

Exploring benefits of work-integrated learning for the employer and the student: A case study of Bachelor of Commerce student placement at a Municipality

by

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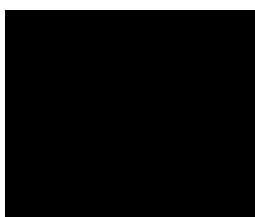
JANUARY 2023

Supervisor: Professor Vaughn M. John

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I Busisiwe Theodorah Kuzwayo declare that

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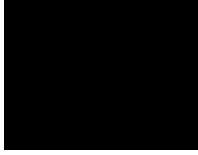
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SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

As the candidate's supervisor, I agree to the submission of this dissertation.

Supervisor: Prof. V.M. John



Signed: _____

30 January 2023

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Glory be with God the Almighty Jesus Christ of Nazareth who carried me throughout this journey. He is Alpha and Omega; I would not have made it without Him. I will forever praise Him for He is worthy to be praised.

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- My colleagues, the Skills Development team for assistance, advice and guidance.

ABSTRACT

The study explores the benefits of work-integrated learning (WIL) for the employer and B. Com students placed at a municipality. WIL is intended to provide students with skills that will make them marketable to employers, afford them an opportunity to practise under supervision and gain experience to supplement their qualifications and general work experience. The question is, is the WIL's intended purpose fulfilled for the benefit of both parties, namely, the employer and interns? The study focuses on exploring the perceptions of students of the WIL experience in the Municipality. It examines if and how the Municipality enables students to acquire qualification-relevant experience and explores the extent to which mentors contribute towards the acquisition of new knowledge and the understanding of WIL. Previous studies failed to adequately address this issue, yet it is important to do such an exploration in order to review current policy for the organisation to conform to best practices. In terms of the qualitative approach used to conduct this case study, an interview schedule was prepared to conduct semi-structured interviews for the interns with the aim of collecting descriptive information. A questionnaire was used within mentors to record their experiences of the WIL programme.

The study adopted Kolb's experiential learning theory to theorise the findings that revealed that; WIL placement involved interns in understanding new tasks in the workplace and interns found it meaningful since it managed to close learning gaps between theory and practice. This was a result of appropriate placement of each intern. Mentors effectively inducted interns as they deemed workplace readiness an important factor and they valued the association between practical work and theory. Students managed to execute relevant tasks in compliance with mandatory legislation even though they were not rotated amongst other Finance sections but work scope and knowledge growth were noted. It also emerged that mentors effectively mentored students regardless of some inconsistency, especially when providing feedback to interns. Based on the findings, it is concluded that interns were relevantly exposed and showed evidence of achieving the four stages of Kolb's learning cycle.

Based on the findings, it was therefore recommended that mentors are trained for the standard implementation of the WIL programme, and they are involved in advisory committees. Lastly,

an adequate quality management process must be developed for successful implementation of the WIL programme.

TABLE OF CONTENT

SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENT	vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY.....	1
1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM.....	2
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	3
1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	3
1.6 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY.....	3
1.7 AIM OF THE STUDY	4
1.8 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	4
1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	4
1.10 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	5
1.11 KEY CONCEPTS IN THIS STUDY	6
1.11.1 Experiential Learning:	6
1.11.2 Concrete experience	6
1.11.3 Reflective observations.....	6
1.11.4 Abstract conceptualisation	6
1.11.5 Active experimentation.....	6
1.11.6 Placement:	6
1.11.7 Education:	6
1.12 DETAILED OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION	6
1.12.1 Chapter One	6
1.12.3 Chapter Three	7
1.12.4 Chapter Four	7
1.12.5 Chapter Five	7
1.12.6 Conclusion.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
CHAPTER TWO	8
LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2. INTRODUCTION	8

2.1	WHAT IS WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING?.....	8
2.2	BACKGROUND OF WIL IN SOUTH AFRICA.....	10
2.3	KEY ROLE PLAYERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WIL PROGRAMME	13
2.4	WIL IMPLEMENTATION BENEFITS.....	16
2.4.1	Interns.....	16
2.5	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	18
2.5.1	CONCRETE EXPERIENCE	20
2.5.2	Reflective observations.....	21
2.5.3	Abstract Conceptualisation.....	22
2.5.4	Active Experimentation.....	23
2.6	Conclusion.....	24
CHAPTER THREE.....		25
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY		25
3.	Introduction.....	25
3.1	Research Paradigm	25
3.2	Research style	26
3.3	Research approach.....	26
3.4	Sampling.....	27
3.5	Data generation methods	29
3.7	Ethical considerations	32
3.8	Research Quality	33
3.9	Research limitations.....	34
3.10	Conclusion.....	35
CHAPTER FOUR.....		36
PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....		36
4.	Introduction.....	36
4.1	Background	36
4.2	Data analysis	37
4.3	Findings	37
4.4	Perceptions of interns towards WIL and perceptions of mentors towards the interns' experiences	38
4.4.1	Placement	38
4.4.2	Professional Growth.....	39
4.4.3	Managing daily tasks.....	41
4.4.4	Mentoring	43

4.4.5 Feedback	44
4.5 The extent to which mentors contributed towards the acquisition of new knowledge and the understanding of WIL.....	46
4.5.1 Workplace readiness and associations between practical work and theory.....	46
4.5.2 Reflection on work experience	48
4.6 How does the Municipality enable interns to acquire relevant experience related to.....	50
their qualification outcome?.....	50
4.6.1 Relevance	50
4.6.2 Application of skills and knowledge.....	52
4.7 Deductive Analysis Process	54
4.8 CONCRETE EXPERIENCE	54
4.9 REFLECTIVE OBSERVATIONS	56
4.10 ABSTRACT CONCEPTUALISATION.....	58
4.11 ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION	60
4.12 DISCUSSION.....	62
4.13 Chapter Summary	66
5. Conclusion.....	66
CHAPTER FIVE	68
CONCLUSION	68
5.1 Introduction	68
5.2 Brief overview of the thesis	68
5.3 Summary of findings	69
a) What are the perceptions of students towards WIL and perceptions of mentors on the interns' experiences?.....	69
b) To what extent did mentors contribute towards the acquisition of new knowledge and the understanding of WIL?.....	70
c) How does the Municipality enable students to acquire relevant experience related to their qualification outcome?	70
5.4 Reflections on the study process/methodology	70
5.5 Recommendations	71
APPENDICES	80
Gate Keeper Letter.....	80
Informed consent form	82
Consent to participate	79
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE	85
Questionnaire	83

<u>Turnitin Report</u>	92
Ethical Clearance Approval Letter	97

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) is an important part of many qualifications. The main purpose of WIL is to enable interns to apply knowledge and relevant skills to fulfill workplace work obligations (SSACI, 2013). There is a need for some qualifications to balance the theoretical and practical skills attained under the supervision of an employer's approved WIL programme. According to UNISA, WIL enables the developmental skills for interns to be employable and allows the development of both theoretical and practical knowledge in an integrated way (Lewis et al., 2010). WIL is a practice for interns to learn through participating in realistic workplace activities thus developing and allowing for the integration of the intern's skills and knowledge. It is through working that interns learn (Brink, 2015).

The implementation of WIL by the corporate world was intended to benefit both the employer and interns participating in the programme. WIL is generally focused on improving the student's/graduate's knowledge, skills and attitude in the work place. This can be achieved by placing interns at the place of employment for a specific period in order to achieve the WIL objectives. Various role players make a significant contribution to the implementation of the WIL programme. It was therefore imperative for this study to explore the actual benefits and how these benefits come to reality. The study reveals information that could be beneficial to both interns and the employer. It contains improvements on the implementation of the programme and has the potential to influence the amendment of existing policies.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The provision of Work-Integrated Learning is defined within different types of WIL modalities and two of them relate more to the current study. When interns are exposed to and get acquainted with work-based, cooperate world experience and professional practices, this is referred to as structured work experience. When learning mainly takes place in the workplace, this is referred to as systematic training where interns are provided with knowledge that enables decision-making (Stirling, Kerr, Banwell, MacPherson, & Heron, 2016).

Tertiary education (colleges and universities) aims at producing graduates ready to embark on work experience by closing the theory and practice through WIL participation thus increasing employability (Taylor & Govender, 2017). WIL, allows interns to follow a structured programme expecting them to accomplish specific tasks under supervision. Guidance and mentoring are crucial for the fulfilment of these tasks hence Hlubi (2018) emphasised mentoring by a qualified mentor during the WIL process.

South Africa faces numerous challenges in the implementation of WIL and these include a shortage of qualified mentors to supervise interns and the placement of interns in the industry. In addition, theory-practical misalignment could hinder the compilation of the Portfolio of Evidence (PoE). Many employers perceive WIL implementation as a challenge because some interns have to produce a portfolio of evidence that does not match what happens in the workplace (Taylor & Govender, 2017).

There is an assumption that knowledge and employability skills required in the workplace are not taught in universities and colleges. Specific communication, certain problem solving and other skills are required for interns to cope with activities in the workplace.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study explores the benefits of WIL for the employer and the student. From my observations, placement of interns in the WIL programme within the labour market has several challenges that may impact the progression of students. The Universities of Technology (UoTs) in South Africa are battling to generate graduates that are ready for employment yet, according to Hlubi (2018), universities have a mission to offer education skills and knowledge to equip interns for employment. WIL is intended to provide interns with skills that will make them marketable to employers, afford them an opportunity to practise under supervision and gain experience to supplement their qualifications and general work experience. The question is, is the WIL intended purpose fulfilled for the benefit of both parties, i.e., the employer and students?

Based on my experience and observations within the Training and Skills Development, I believe that among many issues associated with WIL are the recruitment process, qualifying criteria, remuneration, mentoring, skills, knowledge and attitude required by both interns and

employers. All of these could be areas that the study might explore as they link to the WIL elements.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1.4.1 What are the perceptions of interns of the WIL experience in the Municipality?
- 1.4.2 How does the Municipality enable interns to acquire qualification-relevant experience?
- 1.4.3 To what extent do mentors contribute towards the acquisition of new knowledge and the understanding of WIL?

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1.5.1 To explore perceptions of interns of the WIL experience in the Municipality.
- 1.5.2 To understand if and how the Municipality enables interns to acquire qualification-relevant experience.
- 1.5.3 To explore the extent that mentors contribute towards the acquisition of new knowledge and the understanding of WIL.

1.6 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

As an Education Training Development Practitioner (ETDP) within the Municipality Skills Development Unit, evaluating the effectiveness of the implemented program over the years is crucial to substantiate and promote its continuation within the municipality. With eight years of experience in a similar initiative, the Work Exposure program, I am interested in investigating the impact of the Workplace Integrated Learning (WIL) program on student participants. Unlike the Work Exposure program, the WIL program entails placement periods lasting between 12-24 months.

This study aims to explore students' perceptions regarding their placement experiences and identify any challenges that could hinder their progress. While studies on WIL in South Africa have been conducted, some of which focused on municipalities, there needs to be more literature concerning the WIL program within any of the uMgungundlovu district municipalities. Monitoring intern progress is essential to the program's implementation,

necessitating evidence of its effectiveness. This inquiry is critical to align the municipality's current policy with best practices.

1.7 AIM OF THE STUDY

To explore the benefits of WIL for both interns and the employer.

1.8 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The overarching objective of this study is to examine the efficacy of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programs for both employers and Bachelor of Commerce (B. Com) interns placed in a municipality. The study will adopt a multifaceted approach to exploring interns' perceptions concerning their WIL experience in the municipality. Additionally, the research will assess whether and how the municipality enables interns to acquire qualification-relevant expertise and the extent to which mentors contribute to developing new knowledge and understanding of WIL. It is worth mentioning that this study targets a specific group of students who have already attained a B. Com degree from their respective academic institutions. The program under scrutiny is structured as a tripartite agreement between the National Treasury, the municipality, and the interns. The funding provided by the National Treasury allows the municipality to offer the interns ample learning opportunities, including participating in the Municipal Finance Management Programme (MFMP) and gaining practical work experience. The interns must complete a twenty-four (24) month tenure in the municipality, supervised by appointed mentors. The study will provide insights into the effectiveness of WIL programs and inform educators and policymakers on how to optimise these programs for the benefit of both learners and employers.

1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The interns that participated in this study were placed in the WIL programme for two years. My study was a small-scale study therefore I only looked at a single intake cycle, i.e., interns who were placed in the WIL programme from February 2020 to January 2022. I therefore needed to be cautious of the study claims and avoided generalising information based on other cycles. As an official in the Municipality, that could be intimidating to the participants but in this study interns responded freely. I tried to mitigate this by explaining the study intention, which made interns freely participate notwithstanding the few that ended up not participating

in this study due to unknown reasons. The trust issue in this aspect of the study was established by ensuring that the research document clearly explained a detailed process that created, shaped and made a meaningful link in relation to the phenomena.

1.10 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As part of the methodology, this research study used the interpretive paradigm because research in this paradigm seeks to understand and interpret the meaning and reasons of experiences rather than generalise a particular cause (Cohen et al., 2018). The purpose of inquiry in this case is to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon as opposed to generalising to a population, thus this paradigm is best suited due to its interpretive nature of inquiry (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). The qualitative style was better suited for this study because it contained less structured data and used verbal rather than statistical analysis. The qualitative style allows the interpretation of the participants' words thus making it possible to understand their emotions and interpretation of their experiences. Furthermore, it gave me a good understanding of why things happened the way they did with the WIL programme implementation and an understanding of the participants' actions. A case study approach best fitted this study because of its diverse processes of generating data when exploring a particular phenomenon in depth.

For the collection of data from the WIL students, I used semi-structured interviews followed by surveys to solicit information from the interns' mentors and further used written sources e.g. reports, signed agreements and logbooks to supplement information as needed (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). I believe that the trustworthiness of the study was enhanced through the use of the multi-method approach to collecting data. The recorded interviews were later transcribed and I analysed themes from the descriptive responses. In this case study, I used face-to-face engagement interviews instead of online ones. The four ethical principles were applied in this study i.e. autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice. These principles adhered to the requirements of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Research Office. The experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984) was a significant theoretical framework that aided the analysis process of this study.

1.11 KEY CONCEPTS IN THIS STUDY

In this section, I discuss some key concepts related to this study. Some of the theoretical concepts are discussed further in Chapter 2.

- 1.11.1 **Experiential Learning:** It is a learning opportunity given to a student over and above the formal education offered by the higher learning institution. It is set with workplace learning objective, monitoring and evaluation of the candidate's performance (Engelbrecht, 2003, p.14 14)
- 1.11.2 **Concrete experience:** An encounter of new experience when learning or in practice (Kolb, 2014).
- 1.11.3 **Reflective observations:** The reflection of experience based on personal encounters. Reflective observations are done through "watching others, developing observations about one's own experience and giving feedback to other participants" (Kolb, 2014:8).
- 1.11.4 **Abstract conceptualization:** new ideas are formed based on the reflection of the abstract information. This requires "creating theories to explain observations, present models and give facts" (Kolb, 2014, p.8).
- 1.11.5 **Active experimentation:** This refers to the application of ideas to one's surroundings (Kolb, 1984).
- 1.11.6 **Placement:** Posting of a student particularly to acquire practical experience in the workplace in a specific area of training (McLennan & Tyler, 2007, p, 3).
- 1.11.7 **Education:** Its main objective is to upgrade an employee's future job performance in line with job specification standards (Botha *et al.*, 2014, p. 193)
- 1.11.8 **Municipality** - According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (n.d), a municipality is a geographic and political division of a region usually characterised by having some degree of local government and a defined territory. In this study, the terms "municipality" and "employer" will be used interchangeably.

1.12 DETAILED OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation has five chapters, as presented below

1.12.1 Chapter One: Introduction and Background to the Study

This chapter outlines an introduction and presents a brief background of the study. An articulation of the purpose of the study, and an indication of why the study is being conducted

are discussed under rationale. The chapter also states the research problem being investigated, as well as the objectives and research questions.

1.12.2 Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter presents how this study links to the pre-existing literature on WIL. Discussions of the reviewed literature are mainly to contextualise the study by indicating important concepts and how these were previously applied by other scholars and how the different research techniques and methods were used.

1.12.3 Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This chapter gives details by describing the research paradigm, research style, research approach and sampling size. It presents data generation methods relevant to this study, how the data will be analysed, research quality, synopsis of ethical considerations and possible limitations to this study.

1.12.4 Chapter Four: Presentation of Findings and Discussion

This chapter gives details by describing the study findings of the phenomenon within the WIL context. To make a logical analysis of this study, the theoretical framework is used to link the framework concepts i.e. Kolb's four experiential learning stages (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation) and the research questions.

1.12.5 Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

The chapter presents the impact of the study findings by interpreting them and indicating implications thus making recommendations and conclusions based on the significant findings.

1.12.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of the structure of this dissertation and a brief background to the study and highlighted the purpose of the study, its theoretical framework and methodology.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. INTRODUCTION

The literature review for this study will present different viewpoints from other studies on Work-Integrated Learning. It is vitally important that the study explores the following areas as they are pertinent to the study; what is WIL, background of WIL in South Africa, key role players in the implementation of the programme, WIL implementation benefits to both parties. Subsections under this chapter will present views from other studies of WIL.

2.1 WHAT IS WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING?

The concept of WIL is defined as, “an umbrella term for any purposefully-designed learning programme that integrates theoretical knowledge with authentic practice in the workplace” (SSACI, 2013, p.5). The main objective of the programme implementation is to develop the intern’s competence by enabling the application of knowledge and skills to the demands of the workplace (SSACI, 2013). The implementation of WIL allows interns the application of theoretical knowledge by giving them real involvement in workplace activities (Winberg et al., 2011).

