

ENHANCING WORK IMMERSION AND LEARNING EXPOSURE
PROGRAM: A RESEARCH-BASED PLAN FOR SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL
OF HOLY ANGEL UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This study examined the needs, gaps, and opportunities for improving of the Work Immersion and Learning Exposure Program of Holy Angel University (HAU) Senior High School and proposed a research-based enhancement plan. A qualitative, exploratory-descriptive research design was employed using purposive sampling to select information-rich participants who were directly involved in the program. Participants included 20 Grade 12 students from the ABM, STEM, HUMSS, and TVL strands who had completed the work immersion, five faculty supervisors, one program coordinator, and ten industry supervisors selected based on their supervisory and implementation roles. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, open-ended student questionnaires, reflection logs, and institutional document analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis framework.

Findings revealed nine interrelated themes organized around three objectives: (1) program gaps and challenges, including limited hands-on activities, restricted real-world exposure, and financial barriers; (2) student needs and priorities, such as structured industry mentorship, skills training, employment process simulations, and teamwork development; and (3) enhancement strategies, including job shadowing and strand-aligned work immersion opportunities. These findings informed the development of both short-term and long-term interventions aimed at strengthening industry-academe partnerships, institutionalizing mentorship, enhancing career readiness, and ensuring program sustainability. The study concludes that qualitative, stakeholder-driven evidence is essential for aligning senior high school work immersion programs with employability and workforce readiness outcomes.

Keywords: Work Immersion, Learning Exposure, Senior High School Students, Holy Angel University

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Introduction

The implementation of the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum under the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act 10533) institutionalized Work Immersion and Learning Exposure as a culminating and required component of Senior High School (SHS) education in the Philippines. The program aims to provide Grade 12 learners with authentic opportunities to apply academic learning in real-world settings, develop employability-oriented soft skills, and align discipline-specific competencies with workforce demands. In support of this mandate, DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2017 emphasizes that Work Immersion and Learning Exposure should prepare learners for both higher education and immediate employment through structured interaction with actual workplace environments. Recent DepEd implementation reports further underscore immersion as a key strategy for strengthening school–industry alignment and workforce readiness in the post-pandemic educational landscape.

Despite these policy intentions, empirical studies and institutional assessments continue to reveal persistent challenges in the implementation of Work Immersion and Learning Exposure programs. These include limited and uneven industry partnerships, misalignment between student strand specializations and placement opportunities, financial barriers to student participation, and inconsistent mentorship and supervision mechanisms. The COVID-19 pandemic

intensified these issues by necessitating simulated or school-based immersion models, further exposing gaps in experiential authenticity, industry alignment, and employability preparation.

While existing studies largely focus on describing implementation challenges or assessing student satisfaction, there remains a limited body of research that systemically examines learner experiences to inform the design of a comprehensive, research-based enhancement plan that integrates both Work Immersion and Learning Exposure within a single institutional framework. In particular, there is a scarcity of qualitative investigations that translate students' lived experiences, needs, and contextual constraints into actionable, sustainable program interventions aligned with DepEd policy and industry expectations.

Recognizing this gap, Holy Angel University (HAU) established a Work Immersion Office to professionalize and strengthen program delivery for its Senior High School department. Anchored in the university's mission of holistic formation, the HAU Work Immersion and Learning Exposure framework emphasizes industry partnership development, values integration, and student-centered experiential learning. This study responds to the identified research gap by examining the qualitative experiences of SHS learners and stakeholders to generate a research-based plan aimed at enhancing the effectiveness, relevance, and sustainability of the Work Immersion and Learning Exposure Program.

Objectives

This study aims to analyze and enhance the Work Immersion and Learning Exposure Program at Holy Angel University Senior High School by:

1. Identifying the gaps and challenges experienced by SHS students in the implementation of the Work Immersion and Learning Exposure Program;
2. Determining student needs and priorities related to career readiness, practical training, and industry mentorship;
3. Proposing short-term and long-term, research-based interventions to strengthen the Work Immersion and Learning Exposure Program.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the professionalization and continuous improvement of the Work Immersion and Learning Exposure Program at HAU-SHS and similar educational institutions.

For students, the findings support the design of more meaningful, strand-aligned immersion and exposure experiences that enhance employability, self-efficacy, and career readiness. For educators and program administrators, the study provides evidence-based insights to guide curriculum integration, mentorship structures, monitoring systems, and partnership development. Industry partners benefit from clearer engagement models that promote mutually beneficial and sustainable school–industry collaboration.

