Shifting intentions: A 2020–2025 comparison of Canadian universities, polytechnics and colleges' publicly stated work-integrated and experiential intended outcomes

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Higher education in Canada has undergone notable shifts in how institutions articulate the purposes of experiential and work-integrated learning (WIL). Building on our comprehensive 2020 dataset, this study conducts a comparative analysis between 2020 and 2025 of publicly stated experiential and WIL outcomes across 81 Canadian post-secondary institutions. Thematic coding of 2,817 intended-outcomes quotes identifies growth in outcome statements and shifts toward technical and general skill development, career preparedness, and theory-practice integration, alongside a decrease in human and relationally oriented intended outcomes. These patterns highlight an increasing articulation of intentions and reflect a broader transformation in Canadian post-secondary education focus on skills and WIL. By providing direct comparison of 81 Canadian institutions, this analysis contributes evidence of shifting educational priorities and contextual variation across institutional types and provinces.

Keywords**:** Work-integrated learning, experiential learning, post-secondary, higher education, learning outcomes

Public statements by Canadian universities, polytechnics, and colleges (Canadian post-secondary institutions [PSIs]) like all public documents reflect the assumptions, concepts, and rhetorical framing, and ideas of the people and institutions that author them (Leigh Pigg et al., 2018). By comparing publicly stated work-integrated learning (WIL) and experiential learning (EL) intended outcomes of 81 Canadian PSIs from 2020 to 2025, this study quantifies and evidences the level of change in intentions for WIL and EL over the past five years, relative to a comprehensive 2020 dataset (Hoessler & Godden, 2021). Intended outcomes reflect publicly positioned reasons, purposes, and intentions. Societal and PSI shifts in the last five years have invited consideration for current intended outcomes of EL and WIL, stated by Canadian PSIs, and how these outcomes have changed.

This research is grounded in the premise that when educational experiences, particularly WIL and EL, are well-designed, they can be transformative for student learning and help build meaningful relationships between students, PSIs, employers, and the wider community (Hoessler & Godden, 2021). Though ideally distinct, EL and WIL overlap in theory (e.g., Zegwaard et al., 2023) and in our studied PSI websites and public documents. WIL is defined as educational experiences involving three parties that are authentically work-focused and integrate relevant theory and work-immersion practice with reflection, and include co-op placements, entrepreneurship, and projects with external partners (Zegwaard et al., 2023). WIL exists within the broader experiential and reflective opportunities of EL that also include non-WIL observation, computer/AI simulation without external stakeholders, case studies, job shadowing, and extra-curricular volunteering or sports. Articulation of intended outcomes is a key step for outcome-based design (also called backwards design) of each

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instance of a WIL model, and as such, identifying PSI's current outcomes and shifts in outcomes since 2020 remains a priority.

CONTEXT

Since 2020, Canadian PSIs have navigated back to in-person teaching post-pandemic (Statistics Canada, 2020) and are continuing to respond to the increased role of artificial intelligence in educational settings (KPMG, 2025), changes in student enrolment (Usher & Balfour, 2024), and federal reduction in international student permits. These and other financial strains are placing PSIs at risk of needing to enact change if they are to continue their mandates (e.g., Statistics Canada, 2024; Usher, 2021; Verdecchia, 2025; Williams, 2025).

Government expenditure for increasing the availability of WIL programs across Canadian post-secondary education (PSE) has increased significantly over the past 20 years (Dreesha et al., 2025). For example, $17.1 Million CAD was awarded in 2022 to the Business and Higher Education Roundtable (BHER) for them to facilitate 22,300 WIL opportunities and to generate new resources for strengthening Canadian WIL programs (Romito, 2022). Extra funding to encourage participation in WIL was announced by the Canadian federal government in 2025 for 40,000 additional WIL opportunities through the Student Work Placement Program (SWPP) together with financial support for an additional 8,000 students in BHERs WIL initiatives. Data from Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada (CEWIL Canada) adds more support in how participation in WIL has increased over recent years. In 2022, 53 Canadian institutions reported offering 3,413 WIL programs (Drewery, 2023), which grew to 83 institutions offering 6,217 WIL programs by the end of 2024 (Drewery, 2025), representing a 10.4% year-over-year increase from the 5,633 WIL program count in 2023. Most of this increase reflects new WIL programs across institutions along with improved institutional reporting in 2024.

