



Building awareness, interest, and readiness towards college course through work immersion

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ABSTRACT

Work immersion is required before graduation for senior high school students that aims to prepare the students for college life, particularly for humanities and social sciences (HUMSS) students. Despite the restriction in face-to-face classes and prohibiting industry-based experience, teachers need to build the students' awareness, ignite their interest and uplift their readiness for college courses. So, teachers decided to implement work immersion via a blended modality wherein students experience school-based and online work immersion. This study aimed to build the HUMSS students' awareness, interest, and readiness for college courses. A practical action research design was utilized to measure the variables before and after the work immersion implementation. Hence, survey questionnaires and interviews were the data collection tools employed to collect both quantitative measures and qualitative descriptions of experiences. The findings show that the students have low awareness, interest, and readiness for their preferred college courses before implementing work immersion in a blended modality. However, after two months of implementation, all variables become high and significant differences exist before and after the implementation. The work immersion using a blended modality effectively increased students' awareness, interest, and readiness for college courses. However, they suggested having more webinars and activities, more learning materials, frequent face-to-face interactions, parents' involvement during the webinar, and a student committee for communication.

Keywords: awareness, college course, interest, readiness, work immersion

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INTRODUCTION

Work immersion as a required subject before graduation must be appropriately delivered to secure the work-related experience of the graduating students so that they are equipped with competencies and ready to face college life or job-related activities. However, industry-based work immersion is impossible due to the continuous spread of mutated coronavirus. Hence, the Philippine government permitted face-to-face school activities, limiting students' attendance. However, the Department of Education (DepEd) mandated the school to implement a flexible setup in the conduct of work immersion experience for the graduating students utilizing the available resources (DM-CI-2020-00085, 2020). Hence, high school students must undergo work immersion despite a health crisis.

Grade 12 students must experience work immersion in the second semester as part of the Philippine basic education curriculum. Work immersion provides a learning experience for the graduating students in the field of work related to their preferred college course on school premises relevant to the job market needs. Also, it develops relevant

students' skills (Acar, 2019; Mahaguay & Mahaguay, 2020) by giving them opportunities to apply their acquired knowledge, skills, and values from school. Also, work immersion is a realization of gained competencies and values learned from schooling that they use in real work experience (Victory Christian International School, 2016). Also, work immersion provides social interaction and application of learned competencies from school that the students need to face real-life situations (DepEd Order No. 30 s. 2017, 2017). It enhanced students' competence when they experienced work-related activities.

DepEd Order No. 30 s. 2017 (2017) mandates the school to implement 80 hours of work immersion activities under the guidance of the teacher and partner institution. However, due to the government restriction, DepEd restricts the implementation in school or at home. This situation is a tremendous challenge for the work immersion teachers to maximize work-related experiences following the government restrictions. Implementing work immersion under the blended modality is another challenge to face and deal with. Hence, education must continue whatever the challenge arises, utilizing the available resources and collaboration among stakeholders.

Through work simulation experiences, work immersion allowed the students to develop their professional competence (Lozada, 2017). These experiences teach the students to become proficient in their chosen field of interest. Experiencing work immersion is vital for the holistic development of the students (Rex Bookstore, 2018). So, work immersion, aside from being one of the specialized subjects in senior high school, must give valuable learning experiences aligned to the main goal of the K to 12 curriculum exits such as tertiary education, technical-vocational education, entrepreneurship, or work. On the other side, continuous improvement must be placed to increase the involvement of stakeholders in work immersion implementation (Onte, 2019).

Literature Review

Gafoor (2012) defines awareness as a person's ability to perceive, feel, or be conscious of an event, object or pattern. Awareness of a college course and career is essential to build among high school students. For instance, Ibrahim et al. (2014) made a descriptive study on the status of career awareness for public high schools in Kenya. They found that students aware of their preferred career so that they can make the right career decision. Career awareness in secondary schools is related to career decision-making. It shows that the student must be aware of their future career so that they can make a good decision toward it. Similarly, Glaser and Warick (2016) and Kroboth (2016) said that college awareness enables young people's minds to create expectations they might experience in college life.

Meanwhile, Gracida (2019) integrated college awareness in elementary schools using a capstone project. She used pre-survey and post-survey methods to measure the gained awareness and knowledge. She found that it was crucial to integrate college awareness at an early age. Students became more engaged and developed a positive attitude toward their future careers. So, if college awareness benefits elementary students, it will benefit more senior high school students. Hence, teachers must open the minds of the students about college courses so that they become aware of what kind of decisions they need to make relevant to their preferred profession someday.