For policymakers and educational leaders, this study offers data-driven recommendations aligned with DepEd policies and current workforce demands, contributing to informed decision-making at the institutional and system levels. Finally, the study addresses a gap in the literature by extending qualitative scholarship on Work Immersion and Learning Exposure through a research-based planning lens, emphasizing equity, sustainability, and experiential learning effectiveness in Senior High School education.

Literature Review

The Work Immersion and Learning Exposure Program is a core component of the Philippine Senior High School curriculum mandated under DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2017, designed to enhance students' employment readiness through authentic workplace engagement (Department of Education, Schools Division Office of Catanduanes, 2023). Despite its institutionalization, empirical literature consistently indicates uneven implementation across schools and regions, particularly in Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) contexts (Vibal & Madrideo, 2022). Studies by Castro et al. (2020) and Quijano and Ong (2020) highlight persistent structural constraints, including limited industry partnerships, administrative barriers, and financial challenges that restrict students' access to meaningful immersion experiences.

Beyond structural concerns, several studies emphasize the pedagogical value

of experiential learning within immersion contexts. De Guzman and Choi (2019) demonstrate that hands-on, industry-aligned exposure significantly enhances learners' employability competencies and career readiness. Similarly, Combalicer (2020) argues that authentic workplace environments cultivate professional attitudes, work ethics, and contextual understanding that cannot be replicated through classroom simulations alone. However, the shift toward simulated or school-based immersion during the COVID-19 pandemic further exposed limitations in achieving experiential authenticity, reinforcing the need for systematically designed learning exposure models. Mentorship and guided participation emerge as critical mediating factors in effective immersion programs. Navarro and Tarrayo (2022) emphasize that learners benefit most when immersion experiences are scaffolded by industry mentors who provide contextual feedback and professional modeling. Dizon and David (2020) further stress that strong industry–academe partnerships are essential not only for placement availability but also for ensuring sustained mentorship, relevance, and program sustainability. Torres and Guevara (2021) add that policy-level delays and lack of monitoring mechanisms weaken program coherence and accountability.

While these studies offer valuable insights into the outcomes and challenges of Work Immersion, the literature remains largely descriptive and evaluative, focusing on implementation issues or student perceptions

in isolation. There is a notable lack of qualitative, learner-centered studies that integrate student experiences, institutional contexts, and theoretical frameworks to inform a research-based enhancement plan combining both Work Immersion and Learning Exposure. This gap underscores the need for deeper qualitative inquiry that translates experiential realities into structured, theory-informed program interventions.

Theoretical Framework and Rationale

This study is anchored on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) and Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (1978) to provide a holistic and complementary lens for examining Work Immersion and Learning Exposure. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory posits that learning occurs through a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. This framework is particularly relevant to Work Immersion and Learning Exposure, as students engage directly in workplace tasks, reflect on their experiences, conceptualize professional practices, and apply learning in subsequent activities. Kolb's model supports the view that immersion should be intentionally structured to maximize reflective and applied learning rather than functioning as mere task exposure.

Vygotsky's Social Development Theory complements Kolb's framework by emphasizing the social dimension of learning. Central to this theory is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners acquire higher-order skills through scaffolding

and interaction with more knowledgeable others. In the context of immersion, mentors, supervisors, and industry professionals function as social mediators who guide students' skill development and professional socialization. This perspective underscores the necessity of structured mentorship and guided learning exposure within immersion programs.

The integration of Kolb's and Vygotsky's theories provides a robust rationale for examining Work Immersion and Learning Exposure as both an experiential and socially mediated learning process. While Kolb explains how learning is constructed through experience, Vygotsky explains how learning is enhanced through social interaction and mentorship. Together, these theories justify the need for program designs that balance authentic workplace exposure with guided support, reflection, and structured learning as a key principle that inform the research-based enhancement plan proposed in this study.

Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This study adopted a qualitative, exploratory-descriptive research design to examine the lived experiences, perceptions, and recommendations of Senior High School (SHS) stakeholders regarding the Work Immersion and Learning Exposure Program at Holy Angel University (HAU). A qualitative approach was selected because it enables in-depth exploration of contextualized experiences, institutional practices, and meaning-making processes that cannot be

sufficiently captured through quantitative methods. The design is appropriate for identifying programmatic gaps, learner needs, and opportunities for evidence-based enhancement.

The study was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, which provides a systematic yet flexible framework for analyzing qualitative data and generating theoretically meaningful patterns grounded in participant narratives.