The significant increases in governmental funding for WIL seen in recent years are rooted in WIL's robust reputation as an effective mechanism for transferable skills development (Dreesha et al., 2025), and as a strategy to close any gaps between the competency profiles of post-secondary graduates and the labor market they are entering (Jackson, 2014; Jackson & Dean, 2022). The opportunity to prepare for labor market entry aligns with many students' reasoning for choosing to attend post-secondary institutions; as of 2023, 60% of learners chose to attend post-secondary to prepare to enter their preferred career (Crocker et al., 2024). Research has demonstrated that WIL can make an effective contribution in supporting students' career preparation through helping students obtain relevant work experience, practice and further develop their skills in real-life settings, and gain first-hand experience of aligning their knowledge to practice (Pizarro Milian et al., 2021). Acknowledging such positive outcomes, provincial governments across Canada–the level of government in Canada that provides direct PSI funding–have increasingly tied funding allocations for PSIs to strategic mandates that include specific targets for skills development and career preparation (e.g., Government of British Columbia, 2025; Government of Ontario, 2020). WIL features strongly as a target within the provincial strategic mandates as WIL is positioned and perceived as a strong differentiator of employment rates and earnings post-graduation (Council of Ontario's Universities, 2014; De Raaf et al., 2018). With research reports, government funding and policy, and broader institutions such as CEWIL Canada pointing to the beneficial outcomes of WIL, our work examines how these mandates and other influences might shape the intended outcomes that PSIs state publicly for WIL, and whether these are shifting over time.

Building on our 2020 dataset and initial analysis of outcomes (Hoessler & Godden, 2021), our study compared the 2020 and 2025 intended learning outcomes that Canadian PSIs publicly convey for EL and WIL across a range of audiences (e.g., community, future students, current students) and formats (e.g., strategic reports, initiative webpages inviting participation, academic calendar/program description webpages). Variation in the 33 identified outcomes, including across provinces/territories and institution types, are explored and contextualized in relation to larger shifts in post-secondary education.

METHODOLOGY

A consistent comprehensive two-time-period review with the same institutions in both 2020 and 2025 samples utilized the same search process for online public documents or webpages about EL or WIL, the same quote selection process of all EL/WIL outcome statements on those pages, the same human-only thematic coding process, and the same final list of outcome codes and categories deductively applied to both datasets. The details can be found below.

SAMPLE

The sample is comprehensive and includes all outcomes about EL or WIL collected during the 2020 and 2025 timeframes from all institutions, which mentioned EL or WIL in 2020 and still existed during 2025 sampling. The data were collected in two time periods: July–August 2020 (labelled as 2020 in this article) and Oct 2025–Jan 2026 (labelled as 2025 in this article). Quotes for that time period were collected contemporaneously (during) the respective time periods. No retroactive collection or archive sampling occurred. The quotes were statements from EL or WIL initiative webpages for students (e.g., studentships, WIL promotion, specific hubs or other WIL opportunities), as well as for broader audiences (e.g., community reports, institutional strategies, and institutional reports).

The 2020 sampling was a comprehensive online search of 116 Canadian PSIs for public documents or webpages containing "experiential learning" or "work-integrated learning" in site-specific searches (e.g., site: [PSI URL] "experiential learning") using Google search. Of these 116 PSIs searched in 2020, only 82 of them mentioned EL or WIL at that time: 51 Universities, 4 Polytechnics, and 26 Colleges. Between 2020 and 2025, five of these colleges had converted to polytechnics and one college had closed. Excluding the closed institution, the final 2020–2025 comparison sample was 81 institutions, which had originally publicly mentioned EL or WIL in the 2020 sampling and were still existing. For context, in 2025, there were 100 publicly funded universities (Government of Canada, 2026a) and 127 colleges, institutes and polytechnics in Canada (Government of Canada, 2026b). Total documents, institutions, and intended-outcome quoted statements are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Sample of 2020 and 2025 statements.

