



Industry supervisors' final evaluation of tourism students Work Integrated Learning

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Abstract

Feedback from industry supervisors is crucial for the success of work-integrated learning (WIL) activities in academic qualifications. This study analyses industry supervisor's final evaluation of tourism students in terms of job performance, soft skills and general performance. The evaluation questionnaire formed part of the final WIL report and supervisors rated the performance of tourism WIL students on a 5-point Likert Scale. Using 461 completed WIL reports descriptive statistics, Kruskal-Wallis test analyses, Mann-Whitney test analyses and Spearman's rho correlations were used to analyse the data. The key findings of this research indicate that overall ratings by supervisors were excellent and good, findings show that qualification type, payment for WIL and gender affect aspects related to the performance of students. This study provides valuable feedback to academic institutions regarding the performance of Tourism students which is important in efforts to enhance academic qualifications and quality aspects relating to the use of WIL components in education.

Keywords: Supervisors, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), WIL evaluations, employer's perceptions

Introduction

The successes of an institution's academic programmes are determined by its proficiency in educating graduates with knowledge, skills and abilities as deemed important by industry (Petrillose & Montgomery, 1998:46). Industry professionals agree that integration of academic study and experiential education provides an effective opportunity for preparing students to be successful within their chosen industry (Kay & DeVeau, 2013:24). Work-Integrated learning (WIL) is incorporated into qualifications to align academic and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of students and workplaces (Nduna, 2012:233, SAQA, 2014, Tovey, 2001:225). WIL is the ideal space to develop professionally, as it is the space that occupies both learning and work (Trede, 2012:159). However, in order for WIL to be successful in developing workforce entry-level competencies and improving the workplace readiness of graduates (Sealey, Raymond, Groeller, Rooney, Crabb & Watt, 2015:53), all relevant stakeholders need to be involved in, and committed to the process. Meaningful feedback is required to close the gap between current and expected performance (Peach, Ruinard & Webb, 2014:242) and assists academic institutions with adapting the WIL programme according to educational and industry requirements.

Higher education institutions in South Africa, are obliged, in accordance with the South



African Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF), Department of Education Government Notice No 928, gazetted (No. 30353) 5 October 2007 as policy in terms of the Higher Education Act, to place students for prerequisite WIL (Keating, 2012:89). There is a renewed focus on WIL, stemming from the often-repeated refrain by employers that the products of the education system are not ready for the workplace (DHET, 2013:5). Because of this renewed focus, there is a need for education institutions to reflect on their current organizational practices. Placement programmes should be designed with industry advisement and preferences in mind for workable and effective arrangements between academic institutions and tourism industry employers (Kay & DeVeau, 2013:25). The WIL programme is a collaborative effort among the student, the industry supervisor and the academic department coordinator (Tovey, 2001; Khuong, 2016; Bilsland & Nagy, 2015)

This article forms part of a series of research projects within the Department of Tourism Management at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT). The Department of Tourism Management is in the process of reviewing the WIL programme; with the intention of designing and developing a comprehensive and innovative programme, that considers the needs of all relevant stakeholders. The focus of the research projects is to analyse the WIL reports of students registered for the National Diploma Tourism Management, National Diploma Adventure Tourism Management, National Diploma Ecotourism Management and National Diploma Event Management who completed WIL between 2010 and 2015. The purpose of these projects is to gain insight into the evaluations of tourism students with regard to their WIL placements (Taylor & Geldenhuys, 2016a, Taylor & Geldenhuys, 2016b), to analyse industry supervisor's final evaluations of tourism students and to understand the current structure of the WIL programme at TUT. These research projects will be used as benchmark of current practices. This paper examines industry supervisor's final evaluations of tourism student's performance during WIL placement. The article provides insight into the existing literature on WIL, stakeholder perspectives, supervisor's perceptions and the importance of WIL. The research methods and procedures used in the study are explained and the results presented and discussed. Finally, implications, limitations, and directions for future research are offered.