The South African Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) gazetted in 2007 came up with a revised qualifications framework that demanded the re-evaluation and redesign of programmes to align with the new framework. Then HEQF introduced the WIL concept into the Department of Education document for institutions of higher education to adhere to. As much as the HEQF introduced the WIL concept to the Department of Higher Education it is acknowledged that WIL has been implemented for a while without a single agreed policy framework for all levels in the system until the Southern African Society of Cooperative Education (SASCE) took an initiative to develop one (Brink, 2015). A revised qualification framework compels the higher education institutions that offer qualifications with WIL to place interns in the workplace (Lewis et al., 2010). Considering that higher learning institutions find it difficult to find WIL placement as it is not readily available, the authors argue that the Department of Education must consider many factors before the institutions are considered non-compliant with the framework. Lewis et al., (2010) state that the institutions drive interventions to facilitate the world of work showcasing WIL placement

opportunities and permanent positions. It must be noted that the intern's placement depends on the availability of WIL opportunities in the workplace.

The Department of Higher Education and Training (2013) emphasises the importance of WIL as a strategy for addressing the skills gap in South Africa and promoting graduate employability. Wheeler (2015) suggests designing curricula that will consider a partnership with education, employer, training providers and SETAs. WIL is currently implemented in various forms of structured work experience, intending to integrate theory and practice while providing interns with a relevant and valuable learning experience in a real-world work setting. It is noted that this integration result can benefit both interns and employers (Winberg et al., 2011).

In terms of the concept of structured work experience, Billett (2011) notes that this involves the intentional design of learning experiences that integrate theory and practice in the workplace. Meanwhile, systematic training and the provision of knowledge enable decision-making to align with the competency-based education concept, which emphasises developing practical skills and knowledge relevant to the workplace (Gonczi et al., 2018).

Scholars in the field of work-integrated learning widely agree that WIL involves structured work experiences that integrate theory and practice and provide learners with valuable learning experiences. According to Billett (2011), WIL involves integrating learning with the workplace and can take different forms, such as internships, cooperative education, and apprenticeships. Similarly, Lattuca and Stark (2016) define WIL as a pedagogical approach that connects academic knowledge and professional practice through various forms of experiential learning, including internships, service learning, and fieldwork.⁵

The interns partaking in this study were appointed to serve as WIL interns with the aim to expose them to work-based learning and equip them with supplementary skills and knowledge. This exposure was part of the funding conditions during their WIL placement prescribed by the National Treasury which is funding this WIL programme. The Municipality was therefore compelled to enrol the interns on the Municipal Finance Management Programme (MFMP) NQF 6. The National Treasury considered WIL as a logical training structure that intended to shape the interns' skills and competencies attained from tertiary

education. The skills obtained from the Municipal Finance Management Programme (MFMP) were reinforced in the workplace as part of the learning process.

2.2 BACKGROUND OF WIL IN SOUTH AFRICA

According to Wheeler (2015) the Southern African Society of Cooperative Education (SASCE) expressed its concern about the increasing trend of unemployed graduates in South Africa. The perspective of interns and employers regarding unemployment points out that interns are blaming the employers for unemployment, yet the employers point out the negative attitude of interns resulting in a reluctance to employ new graduates. SASCE suggests an increase in the implementation of WIL to prepare unemployed graduates for employment prospects. The improvement within the NQF calls for the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008 to provide legislation to effect these changes (SAQA, 2010) forcing universities to reconsider the implementation of WIL. The use of the new term 'work-integrated education' replacing WIL is influenced by the fact that the World Association for Co-operative Education (WACE) believes that education includes both teaching and learning (Brink, 2015).

There is an indication of a substantial number of unemployed graduates not in possession of critical skills desired by the employer (Oluwajodi et al., 2015). Gatzia (2012) states that unemployment is a structural problem that is due to a mismatch of skills of the unemployed group. This is caused by technological changes or global competition. To resolve the unemployment issue, one of the solutions is to replace capitalism with another economic system that will ensure a zero rate of unemployment (Gatzia, 2012). However, it is believed that interns who have realised career prospects and learning through WIL stand a better chance of being employed (Govender & Wait, 2017). South Africa needs to offer various education and training opportunities as this will result in a competitive and growing economy thus eradicating poverty. It is for this reason that South Africa has passed programmes such as internship and learnership funded by the Skills Development levy on employers. The employer's participation in such programmes is in support of the skills development of youth. WIL is for interns pursuing professional qualifications needing to obtain qualifications within this category (Joyce et al., n.d). According to Brennan and Little (1996, p. 91), workplace learning encourages the use of workplace to be a learning environment.

The guide is comprehensive and covers a conceptual framework for WIL, curriculum design and development for WIL, teaching and learning for WIL, assessment for/of WIL, partnerships for WIL, and the management of WIL. The university curricula should align teaching and learning with the course outcomes; therefore, universities should negotiate limitations of the educational theories and design appropriate curricula for pre-graduation WIL. In addition to this, assessment practices should also be aligned with the same course outcomes (Maseko, 2018).

Universities in South Africa currently use different models for work placement to fulfil WIL requirements in their programmes. The first approach is experiential learning whereby the work placement component is embedded in the National Diploma qualifications offered by universities of technologies or comprehensive universities with bilateral assessment structure. Another WIL model is carried out in the industry by a mentor who declares the student to be competent based on the fulfilment of the student's logbook requirements (Maseko, 2018). The submission of logbooks is a qualification requirement. The logbook is meant to give details of the intern's learning exposure (Taylor & Govender, 2017). Hlubi (2018) states that a logbook is recorded daily to prove tasks undertaken by interns in the workplace. The logbook is assessed by the workplace mentor and subsequently by the lecturer (Hlubi, 2018). Part of the qualification requirements still requires interns to go through a summative assessment carried out by the learning institution (Maseko, 2018). Maseko (2018) states that there are still challenges in the implementation of WIL regardless of the remarkable developments. These challenges range from suitable mentors to the placement of interns in the programme. In my view, the issue of unsuitable mentors is a serious concern as it is also raised in literature (Maseko, 2018). It could affect the extent to which mentors contribute towards the acquisition of new knowledge of WIL.

Employment in developing nations has been adversely affected by high levels of inequalities, different working conditions and weak social systems (Sharma, 2022). Sharma (2022) also points out that employment setbacks are a result of new outbreaks such as Covid-19 that created more difficulties in job seeking.

Employers have different employment categories for hiring individuals such as full-time, part-time, seasonal, temporary, leased, and contingent workers. It is noted that within this employment category, contingent workers differ in that these workers do not earn a salary

with no fringe benefits, and they have control over their daily tasks like interns. Interns are placed for a specific period to gain experience with or without a salary. The unemployment categories in the economy with different causes are frictional, structural, cyclical and seasonal. New graduates are mostly affected by frictional unemployment caused by temporary transitions resulting in looking for a new job.

Maluleke in the Quarterly Labour Force Survey Q3 of 2021 indicates that in South Africa 14,5 million people were employed, and 7,9 million were unemployed. The unemployment rate for graduates was 23,5%. In Kwa-Zulu Natal, the unemployment rate was 32,4%, and the Eastern Cape was the highest with 45,0% unemployment rate. The unemployment rate for Q4: 2021 remarkably increased by 3,0%. Out of a total of 10,2 million, 3.4 million youth aged between 15-24 years were unemployed and 43,5% were aged between 25-34 (Maluleka, 2022).

There is a great need to increase post-school education and training opportunities in the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system for the “Not in employment, education or training (NEET)” group. The decline of the unemployment rate for NEET in 2020 could be improved participation in the education and training interventions. It was noted that the contributing factors to unemployment for NEET aged were caused by loss of jobs and health issues. There is however an indication that amongst many reasons contributing to unemployment for persons aged 15-60 years who are NEET is that they are discouraged job seekers and that they are not economically active. In 2020, the two provinces Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal showed the highest NEET number. It is acknowledged that increased participation in education and training activities did not improve the NEET problem in the country. In 2021, over one-third (3.5 million) of young people aged 15–24 years were unemployed (Khuluvhe & Netshifhefhe, 2022). In the third quarter of 2022, the unemployment rate in South Africa for youth aged (15 to 24 years) was at its highest, 59.6% (Galal, 2022).

The results of van Rensburg’s (2020) research on talent shortages indicated that the government and other organisations have to increase their effort in creating more career opportunities for the youth within the accounting and finance sector. Most organisations especially the government sector apply the principle that at the end of the WIL student contract term, the employer is not obligated to offer a permanent position, which could also be adding

to unemployment. I have noticed that some government departments opt to absorb interns that they have developed as this assists in the furtherance of projects.

2.3 KEY ROLE PLAYERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WIL PROGRAMME

The successful implementation of the WIL programme is dependent on the role and responsibilities of each stakeholder involved. The South African higher education system has a responsibility to offer career-orientated education in order for interns to gain entry into the workplace through participating in WIL (Winberg et al., 2011). This section discusses who and how each stakeholder plays its role to fulfil the WIL programme goals. I have realised that WIL responsibilities do not only depend on the students, employers and higher learning institutions but on other influential stakeholders as well, such as SETAs and other government entities supporting the Training and Skills development initiatives such as WIL in this instance. Therefore, WIL is a jointly monitored programme supervised by the education institution, employer (mentor) and the student.

2.3.1 Students

According to Blom (2014), the intern's role is to ensure that they use the place of employment as a place of learning. Interns are therefore expected to adhere to certain conditions or play an active role to fulfil their responsibilities such as adhering to the employer's contractual WIL obligations, submitting to the immediate supervisor or mentor and undertaking all work-associated tasks assigned by the supervisor. Most importantly, their accountability is vital and acting professionally is a must (Blom, 2014). Du Plessis (2015) highlights that interns need to apply knowledge and skills acquired from the institution. Students need to adhere to company policies during their WIL placement in order to achieve contractual obligations. This goes with their professional etiquette. Interns ought to constantly communicate with academic supervisors as their intervention is required whenever needed.

2.3.2 Employers and Mentors

Planning and organizing the placement of interns involve the identification of a mentor to supervise interns and planning the implementation of the WIL programme in line with what interns need to achieve at the end of the programme. The role of the mentor is key in the

programme considering their task of mentoring and job shadowing (Taylor & Govender, 2017). Rony et al., (2019) state that job shadowing enables interns to better understand the tasks undertaken. However, Taylor and Govender (2017) further indicated that there have also been reports of poor mentoring due to under-preparedness of supervisors. Most importantly, Ngwane (2015) adds that amongst many other critical roles mentors ought to induct interns into the WIL programme and develop appropriate assessments to ensure the maintenance of high standards.

According to National Treasury (2014), besides allocating a mentor, the employer needs to have a programme organizer who will manage the WIL programme and keep records of training undertaken by students. Spowart (2012) expresses a need for the employer to integrate theory with workplace practicals ensuring relevance to what interns learn during their WIL placement. Bezuidenhout (2015) also states that the role of a mentor includes the development of generic graduate skills, training interns to apply knowledge and skills in practice, leading and motivating. Thus Bezuidenhout (2015) further stresses the importance of providing interns with learning that is structured as he believes that WIL is about exposing interns to workplace tasks that are relevant to their education for their understanding. He also states that this develops interns thus making them ready for employment. Imperatively, the employer must guarantee the intern's safety in the workplace (Blom, 2014). Professional development is also one of the critical areas forming part of the WIL programme thus emphasizing the need for mentors to ensure that WIL happens under strict supervision. The mentor's supervision requires that they identify where interns lack in order to close the gaps identified and then reassess them. Such gaps should be discussed during feedback sessions. Interns are responsible for their own learning hence they are capacitated to also evaluate themselves (du Plessis, 2015).

2.3.3 Other Stakeholders

In South Africa, the following public institutions referred to as traditional, technical, and comprehensive universities offer undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral degrees. Different learning institutions offer different qualifications at different levels. Traditional universities offer more theoretical-based training whereas technical (universities of

technologies) offer vocational-orientated training and comprehensive universities offer qualifications offered by both technical and traditional.

The WIL model requires the Higher Education institution and the labour market to collectively design programmes that would assist the labour market to close the workforce skills gaps. Hlubi (2018) states that the White Paper suggests that universities need to partner with companies and training providers to promote workplace training. Universities ought to align roles with changing needs of the global economy thus also demanding that they develop the intern's generic skills through WIL. According to Msukwini (2017), WIL management depends on the type of learning institution, and different qualification types at different levels. Many universities e.g. comprehensive and UoTs focus on applied discipline or career-focused programmes.

WIL applies to some general degrees that the universities offer like BA or BSc. The exit, cross-field outcomes and graduate attributes determine the WIL modality appropriate for each level (Winberg et al., 2011). The TVET colleges prepare interns for the workplace therefore WIL must be incorporated into the curricula of NC(V) and N4-6 programmes. It is however noted that TVET colleges have different requirements for WIL interns who wish to upgrade from N6 qualification to a National Diploma. Interns may need the workplace before or after the theoretical component of their qualification (SSACI, 2013).

The implementation of the WIL programme involves the student, the employer, the educational institution's academic team and the cooperative education department. The Cooperative Education Department is part of the higher learning institutions that prepares interns for the workplace as they possess the essential skills needed by the workplace (Brink, 2015). According to Msukwini (2017), Co-op Practitioners are lecturers that play an administrative and lecturing role.

The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA), the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and the National Treasury working closely with LGSETA support municipalities with most Training and Skills Development related interventions including WIL. The National Treasury is the external funder of the WIL programme for this study. The National Treasury's role in this WIL programme is to make funds available to cater for stipends and training, provide programme guidelines for the

Municipality's adherence, monitoring, support, and guide the implementation of this WIL programme in all municipalities across South Africa (National Treasury, 2004). The role of professional bodies is acknowledged for their involvement in providing training and development programmes to professionals within the accounting field. WIL interns are included in these development programmes. The professional bodies identify specific competencies that the accounting interns require like routine skills, analytic and design skills, appreciation skills, personal skills, and interpersonal skills. These cover the development of the intern's cognitive and behavioural skills (Abeysekera, 2006). The role of SETAs in the different sectors includes promoting learning programmes and partnering with workplaces to offer practical work experience to interns (Department of Labour, 2019).

2.4 WIL IMPLEMENTATION BENEFITS

The higher learning institutions took an initiative to equip interns with comprehensive and fundamental skills for interns to learn from the industry enabling them to understand workplace accountabilities. Placing interns in the WIL is beneficial to both the student and the employer. WIL placement's objective is to provide interns with an opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills needed in the workplace (SSACI, 2013). WIL is merely meant to prepare interns for the workplace experience (Winberg et al., 2011). This section, therefore, seeks to discuss the benefits of WIL to the various parties.

2.4.1 Interns

Amongst the many benefits of participating in the WIL programme are professional growth and personal development (CHE, 2011). Interns also gain real-life experiences mainly because they can make meaning of the theoretical and practical aspects as they are able to find a link between both aspects of learning. Apart from developing practical skills like problem-solving skills, and communication, the intern's maturity growth and self-confidence are noticeable (Ngwane, 2015). The intern's benefits of participating in WIL are not only limited to what they obtained and what they were able to do but they also indicate the conducive environment for WIL, the character of colleagues they work with during the WIL term, the organisational goals and structure (Govender & Wait, 2017). Bezuidenhout (2015) believes that students should maintain professionalism and being punctual is one of the expectations. Loyalty and fulfilling their contractual obligations until completion are also

crucial. Interns are expected to keep in contact with the learning institution and their workplace supervisor in order to intervene when they encounter certain challenges in the workplace. Interns receive on-the-job training thus increasing opportunities to enter the job market. They also earn a monthly stipend for the duration of the contract determined by the employer (Bezuidenhout, 2015). Students placed in the WIL programme can confirm their career choice thus also improving their self-confidence and their maturity levels develop. Interns can keep a record of experience gained for future employment opportunities and this increases their employability chances (Brink, 2014). Winberg et al. (2011) believe that interns' participation in WIL benefits them academically as their performance improves, they are able to work as a team coupled with co-operation while increasing employability chances and most importantly WIL makes them understand their career better.

2.4.2 Employer

The employer gets tax rebates from the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) for capacitating staff in areas most necessary for the company's growth. This is one opportunity for employers to give back to the community. Hlubi (2018) believes that interns implement innovative concepts in the workplace thus enabling the employer to achieve company goals. Interns' WIL placement in the workplace is complementary and does not result in the replacement of permanent staff (Joyce et al., n.d). WIL implementation saves employer recruitment costs as readily available groups of interns are placed through the WIL programme at a low cost to the company (Abeysekera, 2006). Students' placement in the workplace can be less costly as the employer can access grant funding from a relevant SETA to pay the intern's stipend (Hlubi, 2018).

In conclusion, WIL is defined as one of the key concepts providing interns with hands-on experience i.e., interns see their subject area in practice. The inclusion of the WIL component as part of the qualification complies with legislation, the South African Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) gazetted in 2007. A collaborated effort in implementing WIL in SA by various role players is critical.

2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study used Kolb's experiential learning theory to explore the effectiveness of learning through WIL. Many authors have expressed their understanding of experiential learning based on their individual backgrounds, observations, and experiences.

