Soft and Hard Skills Perceived Relevant by the Work Immersion Partner Institutions in the Countryside

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Article Information

Abstract: *This descriptive research investigated the work-related skills required by public and private work immersion partner institutions among STEM senior high school students using qualitative and quantitative survey method design. It intended to develop a list of relevant soft and hard skills viewed significant by each institution to be found among students who will immerse in both public and private work place. It was conducted among the STEM work immersion partner institutions of a public secondary school. Checklist and standardized questionnaires on soft and hard skills were used in the study. Based on the findings both public and private institutions required various soft and hard skills to be found among immersion students and use these skills as bases for rating students as career ready or not. The soft skills required by the institutions include communication, teamwork, initiative/ proactivity, professionalism, and dependability/ reliability skills. Moreover, hard skills were also viewed equally relevant such as mathematics and numeracy, and ICT skills. Hence, it is vital for students to be trained by these skills in the school level so as to open wide opportunities for them to become employable right after senior high school or become productive even in higher education and in curriculum exit they would choose.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The goal of every country's education is to prepare students to be equipped with the 21st century skills they need to be able to make informed decisions, solve problems, compete globally and succeed in the evolving society. However, to realize this goal requires an all-inclusive education program that will in turn produce competent individuals. It is for these thrusts that Philippine education system has to endure a major revamp part of which is the implementation of senior high school with work immersion program (DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2017).

To help students keep pace with the changing demands of the society requires them to upskill, reskill and master relevant hard and soft skills. Schools play a significant role in developing these skills among students. The gaps between traditional education practices and the needs of fast-paced economy and society could be addressed by preparing students for lifelong learning (Bourn, 2001).

Work immersion program is the Philippine education's response to the need of improving the country's education system to fully prepare high school graduates with the 21st century skills needed for the demand of the ever-changing society and global competition. It is envisioned that through work immersion, essential soft and hard skills will be developed and enhanced in the students before they leave the school and be able to use the skills as they transition to a career or higher education after high school (DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2017)

In the school level, students are expected to acquire the relevant soft and hard skills that they can utilize on their future careers either in employment or higher education. Every classroom scenario is expected to involve students in activities that will develop various skills; hence, teachers need to create diverse learning opportunities that equally expose students to different experiences for them to develop holistically. Since the main goal of education is to mold students and train them to become ready in their future career, it is therefore relevant to focus on how to achieve this goal. Therefore, it is vital for educators and schools to collaborate with the stakeholders such as the public and private work places to lay down their lists of expectations among the graduates. In this way, teachers could create learning experiences aligned to the skills highly valued by these

institutions and students learning will become more useful and relevant (Patacsil and Tablatin, 2017). It is for this purpose that the researcher conducted this research undertaking.

It is the intention of this study to survey the soft and hard skills that public and private institutions considered relevant to be found among senior high school students for them to have a productive career ahead. The findings of the study will hopefully serve as a guide among STEM educators and curriculum implementers in creating learning experiences aligned to the list of relevant soft and hard skills during classroom and work immersion activities so as STEM students will be able to make informed career decisions and straight out senior high school they will be capable of creating employment opportunities (Australian Aid, 2018). Moreover, this study aimed to significantly contribute to the limited literature on the implementation of STEM work immersion program in the country.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used the descriptive research design in the collection of information from STEM work immersion partner institutions. Furthermore, this method was employed in gathering information such as the work-related skills required by the work immersion partner institutions among senior high school graduates.

Research Participants

The subjects of this study included the four work immersion partner institutions of Carmen National High School- Day Class. These participants were chosen based on the consideration that it is where the STEM students could apply competencies and skills related to their STEM specialization. The number of participants is small since during the conduct of this study there were very few partner institutions who agreed to be part of the work immersion program of the school. The participants included:

Partner Institution A, a carrageenan production company based in the Philippines. They supply raw materials to the carrageenan industry; it has established a name in the Philippine seaweed industry for the company's used and as suppliers to producers of carrageenan. It is located somewhere in Northern Cebu.

Partner Institution B, a full-service structural Engineering Firm somewhere in Northern Cebu and established in 2008. It addresses the demand for structural engineering services in the design and construction industries.

