



Tourism students' experience of work-integrated learning

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of tourism students' work integrated learning (WIL). The study involved an analysis of tourism students' that completed the six-month WIL placement between December 2016 and July 2017, from the Department of Tourism Management at the Tshwane University of Technology in South Africa. The study investigated students' perceptions with regard to WIL placement, hosting organisation and academic institution support. Tourism students' completed the perception questionnaire at the end of their six-month placement period at a hosting organisation. The data presents the demographic profile of students', the mean and standard deviation of perception variables of WIL placement, hosting organisation and academic institution support as well as Mann-Whitney and Kruskal Wallis analyses, which are generally used to test for variance between distinct groups. The results indicate that students have a positive overall impression of WIL, but that support from both the hosting organisation and from the academic institution were lacking. The implications for students are potential drop-outs prior to WIL completion, insufficient industry experience and potential career changes. It is recommended that academic institutions revisit the

Keywords: Tourism, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), workplace-based learning (WPBL), internships, students' perceptions.

Introduction

Higher education is under increasing pressure to re-evaluate work integrated learning (WIL) offered as part of undergraduate qualifications (Bates, 2008:305). There is renewed focus on WIL or work place based learning (WPBL) in South Africa and the Department of Higher Education (DHET), recognising this focus, has initiated the drafting of a policy framework on WPBL (Blom, 2015:1). Until now, many higher education institutions (HEIs) offering WIL or WPBL have been doing so under the guise of individual institution policies and contexts (Blom, 2015:1). As a result, credible research centred on WIL in South Africa is lacking, which runs the risk of WIL being seen as an empty pedagogical claim by Universities of Technology (UoTs) (Mthembu, 2013:1).

There is a need to explore ways and means to evolve, expand and improve on the practice of WIL and WPBL (Morse, 2006:735), to meet the needs of all relevant stakeholders. A review of the literature indicates the many benefits of WIL to students, industry and institutions (Stone & McClarn, 1999; Weible, 2010; Yiu & Law, 2012; Zopiatitis &



Theocharous, 2013), however for these benefits to be fully realised, by all stakeholders, it is imperative that HEIs continuously evaluate and improve on current WIL practices.

This study forms part of a of research project within the Department of Tourism Management at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT). The focus of the research project is to analyse the expectations and perceptions of tourism students' with regard to WIL and finally to identify gaps between these expectations and perceptions. The third year students registered for the National Diploma Tourism Management, National Diploma Adventure Tourism Management, National Diploma Ecotourism Management and National Diploma Event Management in 2016 formed the sample for this project. This research project will be used as a benchmark of current practices. This paper thus examines the perceptions of tourism students' with WIL and will hopefully provide insight into the existing literature on WIL in which there is a current dearth. 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

The government of South Africa has identified the key long-term priorities of education and skills development to solve the challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality (Govender & Taylor, 2015). With the development of the National Skills Development Strategy III (South Africa, 2011a), the Skills Development Amendment Bill (South Africa, 2011b) and the Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training (South Africa, 2012), the prominent theme that is emerging is that of stakeholder partnerships to develop skilled graduates (Govender & Taylor, 2015). WIL is widely considered instrumental in equipping new graduates with the required employability skills to effectively function in the work environment (Jackson et al., 2015) and is firmly entrenched in the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) in South Africa (South Africa, 2007).

Embedded in the nature of technology higher education in South Africa, is compulsory experiential learning (WIL), which requires that students undergo a period of on-the-job training, as part of their qualification (Council of Higher Education [CHE], 2010:17). Many HEIs are re-engineering the curricula of qualifications in order to reflect a WIL component (Govender & Taylor, 2015), as WIL promises a better return on investment to students, meets the needs of employer demands for work-ready graduates and enhances national productivity (Smith, 2012). Many HEIs are viewing WIL as a strategic objective (Cameron et al., 2018). In emerging economies, such as South Africa, WIL is still considered to be in its infancy (Govender & Taylor, 2015) thereby providing opportunities to develop and implement tried and tested models and policies of WIL. The idea of WIL is so popular in Australian Universities that there is a call for a national internship scheme that will address both a national skills shortage and student employability systematically (Smith, 2012). WIL has become an important feature in HEIs worldwide and is attracting significant funding for future growth (Jackson et al., 2015), which results in the need for improved curricula development of WIL, integration between stakeholders and adequate administration. WIL is considered imperative to the job-readiness of graduates as it builds confidence of students with regard to their workplace capabilities, provides students with a better understanding of the industry required skills and an appreciation of the work required (Smith, 2012). In all forms, WIL is recognized as having strategic value for the HEI as it can positively influence the generic skills of students, the students understanding of the work environment and employer expectations and career awareness, progression



and direction (Cameron et al., 2018). As a result of the popularity, importance and funding, HEIs are engaging with WIL on a deeper and more serious level in order to create WIL programs that provide the benefits and returns to all relevant stakeholders.

