Perceptions of Organizational Workforce on WIL Programs to Broaden Students' Competencies

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Abstract— All work integrated learning programs share one underlying goal: to make students more employable. This research concentrates on the viewpoints of organizational workforce (employers that provide work-integrated learning experiences to students) in terms of how it improves students' professional competencies. In 21 different organizations where students were placed, the research looks at the links between student engagement in work-integrated learning and the advancement of their office management and technology competencies. According to the findings of this research, students' competencies were enhanced, and they are more prepared to adapt to changing workplaces. According to this qualitative research, competencies obtained by students during successful placements may be translated into a range of circumstances, activities, and employment opportunities. This research contributes to a better understanding of many issues that placement encounter, and it suggests that collaboration between organized industry and higher education institutions be enhanced to improve communication and student's placement.

Index Terms— Students' competencies, organisational workforce, WIL.

I. INTRODUCTION

In South Africa (SA), a rise in the number of graduates who are unemployed has been widely reported in the literature (Statistics South Africa, 2021; Oluwajodu, Blaauw, Greyling, & Kleynhans, 2015). One of the main reasons for the growth in unemployed graduates is potential employers' unwillingness to recruit unskilled graduates (Alho, 2020) owing to the necessity for extra training, such as graduate trainee programs and the costs associated with them. Furthermore, for the good name of their organizations and to boost organizational profit. Companies frequently want to hire professionals with expertise and advanced office management competencies (Ahammad, 2017). Organizations typically demand self-starters because they are concerned about rescheduling work and losing production time as a result of the deployment of experienced workers into rookie training programs. Work-integrated learning (WIL) has become increasingly difficult yet important in the twenty-first century as office management expectations for students, lecturers, and the institution have increased (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). More so, WIL is well incorporated into the Office Management and Technology (OMT) curriculum. Work-integrated learning is frequently praised for allowing students to quickly adapt to organizational work needs as well as emphasize the applicability of information gained in academic settings to work situations (Rambe, 2018). Several graduates struggle to gain suitable pre-work exposure owing to the absence of preparation and a lack of graduate courses that include a full package of work-integrated learning in their institutions. As a result, student involvement in WIL should become a requirement for graduation in all faculties where practical experience is required for successful placement. Nevertheless, it is expected that robust research into WIL can potentially improve the credentials and professional competencies of university graduates, as some students do not have the tools to undertake the mandatory WIL, particularly in cases where students must find their own placements (Pinto, Sales, Fernández-Pascual, and Caballero-Mariscal, 2021).

As a result, while there is general agreement at SA universities on the potential of WIL to improve student preparedness for work, there is a lack of competencies on the precise impact of WIL on the enhancement of knowledge, skills, and abilities of OMT graduates and on the performance of the organization where WIL takes place (Pinto et al., 2021). The previous research presented educators' perspectives on the capacity of WIL programs to broaden Office Management and Technology competencies of students at UoTs. Therefore, this research focuses on the following objective;

   a) *To examine the perspectives of organisational workforce on the impact of WIL programs to enhance office management and technology students' competencies such as knowledge, skills and abilities.*

II. METHODOLOGY

This research comprised 21 organizational workforces in which OMT students participated in their WIL. Moreover, this research employed semi-structured questionnaires as a data collection tool to get different perspectives on the overall impact of WIL on improving OMT students' knowledge, skills, and ability to understand organizational workforce viewpoints. Participants were given questionnaires by the researcher in person. The questionnaire responses were examined using Burnard's (1991) thematic content analysis. The researcher was granted ethical permission to perform the research. All research participants were informed about the goal of the research and assured of their confidentiality,

allowing them to participate. They were told that their involvement was entirely optional and that they might leave the research at any moment, which encouraged them to take an active role.

A. Results

Organisational Work Force's Biographical Summary

Biographical variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Q1. Gender	Female	4	19%
	Male	17	81%
Q2. Age group	35-44	11	52%
	45-54	7	33%
	55 and above	3	14%
Q3. Home Language	English	9	43%
	Afrikaans	5	24%
	Sesotho	3	14%
	IsiZulu	2	10%
	IsiXhosa	2	10%
Q4. Qualification	FET or equivalent	1	5%
	University Degree/Diploma	20	95%
Q5. Role in this Business	Manager	6	29%
	Owner	6	29%
	Manager/owner	2	10%
	Employee	6	29%
	Other	1	5%
Q6. Year of experience on this job	below 1 year	1	5%
	6-10 years	4	19%
	11-15 years	5	24%
	16-20 years	4	19%
	over 20 years	7	33%
Q7. Year of experience in management	below 1 year	1	5%
	2-5 years	6	29%
	6-10 years	7	33%
	11-15 years	4	19%
	16-20 years	1	5%
	over 20 years	2	10%
Q8. Number of employees in this business	6-10 employees	1	5%
	11-15 employees	3	14%
	16-20 employees	17	81%
Q9. Highest qualification	Tertiary certificate	1	5%
	Diploma/Degree	20	95%

1) Timeous Knowledge

According to all respondents, students' understanding of the timely execution of business operations is crucial to their effective engagement in WIL. Students' awareness of appropriate time-based sequencing of tasks or work activities was also recognized as vital to student effective involvement in WIL by all organizational workforces. This might imply that the employers believe that properly allocating task time is vital to their capacity to efficiently fulfill obligations. Students may gain time management knowledge, such as how to prioritize activities and use time efficiently while avoiding distractions and squandering time. This finding backs up Gregg's (2018) claim that time management is a never-ending series of little and significant decisions that gradually shape the structure of everyone's life decisions and task management.

2) Space Management Knowledge

All of the essential questions about space management knowledge that students must have in order to participate effectively in WIL were unanimously agreed upon by all of the organizational workforces. These findings demonstrate a relationship between space management knowledge and the numerous responsibilities that aspiring office managers, administrators, and secretaries are required to undertake at their workplace. Managing information repositories, for example, demands a well-managed office space to enable

information access and reuse. This interpretation confirms Cranton's (2011) findings that WIL assessments of accurate spatial knowledge management must be undertaken in combination with the work environment in order for each student to meet the working objectives' requirements.

3) Students' Skills Impacted by WIL Placements

All of the respondents fully agreed on all of the questions in this section. This indicates that all of the workforce's employers, managers, and employees feel that student placement enhances their skills. The findings emphasize the value of WIL in refining and improving the skill base of new job entrants or novices who have never worked in a real work environment (Gregg, 2018). The vast majority of the organization's workforce also highlights that any organization's future profitability is ultimately defined by the number of individuals employed who have productive skills that connect with the organization's demands.

4) Students' Abilities Impacted by WIL Placements

All of the respondents believed that placement has an impact on the abilities of different students. As a consequence, the workforce at the company believes that WIL assignments may help students in all capacities. WIL should continue to have an impact on student development and provide opportunities for all students to learn for the first time and for the rest of their lives.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

According to the findings of this research, students' involvement in WIL enhances their competencies. Organizational workforces are assisting students in becoming better employees for the workplace by supporting placement and collaborating with universities. As a consequence of this research, it is suggested that WIL be made mandatory for all courses at both traditional and universities of Technology. Furthermore, significant collaboration between universities and organization should be encouraged so that institutions may understand what is required of them when developing a curriculum that meets industry needs. Because this research was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic, future research should use both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to determine how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted WIL placement and engagement.

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