Literature Review

Industry supervisors have a core task in the internship in addition to integrating theory and practice (Karlsson, 2010:30), facilitating exposure to authentic experiences (Sealey *et al.*, 2015:54) and are key to underpinning the success of WIL students (Winchester-Seeto, Rowe & Mackaway, 2016:101). Supervisors are part of the WIL experience and without them it is not education, but merely an experience. The process of transferring theory into practice is conducted under the guidance of the supervisor who facilitates learning and reflection and who provides feedback (Ralph, Walker & Wimmer, 2007; Sealey *et al.*, 2015; Rayner & Papakonstantinou, 2015). Industry supervisors have firsthand knowledge of the student's WIL experience and the evaluations completed by supervisors are therefore important in creating a holistic WIL programme.

Previous research on WIL supervision relates to the benefits associated to industry (Wiseman & Page, 2001; Braunstein & Stull, 2001), support for placement supervision (Sealey *et al.*, 2015), understanding the role of supervisors in WIL (Winchester-Seeto *et al.*, 2016; Paech *et al.*, 2014; Keating, 2012; Rowe, Mackaway & Winchester-Seeto, 2012), supervisor satisfaction with WIL (Jiang, Lee & Golab, 2015) and expectations of supervisors (Lim, 2015). Milne and Caldicott (2016) conducted a study, which explored the differences in industry supervisors' ratings of student performance on WIL placements and the relative importance of skills. The article examined the influence of remuneration as a factor in supervisor rating scores. The conclusions found little evidence of significant differences in patterns of supervisor ratings of student performance, or in the importance attributed to skills, in either 'paid' or 'unpaid' settings (Milne & Caldicott, 2016:182).



Khuong (2016) examined the WIL process in tourism training programmes in Vietnam from the perspective of academic institutions and industry. The study indicated the existence of WIL initiatives taken from industry engagement, but that links between institutions and industry were superficial and unstable (Khuong, 2016:149). Bilsland and Nagy (2015) conducted a study on the perspectives of intern work supervisors in Vietnam for Commerce and Management students. The study examined supervisor’s perspectives of interns from a foreign university, the university’s WIL programme and their views on their own role in the intern’s learning process (Bilsland & Nagy, 2015:185). Odora (2011), conducted a study of employers’ perceptions regarding the quality of technical education and training in Botswana, Southern Africa. The study sought to determine the perceptions of employers regarding the quality of graduates and concluded that skills levels of graduates were less than satisfactory. These studies emphasise the necessity and importance of understanding supervisor’s perspectives of WIL graduates and despite the lack of exploration of workplace supervisors’ ratings of student performance during WIL, some studies suggest the need to do so (Milne & Caldicott, 2016:176). This is the first study that reviews the supervisor’s final evaluations of WIL tourism students.

Capturing industry supervisor’s perspectives on tourism students’ performance during placement will enable academic institutions and the profession to address current needs and to design and implement strategies aimed at assuring improvement and sustainability of WIL (Sealey *et al.*, 2015:54). Supervisors are the best judges of professional competence (Milne & Caldicott, 2016:101), and their assessments are therefore important, whereas student self-ratings and academic assessments are less appropriate to rely on. Greater understanding of supervisors’ approach to providing input into assessment of WIL is therefore of interest to practitioners (Milne & Caldicott, 2016:175).

Research Methodology

The instrument used for data collection was the Industry Supervisor’s final evaluation questionnaire, which is used to assess student performance on placement. The quantitative analysis consisted of three topics, namely the job performance, skills and general skills of student. A saturation sample was used and included all WIL reports, from all four of the tourism diplomas on offer at TUT. The reports were analysed from October 2015 to December 2015 and the final realised sample included a total of 461 usable reports.

WIL reports contained demographic information of students and employers and Table 1 provides a profile of the student placements. Female students (72,70%) made up the majority of tourism WIL students and majority were registered for the National Diploma in Tourism Management (73,50%). This is in line with the number of students registered for the various Tourism Qualifications. The year of completion of WIL indicated fewer respondents for 2015 (5,60%) than in previous years. This can be ascribed to the fact that reports were analysed from October 2015 to December 2015 thereby excluding WIL students who finished their six-month practical at the end of 2015. Salary during WIL indicates that a slightly more students (55,30%) were paid during their WIL placement than not, and majority of placements were completed within the hospitality industry (44,30%).

