

An assessment of the quality of a work-integrated learning internship program in Kenya

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The concept of work-integrated learning (WIL) is significant as it has a considerable influence on a student's fitness for the workplace upon graduation. This paper aims to determine the perception of graduates of the United States International University – Africa (USIU-A) towards the quality of the internship program and especially the effects of the learning activities of a work-integrated learning course. The study was conducted using an adjusted framework for evaluating the quality of WIL curricula based on six dimensions of WIL including: authenticity; integrated learning supports; alignment of teaching and learning activities and assessments with integrative learning outcomes; supervisor access; and, induction / preparation processes. From the findings, supervisor access and authenticity received high ratings while integrated learning support and alignment of both teaching and learning activities received the lowest rating. The findings will inform the developers and implementers of internship programs by identifying key areas of focus.

Keywords: Work-integrated learning (WIL), internship, WIL assessment, WIL dimensions, Kenya, Africa

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is a curriculum design in which students spend time in professional, work, or other practice settings relevant to their degrees of study, and to their occupational futures (Smith, 2012). WIL is a term used to describe the variety of experiences that engage students in workplace situations (Ferns, Campbell, & Zegwaard, 2014). It is viewed as an umbrella term for a range of applications and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum (Patrick et al., 2008). WIL is a response to the demands of the industry by higher education institutions to produce graduates who are “work-ready” (Ballantine & Larres, 2007). It has therefore become important to study and measure the impact of WIL in order to justify the investment by tertiary providers in enhancing graduate employability (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). In assessing the quality of WIL, institutions understand issues students are experiencing in the WIL environment and can therefore plan to avoid similar issues in future placement (Venville, Lynch, & Santhanam, 2108).

Students in WIL courses are encouraged to apply and learn disciplinary knowledge and skills in a real-world context. The focus of WIL is to improve the employability of graduates by providing practical experiences directly related to university courses, as well as facilitating the transition from university to the workplace (Brimble & Freudenberg, 2010). WIL is focused on producing a highly skilled workforce that can meet industry and community needs (Reddan, 2016). WIL centers attention on the integration of discipline learning and workplace practice or application. According to Reddan (2016), significant evidence indicates that work experience contextualizes student learning, is influential in graduate employment and should be integrated into course curricula wherever possible. The value of placements and other forms of WIL have been demonstrated by Lowden, Hall, Elliot, and Lewin (2011) who found overwhelming support from institutions of higher education and employers for work placements and internships.

The importance of WIL cannot be overemphasized. Universities encourage their students to participate in WIL programs due to the role it plays in transitioning from the university to the workplace. According to Reese (2008), WIL programs allow students to participate in a variety of programs

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designed to expose them to a realistic world of work, as well as provide them a wealth of knowledge in career development. Reese also states that these programs provide students an environment where they practice a range of activities that facilitate the construction of knowledge by engaging them in actual tasks that occur in the workplace. As a result, students are afforded a context where creative decision making in uncertain situations can occur (Harnish & Wilke-Schnauffer, 1998) and engage in reflective practices that enable them to develop both personally and professionally (Kinman & Kinman, 1997). Participants in a WIL course derive several benefits including career direction, insight of what practice was outside university environment, and motivation for possibly undertaking higher degree research (Zegwaard & McCurdy, 2014).

According to Smith (2012), WIL contributes to the missions of universities by ensuring the desired end product in graduates is achieved. WIL forces students to do real work that translates into social and economic values (Govender & Walt, 2017). Barnett, Parry, & Coate (2001) note that WIL provides learning that would be of use to the society and not merely adding to students' disciplinary knowledge base. On the other hand, Khampirat and McRae (2016) indicate that WIL can effectively connect what students are learning to the world of work. Through practice based learning events, WIL engages students in addressing identified learning needs as well as providing a service to the community (Jeong & McMillan, 2015). In recent research, Zegwaard, Campbell, and Pretti (2017) have argued that, other than WIL ensuring that the graduates are work ready, it should also make them profession-ready by ensuring that they have capacities and abilities in critical thinking and reflection, managing workplace ethical challenges and shaping the organizational culture of the workplace. In order to produce work-ready graduates, universities need to change their traditional approaches (Siddoo, Janchai, & Sawattawee, 2018).