The selection of a theoretical framework is critical in guiding the study process, particularly in research methods and data analysis. It provides a means of analysing the study by connecting the framework concepts with the research questions (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). In this study, careful consideration was given to choosing a theoretical framework as a guide for exploring the research questions and interpreting the findings. This section presents the theoretical framework used in this study and discusses its origin and how it relates to how interns learn. The study utilised Kolb's experiential learning theory to investigate the effectiveness of learning through WIL. While various authors have offered their interpretations of experiential learning based on their unique backgrounds, observations, and experiences, this theory was deemed the most suitable for this study.

McLeod (2017) states that learning is a process through which knowledge is established through the transformation of experience. Kolb's theory indicates that learning takes place in four stages that cannot be separated as they are equally important. Experiential learning is not adequate as part of learning but failure to think critically about the experience makes learning from the experience and reflection impossible. The achievement of all four learning stages of the learning cycle enables learning and knowledge transfer to take place (McLeod, 2017). The history of Experiential Learning theory provides details about what applied at the time of theory development and how experiential learning relates to other theories of learning. Stirling et al. (2016) state that during the 1590s-1650s Rene Descartes's focus was on reasoning rather than experience and during 1910s-1940s John Dewey questioned the philosophical approach of reasoning and rather replaced it with the term experience. During the 1940s-1950s, Kurt Lewin believed that experience is very important to learning. Subsequently, Jean Piaget in the 1970s developed a cognitive development model that emphasised that learning is a collaboration of what the student knows and their personal experiences (Kolb, 1984). To achieve deep learning, it is essential to practice new behaviours and skills, receive feedback, realise consequences of new behaviour patterns, and then integrate new skills into our way of thinking and behaving (Gibbs, 1988). Peter Jarvis

proposed a different Existential Learning Model that suggests different ways of learning; however, the model is complex and does not communicate the ways of learning effectively (Steenkamp, 2009). Emancipatory learning includes interns examining what brought them to the point of examining and questioning the positions, values and/or power of not only themselves, but also of their groups or societies (Freire, 1970). Transformative learning is an example of emancipatory learning that focuses on freedom from personal rather than societal constraints (Thompson, 2000).

In 1980, Kolb decided to lay out a step-by-step approach to learning through experience. His approach realised the acquisition of knowledge links with the transformation of one's personal experience. Kolb established his theory based on the following principles that inform the learning cycle. These principles inform us that:

- Learning is a process – Intern's acquisition of theoretical skills and knowledge for further application in a workplace setting through participation in WIL.
- Learning is grounded in experience – Collaboration of what the learner knows and personal experience at the learner's suitable pace.
- Learning is a holistic process of adaptation – Exposing interns to problem-solving situations and such situations may require exercising innovative ways.
- Learning occurs when an individual interacts with his or her environment – learning in a real work setting.
- Knowledge is created through learning – Interns taking responsibility for their own learning.

Kolb's theory outlines a process that guides how an individual learns through experiential learning. According to Kolb (1984), knowledge is formed through the transformation of experience which is illustrated in his learning cycle that involves four stages, **concrete experience** (encounter of new experience), **reflective observations** (reflection of experience based on personal encounters), **abstract conceptualisation** (new ideas are formed based on the reflection of the abstract information) and **active experimentation** (application of ideas to his surroundings).

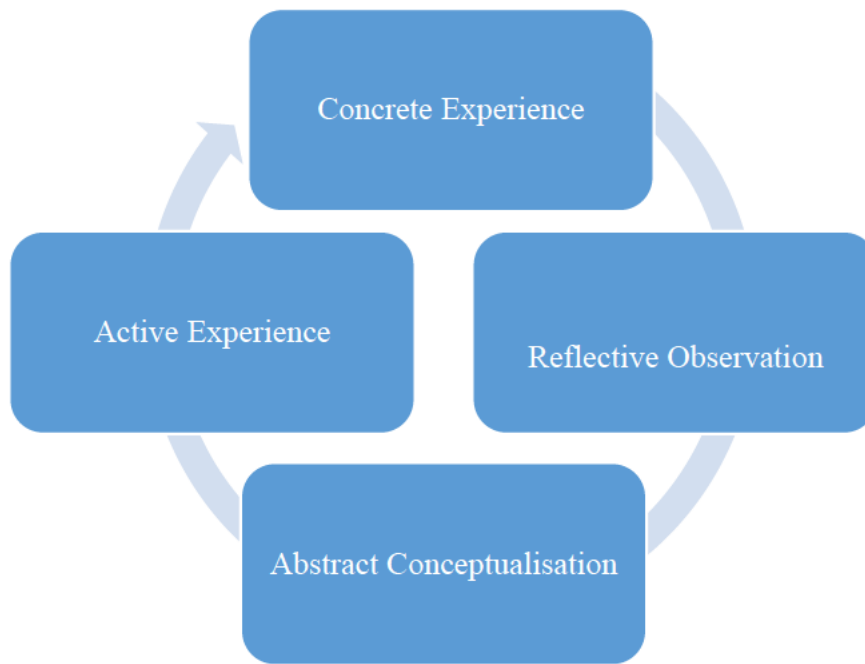


Figure 1: The Experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 2015,p.51)

According to Kolb (2015), the above experiential learning model depicts a logical link between the Concrete Experience (CE) and the Abstract Conceptualisation (AC) relates to the grasping experience style of learning and the logical link between the Active Experience (AE) and Reflective Observation (RO) relates to transforming experience style of learning. The achievement of remarkable results requires interns to be exposed to specific actions associated with each learning mode of the experiential learning cycle.

2.5.1 CONCRETE EXPERIENCE

Allison and Seaman (2017) state that a combination of actions, feelings and reflection of experiences for later application is considered an initial stage of experiential learning. Interns encounter new experiences through exposure to work presentations, team-building exercises and problem-solving (Hlubi, 2018).

Team building is understood as a process that facilitates individuals working together to attain communal goals. Team building aims at contributing towards an individual's leadership skills, joining forces in solving problems thus developing team members. The attainment of the set goals depends on the team member's commitment, congruence and each member become accountable for their actions. The five listed stages involved in the team building process enable the team to successfully fulfil their roles and achieve good results,

namely forming, storming, norming, performing and transforming (Fapohunda, 2013). The five stages play a crucial role during the development of the team are **forming** which is the first stage where members become acquainted with each other and project details. The second stage is the **storming stage** where members deliberate on their individual ideas concerning the project. This is followed by the **norming stage** where the shows that it has jelled together thus undertaking roles in order to pursue what needs to be achieved in the project. The team comes up with project resolutions and consequently results are apparent during the **performing** stage and the team finally goes separate ways at **transformation** stage having completed what was set for the project and geared up to undertake other tasks (Fapohunda, 2013). Work orientation/induction of interns in new work settings plays a significant role (Kempen, 2010).

- **Work presentation** offers interns an opportunity to reflect on their work experiences specifically on projects undertaken. Work presentations can either be done in groups or individually using PowerPoint or video. They assist interns to develop their critical thinking (Hlubi, 2018).
- **Problem solving** is a procedure that involves the identification of a problem, consideration of possibilities then making of informed decisions. Msukwini (2017) believes that problem-solving indicates growth. He further indicates that assigning students to a project allows students to demonstrate their ability to solve problems. Some employers consider problem-solving as one of the criteria required from graduates during the recruitment process. Students' exposure to tasks/projects with complex issues prepares them for problem-solving skills at the workplace. Problem-solving involves four steps: full understanding of the problem, formulating a plan, executing the plan and evaluating the solution. Experience and problem-solving have a strong relationship more so because students consider experience to be the source of knowledge that enables one to analyse and solve a problem through the use of theories and practices. Within the concrete experience contexts, students have a wide range of exposure to activities such as observations, fieldwork, and internship (Hulaikah et al., 2020).

2.5.2 Reflective observations

An intern's reflection of experience is based on their personal encounters through observations of the understandings (Kolb, 1984). An intern's reflections are evident through the following:

- **Intern's Logbook** completion is one way of reflecting an intern's reflections. The logbook is a collection of material in form of records and it is a reflection of events and processes undertaken during an intern's career exposure. The logbook encourages the student to reflect on their learning experiences soon after the completion of a task/activity. Not only does this allow reflection but equips interns with self-assessments thus allowing the student and supervisor to discuss the intern's development (Dahllof et al., 2004).
- **Brainstorming** allows interns to deliberate about the finance system currently used in the organisation based on their experience. Subsequently, results are presented calling for inputs in order to make conclusions about the system (Hulaikah et al., 2020).
- **Feedback sessions** are about discussing the intern's development facts thus making them understand and identify gaps they need to close. Affording interns with an opportunity to provide feedback goes with hesitance as they might not be willing to disclose their flaws. It is acknowledged that the intern's feedback can assist in influencing teaching. On the other hand, feedback given by the workplace supervisor provides interns with good information about their learning. According to Msukwini (2017), feedback proves effective mentoring of the WIL. During the feedback sessions, the engagement allows interns to give answers to feedback given and this helps with the reduction of tension between a student and a supervisor (Peach et al., 2014). Peach, Ruinard and Webb (2014) believe that feedback is a two-way process that involves both the student and the supervisor. Interns also get an opportunity to report the benefits of using new strategies for the fulfilment of work goals (Ching, 2014). Peach et al. (2014) suggest that an intern's self-assessment is one way that enables the intern to provide feedback which is a reflection of their experience. Pearl (2008) also indicates that an intern's self-reflection is more significant if a mentor is involved.

2.5.3 Abstract Conceptualization

An intern's new ideas are formed based on the reflection of the abstract information (Kolb, 1984). Sheidaee and Mühlow (2021) believe that generating theories is abstract and can be applied in a new context as it is not dependant on concrete experience. It involves perusing papers/ system manuals ascertaining how the system operates and what processes are involved for account reconciliations. This allows interns to integrate their experiences and reflection when evaluating the system concept. Based on the comparison of the intern's experience and

information obtained from the system manual would enable the student to draw conclusions, and as a result, real knowledge is created through this undertaking (Hulaikah et al., 2020).

2.5.4 Active Experimentation

Active experimentation refers to the intern's application of ideas to their surroundings through daily practical undertakings (Kolb, 1984). Student participation in the WIL programme gives them exposure to activities such as fieldwork, projects, and case study. WIL as a learning platform enables interns to create knowledge that they can later apply in problematic situations particularly answering a case study they have been involved in (Hulaikah et al., 2020).

Kolb emphasises that interns must achieve all four stages of the learning cycle for learning and knowledge transfer to take place. From the four learning styles that are implemented when acquiring new or building on existing knowledge, the converging learning style is appropriate to this study target as it involves problem-solving, reasoning and practice. Kolb's contribution has shifted educational responsibility from a lecturer to a student (Kelly, 1997). While Smith (2001) discusses the views of other scholars that express arguments about Kolb's model the scholar admitted that the model provides an excellent structure for planning teaching and learning activities. These were to be used to guide understanding of learning difficulties including vocational counselling. Kolb identified some key concerns about the model that:

- The process of reflection is not given enough time based on a claim that learners indicated that this process does not help.
- The model is insignificant with regard to cultural experiences/conditions.
- The model stages are not favourable in the reality of thinking due to their sequence.
- The empirical support for the model is not so strong as studies conducted to test the model are limited.

The relationship between learning processes and knowledge is awkward considering that the model does not explore the nature of knowledge thoroughly.

The following learning models drawn from the experiential learning theory are pertinent to the WIL programme as they indicate growth and are significant to the achievement of one's goals. Peter Jarvis criticises Kolb's model for not incorporating the social and interactive dimensions (Bélanger, 2011). Dewey's Model of learning defines how the learning process changes impulses and feelings in order to take meaningful actions (Kolb, 1984). Jarvis (2004) emphasises that vocational education involves much work experience applicable in a workplace setting. Experiential learning is quite a significant concept that plays a critical role in interns that participate in the WIL programme. Jarvis (2004) further considers training as a continuous process that can integrate different elements such as practical experimentation, reasoning and reflection. Piaget's cognitive development model also emphasises that learning is a collaboration of what the student knows and personal experiences (Kolb, 1984). It is noted that experiential learning is a process that allows interns to have a direct encounter through exposure to the world. The acquisition of skills and knowledge theoretically and later exposure of interns to practical situations enable learning to become new (Jarvis, 2004). Moletsane and Moloji (2015) therefore highlight the importance of the use of embedded knowledge.

It is believed that for many years effective learning happens through experience. Countries like the UK have created learning outside of the class. The continuous application of theory in an actual work environment enables interns to gain experience. It is assumed that interns inspire to take charge thus also improving their optimism in life. Experiential learning also enables interns to achieve their learning outcomes. It is also through experiential learning that interns can realise their strengths and weaknesses (Caulfield & Woods, 2013).

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented how this study links to the pre-existing literature on WIL. The chapter also discussed the theoretical framework used in this study and explored the effectiveness of learning through WIL. Discussions in this chapter indicated that the achievement of remarkable results required interns to be exposed to specific actions associated with each learning mode of the experiential learning cycle consisting of learning stages i.e. concrete experience, reflective observations, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. Introduction

Research methodology is a systematic process that includes a set of methods applied in a particular study to determine results. The analysis and description of methods make a reader to understand how a study was conducted (Igwenagu, 2016). This chapter seeks to outline, motivate and justify the choice of the research process and the data collection methods employed in this study. The discussion includes research paradigm, research design, sampling, data generation methods and data analysis used, research quality, ethical considerations and limitations. Van der Berg (2012) believes that methodology assists the researcher to respond to the research questions of the study.

3.1 Research Paradigm

This research was conducted using the interpretive paradigm of research because this paradigm seeks to understand and interpret meaning and reasons based on participants' experiences (Cohen et al., 2018). According to Thomas (2010), the interpretive paradigm is used in studies that require an individual to understand a phenomenon through meaning-orientated methods, in this case, interviews and observations. The purpose of inquiry in this case was to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon as opposed to generalising to a population, thus this paradigm is best suited due to its interpretive nature of inquiry (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). How someone else understands the phenomenon also matters within the interpretive paradigm (Tuli, 2011). The various means to interpret situations are based on the position that the interpretive paradigm believes that there is no single reality; instead, it looks at a set of truths that are historical, local and specific. Therefore, the philosophical assumption for the WIL study could indicate that there are multiple realities in that both the researcher and the participant construct their own meaning. For this study, interpretation of data is based on the meaning I constructed as a researcher based on the meaning participants make of their different experiences. As a researcher, I needed not to generalise findings (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

3.2 Research style

This study used a qualitative style as it contains qualitative data and used verbal rather than statistical analysis. This approach uses multiple methods to generate data on sensitive subjects. However, data generation is time-consuming. Qualitative research was the best approach considered in this case as it gave me an understanding of the how and why questions of the study. The qualitative style mostly depends on and allows personal contact and a rapport that is established between the researcher and the study participants. The rapport leads to in-depth interaction over a period of time (Ulin et al., 2005). Open-ended responses enable the researcher to understand the participants' viewpoints thus also allowing direct quotes to document the participants' depth of feelings and experiences. The qualitative style aided the interpretation of the participants' words thus making it possible to understand the participants' emotions and interpretation of their experiences. The style also enabled the study participants to make sense of their realities. The meaning, understanding and interpretation of data were through inductive and deductive reasoning (Yilmaz, 2013). Furthermore, the use of qualitative style made it clear why things happened the way they did with the WIL programme implementation and as a researcher, I understood the participants' actions.

3.3 Research approach

The chosen approach is a case study as it allowed the use of a variety of sources of data when exploring a particular phenomenon in depth. Case study allowed issues to be meticulously explored exposing the core features of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The case study also allowed a detailed study of an educational phenomenon creating an understanding of insight by giving rich descriptions (Rule & John, 2011). This case study enabled the researcher to generate theoretical perceptions. An advantage of the case study was the close working relationship between the researcher and the participants. The participants were able to open up when providing information that enabled the researcher to understand the participant's actions and behaviour better. A case study's disadvantage is that it is time-consuming during the data generation phase (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In-depth interviews were one of the appropriate methods considered to collect data for this case study (Rule & John, 2011). The conspicuous advantage was that case study allowed the intensive analysis which enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the situations and meaning of those involved in the WIL programme (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Furthermore, the case

study justifies the occurrence of events (Rule & John, 2011). Since the topic currently explored in this case study included individuals and groups, this research approach intensively investigated issues with the possibility to take multiple perspectives.

The use of a case study enabled me to provide a clear sense of the group and their experiences investigated in this thesis. As a researcher, I was able to include a variety of data in order to draw considerable explanations from the case (Widdowson, 2011). Based on the data collected, I was able to assess what actually happened in the WIL programme which indicated whether interns and the employer benefited from the WIL or they did not.

3.4 Sampling

The Municipality utilised an unemployment database to recruit interns from various universities. Out of the 80 WIL interns at the Municipality, the research sample comprised 12 B. Com interns, known as the Municipal Finance Management Programme (MFMP) interns, who were placed in different sub-units of the Finance Department. This group of 18-35 interns represents a significant proportion of the unemployed graduates listed in the Municipality's 2020/2021 database of 120 unemployed graduates. The sample was chosen due to its accessibility and manageability, as it was in the same building near the researcher's office. Although 12 interns were expected to participate in the study, three could not participate due to unforeseen constraints. However, this did not impact the quality of the data as sufficient data was collected. The study included 14 participants, including nine interns and five mentors. At the Municipality, section managers are responsible for mentoring interns placed in their respective sections. The study required the inclusion of these mentors as they represent the Municipality in the study. The number of interns placed across the five different sections of the Finance Department, including Supply Chain Management, Revenue, Asset, Budget, and Finance Governance, varied based on the size of each section.