Sample	College	Polytechnic	University	Grand Total
# of institutions	21	9	51	**81**
# of docs	40 : 419	9 : 259	96 : 1519	**144 : 2200**
# of sources : docs per institution (on average)	1.9 : 20.0	1.1 : 29.1	1.9 : 29.8	**1.8 : 27.2**
# of statements	62 : 433	13 : 292	182 : 2092	**257 : 2817**
# of sources : docs per institution (on average)	3.0 : 20.6	1.4 : 32.4	3.6 : 41.0	**3.2 : 34.8**
# of statements per document	1.55 : 1.03	1.30 : 1.11	1.90 : 1.38	**1.78 : 1.28**

Note: 2020 : 2025 values. Number of institutions is the same.

Using the DuckDuckGo search engine, site specific searches were conducted on these 81 PSIs for "work-integrated learning" and "experiential learning," opening all webpages, conducting key word searches on the page for "work-integrated learning" and "experiential learning,' reading the section, and identifying and copying statements into the shared Excel coding table. If a page had the title of EL or WIL then the whole page was reviewed. Any stated outcomes, intentions, benefits or rationales for why engage in EL/WIL, were noted as intended outcomes for the purpose of this study.

Initial analysis in 2020 did reveal minor variation across EL- and WIL-labeled sections, in proportions for the same set of outcomes, with pages typically distinct in their focus. In contrast, the 2025 sampling found that EL and WIL sections and labels were often interspersed or combined on websites and documents. As a result, outcomes were coded together across EL and WIL in the final analysis, with suggestions for future research in the limitations sections.

The comparative deductive thematic analysis was based on code developed through the original 2020 OBEL landscape scan and inductive thematic analysis (Hoessler & Godden, 2021), and subsequent outcome framework that was then deductively applied to the 2025 coding along with abductive analysis to identify newly emerging codes. During the 2025 analysis, the first 639 codes were also paraphrased to identify meaning and inform human inter-rater review. Following initial deductive analysis of the 2025 data, codes were refined, and categories' scope and names were also revised. The final set of 2025 codes were then updated for the 2025 dataset and then utilized to re-code 2020 data, thus both datasets had the same institutions and final deductive coding. Sentences with multiple outcomes were segmented with the quoted statements reflecting a clear single outcome. The final dataset consisted of 257 statements coded from the 2020 sample and 2817 statements coded from 2025. The analysis resulted in 33 outcomes across 12 categories, though literacy outcomes (#6) were rare, and there is an emergence of EL- and WIL-related intended outcomes in land-based or Indigenous ways-of-knowing learning that are explored in the discussion (#12).

The number of outcomes stated (codable segments) was 11 times higher in 2025 (2817) than in 2020 (257), representing a growth rate more than four times faster than that of the internet as a whole, which doubled (from 12,545,098 to 25,731,691 URLs analyzed) from October 2020 to January 2025 (Http archive, n.d.).

The thematically coded statements were then counted and proportions compared quantitatively using two-proportion z-tests across the 2020 versus 2025 timeframes, and in 2025 across universities compared to colleges and polytechnics, which had similar patterns. Outcomes with less than five in one of the subtotals were excluded. Patterns in provinces revealed a consistent shift except for provinces that were already high or moderate as of 2020 and remained so.