The success of WIL depends on the achieving of qualification curricula outcomes; this is largely dependent on the administration and pedagogical management by WIL coordinators (Smith, 2012). The focus should be placed on preparing students, both pedagogically and practically, for the world of work (Smith, 2012). Importantly, WIL is not the same as work-based learning (WBL), which does not require the student to work in industry, but take part in work-place simulations. According to the CHE (2011:16-21), the four main programmes are word-directed theoretical learning (WDTL); problem-based learning (PBL); project-based learning (PjBL) and workplace-based learning (WPBL), which are commonly refereed to as WIL (Govender & Taylor, 2015). Students taking part in the WIL program are led by specifically designed activities to apply and learn theoretical knowledge and hard and soft skills in a real-world context (Smith, 2012). However, poorly administered curricula will lead to poor integration between practical and theoretical learning, students being dissatisfied with the experience, unprepared and unmotivated students, disorganized academic coordinators and workplace supervisors and unprepared workplaces (Smith, 2012). It is therefore imperative, to all HEIs to understand the perceptions of stakeholders, with regard to WIL programs. By providing deeper insight into the experiences of students, industry and academic coordinators, HEIs are able to redesign and develop effective WIL placement programmes, which lead to employment ready graduates. The purpose of this article is to provide insight into the perceptions of WIL students with regard to their WIL placement, in order to understand where improvements can be made for future students.

Method

This paper focused on the perceptions of tourism students' regarding their WIL placement. The methodological framework is action research, which is used to guide the continuous enhancement of program design and delivery. Research findings, WIL objectives and outcomes will be used to revisit the design of WIL logbooks, reports and reporting procedures.

Participants included all tourism students' registered for the WIL placement program in 2016. Tourism students' completed the perception survey at the end of the six-month placement period, when returning to the institution to submit their WIL reports. No inducements were given for the completion of the survey. A total of 51 students completed the survey between December 2016 and July 2017. Tourism students took part in the study with their knowledge and consent and were free withdraw at any time. The purpose of the study was explained to the students prior to their participation. Students were all over the age of 18 years and participation in the study was entirely voluntary. They were assured of confidentiality and the fact that the results would be used for academic purposes only. No personal details of the participants were collected or used as part of the study. The Departmental Committee on Postgraduate Studies (DCPS), Faculty of Management Sciences at Tshwane University of Technology approved the ethical aspects of the questionnaire and the study proposal in November 2015.

The survey required participants to complete demographic questions, questions related to



the WIL placement experience, as well as perceptions of the WIL program, perceptions of the WIL host organisation and perceptions of the academic institution. A Likert-scale was used to rate the level of agreement with various statements, with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree”. The WIL sample comprised 82.4% females and 17.6% males. Most participants were aged between 21 and 23 years (56.9%) with 39.2% being 24 years and older. The National Diploma in Tourism Management had 58.8% of participants, while the National Diploma in Event Management consisted of 17.6%, the National Diploma in Adventure Tourism Management consisted of 15.7% and the National Diploma in Ecotourism Management consisted of 7.8% of participants. In terms of the Industry sector where WIL was completed, The Hospitality industry placed 49% of participants, followed by the Event industry with 15.7%, Retail and Wholesale industries with 13.7%, Government sector with 9.8%, Adventure industry with 7.8% and the Transport sector with 3.9%

Results

The results of the questions related to the WIL placement experience indicated that 94.1% of participants viewed their WIL placement as positive. A total of 56.9% of participants were given a work contract, while only 45.1% of participants received a job description. Most of the participants (76.5%) changed departments during their WIL placement, with 62.7% of participants indicating that they had more than one supervisor during the WIL placement. Of all participants, 83.6% of participants indicated that WIL met their expectations. Interestingly, 15.7% of participants indicated that they changed host organisations during their WIL placement. This is an important area of research, as little to no information is available on the affect that a change in organisation has on the satisfaction of WIL or the overall experience of WIL.