The presentation of this brief profile of the participants is intended to assist the reader to follow the responses provided by participants. Participants were not referred to by their names, instead, reference was made to their departmental sections in compliance with privacy and confidentiality. The table below illustrates interns' placement locations with abbreviations and the number of interns per assigned mentor within a particular section. The Municipality

finance department is referred to as the Budget and Treasury Office (BTO) of which in this study both terms have been used interchangeably.

The distribution of interns was in accordance with the size of the sections.

SECTION NAME AND ABBREVIATION	NUMBER OF INTERNS PER MENTOR
Performance and Governance (PG)	03
Revenue	02
Supply Chain Management (SCM)	02
Asset	01
Finance department or Budget and Treasury Office (BTO) Budget	01

Table 3.1: Interns & Mentors distribution outline

These MFMP WIL interns are externally funded, whilst the other group of interns participating in the WIL programme are funded by the Municipality, therefore their placement conditions are not the same. Their WIL programme objectives are different from the other group of interns participating in the WIL programme of the Municipality. Their programme objectives are set by the funder i.e. National Treasury. The funding conditions compel the Municipality to enrol these MFMP interns in an accredited competency training programme called the Municipal Finance Management Programme (MFMP) for the acquisition of additional knowledge and finance-related skills. One of the mandatory conditions is that interns cannot resign upon completion of the training programme, and they have to serve the same period of the training offered to them. It is also mandatory that they participate in the WIL programme for two years.

The study participants were selected through convenience sampling which allowed the selection of suitable participants who would provide valuable information for the study (Saldana, 2011). The MFMP interns were the only largest number of the 2020/2021 WIL interns placed in one department. Their location and the nature of the work they perform made them to be easily accessible for this study.

3.5 Data generation methods

A study conducted within the interpretivist paradigm generally uses multiple methods of data generation. I chose to initially use semi-structured interviews for the WIL interns followed by surveys to solicit information from the interns' mentors and further used written sources e.g. reports, signed agreements and logbooks to supplement information required for the study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Semi-structured interviews aided in posing ended questions by probing the participants to obtain more information or driving to specific information giving a clear response (Cohen et al., 2008). Conducting interviews allowed the collection of relevant and useful data. I believe that the trustworthiness of the study was enhanced through the use of the multi-method approach to collecting data. The recorded data were transcribed and allowed for analysis and identification of themes from the responses.

Semi-structured interviews were used as they generally allow participants to express their opinions about how they view a particular situation. Interviews allow a flexible engagement with participants in that they can be verbal (two-way communication between the researcher and the respondent); non-verbal (body language showing the emotional state like facial expression) (Cohen et al., 2008). Advantageously the study interviews are facilitated in different ways like conducting them online given the current Covid-19 era. For this study, I initially intended to conduct face-to-face interviews instead of online ones. I eventually pursued the online route due to Covid-19 alert level 3 posing tighter restrictions on gatherings. Six interviews were conducted online using WhatsApp video and conference calls as most participants worked from home. Interdepartmental visits were restricted when I conducted interviews thus preventing face-to-face interviews. The easing of Covid-19 restrictions made it possible to conduct face-to-face interviews for the remaining three interviews. All the face-to-face interviews were undertaken cautiously in compliance with the Covid-19 protocols. Each interview lasted about an hour at times that interns and I agreed upon. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in a private and conducive venue within the Municipality to avoid distractions. The choice of venue intended to remove a student from their normal setting yet done in a relaxed environment. Follow-up interviews to collect supplementary information were conducted during working hours at times that the interns' mentors/managers approved. Management granted interns permission to attend meetings arranged for this study because of the potential benefits to the organisation. Too much probing can be harmful as it may be

unkind to the participant, therefore as a researcher I needed to be very vigilant at the time of interviews (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

This study also employed a questionnaire-based survey to acquire information from the five interns' mentors. Surveying involves data generation using a questionnaire. I initially, intended to use closed-ended questionnaires for the interns' mentors, however, the responses I obtained from the interns required me to change the type of questionnaire questions from closed-ended to Likert scale questions. The participants were requested to express their views by choosing one point from the Likert scale:

- Not at all
- A little
- Moderately to considerable
- To a very large extent

The chosen option from the Likert scale was expanded by a brief narrative description from mentors which allowed the researcher to gain a better insight into the views that the mentors expressed. Likert scale is commonly used when investigating opinions/perceptions. Data collection is easy and quick. It permits the use of other methods like interviews and other methods (Tomoko & Beglar, 2014). Joshi et al. 2015 states that Likert scale survey questionnaire is ideally utilised to measure an individual's attitude. The effectiveness of the survey depends on its proper use (Willis & Gonzalez, 1998). In terms of the data collection chosen i.e., the survey questionnaire did allow broad views of the participants as it only focused on issues of immediate importance to the current study (Pandey & Pandey, 2015).

The questionnaires were emailed to each mentor who was given a date to submit responses to the researcher. All mentors were able to provide adequate information. Conducting a survey allowed the generation of descriptive qualitative data. It is considered an economical, reliable and efficient method to generate data. The researcher used a standardised questionnaire form for all participants. However, it must be noted that a survey can be inflexible in terms of providing in-depth responses. Researchers choose to use a survey to generate data because it is convenient to gather data at a low cost. The questionnaire contained closed-ended questions that enabled quick and easy collection of pertinent information to the WIL programme. Mentors completed the survey questionnaire at their convenience as oppose to interviews

because it is not time consuming. Completed surveys could be completed and submitted within a short space of time. These types of questions allow easy data analysis.

Taking into account the COVID-19 situation, the questionnaires were emailed to all mentors which they emailed back fully completed (Cohen et al., 2008). Written sources e.g. reports, signed agreements and logbooks containing key pertinent information were options to consider in collecting supplementary information that would be useful for the study (Saldana, 2011). This method is considered in addition to other data generation methods such as interviews and surveys or observations (Rule & John, 2011). Other researchers choose to start with the documentary analysis in order to get a better understanding of the case to be studied. For this study, supplementary data were no longer necessary because the other data generation methods provided sufficient information.

3.6 Data analysis methods

Data analysis is a process of making meaning with data that has been generated for the research study. Analysis in the research study followed a particular set of procedures.

The processing of qualitative data during data analysis followed a step-by-step process. Upon completing the interviews and surveys, I went through the survey questionnaires and listened to the interviews in order to transcribe data. The main task that was key to the data analysis process was to identify themes from the interview transcripts. The data analysis involved the following steps;

Organising data involved creating a template to present the transcribed data which was organised to show each participant's responses. I then checked and cleaned the data.

Getting familiar with data involved reading data repeatedly and then identifying relevant information that I colour coded thus coming up with themes. I also reduced data by extracting significant information. I, therefore, placed the data under different themes.

Choosing rich information involved analysing the content of data in line with the research questions. This required that I presented direct quotes under relevant themes. This process enabled me to interpret and draw conclusions.

In this study, I chose an analysis method that is open-ended and exploratory to assist me to analyse the data I received from interviews and surveys. Thematic analysis was one of the best choices as it allows the researcher to uncover themes in the data by looking at similarities and relationships in the data. The use of themes assists in summarising data that aids the researcher to answer research questions (Crosley, 2021). Thematic analysis was followed by deductive reasoning which enabled gazing through the patterns and connections via the theoretical framework. The deductive analysis enabled the discussion of the links between theory and phenomenon under study using the theoretical framework. The approach must be able to respond to the research purpose (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). In this study, the presentation of findings was narrative and I used tables as explained by Bertram & Christiansen (2014).

The deductive analysis was done by considering the Experiential Learning Theory, which was the theoretical framework for this study, that facilitated the analysis of the findings by exploring the framework concepts i.e. Kolb's (1984) four experiential learning stages in the light of my research questions. A summary of Kolb's four learning stages is: concrete experience (encounter new experiences), reflective observations (reflection of experience based on personal encounters), abstract conceptualisation (new ideas are formed based on the reflection of the abstract information) and active experimentation (application of ideas to his surroundings).

3.7 Ethical considerations

This study employed interviews that generally involved people, therefore, tension was possible in the process of maintaining participants' rights, privacy and trust. However, harm was avoided by ensuring that ethical principles were adhered to. The following ethical principles were applied in this study: autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice. Attaining informed consent was imperative, as it assures autonomy and it also affirms trust between the participants and the researcher. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured in this study as it maintained the trust of the participants. According to Thomas (2010), the researcher must swear not to use the participants' names in any reporting. A situation that will result in participants getting harmed (psychologically) due to participation in the study should be avoided at all costs in ensuring adherence to the non-maleficence principle. I used

pseudonyms in the study considering sensitive information that could be disclosed by the participant (Thomas, 2010). The participants were advised of the good intentions of the study thus seeking consent from each participant in order to adhere to the beneficence principle. All participants were treated equally in terms of their participation to ensure justice (Orb et al., 2000). Permission to conduct the study was sought from the Municipality and I also sought informed consent from all the participants to interview interns and conduct a survey (mentors). Human dignity was key to this study therefore it was imperative to maintain it.

3.8 Research Quality

I believe that trustworthiness is an overall concept of quality in a qualitative study. When assessing qualitative data, the criteria consisting of four components are discussed below. Triangulation is also discussed considering that in the study the researcher used more than one data collection method.

a) Credibility

Issues of trustworthiness and credibility are key to qualitative research. Credibility indicates the degree of trusting the data as believable. As a researcher, it is important to establish whether the information is complete and true. It is important to evaluate it therefore it needs to be enhanced during data generation and data analysis. To enhance the credibility of my study, I had to ensure that my data were recorded accurately and clearly. I verified the data that I collected from the participants by getting participants to confirm data on the transcript (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

b) Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree to which the results presented in the study correlate with data attained from participants. The same data may be used by another researcher but according to confirmability, the researcher's results must be within the context of the information obtained from the participants. Confirmability allows the participants to confirm the validity of the data collected during interviews hence for this study the participants had an opportunity to verify the accuracy of information presented in the transcript (Steenkamp, 2009).

c) Dependability

A researcher assesses dependability also known as consistency by making sure that the study adheres to the qualitative procedures. For this study, I had to account for deviations that occurred during the research process by justifying my activities' dependability. The findings of this study are underpinned by a literature review to prove dependability (Steenkamp, 2009).

d) Transferability

The extent to which the results of qualitative research can be generalised or transferred to other settings refers to transferability. As a researcher, I had to ensure adherence to transferability by enhancing it through provision of details about the research methods, assumptions underlying the study and the study context. Therefore, it is believed that the researcher should provide a detailed and rich description of the setting of the study. In this study, I provided enough data to judge the applicability of the research findings to other settings (Thomas, 2010).

e) Triangulation

This is a process to ensure quality and overcome issues of bias and validity in a qualitative study (Rule & John, 2011). Thomas (2010) states that triangulation emerges from an ethical need to confirm the validity of the developments in the case study. The various sources referred to in this process involve methods like interviews, surveys and document analysis as these apply to this study (Rule & John, 2011). In this study, triangulation assisted in providing a broad understanding of the phenomenon studied thus establishing confidence in the findings of this study (Heale & Forbes, 2013).

3.9 Research limitations

Limitations affected this study which as a researcher I had little or no control over. The intake of the WIL programme participants I intended researching is bi-annual i.e. participants are placed in the programme for a 2-year period. My study is a small-scale study, therefore, I only looked at a single cycle i.e. the interns placed in Feb 2020 – Jan 2022. I, therefore, needed to be cautious of the study claims and avoid generalising based on other cycles not fitting in this period. Impromptu work commitments interrupted interviews with some interns which resulted in some interns losing interest in continuing with the interviews. In addition to this

challenge, some interns' unwillingness to participate was due to work and private commitments. This impacted negatively on this study considering that only a limited number of interns are placed in this programme as their placement is subject to a limited budget allocated for two years of the implementing the programme.

Being an official in the Municipality could be intimidating to the participants, and as a result, some were reluctant to participate and initially were not free to respond but improved during the course of the interview. I tried to mitigate this by explaining the study's intention, which was to explore how the programme is beneficial to both the interns and the employer. The trust issue in this aspect of this study had to be established by ensuring that the research document clearly explains a detailed process of creating, shaping and making a meaningful link in relation to the phenomena.

Due to the Covid-19 situation, the researcher had to budget for alternative ways of conducting interviews. For interns that were not comfortable with face-to-face interviews, I had to fund their online methods of communication which negatively impacted my budget. In some instances, follow-up sessions were done telephonically thus incurring additional costs that exceeded the budget.

Considering that there is a possibility of multiple interpretations of the current situation therefore as a researcher, I need to evaluate the degree to which the findings of the study apply to new situations i.e. the current WIL cycle being studied to avoid generalising.

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented an outline of the research process and the data collection methods used in this study. The discussion covered: research paradigm, research design, sampling, data generation methods and data analysis used, research quality, ethical considerations, and limitations. The next chapter will present the findings, and how data analysis was conducted followed by the discussion.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4. Introduction

The study seeks to explore the benefits of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) for the employer and B. Com interns placed at a municipality. The study focused on exploring the perceptions of interns of the WIL experience in the Municipality, seeking an understanding of and how the Municipality enables interns to acquire qualification-relevant experience. The study also explores the extent to which mentors contributed towards the acquisition of new knowledge and their understanding of WIL. The study was conducted at the Municipality offices where all 14 participants i.e., nine interns and five mentors were easily accessible. The presentation of findings will also be supported by direct quotations from the participants.

4.1 Background

The presentation of findings is based on the data collected using the qualitative research style that provided responses to the how and why questions of this study. This style also allowed an in-depth interaction between the researcher and the participants (Ulin et al., 2005). As indicated in previous chapters, the research was conducted within an interpretive paradigm with the idea to examine the meaningful and symbolic content of data by gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). I used semi-structured interviews for the interns and a questionnaire for the mentors. I initially planned to further obtain supplementary information from written sources, programme guidelines and logbooks, however, the interviews and surveys conducted provided sufficient information.

In terms of the qualitative approach used to conduct the study, an interview schedule was prepared in order to conduct semi-structured interviews for the interns aimed at collecting descriptive information. The intention was to allow interns to express their opinions about the WIL programme. Generally, with interviews, the engagement with participants is verbal and non-verbal (Cohen et al., 2008). Interns were able to verbally express their experiences and thus expressed their emotions in various ways that were quite interesting to observe. The tone of voice depicted enthusiasm, professionalism and humour. Interns were free to express themselves hence their inputs sounded genuine. As indicated in Chapter 3, some interviews

were conducted online, and at times there were some disruptions during video call interviews due to network issues but they did not compromise the flow of interviews. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in the Finance Department boardroom which was located away from the participants' offices. This chosen interview venue was conducive because of its location and set-up.

4.2 Data presentation

The data will be presented in two ways using the research questions with themes that guide the presentation of findings from the inductive analysis process. This is followed by the deductive process where data are looked at and presented under each experiential learning stage of the theoretical framework. This allows a better way to effectively present responses. The presentation of findings in this chapter will be structured as follows, starting with the inductive process: Perceptions of interns towards WIL and perceptions of mentors towards the students' experience; how the Municipality enables interns to acquire relevant experience related to their qualification; and the extent to which mentors contribute towards the acquisition of new knowledge and their understanding of WIL. The presentation is followed by the findings and theorisation from the deductive process, which is guided by the theoretical framework (Experiential Learning). This part of the chapter is structured according to the stages of Experiential Learning Theory, as follows: Concrete experience, Reflective observations, Abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. This is followed by a discussion of the findings, a summary of the chapter and a conclusion.

4.3 Findings

This chapter will present data collected from nine interns who participated in the Municipality WIL programme. Although three interns did not participate in the study, the remaining nine provided rich and sufficient data, indicating that their non-participation did not affect the quantity and quality of data collected. Additionally, this chapter includes data obtained from survey questionnaires completed by the five mentors who supervised the participating interns.

4.4 Perceptions of interns towards WIL and perceptions of mentors towards the interns' experiences

The responses of interns and mentors were an expression of perceptions and observations during WIL placement at the Municipality. Their responses are captured under the following themes: placement; professional development; managing daily tasks; monitoring and feedback.

4.4.1 Placement

As indicated in the previous chapter (research methodology) in Section 3.4, a total of 12 MFMP interns were placed within various sub-units of the Finance Department at the Municipality stated above in Table 4.1. Their placement was in accordance with the size and workload of each section.

In terms of the appropriate placement of interns, eight interns were happy that they were appropriately placed because their exposure was in line with their qualifications and the placement allowed the application of what they learnt at the university. All interns felt that their exposure was limited, however, they were still able to put their qualification skills to good use. Of the nine interns, one was not appropriately placed but he indicated that he had learnt a lot from the section he was placed in. This one student with a B. Com in Supply Chain Management (SCM) qualification accepted his placement in the Asset department as he felt that his knowledge expanded and that he acquired additional skills that were not part of his qualification. Four mentors made it clear that interns displayed great commitment to what they were tasked to do and they had great determination to finish tasks allocated to them. Out of the four mentors, one mentor from SCM stated, "*bakhuthele bona*", which translates to "they are industrious". A mentor from the Budget section felt that interns demonstrated commitment regardless of the bad influence of the permanent staff that demoralised them in most instances.