On the other hand, Hidi and Renninger (2006) defined interest as an intention to engage or have a predisposition to the content. Students' interest is essential to consider in choosing a college course. Salonen et al. (2018) studied students' career awareness and interest promotion through career-related instruction. They found that students could acquire knowledge and skills in future careers and be aware of expectations, the learning environment, and the importance of what they learned in high school. Hence, students became more interested in their college and careers.

College readiness, as defined by Common Core State Standards (CCSS), pertains to "readiness to take college-level classes" (Klasik & Strayhorn, 2018, p. 2). In the study context, college readiness means preparing and equipping the students with the knowledge, skills, and attitude to enter their chosen college courses to face the challenges. It is vital to develop the college readiness of high school students because they are unaware of the skills necessary for college (Leeds & Mokher, 2019). So, it is the task of the work immersion teacher to prepare the graduating high school students in entering college life by equipping the students with the skills and right attitude towards higher education. Students must know what college course skills and attitudes they need to pursue tertiary education.

One of the curriculum exits the K to 12 graduates may take is entering a college course. However, students must be ready and prepared before they pursue higher education. That is why work immersion has been created to guide the students and prepare them to become ready to face the challenges. Students' readiness for college courses requires much preparation and building cognitive strategies, including contextual awareness such as the college environment that will prepare the high school students (Gee et al., 2019). The school must early expose the students to career options and prepare them for college and careers (Jimenez, 2020). So, work immersion is an excellent avenue to open the students' eyes to the world of higher education. Work immersion teachers must prepare students to face challenges in any college course.

The literature above justified the relevance of work immersion in the student's college life preparation. Thus, work immersion must prepare the students for college admission by increasing their awareness, interest, and readiness levels. However, limited studies have been conducted on the extent of work immersion implementation (Vecino & Doromal, 2020). Previous research on work immersion focused on technical vocational livelihood (TVL) track (Catelo, 2020; Figueras & Mendoza, 2020; Mahaguay & Mahaguay, 2020) and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) track (Acar, 2019; Acut et al., 2019). Fewer studies have been conducted about how work immersion builds the students' awareness, interest, and readiness for college courses, particularly among humanities and social sciences (HUMSS) students. The said students intend to pursue college-level education. Hence, work immersion for HUMSS students aims to create learning opportunities to integrate what the students acquired from learning areas through culminating activities that exhibit authentic performances and products like creative portfolios, concept papers, and reflections (DM-CI-2020-00085, 2020).

On the other hand, the San Pedro Relocation Center National High School–Main Campus offers a senior high school program under academic and TVL tracks. Under the academic track, HUMSS is one of the strands offered. The students in this strand were expected to have a work immersion in the partner institutions. However, based on the restriction imposed by the Philippine government, work immersion must be done in school and online. The big issue was how to implement work immersion properly so that the student's college awareness, interest, and readiness are boosted despite the current situation.

The researchers sought how the work immersion implementation under blended learning helped the students increase their awareness, interest, and readiness in their preferred college courses. This study measured the variables before and after the implementation and interviewed the students to get their actual experiences. Hence, students' suggestions for improving the work immersion implementation were sought as a basis for refining the intervention.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study leaned on the experiential learning theory that posits that learning happens through experiences (Stirling et al., 2016). The students need to experience work immersion to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values that professionals must possess, which can be gained through concrete experiences (Roberts, 2012). Most students plan to pursue higher education, giving them better employment opportunities and higher salaries (Catelo, 2020). So, the work immersion teacher must keep the students aware of what college courses they need to take aligned with their professional dreams.