The mean scores and standard deviations for the 51 participants on each item of the survey on the Likert-scale were calculated. The results are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Students’ perceptions of Work Integrated Learning

Perception	Mean	Standard Deviation
Perceptions of WIL	4.53	.578
My knowledge of my field has increased	4.49	.644
I gained experience in my field	4.53	.504
My career options have improved	4.31	.812
WIL closed the gap between theory and practice	4.12	.621
I worked in a knowledge centred environment	4.39	.532
I developed my technical skills	4.63	.488
I developed my communication skills	4.53	.674
I developed my human relation skills	4.20	.960
I developed my managerial skills	4.35	.716
I networked with industry	4.67	.589
I improved my self-confidence	4.49	.703
I improved the potential to advance my career	4.35	.716
I took part in interesting and challenging work	4.29	.901
I worked in an enjoyable	4.39	.723



environment		
This experience provided clarity on my future career goals	4.29	.807
I was satisfied with my training	4.59	.497
I took responsibility	4.20	1.000
I made decisions	1.69	.860
I was in a managerial position	4.20	1.059
I did administrative tasks	4.53	.578
Perceptions of host organization		
I was paid a salary	3.12	1.558
I was offered a full-time position	2.35	1.647
I received additional training during WIL	3.69	1.334
My supervisor assisted in building good relations with myself and co-workers	4.02	1.049
I received support from my co-workers	4.35	.744
I received support from my supervisor/s	4.18	.910
My supervisor/s showed an interest in my progress	4.31	.836
My supervisor/s were responsive and provided feedback	4.24	.971
I was corrected when I had done something wrong	4.57	.500
I worked in various departments within the organisation	4.08	1.309
I was treated as part of the staff	4.29	1.045
I worked independently	4.04	.937
I had enough work to keep me busy	4.37	.631
I observed and learnt before doing the task myself	4.41	.638
I worked 40 hours a week	3.92	1.369
I worked over weekends	3.80	1.562
Perceptions with Academic support		
There was co-ordination between myself, the employer and the institution	3.88	1.125
The academic coordinator contacted me regularly during my placement	3.16	1.286
I was visited by the academic coordinator	1.98	1.157
I received emotional support from the academic coordinator	3.16	1.302
I received academic support from the academic coordinator	3.55	1.254
I received technical support from the academic coordinator	3.27	1.387
The academic coordinator contacted my supervisor regularly	2.76	1.320

In terms of student perceptions of the WIL program, the only variable that did not receive a mean score over 4 was “I made decisions” ($M = 1.69$, $SD = .860$). All other variables received mean scores over 4, with “I networked with industry” receiving the highest mean



score ($M = 4.67$, $SD = .589$). The students' perceptions with the host organisation received lower mean scores than the perceptions with the WIL program; however, most of the variables were scored with a mean value of 4 or above. The lowest mean score was for "I was offered a full-time position" ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.647$). The highest mean score was for "I was corrected when I had done something wrong" ($M = 4.57$, $SD = .500$). Students' perceptions with the academic support were lower than the previous sections, with all variables having a mean score below 4. The variable "I was visited by the academic coordinator" received the lowest mean score ($M = 1.98$, $SD = 1.157$), while "There was coordination between myself, the employer and the institution" received the highest mean score ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.125$).

Mann Whitney and Kruskal Wallis tests were used to test for differences between independent groups. The results of significant differences are provided in Tables 2 to 10 below.

Table 2: Mann-Whitney for "I received a salary"

	I was offered a full-time position	I worked over weekends	I received additional training
Mann- Whitney U	167.500	163.500	125.000
Z	-2.075	-2.184	-2.971
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.038	.029	.003
Effect Size (r)	0.3	0.3	0.4
Mean Rank			
Paid	28.47	28.58	29.62
Unpaid	19.46	19.18	16.43

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in perception variables between students who received a salary and students who did not receive a salary. Distributions of the perceptions scores for students who were paid and students who were unpaid were similar, as assessed by visual inspection. Mean rank score's were statistically significantly higher in paid students than in unpaid students. The results indicate that three of the 43 perception variables were statistically significant. "I was offered a full-time position" $U = 167.5$, $z = -2.075$, $p = .038$, $r = 0.3$ was higher for paid students (28.47) than for unpaid students (19.46). "I worked over weekends" $U = 163.5$, $z = -2.184$, $p = .039$, $r = 0.3$ was higher for paid students (28.58) than for unpaid students (19.18). "I received additional training" $U = 125$, $z = -2.971$, $p = .003$, $r = 0.4$ was higher for paid students (29.62) than for unpaid students (16.43). The effect sizes for all three variables indicate a medium effect.