RESULTS

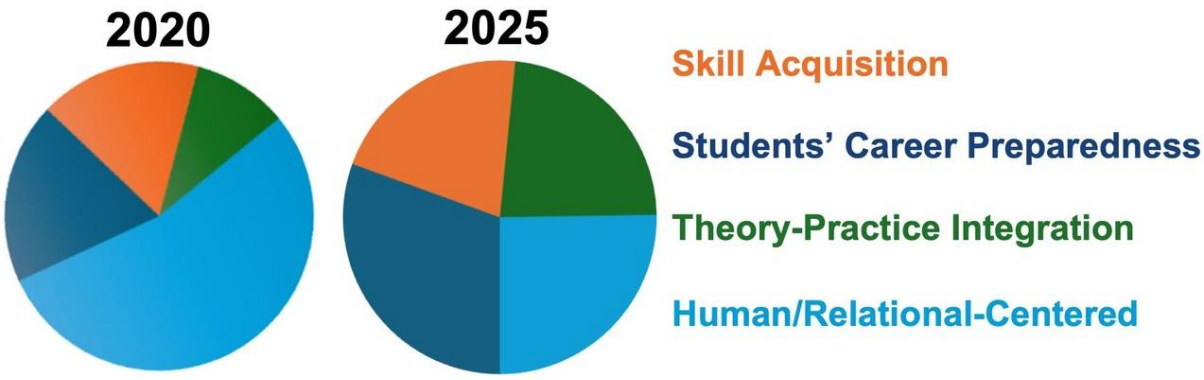
In the final coding, Canadian PSI websites' intended outcomes for EL/WIL fit into 12 categories with 33 identified intended outcomes codes (n 2020 = 257; n 2025 = 2817 coded quote segments). All of the categories and codes were present in the 2025 dataset.

2020 vs. 2025 Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions' Publicly Intended Outcomes of EL/WIL

While "Human/relational-centered" outcome categories were the majority of intended outcomes in 2020 (54%), by 2025 "career preparedness" (experience, networking, gaining employment) and "theory-practice integration" had grown until intended outcomes were almost evenly distributed the

four categories including "theory-practice integration" and "human/relational-centered" outcomes (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: Canadian PSI intended EL or WIL outcomes.



There were significant increases in "career preparedness" (#1) "theory-practice integration" (#3), and "applying theory to practice" (#3.2), and significant decreases in "conceptual experience and learning" (#3), "institutional-community collaborations and local impact" (#8), "benefiting and engaging faculty members" (#9), and "institutional-community collaborations and local impact" (#10), as listed in Table 2 (below). Skills acquisition overall did not significantly change but the type of skills appear to be shifting with significant increases for "acquiring technical and non-technical skills" specific to a sector, or in general, (#2.1) and significant decreases with "acquiring critical thinking skills" (#2.2).

2020 vs. 2025: Remarkable Similarity across Provinces and a Territory

Across the 10 provinces and one territory (Yukon) that had PSIs mentioning EL/WIL in 2020, there were remarkably similar increases including in acquired technical and non-technical skills (+6%; though Alberta was already high and remained high), and applied theory to practice (+11%). Decreases were also similar across regions. There were limited mentions of outcomes (sample sizes) in east coast provinces, Yukon, and Saskatchewan in 2020. The full final list of outcomes is shown in Table 3.

TABLE 2: Intended outcome categories (% of outcome codes).

Intended Outcome Categories	2020	2025	Change (all *p*s <.01)
1. Students' Career Preparedness	18%	29%	Increased sig. (z = -3.60, p <.001)
2. Students' Skill Acquisition	18%	20%	Not sig. (z = -1.12, p = .262)
2.1. Acquire technical and non-tech. skills	7%	12%	Increased sig. (z = -3.06, p = .002)
2.2. Acquire critical thinking skills	4%	1%	Decreased sig. (z = 2.29, p = .022)
3. Students' Theory-Practice Integration	9%	22%	Increased sig. (z = -4.71, p <.001)
3.2. Apply theory to practice	7%	18%	Increased sig. (z = -4.54, p < .001)
4. Conceptual expertise and learning	10%	3%	Decreased sig. (z = 4.99, p <.001)
5. Confidence, wellbeing, personal growth, lifelong learning	6%	5%	Not sig. (z = 1.25, p = .211)
6. Literacies (rare in PSIs)	none	0.1%	Not sig. (z = -0.43, p = .669)
7. Making a difference, civil engagement, understanding complex social issue	4%	6%	Not sig. (z = -1.04, p = .298)
8. Institutional-community collaborations and local impact	6%	2%	Decreased sig. (z = 3.63, p < .001)
9. Benefiting and Engaging faculty members	5%	0.1%	Decreased sig. (z = 10.56, p < .001)
10. Institutional-community collaborations and local impact	8%	4%	Decreased sig. (z = 3.01, p = .003)
11. Organizations' short and long-term benefits	3%	2%	Not sig. (z = 0.23, p = .815)
12. Students' learning land-based or Indigenous ways of knowing, practices or culture (Note 1)	none	2%	Not sig. (z = -1.53, p = .127)

Note: There are nuances with this category that need further exploration as Indigenous courses and experiences and the appropriateness of labelling as EL and WIL.