All nine interns expressed excitement about being part of the WIL programme in the Finance department considering that it is different from the Municipality's customary WIL programme. All interns acknowledged that this Municipal Finance Management (MFM) WIL programme is well-structured, and it has greater learning opportunities than the other WIL programmes implemented in other Municipal Business Units. The three interns from the

Performance and Governance (PG) section reported that it was a hectic but good and gainful two years' experience. The three interns also felt that their knowledge and skills could have been more extensive if their placement was extended to all Finance functions. One student further stated, "I wish the Municipality would consider an extension of our contract for a further year". The mentor from SCM and PG stated that the programme guidelines were clear for the implementation of the programme and seven interns concurred with the mentors adding a comment stating that, "the programme would have been perfect if all sections followed the programme guidelines precisely". All mentors also indicated that they were aware of the Finance WIL programme guidelines to adhere to, however, they could not all fully comply with them. They stated that there are specific departmental operational deliverables that their performance is measured against on a monthly and quarterly basis, therefore, they were compelled to focus on making sure that they achieve them while avoiding deviation. Only two sections i.e. PG and SCM managed to implement the WIL programme as per the guidelines and the Municipal operational plan. One mentor from these two sections stated that, "it is imperative that we expose the interns to both plans in order to achieve the objectives." One mentor added by saying "we had to make it possible that interns are able to complete logbooks which serves as a Portfolio of Evidence (PoE), therefore, as mentors we had to be more vigilant with the WIL intern's performance as the operational plan areas had to be assessed as well".

Only interns from SCM and Revenue reported that they rotated within their sections which gave them sufficient exposure. However, they stated that rotating them within the entire Finance Department would have added more value to their placement for broader exposure. Interns from SCM, PG and Budget indicated that they were lucky to attend the departmental meetings where the Finance Department's key business matters were discussed at great length thus enlightening interns more and making them understand the dynamics of the entire Finance Department better.

4.4.2 Professional Growth

Eight interns stated that their professional growth was a result of appropriate placement. They added that the WIL programme created a platform for the practical application of the theoretical knowledge from the B. Com degree which they believe contributed to their development. All mentors reported that the interns demonstrated commitment to their

professional development to a very large extent due to their inquisitiveness to acquire relevant information and their acceptance of training opportunities. One mentor mentioned that this group of interns funded their own studies since the Municipality's Training and Development policy excludes all contract employees from Municipal-funded training programmes offered. The mentor highlighted the importance of capacitating this group of interns which is in compliance with their WIL programme conditions. It emerged that all mentors identified and included interns in most information-sharing internal or external training workshops that were offered at no charge to the participants. All interns acknowledged this by stating that participating in workshops and information-sharing sessions added great value to their development therefore interns expressed their willingness to attend more training programmes that seek to expand their knowledge. The mentor from SCM and Revenue also reported that interns were free to express their determination to learn more hence they tried to rotate them within the sections but this was not possible with some sections due to the size of the sections and the limited scope of work. All nine interns acknowledged that getting involved in most departmental activities contributed to their growth. All interns indicated that what they studied at the university and the actual work undertaken in the workplace is different. Therefore, they reported that the WIL programme assisted in closing gaps that mentors and interns identified. All interns emphasised that it is not just about the technicality of doing the work, but they also learnt work about the ethos that are fundamental to making them productive. One student reported that "I have learnt to be proactive, and this helped me to manage and handle work pressure".

It emerged that as much as the Municipality does not include interns in any of the accredited training programmes, however, interns expressed gratitude for being enrolled in the Municipal Finance Management Programme (MFMP) which formed part of the WIL programme and attendance was compulsory. Interns stated that attending this programme expanded their knowledge, which to a large extent would better equip them to handle management positions when they become available. It emerged that some interns believed that the acquisition of significant skills made them to be trusted with bigger roles in their sections. Four mentors reported that professional development formed part of their key performance indicators in their scorecards, therefore, they were driven by the interns' commitment to learning. They supported interns through their learning journey and thus observed positive results after training.

Some interns reported that they were given projects to plan, and implement and some were champions of new and old programmes. One student from SCM stated, “I learnt a lot from heading the financial year-end closing of purchase orders task that I had to plan its implementation, monitor and evaluate”. Interestingly, one student acknowledged his professional growth during his WIL placement, however, he indicated that he did not acquire significant skills during this period. He said, “I just applied what I learnt from the university”. All mentors said they believe that giving interns access to all relevant training is a necessity as this equips interns, thus increasing their competency levels. Mentors from Revenue stated that interns always welcomed on-the-job training as it developed their daily tasks. Mentors indicated that the intern’s participation in training was noted to a very large extent as their attendance at any on-the-job training was always 100%. Both interns and mentors emphasised the importance of professional registration with a relevant professional body within the accounting field as part of their professional growth.

4.4.3 Managing daily tasks

All interns from SCM and PG sections reported that they planned their work ahead in order to achieve their WIL programme objectives and departmental operational plans that complimented each other. These interns from the abovementioned sections drew monthly, weekly and daily plans allocating what needed to be done and completed. It emerged that interns monitored themselves as they understand the importance of achieving what they had planned. Four mentors indicated that interns showed their resilience and inner strength to a very large extent by the way they managed to resolve work-related issues that they encountered. One mentor reported that in his section i.e. SCM interns worked independently and also believed that interns' inner strength needs to be discovered and encouraged through positive feedback and motivation. One student from the Budget section reported that he categorised tasks which he undertook in the order of importance. One student from the Asset section planned work for each day upon completion of a day’s work. Two interns from the Revenue section tackled any task given at the time and pointed out that “the nature of work we do at the Revenue section does not necessarily require prior planning”.

All mentors reported that professionalism and ethics are great factors that contributed to the way that each student managed their tasks successfully and resolved problems. One mentor

indicated that he believed that professional standards are instilled in the environment that the interns were placed in and depend on the individual's personality. Eight intern sections were well-resourced because it is imperative for the Finance department to strictly meet deadlines. One student from Asset indicated that she was granted permission to utilise her mentor's resources, such as the laptop, projector and telephone whenever he was away. Interns from the Revenue section indicated that the lack of authority delays service delivery considering that they deal with customers that need instant help. One of the interns stated that "there are problems that they can solve over the counter without an intervention of an official with authority". One mentor indicated that he believed that since there is no rule book on professional standards, what is ethical to one is not to another so interns demonstrated this very well but there is always room for improvement and more coaching is required.

All mentors reported that Municipal employees struggle to maintain high professional standards and ethical practice thus passing on this behaviour to students. This generally affects how staff manage their tasks and the level of resolving a problem is relatively low, however, they noted that this group of interns often presented problems to them with solutions. According to mentors, this behaviour was proof of the interns' professional growth. The SCM mentor noticed that her interns avoided unethical behaviour as all interns worked towards becoming permanent employees someday. The mentor from PG mentioned that "I am confident that these interns are able to manage their daily tasks because of the conduct they demonstrated". All mentors acknowledged that most interns planned for their daily, weekly and monthly tasks hence they were open-minded about whatever was thrown at them hence they were able to manage their tasks well. All mentors indicated that all they did was support the intern's plans and ensured the section's goals and targets were achieved and most importantly the student achieve their learning goals.

It appears that the interns understood that efficiency is key in the Finance departments hence they planned for their undertakings which minimises errors that could delay business processes. Interns' professional behaviour and well-resourced sections contributed towards the achievement of goals.

4.4.4 Mentoring

All interns expressed gratitude for being mentored by competent mentors. Interns reported that most mentors used a similar mentoring approach i.e. work delegation, provision of on-the-job training where necessary, guidance and support and provision of feedback. It emerged that interns were supervised the same way as the permanent staff but it was imperative for interns to be given feedback. Out of the five mentors, two developed their own mentoring plan which was in accordance with the section's operational plans which was supplementary to the WIL programme guidelines. All five mentors reported that the Finance Department Management and the Skills Development (SD) Unit who are the custodians of the WIL programme did not involve them in the planning for this WIL programme prior to the placement of students. One mentor said, "the SD unit should have fully engaged them as mentors to mutually agree upon a well-structured and uniform programme that would be in line with existing programme guidelines". One mentor stated that they should have been trained in their role as mentors as he felt that there is a distinction between normal supervision of staff and mentoring of interns for the WIL programme in particular. All interns reported being content and comfortable with any plan implemented by mentors because of their guidance and support. Mentors indicated that they mentored interns uniquely based on the intern's capabilities even though they all possessed the same qualification.

One mentor highlighted that even though he did not follow the programme guidelines but they ensured that they transferred necessary and relevant skills and knowledge. All interns reported that mentors had expertise based on the quality advice they received from them. Such quality advice was proof that mentors are well-experienced in their field of work. One student from SCM said that "we complied with the assessment plans because we understood that mentors are accountable for their section's performance". Five interns from the two sections i.e. PG and SCM reported that their mentors assessed and signed their logbooks even though other mentors from other sections did not do this for their students. Two mentors indicated that without close supervision, a mentor would not pick up what requires serious attention from the student to prevent damage. Two interns from Revenue were happy with how their mentors implemented the programme in terms of how they were supervised and how mentors conducted feedback sessions. One mentor from the Budget section reported that he does not believe in formal assessments and giving feedback instead he preferred doing observations and addressing pertinent issues on the spot. All interns reported that mentors ensured that

interns were also exposed to other significant areas like taking minutes in meetings even though these did not form part of the programme guideline content. One mentor indicated that as part of mentoring, it was their responsibility to create opportunities for interns to also interact with all levels of Finance management as this expanded the intern's exposure, allowing for further empowerment and feedback. Interns reported that the mentor's conduct was professional and exemplary to them. Interns stated that mentors strictly monitored them and gave them continuous support because the Finance Department regularly produces internal and external statutory progress reports which form part of their performance assessment. One student from the PG section said "achievement of key performance areas is key in the Finance department and over-achievement is deemed a bonus which was very motivational to us as students. The over-achievement was as a result of our mentor's continuous support and guidance".

Interns indicated that they were effectively mentored as most mentors were able to identify gaps during the execution of tasks and further provided guidance and support in order to close those gaps identified. One student stated that "if it was not about the practical solutions that my mentor provided and the continuous guidance I would have pulled out from the WIL programme due to the pressure and demands of the department". Most interns reported that the mentor's supervision was beyond the scope of their key performance areas. One student said, "mentors mentored us with passion as some of them went out of their way to ensure that we are well trained". The SCM mentor reported that the best mentoring approach that worked for interns to easily link theory and practice was through, role modelling, challenging and confronting, educating (providing knowledge), critiquing, coaching (developing skills) and supervising.

Mentors understood the importance of their role regardless of the different ways in which they mentored the interns. Noticeable mentors did not adhere to the WIL programme guidelines but there is no indication of how this impacted the programme negatively. Mentors managed to mentor interns in terms of giving support, guidance and feedback.

4.4.5 Feedback

Interns reported that they were given feedback in a formal and dignified manner even though it was not spelt out that it was a feedback session. Some interns indicated that their feedback

sessions were after the staff meeting and other mentors arranged special supervision feedback meetings. Two mentors pointed out that “providing interns with feedback is essential whether the programme is structured or not”. One mentor said that “I understand that the mentoring task needs to be done constructively and consistently as this is an important element in the implementation of the WIL programme”. One mentor stated that the WIL programme is aimed at developing interns therefore continuous feedback is crucial for interns to know where to improve and to be informed of their achievement is great motivation. All mentors highlighted that providing feedback promotes free and constructive engagements with students. SCM interns stated that “our mentor gave us feedback in a casual way during informal discussion and rarely did it formally and we were comfortable with that approach”. One mentor indicated that he treated performance appraisal the same way for interns and permanent staff. He further said, “I feel that if I treated interns differently, the permanent staff would think that I was giving interns preferential treatment”. One mentee added that their feedback sessions were constructive considering the manner they were carried out and that their mentors had an assessment criterion contained in the logbook.

One mentor said, “for every assessment conducted, I would give individual written feedback and general discussion implicating all officials would be articulated during staff meetings”. One student reported that he did not receive any formal feedback, however, she stated that “I felt that being complimented on what I did well was one way of giving me feedback”. She further indicated that she was compelled to run things with the mentors in most instances which ensured that she executed tasks as delegated. The student stated that she felt that this approach provided her with feedback before the execution of tasks which she executed with confidence. One mentor stated that he believes that feedback is important, however, he also trusted that interns are capable of doing their own assessments. Moreover, he indicated that he believes that the intern’s inner strength had to be discovered and encouraged through positive feedback and motivation which they managed well as mentors.

It is evident that mentors understood that an adequate feedback process is crucial for the effectiveness of a programme regardless of how it was given. Seemingly mentors gave feedback in accordance with their unique management style and it did not come out in the study that there was a set strategy to give interns feedback. Interns were content with how feedback was given to them.

4.5 The extent to which mentors contributed towards the acquisition of new knowledge and the understanding of WIL

The responses of the interns and mentors were captured under the following themes: workplace readiness and associations between practical work and theory; and reflection on work experience.

4.5.1 Workplace readiness and associations between practical work and theory

Most interns began by pointing out the role that the universities did not play towards getting them ready for the WIL programme. All interns indicated that the universities did not do justice in terms of preparing them for the practical work, yet they should have played a huge role in this regard. All interns mentioned that universities only raised awareness of how the world of work operates and focused on academic achievement, theory and research-based learning. One student stated that “there were no programmes to prepare us to face the world of work”. Four interns were of the view that the universities should have supported them to get work experience placement. Interns further believe that the workplace implementing the WIL programme should be aware of qualification curriculum content so that in turn the employer indicates the organisational operations. Interns added that in preparation for workplace placement, the university should have assisted them with negotiating performance tasks/duties, learning goals and monitoring tools. Seven interns reported that their unpreparedness resulted in difficulties in adapting to the workplace due to nervousness of not knowing how to apply the theoretical knowledge practically. Some interns felt that the WIL engagement could assist universities to align the curriculum to suit the industry needs making it easy for interns to fit in comfortably. One student said, “I feel that the less involvement of the universities in preparing interns for WIL strengthened our independent skills, job-hunting skills (for workplace placement) and negotiating skills”. Some interns learnt that the TVET colleges and the UoTs’ curriculum design integrates both theory and practical. However, the student indicated that this might not be the case with the traditional universities hence interns from these universities find it hard to easily apply theoretical knowledge hence they need much guidance and support.

Mentors reported that the mentors together with the assistance of the Skills Development and Training unit ensured that they prepared interns before assuming the actual duties. Interns

indicated that they attended a 5-day induction programme which provided them with necessary information about the programme and made them understand their role as students. Interns further reported that by the end of the 5-day induction they had a good understanding of the organisational work culture, vision and mission and operational goals. All interns indicated that they received first-hand information from their mentors during their orientation on work settings. All interns reported that they were happy with how the induction was carried out. Some interns pointed out that the orientation programme was an eye-opener, especially for some interns that were uncertain about the WIL programme implementation.

One student shared an interesting and alternative view that he felt that the theoretical knowledge obtained from the university prepared her well for the workplace and she found it easy to apply it at work. The student indicated that she took it upon herself to search for work experience and negotiated everything pertaining to WIL placement. She also stated that she did not expect the university to assist with WIL readiness; however, she further stated that the induction was very informative. Much engagement at the intern's induction made interns and mentors realise that there is a huge gap between the skills and knowledge applied in the workplace and what is studied at the university. One student indicated that the finance and accounting principles they learnt about are applied differently than the way they were taught. A student from the Revenue section stated that theoretical knowledge is just a baseline yet the workplace reality expects the accomplishment of tasks to be in the context of relevant legislation e.g. Municipal Management Act (MFMA) and company policies. A student from the Asset department said, "showcasing a good and positive attitude towards work and colleagues, personal character is a sign of maturity". The student from Asset reported that his mentor worked very closely with him considering that his qualification did not cover much content on Asset management and this assisted him to make sense of what he learnt from the Municipal Finance Management Programme (MFMP). The student further said, "I realise and appreciate the mentor's dedication in helping me put things into perspective after attending the Municipal Finance Management training programme where asset management was dealt with intensively".

Interns from SCM indicated that the information-sharing sessions arranged by the mentor for all team members in her section assisted them as interns to make an easy link to skills attained from the university. It emerged that mentors encouraged interns to regularly assess their

learning experience and knowledge acquired during WIL placement. Their understanding is that this reflection is essential for the intern's improvement. Most interns reported that the positive assessment feedback proves that they are able to link their WIL experience with the university coursework. Mentors reported that they created opportunities for interns to test their theoretical knowledge in the work setting by assigning tasks to interns that they would be assessed on. Interns from the Revenue section reported that their mentor allowed them to use their WIL experience to utilise new strategies in dealing with what was assigned to them.

4.5.2 Reflection on work experience

Interns acknowledged that the transition from the university to the workplace was a huge adjustment for them. Seven interns reported that the scope of work required them to engage with members of the public in terms of ensuring that they made customers understand how the finance system works, and the application of laws and regulations. Interns further indicated that they had to ensure that they also applied the Batho Pele principles in the process of serving customers. Interns from Revenue and PG reported that they are placed in vacant posts from the organisational structure such as accountants. They reported that occupying such posts enabled them to undertake tasks like analysis of the monthly budget for the entire Municipality as this required straightforward application of accounting skills. They reported that the on-the-job training offered by mentors assisted them to achieve their work assignments. Reiterating the above statement another student stated that “we are now able to resolve matters presented to us by internal and external customers without their mentors’ intervention”. All mentors indicated that interns have shown maturity based on their attitude towards work and their general behaviour was acceptable hence they were able to obtain work experience in an environment with huge challenges.

