The Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability

ISSN: 1838-3815 (online) Journal Homepage: https://ojs.deakin.edu.au/index.php/jtlge/

Evaluating work placement supervisors' ratings of Master's in research psychology students at an open and distance e-learning institution in South Africa

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Abstract

This paper examines the dataset of work placement supervisors' feedback from 2014 to 2017 on the skillset of Master in Research Psychology students during their first and second placement periods. A total of 47 placement feedback reports were analysed. The analysis included frequency counts and qualitative content analysis using Microsoft (MS) Excel software. The study reveals that placement supervisors place significant value on soft skills, notably a willingness to learn, and frequently rate students favourably on interpersonal skills. The results highlight the importance of viewing placement supervisors as co-educational partners. By evaluating supervisors' ratings of research psychology students on work placement holds significant value in improving educational programs, enhancing student outcomes, aligning with employer expectations, and contributing to the broader understanding of work-integrated learning in research psychology. For students, it entails identifying areas of strength and areas for improvement in their performance. For the university program, this feedback can inform teaching and learning approaches by providing insights into the specific skills, competencies, and knowledge that students need to develop during their program. It can also help tailor feedback and support by understanding supervisors' feedback, leading to more effective guidance and constructive feedback for students. For the placement organisations, the research can contribute to supervisor training and development, ensuring they have the necessary skills to guide and evaluate students, while also improving work placement design and coordination to align with program learning outcomes and provide meaningful experiences for students.

Keywords
Master's in research psychology program, work placements, workplace readiness, Work-integrated learning

Introduction

Research psychologists are professionals who apply scientific methods to investigate human behaviour and mental processes. They conduct research studies, collect, and analyse data, and draw conclusions to contribute to the understanding of various psychological phenomena. In the South African context, research psychologists play a crucial role in addressing social, cultural, and psychological issues specific to the country, such as identity, diversity, and socio-economic disparities (Cognition & Co, n.d; Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), 2023).

As a result of the historical injustices in South Africa, significant efforts have been made to redress the past inequalities caused by apartheid, which had pervasive effects on nearly every aspect of life in the country. Research psychology is a lesser-known category of psychology, despite there being universities offering program in research psychology and that research psychology exists as a field of registration with the HPCSA (Fynn et al., 2019; Laher, 2005). Research psychologist roles rarely feature in job advertisements in South Africa (Rascher, 2016). These job advertisements usually indicate that it is a researcher's post and specify that the applicant should have a background in social sciences, which lists psychology as one of the fields (Long & Fynn, 2018; Rascher, 2016). Nonetheless, Rascher (2016) found that many of the respondents in her study were employed in various sectors, including health and social research, market research, professional undertakings at academic institutions, monitoring and evaluation, impact assessments, psychometric test development, and corporate research. Although completing a master's degree in psychology does not guarantee employment, it does position the individual with better employment prospects (Fynn et al., 2019). However, it has become evident that employability requires not only knowledge but also attributes and skills (Chetty, 2012; Fynn et al., 2019).

While soft and hard skills are crucial for graduates as they enter the workforce, some studies show that employers are more concerned with soft skills than the hard skills of graduates (Succi & Canovi, 2020; Succi, 2019; Succi & Wieandt, 2019; Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017; Tsotsoto et al., 2017). Touloumakos (2020) notes that term 'soft skills' is versatile and can have different meanings depending on the context. However, the literature commonly noted soft skills, also known as non-technical skills, are interpersonal and intrapersonal transferable skills that are not specific to a particular task or field (Yousef et al., 2021). Soft skills are associated with qualities such as adaptability, flexibility, responsibility, integrity, and professionalism, communication, interpersonal skills, leadership, self-management, teamwork and emotional intelligence (Yousef et al., 2021; Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017; Touloumakos, 2020). These skills are important for effective collaboration, decision-making, and overall success in the workplace (Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017; Yousef et al., 2021).

Hard skills refer to technical abilities and knowledge that are specific to a particular field or task (Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017). They are typically acquired through formal education, training programs, or hands-on experience (George et al., 2019; Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017). Examples of hard skills include proficiency in data analysis, clinical procedures, and other technical competencies required for a specific job or profession (Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017; George et al., 2019). These skills are essential for performing specific tasks and are often measurable and quantifiable.

This implies that hard or technical skills alone are not enough to secure employment and that soft skills make individual candidates stand out. There is a growing recognition of the importance of soft skills in various university programs in South Africa, as highlighted by multiple studies (Anthony, 2014; Lansdell et al., 2020; Kapa et al., 2022; Robberts & Ryneveld, 2021). For instance, Lansdell et al. (2020) focused on soft skills development in accounting programs. The study found that an accounting program in question was perceived to have developed most of the soft skills required by The Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0). All respondents (n=916) were aware of the need for well-developed soft skills in order to be successful in today's changing world of business. However, only 58.50% were aware of the impact of Industry 4.0 on their future world of work, while 41.50% were unaware of the specific soft skills demanded by Industry 4.0. Those who were aware stated that it was only during their practical experience (in the form of a traineeship) that an awareness for soft skills was created. The researchers emphasised that the accounting programs could improve on the way it develops soft skills especially those required by Industry 4.0. Similarly, Kapa et al. (2022) emphasised the need for greater emphasis on soft skills in tourist guiding curricula. Robberts and Ryneveld (2021) discussed the challenge of delivering employable graduates and the necessity of prioritising soft skills in higher education institutions since there is a gap between secondary school and higher education. Munir (2021) investigated engineering professionals' dissatisfaction with their soft skills training. The engineering professionals believed that more focus should be placed on soft skills training as a means

to balance technical knowledge training in their curricula to meet the industry's requirements. Muposhi et al. (2019) raised concerns about the lack of soft skill modules in MBA programs. These studies collectively underscore the need for universities to prioritise the development of soft skills in their curricula to ensure graduates are well-prepared for the workplace.

Thus, the input from employers who accommodate students for work placements plays an important role in preparing students for the industry that will absorb them after they have graduated. Thus, the research abilities of master's students in research psychology are highly dependent on the quality of the research experiences obtained while placed in the research environment. The research environment has a key role to play, including the placement supervisor. To clarify, organisations that host students for their placements are referred to as placement sites, and the person who supervises the student at the placement site is the placement supervisor. The placement supervisor is actively involved with the student in their placement site and will guide the student during their work placement (Berndtsson et al., 2020; Fleming & Pretti, 2019; Winchester-Seeto & Piggott, 2020). They provide direct supervision, mentorship, and support to the student throughout their placement experience. They are there to help the student understand the goals, objectives, and expectations of the placement. They provide guidance on specific tasks and projects, offer feedback on the student's performance, and facilitate their learning and professional development: The supervisor assesses the student's performance, evaluates their skills, competencies, and progress during the placement. They may provide formal ratings, written evaluations, or verbal feedback to the student and contribute to the assessment process. They bring industry expertise and knowledge in which the placement is taking place. They provide insights into current practices, industry-specific challenges, and professional standards, helping the student bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world application.

The placement coordinator is from the university program and is the one managing the overall process. The placement coordinator is responsible for the overall management and administration of the placement program. They ensure that the program aligns with the educational institution's objectives and requirements. The coordinator establishes and maintains relationships with organisations and employers to secure placement opportunities for students. They negotiate placement agreements, facilitate the matching of students with suitable placements, and coordinate logistics such as contracts, schedules, and compliance requirements. The coordinator organises orientation sessions to prepare students for their placements. They provide information on expectations, policies, and procedures, and may deliver workshops or training sessions to enhance students' skills and professionalism. The coordinator monitors students' progress during their placements, ensuring they are meeting the program's requirements and addressing any issues or challenges that arise. They provide support to both students and supervisors, acting as a liaison between the educational institution and the placement site. The coordinator gathers feedback from students, supervisors, and placement hosts to assess the effectiveness of the program and identify areas for improvement. They may conduct surveys or interviews to evaluate the overall experience and make recommendations for future placements.