Comparing Intended EL/WIL Outcomes across Institutional Types in 2025

Within the 2025 data, colleges and polytechnics (38%) had proportionally more theory-practice integration intended outcome statements than universities (#3, 18%; z = 10.10, p < .001), and similarly more apply theory to practice statements (#3.2, 32% vs. 15%, z = 9.95, p < .001). Universities had proportionally more build career connections/networking (5%) than colleges and polytechnics (outcome 1.2., 2%, z = -3.07, p = .002), as well as for skill acquisition (#2, 25% vs. 14%, z = -5.92, p < .001), particularly acquiring technical and non-technical skills (#2.1, 16% vs. 9%, z = -4.68, p < .001). Improved conceptual knowledge/learning was also higher for universities compared to colleges and polytechnics (#4, 4% vs. 2%, z = -3.47, p < .001); however, the difference still reflects a decline–though less of a decline at universities relative to large declines overall–rather than an increase in focus. As these 2025 differences were not present in 2020, PSI types demonstrated differential growth or decline in these intentions. Table 3 shows a detailed comparison of specific codes from 2020 to 2025.

TABLE 3: 2020 vs. 2025 proportions of intended outcome categories and codes.

Category	Final Refined Codes (2025) for 2020 & 2025 comparison	2020	2025	Total
01. Students' Career Preparedness	1.1 Gain experiences to meet employer expectations, stand out, and succeed	5%	8%	7%
	1.2. Build meaningful career connections or networking	2%	4%	4%
	1.3. Explore career options and interests	4%	4%	4%
	1.4. Gain entry or employment to launch postgraduate career (professional school or graduate entry, gaining employment)	2%	4%	4%
	1.5. Gain experience and awareness of sector, industry and workplace context	4%	7%	6%
	1.6. Gain employment-seeking skills for job searches, resume writing, and interviews	0.4%	0.5%	0.5%
	1.7. Build connections between students and organizations/employers/sector	2%	2%	2%
01. Subtotal		**18%**	**29%**	**28%**
02. Students' Skills Acquisition	2.1. Acquire technical and non-technical skills	7%	13%	13%
	2.2. Critical thinking	4%	2%	2%
	2.3. Interpersonal skills (communication, professionalism and ethical behavior)	4%	3%	3%
	2.4. Creativity skills/creative problem-solving	2%	1%	1%
	2.5. Prepare to lead	2%	2%	2%
02. Subtotal		**18%**	**20%**	**20%**
03. Students' Theory-Practice Integration	3.1. Integrate Theory & Practice	2%	0.04%	4%
	3.2. Apply theory to practice	7%	18%	17%
03. Subtotal		**9%**	**22%**	**21%**
04. Student's Adaptability Through Conceptual Expertise and clarified values	4.1. Clarify and expand beliefs, perspectives, and values	2%	1%	1%
	4.2. Improve conceptual learning	8%	2%	3%
04. Subtotal		**10%**	**3.4%**	**4%**
05. Students' Confidence, Wellbeing, Personal Growth and Lifelong Learning	5.1. Self-directed and life-long learning	4%	1%	2%
	5.2. Self-confidence	1%	2%	2%
	5.3. Personal growth	1.2%	1%	1%
	5.4. Improve mental health, well-being and resilience ability	none	0.3%	0.3%
05. Subtotal		6%	5%	5%
06. Students' Literacies numeracy, financial, computer, digital, writing and reading)			0.1%	0.1%
07. Relational Connection and Contributions of Students in Community	7.1. Make a difference	1.6%	2.4%	2%
	7.2. Build civic & community engagement and awareness	2.3%	1.9%	2%
	7.3. Gain understanding of complex social issues	0.4%	2%	1%
07. Subtotal		**4%**	**6%**	**6%**
08. Institutional Improvement of Student Experience and Teaching	8.1. Greater student self-directed learning motivation, engagement, retention and recruitment	3%	3%	2%
	8.2. Better teaching	3%	0.4%	1%
08. Subtotal		**6%**	**2%**	**3%**
9. Benefiting and engaging faculty in EL/WIL		5%	0.1%	1%
10. Relational - Institution & Community	10.1. Institutional collaborations with community and industry	4%	2%	2%
	10.2. Showcase graduates and institutional reputation	1%	0.2%	0.3%
	10.3. Institutional Innovation or Economic Impact on sector or local community	4%	2%	2%
10. Subtotal		**8%**	**4%**	**4%**

