

Professional Development through Work Integrated Learning in Tourism and Hospitality – alive in South Africa

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ABSTRACT--- *Tourism is regarded as a modern-day engine for growth and is one of the largest industries globally. South Africa has earmarked tourism as a key sector with excellent potential for growth and development. With its spectacular scenery, friendly people, world-class infrastructure, South Africa is becoming one of the most desired destinations in the world. Being a labour-intensive sector, with a supply chain that links across sectors, tourism is a priority sector in the government's planning and policy frameworks and it is perceived to be one of the six job drivers of the New Growth Path framework. To realise this vision, the government has embarked on skills enhancement drive to complement the tourism growth strategy. Initially tourism training was conducted in Technikons, and vocationally oriented colleges. With the introduction of tourism and hospitality education in conventional universities, a lot of programmes have sprouted up. But to what extent do the current curricula address the training needs in the industry? This paper argues that tourism and hospitality training should address the immediate needs of industry by preparing students for career related occupations. On one hand most graduates from conventional universities tend to delve deeper into more abstract issues, they tend to lack immediate skills that are demanded by employers. On the other hand graduates from colleges lack the aptitude and skills to drive innovation. Whilst higher education institutions play a significant role in the development of the hospitality and tourism industry manpower, they are failing to provide industry with knowledgeable graduates who are highly skilled with positive aptitudes, attitudes and behaviours towards work. The overpowering challenge facing higher education institutions is how to overcome the perceived lack of credibility of higher level hospitality and tourism management programs by the labour market. This paper identifies Work Integrated Learning (WIL) as the vehicle to prepare graduates for employability. The paper concludes with a set of critical success factors for higher education institutions, implications to curricula development and necessary industry partnerships.*

Keywords---- Tourism, tourism training, curriculum development, work-integrated-learning, industry skills, knowledge

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is regarded as a modern-day engine for growth and is one of the largest industries globally. South Africa has earmarked tourism as a key sector with excellent potential for growth and development. The first quarter of 2012 saw an exceptional growth of a total of 2 267 807 in tourist arrivals more than 10.5% last year's figures. With its spectacular scenery, friendly people, world-class infrastructure, South Africa is becoming one of the most desired destinations in the world. Being a labour-intensive sector, with a supply chain that links across sectors, tourism is a priority sector in the government's planning and policy frameworks and it is perceived to be one of the six job drivers of the New Growth Path framework. To realise this vision, the government has embarked on skills enhancement drive to complement the tourism growth strategy. Initially tourism training was conducted in Technikons (now known as Universities of Technology), and vocationally oriented colleges (known as Further Education Training Colleges). Research has shown that the complexity of the tourism industry has resulted in unclear career paths within the tourism industry which tends to demotivate and discourage graduates when entering the job market. With most graduates completing higher education made to start at the bottom, the limited career choices has resulted in unrealistic career expectations.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study sought to examine the adequacy and the balance of tourism and hospitality programmes and determine the relevance of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) in tourism education. The subsequent objectives guided the outcomes of the study. These were as follows:

- To compare and discuss the perceptions of stakeholders with regards to WIL in tourism and hospitality education.
- To examine the relationship between WIL and career choices.
- To analyse the link between WIL and vocational education and training
- To make conclusion and recommendations on the relevance of WIL in tourism and hospitality education

