UNDERSTANDING SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED TO STUDENTS THROUGHOUT WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING PLACEMENT PROCESS: CASE STUDY OF SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

by

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I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

_____   **May 2023**

SIGNATURE   DATE

DEDICATION

This PhD dissertation is dedicated to my both late loving parents,

My pillar of strength, My inspiration

To our GOD and Father be the Glory for ever and ever! Amen

(Philippians 4:20)

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"Do not judge me by my success, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again" - Nelson Mandela

ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa are under pressure from the government, business, and communities to address the country's overall skills gap, while also expecting to ensure that their students are prepared to satisfy the standards and requirements of the business world. Furthermore, HEI are expected to offer student support, prepare students with theory and fuse it with Work-integrated Learning (WIL) placement experience, so that students joining the workplace organisations are prepared to tackle the essential skills.

The purpose of this research study was to investigate students' lived experience of student support services provided at the HEIs throughout their WIL placement process. Furthermore, this study aimed at ascertaining and comprehending various aspects that led to the study's overall conclusion: what student support services are expected from HEI *prior to, during*, and *post* student WIL placement process. Student readiness without student support proved to be challenging. The researcher sought to establish from various participants, what support services *are expected* by the students, what support services *are provided* by the HEI, and what student support services *are required* to make the WIL placement process successful. This study explored the type of student support necessary, challenges and constraints experienced by students throughout WIL placement process.

Based on the nature of this study, a qualitative approach was guided by a case study research design. Thirty-six (36) participants were selected by means of convenience, purposive and snowballing sampling techniques. Multi-data collection techniques consisting of semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and an open-ended questionnaire were used as the research instruments to collect qualitative data. A thematic analysis was used in the analysis processes of this study to give meaning to the data.

Various themes emerged from the data which ought to be reviewed by HEIs to streamline student support throughout WIL. The findings revealed that HEIs did not adequately support students with necessary skills required for WIL placement related

to the workplace environment, causing student placement to disconnect. Other themes emerged whereby students were denied placement readiness, while others indicated that timeframe for WIL placement was restricted. Availability of current and valid resources was raised as a huge concern. Furthermore, Institutional relevance to industry needs, avoiding skill mismatch of what the employer value and what the HEI are willing to assess should be addressed.

This study proposed a Six-Phase Student Support Model for understanding the anticipated contribution and collaboration from various stakeholders to student support throughout the WIL placement process. The recommendations from this study could have a direct impact on a number of organisations, including the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA), the Government, HEIs, world of work, and students as participants in the WIL process in South Africa. The recommended Six-Phase Student Support Model for the WIL placement process exemplifies collaborative processes and teamwork while clearly defining the respective roles and responsibilities at each stage. This study provided evidence of participants' expectations for student support throughout WIL placement, the services the HEIs provide for student support, and the types of student support required to ensure the success of the WIL placement process.

Keywords: Collaboration, Higher Education Institutions, Support Services, Student Placement; Stakeholders, Universities, Work-integrated Learning, Work Placement Experience

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BHER	Borderless Higher Education for Refugees
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
ESDC	Employment and Social Development Canada
EU	European Union
HEI	Higher Education Intuition
HE	Higher Education
HEQF	Higher Education Qualification Framework
ITF	Industrial Training Fund
NDP	National Development Plan
MIPPS	Major Industrial Project Placement Scholarship
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NSF	National Skills Fund
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NSDP	National Skill Development Plan
PAYE	Pay As You Earn
PSET	Post-School Education and Training
SDA	Skills Development Act
SDL	Skills Development Levy
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SSP	Sector Skills Plans
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNISA	University of South Africa
UK	United Kingdom
WIL	Work-Integrated Learning
WITS	University of Witwatersrand
WSP	Workplace Skills Plans

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

"Work placements are supported by employers who are recruiting, valued by students who wish to be work-ready, and initiated by academics who want students to experience theory in practice." (Orrell 2004:1)

1.1   INTRODUCTION

Work-integrated Learning (WIL), to develop work-ready graduates who could transfer the knowledge and skills from the lecture rooms to the world of work, is a key factor in Post School Education and Training (PSET) institutions to address the sustainability of the prospective industry. As a result, there has been a growing interest from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) globally, in Work-integrated Learning (WIL) and its potential impact on student development and employability. WIL has been implemented in many countries, bridging the gap between the theoretical academic knowledge and the professional skills when students are exposed to the world of work in their various disciplines of profession. Therefore, it is considered as an important feature in HEIs globally, attracting significant funding for future growth (Abeysekera, 2006a).