11. Organizations' Benefiting	11.1. Organization tangible benefit during experience	2%	1%	1%
	11.2. Organizations long term benefit of attracting, recruitment and gaining experienced/skilled employees/members (pipeline)	1%	1%	1%
11. Subtotal		**3%**	**2%**	**3%**
12. Learn Land-based or Indigenous Ways of Knowing or Practices (see discussion)		0.4%	2%	1%
Sample Size Total		**257**	**2817**	**3074**

DISCUSSION

Overall, our 2020–2025 comparison of 81 institutions, which mentioned EL or WIL in 2020, revealed an 11-fold increase in EL/WIL outcome statements. Significant shifts in intended outcomes included increases in career preparedness, theory-practice integration, and acquiring technical and non-technical skills specific to a sector or in general (sub-category of skills acquisition). In addition, the results show decreases in conceptual experience and learning and critical thinking skill acquisition (sub-category of skills acquisition). The results also show a decrease in human/relational-centered outcomes of institutional-community collaborations and local impact, engaging faculty members, and institutional-community collaborations and local impact categories. These results suggest a shift towards a focus on more practice, career, and sector-relevant skills development within PSI educational experiences, in alignment with notable government investment and institutional response to WIL policy and advocacy. These increases in work or practice-related and skill-related outcome categories were visible in nearly all provinces/territories studied, with Alberta not shifting because these outcomes were already highly present in this province, with a long running vocational focus in PSIs and K-12 curriculum. There was also a PSI sector-wide emergence in intentions for improving mental health, wellbeing, and resilience with outcomes found at all institution types.

Variations across institutional types reflect distinctions in mandates, with colleges and polytechnics having more "theory-practice integration" and "applying theory to practice" intended outcome statements, whereas universities had more "build career connections/networking" and "skill acquisition", particularly "acquiring technical and non-technical skills", reflective of gaps in curricular learning addressed through EL/WIL and recent investments. In the context of overall decline in conceptual expertise development outcomes, the higher proportion at universities reflects a less steep decline at universities compared to colleges and polytechnics, rather than a preservation or increase in intention at universities for conceptual expertise through EL/WIL. These relative differences may reflect provincially set mandates, sector norms, or other influences such as funding or advocacy connecting WIL with employability (Council of Ontario Universities, 2014; De Raaf et al., 2018).

Across all PSI types (no significant variation), there was a notable decline in critical thinking skill acquisition-stated outcomes from 2020 to 2025, which suggests a loss in focus on critical thinking through WIL/EL, at a time when this skill is increasingly essential for navigating artificial intelligence in workplaces. The implications of AI for graduate competencies and institutional priorities continue to increase in significance, with emphasis on the dual-edged nature of AI's influence in cultivating the development of critical thinking capacity in post-secondary students (Obaje, 2025). AI appears to offer a positive impact, through its capacity to enhance learning experiences, and offers students personalized pathways and learning experiences that can be tailored to support EL, WIL, and career-related learning (Obaje, 2025). However, concerns regarding the negative impact of AI on students'

capacity to develop logic skills, critical thinking (Melisa et al., 2025), and creativity (Suryanto et al., 2025) are beginning to emerge in the literature. As AI continues to shape PSI approaches, critical thinking focus will be an interesting future area to study, including within work-immersive and work-related contexts.