Partner Institution C, an engineering office that offers a variety of services to customers. It offers feasibility study to planning, procurement, and engineering and construction services. It is located somewhere in Northern Cebu.

Partner Institution D, an agency responsible for the conservation, management and monitoring of natural resources' safety and protection alongside with the issuance of a license and implements regulation for the country's/ community's natural resources. It is located somewhere in Northern Cebu.

Data Collection Method

The instrument used in this research, is a survey form asking for the list of specific work-related skills required by each work immersion partner institution for a candidate to be employable and an interview questionnaire. The instruments used were researcher- made and was validated, rephrased and rewritten to suite the participants by the three experts who hold a Doctorate degree in education and are university instructors.

The researcher personally distributed the survey form to the work immersion partner institutions that asked for the lists of specific work-related skills required by each company for the candidate to be employable and was retrieved after ten days. After the retrieval of the survey, the researcher conducted a personal interview with the partner institution's focal person to ensure reliability of the survey instrument. The researcher take notes live of the responses and made a recap with notes following the interview.

Data Analysis

Data gathered from the work immersion partner institutions' responses were tabulated and analyze using appropriate qualitative data analysis approach. Based on the list of specific skills enumerated by the partner institutions, the researcher re-groups the skills according to codes. The researcher then classified the skills into themes and assigned categories. The categories used were communication, teamwork, initiative/ proactivity, professionalism, dependability/ reliability, mathematics & numeracy and ICT skills.

Ethical Consideration

The researcher discussed to the participants the main goal of this investigation and distributed the consent forms prior to the conduct of the study. The participants were given assurance as to the confidentiality of the data given and their anonymity. They were also

informed that there will be no names to be used upon publication of the study. Furthermore, this study has no conflict of interest and does not receive any funding from any funding agencies.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Work- Related Skills Required by the Work Immersion Partner Institutions

Every work immersion partner institution has a list of target work- related skills they sought in every candidate for employment. To be able to productively perform in today's workplace, the work immersion partner institutions require the following skills presented in Tables 1- 7 to be found in every candidate.

A. Soft Skills

Communication Skill

Based on the data (Table 1), the soft skills common to partner institutions B, C and D is active listening to the supervisor and/or co-workers. This attentive listening to superiors and colleagues is deemed necessary for instructions and effective completion of the task. Hence this skill must be present among candidates for employment.

In the senior high school subjects and work immersion program, active listening is strengthened in the classroom instruction through giving of activities wherein students may actively listen to

instructions for them to follow. Similarly, they are also given tasks to accomplish during classroom activities and are checked using rubrics if the completed output based on the instructions given had followed what is expected on them to do. It is therefore, necessary that students must develop their active listening skills from the classroom setting.

This finding is supported in the study of Hadijah and Shalawati (2016) that teachers should provide students with various activities and information, as it will facilitate students' acquisition of listening skills and therefore, improve the skills in listening at the same level of competence with some other relevant skills. Also, Liubiniene (2009) added that allowing students to reflect on their listening processes and practices are part of the teachers' responsibility to afford to the students. Students should be trained to follow instructions so that new things will be learned and they will become familiar with new concepts and skills. Additionally, Harmer (2015) stated that this effective listening skill will also help students in managing a successful communication. Hence, it is important for teachers to provide activities to enhance active listening and following instructions in the classroom.

In the senior high school curriculum, this skill is reinforced through an increased student talking time in the classroom and eliciting student's participation like for instance asking the student to answer other student's question

Table 1

Work- related Soft Skills Required by Work Immersion Partner Institutions in Terms of Communication

Communication Skills	Institution			
	A	B	C	D
1. Listens actively to superiors and colleagues.	√	√	√	√
2. Delivers appropriate written and oral information.	√	√	√	
3. Provides reliable feedback.	√	√	√	
4. Listens to instruction and ask questions if necessary in order to understand and considers different point of view of others.	√	√	√	
5. Communicate with politeness	√		√	
6. Recognize when it is appropriate to communicate.		√	√	
7. Demonstrate credibility.			√	
8. Listen attentively.			√	√

and involving students in group activities like debate and simulation of interesting issues. In this way, students learn to think critically and be able to practice his or her skills in speaking with clarity. Thus, it is significant to provide classroom activities that will help students practice and improve their skills in articulating their ideas.

