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Impractical Practicum? Analyzing the Impact of Online Work Immersion among the Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) Students amidst the Pandemic[1]

Objective. This study aims to document the impact of online work immersion among Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) students at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines. The study highlighted the experiences of BLIS students who underwent online work immersion during the school year 2022-2023 including their challenges and difficulties in completing their work immersion hours. **Methods.** This research study employed

[1]This paper was an undergraduate thesis of some of the authors submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of Bachelor in Library and Information Science (BLIS) under the College of Education, Polytechnic University of the Philippines, Manila, Philippines on February 2023.

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a descriptive quantitative approach to document the impact of online work immersion among Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) students of Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) during the School Year 2022-2023. The researchers used purposive non-probability sampling in gathering the respondents. A total of 63 BLIS 4th-year students who were enrolled in Library Practice subjects agreed to participate in the study and were asked to rate 40 statements using a Likert Scale (1- strongly disagree and 5 - strongly agree). These statements were used to describe their overall experiences as well as the challenges they encountered with the online work immersion. The statements highlighted their difficulties, their coping mechanisms, as well as their readiness to perform professional library work. The researchers employed statistical methods such as frequency distribution, percentage, and weighted means to interpret and analyze the data gathered and provide more compelling results for the study. **Results.** The study revealed that most of the students experienced some challenges in terms of distance learning and connectivity issues. In addition, the said challenges were overcome through various coping mechanism strategies such as establishing rapport with workmates as well as learning and researching the given tasks in advance. **Conclusions.** The study also revealed a high preference for onsite practice training among students in terms of acquiring more knowledge and skills in the actual workforce.

Keywords: online work immersion; LIS students; pandemic; Philippines

Introduction

Connecting theories and knowledge learned inside the four walls of the classroom to the actual real-world scenario is the quintessential way to see the effectiveness of the learning process. Experiential learning allows learners to apply their knowledge and skills to the actual workplace, giving them a glimpse of professional life after completing a degree. Tanaleon, Abang, Alarcon, Camino, Versoza, and Bernales (2020) noted that work immersion or on-the-job training was indeed a requirement before completing any degree. By allowing learners to get these hands-on experiences, they will have a better understanding of what it is like to be in the actual work environment.

One such way to have such experiential learning is through work immersion. Work immersion has been integrated into the curriculum to allow the learners to be familiar with the work environment and apply their skills and competencies in their specific professions (Peñaredonda, 2023). Walczyk and Schultz-Jones (2017) highlighted how work immersion can help library science students determine and apply the appropriate skills and knowledge as well as establish a career path that suits their skills and knowledge. In the Philippines, the Department of Education through its Department Order (DO) 40, Series 2015, Guidelines for K to 12 Partnership stressed the importance of work immersion as part of the Partnership-Building Activities (BPA) to achieve student success (Republic of Philippines Department of Education, 2015). This denotes the importance of work immersion to expose the learners to the actual, real-life workplace. Acut, Curaraton, Latonio, and Latonio (2021) also noted that DepEd implemented work immersion as an aid in the shortcomings for future job careers. In addition, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) also released memorandum orders that aim to monitor and regulate student internship programs for all programs in the Philippines (CHED Memo. Order (CMO) No. 23, s. of 2009; CHED Memo. Order (CMO) No. 104, s. of 2017) ensuring that student internships should be implemented in higher education institutions (HEIs) to prepare students for their future job openings. During the onset of the pandemic, CHED also released the guidelines on the implementation of flexible learning (CHED Memo. Order (CMO) No. 04, s. of 2020) which also include on-the-job trainings (OJT) and practicum highlighting flexible learning and teaching options, strategies, approaches, and modalities to ensure continuous knowledge transfer. Even having the memorandum, with the upsurge of the pandemic, doing work immersion came as a challenge to learners, instructors, and industries alike.

The value of work immersion in the Philippine setting has been evident in a number of studies. The study conducted by Peñaredonda (2023) revealed the effectiveness of work immersion

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among 54 Grade 12 technical-vocational-livelihood (TVL) students of Santa Cruz, North Cluster in Marinduque during the pandemic which includes getting positive ratings in terms of their technical, interpersonal, behavioral, and entrepreneurial skills. However, their communication skills have been the least mastered skills. In addition, students encountered problems such as resource problems and skills execution. In a similar study, Mapalo and Sermona (2022) described the challenges encountered by the Grade 12 TVL students and teachers in Iligan City such as difficulty in work immersion, learning modalities, and execution. While both studies highlighted the importance of work immersion, the setbacks and drawbacks of implementing it during the pandemic became very obvious.