Table 1: Profile of 461 reports

		Numbers of respondents (NR)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	126	27,30%
	Female	335	72,70%
National Diploma (ND)	ND Ecotourism Management	45	9,80%
	ND Event Management	54	11,70%
	ND Adventure Tourism	23	5,00%



	Management ND Tourism Management	339	73,50%
Year of WIL completion	2010	95	20,60%
	2011	72	15,60%
	2012	69	15,00%
	2013	82	17,80%
	2014	117	25,40%
	2015	26	5,60%
Salary during WIL	Paid	255	55,30%
	Unpaid	206	44,70%
Industry where WIL was completed	Hospitality	203	44,80%
	Wholesale	27	6%
	Retail	48	10,60%
	Adventure/Entertainment	42	9,30%
	Government	56	12,40%
	Services	77	17%

In terms of the qualifications, it is important to note that Tourism Management registers the highest number of students, with Event Management, Ecotourism Management and Adventure Tourism Management registering fewer students. It is interesting to note that most of the tourism WIL placements (44,8%) were in the Hospitality Industry. Hospitality included various accommodation establishments where students performed tasks related to reservations and front office duties. Table 2 provides a cross-tabulation between industry where WIL was done and qualification.

Table 2: Industry and Qualification Type

			Qualification Type			
			Ecotourism	Event	Adventure	Tourism
Industry	Hospitality	% within Industry	12,3%	5,9%	3,9%	77,8%
		Count	25	12	18	158
	Wholesale	% within Industry	0%	3,7%	3,7%	92,6%
		Count	0	1	1	25
	Travel/Retail	% within Industry	0%	0%	0%	100%
		Count	0	0	0	48
	Adventure	% within Industry	4,8%	7,1%	11,9%	76,2%
		Count	2	3	5	32
	Government	% within Industry	21,5%	3,6%	1,8%	73,2%
		Count	12	2	1	41
	Services	% within Industry	7,8%	45,5%	7,8%	39%
		Count	6	35	6	30

Table 2 indicates that most Tourism Management students found WIL placement in the Hospitality industry, followed by Ecotourism students. There was no distinction between the types of accommodation establishments that placed students, and it is assumed that Ecotourism students would have conducted their WIL placements at game lodges or



nature lodges. Tourism management students were the only students who found placement in the travel/retail industry. Tourism management students are trained with the specific system knowledge required in the travel/retail industry. It is interesting to note that majority of students placed in the Adventure industry were Tourism management students. Adventure industry organisations may have placed Tourism management students in positions that required administration duties. Majority of Event management students found placements in the services industry, such as event organisations.

The “Industry supervisors’ final evaluation of student” section of the WIL logbook measured supervisors’ evaluations of students in terms of five job performance criteria, six skills criteria and four general skills criteria on a four-point scale (poor, average, good and excellent).

Findings

Descriptive statistics were used to create a profile of WIL students and industry organisations where WIL was completed. Frequencies indicate the rating provided by supervisors for job performance, interpersonal skills and general skills. Spearman’s rank order correlation was used on all criteria statements to determine the strength and direction of relationships between variables. The Kruskal Wallis test (sometimes also called the “one-way ANOVA on ranks”) is a rank-based nonparametric test that was performed on all criteria statements to determine statistically significant differences between type of qualification, industry where WIL was done and year of completion of WIL. Mann-Whitney U tests were performed on all criteria statements, in order to determine if there were any differences in evaluations based on gender and payment of WIL.

Table 3 provides the overall frequencies for supervisor ratings of job performance, interpersonal skills and general performance.

Table 3: Supervisors overall results for criteria

Criteria	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
Job Performance Criteria				
Has sound knowledge of systems/procedures relevant to his/her job	0,2%	3,3%	44,3%	52,2%
Works with speed and accuracy	0,2%	7,7%	53,5%	38,5%
Has an ability to use own initiative to solve problems	0,9%	14,4%	47,6%	37,1%
Learns from errors and acts accordingly	0%	3,1%	41,3%	55,6%
Makes decisions quickly	0,4%	13,7%	50,3%	35,5%
Accepts responsibility for decisions made	0,2%	3,1%	39,4%	57,3%
Keeps abreast of new developments in job area	0,2%	10,2%	45,1%	44,4%
Ensures that his/her work is consistently of good quality	0,4%	2,4%	37,3%	59,8%
Is prepared to make an extra effort when required	0,4%	2,9%	29,6%	67,1%
Has job understanding	0%	1,8%	35,2%	63,1%
Able to complete a task	0%	2,4%	31,6%	66%
Interpersonal Skills				
Appropriate language abilities	0%	3,3%	32,7%	64%
Telephone technique is appropriate	0,2%	4,7%	38,8%	56,3%
Can accept criticism and directions	0,4%	4,9%	45,3%	49,4%
Contributes effectively to group tasks	0%	3,3%	36,8%	59,9%
Courteous to those in senior/similar/minor positions	0%	2%	31,9%	66,2%
Loyal	0%	1,1%	34%	64,9%