The results of this study could help to tourism and hospitality curriculum developers to understand the significance of WIL learning in tourism education which may subsequently increase the chances of graduate employability and/or career mobility.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The need to evaluate the quality of hospitality, tourism and leisure programmes accurately has become increasingly important (Hong, Teng, & Baum, 2009). Tourism education and curriculum design at whatever level are embedded in a complex construct of influences of stakeholders, with students, employers (or the industry) and government funding bodies being the most important one (Chimutingiza, Mwando & Kazembe, 2011). The South African higher education system comprises universities (including research-intensive universities), comprehensive universities, and universities of technology. While the higher education system is differentiated in the sense that different institutions offer different types of qualifications at different levels of the HEQF, most South African higher education institutions (be they research-led institutions, comprehensive universities, or universities of technology) have Applied Science, Business, Humanities, Education, Engineering and/or Health Science faculties, and many of their professional programmes (such as Architecture, Business, Engineering, Law and Medicine) are often the most prestigious and have the highest entrance requirements (CHE, 2011). The levels vary from diploma to doctorate with many universities across the sector satisfied with providing career-focused education. Most South African hotel schools offer national diplomas in Tourism management, Hospitality Management, Food and Beverage Management, and Rooms division management particularly those that fall under the University of Technology banner. All these courses include compulsory WIL (Spowart, 2006). Vocational education (also known as vocational education and training or VET) has been defined as education that prepares people for specific trades, crafts and careers at various levels, from a trade craft to technician, or a professional position in engineering, accountancy, nursing, medicine, architecture, pharmacy, law etc (*see* Ring, Dickinger & Worber, 2009; Aggett & Busby, 2011). Most of these craft vocations are usually based on manual or practical activities, traditionally non-academic and trade specific (*see* Chang & Hsu, 2010; Sattler, 2011; Rotich, Sawe & Akgül, 2012). This type of education is different from academic oriented programmes which are knowledge based with broader scientific inquiry, concentrating on theory and abstract conceptual knowledge. Traditionally 60% of the content of vocational qualifications is theoretically defined by industry and not by government or training providers (Inui *et al.*, 2006). However, the boundaries between Vocational education and academic education are becoming more blurred since most of the tourism programmes are primarily part vocational, and part academic depending upon the needs of a given course.

Historically, tourism education developed from technical/vocational schools in Europe (Barry, 2007). These schools emphasised on training in core competencies such as hospitality, hotel management and related business skills (*see* Inui *et al.*, 2006; Chang & Hsu, 2010). It is frequently said that university tourism education, which in most cases has emerged from purely vocational training courses has not yet overcome its vocational focus (Chimutingiza *et al.*, 2011). While these programmes meet actual needs in training and education, there have been discussions on the proper place of such programmes. Debates over tourism programmes at universities appear to centre on the balance between vocational and academic focus (Inui *et al.*, 2006; Chang & Hsu, 2010). Employability has become the only important end product of tourism education (*see*, Raybould & Wilkins, 2005; Vaz, 2012; Ring *et al.*, 2009). Balancing the vocational and liberal aspects of tourism education is vital to producing a well-rounded graduate (Inui, *et al.*, 2006). Internships have been found to increase the ability of students to critically reflect on the tourism business (Tribe, 2001) and go beyond vocational or academic education dichotomies to meet global tourism market demands (Chang & Hsu, 2010). This perspective is shared by CHE (2011) where it categorically states that “University teachers should be concerned about ensuring that the students that graduate from their programmes are prepared for the world in which they will live and work through Work Integrated Learning (WIL). WIL refers to the process whereby students come to learn from experiences in educational and practice settings and integrate the contributions of those experiences in developing the understandings, procedures and dispositions required for effective professional practice, including criticality (*see*, Martin, Fleming, Ferkins, Wiersma and Coll, 2010; Sattler, 2011; Tanaka & Carlson, 2012). WIL varies from service learning, volunteerism, community service, internships, to field education/practicum (Furco, 1996). For WIL to be meaningful, certain conditions have to be present, namely, an educational experience should result in students: (a) participating in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs; (b) reflecting on the service or activity in such a way to gain further understanding of the course content in a broader appreciation of the discipline, and (c) gaining an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). Even though, strong connections with industry have result due to

internships, the result is the development of industry specific education (Inuiet *al.*, 2006). Concentrating on just the vocational aspects impoverishes students and renders them less likely to be able to respond to stakeholders in a developing tourist society (Acolla, 2006; Pearce, 2006). Questions arise with regards to the viability of maintaining the status quo, of uncritical reproduction of present practice (Dale & Robinson, 2001), and future skills needed for the tourism professional (Morgan, 2004). Due to the varied types of programmes on tourism and hospitality education, it has been noticed that vocationally oriented courses have career benefits exploration, career clarity, and improved prospects for employment but it ignores scientific research and development abilities. Lack of best practices on tourism education has also compromised the WIL concept particularly in comprehensive South African universities where there is no rationale for competency based education, and WIL is not included in production, teaching and scientific process of common talent training and education activities.