The success of online immersion heavily depends on internet use. Del Rosario (2021) stated that a stable internet connection was essential for trainees in an online work immersion. Asio, Gadia, Abarintos, Paguio, and Balce (2021) added that connection instability added stress to the students as it would delay the tasks due to unstable internet connection. Both studies highlighted how their productivity and work performance have been heavily affected due to slow internet connection. Though the Philippines might be considered highly connected, stable internet connections seem to be a problem. Distance and connectivity issues should be considered as essential in making work immersion possible. In addition, connectivity issues should be addressed on a national level in which the government is expected to take a more proactive response in ensuring accessible and stable internet connection across the country.

Given that distance and connectivity issues were considered an integral part of the realization of online work immersion during the pandemic, it is understandable and valid if students feel unsatisfied, unsure, or unconfident with what they were doing. This was also seen as a barrier to ensuring productivity during online work immersion. Having a sense of self-awareness through self-assessment appears to be a good strategy to address such issues. The study of Insorio, Manaloto, and Lareña (2021) revealed that students experience specific difficulties in answering assigned tasks and a lack of parental support. Many students have different careers they want to pursue and work immersion entails hands-on training or work simulation wherein students apply their skills and learn about their chosen field. This was also further outlined by AlGhamdi (2022) on how learners' competencies, practical experiences, and acquired information were enhanced through work immersion and its necessity to consider relevant challenges. These studies relate to students' self-assessment during work immersion to help them assess their quality of work and examine if they learn something from it.

To overcome such challenges and difficulties faced during work immersion, learners were also coming up with various coping mechanisms. Covita and Torres (2016) noted students' coping strategies were problem and emotion-focused. This includes assertiveness and help-seeking, skills enhancements through observation, interaction, and practice, and conflict mediation to address problems; while seeking emotional and social support, cognitive reappraisal, having leisure activities, and venting, ignoring, and postponing to address emotion-focused challenges name a few. Other studies by Shaketange, Kanyimba, and Brown (2017) and Rodríguez-Artura and Meseguer-Artola (2018) also tackled the different challenges of doing internships in an online environment which also highlights similar coping mechanisms to address such challenges.

Similar to other professions, library and information science (LIS) also includes work immersion or on-the-job training (OJT) in the curriculum. As stated in the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 24, Series of 2015 Section 8, all students taking up a Bachelor in Library and Information Science should undergo a minimum of 400 hours of immersion to different types of libraries through the supervision of practicum coordinator. The required number of hours is divided into Library Practice 1 and Library Practice 2 courses which

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should be taken over two semesters. This guideline is applicable to all state universities and colleges (SUCs) offering the same program. In addition, students are also required to submit journals, portfolios, and proposals based on their observations to the assigned area.

The Department of Library and Information Science of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines has Library Practice subjects which are work immersion subjects specifically at the Ninoy Aquino Library and Learning Resource Center (NALLRC) located inside the PUP Mabini Campus. This subject exposes them to real-life actual work experiences in the librarianship field allowing them to apply their knowledge and skills learned from the four walls of the classroom.

Objectives

Understanding the importance as well as the challenges of conducting work immersion online, this study aims to document the impact of online work immersion among 4th year Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) students at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines who were enrolled in the Library Practice subjects from the school year 2022-2023. Specifically, it intends to determine the challenges they encountered as well as their coping mechanisms relevant to the completion of the online work immersion. This study also identified the students' level of readiness to perform in a professional library. Lastly, this undertaking also aims to suggest improvements in the work immersion subject of the Department of Library and Information Science of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines.

Methodology

This research study employed a descriptive quantitative approach to document the impact of online work immersion among Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) students of Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) during the School Year 2022-2023. The researchers used purposive non-probability sampling in gathering the respondents. A total of 63 BLIS 4th-year students who were enrolled in Library Practice subjects agreed to participate in the study and were asked to rate 40 statements using a Likert Scale (1- strongly disagree and 5 - strongly agree). These statements were used to describe their overall experiences as well as the challenges they encountered with the online work immersion. The statements highlighted their difficulties, their coping mechanisms, as well as their readiness to perform professional library work. The researchers employed statistical methods such as frequency distribution, percentage, and weighted means to interpret and analyze the data gathered and provide more compelling results for the study.

Results and Discussions

Profile of the Respondents

The respondents of the study were the two sections of 4th year BLIS students who were enrolled in the subject Library Practice during the pandemic. A total of 63 respondents participated in the study with age ranges from 21 to 25 years old and with females (74.6%) dominating the group.