The primary role of the placement supervisor is to guide master's students in research psychology to become best-practice research professionals. The skills and processes are facilitated by a placement coordinator and involve placement supervision sessions, placement progress reports submitted by the student, and feedback reports from the placement supervisor. The placement feedback reports mainly serve as a gauge for the employability of the student and whether or not they possess the appropriate skills of a researcher.

The primary aim of the study is to evaluate how work placement supervisors rate students enrolled at an open and distance e-learning institution in South Africa during their work placements. A secondary aim of the paper is to serve as a cautionary lesson for academic practitioners as the author reflects on the program design and delivery of work-integrated learning (WIL). This study will help program coordinators of research psychology disciplines and other disciplines who wish to have their students exposed to real-life work experience and to look at the kind of graduates they want to produce that

are employable. The study serves as a case study to examine the possibilities that could emerge from the dyadic relationship between the university and industry to foster and understand how placement supervisors (who are potential employers) take up their roles.

The research questions for this study were:

1) What are the capabilities employers expect Master's in Research Psychology graduates to develop during their degree program, particularly in the context of work placements?
2) How can university programs enhance the workplace readiness of Master's in Research Psychology graduates, considering the challenges and opportunities of work-integrated learning?

Balancing academic pursuits and industry-specific skills in the curriculum

In a study conducted by Fynn and van der Walt (2019) on the reflections of coordinators of the master's program in research psychology, several key aspects were identified: tension for the program coordinators, the demands of employers and the labour market, graduate employability, and the need to restructure degrees and rethink teaching approaches. These aspects are discussed below.

Tension for Program Coordinators

Fynn and van der Walt (2019) found that program coordinators experience tension in balancing the skill demands of employers with the needs of the psychology discipline. The short time frame for completing coursework programs forces coordinators to choose between immersing students in specific psychological theories or emphasising general research skills. A balanced approach could include integrating research skills into the teaching of theories, incorporating practical activities, and creating a supportive learning environment can help students develop a comprehensive understanding of psychological concepts while acquiring important research skills (Prevatt et al., 2021; Reynders et al., 2019). This may assist in mitigating the tensions program coordinator experience.

Demands of Employers and the Labour Market

While program coordinators face increasing pressure to produce employable graduates, it is further complex when employers' needs are not homogeneous and vary across sectors (Fynn & van der Walt, 2019; Mobarak, 2021). In a study by Fynn et al. (2019), the employability skills expected of master's research psychology graduates were examined. The survey employed in the study was used to determine employers' perceptions regarding the skills they deemed important for research psychology graduates to become employable in the field of research. According to Fynn et al. (2019), employers tend to consider the institutions from which individuals graduate, which plays a role in employability. The institution was evaluated by reputation, accredited course material and competence of the graduates. The reputation of the institution seemed to be closely related to the perception of whether or not the institution was considered to be credible (Fynn et al., 2019). Employers do have a preferred institution. Fynn et al. (2019) highlighted that employers highly value interpersonal skills such as the ability to relate to colleagues, and clients. In the research industry, monetary capital is often solely reliant on clients that require research services. The authors' work emphasised that interpersonal skills are crucial in multicultural contexts such as South Africa, where relating to others across linguistic and cultural boundaries are real experiences for most South African employees. In addition, the authors pointed out that the willingness to learn was a major soft skill that employers in their sample deemed important. Fynn et al. (2019) concluded that employers within the field of research psychology place great emphasis on soft skills.

The HPCSA sets the regulatory framework for psychological practice, including research psychology (HPCSA, 2020). However, many graduates do not find it necessary to register as research psychologists to pursue relevant career paths, which include roles in academia, health and social research, corporate

settings, and psychometrics (Rascher, 2016). Employers often seek individuals with related skills rather than specifically titled 'research psychologists' (Bedell & Phanyane, 1998; Rascher, 2016). Those who use 'research psychologist' as their job title work mainly in psychometrics. It thus seems that the title 'research psychologist' is not relevant unless one is involved in a specific field such as psychometrics.

Restructuring Degrees and Rethinking Teaching Approaches

The demands of the labour market have significantly shaped research psychology programs, prompting some coordinators to restructure their programs and teaching approaches (Fynn & van der Walt, 2019). Employability skills can be categorised into 'soft' (people) skills and 'technical' (industry-specific) skills. Industry evidence suggests that communication skills are particularly lacking among graduates (Sambell et al., 2021). To address this, Sambell et al. (2021) recommends introducing curriculum activities in the first year to raise awareness of industry expectations, including the implementation of a self-assessment tool for benchmarking people skills.

Mobarak (2021) emphasises the need for collaborative input into skills and knowledge development, suggesting that universities should engage with industry specialists to stay current with workplace requirements. This could involve qualified industry representatives teaching parts of the curriculum or encouraging lecturers to gain industry experience. Additionally, mentorship involving industry representatives during students' study years can further enhance employability.

Transitioning from university to industry

For graduates, the internship is a complex transition from university and mimics a real work environment (Nkadimeng et al., 2016). This transition is often accompanied by much psychological and emotional distress for the graduate. In exploring the internship experiences of research psychology graduates, Nkadimeng et al. (2016) found that interns considered their internship experience a messy, dynamic and unstructured transition from the learned university auditoriums to the engaging multifaceted workplace. The constantly shifting tasks and emotions seemed to contribute to the experience of the internship as messy, loose and unfocused. Concerning structure and focus, the internship experience was also partially marked by the perceived absence of coordinated mentorship and the burden of multitasking, together with the intrusion of work into the home space. These aspects are part of the work environment that graduates are expected to navigate. Learning how to exercise resourcefulness, manage supervisor expectations, and balance workload with increasingly demanding task requirements are difficult skills to teach but can be appreciated in the learning context of the workplace. This paper suggests that work-integrated learning (WIL), as part of the coursework program, gives students exposure to skills that prepare them for work readiness.

Optimising education outcomes and employability through WIL

There is no precise definition for Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). Instead, WIL is an umbrella term for pedagogical strategies that integrate both industry and education, combining theoretical knowledge from formal training with practice-based knowledge from professional contexts (Berndtsson et al., 2020; Council of Higher Education (CHE), 2011; Jackson et al., 2016; Judd et al., 2023; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). The types of WIL include, but are not limited to, 'action learning, apprenticeships, cooperative education, experiential learning, inquiry learning, inter-professional learning, practicum placements, problem-based learning, project-based learning, scenario learning, service-learning, team-based learning, virtual or simulated WIL learning, work-based learning, work experience, and workplace learning' and so forth (CHE, 2011, p. 4). While these different types of WIL broadly comprise activities that occur in work or campus settings (Jackson et al., 2016), they are not synonymous (Dyke, 2017).

In an Australian context, Jackson and Dean (2023) explored the impact of three WIL types, namely, work-based, non-workplace, and global, on perceptions of employability and skill outcomes across

undergraduate and postgraduate programs and disciplines. The authors collected responses from 76,261 graduates of Bachelor and postgraduate (coursework/research) programs across 30 Australian universities. Findings showed a link between work-based WIL and perceived improvements in foundational, adaptive, and collaborative skills. Work-based WIL was particularly effective in enhancing graduates' perceptions of overall preparedness for employment, though this varied by discipline. Interestingly, non-workplace WIL showed greater gains in collaborative skills, particularly among postgraduates. Graduates, including those who did not complete any WIL, felt that their skills prepared them for employment, which suggests that university programs are in some way providing opportunities for skill development during study. Global WIL appeared to improve participants' market appeal by developing highly sought-after adaptive skills in new graduates. Jackson and Dean (2023) suggest that global WIL might reflect beliefs that travel is attractive on resumes and signals confidence, flexibility, and creativity to prospective employers. Yet, respondents of global WIL reported lower perceived employability than those engaged in work-based WIL.