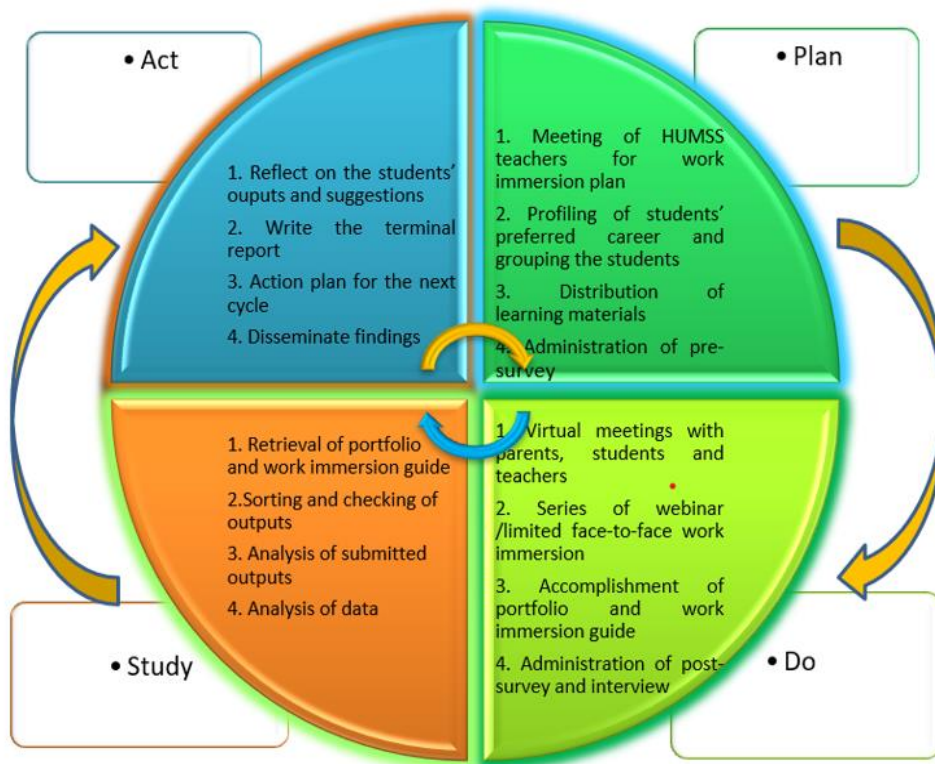


Figure 1. Conceptual paradigm (Source: Authors)

Hence, they must be ready for college admission and face challenges in pursuing college courses. The student's interest and passion for pursuing a degree course are enhanced during work immersion implementation. On the other hand, work immersion experiences are concrete experiential learning that capacitates the students in the field of work, higher education, or skills development (Dela Cruz & Permejo, 2020). Work immersion experiences make the students gain skills of communication, punctuality, proactivity, reliability, and professionalism (Acut et al., 2019)

Figure 1 presents the plan-do-study-act (PDSA) model of action research employed in the study originated from the work of Walter Shewhart and Edward Deming (Taylor et al., 2014). It started with the HUMSS teachers' meeting to plan the work immersion implementation, including the learning materials. Then, profiling students' preferred college courses and grouping them were considered. Work immersion materials were distributed immediately, and the pre-survey was administered via Google Form.

During implementation, virtual orientation was done with the parents, students, and teachers to disseminate how the work immersion would go on and what was expected from them. Then, a series of webinars were conducted for those who chose the online modality, while a series of face-to-face school-based work immersion experiences were given to those willing to go to school. Also, the students were instructed to accomplish the work immersion portfolio and guide activities by the end of the implementation. Post-survey questionnaires and interviews were administered to elicit data on how work immersion increases students' awareness, interest, and readiness in their preferred college courses.

In the post-implementation, the work immersion portfolio and guide were retrieved in school by the end of the fourth quarter period or via Google classroom submission. Students' outputs were sorted and

checked by the teacher. Then, submitted outputs and data analyses were done immediately to arrive a reliable data. Teachers' reflections were done based on the students' outputs and suggestions. A terminal report was written accordingly, and an action plan was crafted for the next action research cycle, considering the dissemination and advocacy plan.

Research Questions

This study aimed to build the awareness, interest, and readiness of grade 12 HUMSS students toward their preferred college courses through work immersion under a blended learning modality.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How can students be described in terms of sex, age, and preferred college course?
2. What is the level of awareness, interest, and readiness of grade 12 HUMSS students for their preferred college course before and after work immersion?
3. Is there a significant difference in the level of awareness, interest, and readiness on preferred college courses before and after work immersion?
4. How work immersion increases the students' awareness, interest, and readiness for their preferred college course?
5. What are the students' suggestions to improve work immersion in increasing students' awareness, interest, and readiness for their preferred college course?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study utilized a practical action design following the PDSA model to determine if the student's level of awareness, interest, and

Table 1. Reliability indices using Cronbach's alpha

Variable	Number of items	α	Interpretation
Awareness	7	.930	Excellent
Interest	7	.927	Excellent
Readiness	7	.944	Excellent

readiness increased before and after the implementation of work immersion under blended learning. Practical action research was the most appropriate design to determine how a work immersion influences the students' awareness, interest, and readiness for a preferred college course, which is one of the objectives of work immersion for grade 12 students. Practical action research focuses on addressing the specific problem experienced by the practitioners (Creswell, 2009).

Participants of the Study

The participants were grade 12 HUMSS students who underwent work immersion under blended learning for the second semester of the school year 2021-2022. The said students were expected to have industry-based work experience, but due to health crises, this was done in school and online via a blended modality. So, work immersion teachers devised how to deliver work immersion experience among students by utilizing online platforms, printed materials, and school facilities. The survey respondents were 181 grade 12 HUMSS students who underwent work immersion under blended learning in San Pedro Relocation Center National High School–Main campus. Instead of having work immersion in the partner industry, online and school-based work immersion were implemented. Hence, twenty participants voluntarily joined in the interview to have qualitative data purposively selected via phone or face-to-face.