DIMENSIONS OF WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Smith (2012), after an exhaustive literature review on WIL, developed and tested the five dimensions which were operationalized in a measurement model. The key dimensions identified were: authenticity; integrated learning supports (both at university and the workplace); alignment (of teaching and learning activities and assessments with integrative learning outcomes); supervisor access; and induction / preparation processes.

Authenticity

According to Smith (2012), authenticity is at the heart of all workplace-situated learning and as a result, curricula should aim to provide students with a real work environment (physical authenticity) doing real-world work as well as cognitive authenticity (Herrington & Herrington, 2006) where students encounter, engage and/or participate in personally meaningful and relevant learning within a particular disciplinary framework (Moore, 2004; Stein, Andrews, & Isaacs, 2001). For WIL curricula to be authentic, students must be exposed to an environment that is not simulated but that which ensures they have a real taste of what a real work environment is about. The tasks the students are subjected to must be meaningful, devoid of menial jobs which might make the students feel that they are being misused, and therefore students should be subjected to projects that are meaningfully consequential (Smith, 2012).

Students in WIL have often felt not appreciated by organizations due to the assignment of trivial and menial jobs as opposed to professional tasks (Candy, Crebert, & O'Leary, 1994). According to Martin (1997), although all students might expect to undertake their share of routine work, too much of this, with little or no engagement in more demanding professional activity, was clearly not conducive to an

overall positive learning experience. In developing the WIL scale, Smith (2012) noted that authenticity involves more than just an absence of menial tasks but also includes the perception of the student as to whether the work was relevant to the organization's goals, required or allowed to work autonomously, and that the work was important and consequential.

Alignment of Both Teaching and Learning Activities and Assessment with Integrative Learning Objectives

Smith (2012) in developing the evaluation framework alignment used Biggs' (1996) notion of the constructive alignment of learning objectives with teaching and learning activities and assessments. This dimension focuses on the ability of the student to apply theories learnt in class to the workplace. It therefore questions the relevance of classroom discourse to the real-world working environment, challenges, and expectations. Integrative learning then focuses in the linkage between theory and practice and as to whether the students have the ability to use acquired knowledge at the right time and the right place (Barnett et al., 2001). For the success of integrative learning, desired learning outcomes and activities should aim at developing students' professional identity and abilities (Smith, 2012); emphasize linkages between theory and practice (Boud & Walker, 1991); and allow transfer of learning from university to the workplace (Dymock & Gerber, 2002).

Integrated Learning Supports

According to Smith (2012), students are exposed to a myriad of support services within the university, for example counselling, welfare, libraries, and study advisory. These services may also be available in host institutions. As a result, Smith recommends that WIL curricula design should consider the integration of support services both at the student's university and within the workplace, which may help to improve the learning process. Smith in a literature review identified that previous researchers have highlighted the importance of supporting students during WIL programs due to the benefits to the intern, the employer and the university.

The learning support should be viewed in three phases or stages. These are before internship, during internship and after internship (Maertz Jr, Stoeberl, & Marks, 2014). The university should focus on support during the three stages while the workplace focuses on support during the internship. The pre-internship support includes pre-internship orientations, internship seminars and workshops as well as a clear explanation to the student of the expectations, behavior and aspirations of internship. In terms of the support during internship, there is need for regularly scheduled meetings between intern and faculty mentor or internship coordinators. These meetings would provide an opportunity to review the process, address any workplace challenges as well as determine the fit between the student course and workplace activities. The organization providing the internship is also required to provide internal support to the students to ensure they are assimilated into the workforce as well as motivate the intern in their work. The post-internship meetings provide an opportunity to the academic supervisor and internship coordinator to receive feedback and assess the success of the program.

Supervisor Access

Supervisor access pertains to the interaction between the student and the supervisor during the internship period. Such interaction provides a critical emotional support to the students and reinforces the role of the university in the WIL curricula. According to Smith (2012), the primary purpose of supervisor-intern contact is typically feedback on learning, support throughout the experience, educational supervision, and emotional support. During the internship, the interaction helps the intern to clarify any issues and dilemmas they may have in relation to the applicability of theory to practice.