Furthermore, Jackson and Dean (2023) found that disciplines such as Education, Health, and Engineering, where WIL is traditionally embedded, indicated a higher proportion of perceived employability. Disciplines where WIL is emerging and typically not mandated expressed lower perceived preparedness for jobs. Overall, Jackson and Dean (2023) highlighted that no singular form of WIL was superior regarding employability, with each demonstrating varying value for different dimensions. Winchester-Seeto and Piggott (2020) also invite WIL practitioners to rethink the ways in which WIL is done, whereby WIL is almost always associated with a physical workplace environment and consider remote or virtual spaces, however, this would depend on the type of discipline.

Researchers highlight that one of the main reasons universities are including WIL in their curricula is to enhance employability (Ferns & Lilly, 2016; Messer, 2018; Okolie et al., 2021; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). However, Rowe and Zegwaard (2017) warns against conflating employability with employment outcomes. Employability refers to industry-valued skills, while employment outcomes pertain to job acquisition and salaries. Neall et al. (2022) highlight that task authenticity and proximity to professional environments are crucial for effective WIL, with authentic tasks resembling real workplace challenges (Ajjawi, 2020; Neall et al., 2022).

In another study, Dollinger and Brown (2019) studied four WIL cases from three Australian universities, including students working in teams with industry partners (n=23); students co-creating learning resources (n=7); student-staff partnerships (n=2); and students acting as peer-learning advisors (n=5). The study found that industry placements offered high authenticity and proximity, yielding benefits in teamwork, communication, and planning skills. However, proximity varied across activities, with placements providing the highest but not exclusive benefits.

Various researchers agree that WIL enhances graduates' skills, work-readiness, and transitions to employment (Neall et al., 2022; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). It also supports student development and builds sustainable partnerships between educational institutions, organisations, and communities (Cooper, 2011). However, WIL's contribution to employability varies across disciplines, and limitations in WIL employability studies often stem from reliance on self-reported perceptions rather than actual employment data (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017).

Implementing WIL faces several challenges. Staff workload, particularly related to assessing student learning in WIL courses, is a significant barrier (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). Authentic tasks alone do not guarantee effective learning, owing to the diverse workplace contexts students are placed in (Ajjawi et al., 2020). Furthermore, Milne and Caldicott (2016) points out that placement supervisors have a tendency to rate students highly on all skills (specifically, soft skills). Various reasons are cited, namely, free labour, different perspectives on what skills are valued in the organisation and in the industry, the diversity of the placement whereby certain skills are valued more over others, and likability of the placement student (Milne & Caldicott, 2016). Placement organisations may encounter issues such as identifying suitable projects, sourcing skilled students, and aligning WIL activities with business needs

(Fleming et al., 2018; Fleming & Pretti, 2019; Jackson et al., 2016). Universities have the obligation of maintaining sustainable partnerships with host organisations and managing risks like poor supervision, intellectual property concerns, and ensuring task authenticity are critical for successful WIL implementation (Cameron et al., 2020; Fleming et al., 2018).

Thus, effective WIL implementation requires high-level leadership support from the university and not the academic or practitioner attempting to facilitate WIL, financial rewards, and recognition for staff and students (Dollinger & Brown, 2019). Researchers have identified the risks associated with WIL, include legal, operational, strategic, reputational, and financial aspects (Cameron et al., 2020; Zegwaard & Rowe, 2019). To address these risks, researchers advise quality assurance in managing these risks, ensuring adequate supervision, and maintaining strong, sustainable industry relationships (Berndtsson et al., 2020; Fleming et al., 2018). Berndtsson et al. (2020) offer tools for WIL practitioners, such as e-conversations and virtual communities of practice, to solve communication problems and promote professional identity development. They also suggest using mobile IT devices for timely access to learning resources as well as cognitive teaching methods like feedback to help students reflect, discover, explore, and focus on the meaning of their experiences and areas for improvement. To assist with assessment ratings by placement supervisors, Milne and Caldicott (2016) suggest the development and use of shared single instruments to assess student performance. This would offer benefits in helping to reduce any systematic differences that do exist and facilitate cross-institutional benchmarking of WIL.

WIL in South Africa

The history of apartheid and the struggle of the working class and students have demonstrated the critical importance of training and development in South Africa (Maseko, 2018). The establishment of the National Qualifications Framework in 1995 addressed this need, providing a structured approach to education and skills development. Given the rise in unemployment in South Africa, WIL helps organisations acquire graduates with the attributes and skills relevant to the workforce (Mabungela & Mtiki, 2024). Universities have been using various approaches to enhance education and training through WIL (Maseko, 2018). However, WIL program still faces several challenges, such as securing industry placements for students, further improving WIL curricula and program, enhancing the pedagogical skills of university lecturers, ensuring the availability of suitable mentors, creating environments conducive to training and development in the industry, and fostering effective partnerships to enhance WIL (Mabungela & Mtiki, 2024; Maseko, 2018). These aspects resonate with the above international context.

For example, du Plessis (2019) investigated practices to improve the delivery of WIL in radiography training in South Africa. An extensive survey was conducted among all universities involved in training radiography students. Data were collected using quantitative questionnaires with open-ended qualitative components, distributed to lecturers (32), clinical supervisors (44), and final-year radiography students (146). Lecturers could select from various learning modes: work-directed theoretical learning (WDTL), problem-based learning (PBL), scenario-based learning, project-based learning, and workplace learning (WPL).

The quantitative results confirmed that WPL was the most preferred mode for facilitating learning in the WIL component of radiography programs (100%). However, the qualitative findings revealed confusion among some lecturers regarding the term ‘learning mode.’ du Plessis (2019) noted that this confusion was evident when lecturers could not distinguish between teaching and learning activities, and assessment activities applicable to different learning modes. He further recommended that teaching, learning, and assessment of WIL should be well planned and structured with a specific focus on constructive alignment.

Du Plessis (2019) emphasised that exposing students to various learning environments nurtures the development of graduate employability skills, particularly soft skills. Using different learning modes

for WIL can foster self-directed learning and critical thinking skills. The placement environments should consider not only the physical workplace but simulation laboratories, interactive group/forum discussions, virtual environments, and e-learning environments.

Overall, while significant progress has been made in implementing WIL in South Africa, ongoing efforts are needed to address the challenges and maximise the benefits of these programs for students and the broader workforce. In the next section, the current study provides the context on how WIL is facilitated in one of the master's in research psychology programs at a HE institution in South Africa.

Facilitating WIL in a master's in research psychology program

The master's program referred to in this study was one of the six research psychology programs that led to registration with the HPCSA. Despite the program being offered at an open and distance e-learning institution, the first year is dedicated to an on-campus, structured coursework program (Fynn et al., 2019; Long & Fynn, 2018). The program involved a selection process before students were admitted for the subsequent year of study. The remaining three years comprised of distance education, during which students were in liaison with their supervisors and were required to complete their dissertations. The on-campus year focused on developing students' theoretical knowledge and applied skills, while exposure to the workplace was provided through two placement periods of 10 weeks each. In the first year, the first placement took place in the first semester, and the second placement took place in the second semester. In the first year, the program placed a strong emphasis on active learning through authentic learning experiences and consequently made extensive use of WIL in the training model. At the end of the first year, students submitted a portfolio of evidence and a complete master's proposal (Fynn et al., 2019; Long & Fynn, 2018).

In this paper, the author, specifically focus on the placement component of the programme. The relationship between the placement providers and the university program coordinator comprised of a well-established connection through alumni of the program, through the program coordinator recruiting potential organisations that specialise in social or market research, or through collaboration with other research institutes or universities. New placement supervisors are briefed on the program's structure and the scope of the placement. Placement supervisors are also requested to provide students with temporary access to the software the company uses should it not be on the university's list of software. Placement supervisors are also requested to provide students with a stipend for expenses such as data and transport to locations not at the placement provider's site if they are required to use their own resources.

