Immersion Program for Academic Track and the Higher Education Tracer Profile of the First Batch Graduates

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Abstract – **This action research assessed the Implementation of the Immersion Program for Academic Track in Science and Technology Education Center Senior High School and the Higher Education Tracer Profile of its First Batch Graduates. The findings of the study were the bases for the Dissemination and Advocacy Plans. This study utilized the descriptive-evaluative type of research in gathering the responses employing the quantitative and qualitative approaches. There are 143 students who are included in the study.**

Findings revealed that STEC SHS is compliant with the requirements for the Immersion Program. The strengths of the implementation are: Curriculum Guide; Students' orientation; parental consent and insurance; and Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) are notarized. The major weak points are: desired competencies to be evaluated; budget and materials for the Immersion and lack of information on process and required forms. The partner Industry input should be taken into considerations: increasing the 80 Hours time for Academic Strand Immersion; Required Prior skills should be taught in the school; The Expected Learned Competencies should be clear and specified.

As to Tracer Profile, majority of the students are taking courses which are aligned to their chosen strands. It is noteworthy that there are students who gained scholarship grant and are studying in prestigious universities in Cebu, Luzon and abroad. The STEC SHS is effective and successful in its constant prodding and guidance to make students be prepared in College.

Keywords – **Immersion Program, Tracer Profile, Senior High School.**

I. INTRODUCTION

The Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) is currently undertaking a series of major reforms anchored on the implementation of a new K to 12 system as it seeks to improve basic education outcomes for Filipino children and achieve its national Education for All commitments. The Senior High School (SHS) is the newest reform of the department which aims to better prepare the students to pursue higher education; for employment or to manage a business. The Work Immersion Program is one of the course requirements for SHS graduation. A SHS student has to undergo work immersion in a business organization or establishment with work requirements related to the specialization. Through work immersion, the students are exposed to and are familiarized with the work-related environment related to their field of specialization. It is the focal aim of the immersion program to let the students gain relevant and practical industrial skills under the guidance of industry experts and workers; appreciate the importance and application of the principles and theories taught in the classroom; and enhance their technical knowledge and skills (DepEd, DO 30, 2017).

The adjunct study (Acar, 2017) on "Implementation of the Full Senior High School Program- Academic Track of Science and Technology Education Center (STEC) and Post Evaluation of the Proposed Action Plan," reveals a short and simple survey in implementation of the immersion program which is evaluated as Evident but

inadequate or interpreted as Good. This means that the STEC SHS is compliant with the requirements for the Immersion, however, there are provisions that need to be addressed. The strength of the implementation of the STEC SHS program lies in the following: Curriculum Guide is followed; Students are oriented and prepared before immersion including parental consent and insurance; there is a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) duly notarized to all partners; there is a scheduled monitoring and feedbacking of the students. The major weak point of the immersion program was on the Specialization of the students that should be aligned to the competencies assigned by the work immersion partners. Most partner industries would find it hard to assign students to do specific tasks aligned to the specialization since it is too generic. What usually happen is STEC follows the immersion program of the partner industries. Not all industries in MEPZ are opened for immersion as well and if they do they only accept minimal number of students and not in bulk. The duration of the work immersion is too short.

The aforementioned part of the adjunct study is a scratch on the surface as it plainly assesses the overview of the selected students and coordinators on how the immersion program is implemented and what are the strong and weak points of the implementation. Hence, the researcher is determined to proceed the study evaluating the full implementation of the Work Immersion Program for Academic Track and full participation of the SHS Coordinators and Partner Coordinators will be tapped for a more comprehensive evaluation. Moreover, researcher-made tool will be used to evaluate the undertaking and hopefully these tools can be utilized and be mainstreamed by the other schools offering work immersion program in the Division of Lapu-Lapu City.

To add, this study will also assess the higher education profile status of the first batch of graduates of STEC SHS. This is a tracer study to assess whether the students who took the academic track will continue to further their specialization in higher education institution.