Abbreviations

The following strand abbreviations are used throughout the study:

- ABM–Accountancy, Business, and Management
- STEM–Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
- HUMSS–Humanities and Social Sciences
- TVL–Technical-Vocational-Livelihood

Data Sources

To ensure depth, credibility, and methodological triangulation, this study utilized multiple qualitative data sources. These included key informant interviews with Grade 12 Senior High School students from the ABM, STEM, HUMSS, and TVL strands; open-ended student questionnaires designed to elicit perceptions of work readiness, skill development, and immersion relevance; and student reflection journals and immersion logs that documented experiential insights during or after program participation. In addition, institutional documents such as the Work Immersion and Learning Exposure Manual,

policy memoranda, monitoring tools, and partnership agreements were reviewed to contextualize participant narratives. Key informant interviews were also conducted with faculty supervisors, program coordinators, and partner industry supervisors who were directly involved in immersion implementation. The integration of these data sources enabled cross-validation of findings and strengthened the analytical depth of the study.

Sampling Strategy and Participants

In qualitative research, the validity and reliability of findings are established not through sample size but through the purposeful selection of information-rich participants, depth of data, and methodological rigor (Patton, 2015). The participants in this study Senior High School students, faculty members, the program coordinator, and industry supervisors were deliberately selected based on their direct involvement, experiential expertise, and decision-making roles in the Work Immersion and Learning Exposure Program. Such purposive sampling is widely recognized as appropriate and rigorous in qualitative inquiry, particularly when the research aims to explore lived experiences, institutional processes, and contextual realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The inclusion of all available faculty members ($n = 5$), the sole program coordinator ($n = 1$), and all industry supervisors/partners ($n = 10$) strengthens the credibility of the study, as it ensures comprehensive representation of key stakeholders directly responsible for

program planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is enhanced when participants possess sufficient knowledge and sustained engagement with the phenomenon under investigation. Similarly, Malterud et al. (2016) emphasize that information power influenced by the specificity of the sample and relevance to the research aim to supports adequacy of sample size in qualitative studies.

The selection of 20 Grade 12 student participants across the ABM, STEM, HUMSS, and TVL strands further reinforces the study's transferability and analytical robustness. Strand representation allowed for comparison of diverse immersion experiences while maintaining depth within each case. Guest et al. (2006) note that thematic saturation in qualitative studies often occurs within relatively small samples when participants share relevant experiential backgrounds, as was the case in this study.

Reliability in qualitative research is addressed through dependability and confirmability, rather than statistical replication (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The present study ensured dependability through consistent use of interview guides, triangulation across multiple data sources (interviews, questionnaires, documents, and reflection logs), and transparent documentation of analytic procedures. Confirmability was reinforced by grounding interpretations in participants' narratives and cross-verifying themes across stakeholder groups.

Overall, the participant composition in

this study aligns with established qualitative research standards, ensuring that the data generated are credible, dependable, and fit for generating trustworthy insights and a research-based enhancement plan for the Work Immersion and Learning Exposure Program.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data were gathered using three primary qualitative instruments to ensure alignment with the study objectives and methodological rigor. Semi-structured interview guides were employed to provide flexibility while maintaining focus on core areas, including immersion experiences, perceived program gaps, mentoring practices, and recommendations for improvement. In addition, qualitative student questionnaires consisting of open-ended items were administered to explore perceptions of career readiness, skill acquisition, alignment between strand specialization and immersion tasks, and perceived institutional support. These questionnaires underwent expert review to establish content validity and clarity prior to administration. Document analysis was also conducted using a structured protocol to systematically review institutional policies, memoranda, monitoring reports, and partnership agreements, thereby contextualizing participant responses and supporting data triangulation. All research instruments were subjected to expert validation before data collection to ensure construct relevance and methodological soundness.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, contextualized to the institutional setting of HAU-SHS. The process began with familiarization, wherein interview transcripts, questionnaires, reflection journals, and documents were read repeatedly to achieve immersion in the data. This was followed by initial coding, during which meaningful units of text related to immersion experiences, challenges, and learning outcomes were manually coded. Codes were then organized into candidate themes reflecting learner needs, institutional constraints, and experiential patterns. These themes were reviewed and refined through constant comparison with the dataset to ensure coherence, consistency, and analytical relevance. Clear operational definitions and names were subsequently assigned to each finalized theme. In the final phase, the themes were interpreted and synthesized in relation to Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Vygotsky's Social Development Theory, forming the empirical basis for the proposed research-based program interventions. Manual coding matrices, peer debriefing, and cross-source triangulation were employed throughout the analysis to enhance rigor.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the study was established in accordance with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for qualitative rigor. Credibility was ensured through prolonged