4. METHODOLOGY

Based on a sociological perspective, the study took a constructivist perspective which sought to understand issues relating to both academic and vocational education and its relationship to WIL in South Africa. A constructivist design focuses on feelings, beliefs, and perspectives of the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Since the researcher in this study was experienced in WIL issues, a snowball sampling technique and self-reflexivity were used. The participants were selected on the basis of their experience regarding WIL. Based on the complexity of the subject, heterogeneous groups were identified made up of tourism students, academics and industry practitioners. An unstructured interview guide was used as a data gathering tool. The interview questions were open-ended which enabled the researcher to probe the respondents further and search for more information until a saturation point was reached after a total of twenty interviews were conducted. The method was complemented by documentary analysis, participant observations, taking notes during interviews and making field visits. Documentary analysis included a review of research reports on WIL, journal articles, books, and other related published documents. Participant observation necessitated visiting various tourism and hospitality organisations made up of eight stakeholders (1-one star, 1-three star and 1-five star, 1 travel agent, 1 tour operator, 1 car hire company, 1 convention centre and 1 attraction) conveniently selected in order to understand the conditions students are subjected to on WIL. The visit took place in the North West and KwaZulu Natal provinces respectively. The two provinces were chosen for two main reasons. Firstly, there were convenient and easily accessible by the researcher. Secondly, there were a significant number of students attached in these provinces. In-depth interviews were recorded and transcribed as notes to ensure reliability of the method. Data collected was then typed, coded and placed into relevant data categories to answer relevant questions. Field notes and observations were typed and coded in a descriptive form. Trends were analysed and triangulated to other subcategories to verify and strengthen the results. Primarily, data was analysed in relation to WIL theoretical frameworks and the literature review. The results were then presented into themes in line with the objectives of the study.

5. RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL SURVEY

To understand the perceptions and experiences of the respondents regarding WIL and its relevance in tertiary education institutions, the following results are presented.

Perceptions regarding skills acquisition

Respondents were of the opinion that tourism and hospitality is a practically driven industry and the curriculum should include WIL. There were differing perspectives regarding this issue particularly the stage at which students should go on experiential learning. The concept of WIL was evident in Universities of Technology but comprehensive universities still question this wisdom. However students showed a lot of interest on WIL but cited incidences that they were not happy with. These included the issue of being used as cheap labour, repetitive skills, no coaching and mentoring, and unfriendliness of supervisors.

Interviewer:

What do you understand by the term WIL?

Respondents:

It is when students put theory into practice on the job.

It is learning that incorporates theory into practice.

It is the practical part of learning where the learner is exposed to real work situations.

Interviewer:

How you are involved and are there any skills gained from WIL?

Respondents:

Well as a student, I think WIL has given me the opportunity to acquire relevant skills, and I am tasked to do certain duties in each department, this is checked by my supervisor from time and time.....but sometimes this is tedious and repetitive.

The work that I do when I am at college is not different from industry; to me it is more about appreciation...learning to work under pressure in real work environment which is different from our Hotel school considering the volume of work.

The results show that, whilst WIL is an integral part of tourism education, for some tertiary institution, a mechanism for integrating students into the operational areas of the organisations are not yet well established to address the tension between educators and the tourism industry (Inui *et al.*, 2006). When it comes to internships, University of Technology students found it easy to cope with work demands since most of them have same or similar facilities within the university's education system. Some academics felt that the concept of approaching tourism and hospitality education from an academic perspective is a long term philosophy which industry does not subscribe to as they require immediate manpower for production. However, these narrow perspectives of the education machine" nullify all forms of WIL (Sattler, 2011). Therefore, novel tourism educational concepts should focus on simultaneously integrating out of college resources, for example, the range of governmental stakeholders, industries, other educational organisations, professionals and the surrounding community (Chang & Hsu, 2010).