This finding is supported in the study of Rodriguez-Cervantes and Rodriguez (2012) that speaking skills can be enhanced by providing classroom activities that allow students to practice and interact with other students. Therefore, if students can express their thoughts clearly, they know what they are doing. This finding is further supported in the study Park et al. (2013) that students who actively engage with the materials they studied, understanding is much more evident; hence, they will learn, remember and enjoy more. Additionally, appreciation of the relevance of what they learned is also evident among students who are actively engaged in the activities than those students who are passively engaged in the classroom activity. So, it is a great challenge for teachers to find ways to actively engage their students in the learning process. Hence, it is a necessity for teachers to ensure that students can express themselves and their ideas clearly even in the classroom setting by providing engaging and interactive activities.

Teamwork Skill

In Table 2, the four work immersion partner institutions require the skills of consistent collaboration with colleagues since in any workplace; cooperation of the team members is a determinant to accomplishing tasks. This skill must be present in a candidate for employment since the institution held this skill as one of the criteria in selecting an employee.

In the high school curriculum, the skill is developed in the students through assigning group activities that require group members to work collaboratively with groupmates in order to effectively accomplish group task. Hence, a candidate for employment must possess the skill in order to contribute positively with colleagues in accomplishing common goals and task. This finding is similar to Laal and Ghodsi (2011) that compared between efforts of students that are collaborative and individualize where competition among them are present, the former offers various advantages and would result to a more renounce efficiency and better achievement often associated with a correlation that is more considerate, reassuring and unswerving, hence, mental and emotional well- being, proficiency and self- worth are remarkably evident.

Consequently, if students are regularly exposed to collaborative activities they tend to achieve more and develop a support system as well as foster cooperation with others. This result is similar to that of Gull and Shehzad (2015) who found that cooperative learning activities had a positive impact on students' achievement. Thus, it is very beneficial that teachers must continually provide classroom activities that promote

Table 2

Work- related Soft Skills Required by Work Immersion Partner Institutions in Terms of Teamwork

Teamwork Skills	Institution			
	A	B	C	D
1. Considers the feedback and views to continuously improve collaboration of the team members.		√	√	
2. Exercise "give and take" to achieve group results.	√	√	√	
3. Work as an individual and as a member of a team.	√	√	√	
4. Is viewed as a valued team member.			√	
5. Consistently works collaboratively with others	√	√	√	√
6. Actively participates in activities and assigned task as required.	√		√	√
7. Plan and make decisions with others and support the outcomes.			√	√

collaborative learning and accomplishing group task.

Moreover, the main goal of teamwork in school is educating learners to set limitations and concur on the processes of conflict resolution which facilitate the teaching of managing group activity and simulate the implemented policies and procedures in the workplace (Ladd and Chan, 2004). So, if students acquire this skill, they will be able to maintain a positive relationship with colleagues, therefore, promoting productivity in the workplace. Hence, teachers must provide activities that hone the students' skills in managing conflict to promote a productive relationship with others.

Initiative/ Proactivity Skill

The four work immersion partner institutions require the skills of an independent and self- motivated worker who engages in a life-long learning (Table 3). These skills are considered necessary by the institutions for continuous job engagement resulting to optimum performance. Therefore, these skills must be present in a candidate for employment.

The skills are developed in the secondary education curriculum through providing students with activities that take them to different roles, provide feedback on their performance and letting them act on it and emphasize the importance of listening and engaging to discussions. Altogether, these activities will help students acquire the essential skills they need to grow professionally and find opportunities for continuous improvement.

Similarly, in the workplace' context, employees who are independent, self- motivated and continually engage in life-long learning manifest a feeling of contentment and sense of accomplishment in work. According to Ganta (2014) self- motivation improves the employee's performance and productivity of the organization. Self- motivation also promotes independent action which results in improvements in the product or service that industry delivers and willingness to take responsibility and get things done. Thus, it is essential for teachers to design individual- based activities to students in the instructional environment.

Professionalism Skill

The four partner institutions have a shared need on obedience to guidelines, policies and authorities as well as good grooming like the wearing of workplace' uniform and proper dress code (Table 4). These skills are regarded as significant in the institution in order to create an environment that is safe and comfortable to do the job effectively. Thus, these skills must be present in the job- seekers.