It is in the aforementioned rationale that the researcher who is a research enthusiast and Senior High School research teacher in STEC and a BERF grantee for the second time, would like to delve another worthy research undertaking that will benefit his school and the division of Lapu-Lapu City.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This study is mainly anchored on issuance of DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2017, the Department of Education (DepEd), in support of its K-12 program, mandated academic institutions that offer Senior High School (SHS) education to implement work immersion programs. One of the goals of the K to 12 Basic Education program is to develop in learners the competencies, work ethics and values relevant to pursuing further education and or joining the world of work. In order that the nations development target will be realized and to achieve greater congruence with the basic education, work immersion is a required subject that has been incorporated in the curriculum.

Under Annex A of Work immersion Curriculum Guide, it was emphasized that through work immersion, students are exposed to and become familiar with work related environment related to their field of specialization to enhance their competence. This is for the purpose that the students can relate directly to their postsecondary goal. Based from these facts, this study claims on the focus of the objectives of work Immersion that by the time learners reach senior High School, they would have already acquired almost all the competencies and skills that would prepare them for the curriculum exits (higher education, employment, middle-skills development and

entrepreneurship). Work immersion provides them with an avenue to test themselves and apply what they have learned in a non-school scenario. In work immersion, learners are not only able to apply their previous training but are also able to experience the social interactions in a work environment. Their experiences during work immersion will develop many skills and values that would help them as they go on the transition from high school to real life. In addition, Dep.Ed. Order No. 40, s.2015 believed that in order to achieve its desired goals and objectives work immersion needs to establish partnerships for work immersion opportunities for students among others. There are many different delivery models offered by Dep. Ed to be chosen according to learners' purposes, needs and partnership arrangement yet great challenges are being faced by many internal stakeholders. Jesuit, 2015, many authors and legal basis has similar concepts of work immersion 16-18 years old students should undergo at least 80 hrs for work immersion. However, many challenges cropped in its implementation which the internal stakeholders like school, teachers, parents, students and partner institutions concern on the achievements of the objectives remains a challenge.

Generally, work immersion is advantageous to students who want to experience and learn more about the life of being employed. It prepares them to the bigger world after graduation and makes them equipped with relevant skills. It also teaches a lot of valuable lessons that they cannot get inside the classroom. One example is having to work in a team and interacting with real managers and bosses. This experience can help the trainability level of a student. It can also give a little push on the assertiveness and confidence of an individual. Accomplishing a task that they know has a real impact on the company will boost their self-esteem as a team player. There are a lot of advantages in work immersion, but some people also have reservations on this program. One major point is safety. Work immersion is an off-campus activity and is done at the student's own expense and accord. Little to no supervision is given to each student and school administration will only rely on written reports submitted to them. Second, while it is inherently designed to develop students, results vary from one student to another. While for one student it is helpful, to another it can be stressful. Some students may find it anxiety-inducing when they are placed in a high-pressuring environment. With these, schools should consider both the pros and cons of work immersion and choose the best program for their students.

Another concept of this study is on Higher Education Tracer profiling of the First Batch of STEC SHS Graduates. A tracer study is an approach which widely being used in most organization especially in the educational institutions to track and to keep record of their students once they have graduated from the institution. Through tracer study, an institution able to evaluate the quality of education given to their graduates by knowing the graduates' placements and positions in the society which later can be used as a benchmark in producing more qualified and competitive graduates. A tracer study is also used in some high school institutions to track their graduates' courses; technical training; advance certification and/or work status. Based on some researches published in a journal (Alcovendras, 2013), tracer study allows the school to assess their outcomes as academic institution and to evaluate if the vision and mission of the schools have been realized through it graduates' status. Furthermore, the journal emphasized that tracer study reveals the career path; employment profile and whereabouts of its graduates. The turn outs of the survey maybe too low but the results are gratifying.