engagement with the data, member checking with selected participants, and peer validation of emerging themes. Transferability was addressed by providing rich, detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and procedures. Dependability was strengthened through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting analytic and procedural decisions, while confirmability was supported by reflexive practices and triangulation across multiple data sources and research instruments.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted as part of the academic requirements of a doctoral-level course. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and participants could withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and all data were used solely for academic purposes. The study involved minimal risk and upheld established ethical principles in research involving human participants.

Results

The qualitative analysis of key informant interviews, open-ended questionnaires, student reflection journals, and institutional document reviews yielded findings aligned with the four research objectives of the study. Using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, nine major themes emerged, reflecting the shared and strand-specific experiences of students, faculty members, coordinators, and industry partners in the implementation of

the Work Immersion and Learning Exposure Program at HAU-SHS. The results are presented according to the research objectives.

Identifying Gaps and Challenges in the Work Immersion and Learning Exposure Program

Findings related to program gaps and implementation challenges revealed three dominant themes: limited hands-on and practical tasks, restricted real-world work exposure, and financial barriers to participation. Students consistently reported that classroom-based simulations and school-bound activities limited opportunities for authentic experiential learning. This challenge was evident in interview and questionnaire data, wherein students emphasized the need for actual exposure to professional environments such as offices, laboratories, and field settings. Reflection journals further documented students' frustration with performing simulated tasks that lacked real workplace accountability.

In addition, financial constraints emerged as a structural barrier affecting equitable participation in immersion activities. Both students and teachers noted that transportation costs, food expenses, and lack of compensation discouraged full engagement, particularly for economically disadvantaged learners. These challenges underscore gaps between policy intentions and actual program delivery, hindering the completion of Kolb's experiential learning cycle, particularly in the stages of concrete experience and active experimentation.

Determining Student Needs and Priorities for Career Readiness, Practical Training, and Mentorship

Findings addressing student needs and preparedness revealed four interrelated themes: industry mentorship and professional guidance, seminars and skills training, employment process simulations, and socialization, communication, and teamwork development. Across interviews and questionnaires, students expressed a strong need for structured mentorship from professionals who could guide skill development, decision-making, and workplace socialization. This highlights the relevance of Vygotsky's Social Development Theory, wherein mentors function as "more knowledgeable others" within students' Zone of Proximal Development.

Students also emphasized the importance of supplementary seminars and workshops, including ICT skills, customer service training, and financial literacy, to complement immersion placements. Coordinators and teachers affirmed that such training addressed competency gaps not fully covered in classroom instruction. Furthermore, students underscored the need for simulated employment processes such as resume writing, interviews, and submission of legal requirements to build confidence and reduce anxiety during post-graduation transitions. These findings reflect learners' desire for guided and scaffolded learning exposure that bridges academic preparation and professional readiness.

Proposing Research-Based Interventions to Strengthen Work Immersion and Learning Exposure

Themes directly informing program enhancement and intervention design included job shadowing and professional observation and broader field-specific immersion opportunities. Students valued job shadowing experiences that allowed them to observe professional routines, decision-making practices, and workplace cultures, even in non-task-based capacities. Such exposure supported reflective observation, a key stage in Kolb's experiential learning cycle.

Additionally, students strongly advocated for strand-aligned immersion opportunities. ABM learners requested placements in financial and business institutions; STEM students preferred laboratories, hospitals, and engineering firms; HUMSS students sought media and government offices; and TVL students emphasized service, culinary, and technical industries. This strand-specific alignment was viewed as crucial to both relevance and motivation, reinforcing the need for differentiated, sustainable immersion tracks responsive to learner specialization.

Collectively, these themes provided the empirical basis for proposing short-term and long-term interventions that integrate authentic exposure, structured mentorship, preparatory training, and industry partnership expansion.

Aligning Program Outcomes with Theory and Policy Directions

Across all data sources, the findings demonstrate that while the HAU-SHS Work Immersion and Learning Exposure Program has strong structural foundations, students aspire to deeper, more authentic, and socially guided experiential learning. The identified themes illustrate the complementary relevance of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes authentic engagement and reflective cycles, and Vygotsky's Social Development Theory, which highlights the critical role of mentorship and scaffolding.