These skills are strengthened in secondary education through creating classroom activities that are well- structured and orderly, and classroom environment that rewards self- control activities. Additionally, this can be enhanced further through consistent follow up of students as to their compliance to school uniform and proper dress code guidelines. Hence, obedience and discipline among students can be inculcated on them if teachers are consistent enough in prompting students to follow school rules and regulations. According to Lopes and Oliveira (2017), teacher's actions that constitute organizational and management processes aimed at establishing classroom order (routines, norms, procedures, etc.) promotes students' discipline.

Developing self- control supports students to develop self-discipline which is needed for them to obey rules, regulations and even their superiors. Acquiring these skills helps fulfill the goals of the company, creates a uniform workflow, ensures workplace safety, improve morale and job satisfaction. Parallel views of Tyler and Steven (2005) argued that an employee who adheres to the rules in the workplace is the precursor of the effective management and operation of the organization. Thus, teachers must reinforce students' obedience to guidelines, policies and authorities in the classroom setting as well as train students to regularly wear proper uniforms and observe the proper dress code.

Furthermore, the four partner institutions also give importance to a good interpersonal relationship in the workplace as this is valuable to promote trust and maintained positive feeling towards each other in the workplace, therefore every candidate for employment must possess this skill. In the secondary education curriculum, students can be shaped with a good interpersonal relationship through maintaining a structured classroom that encourages students to respect individual differences, allows them to work collaboratively and giving scenarios that challenge their interpersonal skills. So, if students are provided opportunities to acquire this skill, they tend to feel a sense of belonging and able to perform productively.

Table 3

Work- related Soft Skills Required by WI Partner Institutions in Terms of Initiative/ Proactivity

Initiative/ Proactivity Skills	Institution			
	A	B	C	D
1. Like to learn new things.		√	√	
2. Successfully completes task independently and consistently.	√	√	√	√
3. Engages in continuous learning.	√	√	√	√
4. Accomplish tasks with less prompting.	√	√	√	√
5. Ask for assistance when needed.	√	√	√	√

Table 4

Work- related Soft Skills Required by WI Partner Institution in Terms of Professionalism

Professionalism Skills	Institution			
	A	B	C	D
1. Carry out good hygiene and has an appropriate professional appearance.	√	√	√	√
2. Undertakes actions that have positive impact to others.		√	√	√
3. Maintain friendly work relationship with others.	√	√	√	√
4. Works to develop and maintain positive working relationships with co-workers by being punctual, keeping personal telephone calls to a minimum, and maintains a pleasant work attitude.	√	√	√	√
5. Respects those in authority.	√	√	√	√
6. Uses tools, equipment and machines responsibly.		√	√	√
7. Follows all policies and procedures when issues and conflicts may arise.		√	√	√

Table 5

Work- related Soft Skills Required by WI Partner Institutions in Terms of Dependability/ Reliability

Dependability/ Reliability Skills	Institution			
	A	B	C	D
1. Committed/dedicated as well as accountable in the assigned task and other aspects of the job.	√	√	√	
2. Accomplished task on time with less supervision.	√	√	√	√
3. Displays high level of performance.			√	√
4. Available as a resource to subordinates/ colleagues.	√	√	√	√
5. Productive and efficient in executing work.	√	√	√	√

Similar study of Reich and Hershcovis (2011) assessed that affirmative social relationship is accompanied by positive work and personal upshots like satisfaction in the job, full engagement and execution of the task, teamwork and dedication to job. The positive interpersonal relationship allows an individual to develop a rapport with others and form a working relationship. Hence, it is a valuable task of the teachers to provide collaborative activities to develop students' interpersonal relationship in the classroom environment.

Dependability/Reliability Skill

From Table 5, the skill set requirement common to four partner institutions includes work efficiency and provide support to others. These are regarded as essential for satisfactory performance and for an organization's success. Hence, these must be present in a candidate for employment.