Overall, there are nuances among the outcomes and across contexts to continue to study, as work roles, contexts, and the spread of AI shifts expectations for graduates, priorities of institutions, and thus, intended outcomes. Studies into the shifts in how external partners are engaged (from faculty-level partnership to program-level partnerships), how equity-deserving learners (e.g., Godden & Hoessler, 2024; Khan et al., 2004; Rao et al., 2024) can be supported, and how benefits and actual outcomes are tracked, will deepen understanding of the implications and drivers of these shifts in outcomes.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The first limitation of this study is its reliance on public statements that reflect rhetorical intentions, rather than actual enacted practice. Scrutinizing documents is not an easy task, but it is nevertheless a worthwhile undertaking (Prior, 2003), as public documents are usually packed tight with assumptions, concepts, and ideas that reflect those who authored and produced the document, helping us reveal intended outcomes tied to particular timeframes (Leigh Pigg et al., 2018). However, the rhetorical nature of document analysis needs to be acknowledged, as insights into how intended outcomes of EL and WIL become enacted into actual practice are often unable to be exposed through a review of publicly held documents (Prior, 2008).

Our first recommendation for future research is to assess directly the impacts and achievement of intended outcomes. Our study examined publicly stated intended outcomes and not programming as enacted by PSIs (process evaluation; e.g., Rogers & Woolcock, 2023) or impact (outcomes evaluation; e.g., Patton, 2015). Future process and outcome evaluation and research are needed to understand how the outcomes claimed are being met. How are academic programs being transformed to align with shifts in outcomes? How are these outcomes being evaluated? What impacts of EL/WIL are being achieved and perceived by students and interest-holders beyond the institutions? Ethical research accessing internal password-protected documents would also provide further insight, particularly in combination with interviews or other methods. In addition, PSI staff, faculty and leaders could review their public and internal websites and documents for the overall outcomes they are presenting, their distinctions or overlaps in EL, WIL, Indigenous, land-based education, as well as connect specific outcomes with specific activities.

Our second recommendation for future research is to examine the influences on these stated intentions including potentially the effects of institutional strategic planning processes, or shifts in parents' or students' interest in career-preparedness , which require more direct study.. For example, policy analysis studies (e.g., Hooley & Godden, 2021) would be better suited to examine the extent to which actors in the system are influenced by these bodies. Similarly, case studies or interviews would provide a deeper investigation into how Canadian PSI staff and faculty perceive the specific goals of WIL as well as the local motivations for engaging in EL or WIL. Another is example future research direction is phenomenological studies to examine how parents and students perceive and experience career preparedness.

In restricting the sample to direct comparisons, a second limitation of this study was that it only examined Canadian PSIs who mentioning EL or WIL in the 2020 search. This limitation points to our third recommendation for future research to expand sampling to examine additional Canadian PSIs

coast to coast to coast, as preliminary test searches indicate far more PSIs are now mentioning WIL who had not in 2020.

Our fourth recommendation for future research includes examining drivers of the changes in focus on skills, careers and integration into practice. Potential drivers include advocacy by CEWIL Canada and other organizations, provincial strategic mandates (e.g., British Columbia, Ontario), and public report connecting WIL with employment rates and earnings post-graduation (Council of Ontario's Universities, 2014; De Raaf et al., 2018). . In addition, given the mention of government, funders, and advocacy bodies on institutional EL/WIL webpages collected for this study, these influences are reasonably likely to have played a role in the focus or increase in intended outcomes and overall growth in statements, though future research is also needed to confirm connections and degree of influence.

We noticed the inclusion of learning of Indigenous practices, culture, and ways of knowing as intended experiential learning or EL/WIL outcomes. For example:

> To provide an opportunity to increase understanding of a specific First Nation culture and their traditional lifestyle and current realities by spending time with First Nation elders and other First Nation people through lectures, discussions, activities and experiential learning.
>
> Our first cohort of Bachelor of Business Administration students leveraged remarkable experiential learning, where multiple night land-based [course name] course sessions introduced them to northern outdoor, leadership and teamwork skills, as well as [location] First Nations traditions and worldviews.

and "enhancing their understandings of art practice and/or Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and creating, particularly in the northern and western regions of Canada".

