



Students' Expectations of Work Integrated Learning in Tourism and Hospitality

Abstract

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This paper explores students' expectations regarding work-integrated learning (WIL), aiming to improve programme outcomes and workforce readiness in South Africa. A questionnaire survey was used to gather information from 220 students studying tourism and hospitality. Findings were obtained by regression analysis. The study reveals that the expectation of career advancement showed a strong positive influence on the overall expectation of programme impact (OEPI), suggesting that students' career growth aspirations significantly drive WIL programme effectiveness. The study further shows that the expectation of networking opportunities also positively affected OEPI, underscoring networking as a critical element for professional success within the WIL programme. However, the expectations of skill development, support and guidance, and personal and professional growth were not significant predictors, indicating that career advancement and networking hold more weight in students' perception of WIL programme impact. Drawing from expectancy theory, the results of this research hold importance for WIL programmes that prioritise career pathways and networking opportunities, as these align more closely with students' expectations for impact. It is recommended that a re-assessment of skill development and support initiatives be conducted, as the study results suggest that these factors did not impact students' expectations.

Keywords: Tourism and hospitality, Students' expectations, work integrated learning, regression analysis, South Africa

How to cite this article: Ntshangase, S.D., Mabaleka, N.M. & Sibisi, A.S. (2024). Students' Expectations of Work Integrated Learning in Tourism and Hospitality. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 13(4):897-905. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.577>

Introduction

According to Gqibani & Maile (2022), integrating practical experience with theoretical learning has emerged as a foundation for preparing students for the workforce WIL programme. This serves as a bridge between academia and industry in higher education (HE) (Briantet et al., 2023; Gqibani & Maile, 2022), providing students with valuable hands-on experience and equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in their future careers (Pilgrim, 2011). WIL is defined as a term denoting an approach to education where the curriculum orders the use of relevant work-based experience to enable the integration of theory and meaningful work practice (Du Plessis, 2019). In other studies, WIL generally refers to learning experiences that combine academic knowledge and real-world work environments (Megayanti et al., 2020). There are several alternatives such as cooperative education, simulations and case studies, job training, attachments or internships, apprenticeships, and dual learning (Vumbunu et al., 2023). All these aim to pass on skills and competencies that will enable a student to transition to the professional work environment. However, this study focuses on WIL since it is highly valuable in industries, such as hospitality and tourism where practical skills and experience are critical components (Vumbunu et al., 2023). According to Pilgrim (2011), WIL is acknowledged by many universities, professional societies, government and industry as a valuable model of learning that provides significant benefits to students. Despite this agreement, there remain some differences of opinion between universities, industry and the professional society regarding implementation of WIL. Despite the growing recognition of the importance of WIL in HE, there remains a need for studies that explore students' expectations within the context of tourism and hospitality education, especially in developing countries such as South Africa, where youth unemployment remains a pressing issue (Gqibani & Maile, 2022; Ezeuduji et al., 2023; Zegwaard et al., 2023; Zwane et al., 2014). Especially noteworthy is the study by Ezeuduji et al. (2017), which found that a greater number of students surveyed did not select hospitality as their first-choice study programme. The gap in the existing literature lies in the limited understanding of tourism and hospitality students' expectations (Ramukumba, 2021), before going to WIL within the South African context (Vumbunu et al., 2023). The study by Vumbunu et al. (2023) suggests that in tourism and hospitality, there are undefined students' expectations regarding the WIL programme. There is therefore a need for the key players (academics and industries, or stakeholders) to work on the student's expectations to make the WIL programme a success (Vumbunu et al., 2023). While previous research has highlighted the significance of the WIL programme in enhancing students' employability and readiness for the industry (Ezeuduji et al., 2023; Gqibani & Maile, 2022; Xu et al., 2022), there is a lack of studies specifically focusing on the expectations of students enrolled in tourism and hospitality programmes in South Africa. Addressing this gap is important for informing the development and implementation of effective WIL initiatives tailored to the needs and expectations of students in South Africa (Daniels et al., 2022).

The adoption of a WIL programme was motivated by research pointing to low skills, disconnections between curriculum and industry needs, and poor work ethic in the hospitality and tourism industry (Vumbunu et al., 2023). The university in question, particularly the Department of Recreation and Tourism (DRT), has implemented the WIL approach, which stipulates a six-month attachment for all students in the second semester of the third year, irrespective of whether they are pursuing a Bachelor of Tourism or Diploma in Tourism Management. The Department of Consumer Sciences at the same university has also integrated a WIL approach, which is implemented during the second semester of the third year for both the Bachelor in Hospitality and Tourism and the Diploma in Hospitality Management programmes. Bachelor students undergo a three-month attachment, while diploma students have a six-month attachment. These programmes equip graduates with