It also affords an opportunity to address work-based challenges and monitor the progress of the student. The interaction can either be at the place of work or arranged at the university at different times in the placement period. If the same is at the workplace, the supervisor is afforded an opportunity to observe the intern at work and be able to give relevant feedback from the observation. There is also an opportunity to meet with the work-based supervisor for progress reports. Invariably, such interaction is useful to all the parties – the intern, academic advisor and the work-based supervisor. In assessing the success of internship, it then becomes imperative to assess the existence, frequency and outcomes/value of such interactions

Induction and Preparation Processes

As mentioned earlier, one of the three levels of a successful WIL curricula is the pre-internship phase. This includes the ability to match students with relevant work related to their courses at the university; preparation before the placement; understanding of the curricula and its expectations; and preparation by host organization to receive the intern, among others. Interns are demotivated when they report to their assigned stations and find that they have no sitting space, no allocated supervisor or role. In order to plug this gap, organizations resort to ‘looking’ for something for the intern to do, which in many cases end up doing menial jobs and others of minimal relevance to application of knowledge to practice. According to various authors, poorly administered curricula leads to several consequences including: weakly integrated (or not integrated) disciplinary and practical learning (Ryan, Toohey, & Hughes, 1996); unorganized experiences for students (Ryan et al., 1996); ill-prepared, and poorly motivated students (Abeysekera, 2006); ill-prepared academic and workplace supervisors (Ryan et al., 1996); ill-prepared workplaces (Pauling & Komisarczuk, 2007); uncooperative and indiscreetly utilitarian industry or community partners (Hughes, 1998; Ryan et al., 1996); and stressful experiences of abandonment (Freestone, Williams, Thompson & Trembath, 2007).

INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Internship is a placement curriculum designed to support work-integrated learning objectives. It is an approach that allows students, sometime within their academic program, to work in an institution for the purpose of learning in a real world situation thereby transitioning knowledge to practice. It has been defined by Taylor (1988, p. 393) as, “structured and career-relevant work experiences obtained by students prior to graduation from an academic program”. Through internships, the students have the opportunity to experience the environments they will work in when they graduate. An internship is a form of experiential education that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom, with practical application and skill development in a professional, work setting. Students may earn academic credit, as determined by an educational institution.

Internship presents a trinity relationship with the stakeholders being the student/intern, the academic institution and the hosting organizations. Through internship, various benefits are accrued by the three parties (Carl, Philipp & Jill, 2014; Sapp & Zhang, 2009; Taylor, 1988). As indicated before, the student gains job-related benefits, career-related benefits, and experience by relating theory to practice, networks with potential employers, and in some cases is paid for work done (financial benefits). Research has found that students who have gone through internship programs are likely to have higher starting salaries and faster advancement than those who have not. In terms of job search, interned students receive more offers and earlier job offers than those who have not. Organizations were also more inclined to offer employment to those who had interned as they stood to be easily assimilated within the organization based on the experience gained through internship. Research has also found

that the quality of the work placement was perceived by students to have a higher impact on the development of employability skills than the duration or structure of the program (Smith, Ferns, & Russell, 2019).

Employers too benefit from an internship arrangement as it gives access to interns with some skills to execute relevant tasks for the employer. Many interns end up with permanent service with the same organization in which they are interned. Carl et al., (2014) identified several benefits for employers including: increased capacity as the interns handle some tasks and as a result freeing the fulltime employees to focus on more critical and core tasks; low cost skilled labor with accruing benefits; high motivation, enthusiasm and informal social skills exhibited by the interns; a future employee assessment – low risk in recruitment since they know the capacities, attitudes and competencies of the intern as a potential employee; and, opportunity to develop and shape interns as new employees.

The academic institution also derives multiple benefits from the program. The institution is able to deliver an industry relevant graduate, giving legitimacy to the courses offered. The process provides the institution with university approved programs where the students are able to fulfil their course requirements in an organization undertaking daily work activities in order to gain insight and acquire direct exposure to a particular occupation (Brown, 2003).

UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY – AFRICA (USIU-A): INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

According to the USIU-A internship office, internship is offered as a course at USIU-A designed for seniors and graduate students in all academic programs at the university. This is in accord with the overall mission of USIU-A to provide an environment of growth, knowledge and work experience for its students. This entails preparedness for career through mastery of a field of knowledge and its multicultural application. Such mastery is accomplished through both formal study and various experiential forms of learning such as the internship and fieldwork, which are a requirement for each student before graduation. The internship program at USIU-A exists to prepare students for a smooth transition to the work environment and to secure internship placements. The purpose of the USIU-A internship program is to equip students with insights into the work environment; increase awareness of personal and social skills for improvement; provide hands on experience in the student's area of study; and, develop student's ability to tackle practical problems in organizations.