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Connectivity and Distance Issues During Online Work Immersion

As the success of online work immersion depends heavily on the use of a stable internet connection, it is essential to understand how it affects their productivity to perform the given tasks. Table 1 below shows statements used to gauge how connectivity and distance issues impact their productivity and performance during online work immersion. The table below shows that most of the students can connect with others in online discussion forums and meetings in addition to being able to go to work on time since they do not really have to travel physically to work. On the contrary, few students felt that they were able to perform the task well without any convenience and that distance learning works better than the typical or traditional mode of learning. This further signified that while some students think of connectivity or distance issues as an advantage, some also find them as a challenge. In addition, this also emphasized the relevance of immersion to the students' connectivity as they become responsible and learn interpersonal relationships with their co-workers. They learned about work ethics which is essential to the workplace. Indeed, through work immersion, the students could distinguish the importance of distance that molds their behavior and knowledge.

Table 1

Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation on Distance and Connectivity

Statements	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Interpretation
I was able to finish tasks without interruptions due to bad internet connections.	3.75	0.84	6	Agree
I was able to go to work on time without getting late.	3.97	0.86	2	Agree
I am worth connecting with others in online discussion forums and meetings.	4.05	0.81	1	Agree
I was able to perform the task well without any inconvenience.	3.63	0.87	7	Agree
I was able to set adjustments to distance learning.	3.86	0.80	4	Agree
I found flexibility in doing online-based tasks.	3.86	0.86	3	Agree
Online work immersion became effective because I used to enhance my computer skills.	3.76	1.00	5	Agree

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Distance learning works better than a typical mode of learning.	3.11	1.25	8	Neutral
Composite Mean	3.75			Agree

Legend: 4.21 – 5.00 (Strongly Agree); 3.41 – 4.20 (Agree); 2.61 – 3.40 (Neutral); 1.81 – 2.60 (Disagree); 1.00 – 1.80 (Strongly Disagree) (n=63)

Self-Assessment on Performing Online Work Immersion Tasks

Given the challenge brought by the pandemic alongside the emergence of technology, it is understandable that students might feel a bit unconfident in performing given tasks during the online work immersion. Thus, it is indeed empirical for students to conduct self-assessments to address such challenges. Table 2 shows how students perceived themselves through their work performance during their online immersions. Students strongly agreed that they learned and showed a professional attitude in dealing with different people that they encountered. In the work immersion, the students become familiar with the work-related environment, which is highly related to their specialization, to develop their competence. Through work immersion, students can improve their knowledge and skills, understand the significance and application of the theories and principles taught in school, improve their communication and interpersonal skills, develop positive work habits and attitudes, and develop an appreciation for and respect for work, all while learning critical industrial abilities under the supervision of professionals. Acut, Curaraton, Latonio, and Latonio (2021) stated that the program based on the assessment can foster professional and personal growth as well as develop the learning experiences of the students and provide opportunities for the students in learning the outside work environment that augments the academic learning performance of the students. The students bring innovations and ideas to government, industry, and community organizations.

Table 2

Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation of Self-Assessment on Performing Online Work Immersion Tasks

Statements	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Interpretation
I demonstrated different abilities/skills to do tasks or operate materials/equipment/applications needed for the job.	3.98	0.77	4	Agree
I could handle the details of the work assigned to me without difficulty.	3.83	0.85	7	Agree

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I learned and showed a professional attitude in dealing with different people whom I came in contact with.	4.29	0.73	1	Strongly Agree
I was able to give sound suggestions for problems.	3.76	0.82	8	Agree
The work immersion program motivated me to pursue a high level of learning and career.	3.92	0.85	6	Agree
I could adapt to the changes in my work environment and overcome problems in the work immersion.	3.95	0.79	5	Agree
The work immersion program allowed me to explore new ideas about the existing knowledge in the field of library science.	4.10	0.80	2	Agree
I was attentive and productive throughout my work immersion.	4.02	0.81	3	Agree
Composite Mean	3.97			Agree

Legend: 4.21 – 5.00 (Strongly Agree); 3.41 – 4.20 (Agree); 2.61 – 3.40 (Neutral); 1.81 – 2.60 (Disagree); 1.00 – 1.80 (Strongly Disagree) (n=63)

Self-Application of Task After Online Work Immersion

Since the objective of work immersion is to apply the knowledge acquired from the classroom to the actual work environment, it is understandable that students may also assess if the skills and experience learned from the online work immersion can be applied after the immersion or at the actual workforce. Table 3 below shows how the students perceived their experiences once the online work immersion had ended. Based on the responses, many students believed and strongly agreed that they accomplished all the assigned tasks on time. Students also agreed that they became well organized and competent to complete the task. However, only a few students agreed that they were more efficient in doing tasks online than working physically inside the library. This further signified that as the students worked independently, students were also developing their sense of responsibility and self-reliance to finish the given task.

