"I was culture shocked because I had never encountered anything like that before. For me right now, it's okay, because if I were to go back to that experience, I would not consider that a difficulty anymore."*

CP2: *"There were also tasks that required flexibility and the ability to work under pressure because a lot of patients were coming in, and it was very, very busy at that time. But eventually, I was able to adjust and overcome it."*

CP3: *"They didn't negatively affect me. If anything, they prepared me to work under pressure, follow instructions carefully, and be more disciplined."*

CP4: *"Initially, it felt overwhelming, but I gradually adapted to the expectations and became more confident in my tasks."*

CP5: *"Although it was a bit intimidating at first, these challenges actually made me more aware and mentally prepared for nursing school."*

CP8: *"Even though it was difficult at first, I learned how to adapt and improve. It helped me become more confident in handling responsibilities."*

These statements showed how problems faced during work immersion have turned out to be important learning opportunities that improved students' flexibility and resilience. At first, assignments, new surroundings, and rigid work practices may seem daunting or even frightening. But the students became accustomed to them by observing, posing inquiries, and undertaking their duties. This made them more assured, disciplined, and better able to deal with stress, as they came to realize that difficulties in practical settings could spur development and better equip them for subsequent schooling and career demands.

According to Alarilla (2024), working students perceive resilience in adverse conditions in two ways, namely balance and overcoming problems. These individuals attribute their resilience to tactics like capitalizing on their available resources and taking advantage of social networks. Likewise, respondents in the current study claimed that difficulties in work immersion increased their flexibility and endurance.

Furthermore, Ador et al. (2023) pointed out that the benefits of experiential learning, including work immersion, are instrumental in personal development and professional preparation. Similar results were obtained in the current study, where the respondents highlighted that dealing with problems while participating in the immersion process not only helps them become professionally prepared but also increases their confidence and resilience.

Theme 4. Improving work immersion requires better alignment with students' career interests and increased experiential learning opportunities.

This concept highlighted how work immersion became more effective when students were immersed in places that had something in common with the job they would do in the future. Linking activities with what students liked helped them develop skills and knowledge about the area they were interested in. In addition, the creation of opportunities to practice



ensured that they developed their technical skills, professional practices, and got ready for further study at colleges and universities.

CP1: *"I would suggest that they send students to places aligned with the program they want for their immersion, because it will spark their love to pursue the course."*

CP2: *"I think misalignment is a really big problem, but we can't really avoid it because here in Santa Fe, there are limited places for work immersion."*

CP3: *"I would suggest aligning students' placements with their intended programs whenever possible."*

CP5: *"I also think schools should partner with more companies or health facilities so students can see a wider range of work and learn more."*

CP6: *"Clear delegation of tasks and proper guidance from staff would make the immersion more productive."*

CP8: *"There should be more partnerships with different kinds of companies so that students will have more options on where to be deployed."*

From these quotes, it was evident that providing an environment where students can learn within their chosen field of interest makes them more motivated and increases their level of engagement. Mismatch in cases where it occurs may be inevitable because of the scarcity of other options available; however, it may make the entire process less effective. Students also noted that having structured guidance, including assignment of specific tasks, plays a critical role in learning.

According to the research conducted by Buenaventura (2025), immersion programs tend to be effective if the process of learning corresponds with the objectives students pursue in their careers. Likewise, participants of the current study found that immersion in accordance with what they planned to study in college, together with increased diversity of assigned tasks, promoted their learning.

Furthermore, Durante (2025) noted that it is crucial that mentorship, guidance, and exposure enable professional and personal development. In addition, the respondents indicated that the connection between immersion activities and their career goals, together with proper mentorship, helped them cope with future academic and professional obstacles. Based on these results, it could be argued that work immersion would become more productive if students had similar tasks and placements aligned with their future careers.

Furthermore, offering a variety of experiential activities allowed students to develop appropriate skills and feel confident about their academic and professional endeavors.

All in all, work immersion was deemed a significant learning approach that created a connection between learning in the classroom and practical application outside the classroom. Work immersion enabled learners to put theoretical knowledge into practice in the working environment to hone skills such as communication, teamwork, time management, problem-solving, discipline, and flexibility. By being exposed to various working environments, including healthcare, laboratories, and engineering workplaces, learners acquired a deeper understanding of the industry they wished to join.

Enhancement plan

Work immersion plays a critical component of senior high school education, providing students with the opportunity to connect classroom learning to real-world practices. To maximize its benefits, it is essential to examine how the program can be improved to ensure meaningful experiences for students. This enhancement plan outlines strategies to strengthen the effectiveness of work immersion, addressing key aspects such as skill development, career alignment, and mentorship, with the goal of supporting students' readiness for higher education and future professional roles.

Main Objectives

The main objective of the enhancement plan for work immersion is to improve students' readiness for higher education and future careers by providing meaningful, career-aligned placements, hands-on learning, and mentorship. It aims to



develop practical, professional, and interpersonal skills, while fostering confidence, discipline, and adaptability through real-world experiences.