essential skills for the tourism and hospitality industry, enhancing their employability. Students complete activity logbooks, and reflective reports, receive site mentor evaluations, as well as present their WIL experience report and submit a portfolio at the end. Diploma students also execute a site-based research and innovation project, while bachelor students submit a research report. This study focuses on these departments (DRT and Consumer Sciences) to explore students' expectations regarding WIL, aiming to improve programme outcomes and workforce readiness in South Africa. The DRT and Consumer Sciences recently hosted the "Hospitality and Tourism WIL Indaba" from 18–20 September 2024, a significant step in introducing WIL programmes through collaboration with universities and industry partners. The event revealed key challenges, with students citing inadequate mentorship, long working hours, and financial difficulties, including low stipends and accommodation costs. Meanwhile, industry partners raised concerns about student motivation and instances of unethical behaviour during placements. These findings highlight the need for improved mentorship, enhanced financial support, and curriculum adjustments to better prepare students for WIL programmes and professional success. The results of this study may also be very helpful in developing curricula, assessing programmes, and formulating policies related to tourism and hospitality education. The subsequent sections include a review of relevant literature on WIL, theoretical underpinning and hypotheses development, and students' expectations. This section is followed by a research conceptual model showing the proposed multiple linear relationship between the predictor variables and the outcome variable. Methodology outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical approach employed in the study. Results present the findings of the empirical investigation, followed by a discussion of the implications of the findings. Finally, the conclusion summarises the key findings, discusses their implications, and suggests avenues for future research. The next section covers the literature review.

Literature review and hypothesis development

Tourism and hospitality students frequently have high expectations of WIL, regarding it as an important component of their education (Pažur Anicic & Divjak, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023; Vumbunu et al., 2023). They anticipate receiving practical experience that bridges the gap between theoretical information learned in class and real-world application, hence improving their professional competencies and employability (Aprile & Knight, 2020; Smith et al., 2019). This demonstrates that many students expect WIL to give possibilities for networking, skill development, exposure to industry practices, career advancement, and personal and professional improvement (Aprile & Knight, 2020; Zhong et al., 2021). A predominant issue in South Africa is the insufficient growth of training establishments like hotels, lodges, and restaurants, posing a significant problem for many hospitality students seeking placements (Nomnga, 2021; 2024).

Theoretical underpinning

The study is firmly rooted in Vroom's (1960) expectancy theory to explore the expectations of students in WIL. Vroom's (1960) expectation theory delves into the psychological mechanism guiding individuals in selecting behavioural actions to meet their needs or achieve desired outcomes. The theory posits that conscious decision-making processes among various options determine the anticipated efficiency and rewards associated with those choices (Vroom, 1960). Expectation theory comprises three key components: valence, instrumentality, and expectancy. Within this framework, "expectancy" signifies the belief that increased efforts will lead to enhanced performance outcomes (E → P). Conversely, instrumentality suggests that enhanced performance will result in specific outcomes (P → O). Thus, the perceived significance or value of an outcome is termed its valence (Vroom, 1960). According to this perspective, an individual's drive to exert effort is influenced by a combination of three elements: (a) performance expectancy, reflecting the belief that effort will yield desired performance levels; (b) outcome expectancy, indicating the belief that performance will culminate in specific outcomes; and (c) valence of outcomes, representing the desirability, value, or appeal of such outcomes (Vroom, 1960). However, the application of this theory in the context of tourism and hospitality WIL programmes needs more empirical validation. Studies like those by Kim et al. (2021) and Al-Romeedy et al. (2020) apply this theory broadly but do not thoroughly investigate its specific mechanisms within the WIL context. According to expectancy theory, weak links within factors may weaken the motivation to act. In this investigation, the researchers established connections between outcome expectancy and the valence of outcomes about students' perspectives on skill development, career advancement, networking opportunities, support and guidance, as well as personal and professional development.

Expectation of skill development (ESD)

Within the field of tourism and hospitality, our empirical observations indicate that this hands-on exposure increases students' employability and preparedness for the labour market (Pažur Anicic & Divjak, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023). The present authors posit that these exposures are geared towards enriching students' competencies and equipping them for the transition into the tourism and hospitality sector or self-employment. Many research undertakings have underscored the significance of skill development within WIL initiatives (Ezeuduji et al., 2023). The study conducted by Keating (2012) underlines the necessity of acknowledging specific skill proficiencies to support graduates' capacity to transfer skills and contribute meaningfully within their professional environment. The existing literature suggests that without acknowledging skill development, activities to integrate WIL into curricula may prove ineffective (Hill et al., 2019; Molele et al., 2024). Moreover, the acknowledgement of skill development is essential for students to articulate their proficiencies in job applications, interviews and starting their jobs (Molele et al., 2024). Another scholarly research by Smith et al. (2022) showcases the positive influence of a pedagogical approach grounded in lectures delivered by seasoned practitioners in fostering knowledge of sustainable development and intercultural proficiencies. Aligned with these outcomes, WIL programmes according to Zhong et al. (2021), must deliver



opportunities for students in the tourism and hospitality sector to partake in actions and exercises that foster adaptive expertise. Nevertheless, the precise impact of students' expectations regarding skill development on the overall expectation of programme impact (OEPI) remains ambiguous. Therefore, the study posited the subsequent hypothesis:

H1: ESD will show a significant positive relationship to OEPI

Expectation of career advancement (ECA)

Kim et al. (2021) posits that students expecting clear career advancement opportunities exhibit higher motivation and commitment towards their WIL experiences, consequently enhancing their learning outcomes. Azevedo et al. (2012) further support this notion by revealing that students' perceptions of career prospects positively influence their satisfaction and perceived value of educational programmes within the tourism and hospitality sector. The expectancy theory of motivation (ETM) developed by Vroom (1964) gives a conceptual framework for explaining the positive correlation between ECA and OEPI, suggesting that individuals are more inclined to invest effort and excel when they believe their activities will conclude in favourable outcomes, such as career progression (Azevedo et al., 2012; Vroom, 1964). Nonetheless, most analysed studies, such as those conducted by Kim et al. (2021) and Azevedo et al. (2012), concentrate on broader educational frameworks or geographical areas beyond South Africa. While these investigations yield valuable overarching insights, the specific cultural, economic, and institutional situations of South African universities may provoke different dynamics in the interplay between ECA and OEPI. Al-Romeedy et al.'s (2020) research indicate that setting-specific elements notably shape student expectations, underscoring the necessity for localised inquiries to authenticate and broaden these findings. Considering these observations, this study posits that:

H2: ECA will have a significant positive relationship with OEPI

Expectation of networking opportunities (ENO)

Networking plays a central role in WIL placements for students in the field of tourism and hospitality (Ezeuduji et al., 2023; Ntshangase & Mabaleka, 2024; Zhong et al., 2021), facilitating connections with industry professionals, potential employers (Mesuwini & Mokoena, 2023), and peers that contribute to career advancement (Pažur Anicic & Divjak, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023). These interactions enhance students' exposure and job prospects (Kay et al., 2021), given employers' preference for familiar candidates (Mesuwini & Mokoena, 2023). The mentorship opportunities that stem from such connections provide valuable guidance and career insights (Keating, 2012). Essentially, WIL placements promote crucial relationships for sustained career development (Kay et al., 2021). Nevertheless, existing literature predominantly stresses the advantages of networking in immediate job placement and mentorship (Kay et al., 2021), possibly neglecting other issues of programme impact, including networking. While Ramukumba (2021) delves into networking strategies, the clear correlation with overall programme impact metrics remains less established in the tourism and hospitality context, highlighting a gap in comprehensive WIL evaluation. There are fewer quantitative studies rigorously examining the association between ENO and OEPI, suggesting a need for further empirical exploration (Keating, 2012; Mesuwini & Mokoena, 2023; Pažur Anicic & Divjak, 2022). Thus, this study posits the following hypothesis:

H3: ENO will show a significant positive relationship with OEPI

The expectation of support and guidance (ESG)

The empirical data available in academic literature underlines the critical significance of support and guidance in the efficacy of WIL initiatives for students pursuing studies in the field of tourism and hospitality (Al-Romeedy et al., 2020; Nomnga, 2021; 2024). Recent scholarly investigations (e.g., Lee & Kim, 2023; Lingadkar & Sankaranarayanan, 2023; Ntshangase & Mabaleka, 2024; Thompson & Parker, 2023) highlight the key role of structured support mechanisms in strengthening student satisfaction and the overall effectiveness of academic programmes. Smith & Brown (2022), for example, observed that students in tourism-related disciplines who projected and received full support and guidance during their WIL experiences tended to express higher levels of satisfaction. The support, as identified by Lingadkar & Sankaranarayanan (2023) and Stevens et al. (2024), covers basics such as academic counselling, mentorship, and consistent feedback, all of which are deemed instrumental in assisting students in navigating the intricate facets of their experiential placements. All of this also holds for students' expectations of assistance and direction in travel and hospitality. Nevertheless, based on the literature, there exist theoretical gaps about the change in ESG confronted by students specialising in tourism and hospitality in South Africa (Ntshangase & Mabaleka, 2024). Consequently, scholars have hypothesised that:

H4: There is a significant positive relationship between ESG and OEPI

Expectation of personal and professional growth (EPPG)