III. Scope and Limitation

This study utilized the descriptive-evaluative type of research in gathering the responses employing the quantitative and qualitative approaches. Science Technology Education Center (STEC), Basak, Lapu-Lapu City

Senior High School Department is the main locale of the study. The Immersion Coordinators (Both (4 coordinator in school and 6 representatives in the Industry) are the main respondents of the study and the data based on the students' performance ratings; portfolio and feedback forms were utilized. This research is mainly focused to gather data on: The extent of the implementation of the Immersion Program for Academic Track; The performance of students during the Immersion Schedule; The satisfaction level of students on the assigned units; The Industry Partners' Recommendation to improve the Immersion program; The tracer profile of the First Batch Graduates of STEC SHS; Proposed Action Plan based on the findings of the study.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling.

There are 143 students who are included in the study and the primary means of reach is through Facebook account – STEC SHS Alumni batch 2018. However for some tools like perceptions there are 100 students who were selected to participate; 20 per section to make it fair.

Research Procedure.

The researcher prepared the research design and tools to be utilized in the study. Approval and recommendation from the principal was sought. The proposed title and design was submitted to the DepEd Division office for screening, evaluation and approval. Upon approval, the Division released endorsement to the Regional Office for the BERF program for further screening and approval. When the research was approved by the Regional Office, the researcher began the process of data gathering. Validation of the instruments through the External Experts was sought. A Cronbach's alpha test was used for the reliability test. Orientation of the participants (by group, Students, SHS Immersion Coordinators and Industry Coordinators). Answering and retrieval of the research tool followed. Different tools were given separately and were explained thoroughly. The secondary data on immersion ratings and portfolio ratings and students' feedback were sought. Focus Group Discussion for the SHS Immersion Coordinators and Industry Partners was scheduled separately. Tallying of results and treatment of data. Analysis and Interpretation of Data. Making of Proposed Improvements.

Ethical Issues.

The right to conduct the study was strictly adhered through the approval of the principal, approval of the Superintendent of the Division and approval of the Regional office under BERF guidelines. Orientation of the respondents both the students and the teachers and the industry partners was done separately. In the orientation, the issue on confidentiality and anonymity was discussed requiring them not to write names on the tools and will have assigned codes instead. For Qualitative data, an Informed Consent Form was accomplished prior to the Focus Group Discussion. The need for the secondary data, a written permission was sought to the principal.

Plan for Data Analysis.

The Extent of the implementation of the SHS Immersion on the area focused was treated through a weighted mean and descriptions (refer to appendices for the scoring and description). The data on tracer profile was presented through Simple Percentage. Work Performance and Portfolio was gathered through the use of rating rubrics and the results were treated through weighted means. The qualitative data was gathered through a focused group discussion and note taking. The responses were analyzed through themes and codes.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Extent of the implementation of the Immersion Program for Academic Track -Immersion Program for Academic (Model A – 80 hours).

The weighted mean is 2.73 which is interpreted as Evident but inadequate or interpreted as Good. This means that the STEC SHS is compliant with the requirements for the Immersion, however, there are provisions that need to be addressed. This implies that the immersion program is fairly accomplished in its first year (November - December 2017) of implementation.

All items in the tool specified in DO 30 series of 2017 Annex F were justified individually found in the table. The strength of the implementation of the STEC SHS program lies in the following: Curriculum Guide is followed; Students are oriented and prepared before immersion including parental consent and insurance; there is a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) duly notarized to all partners; there is a scheduled monitoring and feed backing of the students.

The major weak points of the immersion program, one is on Specialization are aligned to work immersion partners and activities of the students are based on the competencies. This is hard to accomplish considering that academic strand competencies are too generic to be aligned with the industries; line of work and limited number of partners and the duration is too short.

Performance of Students during Immersion (N =143).

The grand mean is 3.95 interpreted as Very Good or Outstanding Performance wherein the performance exceeds the required standard. The aspects of Professionalism, Productivity and Work Behavior are rated high by the assigned supervisors in the companies. The pre-orientation by the immersion coordinators and the orientation proper by the companies have made the students aware of the significance of following the standards of the company; being respectful and must devote to accomplish the assigned tasks. A PhilIIno supervisor commented "students in STEC are polite and most of all they can follow and even exceed expectation of the supervisors when they are given tasks." During the Immersion exhibit and forum, HRD manager of LEAR emphasized, "STEC students are highly trainable and they manifest good work ethics and must continue these values until they work in companies." In the same event, a teacher mentor in John Highland School commented, "STEC students are easy to engage with the kids and they are approachable, they could become good teachers someday."