Interns from the Revenue section indicated that they did not enjoy dealing directly with customers, however, the improved Municipality platforms created an indirect way to interact with members of the public. The skills they obtained in order to use these platforms enabled them to conclude processes for the end user within the system to finally provide the prerequisite service. Mentors noticed that some interns already possessed the critical soft skills required in the workplace such as regularity in attendance, punctuality, and reliability in preparing and completing tasks. It emerged that mentors were happy to mentor this group of interns that possessed such qualities. One mentor indicated that it was crucial for them to

understand the role they had to play in the intern's learning experience. The mentor from the Budget section stated that, "I understood and observed that there is a cohort of interns that were more competent than others therefore as mentors we needed to customise our support to cater for each student". He further indicated that less competent interns were allocated tasks that improved their confidence.

Most interns reported that they learnt to value teamwork as achievement of tasks in all Finance sections was crucial. They stated that in their teams if one staff member was off sick colleagues would undertake any crucial tasks in the absence of a sick member. They further stated that mentors were there to guide and support them all the way but their colleagues and fellow WIL interns also provided appropriate support where necessary. Most mentors reported that initially there was a bit of a struggle with interns understanding their role as interns in the position they were placed in. Demonstrating their level of creativity and innovation, ability to apply new ways of doing things and to react to unexpected situations lacked in some students but later improved. Mentors reported that with exposure to practical work, students improved in this regard. Mentors reported they applied different mentoring strategies to improve the interns' performance. They said, "we had to ensure that sufficient resources were made available for the achievement of tasks". Even during the trying times of COVID-19, staff worked from home on a rotational basis, interns in particular managed to perform their tasks remotely and they were still monitored.

Interns from the PG section reported that the challenges of not getting something right the first time frustrated them as accuracy in the Finance departments is essential. Furthermore, another student highlighted that entering wrong information on the system distorts information therefore the error produces an incorrect end document such as a customer utility bill. It is for this reason that mentors needed to be vigilant when monitoring daily tasks. It emerged that some interns were made to lead projects due to the confidence they demonstrated in most undertakings. Four mentors indicated that interns developed immensely as a result of enabling them to apply the knowledge and skills they (interns) acquired from attending the Municipal Finance Management Programme (MFMP). One mentor felt that his interns well-connected knowledge and skills in practice due to the exposure afforded to him. The mentor indicated that regardless of not rotating students, two interns gained immense experience as they were members of certain committees within Supply Chain Management. She further

stated that this enabled interns to make huge contributions as they worked with officials from other Finance sections which broadened their knowledge. It emerged that some mentors encouraged interns to apply for permanent positions which exposed them to new experiences of dealing with interview pressure. They indicated that this exposure made them grow, strengthened their confidence, made them to be more structured as well as gave them a good future outlook of what to expect in the industry.

4.6 How does the Municipality enable interns to acquire relevant experience related to their qualification outcome?

Student responses will indicate how the Municipality enabled interns to acquire qualification-relevant experience in order to apply them respectively. Their responses were captured under the following themes: Relevance, application of skills and knowledge.

4.6.1 Relevance

Five interns from SCM and PG reported that most tasks that they performed were relevant to the WIL programme curriculum; however, they indicated that there were additional tasks that they had to perform like taking minutes of meetings held in their section and other menial departmental tasks. Most interns indicated that they did not mind performing extra tasks that were not part of the curriculum because this contributed to their personal and professional growth. Two mentors reported that it was crucial that their interns performed relevant tasks and expose them to more than what was in their programme to expand their knowledge. They also highlighted that the execution of actual work relevant to their qualification was rewarding as they anticipated that they would be given photocopying and filing to do. They indicated that they allocated tasks according to complexity.

It emerged that at some point interns found it easy to execute relevant tasks in the presence of their mentors. The mentor from SCM stated that he got the student to job shadow an old employee for some time and then a few months later assigned a similar task/project to the student. Another mentor stated that he started by allocating menial tasks to interns and progressively allocated more complex ones based on satisfactory performance. A student in the Revenue section reported that working with an experienced colleague enabled her to apply her knowledge with ease as she would observe her undertakings and then apply the same approach to progressively improve her execution. She stated that “I dealt with matters like an

expert because I was already used to the common problems presented to me at enquiries”. She further indicated that “engaging with colleagues within the section enables me to gain insight into solutions”. All interns reported that they worked diligently even though some tasks they performed were not relevant to the WIL programme, but all were within the B. Com framework. One student stated that his mentor created lots of work experience opportunities by including him in various projects; as a result, he was able to undertake most tasks with great confidence and even excelled. Interns indicated that they willingly performed all duties allocated to them as they appreciated that their exposure prepared them for permanent positions within the Finance department.

There was an indication from interns that certain tasks that they performed were in line with the departmental operation plan which he did not mind executing because they are part of their assessment. One student felt that they could have been exposed to more relevant areas if the programme was implemented according to the WIL programme guidelines. Mentors indicated that there were limitations in terms of only exposing interns to the WIL programme-related areas hence they expanded exposure to tasks that are in line with the department's operational plan. One mentor indicated that interns had to be exposed to PowerPoint presentations, and consulting in order to learn and sharpen these skills for employment readiness. Some interns that lead projects stated that they acknowledge that the skills and knowledge acquired at the Municipality increased their career benefits in and out of the Municipality.

One student stated that his mentor created lots of work experience opportunities by including him in various task teams; as a result, he was able to undertake most tasks with great confidence. Interns indicated that they willingly performed all duties allocated to them and strongly felt that their exposure prepared them for permanent positions within the Finance department. One student stated that his mentor created many work experience opportunities by including him in various task teams; as a result, he was able to undertake most tasks with great confidence. Interns indicated that they willingly performed all duties allocated to them and strongly felt that their exposure prepared them for permanent positions within the Finance department.

4.6.2 Application of skills and knowledge

All interns reported that the Municipality managed to give them an opportunity to apply their skills and theoretical knowledge to achieve both the curriculum and departmental goals. Most interns highlighted that they realised what they learnt from the university must be applied in line with the Municipal systems and in compliance with legislation such as the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) and other relevant legislative framework. Furthermore, it emerged that application of skills and knowledge had to be done in accordance with the systems of the organisation. Notwithstanding the fact that the finance/accounting practice and principles are common, the application of skills and knowledge had to be relevant to respond to organisational operations culture and needs.

The mentor from the PG section noticed that interns were not battling much with the application of skills and knowledge because in this section most tasks require basic accounting skills. The mentor however reported that he made sure that interns master the application of skills within the municipality processes. All mentors indicated that they had to ensure that interns adhere to internal practices and methods in compliance with the SCM legislation, MFMA, and other internal policies therefore application of skills was mostly guided by such a framework. Interns stated that their qualification was just a baseline to the actual work they were expected to perform in the workplace. A student from the Revenue section stated that “the application of skills differed from one sector to another. All interns indicated that they were trained on the Finance system i.e. the System Application Process (SAP) system that enabled them to apply their skills and the knowledge they acquired from the university and from other training programmes attended during their WIL placement. They indicated that certain tasks had to be strictly performed in compliance with the National Treasury guidelines as non-compliance would compromise grants allocation to the Municipality. Interns stated that all tasks linked to compliance demanded close monitoring, therefore, the appropriate application of skills was crucial.

Interns from most sections indicated that from time to time, the application of skills required them to identify alternative ways of undertaking a specific task and mentors would accept and accommodate suggestions aimed at improving the application of specific tasks. All interns stated that the application of actual tasks was an eye-opener as the university did not prepare them for the workplace. One student indicated that the role that mentors played was great as

they managed to get them acquainted with the departmental functions thus enabling the application of skills and use of appropriate knowledge. Mentors stated that interns' prior knowledge acquired from the university better equipped them to easily fit in the workplace and enabled them to apply relevant skills. Mentors indicated that proper briefing and guidance enabled interns to apply relevant skills appropriately and interns mastered this to a large extent because of their positive attitude towards work. All mentors reported that interns managed to adhere to all legislative framework to a large extent as non-compliance would compromise the Municipality's integrity thus running the risk of loss of reputation. One mentor said, "had we failed to ensure that interns applied their skills and knowledge in accordance with the framework the Municipality would have lost statutory grants paid as a result of compliance". All mentors indicated that interns' application of skills is closely monitored by their supervisors to ensure that tasks are completed in accordance with the unit's performance standards and relevant legislative framework. The mentor from PG indicated that it was crucial that they transferred knowledge and skills to interns recognising the impact on the application of skills. Most interns reported that mentors allowed them to apply new ideas to the projects they were assigned. All mentors stated that they ensured that the application of what the interns learnt at the university incorporated personal skills, and work strengths into the actual work.

Two interns from SCM made a typical example of punctuality stating that failure to arrive on time for a meeting delays the meeting proceedings considering that all members' presence is crucial for decision making. The SCM mentor discovered that it is common for a human being to be distracted by other factors such as stereotypes causing the student to fail to apply the skills attained. It was evident that the student learnt a lesson after being addressed concerning the matter as the mentor attested to noticing a change in the behaviour and performance of the student concerned.

All the above responses were presented under these sub-topics: perceptions of interns towards WIL and perceptions of mentors towards the interns' experience; how the Municipality enables interns to acquire relevant experience related to their qualification outcome; and the extent to which mentors contribute towards the acquisition of new knowledge and the understanding of WIL. The research questions and themes guided the presentation of the above findings. Following the above presentation of finding under each research question

guided by themes, the rest of the presentation of findings will be presented guided by the theoretical framework i.e. experiential learning stages adopted in this study. The use of Kolb's experiential learning theory allowed me to theorise the above findings.

4.7 Deductive Analysis Process

The discussion below is guided by the theoretical framework i.e. Kolb's experiential learning theory with the following stages of learning: Concrete experience, Reflective observations, Abstract conceptualisation and Active experimentation. This section seeks to show how participants in the WIL programme engaged in experiential learning. All experiential learning stages work together as a process of learning noting that each stage leads to the other making up a cycle.

4.8 CONCRETE EXPERIENCE

According to Kolb (2014), interns encounter new experiences expressed in feelings. It emerged that placement of interns in the Experiential learning programme was key for both interns and mentors. Placement of interns in the various sections of the Municipal Budget and Treasury Office under the WIL programme intended to get interns involved in new experiences by obtaining practical experience (Kolb, 2014). Interns are actively engaged in practical activities in accordance with the Accountants' core functions that give them direct experience deemed crucial in this learning stage. Interns worked as a team in order to achieve the tasks at hand. It emerged that some tasks performed by interns involved process undertaking where each part of the process leads to the other until completion (Morris, 2020).

However, Hulaikah et al. (2020) state that within this learning phase, interns also must make observations. This can be followed by physical contact. In this study, evidence indicates that some interns initially job-shadowed their mentors and other senior officials. It also emerged that job shadowing enabled interns to make meaning of their future actions and further work alongside Rony et al., (2019).

The finance system called SAP used in the Municipality compelled interns to undergo observations and demonstrations and then physical practice under the observation of the mentors. However, this was not the case with some WIL interns placed in the SCM and Asset sections. Interns were just taken through the process without physically getting involved

which made it difficult to get used to the system, yet they were expected to undertake major tasks on the SAP system. Apparently, the SAP system is very complex hence it requires users to initially observe how it is used to ensure proper use of the system and prevent corrupting it due to incorrect functions. Morris (2020) states that experiential learning also implicates risk and this was the case with interns placed at SCM and Asset using the SAP system without pre-observations. This underlines that in concrete experience, the physical experience is not the only way. Morris further states that experience is unique therefore there is a possibility that the interns' experience will not be the same.

The whole month of November each year is allocated for the Municipal budgeting process which involves the Finance personnel i.e. senior managers, operational managers and the WIL interns, which gave them good exposure and direct involvement in terms of assisting the business units on how to budget correctly for their sections. This direct experience involving interns and other key role players in this context is key in the concrete learning stage. Morris (2020) citing Coker, Heiser, Taylor, and Book (2017) states that attempting certain tasks in experiential learning may require a considerable amount of time and that knowledge is built in context materialising in a particular place with vital role players in the field. There is an indication in this study that the process is not facilitated at the Budget and Treasury Office, instead, the respective Business units are directly involved as guided by the subject matter expert from Finance.

Problem-solving is a procedure that involves the identification of a problem for an individual to come up with possible solutions in order to make an informed decision (Hlubi, 2018). It involves four steps: full understanding of the problem, formulating a plan, executing the plan and evaluating the solution. Msukwini (2017) also indicates that graduate attributes in the workplace include, problem-solving skills. Interns' direct involvement in the budget process and creating the accounting journals with the municipal financial system SAP also involved problem-solving and checking annual financial statements. Experience and problem-solving go together enabling interns to consider the experience a source of knowledge, as a result, the ability to analyse and solve a problem through the use of theories and practices is demonstrated in this study. Evidently in this study interns' hands-on exposure to various Finance functions played a huge role in how they managed to resolve work-related challenges they encountered during their work undertakings.

The accounting journals produced by interns are submitted to the mentor for verification. This could form part of the intern's Portfolio of Evidence (PoEs) in compliance with the WIL programme guidelines. However, this was not the case in this instance as mentors did not compel interns to compile PoEs. Involving interns in PowerPoint presentations and any other form of presentation stimulates the interns' critical thinking (Hlubi, 2018). The study revealed that this exposure made the interns' placement exciting and meaningful. This also serves as evidence that interns' presentations in meetings were proof that they understood the different concepts of the practical work that they were exposed to. Interns also got more empowered based on the engagements they had with the meeting audience after the presentations.

Jarvis (2004) emphasises that vocational education is significant work experience applied in a workplace setting. He states that experiential learning is quite a relevant concept as it plays a critical role in interns that participate in the WIL programme. He further considers training as a continuous process that can integrate different elements such as practical experimentation, reasoning and reflection which will be discussed in depth in the section below.

4.9 REFLECTIVE OBSERVATIONS

Kolb (2014) states that interns' reflection on their experience is subject to their personal encounters through observation. This is achieved by watching others in the same work settings as theirs, observing their experience, and providing feedback to others (Hlubi, 2018). Interns were involved in activities that enabled them to reflect on their experiences of what they learnt then what they actioned. Kolb states that "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (1984: 38). Experience is educative when the intern embarks on the thinking and reflection process (Hlubi, 2018).

In this study, the prominent intern's reflections are evident through the reports they generated, and the feedback sessions they had with their mentors. The reports that interns generate form part of the areas for exposure within this WIL programme and interns need to be assessed on the reports produced (Hlubi, 2018). All reports generated by interns should be submitted to mentors as the Portfolio of Evidence (PoE) for later assessment by the WIL programme sponsor. However, this was not the case in this study as mentors did not ensure the compilation of PoE prescribed in this WIL programme that the interns are placed under.

Moreover, there was no reprimand for failure to comply with PoE submission from the side of the WIL programme sponsor. The study indicates that the report content highlighted the discovery of errors and flaws in the annual financial statements (AFS) presentation of remedial actions required. Besides producing the report, presenting it to the heads of department also forms part of the intern's reflective observations.

Msukwini (2017) states that mentoring is crucial to reinforce interns' transferable skills and abilities thus improving confidence when executing tasks in the workplace. Part of mentoring involves giving feedback to students. Mentoring these interns placed under the WIL programme was very necessary, giving interns continuous support and feedback considering that interns at the Finance Department personnel regularly produce internal and external interns who are SAP users attested to this by saying they learn new techniques that would be remedial action suggested based on challenges they encounter with the system. Positive feedback proves effective mentoring (Msukwini, 2017). The study revealed that mentors gave constructive and consistent feedback that enabled interns to know where to improve. Wiggins (2012) highlights the importance of capacitating interns to also give feedback. Peach et al. (2014) also maintain that feedback is a two-way process that involves both the student and the mentor. Evidence indicates that some mentors believe that interns are capable of assessing themselves thus giving interns a chance to also provide feedback, which made them feel worthy and motivated.

Pearl (2008) also maintains that students can be afforded an opportunity to self-reflect, however, it could have great significance if it involves the mentor. Pearl further claims that the intern's assessment should include focused reflection as this would assist in increasing the intern's learning ability. This is the case realised in the study that interns used brainstorming sessions and meetings to reflect a lot on their experience and some of them attested to have learnt from each other's reflections. Feedback sessions provide a good platform for interns to respond to feedback given; as a result, it helps with the reduction of tension between a student and a supervisor (Peach et al., 2014).

It is therefore not necessary to hold back feedback from the students. Ideally, it must be given timeously (Wiggins, 2012). The study results indicated that some students received written

feedback and general feedback was presented at regular staff meetings. Giving feedback is a vital element of learning; it serves as one way of evaluating interns' understanding.

4.10 ABSTRACT CONCEPTUALISATION

According to Kolb (1984), the intern's new ideas are formed based on reflection of the abstract information. Interns learn from experience through the creation of concepts based on observations and actions; their learning is influenced by logical understanding (Kolb, 1984). Interns integrate their experiences and reflections when evaluating learning as it relates to WIL. Comparison of the intern's concrete experience during the WIL programme, lessons and information obtained from their formal training at the university enables interns to engage in abstract conceptualisation and to draw conclusions as a result of new knowledge that is created through the WIL practical undertakings (Hulaikah et al., 2020). Mentors realised that the theoretical knowledge from the B. Com curriculum on its own does not fully equip interns to tackle complex issues that interns have encountered in the workplace. It was for this reason that mentors created opportunities for interns to test their theoretical knowledge in context with the municipal accounting concepts that they have been exposed to. Interns' capabilities were revealed during the two previous learning stages i.e. concrete learning and reflective observation thus making it easy for the mentors to allocate specific tasks to interns that they can accomplish through the use of abstract information. According to the study, the interns introduced a better way of tracking purchase orders appearing on the SAP system in order to reflect unprocessed invoices. With the assistance of the abstract information, it is apparent that interns managed to make meaning of what they have already experienced during their work exposure thus able to solve a long-existing practical problem.