Research Instrument

The study employed a survey questionnaire via Google Form to elicit student's awareness, interest, and readiness level in their preferred college course. Some items were adopted from Salonen et al. (2018), DepEd Order No. 30 s. 2017 (2017), and DM-CI-2020-00085 (2020) with some modifications to make statement suited to our study. Hence, permission was secured as part of the protocol. The first draft has eight statements per variable answerable on a scale of 1 to 6, plus three questions about the level of awareness, interest, and readiness. Also, demographic profiles such as sex, section, age, area of interest, and preferred college course were included. The three head teachers validated the said questionnaire to establish the content validity. Their suggestions such as removing unnecessary statements, simplifying sentences, grammar and parallelism were strictly followed. Then, the revised version was submitted to validators again to seek their approval.

The final version has seven demographic variables such as name, section, age, sex, area of interest, preferred college course and work immersion teacher, three questions for the level of awareness, interest, and readiness, and seven statements per variable answerable by a scale of 1 very strongly disagree to 6 very strongly agree.

Table 1 shows the reliability indices of the questionnaire. The said questionnaire was excellent to use since the internal reliability indices exceeded .900, which means the responses were consistent. Onyefulu and Roofe (2019) claimed that the acceptable value for Cronbach's alpha lies between 0.7 to 0.95. Also, the reliability indices show a positive correlation among the items per variable (Cristobal & Cristobal, 2017).

To sum up, the survey questionnaire was valid and reliable, which were good characteristics of a research instrument.

Also, the teachers conducted semi-structured interviews via phone calls and face-to-face modalities to elicit qualitative data on how the work immersion increased the level of awareness, interest, and readiness of the students toward their preferred college course and suggestions to improve the work immersion implementation. Seven-item interview guide questions were constructed and validated by the three head teachers. They carefully examined each item and suggested improvements to the questions, like making them simple but powerful. All suggestions were considered in the final version of the interview guide questions.

Data Gathering

Permission from the school head was secured first before the conduct of action research. After the grant of permission, a pre-survey was administered online for two weeks to measure the students' prior awareness, interest, and readiness in their preferred college courses. Work immersion teachers were asked for their assistance in the distribution of the survey link. Their voluntary participation was highly appreciated since they directly interacted with the students. After the two months of work immersion implementation under blended learning, a post-survey was administered online to see the increment in the students' awareness, interest, and readiness in preferred college courses for two weeks with the assistance of work immersion teachers. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit qualitative data in response to research questions five and six. Moreover, to establish the credibility of data, member checking was done to ensure the accuracy and completeness of qualitative data.

Birt et al. (2016) claimed that member checking could be done by returning the data analysis and transcript to the participants to seek their conformity. Hence, the participants were instructed to check the completeness and truthfulness of the data based on what they experienced during work immersion.

The first researcher was not an immersion teacher assigned to administer the survey questionnaire, conduct data analysis, and write the whole research report. In contrast, the last two researchers were the work immersion teachers who implemented the program and collected data through interviews. Their personal biases, such as students performing well in the implementation, total students' participation, and insights, were set aside to avoid data contamination. Similarly, their influences were not used to require the students to finish the students' participation and render good answers in the interviews.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations such as informed consent and assent, data confidentiality, voluntary involvement, secured permission, and justice must be established in any research (Stockemer, 2019; Vaccaro & Lambie, 2007). So, the researchers sought the school head's permission before the study and secured parental permission by sending informed consent and assent form.

The students' participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw without consequences. Also, they did not receive any favor in exchange for their participation. Hence, participants' identities and data collected were treated with the utmost confidentiality for their protection. Moreover, the research report, including the data, was restored to the researcher's computer for three years only. However, the research

Table 2. Homogeneity of variances using Levene’s test and normality test using Shapiro-Wilk

Variable	Levene’s test			Shapiro-Wilk				
	Statistic	df ₁	df ₂	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.	
Pre-survey	Awareness	.002	1	179	.968	.900	181	.000
	Interest	1.362	1	179	.245	.892	181	.000
	Readiness	.003	1	179	.954	.896	181	.000
Post-survey	Awareness	3.204	1	179	.075	.948	181	.000
	Interest	4.186	1	179	.042	.920	181	.000
	Readiness	3.324	1	179	.070	.939	181	.000

Table 3. Demographic profile of the respondents in the survey

Variables	Frequency	%
Sex		
Female	111	61.30
Male	70	38.70
Age		
17-19	155	85.60
20-22	23	12.70
23-25	3	1.70
Preferred college course		
Business management	22	12.15
Criminology	43	23.77
Communication arts	13	7.18
Education	40	22.10
Hospitality management	9	4.97
Information technology	9	4.97
Political science	6	3.31
Psychology	28	15.47
Tourism	11	6.08
Total	181	100.00

report was committed to sharing in school meetings, conferences, and journal publications.

