

**Work Immersion and Soft Skills Development among Grade 12 Learners
in Benito Soliven, Isabela**

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ABSTRACT

In today's rapidly evolving labor market, educational institutions are expected to equip learners not only with technical competencies but also with essential soft skills necessary for workplace success. However, despite the implementation of the Work Immersion Program in Senior High School, inconsistencies in learners' communication, dependability, and workplace readiness remain evident, highlighting the need to evaluate the program's effectiveness. This study examined the effect of the Work Immersion Program on the soft skills development of 401 Grade 12 learners from Benito Soliven National High School and Andabuen National High School during School Year 2025–2026. Using a descriptive research design with inferential components, the study assessed communication, teamwork, proactivity, professionalism, and dependability skills through non-parametric statistical analysis. Findings revealed that the program obtained an overall grand mean of 3.27, interpreted as High Effect. Professionalism Skills recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.38$), while Dependability Skills registered the lowest ($M = 3.13$). Significant differences were found across the five soft skill domains ($p < 0.001$) and according to sex, strand, and workplace immersion venue. The study proposed the HUSAY Program as an intervention to strengthen identified competency gaps.

Keywords: Work immersion, soft skills, professionalism, dependability, workplace readiness.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive job market, employers seek more than technical qualifications from applicants. They value individuals who can communicate effectively, solve problems creatively, collaborate with others, and adapt to changing workplace demands. This shift has prompted educational institutions worldwide to implement work immersion programs that help students develop both technical competencies and essential soft skills. By bridging the gap between classroom learning and workplace realities, these programs provide meaningful experiences that prepare students for future employment.

Soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and professionalism are critical to career success but are not always fully developed through

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traditional classroom instruction alone. Work immersion programs address this gap by placing students in authentic workplace environments where they interact with professionals, observe workplace protocols, and perform actual tasks and responsibilities. Through these experiences, students are able to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings while developing interpersonal and professional competencies necessary in the modern workplace.

From a global perspective, the development of soft skills through curricular and experiential programs has become increasingly important in preparing learners for the demands of both society and the workforce. Industries now prioritize employees who possess not only technical expertise but also the ability to collaborate effectively, think critically, and adapt to diverse work environments. Consequently, educational institutions are encouraged to integrate soft skills development into their academic programs.

In the Philippine context, the Enhanced Basic Education Curriculum recognizes the importance of developing soft skills among Senior High School learners. Through applied subjects, specialized tracks, and work immersion programs, students are expected to cultivate competencies such as communication, critical thinking, leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving alongside technical knowledge. These learning experiences are designed to enhance students' adaptability and workplace readiness while aligning educational outcomes with industry demands.

Montes and Paño (2021) emphasized that programs such as work immersion must prioritize both hard and soft skills to adequately prepare learners for professional environments. According to the authors, work immersion experiences cultivate competencies highly valued by employers, including communication, adaptability, leadership, and problem-solving skills. By integrating theory with practice, work immersion strengthens not only technical proficiency but also interpersonal and ethical competencies essential for workplace success.

Similarly, DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2017 underscores the significance of the Work Immersion subject in the Senior High School curriculum under the K to 12 Basic Education Program. The policy aims to provide learners with practical industry exposure that enables them to acquire both technical competencies and essential soft skills such as communication, teamwork, professionalism, and problem-solving. These competencies are necessary in preparing students for real-life workplace situations and increasing their employability.

Further reinforcing this concern, the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) recently reported a significant mismatch between graduates' competencies and labor market demands. Employers frequently cite deficiencies in soft skills as a major barrier to youth employability. This national concern highlights the need to evaluate the effectiveness of programs such as work immersion in developing students' workplace competencies.

At the local level, varying observations regarding the effectiveness of work immersion have emerged among Grade 12 learners of Benito Soliven National High School and Andabuen National High School. Teachers handling Media and Information Literacy and Career Guidance activities observed that several graduates from School Year 2024–2025 experienced difficulty during mock job application activities, particularly in expressing ideas clearly, participating in professional conversations, and demonstrating confidence during interviews. These observations suggest possible deficiencies in communication and workplace readiness skills.