Applicants to the program must be in their final semester. As a requirement, the students are expected to attend the first class, for a briefing and highlighting of the expectations of the process and the last class at the university during which they are expected to submit the Internship report together with the evaluation form and daily diaries to the instructor. The internship is spread over three months (whole semester) and students are expected to work for a minimum of 400 hours. It's a credit graded course.

STUDY OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study was to determine the perception of students of United States International University – Africa towards the quality of the work placement program. In order to achieve this objective, an evaluation of the learning activities of a work-integrated learning course were undertaken.

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The sample for this study was drawn from students at the United States International University – Africa who had undergone an internship in the 2017 - 2018 academic year. The targeted students

graduated from the University in September 2018. This was due to the need to have responses from students who had a recent interaction with the internship services. For the purpose of this study, a structured questionnaire with two parts was developed to collect primary data. Part one collected demographic data which included gender, age and school while part two collected data on perception of internship quality. Part two was an adaptation of the scale developed and validated by Smith (2012) which was used as the measuring instrument for evaluating the quality of work-integrated learning curricula. The framework considers an integrative approach to the assessment of WIL. Unlike other previous WIL assessment frameworks, (e.g., course experience questionnaire [CEQ] by Ramsden, 1991; the extended CEQ by McInnes and James, 2003, and; work experience questionnaire [WEQ] by Martin 1997), the adopted framework provides an integrated approach to WIL. It focuses on the six dimensions of WIL evaluation as identified by Smith (2012) and as discussed earlier. Prior to the data collection, the tool was subjected to ethics approval process in line with the recommendations by Fleming & Zegwaard (2018). Ethical clearance was given by the United States International University – Africa ethics board (USIU-A/IRB/6619).

Altogether, 92 questionnaires were distributed with 35 returned representing a response rate of 38%. A response rate of 35% in educational institutional surveys has been identified as adequate (Venville et al., 2018). From the responses, 37% of the respondents were males while 63% were females. In terms of the distribution of the respondent's age, 97.1% of the respondents were of age 20-30 years while 2.9% years were of age 31-40 as indicated in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Sample demographic profile of internship respondents

Demographic data	Categories	Percent
Gender	Male	37.0
	Female	63.0
Age Category	20 - 30 Years	97.1
	31 - 40 Years	2.9

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The analysis is presented based on the different dimensions of WIL as discussed earlier. Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis indicating the mean and standard deviation. Further, inferential statistics, specifically ANOVA, were undertaken to identify any significant dimensions according to the respondents. The respondents were asked to rate the statements on the dimensions on a scale 1 to 5 where a rating of 1 means strongly disagree, 2 means disagree, 3 means neutral, 4 means agree and 5 means strongly agree. Initially, to test the reliability of the data, a Cronbach Alpha test was undertaken. The test results indicated that from the scale of 35 questions, only one did not meet the 0.7 criteria and was thus deleted resulting in an overall test value of 0.962.

Authenticity Dimension

Based on the responses, all the statements were found have an average rating of 4, meaning that the respondents agreed with the statements as shown in the Table 2. Based on the findings, it is clear that the respondents were satisfied with the authenticity of the internship placement. It can therefore be said that the interns were exposed to a real work environment doing real-world work by engaging and/or participating in personally meaningful and relevant learning. The tasks the students were subjected to were meaningful and devoid of menial jobs. However, some students felt that they were

limited to what they could do within the organizations. This was captured by Student 1 who said “It is the best but I had a problem with my workplace supervisor since he never allowed me to interact with their systems”.