Data Analysis

For quantitative data analysis, the study used frequency, percentage, and median to describe the quantitative data, Shapiro-Wilk for normality of data, Levene’s test for homogeneity of variances, Wilcoxon signed-rank test test for the significant difference in the student’s level of awareness, interest, and readiness before and after the work immersion implementation, Kruskal-Wallis H test and Mann-Whitney U test for significance difference based on demographic variables. Statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) version 23 was used for computation, while thematic analysis was employed for qualitative data from the interview. Qualitative data were reduced to find patterns in the experiences as descriptions called themes (Given, 2008).

Table 2 depicts the homogeneity of variances using Levene’s and normality tests using Shapiro-Wilk as requirements before using any inferential statistics (Hanusz & Tarasińska, 2015). It shows that the quantitative data did not resemble a normal distribution by looking at the p-value (.000), which is lower than the significance level of .05. However, the variances are homogeneous since the p-values from Levene’s test are more remarkable than alpha .05. Since the normality of data failed to hold, it justifies the use of non-parametric tests of difference, notably the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, Kruskal-Wallis H test, and Mann-Whitney U test for a significant difference. These non-parametric tests were used to determine the significant difference in the pre-survey and post-survey responses, which shows discrete variables that do not ask for normality of data (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

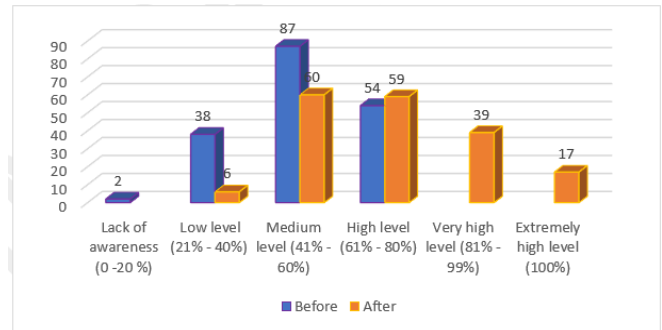


Figure 2. Student’s level of awareness in preferred college courses before & after work immersion implementation (Source: Authors)

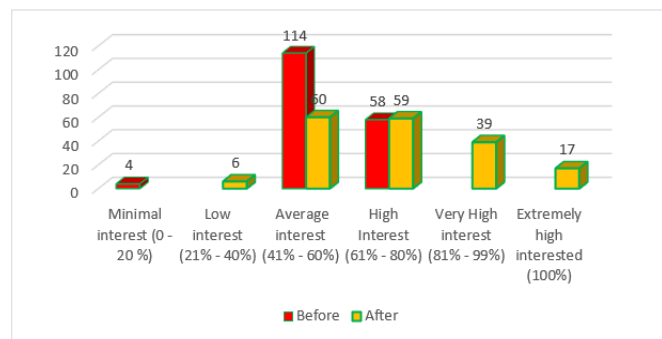


Figure 3. Student’s level of interest in preferred college courses before & after work immersion implementation (Source: Authors)

RESULTS

Table 3 shows the participants’ frequency in terms of sex, age, and preferred college courses. Most of the participants were female aged 17 to 19 years old. They preferred to take criminology, followed by education and psychology. A smaller number of students wanted to take political science, information technology, and hospitality management in college.

Figure 2 shows the students’ awareness level of their preferred college courses. It can be depicted from Figure 2 that work immersion under blended learning increased the students’ level of awareness of college courses. They became highly aware of the college course, one of the goals of work immersion implementation. Building college awareness makes students’ minds anticipate expectations about college life (Glaser & Warick, 2016; Kroboth, 2016), which is vital for them to be more prepared for possible challenges they might face someday.