At the beginning of the first year of the program, a representative from the placement organisation would present placement opportunities to the students, indicating the type of research they do and the learning experiences they can offer the students. The placement sites range from market research, health and social research, assessing the impact of intervention programs, as in monitoring and evaluation, and research in psychometric tests and academia. Students are expected to secure their own respective placements by the stipulated due date for semesters one and two. It is believed that in securing their own placements, students are grooming specific characteristics, for example, interactive skills, problem-solving skills, entrepreneurship skills, presenting and applying skills, and goal-directed behaviour (Nienaber et al., 2012). In securing placements, students would send an email to the placement provider, express their interest in doing their placement with a particular placement company and attach their resume.

The program uses a triangulated approach that involves receiving feedback from the student, the university-based placement coordinator and the placement supervisor (von Treuer et al., 2011; du Plessis, 2019). Feedback from students involves three placement progress reports per semester, each submitted to the placement coordinator by the stipulated due date. During the placement period, three group placement supervision sessions are held with the students and the placement coordination team to check the personal development of the students and whether any challenges

were experienced. At the end of the placement period, placement providers are sent a short survey to provide feedback on the student's performance. Students are aware that by the end of the placement period, the placement company will evaluate their performance, which may be shared with the student for professional growth purposes. Incorporating feedback received from the placement providers back into the program will assist the program in remaining relevant and producing employable graduates. It is worth noting that some students decide to do their second placement where they completed their first placement. Based on the author's encounter with students during the preparations for placements, some reasons often provided by students who continue at the same placement site for the second placement are that the pace of the work has started to pick up in the latter part of the year, the possibility of securing of potential employment after the coursework year, and the confidence in mastering the content and tasks allocated to the projects. Whereas some students choose to complete their second placement at different placement companies for exposure to different networks and mastery of preferred skillsets. Thus, WIL is used in this program in the following ways: To reflect on what students have learned through WIL in the submission of the placement progress reports; Networking; and for potential employment opportunities.

This paper argues that it is important to understand the generic skills needed for graduates to be prepared for the world of work and how university programs should incorporate these skills into their curriculums. Understanding what placements supervisors expect from master's students will assist in working towards an alignment between HE and the workplace. The WIL approach is seen as an appropriate way to actively build linkages between the world of teaching and learning and the world of professional practice. Research has shown that effective pedagogical interventions before, during and after WIL activities can maximise student learning from the experience. WIL activities mentioned are reflective practice, debriefing and assessment (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). Thus, having WIL as part of the coursework program gives students exposure to workplace experiences to nurture skills that prepare them for work readiness. The study specifically focused on placements as a form of WIL and how this can assist programs in remaining relevant and producing employable graduates.

Integrating Bloom's and Fink's Taxonomies as a theoretical framework

The paper is underpinned by two influential educational taxonomies: Bloom's Taxonomy and Fink's Taxonomy (Boles et al., 2005; de Beer, 2017; Ho, 2023). Bloom's taxonomy focuses on cognitive skills and thinking processes and, therefore, is the cognitive dimension. In contrast, Fink's taxonomy encompasses holistic dimensions because it considers cognitive, affective, and interpersonal dimensions of learning. While Bloom's taxonomy has six hierarchical levels of cognitive ability, Fink's taxonomy has six non-hierarchical categories of learning (Boles et al., 2005; de Beer, 2017; Ho, 2023). The author decided to use both taxonomies as an integrative framework to provide a structured approach for analysing supervisors' ratings, covering both cognitive and holistic student learning dimensions. Overall, five levels are outlined below:

1. Foundational Knowledge and Comprehension is derived from the Knowledge and Comprehension dimensions of Bloom's taxonomy and the Foundational Knowledge dimension of Fink's taxonomy. This concept refers to students' ability to recall facts and understand concepts related to their tasks, such as psychological theories and research methodologies (Boles et al., 2005; de Beer, 2017; Ho, 2023).
2. Application is derived from the Application dimensions of Bloom and Fink's taxonomies. This concept is a higher order cognitive skill that involves understanding concepts and applying knowledge to real-world tasks, such as data interpretation and using statistical software for analysis (Boles et al., 2005; de Beer, 2017; Ho, 2023).
3. Knowledge integration and generation is a concept derived from the Analysis and Synthesis dimensions of Bloom's taxonomy, and the Integration dimension of Fink's taxonomy. It is a higher order cognitive skill that refers to the breaking down complex information and

integrating classroom and workplace learning to generate insights and articulate skills for future employment (Boles et al., 2005; de Beer, 2017; Ho, 2023).

4. Personal and professional values is a concept derived from the Human and Caring dimensions of Fink's taxonomy. Involves understanding oneself and others, exhibiting high self-awareness, and aligning personal values with organisational values, including research interests and commitment to the field (Ho, 2023).
5. Self-directed reflexivity is a concept derived from the Evaluation dimension of Bloom's taxonomy, and the Learning to Learn dimension in Fink's taxonomy. It involves making judgments about work quality, assessing the effectiveness of one's own learning, and demonstrating initiative and self-directed learning (Boles et al., 2005; de Beer, 2017; Ho, 2023).
6. This integrative framework provides a structured approach for analysing supervisors' ratings, covering cognitive and holistic student learning dimensions as valued by placement supervisors.

Research methodology

Data collection – instruments and procedures

The primary data sources for this study were the placement feedback reports delivered by placement supervisors to program coordinators at the end of each work placement period. Each placement supervisor completed a placement feedback report for the student hosted during the placement period. If the placement supervisor hosted more than one student, the supervisor would complete a placement feedback report for each student.

The feedback reports contained both closed and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions contained a rating scale in which the student's research and interpersonal skills were rated. The distractors for the research skills of students ranged from 'Disappointing', 'Basic', 'Satisfactory', 'Proficient', and 'Not applicable'. The skill domains covered in the feedback report were 'Knowledge of basic quantitative analysis techniques', 'Knowledge of basic qualitative analysis techniques', 'Knowledge of quantitative questionnaire design', 'Knowledge of survey administration', 'Knowledge of qualitative questionnaire design', 'Ability to apply interviewing approaches and techniques', 'Ability to apply research project management principles', 'Use of technological tools (i.e. ATLAS.ti, SPSS etc.)', and 'Ability to work in a team'.

The distractors for the interpersonal skills of students ranged from 'Disappointing', 'Reasonable', 'Acceptable', 'Proficient', and 'Not applicable'. The skill domains covered in the feedback report were 'Ability to interact with members of your department', 'Ability to deal with mistakes made during the course of the placement', 'Ability to adjust to changing priorities', 'Ability to work with other members of the department', 'Ability to handle criticism of his/her work', 'Ability to follow up on requests', 'Ability to manage conflicting deadlines', and 'Ability to respond to requests beyond the scope of the placement'.

The open-ended questions focused on the placement supervisors' expectations of a master's student. As a result of the selection process involved in the program, the number of students admitted into the program varies from year to year. Therefore, the reports on the skillsets of the master's students during their placement periods (first and second) span 4 years (2014−2017). During the 4 years, the placement coordinator had a professional relationship with 17 placement providers that were from the following sectors, health and social research (n = 5), market research (n = 5), professional undertakings at academic institutions (n = 6), psychometric test development (n = 1).

Data analysis

In all, 47 placement feedback reports were included in the analysis. The final data set were cleaned, recorded and analysed using Microsoft (MS) Excel. The data were split into the first and second semesters, bearing in mind that the first placement commenced around April and ended in June, and the second semester commenced around August to November. This knowledge was used to scrutinise the time stamps on the placement feedback reports and delineate them by semester, with 23 (n = 23) in the first semester and 24 (n = 24) in the second semester. Since the study was descriptive, the analysis included frequency counts on the ratings of the research and interpersonal skills among placement providers.

Qualitative content analysis was conducted on the responses to the open-ended questions on the expectations of placement supervisors regarding the master's students. This qualitative approach was suitable for this study because it employed a relatively low level of interpretation that was based on the subjective experiences of the placement providers' expectations of the master's students they hosted (Elo et al., 2014). The data on the qualitative component contains the placement providers' expectations for both semesters and are not split.