Satisfaction Rating of the Students (N-100 Students).

The general weighted mean is 3.45 which is interpreted as Strongly Agree or equivalent to High Satisfaction. This means that the Immersion program objectives were achieved and able to meet the expectations of the students. The areas on Environment and Delivery were given the highest ratings among the 143 students. The students were agreeable that the Environment or the venue has enabled them to appreciate the world of work and it has made them appreciate the actual tools found in the actual workplace. The Delivery means that the students were aided with their learning and given opportunities to perform hands-on activities that they can learn. The companies were gracious enough to train the students and expose them in the real work.

Industry Partners' Perception of the Program and Recommendation to improve the Immersion Program.

There were 6 Industry/ Institution partners that were asked to answer the questionnaire and some answers were based on the minutes of the Immersion Forum that was held last February 2018. Two themes immerged when asked about the perception about the program and these are: Useful- Students are exposed to Industry Setting and Jointly Beneficial – (Establish Partnership). The representatives of the companies were agreeable to the fact that the Immersion program is a useful mechanism whereby students are exposed in the industry setting. In the aspects of recommendations, there were three themes emerged and these are: Increase the 80 Hours time for Academic Strand Immersion; Required Prior skills should be taught in the school; The Expected Learned Competencies should be clear and specified. In the aspect of increasing the 80 hours, unanimously the industry partners recommended that for academic track, the immersion time should be increased and if possible during summer so no class will be affected.

Tracer Profile Summary (143).

As to chosen program there are 47% taking STEM Related courses; 17% on teacher education; 16% in ABM; 13% in HUMSS courses and 7% who are either not schooling and no response. In terms of type of school, 50% are in private schools and 42% in government schools; 1 % in international school. In terms of scholarship grant, 8% are with grants and in terms of course alignment, 76% are taking courses aligned to their SHS strand and 17% are not aligned.

VI. CONCLUSION

STEC SHS is compliant with the requirements for the Immersion Program, however, there are provisions that need to be addressed. The strengths of the implementation are: Curriculum Guide; Students' orientation; parental consent and insurance; and Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) are notarized. The major weak points are: desired competencies to be evaluated; budget and materials for the Immersion and lack of information on process and required forms. The partner Industry input should be taken into considerations: increasing the 80 Hours time for Academic Strand Immersion; Required Prior skills should be taught in the school; The Expected Learned Competencies should be clear and specified.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The prime means of communicating the students are through Facebook account (STEC SHS Alumni batch 2018). Selected students could have been invited for Focus Group Discussion.

2. The Company representatives were also given questionnaires (open-ended tool) and minutes of the forum during the Immersion Exhibit and Forum held on February 2018 were the only means of data gathering. IT would have been better that an interview could be done.

3. There were students (9) who did not respond to the profiling. Other means could have been done to reach them like home visits or calling in number rather than Fb.

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE

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The author is born on January 20, 1978 at Cebu City Philippines. He finished his Bachelor of Science in Biology at University of Southern Philippines Foundation. He finished his Master's Degree in Teaching Science at Southwestern University.   He finished his Doctor of Education major in Educational Management at University of Southern Philippines Foundation. He is currently a Master teacher II in Department of Education and he is assigned at Science technology Education Center, Basak, Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu, Philippines. He is teaching: Research, Biology, Academic English and Elective courses. His previous work background was a college instructor for 14 years at University of Southern Philippines Foundation. He has published a research paper in IAMURE international journal for Research in 2011. His study was about the Research Capabilities of HEIs in Cebu City. He is a Regional Trainer for Mass Training in the areas of Research. He is a member of Environmental network of the Philippines. He bagged 2nd Place winner in the Ki Hajar Dewantara Award for the search for Best Science Teacher on September 2018. He was also awarded as Regional Outstanding Researcher and Outstanding Master Teacher warded by DepEd Region VII during the Pasidungog 2018 on December 13, 2018.