Vroom's expectancy theory (1960) posits that the EPPG of tourism and hospitality students can be interpreted as the expectancy element, wherein students hold the belief that their participation in WIL will enhance their skills and knowledge. Bandura (1977) and Nomnga (2021; 2024) suggest that WIL students acquire knowledge on "what to do" and "how to do it" by observing their colleagues' actions and interacting with their supervisors and peers. This assessment impacts students' motivation to

actively participate in WIL activities, under the OEPI, where students’ actions in WIL are predicted to result in tangible enhancements. Consequently, if students perceive a high probability that their involvement in a WIL programme will yield significant personal and professional development (Taylor & Geldenhuys, 2016; 2019), their drive to excel and fully engage in WIL activities rises (Lingadkar & Sankaranarayanan, 2023; Nomnga, 2021; 2024), thus enriching their OEPI. Notably, while Vroom’s theory endorses the notion of a significant positive correlation between EPPG and OEPI, it also brings to light potential discrepancies. Should students’ real-life encounters fail to meet their patronising expectations, their motivation and perceived value of WIL could weaken (Deen & Tichaawa, 2016; Lingadkar & Sankaranarayanan, 2023). In South Africa, WIL is upheld by various legislative frameworks such as the Skills Development Act of 1998 (Deen & Tichaawa, 2016; Nomnga, 2021), which promotes the training of employees and learners and encourages collaboration between private and public sector entities. This paper therefore hypothesises that:

H5: There is a significant positive relationship between EPPG and OEPI

Within the context of WIL, the theoretical framework presented in Figure 1 explains the suggested relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Using Vroom’s expectancy theory as a guide, this framework is intended to investigate the significant positive impact of five (5) conceptual variables on the dependent variable.

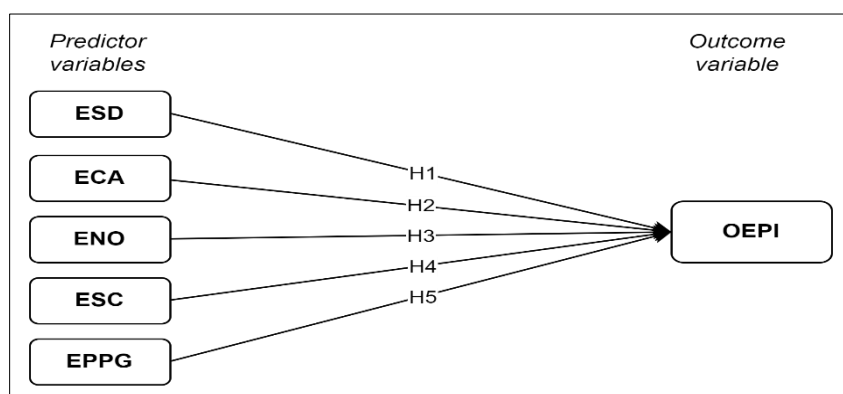


Figure 1. Research conceptual model

Note: ESD=Expectation of Skill Development; ECA=Expectation of Career Advancement; ENO=Expectation of Networking Opportunities; ESG=Expectation of Support and Guidance; EPPG=Expectation of Personal and Professional Growth; OEPI=Overall Expectation of Programme Impact

Methodology

This study is designed as a survey, using a quantitative research approach, data collection methods, and sample characteristics. For data collection, the study used a probability sampling approach and a stratified sampling technique to ensure representation from each group (Diploma in Tourism Management, Bachelor of Tourism Studies and Consumer Science (Bachelor in Hospitality and Tourism and Diploma in Hospitality Management)). The respondents were randomly selected from each stratum to maintain the representativeness of the sample. This increases the generalisability of the findings to the larger population (Ntshangase & Mabaleka, 2024). The data collection period is shorter than for other types of surveys. It was only one day at a single venue. Quantitative data were gathered from 220 Bachelor of Tourism, Diploma in Tourism Management, and Consumer Sciences (Bachelor of Hospitality and Tourism and Diploma in Hospitality Management) students (final-year undergraduates). These responders were large enough to allow the adoption of data analysis tools that could yield substantial findings. Data analysis was conducted in different phases, where the first phase dealt with descriptive analysis. This includes calculating frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations for variables such as gender, age group, academic programme affiliation, and confidence in learning outcomes. Analyses were conducted to identify variations in perceptions across different academic programmes, as earlier indicated above. Mean scores for each variable were computed within each programme to assess potential differences in students’ expectations of WIL programmes. The second phase used a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) to measure the sampling adequacy of the data before conducting factor analysis (FA). In this study, KMO was used to evaluate whether the data were suitable for factor analysis by examining the proportion of variance among variables caused by underlying factors. The third phase employed FA to explore the underlying structures between the expectancy theory variables to WIL programme in the tourism and hospitality sector. Furthermore, Factor Analysis (FA) was implemented throughout all components of the research study (using Extraction Method (EM) - Principal Component Analysis (PCA); Rotation Method (RM) - Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalisation (VRKN)) to condense the quantitative data into five primary constructs (Ezeuduji et al., 2023). Subsequently, the fourth stage involved assessing the reliability, specifically through Cronbach’s alpha analysis, to evaluate the internal consistency of the instruments employed in the investigation. The assessment of reliability was executed by applying Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient on the identified factors to gauge the degree of internal consistency among the variables within the factors. The values of Cronbach’s Alpha range from 0 to 1, with the commonly accepted range between 0.5 and 0.7 indicating the internal consistency or reliability of the variables measuring a specific construct in the study (Collier, 2020). In this study, a Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of 0.7 and above was deemed