Chapter 1, as an introduction, offers an overview and background to the study. Following the statement of the problem, the chapter presents the purpose as well as the significance of the study, primary research question and sub-questions. Additionally, this chapter briefly discusses the theoretical framework underpinning the study, its relevance, the philosophical perspective, research paradigm, data collection and analysis, outlining the significance of the research results. Furthermore, it explains the parameters of the study, offers a definition of terms and limitations of the study are specified. Finally, concluding Chapter 1, a summary and description of the organisation for this dissertation is presented.

1.2   BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

WIL is perceived to be a mechanism that provides an opportunity for all students to work with professionals in an authentic environment (Patrick et al., 2008). Such opportunities allow students to develop and experience authentic work skills that are vital to their future careers but are difficult to obtain through lecture-based teaching (Jonassen et al., 2006). Although WIL appears to be an umbrella terminology used by many organisations, there are other terminologies which include work placements, internships, field work, sandwich year degrees, job shadowing and cooperative education (von Treuer et al., 2010). Clinton and Thomas (2011) offer a further understanding of WIL, that of service learning, which encourages students to participate in organised service activities, contributing to the community. Traditionally Medicine, Nursing, Education, and Law have been acknowledged as incorporating WIL. However, due to employers expecting 'work- ready' students, the scope for WIL experience has expanded (Billett, 2011a; Garnett, et al., 2012). As it stands, WIL's expertise overlaps into other non-clinical programmes due to increasing pressure on universities to produce graduates off the shelf (Garnett, et al., 2012), informed by experience, participation and reflection, providing students with an educational understanding, transition to professional practice (Billett, 2011a).

WIL could boost self-confidence, increase independence and teamwork, develop personal and expert abilities and self-identity (Hynie et al., 2011; Kaliyamoorthy & Sridevi, 2011). Additionally, WIL is deemed to be instrumental in developing confidence in workplace and supporting students to become work ready (Billett 2011a; Clinton & Thomas 2011), supporting them with knowledge of the character and standard of skills required in world of work with the comprehension (Wilton, 2012). To aid students maximise their employability skills (Yorke, 2011), it is believed that one important quality of their graduate training is keeping up with current challenges within the HE sector (Coll & Zegwaard, 2006).

Research has reported on the improvement in employability skills with students who have completed WIL; these skills include team working, problem-solving, communication, information literacy and professionalism (Freudenberg et al., 2011). Furthermore, employability skills are considered integral to enable the students to

effectively function in the advanced and fast-changing workplace. Yorke and Knight (2006) suggest that employability is defined as the set of outcomes (skills, understandings and personal characteristics) that increase a graduate's chances of getting a job and succeeding in their chosen career, benefiting themselves, the world of work, their communities and the economy. WIL supports Higher Education (HE) students to develop the ability to construct knowledge through four learning steps according to Kolb (1984), as indicated in Figure 1.1:
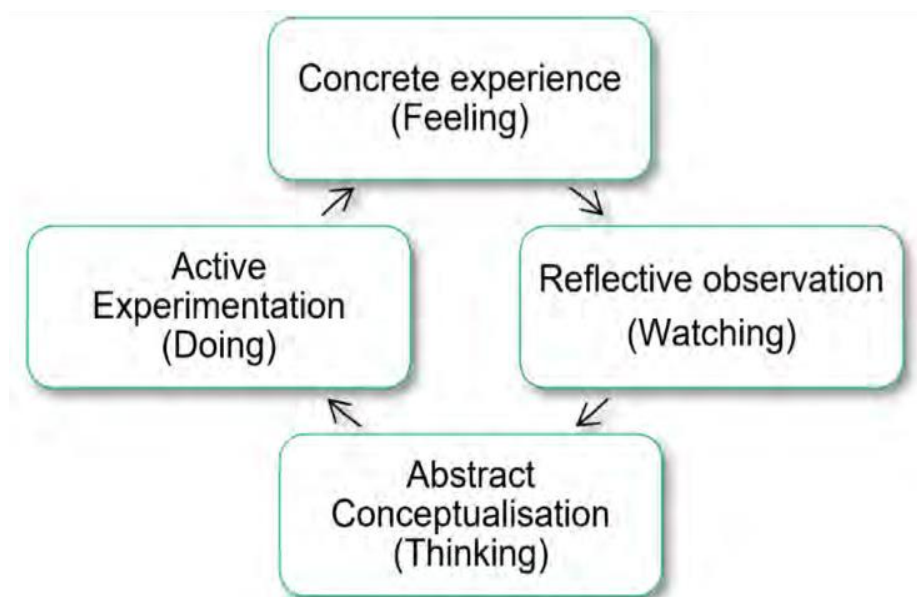
(Source: Kolb, 1984:21)