Some statements speak to the depth of learning.

> These knowledges and teachings are best understood through experiential learning on the Stó:lō lands. This associate certificate creates several opportunities for multi-dimensional connections with Indigenous lands, waters, and people, so that the learning process emphasizes the process of learning with Stó:lō people as opposed to simply learning about Stó:lō people.

Most mentioned this intended outcome in the context of experiential learning, however some provide WIL placements (e.g., "practicum placements in Indigenous schools"). Overall, given the growth in Indigenous education as a result of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation process (Universities Canada, 2023) and concerns about the implementation of Indigenous learning in Canadian institutions (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018), our fifth recommendation for future research and critical consideration is an examination of how Indigenous ways of knowing, practice and culture are or are not being respectfully distinguished from or included within EL or WIL designations at institutions.

CONCLUSION

Alongside massive widespread growth in Canadian post-secondary institutions' intended outcomes statements totals, there was a shift in emphasis, with increased focus on acquiring skills, gaining experience, and applying theory to practice, and a decrease in human/relational-centered outcomes. Our comprehensive comparison of institutional statements allows for direct temporal comparison from 2020 to 2025. The data also suggest widespread engagement in WIL and a shift in focus from primarily framing statements about activities and qualities of EL and WIL towards more articulated intended

outcomes by 2025. Variation across specific outcomes, provinces, and institution types underscores how WIL intentions remain shaped by distinct local and institutional contexts within widespread Canadian investment, student demand, and institutional embrace of WIL. By identifying patterns in outcomes, future research into actual achievement of these outcomes, as well as alignment with current local practices and motivations, can further strengthen EL and WIL design, planning, and contributions.

DISCLOSURE OF THE USE OF GENERATIVE AI

AI was only utilized to reformat author/human-created slide text from PPTX to DOCX file. Authors then reviewed, confirmed, and drafted the full manuscript with additional human-created content.

As part of ongoing AI-testing, AI for thematic analysis was piloted in summer 2025 and was determined to have low consistency/reliability and as such was not used for text sampling or initial coding. In January 2026, after 1581 quoted outcomes were coded, the quotes were provided to ChatGPT 5.2 (AI) to re-test analysis quality. While Acquire Skills typically showed 90% interrater human-AI agreement, more varied or euphemistically described statements (e.g., "enriching education in ways that deepen knowledge and insight") received 10% human-AI agreement with several hallucinations or misinterpretations. The human-based coding also furthered the learning experience of a student who was provided with a paid research assistantship and received training and mentorship to complete the majority of sampling and coding. Human-coding was utilized for random checks, and complex statements were flagged by the initial human reviewer for additional secondary human review. Thus, all data sampling, analysis and results presented here are based on human-coded and human-reviewed analysis.

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The International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning (IJWIL) publishes double-blind peer-reviewed original research and topical issues related to Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). IJWIL first published in 2000 under the name of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE).

In this Journal, WIL is defined as:

> *An educational approach involving three parties – the student, educational institution, and an external stakeholder – consisting of authentic work-focused experiences as an intentional component of the curriculum. Students learn through active engagement in purposeful work tasks, which enable the integration of theory with meaningful practice that is relevant to the students' discipline of study and/or professional development* (Zegwaard et al., 2023, p. 38*).

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, entrepreneurships, student-led enterprise, student consultancies, etc. WIL is related to, and overlaps with, the fields of experiential learning, work-based learning, and vocational education and training.

The Journal's aim is to enable specialists working in WIL to disseminate research findings and share knowledge to the benefit of institutions, students, WIL practitioners, curricular designers, and researchers. The Journal encourages quality research and explorative critical discussion that leads to the advancement of quality practices, development of further understanding of WIL, and promote further research.

The Journal is financially supported by the WILNZ, WACE, WIL Australia, and the University of Waikato.

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Types of manuscripts sought by IJWIL are primarily in two forms: 1) *research publications* describing research into aspects of WIL and, 2) *topical discussion* articles that review relevant literature and provide critical explorative discussion around a topical issue. The journal will, on occasions, consider good 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 including recommendations.

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