TABLE 2: Authenticity of the internship placement

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
During internship, I was exposed to meaningful work, tasks, activities	3.83	1.224
I worked with autonomy or responsibility	3.91	1.011
The workplace gave me opportunities that were relevant to my career	3.77	1.190
The work I was doing was important or consequential to the organization	4.31	0.993
The work I was doing was relevant to organization's goals or outcomes	4.20	1.052
The work I did resulted in worthwhile outcome for the organization	4.00	1.213
The internship provided me with real world work experience	4.11	1.255
I enjoyed the internship experience	3.97	1.224
I learnt a lot during internship that will help me in future	4.11	1.183
The organization I was attached provided a good learning environment	4.11	0.993
The work placement has developed my ability to solve problems	4.00	0.804
My workplace supervisor provided me with relevant feedback	3.94	1.083

Alignment of both Teaching and Learning Activities and Assessment with Integrative Learning Objectives

This dimension is about the linkage between the classroom and the workplace. It focuses on the linkage between theory and practice and as to whether the students have the ability to use acquired knowledge in the real world environment. It determines the ability of the student to apply learnt theories in class to the workplace. On the other hand, it assesses whether the student engaged in activities that contributed to the development of the students' professional identity and abilities. The results from the findings indicate that the respondents were of average opinion regarding the linkages between theory and practice. In particular, the interns rated the least the statement that they were able to apply theories they had learned in class to work. The students however indicated that through the internships they were able to apply or develop professional skills in the workplace as shown in the Table 3.

TABLE 3: Teaching and learning activities and assessment with integrative learning objectives

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
I was able to apply the theories I had learned in class to the work	3.31	1.255
The internship allowed me to transfer what I had learnt in the university to a real workplace.	3.51	1.147
I was able to apply or develop professional skills in the workplace.	4.26	0.919
During internship, there were effective ways of assessing whether I achieved work goals.	3.77	1.285
The work I did was focused on application of theories learnt in workplace.	3.37	1.262

From qualitative data, the students indicated different perceptions in regard to the linkage between learning in university and the practice encountered during internship. In this regard, student 2 stated “the internship program had been instrumental as it helped me transition from the university life to the workplace. It is therefore very important in my opinion”. However, Student 3 had a different opinion on the role of internship as he felt that the theories that were taught in class didn't reflect or help at work. He indicated that he had to be trained on appropriate skills and job know how. The views of Student 3 were supported by Student 4 who stated “I would recommend that particularly for marketing students to include a more informative session about advertising as I was not aware of the processes involved when advertising products and learned from the organization itself. It would be a fun and interesting class/topic to engage students in”.

Integrated Learning Support

Just like any other course offered in a university, students undertaking internships require support from both the university and the institution they are interning. To ensure the students have settled and feel part and parcel of the workplace, support services should be provided. The provision of such services may help to improve the learning process. From the findings, the interns did not think that support given by the host institution were exceptional. This may indicate a level of non-integration within the institution's environment and culture where the intern is viewed as an outsider and therefore not allowed to enjoy services within the organization like the fulltime employees. These findings are indicated in Table 4.

TABLE 4: Integrated learning support during internship placement

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
I was encouraged to use workplace support services e.g., recreational facilities, libraries, canteen, staff transport, etc.	3.59	1.373
The organization I was placed in during my internship gave me all the support I needed.	3.74	1.189

Supervisor Access

As indicated before, internship is considered as part of a course and therefore the interactions between the academic supervisor and the intern is critical in offering feedback and support to the intern. The interaction affords the supervisor an opportunity to address work-based challenges and monitor the progress of the student. The current study endeavored to assess the quality of the interaction through the existence, frequency and outcomes/value of such interactions. As indicated in Table 5, most of the respondents were able to contact their university supervisor easily; had a quick response time; and, found supervisor interactions useful. However, there was an indication that supervisor visits to the workplace of the internship were not frequent. This is amplified by the comments from Student 5 who stated “USIU offers students a good exposure during internship in preparation to a good experience. The lecturer should follow up on tasks offered at least several times during internship period. I think this will help the students to gain more exposure”

TABLE 5: Supervisor access during the internship placement period

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
It was easy for me to contact my university internship supervisor	4.57	0.850
My supervisor visited me frequently at my workplace during internship	3.54	1.379
My supervisor got back to me quickly whenever I had an issue	4.14	0.944
I had interactions with my academic supervisor during internship period	3.94	0.968
The interactions with my supervisor during internship were useful	4.03	1.043

Induction and Preparation Processes

Preparation for internship, both mental and physical is critical. Such preparation and induction is offered by the internship or placement office. For relevancy of the curricula, students must be matched not just to organizations but to those providing opportunities relevant to the students’ academic courses. The students must understand what is expected of them before, during and after internship. How they are received, settled and socialized in the interning organization is critical to the learning process. When asked about the induction and preparation process, the respondents were satisfied with the pre-internship briefing, reception at the interning organization and had clear understanding how they were to be assessed. However, areas that were rated lowly included the system of connecting students and workplaces, fit between the course and workplace allocation, getting assistance for workplace problems and the provision of documented roles and responsibilities by the intern office. This is indicated in Table 6.