Table 1.

Enhancement Plan Matrix

Objectives	Strategies / Activities	Persons Involved	Expected Outcomes
Align work immersion placements with students' career interests	Conduct career interest screening before deployment and match students with immersion sites related to their intended college program or career path	Work Immersion Coordinator, SHS Teachers, Guidance Counselor, Partner Institutions	Students are placed in relevant work environments that support career clarity and meaningful learning
Expand students' exposure to different workplace functions	Establish more partnerships with STEM-related institutions and allow departmental rotations or broader task exposure when possible	School Head, Work Immersion Coordinator, Partner Institutions	Students gain wider exposure to professional practices, workplace roles, and industry expectations
Strengthen mentorship and supervision during immersion	Assign workplace mentors/supervisors and implement regular monitoring, guidance, and feedback sessions throughout the immersion period	Workplace Supervisors, Work Immersion Coordinator, Subject Teachers	Students receive consistent support, improve adaptability, and develop professional competencies
Enhance students' practical, interpersonal, and professional skills	Provide pre-immersion orientation and training on communication, teamwork, workplace ethics, and basic technical skills relevant to placement sites	SHS Teachers, Work Immersion Coordinator, Guidance Counselor	Students become more prepared, confident, and capable of handling workplace responsibilities
Improve program and evaluation and continuous development	Conduct post-immersion reflection sessions, collect student feedback, and evaluate placement effectiveness to identify areas for improvement	Researchers, Work Immersion Coordinator, Students, Partner Institutions	The program is continuously improved based on students' experiences and feedback

CONCLUSION

Summary. The research focused on understanding the work immersion experiences of Grade 12 STEM students to determine how these immersion experiences impacted academic readiness, career choice decisions, and professional skill development. Using a multiple-case study design, the experiences of eight students were analyzed by focusing on what tasks they performed, how they handled challenges, and how they interacted within the workplace environment. The findings indicated that work immersion experience was important since it facilitated the transition from classroom to reality in the sense that it enabled students to hone skills, habits, and attitudes that were crucial for further learning and career advancement. Work immersion experience also helped students make informed decisions regarding career options and ensured readiness for post-secondary learning. Although challenges such as new tasks and quick performance were encountered, these challenges were effectively addressed using mentors and through the observation and practice method.

Implications. From the findings of this study, work immersion played an important role as an experiential method of learning that helped improve skills related to practical work, professional and social interaction while building up self-confidence, discipline, and readiness for university-level and later STEM career life. Experience enabled students to identify career aspirations, develop greater independence, and improve their ability to solve problems and adapt and persevere through difficulties. Common themes showed that undertaking activities, learning professional ways of doing things, and getting mentors all helped with professional development, while differences pointed out that experience should be



customized to suit the students' particular career paths. Difficulties experienced in adapting to hectic workplaces and learning new processes helped develop resilience.

To maximize the success of work immersion programs, it was suggested that the assignments given to students be properly matched with the courses that they would take so that they gain practical experience related to the same field. In addition, forming more partnerships and rotations among departments, as well as establishing mentorships and regular feedback sessions, allowed the development of greater technical expertise and interpersonal skills. All these factors ensured that students were well prepared for university life and career practice.

Reflections. *This research journey was both difficult and fruitful. Initially, the researcher found it exhausting because data gathering involved students' personal experiences, which required more patience and sensitivity. Not only that, but it was also challenging due to the need for more knowledge and skills in research, something that she had yet to master. But then, she came to realize the enormity of what there was to be learned—not just in terms of students' experiences but also on the reality of the implementation of the immersion program under the Department of Education. Being able to see the problems and strengths in the program helped her gain an appreciation of how government policies affected actual education programs. This study gave her renewed enthusiasm as a public-school teacher to do her best in her own community. Through this research, she came to realize how her contributions would enable her school to cope with its own share of problems and make a better experience out of the work immersion program.*

Recommendations. *Taking into consideration the results and conclusions obtained in this research, several recommendations were made to increase the efficiency of the work immersion program. In the first place, it was necessary to provide students with appropriate placements related to the college programs they would attend after graduation and to their career aspirations. As a result, the activities performed during work immersion promoted further skill development and career choice. In the second place, there was a need to create new collaborations between different industries and departments, which helped students obtain more experience with professional issues, including particular tasks. In the third place, mentorship and supervision were highly important for the development of skills necessary for professionals.*

Recommendations for future studies included conducting the same study in other senior high schools or regions to confirm findings.. The use of more sophisticated or mixed methods of data gathering gave researchers a better understanding of the participants' experiences and learning outcomes during immersion. Lastly, there was an opportunity for future methodological enhancements by increasing the number of respondents, lengthening the immersion period, or diversifying the industries that participated in the program.



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