Table 3: Mann-Whitney for "I was satisfied with my WIL"

	I received support from my supervisor/s	I was corrected when I had done something wrong
Mann- Whitney U	34.000	36.000
Z	-2.350	-2.368
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.033	.041
Effect Size (r)	0.3	0.3
Mean Rank		
Yes	27.28	27.23
No	11.00	11.50



The differences in perception variables between students who were satisfied with WIL and students who were not satisfied with WIL revealed two statistically significant variables. Distributions of the perceptions scores for students who were satisfied with WIL and students who were not satisfied with WIL were similar, as assessed by visual inspection. Mean rank score's were statistically significantly higher in students who were satisfied with WIL than in students who were not satisfied with WIL. "I received support from my supervisor/s" $U = 34$, $z = -2.350$, $p = .033$, $r = 0.3$ was higher for students that were satisfied (27.28) than for students who were not satisfied (11.00). "I was corrected when I had done something wrong" $U = 36$, $z = -2.368$, $p = .041$, $r = 0.3$ was higher for students that were satisfied (27.23) than for students who were not satisfied (11.50). The effect sizes for both variables indicate a medium effect.

Table 4: Mann-Whitney for "I was offered a permanent position"

	I gained experience in my field	I made decisions	I was paid a salary	My supervisor assisted in building good relations	I received additional training	I worked over weekends	My self-confidence improved
Mann-Whitney U	171.500	167.500	169.000	155.000	162.000	154.500	179.000
Z	-2.112	-2.109	-1.969	-2.344	-2.151	-2.390	-2.131
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.035	.035	.049	.019	.031	.017	.033
Effect Size (r)	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Mean Rank							
Yes	32.25	32.54	32.43	33.43	32.93	33.43	31.71
No	23.64	23.53	23.57	23.19	23.38	23.18	23.84

The differences in perception variables between students who were offered a permanent position and students who were not offered a permanent position revealed seven statistically significant variables. Distributions of the perceptions scores for students who were offered a permanent position and students who were not offered a permanent position were similar, as assessed by visual inspection.

Mean rank scores were statistically significantly higher in students who were offered a permanent position than in students who were not offered a permanent position. "I gained experience in my field" $U = 171,5$, $z = -2.112$, $p = .035$, $r = 0.3$ was higher for students that were offered a full time position (32.25) than for students who were not offered a full time position (23.64). "I made decisions" $U = 167,5$, $z = -2.109$, $p = .035$, $r = 0.3$ was higher for students that were offered a full time position (32.54) than for students who were not offered a full time position (23.53). "I was paid a salary" $U = 169$, $z = -1.969$, $p = .049$, $r = 0.3$ was higher for students that were offered a full time position (32.43) than for students who were not offered a full time position (23.57). "My supervisor assisted in building good relations" $U = 155$, $z = -2.344$, $p = .019$, $r = 0.3$ was higher for students who were offered a full time position (33.43) than for students who were not offered a full time position (23.38).



“I received additional training” $U = 162$, $z = -2.390$, $p = .031$, $r = 0.3$ was higher for students that were offered a full time position (32.93) than for students who were not offered a full time position (23.38). “I worked over weekends” $U = 154,5$, $z = -2.390$, $p = .017$, $r = 0.3$ was higher for students that were offered a full time position (33.43) than for students who were not offered a full time position (23.18). “My self-confidence improved” $U = 179$, $z = -2.131$, $p = .033$, $r = 0.3$ was higher for students that were offered a full-time position (31.71) than for students who were not offered a full-time position (23.84). The effect sizes for both variables indicate a medium effect.

Table 5: Mann-Whitney for “I was given a contract”

	I observed first and then did the task
Mann- Whitney U	417.500
Z	2.049
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.040
Effect Size (r)	0.3
Mean Rank	
Yes	21.85
No	29.41

The differences in perception variables between students who were given a contract and students who were not given a contract revealed one statistically significant variable. The distribution of the perceptions scores for students who were given a contract and students who were not given a contract were similar, as assessed by visual inspection. “I observed first and then did the task” $U = 417,5$, $z = -2.049$, $p = .040$, $r = 0.3$ was higher for students who were not given a contract (29.41) than for students who were given a contract (21.85). The effect size for the variable indicates a medium effect.

Table 6: Mann-Whitney for “How many supervisors did you have during WIL?”