Figure 3 presents the student’s level of interest in their preferred college courses. It shows that their interest level increased after the work immersion implementation. Before the work immersion implementation, most students had average interest, while their

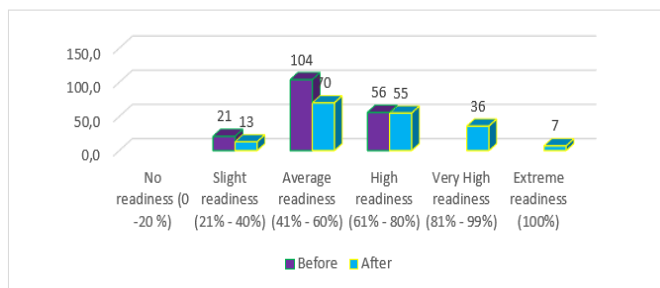


Figure 4. Student's level of readiness in their preferred college courses before & after work immersion implementation (Source: Authors)

interest increased after the implementation. It implies that the work immersion helped the students to become more interested in their preferred college courses. Many of them have a high interest in pursuing college courses after graduation. The career-related instruction during work immersion promotes college interest, similar to the findings of Salonen et al. (2018).

The student's level of readiness in their preferred college courses is presented in **Figure 4**. As depicted in **Figure 4**, the student's level of readiness increased after the implementation of work immersion. Before the work immersion implementation, many students had average readiness, while after the implementation, many of them increased their readiness. It means that work immersion under blended learning helped the students to become ready to face college life. Work immersion experience exposed students to various career options and prepared them for college, similar to Jimenez's (2020) findings.

Table 4 shows students' awareness of preferred college courses. It shows that the work immersion implementation helped the students to increase their awareness. They gained clarity about the courses they want to pursue, including their expectation from them, the learning environment in college, and what precisely the college course is all about. Also, they were aware of the importance and application of what they learned from senior high school, which they can use in college. Hence, they were aware of ethical principles in dealing with the college requirements. If the students know a college course, they can make a good career decision (Ibrahim et al., 2014). The findings above justify the effect of work immersion in uplifting the students' awareness of college courses.

The student's interest in their preferred college courses is presented in **Table 5**. It shows their interest in their preferred college course increased after the work immersion implementation. Students were highly interested in seeing themselves as competent professionals someday since they were interested in their preferred college courses. They were passionately dedicated to learning, developing skills and knowledge relevant to the job market, applying what they have learned in school, and experiencing relevant training. All of these were manifested through their active involvement during work immersion. It means that the work immersion implementation helped the students boost their interest in college courses, similar to the findings of Salonen et al. (2018).

It can be gleaned from **Table 6** that the students were ready for their preferred college courses. Their readiness was increased due to the work immersion implementation. They demonstrated their knowledge

Table 4. Student's awareness in preferred college courses (PCCs) before & after work immersion implementation

Statement	Before		After	
	Median	Interpretation	Median	Interpretation
1. At this moment, I know what all about my PCC is.	3	Disagree	4	Strongly agree
2. It is clear to me what course to enroll in college.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
3. I am aware of expectations concerning my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
4. I am aware of learning environment related to my college course.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
5. I am aware of importance & application of what I learned in senior high school concerning my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
6. I am aware of how I will apply my knowledge & skills in performing college course-related activities.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
7. I am aware of proper way of applying ethical principles dealing with requirements of my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree

Table 5. Student's interest in preferred college courses (PCCs) before & after work immersion implementation

Statement	Before		After	
	Median	Interpretation	Median	Interpretation
1. I participated actively in work immersion activities as a sign of my interest in my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
2. I am interested in my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
3. I showed my passion & dedication to learning more in my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
4. I am highly interested in applying theories & principles learned during work immersion.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
5. I am highly interested in experiencing relevant training in an actual work area as part of college course.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
6. I am highly interested in developing my knowledge & skills relevant to job market needs of my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
7. I am highly interested to see myself in future as a competent professional in my PCC.	2	Strongly disagree	6	Very strongly agree

Table 6. Student's readiness in preferred college courses (PCCs) before & after work immersion implementation

Statement	Before		After	
	Median	Interpretation	Median	Interpretation
1. I can demonstrate my knowledge & skills in communication & human relation related to my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
2. I can show good attitudes, work habits, & an appreciation for work related to my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
3. I can demonstrate practical & relevant skills under guidance of my work immersion teacher.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
4. I can apply my skills learned & values based on ethical work principles relevant to my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
5. I can create a comprehensive portfolio as evidence of my acquired competencies related to my PCC.	3	Disagree	4	Agree
6. I am ready to face challenges of college life related to my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
7. I am ready to prepare my credentials for college admission related to my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree

Table 7. Wilcoxon signed-rank test for significant difference in student’s level of awareness, interest, & readiness before & after work immersion implementation

Before vs. after	Test statistic	p-value	Decision
Awareness	-10.682	.000	Significant
Interest	-11.392	.000	Significant
Readiness	-10.786	.000	Significant

and skills in communication and human relation, showed proper work ethics, and applied skills and relevant values. The students gained communication skills and professionalism similar to the findings of Acut et al. (2019). Also, they were prepared to face the challenges of college life. They can produce a creative portfolio to prove their competence and prepare credentials for college admission. Developing college readiness is crucial in making the students aware of the necessary skills for college (Leeds & Mokher, 2019). Equipping the students with the skills vital in college life is like empowering them to survive with hindrances and roadblocks that need to pass.