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Table 3

Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation of Self-Application of the Task After Online Work Immersion

Statements	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Interpretation
I was able to accomplish all assigned tasks on time.	4.24	0.89	1	Strongly Agree
I was able to communicate well with my superiors.	4.10	0.82	3	Agree
I am more efficient in doing tasks online than working inside the library.	3.41	1.16	8	Agree
I was able to manage my time and stay motivated.	3.79	1.06	6	Agree
I am committed to doing more online work.	3.57	1.07	7	Agree
I was able to focus on achieving goals in work, results in higher productivity.	3.86	1.00	5	Agree
I am well organized and competent to complete and get stuff done.	4.14	0.90	2	Agree
I was able to prioritize the tasks wisely.	4.00	0.92	4	Agree
Composite Mean	3.89			Agree

Legend: 4.21 – 5.00 (Strongly Agree); 3.41 – 4.20 (Agree); 2.61 – 3.40 (Neutral); 1.81 – 2.60 (Disagree); 1.00 – 1.80 (Strongly Disagree) (n=63)

Coping Mechanisms to Overcome Difficulties During Online Work Immersion

With challenges associated with conducting online work, immersions call for the students to be as resilient as possible to accomplish given tasks. Table 4 below shows how students overcome these challenges. Based on the responses, the majority of the students noted that being friends with workmates helped them to overcome difficulties in work immersion. In addition, some students also agreed that the work institution helped them to overcome difficulties by adjusting

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deadlines and being lenient on workloads. However, some students agreed that they were able to ease the stress from work immersion through entertainment materials/mediums such as watching television and listening to music as well as sleeping throughout the working hours whenever it was possible to regain their strength. This further denotes that students responded through various coping mechanisms to be more focused and to accomplish the given task during online work immersion.

Table 4

Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation of Coping Mechanisms of the Students to Overcome Difficulties During Online Work Immersion

Statements	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Interpretation
I was able to ease the stress from work immersion through entertainment materials/mediums such as watching television and listening to music.	3.97	0.86	6	Agree
I use social media to relieve work fatigue.	4.02	0.89	5	Agree
Learning and researching advances sustained the gap in my abilities.	4.10	0.78	3	Agree
Asking questions to my instructor right after the work immersion hours will help me to understand the task more.	4.06	0.80	4	Agree
I sleep throughout the working hours whenever it is possible in order to regain my strength.	3.29	1.17	7	Neutral
Being a friend with workmates helps me to overcome difficulties in work immersion.	4.30	0.75	1	Strongly agree
The work institution helped me overcome difficulties by adjusting deadlines and being lenient on workloads.	4.11	0.88	2	Agree
Composite Mean	3.98			Agree

Legend: 4.21 – 5.00 (Strongly Agree); 3.41 – 4.20 (Agree); 2.61 – 3.40 (Neutral); 1.81 – 2.60 (Disagree); 1.00 – 1.80 (Strongly Disagree) (n=63)

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Level of Readiness to Professional Library Work

As the online work immersion comes to an end, students were also asked to assess their readiness level for actual professional library work and see that the said immersion has been helpful in preparing them for the real-life work environment. Table 5 below shows that the majority of the students agreed that they learned and improved their skills during the online work immersion. In addition, most of the students agreed that the online work immersion allowed them to gain additional knowledge that was not discussed in the classroom. However, few students agreed that the online work immersion allowed them to experience different library works and taught them to be more resourceful and productive. This further denotes that the students felt that they were indeed ready to work professionally. The experiences of students in the programs where one would learn the long-term goal while celebrating successes along the way, establish and build expertise, draw, and become a veteran librarian based upon new ideas of new librarians, learn to recognize the information literacy program, and believe good results from their efforts. They begin working towards incorporating talents and ideas with their groups.