On the other hand, reports presented during Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions indicated that several students had positive immersion experiences. Based on students' portfolios and reflections, many learners reported increased confidence in interacting with professionals, improved teamwork, and greater appreciation of workplace responsibilities. HUMSS students assigned to schools and offices particularly noted that their immersion experiences helped enhance their communication skills and sense of responsibility. Likewise,

STEM students reported that work immersion deepened their understanding of their field and strengthened their confidence in pursuing their chosen college programs.

Despite these positive experiences, more recent observations raised concerns regarding the consistency of soft skills development among learners. In January 2026, personnel from Isabela State University–San Mariano Campus reported concerns regarding the workplace behavior of some Grade 12 students from Benito Soliven National High School assigned to their institution for work immersion. According to these reports, several students frequently complained about assigned tasks, expressed dissatisfaction with their placements, and displayed disengagement and lack of cooperation in workplace activities. These observations indicate possible inconsistencies in students' workplace preparedness and professional behavior.

Given the growing emphasis on soft skills development in education, the policy support for work immersion, and the varying observations regarding learners' workplace readiness, this study seeks to examine the effect of the Work Immersion Program on the development of soft skills among Grade 12 learners of Benito Soliven National High School and Andabuen National High School. Through a systematic and research-based investigation, the study aims to generate empirical findings that may serve as the basis for evidence-based recommendations and interventions to strengthen the implementation of the Work Immersion Program in Benito Soliven, Isabela.

This study is anchored on DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2017, which institutionalizes the Work Immersion Program within the Senior High School curriculum under the K to 12 Basic Education Program. The policy emphasizes the importance of providing learners with authentic workplace experiences to prepare them for employment, entrepreneurship, or higher education. Central to this immersion experience is the development of essential soft skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, professionalism, and problem-solving, which are considered indispensable in meeting the demands of the 21st-century workforce.

The study is also anchored on the 21st Century Skills Framework developed by Battelle for Kids (2019), which highlights the growing importance of competencies beyond technical knowledge. The framework emphasizes skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and adaptability as essential for success in education and employment. This theoretical perspective provides a relevant basis for evaluating how work immersion programs contribute to the development of soft skills among Grade 12 learners.

Anchoring the study on DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2017 and the 21st Century Skills Framework provides a strong conceptual foundation for examining how experiential learning through work immersion contributes to the development of learners' soft skills and workplace readiness.

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to examine the effect of the Work Immersion Program of Benito Soliven National High School and Andabuen National High School on the soft skills development of Grade 12 learners and to propose an evidence-based intervention for enhancing soft skills through workplace immersion experiences.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of sex, family income, strand, and workplace immersion venue?

2. What is the effect of the Work Immersion Program on the respondents' soft skills in terms of communication skills, teamwork skills, proactivity skills, professionalism skills and dependability skills?
3. Is there a significant difference in the effect of the Work Immersion Program on respondents' soft skills when grouped according to profile variables?
4. Is there a significant difference among the five identified soft skill domains in terms of the effect of the Work Immersion Program?
5. Is there a significant difference in the respondents' assessment of the effect of the Work Immersion Program on soft skills when grouped according to respondent classification?
6. What challenges were encountered by the respondents during the implementation of the Work Immersion Program?
7. Is there a significant difference in the challenges encountered by the respondents during the Work Immersion Program when grouped according to profile variables?
8. What intervention program may be proposed, based on the findings of the study, to enhance the soft skills development of Senior High School learners undergoing work immersion?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a descriptive research design with inferential components. The descriptive aspect described the profile of Grade 12 learners and examined the effect of the Work Immersion Program on their soft skills, including communication, teamwork, proactivity, professionalism, and dependability. The inferential aspect determined whether significant differences existed in soft skills outcomes when respondents were grouped according to profile variables and respondent classifications. The study employed non-parametric statistical methods appropriate for the nature of the data.