Qualitative content analysis was appropriate as the study used it to search for common patterns in the themes elicited from the data and thereafter to analyse the frequency of these patterns across the various placement providers (Elo et al., 2014). Specifically, conventional qualitative content analysis was used to describe the placement providers' expectations of the master's students they hosted (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Categories and codes are primarily derived from the text itself and allow names for categories to flow from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Thus, the study systematically classified the codes into themes in addition to counting words in the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Ethical considerations

The study obtained ethics approval from the University of South Africa (2015_RPSC_069_AR), followed by gatekeeper permission to use the data based on the guidelines set out in the Policy on Conducting Research Involving Unisa employees, students and data.

Results

The study used the Bloom and Finks taxonomy as a framework described above to provide an integrated approach to understanding the feedback provided by the placement providers. Placement providers highlighted the different projects students worked on, the skills they practised and gained, and exposure to the intricate processes involved in the workplace. At the end of the placement period, placement providers rated students on the hard technical and soft skills they felt a graduate should possess. At the end of each placement, the placement supervisors were asked to rate specific hard and soft skills domains.

Placement supervisors' expectations of a master's student: Learning to learn

All placement supervisors were asked a generic question pertaining to what their expectations were of a master's student. While many of the placement supervisors provided a generic response, they took into consideration the student they hosted in line with what they expected. This assists the program coordinators in knowing what the research industry expects of our students. The placement supervisors' expectations of a master's student include a description of the skills that students should possess. Figure 1 shows that the most predominant component is the attitude of the student (n = 47; 100%). This is followed by a basic understanding of qualitative and quantitative research methods (n = 22; 46.8%), statistical analysis (n = 15; 31.9%), writing skills (n = 14; 29.8%) and conduct (n = 13; 27.7%) (see Figure 1).

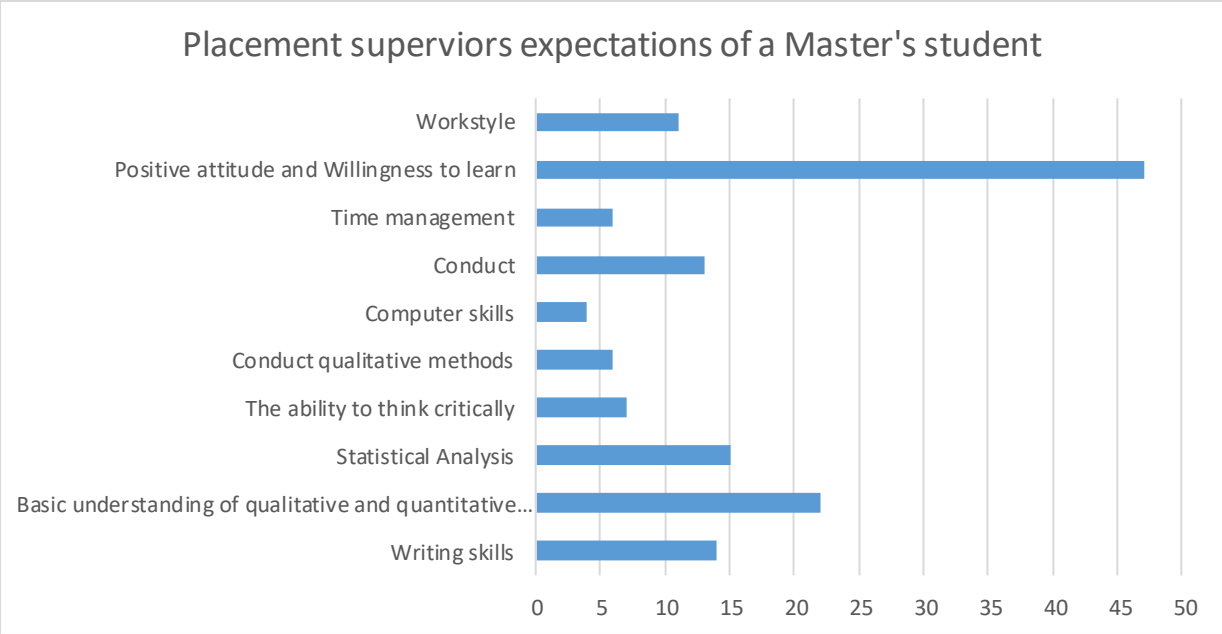

Figure 1: Placement Supervisors' Expectations of a Master's Student

Placement supervisors emphasised soft skills such as a positive attitude and willingness to learn. This was reflected when the placement provider gave feedback on the student they hosted.

> *Trust yourself - you have the ability! You have a wonderful nature and are prepared to work hard and get the job done, which is a characteristic any employer will value greatly. You learn quickly, ask questions where you need to, and take pride in the output you produce. You may need to be a bit more assertive in sharing your opinions in future, but that will probably come as you build confidence in the knowledge and skills that you develop. Good luck with your career ... I expect to see and hear good things from you!* (Placement supervisor in the psychometric test development sector)

> *Student A has a good, can-do attitude and a willingness to learn. She takes responsibility for whatever she works on, no matter how apparently menial, and tries to do this to the best of her ability. She is motivated and prepared to work hard. I appreciated that she usually informed me of her progress or completion of tasks without me having to follow up. She was also respectful of my schedule and willing to accommodate me for meetings and so forth. She is also able to organise others and to work in a team. I believe that [student's name] productivity levels will improve if she slows down, listens and approaches a task more systematically. In her eagerness to do a task correctly, she sometimes does not take in details or pre-empts questions. This eagerness also sometimes makes prioritising difficult for [student's name], as she tends to work harder rather than 'smarter' on tasks, without prioritising what requires the most attention and when a task can be reasonably left on hold for a while, or requires less labour (due to its relative lesser importance). I think she did come some way to realising this during her time with us and will be able to work on these issues*. (Placement supervisor in the health and social research sector)

> *Expectations are that candidates are self-starters able to work independently as well as in a team. Candidates have to be able to take initiative in projects, identify elements of projects where problems need solving and be able to address these creatively. At a master level, the expectation is that candidates are able to conceptualise research problems, develop methodologies and execute the projects in accordance to the timelines.* (Placement supervisor in the technology and innovation research sector)

One placement supervisor acknowledged the role of the student in that they took the lead in writing proposals and providing inputs:

> *[Student's name] was initially involved only on the [project's name] evaluation - which is an outcome evaluation of a management training program that has been implemented over a number of years. [Student's name] was very pro-active, and he became involved with giving advice on various projects, and he also wrote proposals. A number of projects were secured with student's help*. (Placement supervisor in a private institution of Higher Education sector)

Research skills: Foundational knowledge and comprehension

At the end of each placement, the placement supervisors were asked to rate specific hard and soft skills domains. Figure 2 presents the ratings for the research skills for the first semester; Figure 3 presents the research skills for the second semester. These two figures depict the research skills on which students were rated according to five options. The options ranged from disappointing, basic, satisfactory, exceptional, and not applicable.