From the qualitative responses, the respondents had various perspectives in relation to the support given by the internship office. According to Student 6, “the internship coordinator was helpful and willing to help 24/7”. Student 7 supported this by stating “the program is doing a good job since it is not easy to get internship by your own”. Similarly, Student 8 indicated about the internship program “it’s a good program as you get to explore the real world but I wish the internship office could help us get internships that are relevant to our course because some of us sought outside help in order to get internship since we weren’t lucky to get one by use of internship office”. It was also the view of Student 9 that the internship program needed to offer better services in terms of connecting students to internships,

TABLE 6: Induction and preparation processes for the internship placement

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
The university has a simple system for connecting students & workplaces	3.60	1.459
I received adequate briefing about internship and what was expected of me by the university	4.00	1.163
The university internship services ensured a good fit between my course and workplace allocation	3.63	1.374
It was easy for me to get assistance for problems faced during internship	3.77	1.285
The university internship office clearly provided me with my documented roles and responsibilities	3.71	1.447
During internship, it was clear to me what to do in the event of a problem	3.89	1.022
The organization I was attached to was ready for me when I went for the internship	4.26	0.950
I knew from the beginning how I was going to be assessed after internship	4.14	1.004

Responses Based on Gender

An independent t-test was undertaken to investigate if there was significant difference between male and female responses. From the findings, the average female response was higher than that of males in every dimension. As shown in the independent samples test table, there was statistically significant differences between male and female on authenticity, integrated learning support and induction and preparation processes as their t-test p-values are less than 0.05 level of significance. There was no statistically significant difference between male and female on alignment of both teaching and learning activities and supervisor access as their t-test p-values is above 0.05 level of significance. Table 7 provides the t-test results.

TABLE 7: Gender comparisons per WIL dimension among the internship respondents

	Gender	Mean	t	Sig.
Authenticity	Female	4.26	2.306	0.028
	Male	3.62		
Alignment of both Teaching and Learning Activities	Female	3.85	1.672	0.104
	Male	3.31		
Integrated Learning Support	Female	4.0	2.447	0.02
	Male	3.12		
Supervisor Access	Female	4.15	0.949	0.35
	Male	3.86		
Induction and Preparation Processes	Female	4.07	2.069	0.046
	Male	3.50		

Overall Performance of the Internship Program

An analysis was performed to determine the ranking of the five dimensions on perceived performance by the respondents. The means for the dimensions were computed. From the findings, supervisor access and authenticity received high ratings while integrated learning support and alignment of both teaching and learning activities received the lowest rating as indicated in Table 8.

TABLE 8: WIL dimensions ranking by the respondents

Dimensions	Mean	Rank
Supervisor Access	4.05	1
Authenticity	4.02	2
Induction and Preparation Processes	3.86	3
Integrated Learning Support	3.67	4
Alignment of both Teaching and Learning Activities	3.65	5

In order to determine if there was any significance in the findings above, an ANOVA was conducted and the analysis is provided in Table 9. From the analysis, it was found that authenticity and supervisor access were significant at $p=0.05$ level. This being an indication that the respondents were satisfied with the two dimensions of WIL. However, the performance of the other three dimensions was wanting and may require a review.

TABLE 9: WIL Dimensions ANOVA results indicating the most significant dimension

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Test Value = 3.5		
				Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
-					Lower	Upper
Authenticity	3.681	34	0.001	0.52381	0.2347	0.8130
Alignment of TLA	0.914	34	0.367	0.14571	-0.1783	0.4697
Integrated Learning Support	0.858	33	0.397	0.16176	-0.2217	0.5452
Supervisor Access	3.663	34	0.001	0.54571	0.2430	0.8484
Induction and Preparation	2.571	34	0.015	0.35714	0.0748	0.6395

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study found and rated authenticity as a critical dimension of WIL. According to Smith (2012), the heart of all workplace-situated learning is authenticity which enables the students to be able to encounter meaningful and relevant work environments. The relevance of WIL is also influenced by whether the students feel that the work they were subjected to was too menial and trivial and as such did not expose them to the ideal work situation that promotes their ability to practice what they had learnt in university (Candy et al., 1994). When there is authenticity, the students are able to realize a value for their time within the workplace organization and feel more valued and utilized. This dimension of WIL becomes even more important when students in internship are looking at the possibility of being absorbed in the organization where they were interning. It contributes to the desire

of the intern to seek further reengagements with the organization and the evaluation towards the whole WIL process experience. Therefore, in designing a WIL program there is need to have experience that is both relevant to the interns' discipline and enriching for the student, university and the internship provider (Sutherland & Symmons, 2013).