Human Relation Skills	0,2%	2,7%	34,1%	63,1%
Is able to handle conflict	0,4%	12,5%	51,2%	35,9%
General Skills				
Uses initiative	0%	8,2%	45,4%	46,5%
Computer/typing Skills	0%	3,5%	39,9%	56,7%
Works speed and accuracy	0,2%	6,5%	47%	46,3%
Works under pressure	0,2%	5,1%	46,1%	48,6%

The table provides the score and category for each criterion of the 461 WIL reports. The ratings indicate that the highest scores rated by supervisors were either “excellent” or “good”. The table indicates that “Is prepared to make the extra effort when required” (67,1%) received the highest “excellent” rating from supervisors. While “Works with speed and accuracy” (53,5%) received the highest “good” rating from supervisors.

This study confirms previous research where there is a tendency for supervisors to rate all students highly on all skills (Milne & Caldicott, 2016:179; Jiang, Lee & Golab, 2015:230; Bilisland & Nagy, 2015:185). Peach *et al.*, (2014:241) indicate that WIL feedback is frequently developed and conducted in a hurried fashion and sometimes comprises an approach that merely reproduces academic assessment in the workplace context. It is therefore recommended that an alternative approach to supervisor evaluation be taken in order to eliminate the simplicity in which students are currently evaluated.

Table 4 provides a summary of strong correlations between the job performance, skills and general performance criteria. Spearman correlations were calculated to determine the strength and direction of relationships. Results indicate that criterion with the most correlations was “V33 Ensures that his/her work is consistently of a good quality”, which correlated with “V32 Keeps abreast of new developments in job area” (.558), “V34 Is prepared to make the extra effort when required” (.547), “V35 Has job understanding” (.533) and “V36 Able to complete a task” (.521). “V27 Works with speed and accuracy” positively correlated with “V46 Computer/typing skills” (.560) and “V48 Works under pressure” (.582). “V43 Human relations skills” positively correlated with “V42 Loyal” (.594) and “V44 Is able to handle conflict” (.547).



Table 4: Spearman correlation of job performance, skills and general performance

	V35 Has job understanding	V27 Works with speed and accuracy	V30 Makes decisions quickly	V39 Can accept criticism and directions	V33 Ensures that his/her work is consistently of a good quality	V38 Telephone technique is appropriate	V45 Uses initiative	V42 Loyal	V43 Human relations skills	V28 Has an ability to use own initiative to solve problems
V26 Has a sound knowledge of systems/procedures relevant to his/her job	.533**									
V28 Has an ability to use own initiative to solve problems			.586**							
V31 Accepts responsibility for decisions made				.502**						
V32 Keeps abreast of new developments in job area					.558**					
V34 Is prepared to make the extra effort when required					.547**					
V35 Has job understanding					.533**					
V36 Able to complete a task					.521**					
V37 Appropriate language						.545**				



skills										
V40 Contributes effectively to group tasks							.540**			
V41 Courteous to those in senior/similar/ minor positions								.587**		
V42 Loyal									.594**	
V44 Is able to handle conflict									.547**	
V45 Uses initiative										.566**
V46 Computer/typi ng skills		.560**								
V48 Works under pressure		.582**								

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)



Kruskal Wallis Tests were conducted to determine if there were any differences in criteria between qualification types, industry where WIL was done and year of completion of WIL. Distributions of criteria were not similar across qualification type, industry where WIL was done and year of completion of WIL, as assessed by visual inspection of boxplots. The mean rank of criteria was not statistically significant for industry where WIL was done and year of completion of WIL. Table 5 provides a summary of the mean ranks of criteria scores that were statistically significantly different between qualification type groups.