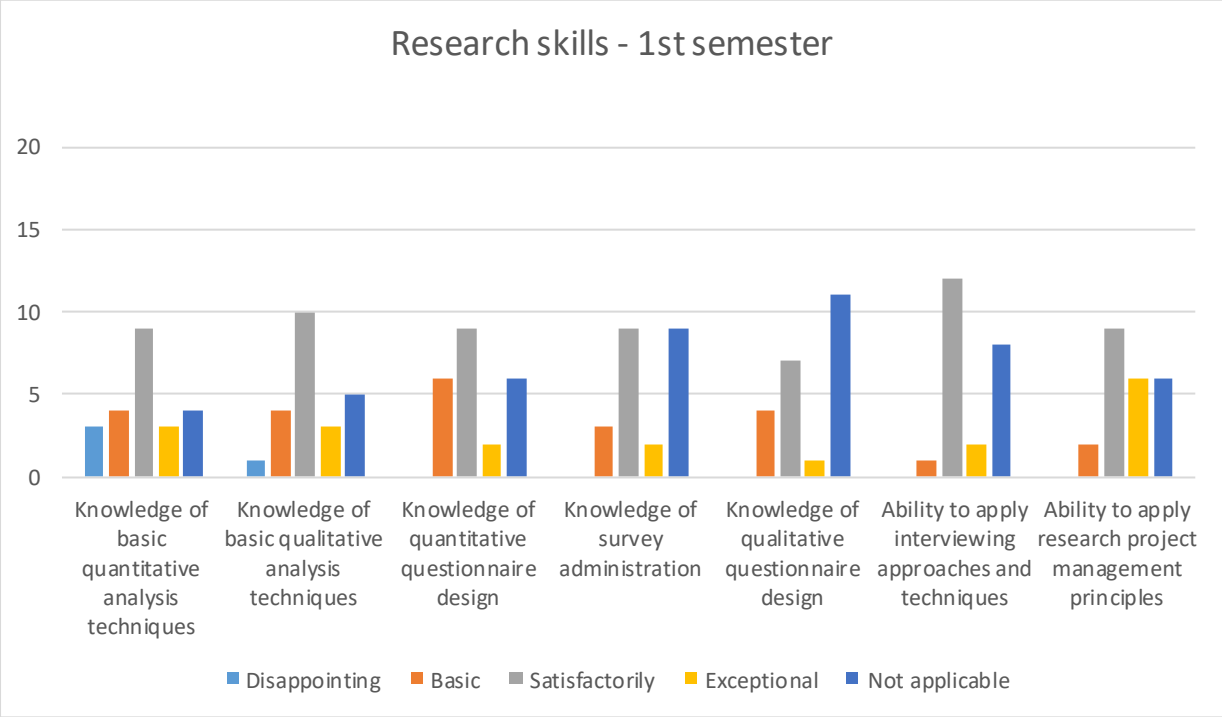

Figure 2: Research Skills for the First Semester

In the first semester, placement supervisors rated students as satisfactory for knowledge of basic quantitative analysis techniques (n = 9; 39.1%), knowledge of basic qualitative analysis techniques (n = 10; 43.5%) and ability to apply interview approaches and techniques (n = 12; 52.2%). Knowledge of qualitative questionnaire design was not considered applicable in the first semester (n = 11; 47.8%) Students' research skills were rated as disappointing in only two domains, knowledge of basic quantitative analysis techniques (n = 3; 13.0%) and knowledge of basic qualitative analysis techniques (n = 1; 4.3%) (see Figure 2).

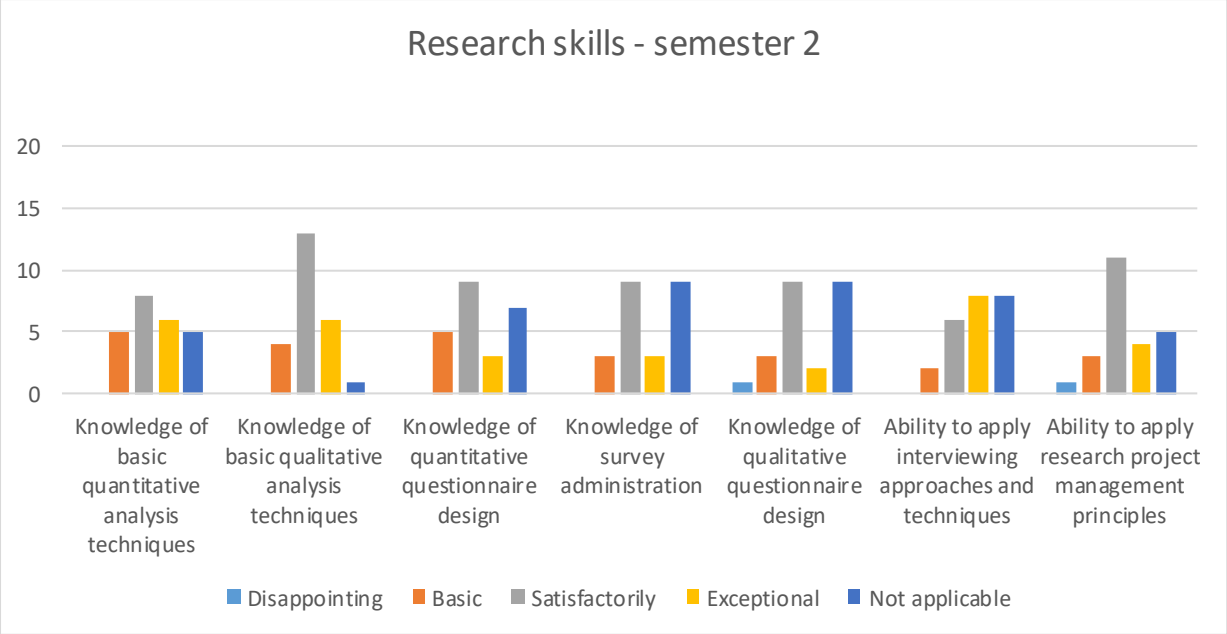

Figure 3: Research Skills for the Second Semester

In the second semester, placement supervisors rated students' research skills satisfactorily for knowledge of basic qualitative analysis techniques (n = 13; 54.2%), ability to apply research project management principles (n = 11; 45.8%) and knowledge of quantitative questionnaire design (n = 9; 37.5%). The lower end of the ratings comprised basic and disappointing regarding the students' research skills. The specific domains with basic as a rating were knowledge of basic quantitative analysis techniques (n = 5; 20.8%), knowledge of quantitative questionnaire design (n = 5; 20.8%) and knowledge of basic qualitative analysis techniques (n = 4; 16.7%).

Students' research skills were rated as disappointing in only two domains, knowledge of qualitative questionnaire design (n = 1; 4.2%) and the ability to apply research project management principles (n = 1; 4.2%) (see Figure 3).

As the figures (i.e., 2 and 3) above indicate, the research skills in the first semester are rated much higher in comparison to the second semester. Students were rated mainly as satisfactory but there were ratings of disappointing in the following domains: knowledge of basic quantitative analysis techniques (n = 3; 13.0%); knowledge of basic qualitative analysis techniques (n = 1; 4.3%);; knowledge of qualitative questionnaire design (n = 1; 4.2%) and the ability to apply research project management principles (n = 1; 4.2%). The quotes below highlight the graduate attributes that placement providers value in their organisations.

> *[Student's name] needs to improve her quantitative research skills*. (Placement supervisor in the health and social research sector)
>
> *We expected a candidate with good conceptual knowledge of research methodologies and some exposure to both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. [Student's name], exhibited all of these qualities.* (Placement supervisor in the psychometric test development sector)
>
> *[Student's name] writing skills were good. [Student's name] would benefit from additional exercises in SPSS and MS Excel. She should also practice developing quantitative questionnaires. Student's interview skills were acceptable and she was able to cope with a large group of participants, however, she could strengthen her interview techniques.* (Placement supervisor in a private institution of Higher Education sector)

Interpersonal skills and values

Figure 4 presents the ratings for the interpersonal skills for the first semester and Figure 5 presents the interpersonal skills for the second semester. These two figures depict the interpersonal skills on which students were rated according to five options. The options ranged from disappointing, reasonable, acceptable, proficient and not applicable.