	I received academic support from the academic coordinator
Mann- Whitney U	193.000
Z	-2.287
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.022
Effect Size (r)	0.3
Mean Rank	
One	31.84
More than one	22.53

The differences in perception variables between students who had one supervisor and students who had more than one supervisor revealed one statistically significant variable. The distribution of the perceptions scores for students who had one supervisor and students who had more than one supervisor were similar, as assessed by visual inspection. “I received academic support from the academic coordinator” $U = 193$, $z = -2.287$, $p = .022$, $r = 0.3$ was higher for students who had one supervisor (31.84) than for students who had more than one supervisor (22.53). The effect size for the variable indicates a medium effect.



Table 7: Mann-Whitney for “Did you change departments during WIL?”

	My career options have improved	I developed my managerial skills	The academic coordinator contacted me regularly	I had enough work to keep me busy
Mann-Whitney U	327.000	142.000	337.500	111.000
Z	2.388	-2.219	2.388	-3.046
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.017	.026	.017	.002
Effect Size ϕ	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4
Mean Rank				
Yes	23.62	28.36	23.35	29.15
No	33.75	18.33	34.62	15.75

The differences in perception variables between students who changed departments during WIL and students who did not change departments during WIL revealed four statistically significant variables. The distribution of the perceptions scores for students who changed departments during WIL and students who did not change departments during WIL were similar, as assessed by visual inspection. “I developed managerial skills” $U = 142$, $z = 2.219$, $p = .026$, $r = 0.3$ was higher for students who changed departments during WIL (28.36) than for students who did not change departments during WIL (18.33). “The academic coordinator contacted me regularly” $U = 337.5$, $z = 2.388$, $p = .017$, $r = 0.3$ was higher for students who did not change departments during WIL (34.62) than for students who changed departments during WIL (23.35). “I had enough work to keep me busy” $U = 111$, $z = -3.046$, $p = .002$, $r = 0.4$ was higher for students who did change departments during WIL (29.15) than for students who did not change departments during WIL (15.75). The effect sizes for all four variables indicate a medium effect.

Table 8 below, provides the differences in perception variables between students whose expectations were met during WIL and students whose expectations were not met during WIL. The distribution of the perceptions scores for students whose expectations were met during WIL and students whose expectations were not met during WIL were similar, as assessed by visual inspection. “I gained experience in my field” $U = 64.5$, $z = -2.801$, $p = .012$, $r = 0.4$ was higher for students whose expectations were met during WIL (28.03) than for students whose expectations were not met during WIL (13.21). “I developed my managerial skills” $U = 78$, $z = -2.260$, $p = .037$, $r = 0.3$ was higher for students whose expectations were met during WIL (27.73) than for students whose expectations were not met during WIL (15.14). “I improved the potential to advance my career” $U = 73$, $z = -2.550$, $p = .011$, $r = 0.4$ was higher for students whose expectations were met during WIL (27.84) than for students whose expectations were not met during WIL (14.43). “I took part in interesting and challenging work” $U = 55$, $z = -3.085$, $p = .005$, $r = 0.4$ was higher for students whose expectations were met during WIL (28.03) than for students whose expectations were not met during WIL (13.21). “I worked in an enjoyable environment” $U = 49$, $z = -3.170$, $p = .003$, $r = 0.4$ was higher for students whose expectations were met during WIL (28.39) than for students whose expectations were not met during WIL (11.86). “I was satisfied with my training” $U = 53.5$, $z = -3.001$, $p = .004$, $r = 0.4$ was higher for students whose expectations were met during WIL (28.03) than for students whose expectations were not met during WIL (13.21). “I was paid a salary” $U = 53$, $z = -2.865$, $p = .008$, $r = 0.4$ was higher for students whose expectations were met during WIL (28.30) than for students whose expectations were not met during WIL (11.57). “I received additional training during WIL” $U = 60.5$, $z = -2.689$, $p = .008$, $r = 0.4$ was higher for students whose expectations were met during WIL (28.12) than for students whose



expectations were not during WIL (12.64). “My supervisor assisted with building good relations” $U = 80.5$, $z = -2.148$, $p = .042$, $r = 0.4$ was higher for students whose expectations were met during WIL (27.67) than for students whose expectations were not met during WIL (15.50). “I received support from my co-workers” $U = 57$, $z = -2.961$, $p = .006$, $r = 0.4$ was higher for students whose expectations were met during WIL (28.20) than for students whose expectations were not met during WIL (12.14). “I received support from my supervisor/s” $U = 80$, $z = -2.265$, $p = .042$, $r = 0.4$ was higher for students whose expectations were met during WIL (27.68) than for students whose expectations were not met during WIL (15.43). The effect sizes for all variables indicate a medium effect.



Table 8: Mann Whitney for “did WIL meet your expectations?”