The results further align with DepEd's policy objectives of preparing students for both higher education and employment, while also revealing areas where implementation support, equity measures, and industry collaboration must be strengthened. Overall, the findings underscore the necessity of a structured, theory-informed, and student-centered enhancement plan that integrates technical competencies, soft skills, and real-world learning exposure.

Discussion

The findings of this study affirm that Work Immersion and Learning Exposure serve as a critical bridge between academic instruction and workforce readiness, particularly when implemented as authentic, structured, and socially guided learning experiences. Students' strong emphasis on hands-on and practical tasks aligns with Kolb's Experiential

Learning Theory, which highlights concrete experience and active experimentation as essential to meaningful learning. Consistent with De Guzman and Choi (2019), the results indicate that immersion activities grounded in real workplace responsibilities enhance learners' employability competencies more effectively than classroom-based simulations. In the HAU-SHS context, this underscores the need to move beyond compliance-driven immersion toward intentional program design that prioritizes experiential authenticity.

The demand for real-world work exposure and interaction with industry professionals also reinforces Combalicer's (2020) findings on the role of workplace familiarity in professional growth. Within Kolb's framework, such exposure enables learners to engage in reflective observation and abstract conceptualization based on actual professional practice. However, the reliance on simulated or school-based immersion, particularly during constrained periods, reveals a structural gap between experiential learning theory and program implementation. This finding directly addresses the research gap identified in the literature: the limited translation of experiential learning principles into sustainable, theory-informed institutional practice.

Mentorship and professional guidance emerged as a central theme, strongly supporting Vygotsky's Social Development Theory, which posits that learning is mediated through interaction with more knowledgeable others. The students' call for structured mentoring echoes Navarro and Tarrayo (2022)

and highlights mentorship as a scaffold within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development. For HAU-SHS, this emphasizes the importance of formalizing mentoring roles among teachers, coordinators, and industry partners to ensure that learning exposure is purposeful rather than incidental.

The identified need for seminars, skills training, and employment process simulations further extends existing literature by positioning readiness activities as an integrated component of immersion rather than a preliminary stage. Rosario et al. (2021) similarly found that readiness training reduces anxiety and builds learner confidence. Within Kolb's learning cycle, these activities support reflection and conceptualization before and during workplace exposure, suggesting the value of a hybrid immersion model at HAU-SHS that combines experiential placement with structured learning modules.

Finally, the emphasis on teamwork, communication, and strand-specific placements highlights immersion's dual technical and social function, consistent with Borling et al. (2023) and Lagman and Clemente (2024). Equity concerns related to financial constraints further support Yap and Fajardo's (2025) findings, underscoring the need for institutional strategies that ensure inclusive access. Overall, the discussion demonstrates that effective Work Immersion and Learning Exposure programs must be theory-informed, context-responsive, and equity-oriented, addressing the research gap through a research-based enhancement plan grounded

in experiential learning, mentorship, and sustainability.

Conclusions

This qualitative study concludes that the Work Immersion and Learning Exposure Program at Holy Angel University Senior High School (HAU-SHS) is a vital yet evolving component of the Senior High School curriculum. The findings identified key gaps and student priorities, including the need for authentic hands-on experiences, real-world exposure, structured mentorship, strand-aligned placements, and equitable support systems. These results confirm that work immersion is not merely a curricular requirement but a transformative learning process that effectively bridges academic knowledge and employability when intentionally designed and supported.

Consistent with experiential and social learning theories, immersion effectiveness depends on authentic participation, guided mentorship, and readiness-oriented learning support. The study underscores the importance of institutional innovation, sustained industry-academe partnerships, and student-centered, equity-driven policies in strengthening immersion implementation. Continuous refinement of the Work Immersion and Learning Exposure framework is therefore essential for HAU-SHS to balance policy compliance, competence development, and character formation while preparing students for higher education and employment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following research-based recommendations are proposed: (1) strengthen and diversify industry partnerships to ensure strand-specific placements; (2) institutionalize structured mentorship involving teachers, industry partners, and alumni; (3) integrate pre-immersion readiness modules covering employment processes and workplace ethics; (4) enhance technical and soft skills

development through targeted seminars and workshops; (5) address financial barriers to ensure equitable access; (6) digitize monitoring and evaluation systems; (7) customize strand-based immersion tracks; and (8) conduct continuous evaluation to assess long-term program outcomes.

Together, these recommendations present a coherent and sustainable enhancement plan aligned with the study objectives and learner needs.

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