Related to relevancy is the alignment of both teaching and learning activities and assessment with integrative learning objectives. The need for alignment is critical as the university often has little control over the workplace learning environment (Venville et al., 2018). The alignment is more towards the relevance of what the students learnt in class in terms of theories and the applicability of the same in the workplace. The findings reported that this was the least area of performance in the USIU-A internship program. The WIL curricula must ensure alignment with all the dimensions to the purpose/learning goals and to each other (Rosse & Browne, 2013). It is through an aligned process that the students have the ability to use acquired knowledge at the right time and the right place (Barnett et al., 2001). Alignment of learning activities and desired learning outcomes should be critical in developing the students' workplace abilities (Smith, 2012). An internship program should therefore allow transfer of learning from university to the workplace (Dymock & Gerber, 2002). On the other hand, it is imperative that the designers of a WIL curricula should involve the industry stakeholders to ensure achievement of alignment between theories and practice (Wijngaards-de & Merx, 2018) since workplace learning situations are quite different from classroom-based learning (Venville et al., 2018).

From the findings the respondents agreed that the USIU-A internship program performed well in terms of supervisor access. This was especially in terms of offering helpful advice as well as a quick response time. Previous studies have highlighted the value of the supervisor in the internship process. According to Rosse & Browne (2013), the goal of supervision is to facilitate the connection between the requirements of the program and the student experience, and to support the student in the experience. One of the objectives of supervisor support is to ensure that the alignment of the course to a WIL program is achieved (Keogh, Sterling & Venables, 2007). A visit by a supervisor helps to assure the intern of the university support to the WIL activities. As an academic advisor, the interaction with the intern ensures relevant feedback on learning is given, the intern receives support throughout the experience, and academic goals are also achieved (Smith, 2012). Accordingly, the functions of supervision include monitoring, clarification of roles and responsibilities, administrative support, educational support, and personal support to those involved (Rosse and Browne, 2013).

The study findings also identified challenges in terms of integrative learning support. This is the support accorded to interns in the workplace by the organization and university. Various authors have discussed the critical role played by integrative learning support for a successful internship. The workplace organization should provide the intern with some of the support services available in their university including counselling, welfare, libraries, and study advisory which may help to alleviate the stress and/or improve the learning process (Smith, 2012). The existence of intern support mechanisms in the workplace helps to assimilate the employee within the organization. Support can take many forms, including explanatory documents, field manuals, field visits provided to interns, conflict resolution meetings, and counseling to support students in stressful situations (Rosse & Browne, 2013). According to Zegwaard and McCurdy (2014), integrative learning support can also include career advice from workplace supervisors linked to further studies. It is recommended that in order to realize the benefits of WIL curriculum, there is need to have strong partnerships between industry and universities (Smith et al., 2019).

Students undertaking internship require support from the university before, during and after. Critical to the findings of this study was the need for the university to ensure an alignment between the area of study and the workplace allocation. Before placement in an organization, students should be prepared as much as possible more so since the work placement might be their first experience of a structured professional working environment (Pearl, 2004; Freestone, Thompson, & Williams, 2006). Universities through a structured process should have pre-placement workshops as early as the first year of study about the value of placements, the need to prepare for the same, the application process and schedule or timings of internships in the degree course (Neugebauer, 2009). The outcomes of lack of support before, during and after have negative consequences and implications to the parties involved – students, university and workplace institution (Ryan et al., 1996; Abeysekera, 2006; (Pauling & Komisarczuk, 2007; Hughes, 1998; Freestone et al., 2007).

CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this study was to determine the perception of students who participated in the internship program towards the quality of the work placement program through an evaluation of the five dimensions of WIL. From the findings and based on the five dimensions, the respondents agreed that the program performed well in terms of authenticity and supervisor access while alignment of teaching and learning activities and integrated earning support were voted as being of average performance.