	I gained experience in my field	I developed my managerial skills	I improved the potential to advance my career	I took part in interesting and challenging work	I worked in an enjoyable environment	I was satisfied with my training	I was paid a salary	I received additional training during WIL	My supervisor assisted in building good relations with myself and co-workers	I received support from my co-workers	I received support from my supervisor/s
Mann-Whitney U	64.500	78.000	73.000	55.000	49.000	53.500	53.000	60.500	80.500	57.000	80.000
Z	-2.801	-2.260	-2.550	-3.085	-3.170	-3.001	-2.865	-2.689	-2.148	-2.961	-2.265
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.037	.011	.005	.003	.004	.004	.008	.042	.006	.042
Effect Size (r)	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3
Mean Rank											
Yes	28.03	27.73	27.84	28.25	28.39	28.28	28.30	28.12	27.67	28.20	27.68
No	13.21	15.14	14.43	11.86	11.00	11.64	11.57	12.64	15.50	12.14	15.43



The Kruskal-Wallis H test is a rank-based nonparametric test that can be used to determine if there are statistically significant differences between two or more groups of an independent variable on an ordinal dependent variable. A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine if there were differences in the perception variables between the industry sectors where WIL was completed as well as the perception variables and qualification for which the participants were registered. The results are presented in Table 9 and 10 below.

Table 9: Kruskal Wallis for “industry Sector where WIL was done”

	WIL closed the GAP between theory and practice	I was in a managerial position	I was visited by the academic coordinator	I was offered a full-time position
Chi-Square	11.903	13.034	12.479	16.258
Df	5	5	5	5
Asymp. Sig.	.036	.023	.029	.006
Mean Rank				
Adventure	19.12	41.62	21.75	35.88
Retail/Wholesale	36.64	20.00	30.93	28.07
Transport	40.00	35.00	31.50	34.25
Government	18.60	18.20	43.30	13.00
Event	31.19	18.00	18.06	38.56
Hospitality	22.82	28.58	23.94	21.76

Distribution of perception variable scores was not similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. “WIL closed the gap between theory and practice” scores were statistically significantly different between the industry sectors where WIL was completed, $X^2(5) = 11.903$, $p = .036$. Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn’s procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted p-values are presented. Values are mean ranks unless otherwise stated. This post hoc analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in “WIL closed the gap between theory and practice” scores between industry sectors. “I was in a managerial position” scores were statistically significantly different between the industry sectors where WIL was completed, $X^2(5) = 13.034$, $p = .023$.

Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn’s procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted p-values are presented. This post hoc analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in “I was in a managerial position” scores between industry sectors. “I was visited by the academic coordinator” scores were statistically significantly different between industry sectors where WIL was completed, $X^2(5) = 12.479$, $p = .029$. Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn’s procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted p-values are presented. This post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in “I was visited by the academic coordinator” scores between the Event industry (18.06) and the Government sector (43.30) ($p = .022$), but not between any other group combinations. “I was offered a full-time position” scores were statistically significantly different between industry sectors where WIL was completed, $X^2(5) = 16.258$, $p = .006$. Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn’s procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted p-values are presented. This post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in “I was offered a full-time position” scores between the Event industry (38.56) and the Government sector (13.00) ($p = .018$), and between the Hospitality industry



(21.76) and the Event industry (38.56) ($p = .042$), but not between any other group combinations.

Table 10: Kruskal Wallis for “which qualification are you registered for”

	I was in a managerial position	I worked 40 hours a week	I received emotional support from the academic coordinator
Chi-Square	8.439	9.840	7.942
Df	3	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	.038	.020	.047
Mean Rank			
Tourism Management	26.97	22.90	24.70
Adventure Tourism	35.25	32.38	36.62
Ecotourism Management	19.25	15.12	13.00
Event Management	17.56	35.50	26.67

Distribution of perception variable scores was not similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. “I was in a managerial position” scores were statistically significantly different between the qualification type, $X^2 (3) = 8.439$, $p = .038$. Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn’s procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted p-values are presented. Values are mean ranks unless otherwise stated.

This post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in “I was in a managerial position” scores between the National Diploma Event Management (17.56) and the National Diploma Adventure Tourism (35.25) ($p = .042$), but not between any other group combinations. “I worked 40 hours a week” scores were statistically significantly different between the qualification type, $X^2 (3) = 9.840$, $p = .020$. Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn’s procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. This post hoc analysis revealed no statistically significant differences between qualification type groups. “I received emotional support from the academic coordinator” scores were statistically significantly different between the qualification type, $X^2 (3) = 7.942$, $p = .047$. Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn’s procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted p-values are presented. Values are mean ranks unless otherwise stated. This post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in “I received emotional support from the academic coordinator” scores between the National Diploma Ecotourism Management (13.00) and the National Diploma Adventure Tourism (36.62) ($p = .043$), but not between any other group combinations.