Table 7 shows the significant difference in the student’s awareness, interest, and readiness level in their preferred college courses using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test before and after the work immersion implementation. The p-value of .000 signifies the existence of a significant difference before and after. It means the work immersion implementation increases the students’ awareness, interest, and readiness levels in their preferred college courses, which is one of the objectives of the senior high school curriculum. It implies that the implementation was influential in helping students prepare for their preferred college courses.

Figure 5 presents the effect of work immersion on the students’ awareness, interest, and readiness for college courses. Through work immersion, students acquire knowledge and skills relevant to their preferred college course, broadening their perspectives on the college. Building college awareness makes the students more engaged, which creates a positive attitude for a future career (Gracida, 2019). Hence, online and face-to-face interactions increased their communication and social skills. Also, they became motivated to pursue their preferred college courses and decided to finish a degree, hoping to experience more relevant work immersion in college. In terms of readiness, students become prepared to face college courses since they know what is expected from them once they enroll in a specific course. Similarly, they were inspired to pursue their dream course and ready to face challenges.

The words of the participants support the findings above.

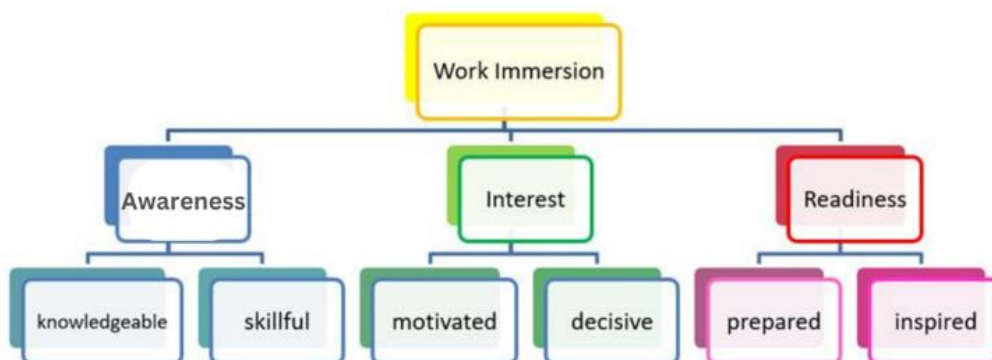


Figure 5. Effect of work immersion in increasing students’ awareness, interest, & readiness in the preferred college courses (Source: Authors)

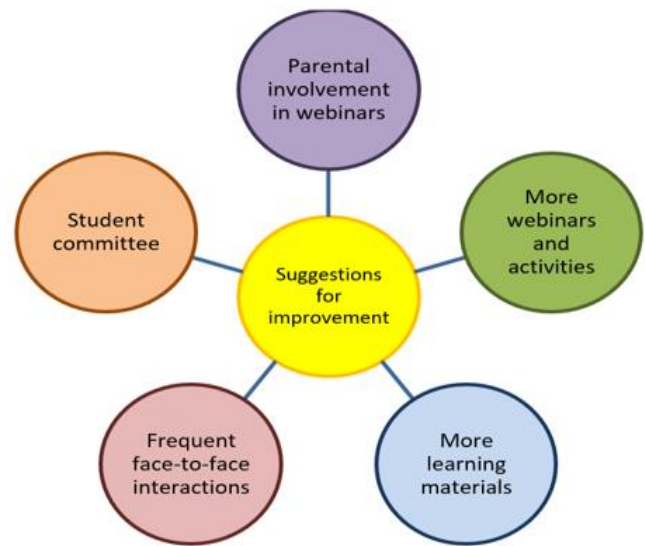


Figure 6. Students’ suggestions for improving work immersion implementation (Source: Authors)

“Lessons from work immersion helped me become more knowledgeable in a college course I will choose. The webinar was able to inspire us from the speakers’ experiences”– Participant 9.

“Work immersion prepared me for what to expect from a college course, motivated me, and challenged me that my preferred college course is not easy to learn about”–Participant 17.