Kolb (1984) also emphasises that interns try to make sense of work practices by making connections to what they experienced concretely. For invoices that could not be paid at the financial year end, an accrual is raised for payment to be made in the new financial year. Based on a good understanding of how an accrual works, interns were clear on how to create journals for various payments. Pearl (2008:20) states that "A learner's ability to generalise depends on their ability to see a connection between actions and effects over a range of circumstances". In this study, a student realised that a particular department raised an incorrect accrual figure when comparing it with the actual invoice. This calls for a student to alert the respective department of the error and guide them on how to correct it.

Based on the interns' concrete experiences coupled with the embedded accounting knowledge interns managed to establish a better way to do statement reconciliations within an existing finance system used in the municipality SAP. "Host supervisors are generally expected to offer support and guidance to students" (Msukwini, 2017, p. 191). At this stage, interns needed less or no support/guidance as they demonstrated great improvement due to the innovative application of skills without the mentor's involvement. It emerged that interns were at a point where a problem would be presented to them and in turn, they would diagnose how the problem could have occurred, which would consequently lead to a solution. This indicates that interns were no longer generalising but demonstrated an ability to connect actions and consequences and therefore concluded the matter based on their understanding. As a result, interns' scope of work and exposure was increased.

Kabugo et al. 2015 stated that "Sense making happens through interpretation and involves the making of connections, discussion of consequences and implications of the form, structure, operations, and dynamics of the subject or object of engagement" p.18. Generating theories is abstract and can be applied in a new context considering that it is no longer dependent on concrete experience (Sheidaee & Mühlow, 2021). Mentors therefore expanded the intern's work exposure by assigning them major projects so that they could test their theoretical knowledge and apply theories they created in new situations. Based on the intern's experience that they reflected on, it is realised from the findings that interns from Revenue were allowed to use their WIL experience to utilise new strategies to deal with audit queries that needed to be corrected (Ching, 2014). Interns realised that the cash basis way of transacting for services received is impossible in the municipality. The study revealed that interns had to make sure that all departments they support comply with the invoice-based principle to make transactions for services already received by the municipality. With a good understanding of this concept, interns indicated that it became clear to them that in the municipal context, the cash basis concept is not applicable. According to the study, the mentor from the Asset section appreciated the intern's contribution to running the depreciation process on the SAP system currently used by the municipality as opposed to another system that was not user-friendly.

According to Sheidaee and Mühlow (2021) drive and action orientation also play a critical role in the abstract conceptualisation learning phase as they relate to the motivation and attitude when experimenting with new concepts. The drive and action orientation allowed

interns to accept their failure which is regarded as a learning opportunity. Interns attested that in the event of failure to deliver a particular service due to some misconceptualisation, it was necessary for them to apply certain Batho Pele principles that facilitated the enhancement of quality, and efficiency in the public service.

While undertaking the monthly budget analysis for the entire Municipality allowed interns to reflect on their theoretical knowledge and application of accounting skills during their first encounter made them to better understand the budgeting process within the municipality context. It is noted that during the acquisition of new knowledge, interns are expected to analyse it in order to modify the pre-existing ideas. As stated by Moletsane and Moloji (2015), WIL is about the use of embedded knowledge, and that is evident in this instance. Sheidaee and Mühlow (2021) state that analytical skills are also important in this phase hence from the mentor's point of view concluded that the intern's ability to successfully solve complex issues was based on the new theories they created awaiting to test them in the next Kolb learning stage. The analytic ability also enabled interns to use their developed soft skills.

As defined by Kolb, interns' embedded knowledge; experience from various exposure and observations was a process that led to this abstract learning stage. There have been consistent reports from the findings of this study that depict interns taking actions based on the understanding of new ideas during their learning phase and how interns perceived to apply them in context.

4.11 ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION

This learning phase allows interns to put what was learnt into practice (Kolb, 1984). Student responses indicate how the Municipality enabled interns to acquire qualification-relevant experience in order to apply it respectively. The analysis of the data, collected during this study within this learning seeks to reveal an in-depth insight into the relevant tasks that the interns were exposed to and how they managed to apply them through their mentor's support and guidance. The later application of previously developed knowledge facilitates problem-solving (Hulaikah et al., 2020). It is assumed that the findings will also provide evidence of interns making decisions during the application of relevant experience.

Msukwini (2017) identified an ability to plan and execute tasks independently as one of the qualities, skills and attributes required to facilitate learner support. Interns drew monthly,

weekly and daily plans allocating what must be achieved. The execution of relevant tasks given has great significance in a particular programme being implemented. It emerged that the interns' tasks were relevant tasks and other menial tasks to expand their work scope, thus expanding their knowledge. Getting a sense of what the job feels like and what it entails through job shadowing makes a student understand the relevant task undertaken Rony et al., (2019). Some mentors used this method with their students. It emerged that working closely with experienced employees contributed to the learning process of interns as they attested to have better achieved their tasks.

Students getting absorbed into permanent positions sounds like a promotion to them as they understand that recognition of the ability and skills of the employees in this case leads to the occupation of a higher position Rony et al., (2019). Interns remarked that they happily executed all tasks allocated to them as this was preparing them for permanent positions. It also emerged that the interns would be assessed on the achievement of these tasks that they were exposed to. The necessity to expand the interns' skills for employment readiness was of utmost importance to them as mentors when they realised that in some sections interns' work exposure was limited. It became evident to interns that the skills and knowledge acquired during their WIL placement and performing their delegated tasks optimally had positive repercussions on their career development. It was crucial for interns to execute relevant tasks during their WIL experiential learning experience as Blom (2013) states that WIL reduces mismatch of the requirement in the workplace.

The implementation of Work-Integrated Learning in the workplace aims at allowing interns to apply theoretical knowledge. Interns confirmed to have been allowed to apply both what they learnt from the B. Com degree and the Municipal Finance Management programme. It emerged that their application of skills and knowledge had to be in compliance with municipal-related legislation. It is apparent that compliance with legislation, internal processes and National Treasury guidelines is imperative, and mentors had to be extra vigilant when mentoring students. The misconception of WIL could be associated with a lack of understanding of the concept of learning and cohesiveness (Wardani & Sulistyawati, 2019). Interns supported this fact by stating B. Com qualification served as a baseline of what is actually executed in the workplace. WIL is a process that enabled interns to portray their understanding more than learning new skills (Hlubi, 2018). It was given that the application

will differ according to each sector's core business functions. Furthermore, in some instances, the application is reliant on some technical system that each company opts to use. It emerged that the municipality trained interns to use the System Application Process (SAP) system which enabled them to further use their knowledge acquired from the university.

Problem-solving as a skill acquired should evolve as evidence of growth. Assigning interns with projects assisted them to demonstrate their problem-solving skills which is deemed an important talent that mentors ought to improve (Msukwini, 2017). Relating to this, one student remarked about managing to use contingency plans whenever necessary. The appropriate application of skills and knowledge was said to have been guided by mentors together with the intern's open-mindedness about work. This is evidence of good mentoring support in this regard. "Knowledge transfer is more effective when it involves practical experience" (Hlubi, 2018, p. 21). Mentors deemed it important to transfer skills and knowledge to interns knowing the impact it has on the actual application thereof. Primarily active experimentation enables interns to test lessons from practical experience in the workplace. With this active experimentation, the results enable the student to make a judgement of his/her initial experience and then make the decision to conclude a particular task.

4.12 DISCUSSION

Interns must achieve all four stages of Kolb's learning cycle for learning and knowledge transfer to take place (Kolb, 1984). This study provides evidence that interns were exposed to all learning phases of the framework i.e. concrete experience, reflective observations, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. It is therefore established from Kolb's theory of learning framework employed in the study that c interns were exposed to experiences and working conditions that aided their experiential learning during WIL.

Placement of students in the WIL programme was vital as interns got to be personally involved in new tasks which are regarded as concrete experiences. Eight out of the nine interns were appropriately placed. It was however noted that one student was inappropriately placed, nevertheless, he gained additional skills and expanded knowledge that was still part of his qualification. According to one mentor's perspective, interns were constantly motivated, showed great commitment and were mostly determined to complete tasks assigned to them. On the basis of these perceptions, it is concluded that the intern's placement was meaningful

considering that Koch (2012:2) also indicates that the intern's involvement in the workplace should be significant in terms of tasks and performance. According to the findings of this study, it is significant that the intern's placement duration i.e. two years was sufficient for interns to acquire relevant skills and knowledge.

It was noted that interns executed actual work that was relevant to the intern's qualification that they found fulfilling considering that some organisations give interns menial tasks like making copies, filing and so on. It was concerning that the exposure areas guided by the WIL programme guidelines were not fully adhered to. The study acknowledged the fact that mentors expanded the work experience scope by incorporating sectional operational plan areas which formed part of the annual performance appraisal for themselves and students. The study revealed that the WIL programme added great value to the intern's development as it managed to close learning gaps between theory and practical due to the intern's exposure during the placement term. There was a great emphasis that mentors ensured that the intern's application of skills and knowledge was in compliance with the municipal internal policies, processes, and relevant legislative framework. It was important that interns understood compliance which is an ongoing process aimed at mitigating risks at the workplace. Furthermore, this study implies that career development is crucial in enhancing capacity building in public service.

The findings of this study therefore reflected that the Municipality enrolled interns in a relevant training programme i.e. Municipal Finance Management Programme (MFMP) aimed at developing skills and promotable talent in the organisation. It was however noted with concern that interns are excluded from other accredited training programmes, but it is reassuring that the Municipality made an effort to facilitate information-sharing workshops for staff and students. Learning in the workplace encourages a supportive learning environment (Brennan & Little, 1996, p. 91). Training and development is an obligation and also a mandate promulgated by the Skills Development Act (1998) for an employer to train employees. However, the Municipality Capacity Building Policy application opted to exclude non-permanent staff. Moreover, an intern's professional development enhances employability. The study revealed that most sections were well-resourced thus enabling

interns to successfully undertake their tasks and achieve set goals and possibly increased productivity.

Taylor and Govender (2017) emphasise that mentoring is key to the WIL programme. It is evident that the assigned mentors performed their roles exceptionally as all interns were satisfied with how they were mentored. Experiential learning provides interns with guidance during the application of knowledge aimed at improving learning (Kolb, 1984). It is concluded that mentors effectively mentored interns based on the best mentoring practices that they (mentors) used in this case. CHE (2004:21) states that through mentoring, interns can recognise their strengths and weaknesses in the workplace. It is remarkable to notice that mentors provided positive, regular, and considerate feedback. Inconsistent methods of giving feedback to interns were noted as the study revealed that some feedback sessions were structured but others were not. It is however acknowledged that the findings show that the non-uniform approach used by mentors did not negatively impact students.

Based on the intern's views regarding their unpreparedness for the WIL programme and the less involvement of universities it can be concluded that Work-Integrated Learning is not compulsory for B. Com interns from traditional universities as supported by (Msukwini, 2017). Significantly, interns managing to find WIL placement was driven by their desire to acquire work experience in order to stand a good chance for future permanent job opportunities. The findings revealed that the Municipality mentors played their role by inducting the interns as suggested by Ngwane (2015). Furthermore, induction reduces fear and anxiety that may arise from negative feelings about the organisation and perhaps the chosen profession (Kempen, 2010).

According to the intern's perspective, they found a huge gap between theory and the practical component of their qualification; however, they eventually managed to fit into the equation as a result of the exposure afforded to them. It is evident that the interns' ability to incorporate their personal skills showcasing positive attitudes, and good personal character was a sign of maturity that made their work experience rewarding. The findings revealed that interns were overwhelmed at the beginning of their work experience but with time they coped and successfully executed their duties. Significantly, the majority of interns believed that their WIL work experience had great rewards in that they obtained an extra qualification i.e. Municipal Finance Management Programme NQF 6. Furthermore, the study revealed that

eight interns were exposed to interviews for permanent positions which for them was a great experience.

The study recognises the fact that all interns occupied vacant posts hence mentors incorporated the sectional performance areas in the WIL programme. It is evident that the Municipality used the WIL programme as an alternative way to complement staff shortage. However, according to the findings, mentors encouraged interns to apply for permanent positions which is evidence that mentors valued and recognised the interns' talents. Msukwini (2017) states that personal skills development during the interns' work exposure prepares them for employment.

It is significant that the role of mentors in the implementation of WIL is crucial as revealed by the study findings since most interns expressed their gratitude for the support they received from their respective mentors as also highlighted by Spowart (2012). Furthermore, the findings revealed that a blanket approach to mentoring was not appropriate for the group of interns enrolled in this WIL programme as mentors identified variable levels of the intern's competency. However, it is important to note that uniformity should have applied considering that this WIL programme sponsorship had conditions that had to be adhered to yet the study revealed non-adherence by some mentors.

It is concluded that the success of this WIL implementation was a combination of the commitment demonstrated by the students, a conducive working environment, continuous support and proper guidance from the mentors. Apparently, there were some gaps within the implementation of this WIL programme such as minimal /or no rotation, and non-completion of logbooks which was an act against the WIL programme guidelines provided by the programme sponsor National Treasury. Recommendations will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter considering that the interns' reporting could have been more comprehensive.

According to the study findings, it was noted that the implementation did not conform with the structured programme as prescribed by the programme guidelines. It emerged that consequently, interns did not compile a Portfolio of Evidence (PoE) for the funder to appraise. Though the study revealed that the interns were afforded an opportunity to get skills and practical experience as it relates to their qualifications, it is evident that allocating interns to one section with no rotational plans implicated compensation for staff shortages within the

Finance Department. Significantly, there was a lack of firm monitoring by the WIL programme champion from the Skills and Training Development Unit and the programme funder National Treasury. The findings revealed that the implementation of the programme was rewarding for both interns and employer regardless of the gaps identified.

4.13 Chapter Summary

The Bachelor of Commerce interns, placed at a local municipality in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), had previously completed their academic studies at various universities. While the interns conveyed favourable feedback regarding the WIL program, they also expressed reservations about the placement duration, employment prospects, rotation during WIL, and opportunities for training.

This chapter presented an introduction, data methods and instruments used in the study, how data analysis was conducted, findings, discussion and summary of the chapter. This chapter involved nine B. Com interns and five mentors who participated in this study and were all from the Finance Department. The findings presented emerged from two forms of analysis i.e. the inductive and deductive process.

5. Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of this study starting with the inductive process followed by the findings and theorisation from the deductive process, which was guided by the theoretical framework (Experiential Learning).

a) Perceptions of interns towards WIL and perceptions of mentors on the interns' experience

WIL-appropriate placement was key to the intern's direct personal involvement. Evidence depicts that an intern's relevant placement was beneficial in that it closed the intern's learning gaps. The successful implementation of this WIL programme was due to the effective mentoring that the interns noted.

b) The extent to which mentors contributed towards the acquisition of new knowledge and the understanding of WIL

The study revealed that workplace readiness had great significance to the interns as this enlightened them about their roles and responsibilities. Moreover, it was reported

that mentors allocated tasks that enabled interns to reflect on their WIL experience. Interns admitted that non-rotation was not so detrimental since they became experts in the areas of their exposure as some of them championed certain programmes in their sections.

c) How does the Municipality enable interns to acquire relevant experience related to their qualification outcome?

It emerged that the municipality created learning opportunities that enabled interns to appropriately apply work-related legislation portraying their understanding of work processes and associating them with their theoretical knowledge. Therefore, most of the tasks that the interns undertook developed their existing theoretical knowledge.

The next conclusion chapter will give an overview of the entire dissertation, highlight the importance of the study and provide a summary of the findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The study explored benefits of work-integrated learning (WIL) for the employer and B. Com students placed at a municipality. The primary objective was to explore the interns' and the mentor's perceptions, experiences, and understandings of a work-integrated learning (WIL) programme. It is anticipated that the study findings could inform and influence the review of the current WIL policy of the organisation as it strives towards best practices.

The following research questions were developed namely, what are the perceptions of students of the WIL experience in the Municipality; how does the Municipality enable interns to acquire qualification-relevant experience; and to what extent do mentors contribute towards the acquisition of new knowledge and the understanding of WIL?

5.2 Brief overview of the thesis

The study provides background to the key questions under study, outlines the scope of the study and outlines the research question to be examined. The study highlights the significance of Work Integrated Learning in most qualifications and how it enables interns to apply knowledge and relevant skills to fulfill workplace work obligations (SSACI, 2013). Interns learn through participating in authentic workplace activities thus developing and allowing the integration of the student's skills, knowledge, and values. WIL is intended to benefit both the employer and interns that are placed in the workplace for a specific period to achieve the WIL objectives. The study indicates that the learning institutions i.e. colleges and universities aim at producing graduates ready to embark on work experience by closing the theory and practice through WIL participation, thus increasing employability (Taylor & Govender, 2017).

However, the study revealed that the implementation of WIL has challenges such as the placement period of interns in the workplace and the shortage of mentors. As such, the WIL students at the Municipality also raised placement issues as some of the challenges. The study presented reviewed literature with the purpose of contextualising the study by indicating important concepts and how these were previously applied by other scholars. The study also

highlighted key legislative directives established by the South African government guiding the implementation of WIL and the critical role players involved. The study outlined the theoretical framework which is the Experiential Learning Theory that guided the investigation. It indicated the research methodology utilised to respond to the research questions giving a detailed discussion of how data were generated and analysed. The study also presented a discussion on the analysis of data that were collected using interviews and surveys. It indicated that the findings presented emerged from two forms of analysis i.e. the inductive and deductive processes. The researcher hopes that the study has revealed if the WIL intended purpose is fulfilled for the benefit of both parties i.e. the employer and interns.