Discussion

Demographic results

The demographic results provided above are consistent with previous research conducted by Taylor and Geldenhuys (2016a, 2016b) in that majority of tourism students are female, aged between 21 and 23, are registered for the National Diploma in Tourism Management and complete their WIL placement in the Hospitality Industry. Participants further revealed that 56.9% received a work contract from the host organisation, 45.1% received a job description, 76.5% changed departments during their placement period and 62.7% had more than one supervisor during their placement period. Interestingly, there is no previous research into the effect of using contracts or job descriptions on the satisfaction of students’ with WIL or on whether the use of contracts and job descriptions result in the



offer of full time positions. Most of the participants (83.6%) indicated that WIL met their expectations, however this is approximately 10% lower than the number of students that had a positive experience. The 15.7% of participants that changed host organisations during WIL did not provide reasons for this change and as a result no further analysis could be conducted. However, this is an important part of WIL that has, until now, not been mentioned or researched. Students are assessed using the final host organisations reports and analyses; as a result any information from previous host organisations is lost.

Perceptions of WIL, Host organisations and academic support

The results of students' perceptions, in Table 2 above, indicate that students' perceptions toward the WIL program were positive, with an average mean score of 4.27 for the 21 WIL program variables listed. "I made decisions" ($M = 1.69$) was the only variable that received a mean score below 4. This could be due to the fact that host organisations would be reluctant to allow undergraduate students', with little or no industry experience, to make any business decisions. The point of WIL is for students to gain work experience in the industry and as such require supervision and assistance with all decisions.

In terms of the students' perceptions of the host organisation, mean scores were lower than for the perceptions of the WIL program. Students undertake WIL orientation at the academic institution prior to industry placement. The orientation provides students with administrative and academic requirements of the WIL program, however, little information is provided on host organisations. Students, therefore have unrealistic expectations of the host organisation. Taylor and Geldenhuys (2017) indicate that the gaps between student expectations and student perceptions of the WIL program yielded an overall mean score of $M = 0.37$ for the 20 variables, and a mean score of $M = 0.53$ for the 16 host organisation variables.

The average mean score for the 16 host organisation variables was $M = 3.98$. "I was offered a full-time position" ($M = 2.35$) was the variable with the lowest mean score. This confirms previous findings by Taylor and Geldenhuys (2016a), where 4% of tourism students indicated that they received full-time employment from the WIL organisation. It is important to conduct further research into the numbers of students who are offered full-time positions by the host organisation after completing WIL, as well as understanding the reasons why host organisations do not offer students' full-time positions.

For the students' perceptions of academic support during WIL, the average mean score for the 7 variables was $M = 3.11$. This was lower than both the previous categories and identifies potential areas for further research. "I was visited by the academic coordinator" ($M = 1.98$) received the lowest mean score. In many institutions, WIL coordinators have other academic responsibilities, which include contact lecturing. As a result, WIL coordinators are not as freely available to WIL students' as is required by students. Many of the students that register for Tourism Management Diploma's at TUT find placement outside of the area, province and country, thereby making site visits improbable.

Differences in perceptions for independent groups

Both Mann-Whitney U Tests and Kruskal Wallis Tests were conducted to determine if there were any significant differences in perception variables of independent groups. For students that were paid a salary during their WIL placement period, the results indicated that they were more likely to receive a full-time job offer, work over weekends and receive additional training with the host organisation while on WIL placement. These results are confirmed in Taylor and Geldenhuys (2016b) which found that host organisations that pay



WIL students have a financial interest in the student and are vested in the future of the student. According to Loretto (2017), 60% of paid undergraduate students received a full-time job offer after completing their internship, while only 37% of unpaid undergraduate students received a full-time job offer after completing their internship.

Students that were satisfied with the WIL placement had higher mean rank scores for “I received support from my supervisor/s” and “I was corrected when I had done something wrong” than for students that were not satisfied with their WIL. This indicates that students’ satisfaction with WIL placement can be linked to the support and guidance received at the host organisation. WIL is undertaken for the purpose of allowing students to gain industry experience, however this is still a training experience and therefore requires the involvement of a supervisor. Students that receive proper guidance and correction are able to learn through and from their mistakes, while receiving support.