The study was conducted at Benito Soliven National High School and Andabuen National High School in Benito Soliven, Isabela. These public secondary schools offer Senior High School programs and implement the Work Immersion Program as part of the K to 12 curriculum. The research focused on Grade 12 learners participating in work immersion activities during School Year 2025–2026.

The respondents included Grade 12 learners, Work Immersion teachers, and partner institution representatives from both schools. Total population sampling was employed to ensure comprehensive representation across all academic strands and respondent groups.

The study adapted the assessment tool of Montes and Paño (2021) with modifications suited to the local context. The questionnaire measured five soft skill domains: communication, teamwork, proactivity, professionalism, and dependability. It also gathered demographic information such as sex, family income, academic strand, and workplace immersion venue.

Separate versions of the questionnaire were administered to learners, teachers, and partner institutions to allow a multi-perspective assessment of learners' soft skills development. Additional items were included to identify challenges encountered during the implementation of the Work Immersion Program.

The researcher first secured approval from the Schools Division Superintendent, district supervisors, and school heads. The survey instrument was reviewed by the Quality Assurance Team to ensure validity and clarity. After securing informed consent from parents and respondents, the researcher administered the questionnaires. Respondents were provided with instructions and given sufficient time to complete the survey. Collected data underwent screening, encoding, organization, and analysis.

The study utilized frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores to describe respondents' profiles and assess soft skills development. Non-parametric statistical tests were

employed to determine significant differences across profile variables and soft skill domains. Thematic analysis was also used to identify common challenges encountered by respondents during work immersion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the respondents

The study revealed that male learners comprised the majority of the student-respondents at 52.61%, while female respondents dominated among Work Immersion teachers and Work Immersion partners. Dela Cruz and Permejo (2020) emphasized that the demographic profile of workplace evaluators influences the assessment of learners' competencies. Hussein (2024) likewise observed that gender differences affect soft skills outcomes, particularly in interpersonal competencies.

In terms of socioeconomic status, most learners belonged to low- to lower-middle-income households, with the largest group reporting a monthly family income ranging from ₱10,001.00 to ₱20,000.00. This finding reflects Bhandari's (2023) observation regarding the prevailing socioeconomic conditions among learners in Philippine public schools.

Regarding academic strand, the overwhelming majority of respondents belonged to the HUMSS strand, while only a small proportion came from STEM. Garcia and Yazon (2020) explained that the alignment between academic strand and immersion placement significantly affects the development of workplace competencies.

Most learners were assigned to school-based immersion venues, followed by government offices. The predominance of these placements reflected the large number of HUMSS learners whose strand naturally aligns with educational and public service settings.

Effect of the work immersion program on soft skills

Communication Skills obtained an overall mean of 3.23, interpreted as Moderate Effect. The highest-rated indicator involved communicating with politeness and respect, while non-verbal communication registered the lowest mean of 2.74, the lowest individual score across all indicators in the study.

Borling et al. (2023) found that work immersion programs generally produce moderate gains in communication competencies. Moro et al. (2021) further explained that immersion environments more effectively reinforce surface-level communicative behaviors, such as politeness and listening, than deeper competencies involving non-verbal fluency and conflict resolution.

Teamwork Skills registered an overall mean of 3.32, interpreted as High Effect. Learners demonstrated strong participation in assigned tasks and collaborative activities, although conflict resolution within teams remained comparatively lower.

These findings support Nada and Ubaidillah (2023), who concluded that immersion-based programs are highly effective in strengthening collaborative task performance. Carreon (2021) also noted that workplace environments naturally promote teamwork because collaboration becomes necessary for task accomplishment.

Proactivity Skills yielded an overall mean of 3.29, interpreted as High Effect. Learners showed strong enthusiasm toward learning new things and completing assigned tasks independently. However, indicators involving autonomous initiative and minimal prompting remained lower.

The findings align with An Ngo (2024), who observed that experiential learning environments increase learners' motivation and willingness to learn. Bhandari (2023), however, emphasized that self-management and autonomous initiative require deliberate instructional support and cannot be fully developed through immersion exposure alone.