Relevance of tourism and hospitality curriculum in South Africa

The evidence shows that the integration of academic and vocational forms of education and training needs to be included in the curriculum. However, concentrating more on vocational studies can easily with hold the students' motivation for growth, intuition, business acumen, and creativity. Paradoxically, vocational higher education in tourism may need to rediscover these humanistic values in order to fulfil its managerial objectives of creating successful tourism business managers" (Morgan, 2004). Vocational tourism education seems to consider employability as a means to an end goal, which short-changes students in addressing long range sustainability, moral and ethical decision making functions (Tribe, 2002; Cooper, 2002). Most tourism programmes were found to be employment driven, industry needs and expectations dominate curriculum design, since they are rooted in practice and application.

Interviewer:

Are there any benefits associated with WIL and what are the challenges associated with it?

Respondents:

Where I come from we have no Hotel school, no practicals and no exposure, therefore, WIL gives me the opportunity to link theory and practice. Since most of the things that we do are abstract, being on WIL is an opportunity to translate and apply abstract concepts into the work environment.

We work so hard here, because facilities and places are different, this tends to give us different experiences. If one is placed in a five star hotel and the other student placed in a lodge, the resulting experiences are different. Those in a five star hotel are likely to benefit much more, but the basic procedures are the same.

The benefits include knowing what is expected when one enters the industry. It helps one to identify his strengths and weaknesses and work on these before joining the industry. WIL is the only way I can gain experience since most organisations want to employ people with experience.

However, the perception that education should suit only the employment requirements of the industry may not be the most effective or desired purpose of a university education, nor provide qualified individuals as contributors not only as tourism professionals, but also as thoughtful participants in a global society (Inui *et al.*, 2006). The respondents were of the opinion that the curriculum should be designed to respond to the needs of the tourism industry to satisfy customers and to produce appropriate economic benefits for the country, industry and individual. As Chang and Hsu, (2010), argue, that the schools' role should be more than just providing students with a skill base; it is about educating them for "appropriate attitudes and aspirations to guide their career trajectories and industry vision". This may seem problematic in South Africa considering that the drive is to create employment. Academics felt that current curricula are still more vocationally aligned. Morgan (2004) suggests shifting the educational focus from a rigorous vocational framework to a liberal reflective approach in order to address this issue. Curriculum design undoubtedly affects the student experience with different curricula framings, resulting in students graduating with a range of perspectives attitudes and competency (Tribe, 2002). Whilst tourism education can lead to customer satisfaction, wealth creation, and employment, the interaction between tourists, tourism organisations and its employees tends to create new landscapes, socio-economic relationships and a myriad of social problems which are not addressed in the current tourism programs. Tourism education should as well as orient individuals on how to act as humans (Chang & Hsu, 2010). Respondents felt that the curriculum design should enable students to critically engage on issues of corporate social responsibility, produce individuals who can be integrated into society and reflect on self-awareness, creativity and imagination.

Role of WIL in enhancing students' employability

Respondents were aware of the strategic role of WIL in enhancing students' learning experiences. However, the responses were varied and included giving the students the opportunity to put theory into practice. Students viewed work integrated learning as an opportunity to acquire the pre-requisite skills demanded by employers, develop confidence and community engagement. Because students are given an allowance whilst on WIL, some saw this as an opportunity to get an income.

Interviewer:

In your opinion, do you think WIL can increase students' employability?

Respondents:

WIL is a vehicle to employment. When I went for WIL, my employers promised me a job after finishing college. If you are attached in a suitable place, it can equip you with the required skills....these become handy when you are looking for a job.

Being attached to a specific industry gives me the opportunity to see my future career prospects, it directs me to the right job and allows me to specialise in the job of my dreams. Without any attachment, I do not see how one can make a good career choice.