acceptable for demonstrating good reliability, while a threshold of approximately 0.6 was considered adequate for reliability in a factor comprising only three variables. Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients ranged from 0.725 to 0.866 across the variables, indicating reliable measurement across the scales. The scales exhibit robust reliability, enhancing the credibility of the study findings. Lastly, regression analysis was used to examine the relationships between predictor variables (such as gender, age, programme type, and expectancy theory variables) and the outcome variable (students’ expectations of the WIL programme). Hypotheses were tested using regression weights, F-statistics, and p-values to determine the significance of the relationships. The content of the questionnaire covered the ordinal variables (such as ESD, ECA, ENO, ESG, and EPPG) which were assessed using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (SD=Strongly Disagree), 2 (D=Disagree), 3 (S_{WD}=Somewhat Disagree), 4 (S_{WA}=Somewhat Agree), 5 (A=Agree) and 6 (SA=Strongly Agree), where higher scores indicated stronger agreement with the respective construct. Gender, age, and programme type were set as categorical variables.

Model specification

For the regression model predicting the OEPI (overall expectation of WIL impact index), all used predictor variables were entered into the model. The variables included in the model were EPPG, ECA, ESG, ESD, and ENO. The regression model produced an R value of 0.842, indicating a strong positive relationship between the predictor variables (EPPG, ECA, ESG, ESD, and ENO) collectively and the OEPI index. The coefficient of determination, R², was 0.708, meaning that approximately 70.8% of the variance in OEPI scores could be explained by the combined influence of the predictor variables in the model. The adjusted R² (0.702) provides a more conservative estimate of the proportion of variance explained, considering the number of predictors and the sample size. The standard error of the estimate (0.34081) represents the average difference between the observed values of OEPI and the values predicted by the regression model. The change statistics indicate that the inclusion of the predictor variables significantly improved the model fit. The R² change of 0.708 and the associated F change statistic of 103.952 with *df*₁=5 and *df*₂=214 were both statistically significant (*p*<0.001). These findings suggest that the combination of EPPG, ECA, ESG, ESD, and ENO significantly contributes to the prediction of OEPI scores, and the model provides a good fit for the data. Reliability statistics, including Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients, were computed to assess the internal consistency of expectancy theory variables. Cronbach’s Alpha values ranging from 0.725 to 0.866 indicated strong reliability across the scales, enhancing the credibility of the study findings.

Results

Table 1 shows that the sample comprised 51 (23.2%) males and 116 (75.5%) females, resulting in a total sample size of N = 220. The majority of the participants, 207 (94.1%), fell within the age range of 18 to 24 years old. Regarding academic programmes, 25 (11.4%) were enrolled in a Diploma in Tourism Management, 90 (40.9%) were pursuing a Bachelor of Tourism studies degree, and 103 (46.8%) were studying Consumer Science (bachelor’s in hospitality and Tourism and Diploma in Hospitality Management) (N = 220). Comparing these demographic characteristics with previous findings (Adegbite & Hoole, 2024), our results align with the trend observed in the literature, where female students tend to outnumber male students in tourism and hospitality programmes. Regarding students’ confidence in the expected learning outcomes through WIL programmes, our findings indicate that 167 (76%) of the sample expressed confidence in achieving their overall learning objectives.

Table 1: Respondents’ profile and general questions (N = 220)

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
“Gender”	“Male”	23.2
	“Female”	75.5
	Other	1.4
“Age group”	“18-24”	94.1
	“25-34”	5.9
“Indicate your programme”	“Diploma in Tourism Management (IDPTM1)”	11.4
	“Bachelor of Tourism Studies (1RDEG1)”	41.4
	“Consumer Science (Bachelor in Hospitality and Tourism and Diploma in Hospitality Management) ”	47.3
Please indicate how confident you are about the overall learning outcomes you expect to achieve through the WIL programme.	“Not confident”	1.4
	“Slightly confident”	5.5
	“Moderately confident”	15.9
	“Very confident”	52.3
	“Extremely confident”	25.0

Factor analysis (FA)