In terms of authenticity, the respondents were in agreement that they were enabled to perform work that was important and that contributed to the goals of the organization thus providing then a real world work environment. On the supervisor access, the interns indicated that it was easy to contact the university internship supervisor who offered helpful advice as well as a quick response time. However, the visits by the university supervisor were found to be inadequate.

For the three dimensions with lower ratings, more critical was the relevance of what the students learnt in class in terms of theories and the applicability of the same in the workplace. Some respondents felt that there was a gap in terms of relating theories to practice. This poses a critical question to the relevancy of the class work to the real world. Also, of concern was the workplace support given to the interns by the organization. This means that interns were not treated equally as other employees and therefore access to some service offered to the full-time employees was denied to the interns. In terms of services offered by the internship office, areas of improvement related to the process of placing students and more so ensuring that there was a good fit between the course of study at the university and the workplace allocation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several recommendations can be derived from this study. These recommendations are aimed at improving the internship experience.

1. There is a need to understand the industry requirements and what happens in the workplace by the designers and executors of academic programs. This is to ensure relevancy on theories used and the needs for the industry. Such would involve consulting the industry in curriculum development so that the outcome is focused to the need of the industry. This will require a change in approach from a university focused approach to an industry focused approach
2. Whenever possible, academic supervisors should develop a program of visiting the intern in the workplace. This will allow support to the intern and clarifying any issues. It can also afford

the opportunity of the supervisor to show the relevance and/or connection between the theories and what the employee was doing

3. The internship office should endeavor to support the placement of interns in organizations and jobs that are related to their academic course of study. While an organization may decide the roles of the intern, an assertive approach to the quality of work engagements expected from the employer may help to ensure that meaningful and relevant tasks are given to the intern.

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About the Journal

The International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning (IJWIL) publishes double-blind peer-reviewed original research and topical issues dealing with Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). IJWIL first published in 2000 under the name of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE). Since then the readership and authorship has become more international and terminology usage in the literature has favored the broader term of WIL, in 2018 the journal name was changed to the International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning.

In this Journal, WIL is defined as "*an educational approach that uses relevant work-based experiences to allow students to integrate theory with the meaningful practice of work as an intentional component of the curriculum*". Defining elements of this educational approach requires that students engage in authentic and meaningful work-related task, and must involve three stakeholders; the student, the university, and the workplace. Examples of practice include off-campus, workplace immersion activities such as work placements, internships, practicum, service learning, and cooperative education (Co-op), and on-campus activities such as work-related projects/competitions, entrepreneurship, student-led enterprise, etc. WIL is related to, but not the same as, the fields of experiential learning, work-based learning, and vocational education and training.

The Journal's main aim is to enable specialists working in WIL to disseminate research findings and share knowledge to the benefit of institutions, students, co-op/WIL practitioners, and researchers. The Journal desires to encourage quality research and explorative critical discussion that leads to the advancement of effective practices, development of further understanding of WIL, and promote further research.

Types of Manuscripts Sought by the Journal

Types of manuscripts sought by IJWIL is primarily of two forms; 1) *research publications* describing research into aspects of work-integrated learning and, 2) *topical discussion* articles that review relevant literature and provide critical explorative discussion around a topical issue. The journal will, on occasions, consider best practice submissions.

Research publications should contain; an introduction that describes relevant literature and sets the context of the inquiry. A detailed description and justification for the methodology employed. A description of the research findings - tabulated as appropriate, a discussion of the importance of the findings including their significance to current established literature, implications for practitioners and researchers, whilst remaining mindful of the limitations of the data. And a conclusion preferably including suggestions for further research.

Topical discussion articles should contain a clear statement of the topic or issue under discussion, reference to relevant literature, critical and scholarly discussion on the importance of the issues, critical insights to how to advance the issue further, and implications for other researchers and practitioners.

Best practice and program description papers. On occasions, the Journal also seeks manuscripts describing a practice of WIL as an example of best practice, however, only if it presents a particularly unique or innovative practice or was situated in an unusual context. There must be a clear contribution of new knowledge to the established literature. Manuscripts describing what is essentially 'typical', 'common' or 'known' practices will be encouraged to rewrite the focus of the manuscript to a significant educational issue or will be encouraged to publish their work via another avenue that seeks such content.

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