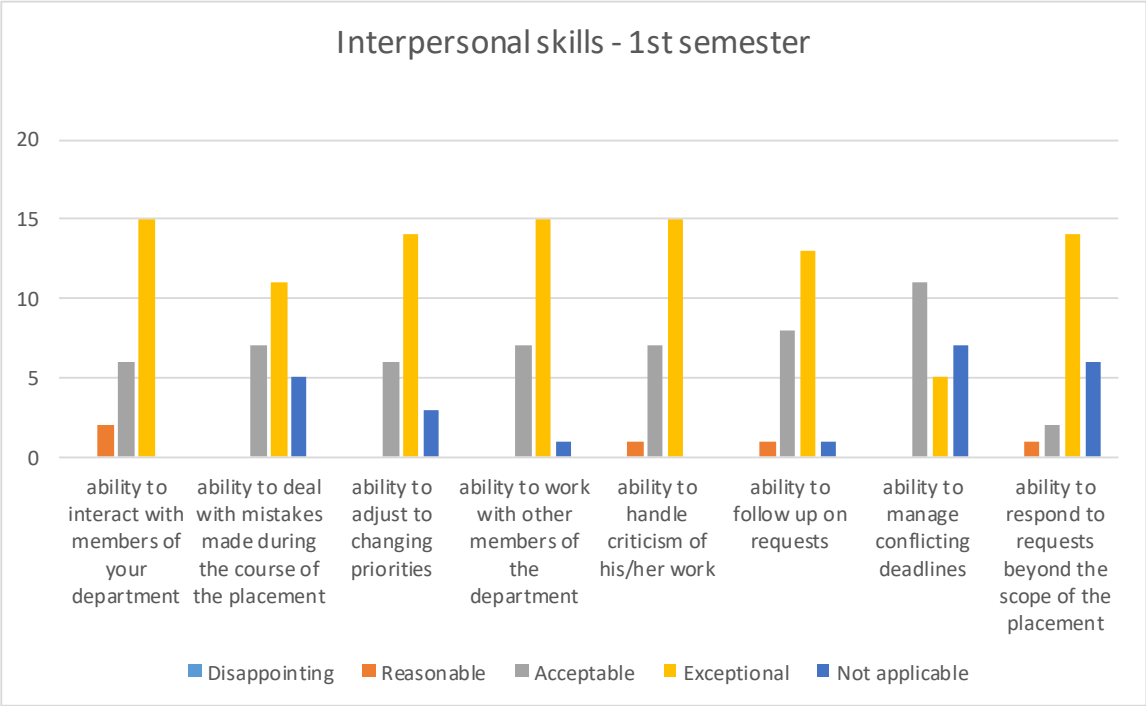

Figure 3: Interpersonal Skills for the First Semester

In the first semester, placement supervisors rated students' interpersonal skills as exceptional across all domains, specifically, the ability to interact with members of your department (n = 15; 65.2%), the ability to work with other members of the department (n =15; 65.2%) and the ability to handle criticism of his/her work (n = 15; 65.2%) (see Figure 3).

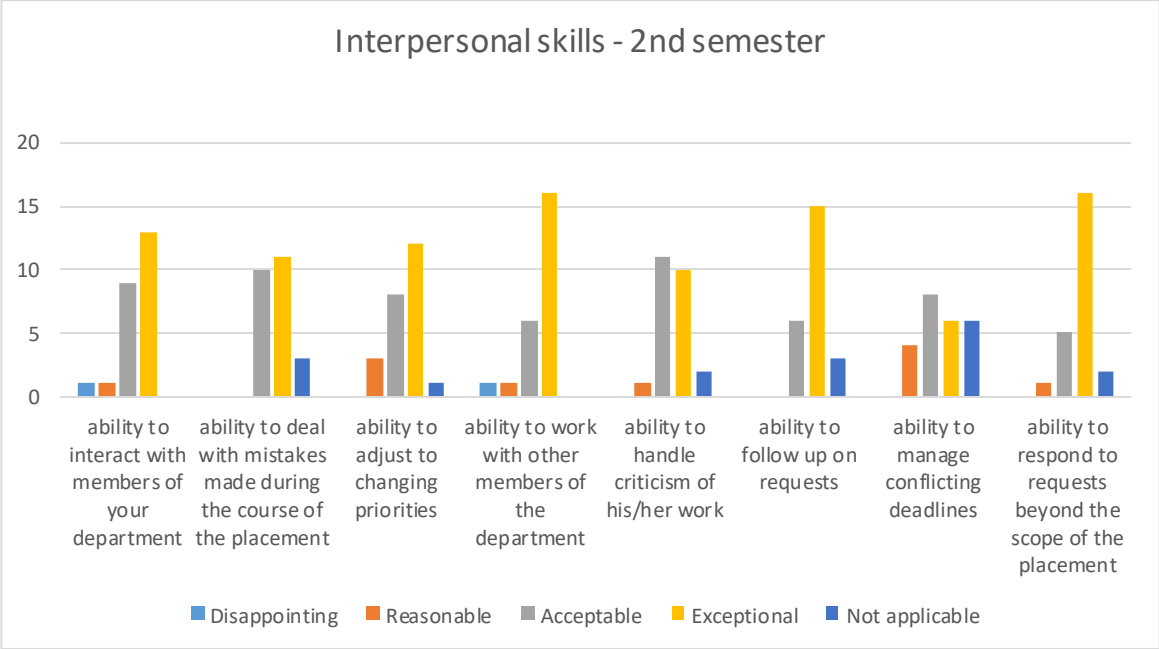

Figure 4: Interpersonal Skills for the Second Semester

In the second semester, placement supervisors rated students as exceptional in the following domains, the ability to work with other members of the department (n = 16; 66.7%), ability to follow up on requests (n = 15; 62.5%) and ability to interact with members of your department (n= 13; 54.2%). The lower end of the ratings comprised reasonable and disappointing regarding the students' interpersonal skills. The specific domains that had reasonable as a rating were the ability to manage conflicting deadlines (n = 4; 16.7%) and the ability to adjust to changing priorities (n = 3; 12.5%).

> *Continue following your interests and passion that you displayed here at placement [organisation's name]. These qualities would serve you well in your career and all the people's lives you could touch. Continue being eager to learn and adapt to new situations.* (Placement supervisor at a Non-profit organisation)

> *Stay confident. Accept criticism and learn from it. Pay attention to detail. Work in a systematic manner. Develop the ability to interpret data with initiative and a view to developing practical insights.* (Placement supervisor in the marketing research sector)

> *Advice: She can be more assertive - it will be easy for her to be taken advantage of in terms of workload. If she pursues a career in market research, she has to learn how to manage up (manage 'superior's' expectations in terms of workload). It will be easy for someone to give her too much to do and she'll simply end up working every night and every weekend. So - she must learn to say NO when a situation calls for it.* (Placement supervisor in the marketing research sector)

As the figures (i.e., 4 and 5) above indicate, the interpersonal skills in the first and second semester are rated as exceptional. There were only two domains in interpersonal skills, whereby students were rated as disappointing, and this appeared mainly in the second semester. These were the ability to work with other members of the department (n = 1; 4.2%) and the ability to interact with members of your department (n = 1; 4.2%) (see Figure 5). The following excerpt serve to indicate this: 'The student can improve his inter-personal skills with his peers and colleagues. He needs to greatly improve his writing skills. The student should continue utilising his networking skills and also maintain his pro-active attitude' (Placement supervisor in a private institution of Higher Education sector).

It is worth noting that, while many of the placement supervisors made some reference to the dimensions that were rated, the following excerpt did not fit in with any of the dimensions rating the interpersonal skills but it was considered important because it highlights the value of the student aligns to that of the placement organisation.

> *Working with individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds need someone who is emotionally well/strong and humble and can be at the level of the beneficiaries to support them well. Communication and interpersonal skills is [sic] key to a successful career.* (Placement supervisor at a Non-profit organisation)

Discussion and recommendations

This paper aimed to evaluate how work placement supervisors rate students enrolled at an open and distance e-learning institution in South Africa during their work placements. This information is useful since it will assist students who graduate from the program in being work ready. A secondary aim of the paper is to serve as a cautionary lesson for academic practitioners, reflecting on the design and delivery of work-integrated learning (WIL) programmes. The following thematic topics are discussed in line with the results of this study: Assessment and placement supervisor's role in WIL; Skills development and support structures; and Aligning WIL programmes with industry.

Assessments and placement supervisor's role in WIL

Data analysis revealed fewer exceptional ratings in the second semester compared to the first across multiple years. However, students consistently received high ratings (i.e., rated as exceptional) for interpersonal skills, aligning with findings by Milne and Caldicott (2016). Yet, exceptional ratings are not necessarily indicative of what employers are looking for in graduates. Despite high ratings, it is unclear whether they reflect what employers truly seek in graduates, necessitating further investigation.