Table 5

Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation of Level of Readiness to Professional Library Work

Statements	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Interpretation
This work immersion taught me to be more resourceful and productive.	3.58	1.17	7	Agree
In my career, I applied all the knowledge I learned in work immersion.	3.89	0.93	5	Agree
Work immersion made me gain additional knowledge that we didn't discuss in the classroom.	4.03	0.94	2	Agree
Work immersion allowed me to experience different library works.	3.80	1.01	6	Agree
I learned and improved my skills during work immersion.	4.13	0.93	1	Agree
I am confident that the work immersion prepared me for my future career.	3.91	0.83	4	Agree

I understood the connection between tasks given to me in the work immersion to my career.	3.95	1.00	3	Agree
Composite Mean	3.89			Agree

Legend: 4.21 – 5.00 (Strongly Agree); 3.41 – 4.20 (Agree); 2.61 – 3.40 (Neutral); 1.81 – 2.60 (Disagree); 1.00 – 1.80 (Strongly Disagree) (n=63)

The results revealed that the knowledge and skills learned both at the schools and at the online work immersion alongside the students' soft skills which may include personal development, technical focus, problem-solving, interpersonal orientation, organizational awareness, positive work attitudes, resilience, adaptability, maturity, and motivation, were indeed a preferable mix in making them work-ready graduates. Indeed, the work immersion would be fruitful if the students were ready to learn new skills and mold their behavior and attitude to venture into the specialized field they want to focus on.

Conclusions

The upsurge of the pandemic halted several functions and processes in the educational landscape. Work immersion regardless of mode of delivery or learning still plays a vital role in ensuring that the teachings inside the walls of the classroom are indeed relevant to the actual work environment. This study revealed that distance and connectivity issues impacted the productivity and performance of the students during the online work immersion as the fulfillment of the task heavily depended on a stable internet connection. In addition, it is also essential to understand how students perceive their overall online work experience and assess how they performed to accomplish the given task. This also helps them to assess if they learned something from the online work immersion and if they are indeed ready to work in the library upon completion of the degree. Students still prefer to have the work immersion done in a physical setting. Lastly, although students still prefer to apply their knowledge in the actual physical library environment, the outcome of the study can be used to improve any online work immersion in the future which may include virtual library tours, online seminars and information sessions, hybrid work immersions, and virtual team building to name a few.

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Практикум без практики? Аналіз впливу поринання в онлайн-роботу серед студентів бакалаврату бібліотечно-інформаційної справи (БІС) в умовах пандемії[1]

Мета. Це дослідження має на меті задокументувати вплив поринання в онлайн-роботу серед студентів бакалаврату бібліотечно-інформаційної справи (БІС) Політехнічного університету Філіппін. Дослідження висвітлило досвід студентів БІС, які зазнали онлайн-поринання в роботу протягом 2022/2023 навчального року, зокрема їхні виклики та труднощі впродовж робочих годин. **Методика.** У цьому дослідженні використано описовий кількісний підхід для документування впливу поринання в онлайн-роботу серед студентів бакалаврату бібліотечних та інформаційних наук (БІС) Політехнічного університету Філіппін (PUP) протягом 2022-2023 навчального року. Дослідники використовували цілеспрямовану неімовірнісну вибірку для збору респондентів. Загалом 63 студенти 4-го курсу БІС, які вивчали дисципліну «Бібліотечна

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[1] Ця стаття була дипломною роботою деяких авторів, поданою на часткове отримання ступеня бакалавра бібліотечних та інформаційних наук (BLIS) у Педагогічному коледжі Політехнічного університету Філіппін, Маніла, Філіппіни, у лютому 2023 року.

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практика», погодилися взяти участь у дослідженні, і їм було запропоновано оцінити 40 тверджень за шкалою Лайкерта (1 – зовсім не згоден і 5 – повністю згоден). Ці твердження були використані, щоб описати їхній загальний досвід, а також проблеми, з якими вони зіткнулися під час поринання в онлайн-роботу. Твердження висвітлили їхні труднощі, механізми подолання, які вони використовували, а також їхню готовність виконувати професійну бібліотечну роботу. Дослідники використовували статистичні методи, такі як частотний розподіл, відсоткові та зважені показники, щоб інтерпретувати й аналізувати зібрані дані та надати більш переконливі результати для дослідження. **Результати.** Дослідження показало, що більшість студентів зіткнулася з певними проблемами, пов'язаними з дистанційним навчанням та питаннями підключення. Крім того, ці виклики були переборені за допомогою різних стратегій подолання, таких як налагодження стосунків із колегами по роботі, а також вивчення та дослідження поставлених завдань заздалегідь. **Висновки.** Дослідження також виявило, що студенти віддають перевагу практичним заняттям на робочому місці з урахуванням набуття більшого обсягу знань та навичок у реальному робочому середовищі.

Ключові слова: поринання в онлайн-роботу; студенти БІС; пандемія; Філіппіни