In the secondary education subjects, work efficiency and providing supports to others is amplified through implementing group work activity which assigned task by groups which in turn bring about participation, teamwork and an equal division of task. Hence, a job- seeker must develop work efficiency and the willingness to support others from the classroom setting. According to Hanaysha (2016) employee's productivity is a positive effect of engagement. Similarly, Richman (2006); Fleming and Asplund (2007) added that productivity among employees is evident among those who are engaged and involved in their tasks since these employees are more motivated in completing their assigned task more than any personal influences. Thus, it is of high importance for teachers to workout students' efficiency in task and cooperation in different classroom activities.

B. Hard Skills

Mathematics and Numeracy Skills

The four partner institutions commonly need proficient skills in basic mathematical

functions (Table 6). This skill is considered important among the four institutions for following and giving directions purposes and should be found in a candidate for employment.

In the secondary education subjects, mathematics and numeracy skills are enhanced by utilizing varied approaches that will make the teaching of mathematics and numeracy interactive such as employing classroom games that will afford an opportunity for students to exercise their skills and expand their understanding to a safe learning environment, supportive and fun.

Furthermore, providing students opportunities to develop logical reasoning and problem-solving skills will also aid in strengthening their skills in mathematics and numeracy. Developing skills in mathematics and numeracy is the key for students to access and make sense of their world; it is vital for them to prepare for better workplace performance. As the study of Higgins (2016) affirmed that improving mathematics and numeracy skills will lead to economic benefit for individuals, firms and the country as a whole. Fitzsimons (2005) added that the aims of mathematics and numeracy in the workplace are more pragmatic, with a focus on getting work done. Thus, it is critical for teachers to design interactive mathematics and numeracy activities in the classroom setting.

ICT Skills

It can be depicted in Table 7 that the four partner institutions give emphasis on digital skills. The skills are regarded necessary by the four institutions for they all use computers to do various functions and to complete daily tasks. Thus, it is vital that a candidate for employment have this skill. In the secondary education curriculum, ICT skills are developed through offering ICT subjects as part of the students' course from junior high school to the senior high school level.

Table 6

Work- related Hard Skills Required by WI Partner Institutions in Terms of Mathematics and Numeracy Skills

Mathematics & Numeracy Skills	Institution			
	A	B	C	D
1. Can interpret and communicate mathematical information and ideas presented in graphs, tables and charts.	√	√	√	√
2. Proficient in basic mathematical functions like plus, minus, multiply and divide.	√	√	√	√
3. Can read and understand information in words, graphs, diagrams, or charts.	√	√	√	√

Table 7

Work- related Hard Skills Required by WI Partner Institutions in Terms of ICT Skills

ICT Skills	Institution			
	A	B	C	D
1. Understand common computer terminology.		√	√	√
2. Knowledgeable in computer software such as words, excel spreadsheets and power point presentation.	√	√	√	√
3. Can easily locate and extract the necessary files from computers.	√	√	√	√
4. Familiar with the use of emails to send and receive mails	√	√	√	√

This skill is also reinforced by integrating the use of technology in non- ICT subjects. Proficiency in using digital technologies is of high importance in today's workplace. This is supported by the findings that computer skills are deemed significant among employees to perform their job tasks and achieved satisfaction among clientele (Kapur, 2018). In fact, nowadays, skills prepare for better workplace performance. As the study of Higgins (2016) affirmed that improving mathematics and numeracy skills will lead to economic benefit for individuals, firms and the country as a whole. Fitzsimons (2005) added that the aims of mathematics and numeracy in the workplace are more pragmatic, with a focus on getting work done. Thus, it is critical for teachers

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, public and private partner institutions require soft skills such as communication, teamwork, initiative/ proactivity, professionalism, dependability/ reliability skills. Additionally, these institutions also require hard skills that include mathematics and numeracy and ICT skills. These work- related soft and hard skills are viewed highly- valuable by these institutions to be developed among senior high school students undergoing work immersion program.

This study focused only on the inventory of soft and hard skills that each partner institution participant needed in their work place. Limited sources of information on work immersion program and the skills required by partner institutions among secondary work immersion students were the challenges upon completing this study. Moreover, during the conduct of this study there were minimal number of partner institutions that have signified their interest to be part of the work immersion program of the school. Hence, the result of this study solely depended on the responses of the four work immersion partner institutions. Further studies that involve

more or various types of institutions as work immersion partners may be conducted.

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