The results in Table 2 indicate the component matrix presents the results of a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) conducted to explore the underlying factor structure of variables related to expectancy theory within WIL programmes in the tourism and hospitality sector. Each row represents an item or statement, while each column represents a component extracted from the analysis. The values in the matrix represent the factor loadings, indicating the strength and direction of the relationship between each item and the extracted components. The component matrix reveals several significant variables based on their factor loadings, which represent their contribution to the underlying factors extracted from the analysis. Notably, the most significant variables are those with the highest absolute factor loadings within each component. ENO1 demonstrates the highest factor loading of 0.796 on its corresponding component, indicating a strong association with the underlying factor. This suggests that students perceive new opportunities as a crucial aspect of their expectations regarding WIL programmes in the tourism and hospitality sector. EPPG2 stands out with a factor loading of 0.701, suggesting its significance in representing the underlying



factor related to practical and professional growth expectations. This implies that students place importance on practical experiences and professional development opportunities offered by WIL programmes. The study further employed a Principal Component Analysis (PCA), to explore the causal factor structure of variables related to expectancy theory within WIL programmes in the tourism and hospitality sector (Lingadkar & Sankaranarayanan, 2023; Richman, 1986).

Table 2: Factor loadings, the correlations between the items and the underlying components (N=220)

Component Matrix ^a						
Items	Component					
	ESD	ECA	ENO	ESG	EPPG	OEPI
ESD						
ESD1	0.711	-0.290	-0.277	0.102		-0.290
ESD2	0.586	-0.347	-0.217	0.272	0.226	
ESD3	0.591	0.219		0.318		-0.315
ESD4	0.685	0.177	-0.391			-0.133
ESD5	0.512	0.333	-0.217	0.273	0.216	
ECA						
ECA1	0.689	0.256	-0.230			
ECA2	0.651	0.213	-0.228	-0.241		
ECA3	0.630	0.244		0.126	-0.310	
ECA4	0.699	0.279	-0.212	-0.188		0.210
ECA5	0.679	0.282	-0.143	0.275		0.274
ENO						
ENO1	0.796	-0.298				
ENO2	0.600	-0.319		-0.172	0.215	0.330
ENO3	0.568	-0.341	0.188	-0.244	-0.199	0.263
ENO4	0.759	-0.290	-0.168		0.112	0.209
ENO5	0.700	-0.328		-0.101	-0.215	
ESG						
ESG1	0.618	0.273	0.106	-0.262	-0.260	-0.138
ESG2	0.548	0.339	0.117	-0.435	0.242	
ESG3	0.454	0.372	0.483	0.182	0.346	
ESG4	0.413	0.308	0.451	-0.101	0.371	-0.244
ESG5	0.618	0.266	0.181	-0.187		-0.269
EPPG						
EPPG1	0.606	-0.252	0.436	0.180	-0.201	
EPPG2	0.701	-0.283			0.217	
EPPG3	0.623	-0.294	0.250		-0.108	-0.324
EPPG4	0.724	-0.307			0.307	
EPPG5	0.480	0.319	0.434	0.228	-0.244	0.203

Note: Extraction Method: 'Principal Component Analysis'; a. 6 components extracted

Rotated component matrix (RCM)

Table 3 represents the results of a PCA followed by Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalisation (VRKN). Each row corresponds to an item or statement, while each column represents a component extracted from the analysis after rotation (Richman, 1986).

Table 3: Showcasing the results of RCM (N=220)

Rotated Component Matrix ^a						
Items	Component					
	ESD	ECA	ENO	ESG	EPPG	OEPI
ESD1	0.607	0.395	0.250		-0.226	0.356
ESD2	0.619	0.406			-0.105	0.262
ESD3	0.104	0.408	0.252	0.264	0.125	0.531
ESD4	0.306	0.622	0.399	0.158	-0.126	
ESD5		0.682		0.236		
ECA						
ECA1	0.257	0.586	0.374	0.169	0.127	
ECA2	0.283	0.460	0.506	0.123	0.121	-0.117
ECA3	0.152	0.476	0.393		0.367	0.206
ECA4	0.314	0.574	0.369	0.219	0.196	-0.211
ECA5	0.235	0.701		0.127	0.369	
ENO						
ENO1	0.751	0.264	0.211	0.139	0.155	0.120
ENO2	0.731	0.131		0.157	0.221	-0.172
ENO3	0.641		0.291		0.374	
ENO4	0.755	0.370	0.179		0.107	
ENO5	0.647		0.377		0.217	0.216
ESG						
ESG1	0.159	0.198	0.645	0.266	0.250	
ESG2	0.204	0.213	0.437	0.605		-0.202
ESG3		0.239	-0.117	0.692	0.406	0.126
ESG4	0.101		0.120	0.790		0.124
ESG5	0.206	0.214	0.443	0.535		0.150
EPPG						
EPPG1	0.504		0.136	0.137	0.459	0.437
EPPG2	0.699	0.244	0.113	0.219		
EPPG3	0.543		0.365	0.218		0.417
EPPG4	0.730	0.257		0.294		0.188
EPPG5		0.196	0.150	0.251	0.696	0.252