The perception variables “gained experience in their field”, “made decisions”, “were paid a salary”, “had a “supervisor that assisted in building relations”, “received additional training”, “worked over weekends” and “improved their self-confidence” were higher for students that were offered a permanent position over those that were not offered a permanent position. Students completed their surveys at the end of the six-month placement period. As a result, it is unclear at which stage these students were offered a permanent position. Being offered a permanent position at the beginning of the placement period means that students were receiving payment and were expected to do the work and receive the benefits of a permanent staff member. If host organisations offered a permanent position at the end of the six-month placement period, this would encourage students’ to prove themselves and their worth to the organisation.

Students who were not given a contract, were more likely to “observe first and then do a task” than for students who received a contract. In this instance, it is presumed that students that did not receive a contract were perhaps unclear as to what they were required to do and would therefore need to observe before undertaking the task on their own.

Students that had one supervisor during their WIL placement received “academic support from the coordinator” over students who had more than one supervisor.

Students that changed departments during WIL were able to “develop managerial skills” and “had enough work to keep them busy”. The experience that students gained by changing departments gave them a holistic view of the organisation and therefore greater insight into the skills required by a manager. Different departments would require that students’ constantly learn the various skills of each department and as a result, keep them busy and with enough work. The “academic coordinator contacted me regularly” and “I improved my career options” were higher for students’ that did not change departments during WIL. In terms of the academic coordinator contact, students’ provide contact details of their supervisor prior to starting WIL. When changing departments, contact details are not provided for all supervisors and as a result the student may feel that the necessary supervisor has not been contacted. In terms of improving career options, students that remain in one department for the full placement period have more experience in one area of the organisation, thereby increasing career options.

It was found that students who stated that WIL met their expectations had “gained experience in their field”, “developed their managerial skills”, “improved the potential to



advance their careers”, “took part in interesting and challenging work”, “worked in an enjoyable environment”, “were satisfied with their WIL placements”, “were paid a salary”, “received additional training”, “had a supervisor/s that assisted with building good relations”, “received support from co-workers” and “received support from supervisor/s”. It is interesting to note that majority of the variables that were statistically significant were those that concerned the host organisation. Working in a positive environment, with support from supervisors and co-workers, will therefore lead to expectations being met.

In terms of the industry sector where WIL was done, there were statistically significant differences for “WIL closed the gap between theory and practice” and “I was in a managerial position”. Post hoc analyses did not find significant differences between the groups. However, “I was visited by the academic coordinator” was higher for government sector students than for Event industry students. Students conducting their placement in government organisations are generally placed closer to the institution, which makes visitation easier. “I was offered a full time position” was higher for event industry students over government sector students and hospitality students. As found in previous research (Taylor & Geldenhuys, 2016b: 7), event students are required to work independently, resulting in experience and responsibility. After a six-month period, these students work as part of the organisation and have the necessary experience required to be employed full time. Despite the large number of tourism students finding placement within the hospitality industry, these students do not have the specific system knowledge required for the hospitality organisation (Taylor & Geldenhuys, 2017: 9)

The various qualifications for which students’ were registered yielded significant differences for “I was in a managerial position”, which was higher for Adventure Tourism students than for Event Management students. Adventure students receive additional training, courses and skills, required for the industry, prior to WIL placement. Adventure organisations are generally smaller than the other industry organisations and allow for greater experience in terms of managerial opportunities. “I worked 40 hours a week” was statistically significant, but the post hoc analyses did not yield significant differences between the groups. “I received emotional support from the academic coordinator” was higher for Adventure Tourism students than for Ecotourism students. As previously stated, Adventure organisations are smaller than other industry organisation and students are required to have specific skills prior to placement. The adventure industry requires students’ to conduct and take part in risk associated activities and as a result, these students could require more support from the academic coordinator.

Conclusions

Much research of WIL has been conducted, however research of students’ perceptions of WIL, specifically within the tourism industry is still scarce. The article has provided insight into a number of the shortcomings regarding various aspects of WIL as well as highlighted other needed areas of research. Tourism students generally view WIL as a positive experience and majority of these students have had their expectations of WIL met. With WIL becoming a compulsory part of undergraduate qualifications in South Africa, it is important to have a thorough understanding of the placement processes. Based on the findings of the study, the article strongly advocates that research into the WIL placement process and the administration surrounding WIL needs to be designed with the stakeholders in mind. This will strengthen relationships between stakeholders, particularly between academic institutions and host organisations and will enable the alignment of WIL objectives for all stakeholders.



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