The results underscore the need to revise assessments by involving placement supervisors in their design, focusing on learning outcomes (Ajjawi, 2020; Berndtsson et al., 2020; Ferns et al., 2015; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). Collaboration between academic institutions and placement providers can help define assessment criteria and enhance students' holistic competence (Berndtsson et al., 2020). This collaboration should include an agreement on what the general understanding is on WIL and specifically the types of WIL the MA programme will employ (Fleming et al., 2018; Jackson et al., 2016).

As noticed, there were diverse placement organisations (i.e., academic, market research, psychometrics, and consulting institutions) who hosted students for placements, and this poses assessment challenges, as different sites value different skill sets (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). As seen from the data, different placement sites value different skillsets and may also be at different phases in research projects (Milne & Caldicott, 2016). Reflective practices, such as group supervision sessions with students and student placement progress reports, serve to complement supervisor evaluations.

The qualitative data indicates that some placement supervisors lack specific expectations beyond broad conceptual knowledge of research and general attitudes and conduct. Placement supervisors seem to understand their role as offering learning sites for students, valuing soft skills such as work styles, positive attitudes, and a willingness to learn, which make students 'teachable' (Fynn et al., 2019). Despite this, students generally performed satisfactorily in hard research skills, particularly analysis, with a balanced mix of quantitative and qualitative research across semesters.

Skills development and support structures

The results in this study highlight the need for the programme to cultivate essential skills and establish support structures to that will help students become employable graduates. Mainly highlighted were the importance of soft skills in the programme. Interpersonal skills were consistently rated higher than research skills, with exceptions in staff interaction and mistake management. This trend supports literature highlighting the growing emphasis on soft skills for employability (Fynn et al., 2019; Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017; Yousef et al., 2021). Students excelled in flexibility, feedback handling, client communication, and staff interaction, although lower ratings in the second semester for some suggest areas for improvement.

The data show that the students were consistently rated as exceptional on their ability to be flexible in responding to requests beyond the scope of the placement; the ability to handle feedback; client communication by following up on requests; and interaction with other staff members. However, some students were rated lower on their interaction with staff members and their ability to deal with mistakes in the second semester. When considering these skills, they are deemed important for employers because they are important for effective collaboration, decision-making, and overall success in the workplace (Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017; Yousef et al., 2021). More specifically, where students were rated exceptional on their ability to be flexible in responding to requests beyond the scope of the placement, may be of concern. It is not clear whether students under placement seem to perform activities outside their scope of practice or whether the students committed to an activity that did not conclude by the end of the placement period. Where, the former is concerned, the HPCSA provides a scope of practice for research psychologists is a regulatory body for guiding activities that fall within students professional training (HPCSA, 2020). The scope of practice and forms from the HPCSA on the training of research psychologists should inform the boundaries of the training activities

and should be part of the assessment guidelines for the placement supervisors. In terms of the latter, this may be on the prerogative of the student who may be attempting to gain as much experience and/or securing potential employment. There is a need to clarify and reinforce scope of practice guidelines for placement supervisors. This ensures that activities assigned to students align with professional training requirements, as stipulated by regulatory bodies like the HPCSA for research psychologists (HPCSA, 2020).

While the author is aware that some placement supervisors in the Master's program offered stipends, the study did not specify which providers did so, as this detail was not included in the data collection. Providing financial support, such as stipends, during placements is crucial in contexts like South Africa, where economic constraints can hinder student participation. This support can alleviate financial burdens and facilitate equitable access to learning opportunities (Cameron et al., 2020; Jackson et al., 2016; Zegwaard & Rowe, 2019). To ensure equitable participation in WIL programs, universities and placement organisations must consider offering financial support to students.

Aligning WIL Programmes with industry

This study may have some interesting implications for WIL in postgraduate programs and highlight the importance of developing sector-specific skills. The results suggest a need to enhance the emphasis on soft skills within postgraduate WIL programs, given mixed ratings in hard research skills like quantitative and qualitative analysis. This aligns with sector-specific demands, where skills requirements vary significantly (Fynn & van der Walt, 2019). Low ratings in quantitative and qualitative analysis skills, especially in the second semester, indicate potential gaps in peer learning and skill transfer. Aligning placement ratings with personal development plans can help track students' progress and address specific learning needs (von Treuer et al., 2011).

Differentiating WIL dynamics based on placement organisations' sectors, student numbers, and placement duration can provide valuable insights. Skills requirements vary across sectors which challenge programs to produce employable graduates (Fynn & van der Walt, 2019). While WPL appears to be the most preferred mode for facilitating WIL as also preferred in the context of this study, there should be consideration for different environments where WIL occurs and not just the physical work environment (du Plessis, 2019; Winchester-Seeto & Piggott, 2020). Exposure to diverse learning environments and inviting industry experts into the classroom can enhance employability skills development (du Plessis, 2019; Winchester-Seeto & Piggott, 2020). Academic staff should treat students like professionals and not students as a means to increasing proximity. Students should also be encouraged to network outside their classroom and lecturing team (Dollinger & Brown, 2019). Furthermore, inviting experts from the industry into the classroom could also ease the burden on programs alone to ensure that students are employable by the time they leave the program (Mobarak, 2021; Sambell et al., 2021). Building sustainable partnerships between universities and placement sites is critical.

Quality supervision training for placement supervisors is essential, emphasising the importance of appropriate student tasks, workplace induction, and ethical considerations (Cameron et al., 2020). Quality supervision is an aspect that can form part of the placement training of new placement supervisor and what would be expected of them. Training should focus on aspects such as arranging a workplace induction for students as the placement site; replacing an absent supervisor where applicable; delineating between activities that requires student observation and student participation; assigning tasks that relate to the learning outcomes of the WIL programme (Cameron et al., 2020). Furthermore, the university facilitators should also engage in a conversation on what is it that the placement site requires from them, this way there is sustainable partnerships are fostered and maintained.

Limitations and proposals for future research

A limitation of this study is the relatively small dataset that consisted of 47 placement feedback reports. This prohibited the generalisability of the findings beyond the response sample. Nonetheless, the findings provide valuable insights into the experiences of placement supervisors, who are generally the future employers that absorb students. Future research should consider interviewing placement providers to obtain further insights into their experiences of the students they host during the placement periods and where these students could be employed after graduating from the program.

The study used a retrospective approach by using data that was initially gathered for the assessment of learners rather than for the specific purpose of this study, thus, it may affect the generalisability and perceived robustness of the study's results. Nonetheless, the data used in this study provides valuable insights into the assessment practices and outcomes within this educational context. While the study's results may be context-specific, they highlight important trends and patterns that can inform practice within similar educational settings.

Conclusion

The insight is that the changes in the placement supervisor ratings from semester one to two reflect skills placement supervisors value in the workplace. From this, it is concluded that if HE institutions invite placement providers to function as co-educators, they are responsible for preparing placement supervisors to support and evaluate student learning adequately. This would mean that HE needs to invest in preparing placement supervisors to give students the best advantage of successful employment after graduation. This could entail getting the placement providers' feedback on the revision of the assessment tool.

It is further concerning that students were consistently rated as exceptional in their ability to be flexible in responding to requests beyond the scope of their placement. In reflection on the program, the program coordinators should consider putting measures in place to protect students from labour infractions and unpaid work. This is also important given the history of South Africa; students of colour from disadvantaged backgrounds may experience further financial constraints as will work longer hours at the expense of wanting to learn. Having contracts that clearly outline what students will have access to and the number of working hours will assist both placement supervisors and students in what is expected of each other. In addition, to better understand the ratings, placement supervisors should be requested to motivate their rating of the student.

The study highlights the important contributions that industry can have in the curriculum and the training of psychology students, thus enabling students to adapt easily to the workplace. In addition, HE makes an important contribution by producing employable quality graduates. Thus, the study has implications for educators and how they implement WIL.

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