Colleges expect the industry to teach students everything, we would appreciate a case where we get students who know what they are doing.....but the calibre of students we are getting these days does not match the job specifications.

Industry was of the opinion that WIL gives them the opportunity to choose best candidates for future employment prospects. In addition, for industry, internships were an extra hand especially during pick periods, instead of employing casual labour they tend to rely on students. However, industry felt that this comes with a price which is not easily translated into financial terms. Some issues that came vividly included accounting and supervision of students on experiential learning. To industry, tourism and hospitality education institutions put an extra responsibility on them regarding the number of students who need placement places. Industry pointed out that sometimes it becomes a big challenge to manage academics' expectations. Most of the industry practitioners have never been in a classroom environment particularly in a university and they are not aware of the quality check points needed by academics. They end up using the rule of thumb. As a result, the assessment processes are sometimes compromised.

Experiences and perceptions of WIL

Other studies have recommended that tourism education should incorporate practical and vocational experience such as internships (Tribe, 2001; Busby, 2003), student work experiences (Leslie & Richardson, 2000), or a sandwich placement (Busby, Brunt, & Baber, 1997), and practicum (Ernawati, 2003). No matter the wording, all forms of WIL arguably form the foundation to develop primary job skills needed in developing countries like South Africa. Students reported substantial benefits including the development of personal and interactive attributes, interpersonal skills, short term financial benefits; employment prospects, career development, gaining management knowledge, experience and civic engagement (*also see* CHE, 2011). However, students thought that they should acquire all the basic skills at college so that adaptation could be faster when they go on WIL. Whilst WIL was found to yield mutually exclusive benefits, there were concerns on the quality of students coming from tertiary education institutions. The current challenge facing education institutions is to match students' ability, aptitudes, behaviour with organisational demands. Some employers voiced some concerns regarding WIL; they felt that the internship period is rather too short, there is poor communication between industry and institutions, and the urgent need for applied research on various areas of the tourism industry which can easily be assimilated into the organisation's systems and procedures. The issue of students using vocational skills to start their own businesses came out stridently as some felt that the current curriculum channels them to become job seekers rather than entrepreneurs.

Interviewer:

What are your perceptions and experiences regarding work integrated learning?

Respondents:

WIL gives the students the opportunity to develop foundation skill but Institutions need to create an environment that can develop and nurture students for work readiness.

As an Institution, we need to endeavour to motivate students to learn, and give them supportive mechanism that would enable them to think outside the box. The current curriculum does not churn out entrepreneurs but it tends to develop workers instead.

I believe the curriculum needs to be dynamic and respond to the needs of the country. Considering that tourism is one of the leading economic sectors in South Africa, expanding knowledge is a pre-requisite.

I believe tourism programmes should be customised....to address skills deficiency in the country.

...tourism curriculum has to channel students into specific tourism related professions and develop practitioners who are likely to lead the profession into the next echelon.

Considering Ernawati (2003) assertion that “vocational education should respond to the needs of the informal economy and be inclusive because in developing countries people work and trade predominantly in the informal economy”, even vocational education has not yielded any meaningful benefits. Therefore a standard tourism degree should be tailored to accommodate vocational as well as intellectual skills (Busby, 2001) to be able to develop entrepreneurs. Dale and Robinson (2001) propose that three domains should emerge in tourism education. Their model suggests that education programmes should offer: ‘generic degrees’ that provide broad understanding of the tourism and interdisciplinary skills; ‘functional degrees’ that focus on particular areas of tourism such as marketing, information systems, or planning; and product based degrees’ that focus on the development of a particular product or market, requiring expertise in the area. Whilst there are a number of approaches to designing a tourism curriculum, the point is, in South Africa the curriculum design should follow either an interdisciplinary approach, systems approach or managerial approach.