Note: ^aPCA=Principal Component Analysis; VKN=Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation; a=Rotation converged in 12 iterations

The RCM reveals several significant variables based on their factor loadings, which represent their contribution to the underlying factors extracted from the analysis. The results in Table 3 show that ENO1 emerges as the most significant variable with a factor loading of 0.751 on its corresponding component, followed by ENO4 (0.755) and ENO2 (0.731), indicating a strong association with the underlying factor related to expectations of new opportunities through WIL programmes in the tourism and hospitality sector. EPPG2 stands out as the most significant variable with a factor loading of 0.699 on its respective



component, followed by EPPG4 (0.730) and EPPG3 (0.543). This suggests that students place substantial importance on practical and professional growth opportunities offered by WIL programmes.

Table 4: Relationship between variables in the model (N=220)

Hypotheses	Regression Weights	β	t	p-value	Results
H ₁	ESD → OEPI	0.285	1.351	0.178	Not supported
H ₂	ECA → OEPI	0.278	5.043	<0.001**	Supported
H ₃	ENO → OEPI	0.092	4.787	<0.001**	Supported
H ₄	ESG → OEPI	-0.005	1.560	0.120	Not supported
H ₅	EPPG → OEPI	0.329	-0.108	0.914	Not supported
R	0.842, R ² = 0.708				
F	103.952, p<0.001				
Std.Error of the Estimate	0.34081				

Note: **, ***, *** denote p <0.1, p<0.05 and p< 0.01, respectively.

The results in Table 4 show that the coefficient for ESD is not significant ($t = 1.351$, $p < 0.001$, $\beta = 0.285$), and H1 is not supported. The correlation between ESD and OEPI is moderate ($r = 0.738$). The positive β value (0.285) implies that there is a negative association between ESD and OEPI. Table 4 shows that the coefficient for ECA is significant ($t = 4.787$, $p < 0.001$, $\beta = 0.278$), supporting H2. This suggests that as ECA increases, OEPI tends to increase also. The correlation between ECA and OEPI is moderate ($r = 0.714$). The moderate correlation coefficient ($r = 0.714$) between ECA and OEPI indicates a reasonably strong linear relationship between these variables. These results support those of Taylor and Geldenhuys (2019), who suggest that individuals who have higher levels of ECA are more likely to achieve higher scores on outcome measures related to the tourism industry. According to Deen and Tichaawa (2016), one possible explanation for this hypothesis is that individuals with a greater ECA may be more inclined to engage in WIL practices. Consequently, their positive attitude towards career advancement may translate into better performance outcomes during WIL in their respective sites. In H3, ENO ($\beta = 0.092$, $t = 4.787$, $p < 0.001$) also positively influences OEPI, with a significant impact ($p < 0.001$). Although the β value is relatively low, the strong significance level suggests a consistent positive relationship. The coefficient for ESG is not significant ($\beta = -0.005$, $t = 1.560$, $p = 0.120$), suggesting that there is no statistically significant relationship between ESG and OEPI. The correlation between ESG and OEPI is weak ($r = 0.542$). Therefore, H4 is not supported. The non-significant coefficient for ESG indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between ESG and OEPI in this context. The weak correlation coefficient ($r = 0.542$) further supports this finding, suggesting that any relationship between ESG and OEPI observed in the data is minimal or negligible. The coefficient for EPPG is not significant ($\beta = 0.329$, $t = -0.108$, $p = 0.914$), and H5 is not supported. EPPG also does not significantly affect OEPI ($p > 0.05$). Given the near-zero β and lack of statistical significance, this hypothesis is not supported.