Professionalism Skills emerged as the strongest domain with an overall mean of 3.38, interpreted as High Effect. Respect for authority posted the highest score, while adaptability to workplace changes remained relatively lower.

These findings corroborate Caga-Anan and Valle (2024), who identified professionalism-related competencies such as punctuality, respectful communication, and adherence to institutional norms as among the most observable outcomes of workplace immersion. Ador et al. (2023) likewise observed that school and government placements effectively reinforce professional conduct and workplace discipline.

Dependability Skills obtained the lowest overall mean at 3.13, interpreted as Moderate Effect. Notably, no indicator under this domain reached the High Effect level. Indicators involving consistent performance, self-supervision, and proactive communication remained relatively weak.

The findings are consistent with Noah and Aziz (2020), who identified dependability and self-management as among the least developed competencies in short-term immersion programs. Romanenko et al. (2024) similarly emphasized that employers continue to identify dependability and self-management as major competency gaps among workforce entrants.

Overall, the Work Immersion Program obtained a grand mean of 3.27, interpreted as High Effect. Professionalism ranked highest among the domains, followed by Teamwork and Proactivity, while Communication and Dependability obtained comparatively lower means.

Montes and Paño (2021) observed that work immersion programs tend to produce stronger outcomes in externally observable interpersonal competencies than in internally anchored competencies such as dependability and self-regulation. The findings also support the objectives of DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2017, which promotes authentic workplace exposure as a mechanism for developing learner competencies.

Comparison in soft skills according to profile variables

The findings revealed significant differences in all five soft skill domains when respondents were grouped according to sex, academic strand, and workplace immersion venue, as all corresponding p-values were below the 0.05 level of significance. However, no significant differences were found when respondents were grouped according to family income.

Hussein (2024) documented gender-based variations in soft skills outcomes, particularly in interpersonal competencies. Garcia and Yazon (2020) likewise found that alignment between academic strand and immersion venue substantially influences learner outcomes. In contrast, Bhandari (2023) characterized work-based learning programs as equalizing mechanisms capable of minimizing the influence of socioeconomic background on skill development.

Comparison across the five soft skill domains

The Friedman Test revealed a statistically significant difference among the five soft skill domains, with a p-value of less than 0.001. This finding confirmed that the Work Immersion Program did not affect all competencies equally.

Professionalism emerged as the strongest domain, while Dependability remained the weakest. Oviawe (2020) explained that workplace immersion programs generally produce

stronger outcomes in observable relational competencies than in internally anchored competencies such as reliability and self-management. Romanenko et al. (2024) similarly emphasized that dependability remains one of the most deficient competencies among new workforce entrants.

Comparison in the assessments of the three respondent groups

The Kruskal-Wallis H Test revealed a significant difference in the assessments of Grade 12 learners, Work Immersion teachers, and Work Immersion partners regarding the effect of the program on learners' soft skills, with a p-value of 0.003.

Dela Cruz and Permejo (2020) explained that industry partners tend to provide more conservative assessments than learners because they directly observe workplace performance under actual professional conditions. Cagas and Abulencia (2022) further emphasized that multi-stakeholder assessment provides a more reliable and comprehensive evaluation of immersion outcomes than single-source assessment alone.

Challenges encountered during the work immersion program

Thematic analysis identified several major challenges encountered by learners during the Work Immersion Program. These included difficulties in adapting to workplace culture, insufficient preparedness for workplace demands, communication and collaboration barriers, self-management and task performance difficulties, and supervision and logistical constraints.

Guadalupe (2024) identified workplace unfamiliarity as a major source of learner discomfort during immersion. Dela Cruz and Permejo (2020) likewise emphasized that mismatched immersion placements reduce developmental effectiveness and increase learner anxiety. Flores and Dela Cruz (2025) also found that communication barriers remain common in Senior High School immersion programs because learners are not yet fully accustomed to professional communication standards.