Benefits of incorporating WIL in tourism and hospitality education

Respondents acknowledged that most vocationally oriented programmes are starved with theory which is a pre-requisite for one to reproduce new knowledge in order to develop the tourism industry. Industry-university cooperation integrates university and vocational training, which plays an important role in tourism and hospitality education (Chang & Hsu, 2010). There is an illusion amongst academics that practically oriented subjects require less theory, the fact that some of the academics have never worked in any one of the tourism sector complicates the whole issue. Any practice should be driven by both theory and practice. However, there was consensus on the suggestion to integrate vocationally oriented tourism and hospitality studies with academic issues. But there was concern that this hybrid has not been done properly causing a lot of anxiety on the part of industry. The failure to appreciate that some sectors of the tourism and hospitality industry are too specialised, need business acumen, intuition and creativity, some respondents tended to think that areas such as “culinary skills” do not require as much theory as management. The kitchen being the heart of a hotel, it has to be staffed by people who are business minded and cost conscious. To develop these skills a lot of business and culinary theory is needed. There was evidence of disparity in skills to be acquired on the job and those to be acquired during training.

Interviewer:

Are there any benefits of incorporating WIL into the curriculum design and what are the challenges?

Respondents:

The current tourism programmes are practically oriented but there is need to balance theory and practice to enable students to operate confidently. I believe cookery and housekeeping courses do not require a lot of theory, therefore students need to take their time on practice instead. If the school does not have any facilities for practice, students may have a challenge after completion.....they will not be able to relate theory into practice.

I believe students at Universities should not do these practically oriented courses. These should be done by universities of technology.....as they do not require rigorous scholarly engagement.

I think the industry is not ready for students either. Most of the time they do not follow the designed attachment program resulting in students doing the same thing over and over. The challenge is to manage suspicion and mistrust in the mind of academics. Academics think that students are being used as an alternative source of labour by industry without giving them the necessary skills.

The challenge facing the design of tourism curricula is to strike a balance between institutions and industry stakeholders’ needs. As long as there is no consensus amongst stakeholders, the industry is likely to suffer in the long run.....to the disadvantage of students.

Some application skills can be acquired during WIL, particularly those skills that do not require intensive scholarly effort. In line with Aggett and Busby (2011), a number of WIL benefits were identified. There were some concerns

regarding some negative experiences of WIL. Improper planning, ill treatment of students by employers, routine and unstructured work schedules, lack of appreciation and communication between students and faculty and faculty and employer could contribute to negative equity on WIL. Some of these consequences were noted as having severe future career choice.

6. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Tourism and hospitality education system requires integrating modern management and innovative practices, and building on from conventional practice-oriented educational methods to those focusing on techniques, skills, aesthetics, and cultures (Chang & Hsu, 2010) shifting more attention and resources to compelling needs of contemporary society (Cecil, 2012). Work Integrated Learning will continue to feature in both vocational and academic disciplines. Horng and Lee (2006) emphasise that tourism and hospitality education should assist students in the integration of subjects in different fields, especially the study of aesthetics, arts, and cultures, the exposure to which can be adopted in their careers. Any abstract concept should be translated and applied. The study has shown that WIL is an integral part of the learning process due to the advantages associated with it. Observations indicate that the way vocational education is construed is sometimes misinterpreted. Because the current conception of vocational education is associated with failures and under achievers, the ability to attract intellectuals to develop the profession will not be realised soon.

The aim of tourism education today is to “promote global citizenship and optimism for a better world” (Sheldon, Fesenmaier, & Tribe, 2011). The failure to appreciate different students’ abilities tends to affect career choices. By nature some professions are vocationally oriented; questions will always be asked as to what constitutes academic and the line that divides the two. Inherently, the two concepts are interconnected, but they have differing pedagogical orientations. Drawing a seam between the two approaches to education becomes unfair as it tends to channel learners by academic achievement. Frankly, due to misconceptions about tourism and hospitality education at school level, students conclude that this area is not academically challenging therefore vocationally inclined. Consequently, the tourism and hospitality education system should urgently address this issue by equipping students with independent thinking, cultural sensitivity and professional skills (Chang & Hsu, 2010; Wells & Grabert, 2004; Martin, Rees, Edwards, & Paku, 2012). A particular strength of WIL experience is the ability to enhance those soft skills that could not be learnt in the classroom environment (*Also see*, Martin, Rees, Edwards, & Paku, 2012). The study has demonstrated that there advantages associated with integrating vocational and academic strands of education. As observed in other studies (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001; Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998; Stukas, Clary, & Snyder, 1999) WIL links community engagement and academic outcomes, yields both civic and academic outcomes that produce changes in not only academic knowledge and skills, but also attitudes toward community service, citizenship, and social responsibility. Apart from meeting the needs of the learners, the programme development also meets the requirements of national needs and ensures equivalence in standards, even if the university programmes are not ‘the same’.