Table 5: Kruskal Wallis Test for criteria and qualification type

	V26 Has sound knowledge of systems/procedures relevant to his/her job
Chi-Square	8.283
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.041
Mean Rank	
Ecotourism	260.42
Event	252.89
Adventure	231.55
Tourism	218.67

- a. Kruskal Wallis Test
- b. Grouping variable: Qualification Type

Statistically significant differences were found between “V26 Has sound knowledge of systems required for job” and qualification type. The mean ranks were statistically significantly different between Ecotourism Management (260.42), Event Management (252.89), Adventure Tourism Management (231.55) and Tourism Management (218.67), $\chi^2(3) = 8.283, p = .041$. This suggests that Ecotourism Management students had the highest system knowledge relevant for the job scores, with the Tourism Management students reporting the lowest. Based on the nature of employment for Tourism Management students, systems knowledge will differ greatly to that of Ecotourism students. Tourism Management students find employment in various industry organisations, such as hospitality, retail, wholesale, which requires knowledge of different systems. However, Ecotourism students often find employment in ecotourism organisations, which require knowledge of systems related specifically to ecotourism. These results therefore indicate that Tourism Management students, employed in sectors outside the traditional travel industry, would not have the specific system knowledge required for the organisation.

Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted to determine if there were differences in criteria scores between males and females and paid and unpaid students. Distributions of engagement for males and females and paid and unpaid were similar, as assessed by visual inspections. Table 6 provides a summary of the median scores for paid and unpaid that were statistically significantly different. Table 7 provides a summary of the median scores for males and females that were statistically significantly different.

Table 6: Mann-Whitney U Test for criteria and payment of WIL

	V35 Has job Understanding	V36 Able to complete task
Mann- Whitney U	27,987.50	28,101.00
Z	2.339	2.384
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.019	.017
Mean Rank		
Paid	215.60	216.10
Unpaid	239.87	240.43

- a. Grouping Variable: Payment for WIL



“V35 Has job understanding” scores for unpaid students (239.87) were statistically significantly higher than paid students (215.60), $U= 27987.500$, $\square= 2.339$, $p= .019$. “V36 Able to complete a task” scores for unpaid students (240.43) were statistically significantly higher than paid students (216.10), $U= 28101$, $\square= 2.384$, $p= .017$. Results from a previous study by Taylor and Geldenhuys (2016b:7) indicate that supervisors show a greater interest in paid students over unpaid students. As a result, unpaid students may be left to complete tasks without supervision resulting in better understanding through trial and error. The results could also indicate that unpaid students feel less pressure to perform according to certain standards set out for paid students. There are however, very few published studies to guide the interpretation of results for paid and unpaid students (Milne & Caldicott, 2016:180). Further exploration into the differences between paid and unpaid student’s performance may provide a deeper understanding.

Table 7: Mann-Whitney U Test for criteria and Gender

	V38 Telephone technique is appropriate
Mann- Whitney U	17,049.00
Z	-2.381
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.017
Mean Rank	
Male	202.58
Female	231.20

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

There was only one statistically significant difference between criteria score for males and females. “V38 Telephone techniques” was statistically significantly higher for female students (231.20) than for male students (202.58), $U= 17049$, $\square= -2.381$, $p= .017$.

Conclusions

The findings confirm the tendency of supervisors to rate all students highly on all skills. Students were rated as either excellent or good for job performance, interpersonal skills and general performance. The findings indicate that the majority of WIL placements took place in the Hospitality Industry; this however did not provide any statistically significant differences between supervisor ratings. Significant differences were found for certain criterion and qualification type, payment of WIL and gender. Further exploratory research into these differences may provide interesting results and can assist with the improvement of WIL placement for future tourism students.

It is contended that for assessment to be effective in WIL, and for students to be able to access a depth of learning in the workplace through maximizing the full impact of industry feedback, it is necessary to frame and implement a model of industry feedback that effectively incorporates the clearly defined perspectives of the student, the industry and the academic (Peach *et al.*, 2014:242). Various research articles have raised concerns regarding the gap between graduate employability skills and requirements of prospective employers and based on the findings of this study, as well as previous studies, it appears that supervisors complete the evaluations in a hurried fashion. It is therefore recommended that further research be conducted into effective, model based evaluation tools, which can be used to assess the depth of learning in the workplace.

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