Figure 6 depicts the students’ suggestions to improve the implementation of work immersion under blended learning. Students suggested more webinar sessions and activities increase their awareness and readiness for their preferred college courses. They ask for more learning materials focused on the area of interest that will boost the eagerness to learn more about college life. Hence, they ask for frequent face-to-face interactions to improve their social and oral communication skills and a student committee that will reach out to every student in group activities aside from the teacher. In addition, they requested to involve the parents during the webinar to enlighten them about the college courses suited to their children and aligned to the senior high school track and strand.

The words of the participants support the findings above.

"There must be more face-to-face classes when the interaction between the teacher and students is possible. The students become engaged, and at the same time, it will lead them to take the college course they want"—Participant 3.

"I suggest the parents/guardians involved in the discussion about the possible course for the senior high STEM, HUMSS, or TVL. So, if they have an incoming grade 11 child, they can discuss it with their child. There are meetings where the parents must also be involved even in webinars so that if they are confused, they can also receive knowledge regarding the college course"—Participant 14.

DISCUSSIONS

Work immersion under blended learning aims to prepare the students to experience the work environment with the guidance of work immersion teachers. Also, it aims to prepare the students for tertiary education for those who choose to pursue degree courses. As implementers of work immersion, the teachers must effectively deliver this program (Vecino & Doromal, 2020) while dealing with the demands brought by the global pandemic. Through the work immersion implementation under blended learning, HUMSS graduates became more knowledgeable and skillful about the college courses, more interested in pursuing their dreams, and ready to face challenges. The students' competencies and skills were developed by work immersion (Gamboa et al., 2020). The work immersion experiences honed the students' values and skills (DepEd Order No. 30 s. 2017, 2017). They produced creative portfolios and concept papers and conducted their planned webinar as the manifestation of their acquired competencies. Students' awareness of a college course enlightens their minds about what college course they need to pursue and what skills and the right attitude are needed to excel. Building college awareness means opening the student's minds to various courses and expectations from them as college students. It is crucial for high school students since most of them plan to pursue tertiary education, which opens them to better employment opportunities with higher salaries (Catelo, 2020). Thus, through the work immersion experience, college awareness becomes higher due to student-teacher interactions and webinars with speakers from the fieldwork.

On the other hand, building college interest increases the students' passion for learning more, development of skills, and eagerness to experience training. Through active involvement in work immersion activities, students become highly interested in building their knowledge and skills related to their preferred college courses. Their passion and interest in pursuing college courses are enhanced after the work immersion experience. Also, students' college readiness prepares them for college life. The work immersion experience prepares the students to face challenges once they enter the college environment.

The researcher admitted some of the lapses they need to improve for the subsequent work immersion implementation. First, there must be more time for implementation, especially in face-to-face interactions. Second, an immediate online meeting must be done frequently to assess whether students have acquired the target competencies. Third, specific activities should be based on the student's area of interest rather than general activities for all HUMSS students. Fourth, review and revise the work immersion portfolio and guide

aligned to a specific area of interest. Fifth, encourage more frequent consultation with parents and possible industry partners. However, in the lens of experiential theory, work immersion capacitates the students in skills development and higher education (Dela Cruz & Permejo, 2020). Through work immersion, students experienced how to deal with the client, proper work ethics, planning and conducting webinars, and simulated work experience. Their experiences equipped them with knowledge, skills, and proper attitude toward college life and ignited their interest in finishing a degree.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study aimed to build the awareness, interest, and readiness of grade 12 HUMSS students toward their preferred college courses through work immersion under blended learning. The student's awareness, interest, and readiness for college courses were low before the work immersion implementation. However, after the implementation, they all increased, and significant differences exist before and after. It means that the students' awareness, interest, and readiness for college were built through work immersion, which is one of the end goals of the senior high school curriculum. Also, a significant difference in awareness and interest levels was established based on a preferred college course. Students who preferred an education course got the highest awareness and interest levels, while those who preferred a criminology course got the lowest awareness and interest levels.

The work immersion experiences made the students knowledgeable about the college course requirements, expectations, and skills needed. They became skillful in communication and socialization, which are essential attributes of HUMSS graduates. Hence, they became more motivated and decisive to pursue a degree course and expected to experience more work immersion in college. Moreover, they were ready and inspired to face the challenges of college life. Meanwhile, to increase the student's awareness, interest, and readiness, the students suggested having more webinars and activities with parental involvement, more learning materials, frequent face-to-face interaction between the teacher and students, and a student committee that constantly communicated with each student.

The study was limited to one school with four sections since the study's nature was action research. The work immersion implementation under blended learning was done for two months. So, it is suggested to have a similar study in other schools for the more extended implementation period considering different research designs to investigate the students' benefits from work immersion. Hence, more face-to-face interactions, if possible, and all student suggestions will be considered for the next study cycle.

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