The paper has shown that internships may form the bridge between the academic curriculum and industrial participation (Airey & Johnson, 1999; Busby *et al.*, 1997). Some previous studies (*see*, Inui, *et al.*, 2006; Sattler, 2011) have concluded that on one hand most academically inclined programmes face a number of challenges. These include poor opportunities for entrepreneurship, limited accessibility, and resource constraints and skills deficiency to operate optimally in the industry. On the other hand, vocationally oriented programmes tend to suffer from perception of inferiority, lack of academic rigor, resource constraints and inadequate management. Therefore, WIL learning should balance this anomaly, and ensure that there is consensus in the skills to be assessed whilst on experiential learning and rationalise vocational and academic training and education. This study argues that whilst it is acknowledged that WIL is pivotal in tourism and hospitality education, methods, systems, procedures and assessment criteria should be carefully embedded into WIL planning and implementation processes.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that WIL is an integral part of the tourism curriculum. Tourism being a career driven profession, with vocationally applied skills, tourism educators need to re-imagine tourism education and student experience to meet the global challenges faced by the tourism industry (Cecil, 2012). The misconception that only vocationally oriented courses need internship is old fashioned and farfetched. Today’s tourism education programme should embody issues to do with ethics, stewardship, knowledge, professionalism, and mutuality (Sheldon *et al.*, 2011). They must demonstrate, at a high level, the ability to work with people of different races, ethnicities, religions and work within the context of local, national, and international societies (Christou, 2002), exhibit competencies that focus on problem solving, teamwork, and conflict resolution. Therefore, WIL should adequately prepare students for both community and professional roles. The study has shown that WIL learning can take place in so many different forms. Tourism in particular, WIL can be exercised through field trips, excursions, internships, attachments and or service learning. The varying degrees of WIL signify its relevance in tourism and hospitality education, be it a University of Technology or comprehensive University. Whilst there is ample evidence that disputes the notion of WIL and academic achievement, this study concludes that

there are other, non-academic but equally important forms of learning that can come from work experience and these forms give us good grounds for supporting WIL. Industry is continuously demanding from educators, graduates who possess sophisticated knowledge, turning lifelong learning bonds into new perspectives. The study is justified to claim that some of the benefits of WIL include increased student interest in the subject, enhanced employment opportunities, development of problem solving skills which makes teaching more enjoyable for academics. The study has also revealed that WIL tends to translate abstract concepts into simple manageable step by step practice thereby making learning more exciting to students. The fact that there is immediate feedback on learning fast tracks the learning process. Students' transition from academia to employment in the field channels them into key positions in the community organizations and remain ambassadors of the university, school, and or department they represent. This study was stimulating and exciting, the experience of which has given a number of interesting conclusions. The study therefore recommends to academics to re-look, re-think, and re-curriculate their programmes so that they are either vocationally, academically or trans-(inter) disciplinary orientated and ensure that WIL is incorporated into the curriculum design as a function of improving graduate employability.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Since the study was qualitative in nature, which utilized in-depth interviews using a snowball sampling, no hypothesis was tested instead research questions were used. A further study is recommended through the use of a quantitative design that will test whether there is a significant relationship between WIL and academic performance. Furthermore, to test whether there is a significant difference in perceptions and experiences of stakeholders regarding WIL.

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