Discussion

The expectation of career advancement is a significant positive predictor of the overall expectation of programme impact. The strong positive effect ($\beta = 0.278$, $p < 0.001$) shows that as participants' expectations for career advancement increase, their perceived impact of the programme also improves. This aligns with studies across Africa that emphasise the role of career development opportunities in enhancing programme effectiveness (Adegbite & Hoole, 2024; Lingadkar & Sankaranarayanan, 2023). The study shows that the expectation of networking opportunities also positively impacts OEPI ($\beta = 0.092$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting the importance of networking as a driver of programme satisfaction. Networking opportunities have been shown to foster professional growth and open new career pathways, a key outcome for African participants where professional networks can support long-term career sustainability (Brahmi et al., 2022). On the other hand, the expectation of skill development (ESD), expectation of support and guidance (ESG), and expectation of personal and professional growth (EPPG) did not significantly impact OEPI. This suggests that while students may value skill-building, guidance (Nguyen et al., 2023), and growth, these factors alone may not predict their perception of the programme's impact. According to Lekgau et al. (2024), this could reflect a need for a more integrated approach where career progression and networking play stronger roles in perceived program success. These outcomes are consistent with the conclusions drawn by Adegbite and Hoole (2024). The scholars posit that WIL offers significant advantages to students, encompassing the cultivation of employability skills (e.g., analytical, adaptive, communicative, foundational, interpersonal, and Fourth Industrial Revolution skill sets) for future professional endeavours (Lekgau et al., 2024; Lingadkar & Sankaranarayanan, 2023). WIL initiatives ought to enhance students' understanding of labour market expectations and the diverse skill sets demanded by the industry (Adegbite & Hoole, 2024; Taylor & Geldenhuys, 2016; 2019; Nomnga, 2021). Furthermore, the simple correlation coefficient ($r = 0.676$) between ENO and OEPI suggests a relatively poor linear association between these variables. This indicates that alterations in ENO are not strongly linked to changes in outcome measures. This partially contradicts the findings of Nomnga (2021; 2024) and Deen & Tichaawa (2016), wherein students' expectations of support and guidance were deemed more central. One plausible explanation in this study is that while support and guidance play a crucial role in WIL activities (Nomnga, 2021), they might not directly influence the specific outcome measures examined in this study. It is plausible that other unanalysed factors, such as financial considerations, exert a more significant impact on the overall programme expectations under review. Alternatively, networking opportunities could potentially benefit students positively (Deen & Tichaawa, 2016; Stevens et al., 2024), yet they might not directly translate into quantifiable outcomes within the domain of tourism and hospitality studies. As indicated by Adegbite and Hoole (2024), programmes regarding networking opportunities could target a broader demographic and concentrate on enhancing awareness rather than directly affecting the WIL programme.



Concluding remarks and recommendations

This investigation confirms multiple hypotheses concerning the significant positive correlations between students' comprehensive expectations of WIL programmes and their anticipations of skill enhancement, career advancement, and networking opportunities. These results are consistent with the assumptions of expectancy theory, which argues that individuals are driven to act based on the expected results of their actions. As per expectancy theory, the incentive to participate in a particular behaviour is shaped by the belief that the behaviour will result in a desired outcome (expectancy), the belief that the outcome will be beneficial (instrumentality), and the significance assigned to the outcome (valence). The expectations of students regarding "skill development"; support and guidance"; and "personal and professional growth" were not supported by the data, indicating that there was no statistically significant relationship between them and the WIL programme. This discrepancy might be explained by the fact that students do not believe these components to be directly related to the outcomes in the WIL framework that they value most. The weak linear relationship that exists between these parameters and the outcome indicators suggests that other factors, such as cost concerns, may have a greater impact on students' expectations and motivations. Based on the findings and discussion provided, the following recommendations emerged to improve the effectiveness of WIL programmes. The study findings strongly suggest integrating structured career advancement components, such as mentorship programmes, job placement services, and career workshops, to align WIL experiences with industry demands. This suggests strong partnerships, partnering with employers to design career-oriented projects and internships that provide tangible pathways to employment or promotion. In this study, it is recommended to strengthen networking platforms by hosting career fairs, alumni networking events and collaborative projects with industry professionals would play a significant role. The university in question and the two departments investigated should leverage digital platforms like LinkedIn or institution-specific portals to facilitate connections among students, alumni, and industry experts. Furthermore, there is a need to design programme curricula that blend skill-building with career-relevant experiences and networking, ensuring these elements are contextualised for the industry. Since, skill development, support, and personal growth did not significantly impact the perceived programme impact of WIL, suggesting a need for a more integrated approach to these factors. This can be done by offering skills workshops directly tied to real-world challenges, such as focusing on Fourth Industrial Revolution (FIR) technologies and providing immediate opportunities to apply these skills in professional settings. Lastly, addressing financial and logistical barriers by offering stipends, travel allowances, or flexible schedules for WIL activities could help Hospitality and Tourism students. Since, the findings indicate that other factors, such as financial considerations, might significantly influence programme expectations. This can be done by conducting periodic needs assessments to identify and mitigate barriers that affect students' access to and perceptions of the programme.

Limitations and future research

The study's weaknesses include its narrow emphasis on a single university, and it used a very small sample size of 220 students. It is important to acknowledge that the findings of this research are specific to the tourism and hospitality students at the university under investigation during the study period, and they cannot be excessively generalised. To draw more reliable results for the South African case, this study suggests that future research should sample additional tourism and hospitality students in South African higher education institutions. As the sample size increases, this could necessitate pre- and post-programme surveys to measure changes in students' expectations, attachment, and satisfaction levels to the WIL programme. More robust structural equation modelling and factor-cluster analyses could be used.

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