5.3 Summary of findings

This summary is based on the research findings and the analysis drawn from the following research questions:

a) What are the perceptions of students towards WIL and perceptions of mentors on the interns' experiences?

The study revealed that placement of interns in the WIL programme was vital as it allowed interns to be personally involved in understanding new and relevant tasks in the workplace. The study indicates that the interns' placement was meaningful as their involvement in the workplace was significant in terms of tasks and performance. It emerged that the WIL programme managed to close learning gaps between theory and practice which were dependent on the appropriate placement of each intern. Career development seemed crucial to interns as they felt it enhances capacity building in public service. The study revealed that the interns' professionalism, commitment and ethical behaviour enabled them to manage their tasks successfully.

The study revealed that mentors effectively mentored students because of the effective mentoring practices used in this case. Mentors provided positive, regular, and considerate feedback even though each mentor did it differently. It is evident that the uniform approach to giving feedback is not significant and the study shows that this did not have a negative impact on interns. It emerged that students did not compile the Portfolio of Evidence (PoE) in compliance with the programme sponsor's grant conditions and the sponsor did not impose sanctions for non-compliance. The submission of the PoEs by each intern had no significance

considering that students participating in this WIL programme are already graduates. However, the PoE could have assisted in their learning by triggering further reflections, abstract conceptualisation, and experimentation with actions based on the PoE content.

b) To what extent did mentors contribute towards the acquisition of new knowledge and the understanding of WIL?

The study findings revealed that workplace readiness for the students was an important factor as were associations between practical work and theory. The study indicates that mentors played a significant role in terms of preparing interns prior to undertaking the actual duties in their respective placement sections. The study also revealed that reflection on work experience had to be ensured as it was believed to enhance learning (Hlubi, 2018). Mentors involved students in activities that enabled them to reflect on their experiences of what they learnt and what they actioned. This regularly involved generating and presenting reports which engaged students in reflection on real concrete experiences. The study findings however also revealed that interns were not rotated within the five different sections of the Finance Department. As much as rotation is important to expand students' exposure it emerged that interns became specialists in the areas they were placed; they had to be innovative in terms of finding ways of getting an understanding of what happens in other sections like reading the Finance Department reports and attending meetings.

c) How does the Municipality enable students to acquire relevant experience related to their qualification outcome?

Findings revealed an in-depth insight into the relevant tasks that the interns were exposed to and how they managed to apply them through their mentor's support and guidance. The study indicates that the intern's exposure and execution of relevant tasks expanded their work scope, thus expanding their existing knowledge. According to the findings, interns managed to apply skills and knowledge as per the systems of the organisation and in compliance with the applicable municipal legislation such as the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMP).

5.4 Reflections on the study process/methodology

For each study, research methodology is key for the selection of the most appropriate data collection method and choosing where data will be collected from and the consideration of the sample. The choice of using interviews with interns was an advantage as it enabled the

acquisition of the participant's deep feelings and experiences thus allowing for a sense of their reality. The researcher established a productive relationship with the participants due to open discussions. On the other hand, the use of the survey questionnaires with the mentors was economical, effective, and reliable. The researcher managed to source information pertinent to WIL. While efficient and suitable for reaching busy individuals, the use of surveys does however limit opportunities for probing and follow-up questions. The data analysis involved both the thematic (inductive) and deductive methods which enabled the effective interpretation and theorisation of the findings.

In conclusion, I believe that based on the responses of all participants, learning from their WIL experience was consistent with Kolb's experiential learning theory. Students were exposed to and engaged in all four stages of Kolb's learning cycle. Interns' placement was meaningful as all interns were effectively mentored and provided with many concrete experiences, with opportunities for observation, reflection, new conceptualisation and practical experimentations in the workplace. It is acknowledged that the municipality's WIL programme accommodates graduates whose qualifications do not require practical training in order to graduate such as the B. Com qualification. The implementation of the WIL programme was not merely for compliance with a particular legislative framework, but it was an experiential learning initiative that meets the Local Government's needs and society's needs to develop more skilled and knowledgeable professionals. Even though the study revealed effective mentoring, the non-uniformity of practices, for example, how feedback was given and the lack of rotation of students could be detrimental to the programme. As stated by one of the mentors, "the lack of rotation of interns was a way of compensating for staff shortage in each section". Inadequate quality management processes can pose a threat to a successful WIL programme.

5.5 Recommendations

Based on the study findings, I recommend training mentors for the standard implementation of the WIL programme. It could also benefit the WIL programme and the mentors to be part of the learning institution's advisory committee. This will keep them abreast of new curriculum developments thus suggesting that the industry creates opportunities for students to practise the new trends in the workplace. Moreover, I recommend the development of an adequate quality management process taking cognisance of the following milestones:

- To prepare for the WIL implementation, the municipality must consult the higher learning institutions to engage them on issues pertaining to the curriculum to gain insight into the new developments that could be incorporated into the WIL programme.
- The Municipality's internal WIL needs identification process must involve the prospective mentors to ensure appropriate placement of students and to avoid mismatch.
- A monitoring and evaluation tool should be developed in line with the WIL policy detailing an evaluation process that must ensure that monitoring also involves site visitations by the learning institutions' representatives to gain insight into what happens in the workplace as this could influence curriculum re-design.
- Programme sponsors and the workplace WIL coordinator must visit the placement site for quality control.
- The Municipal Finance Programme WIL policy should be developed to govern;
 - The mentoring process by both the internal professionals and international advisors
 - Standard evaluation, feedback and intern's retention procedure
- The registration of interns with a professional body
- Partnerships should be established with the professional bodies consultants mainly to transfer skills in order to maximise capacity thus stopping the dependency on consultancy.

It is concluded that the Municipality's implementation of the WIL programme was meant to build the capacity of the municipality to deliver the municipality's financial management responsibilities and constitutional obligations. The municipality created an opportunity to address the macroeconomic challenge of unemployment of graduates by providing development of the interns' talent as needed in Local Government. Based on the findings of this study, I realise that the municipality must influence the inclusion of the WIL programme in the Human Resources Management policy as this will enable it to recognise this as a credible source of talent pipeline it requires since it faces unexpected resignations, retirements and other problems affecting its operations.

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APPENDICES



Gate Keeper Letter

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RESEARCH CONSENT LETTER - EXPLORING BENEFITS OF WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING (WIL) FOR THE EMPLOYER AND THE STUDENT: A CASE STUDY OF B. Com STUDENT PLACEMENT AT A MUNICIPALITY

Your correspondence regarding the above has reference.

Please be advised that you hereby granted permission to conduct your research within Msunduzi Municipality, subject to the following conditions:

- (i) Correspondence from your institution confirming:
 - a. Ethical clearance;
 - b. That you are a registered student, with the relevant student number;
 - c. Qualification that you are studying towards;
 - d. Area of research and research topic.

- (ii) Ensure that the Office of the City Manager is informed when you commence your research in the municipality.
- (iii) You will forward a copy of the completed research report to the Office of the Municipal Manager, c/o Ms. Madeleine Jackson as per the above contact details;
- (iv) None of the information and/or findings obtained during the research project will be used to construe the Municipality in a negative light and/or against the Municipality in any court of law.
- (v) The municipality will not be responsible and expected to provide resources for your study such as transport, research assistants, etc.
- (vi) Permission must be obtained from the municipality prior to any publication or paper that will be published or presented containing municipal information.

I trust the above is in order

Sincerely,



MADELEINE JACKSON
SENIOR MANAGER: OFFICE OF CITY MANAGER

Telephone/uCingo: 033 3922002

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

Private Bag / Isikhwama X321

Facsimile/iFekisi: 0868047309

Pietermaritzburg/ePietermaritzburg 3200

Informed consent form

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL For research with human participants

Date:

Dear respondent,

My name is Busisiwe Theodorah Kuzwayo, I am Master of Education student from University of KwaZulu-Natal at the College of Humanities, School of Education.

Researcher: Busisiwe Theodoarah Kuzwayo (076 721 5936); busisiwekuzwayo@gmail.com

Supervisor: Prof Vaughn John (083 775 1787); JohnV@ukzn.ac.za

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research exploring benefits of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) for the employer and the student: A case study of B. Com student placement at a Municipality.

The aim is to explore the benefits of WIL for both students and the employer. The purpose of this research is to explore perceptions of students of the WIL experience in the Municipality, understand if and how the Municipality enables students to acquire qualification-relevant experience and to explore the extent that mentors contribute towards the acquisition of new knowledge and the understanding of WIL.

The study is expected to enrol 12 B. Com students placed within various sections of the Finance Department and 5 Mentors from each Finance Department section. It will involve the following procedures, interviews with all WIL students individually and will involve the five Mentors completing a survey questionnaire. The duration of your participation as a student if you choose to enrol and remain in the study is expected to be about 45 minutes to an hour.

The study will provide no direct benefits to participants. We hope that this study will assist the Municipality to review its current WIL in order to conform to best practices for future implementation.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (*HSSREC/00002642/2021*).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at 033 392 2048/076 721 5936 or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban 4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Your participation in this research is voluntary and participants may withdraw participation at any point. In the event of refusal/withdrawal of participation the participants will not incur penalty or loss of treatment or other benefit to which they are normally entitled. There will be no monetary gain from participating in this research project.

Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained by myself and the School of Education. All records identifying you as a participant during the project will be stored in a safe lock up cabinet i.e. hard copy documents data and all soft copies documents will be password protected. My Supervisor will have copies of both data. Only my Supervisor will have the password in order to access the documents. At the end of the study data will be shredded and all soft copy files will be deleted.

The researcher or the Supervisor can be contacted for any point of clarity regarding your participation, contact details furnished above.

Sincerely

Busisiwe Theodorah Kuzwayo

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING STUDENTS

The questions seek to obtain responses to this interview based on the three areas that would reveal the Mentorship support you receive as a student during your placement, the role played by the Municipality in your attainment of the relevant experience and your viewpoint about your involvement in the WIL programme in this Municipality

A. WHAT ARE THE PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS OF THE WIL EXPERIENCE IN THE MUNICIPALITY?

1. As an Intern, what contributes to your professional growth?
2. In your opinion, are you appropriately placed for WIL? Justify your answer.
3. Has the WIL placement at this Municipality added value to your qualification? If so how?
4. In your opinion do you feel that the Municipality implements a well-structured WIL programme? Justify your response
5. Do WIL students receive training in order for them to achieve their pre-determined learning objectives? How is this done?
6. Are there adequate resources for you to undertake your daily tasks in order to achieve the objectives of the WIL programme? How is this inadequacy dealt with to avoid your non-performance?
7. Has the Municipality allocated you with a competent Mentor to ensure that you get the relevant experience in all the Curriculum areas as per the logbook? If not, how does the Municipality intend to deal with this?
8. In your own observation, are the learning opportunities provided by the Municipality allowing you to complete the curriculum content of your logbook? If the resources are limited, what measures are in place to deal with this situation.
9. Explain how you plan and manage your daily tasks to achieve your learning objectives?
10. Have you encountered any stressful situation in the workplace, how did you deal with such a situation to avoid conflict?

B. HOW DOES THE MUNICIPALITY ENABLE STUDENTS TO ACQUIRE QUALIFICATION-RELEVANT EXPERIENCE?

1. Are you given an opportunity to apply the new skills and knowledge learnt? If so, how?
2. Is your training/learning formally evaluated/assessed? Explain how this process is undertaken?
3. Do you use the work environment as a learning place, if yes explain how?
4. What specific programmes see relevant to your qualification that you have exposure to?
5. Are there any new trends / methodologies that the Municipality can benefit from in the area of your discipline? If there are, have any of them been tried and tested and how did this work? Your response must indicate your involvement in the process.
6. Has the Municipality exposed or taught you significant skills that are beyond your curriculum? If yes, how do these benefit you in your development?
7. Were you thoroughly prepared at your educational intuition for the world of work before undertaking experiential learning? If so how was this done?
8. The duties that you are expected to perform as a student, are they specific and relevant to your curriculum? How are these outlined?
9. In your opinion how much has the Municipality incorporated into the programme to meet the curriculum content of your qualification? How does the Municipality close the gap if a specific area is not covered?
10. Does the Municipality have a rotation programme to ensure that learners get exposed to generic areas of their discipline in order to attain sufficient relevant work experience? How effective is the rotation programme?

C. TO WHAT EXTENT DO MENTORS CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS THE ACQUISITION OF NEW KNOWLEDGE AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF WIL?

1. What kind of support do you receive from your Mentor?
2. Does your Mentor assist you to broaden your scope of knowledge relevant to your qualification and discipline? If, so explain how?
3. Do you have a personal and professional relationship with your Mentor that supports your effort towards completing your internship? Explain how your Mentor develops this relationship?
4. Does your Mentor offer advice and guidance or do you need to seek advice and guidance elsewhere?
5. Do you feel that your Mentor is knowledgeable and competent about your field of study? Justify you answer
6. Is there a set schedule/process for your Mentor to provide you with feedback? If there is explain how this is undertaken and how often? Is it a cumbersome process?
7. Do you feel that your supervision and mentoring is effective? Justify your response by citing examples of this.
8. What is the attitude of your Mentor towards your development?
9. Does your Mentor's involve you in planning meetings for trainings that are in line with the development areas required by the institution? If yes, what was your involvement and how did this assist you?
10. Are you able to present possible solutions to identified work challenges to your Mentor? How did your Mentor receive the suggestions? Was he/she accommodating?
11. Does your Mentor take accountability for your development? If so, explain how?

WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING (WIL) MENTOR'S SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

My name is Busisiwe Theodorah Kuzwayo a Master of Education student from University of Kwa-Zulu Natal College of Education. I will conduct a study that involves research exploring benefits of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) for the employer and the student: A case study of B. Com student placement at a Municipality. The aim is to explore the benefits of WIL for both students and the employer. The purpose of this research is to explore perceptions of students of the WIL experience in the Municipality, understand if and how the Municipality enables students to acquire qualification-relevant experience and to explore the extent that mentors contribute towards the acquisition of new knowledge and the understanding of WIL.

Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained by the researcher and the School of Education.

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may be contacted, details provided below:

Please email the completed questionnaire back to busisiwekuzwayo@gmail.com or contact me on 033 392 2048 or 076 721 5936.

Please note: Your feedback will be treated confidential.

Below are issues relating to the Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). Kindly express your views by selecting an appropriate category and tick an appropriate box.

Using the choice of answers provided, kindly choose one the best that expresses your understanding of the statement. The questionnaire seeks to know how you feel about the statements presented therefore they neither right nor wrong. Thank you for agreeing to take this survey, the survey will only take about 20 minutes to complete.

[Section A]

Kindly provide the following geographical information which will be used for the purposes of research only.

Gender	Male	
	Female	

Ethnic Group	African	
	Coloured	
	Indian	
	White	

Highest Qualification	Diploma	
	Degree	
	Honours Degree	
	Master's Degree	

Age Category	25-35	36-45	46-55	56-65
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Job Title	
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[Section B]

The following questions relate to development of abilities during the intern's placement

To what degree do students develop an ability to do each of the following as a result of their work placement?

Statement	Not at all	A little	Moderately considerably	To a very large extent
1. Demonstrate a commitment to continuing professional development, further learning etc.				

2. Exhibit effective professional or workplace communication				
3. Apply the practices, methods, theories and principles of the field in the workplace				
4. Interact appropriately with people from different cultures to achieve workplace goals				
5. Interact appropriately with people from different levels in the workplace to achieve workplace goals				
6. Exhibit readiness for the workplace in their field or discipline				
7. Apply information effectively to inform workplace or professional decisions				
8. Display commitment to and interest in the job				
9. Show self-awareness of their developing capabilities				
10. Show resilience / inner strength				

[SECTION C]

IMPACT OF PLACEMENT IN KEY SKILL AREAS. PLEASE COMMENT ON THE DEVELOPMENT YOU OBSERVE IN STUDENTS' ABILITIES TO DO ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:

Statement	Not at all	A little	Moderately considerably	To a very large extent
11. Show high professional standards and ethical practice				
12. Integrate knowledge and practice / apply knowledge to practice				
13. Use information to make decisions about their work				
14. Collaborate and interact with other employees				
15. Commence work in this field and be effective immediately				

[Section D]

Management Role

Statement	Not at all	A little	Moderately considerably	To a very large extent
16. As a Mentor facilitate the planning, preparation and implementation of the internship				
17. Ensure that the interns employed by the municipality have access to all the relevant training regulations				
18. Develop a communication strategy with all stakeholders				
19. Establish an administration system to support the internship				
20. Coordinate on-the-job and off-the-job structured learning				
21. Liaise with the Training and Skills Development Unit				
22. Monitor progress on an ongoing base				

Exploring benefits of work-integrated learning for the employer and the student: A case study of Bachelor of Commerce student placement at a Municipality

by Busisiwe Kuzwayo

Submission date: 08-Feb-2023 01:34PM (UTC+0200)

Submission ID: 1989155108

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16 April 2021

Miss Busisiwe Theodorah Kuzwayo (220101337)

School of Education

Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Miss Kuzwayo,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00002642/2021

Project title: Exploring benefits of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) for the employer and the student: A case study of B Com student placement at a Municipality

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 06 April 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted FULL APPROVAL.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 16 April 2022.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines. HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

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INSPIRING GREATNESS