Challenges related to self-management, such as time management, task prioritization, and independent work, closely paralleled the lower scores obtained in Dependability and Proactivity Skills. Bhandari (2023) observed that self-management competencies remain among the most underdeveloped areas in Philippine secondary education programs. Meanwhile, Cagas and Abulencia (2023) stressed that supervision quality and resource adequacy significantly influence whether immersion experiences produce authentic competency development.

Comparison in the challenges encountered according to profile variables

The findings revealed no significant differences in the challenges encountered when respondents were grouped according to sex, family income, or academic strand. However, workplace immersion venue produced a significant difference, with a p-value of 0.026.

This result suggests that the nature and complexity of the immersion site strongly influence the challenges experienced by learners. Guadalupe (2024) explained that technically demanding environments such as laboratories and private companies present adjustment challenges different from those encountered in school-based or government settings. Garcia and Yazon (2020) similarly argued that workplace structure exerts a stronger influence on learner experiences than individual background characteristics.

Proposed intervention program

Based on the findings, the study proposed the HUSAY Program (Holistic Upskilling through Simulated and Authentic Yielding), a three-phase intervention designed to strengthen Communication and Dependability Skills, the two weakest domains identified in the study.

The intervention includes pre-immersion simulations, structured reflection and feedback during immersion, and post-immersion performance-based assessment. The program seeks to institutionalize deliberate soft skills development before, during, and after workplace immersion experiences in order to address weaknesses identified through both statistical and thematic analyses.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that the Work Immersion Program at Benito Soliven National High School and Andabuen National High School has a significant high effect on the soft skills development of Grade 12 learners, particularly in fostering Professionalism and Teamwork Skills. However, the program remains less effective in developing Communication and Dependability Skills due to the absence of structured feedback mechanisms and deliberate coaching during immersion.

The findings further reveal that the Work Immersion Program functions as a socioeconomic equalizer, as family income did not significantly affect soft skills acquisition. Nevertheless, the outcomes and challenges experienced by learners significantly varied according to sex, academic strand, and, most notably, workplace immersion venue, which strongly influenced workplace adaptation experiences and logistical difficulties.

Although learners encountered systemic challenges related to preparedness and self-management, the differing assessments among learners, teachers, and work immersion partners underscore the need for more unified and standardized evaluation mechanisms. Consequently, the proposed HUSAY Program—comprising the HANDA, UGNAYAN, and PAGSUBOK phases—is deemed a necessary, localized, and resource-efficient intervention designed to address identified competency gaps and strengthen the development of soft skills across all academic strands.

In light of the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are hereby offered to further strengthen the implementation of the Work Immersion Program and enhance the soft skills development of Senior High School learners.

The Schools Division of Isabela and the District II offices are encouraged to institutionalize the HUSAY Program as an official enhancement to the Work Immersion Program and integrate it into Learning Action Cell (LAC) activities and faculty training.

School heads of Benito Soliven National High School and Andabuen National High School should revise existing Memoranda of Agreement with partner institutions to include the mandatory implementation of the daily UGNAYAN reflection and feedback conference and ensure equitable faculty participation in monitoring learners.

Work Immersion coordinators are encouraged to develop venue-specific and strand-specific simulation materials for the HANDA Phase based on actual workplace situations and learner challenges encountered during immersion.

All participating faculty members should be provided with a standardized UGNAYAN Facilitator Guide to ensure consistent learner monitoring, feedback, and assessment throughout the immersion period.

Partner institutions should be actively engaged as collaborators in learners' development by assigning mentors and meaningful workplace responsibilities that strengthen communication, professionalism, accountability, and dependability.

School administrators and Work Immersion coordinators should strengthen the alignment between academic strands and immersion venues by expanding partnerships with government agencies, private offices, and other professional institutions that offer authentic workplace experiences.

Grade 12 learners should be properly oriented on the importance of Communication and Dependability Skills and encouraged to maximize reflection and feedback activities as opportunities for professional growth.

Lastly, future researchers are encouraged to conduct correlational or quasi-experimental studies to further examine the relationship between work immersion and soft skills development and to evaluate the effectiveness of the HUSAY Program after implementation.

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