Figure 1.1: The experiential learning cycle

The following learning steps are the benefits that HE students could gain from WIL:

- *Concrete experience* (Experiencing) - students experience experimenting knowledge in an environment that stimulates their inquisitiveness to learn;
- *Reflective observation* (Observing and reflecting) - students explore and ponder upon this experience;
- *Abstract conceptualisation* (Constructing) - students create knowledge and/or invent new ideas from these reflections; and
- *Active experimentation* (Testing) - students test the developed ideas and knowledge under different circumstances. Knowledge was further developed through evaluations of test results and explanations of the reasons behind the results.

3

In an authentic environment such as that provided by WIL, there are many occasions in which HE students experience circumstances that provoke their thinking and engage them in learning, therefore allowing them to develop new ideas and deepen their knowledge. WIL allows HE students to enhance their understanding of what is learnt in academia, in comparison to what happens in the world of work. Additionally, Ferns et al., (2014) recognise that WIL offers HE students a chance to work with professionals and learn ways in which these professionals tackle industrial problems.

HE students in WIL placement are required to utilise knowledge or theories they have studied to solve real-life problems, whereby professionals often use rule-of-thumb or tacit knowledge (Wilton, 2012). Tacit knowledge is personal expertise that has been accumulated experientially in the workplace by each professional. This type of knowledge could not be learned from academic environment. Instead, HE students are required to work with professionals, observing how these professionals work to develop this tacit knowledge, which is deeply rooted in action and involvement in a specific context at a specific time. Solving real-life problems allows HE students to understand ways to apply theoretical knowledge and the limitations of knowledge application. This understanding is increased through learning by doing and not by studying from lectures or textbooks. A given problem in real life often has more than one solution, depending upon the scope of work and the underlying assumptions whereas there is usually one exact solution to a textbook problem (Jonassen et al., 2006).

Solving a problem in the workplace generally requires multidisciplinary knowledge and collaboration among experts from each field. However, at HEIs, students mostly use specific disciplinary knowledge to solve problems and rarely have a chance to collaborate with students from other disciplines. Higher education students who join workplace organisations often lack essential skills for which WIL was initiated to address this gap. Due to this, WIL gives students the opportunity to consider and talk about their observations, which enables them to create tacit knowledge in accordance with Kolb's learning cycle. Through WIL, students experience 'reality' which differs significantly from academic settings. Finally, there is consensus that WIL presents a valuable opportunity to build relationships with industry and to establish a more well-rounded and realistic experience that enables higher education students become

4

ready for employment (Helyer & Lee, 2014). As a result, the learning opportunities provided by employers to both committed students and academics to support this learning process, is an important consideration.

In as much as WIL is beneficial to the students, support services are required throughout the WIL placement process. It was in Von Treuer, et al.'s (2011) work, where the lack of student support was seen through the eyes of the student prior to, during and post WIL placement. In addition, not only did the students need practical support, but also structural support to be prepared prior to WIL placement. Patrick et al., (2009) state that appropriate preparation, suitable supervision and mentoring arrangements are the three crucial strategies of an effective placement support. World of work expert partners and placement providers allow students to view working procedures, engage in knowledge on effective work practices, hierarchies and to work in a team environment under supervision (Billett, 2011a). For the WIL programme to be implemented and sustained, preparation of students includes generous opportunities and resources (Patrick et al., 2009). However, the reality is that many students are not prepared to assume WIL placement, nor are they aware of the personal skills required to succeed.

Finally, this study which investigated student perceptions of students support services provided by higher education institutions throughout the WIL placement process, extrapolates the 'lived experience' of participants that participated in the WIL process, in some way or form, in various disciplines in selected South African universities. Therefore, the aim of this study was to determine students' experiences of student support services, to develop appropriate resources for future students.

1.3   RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

This study was motivated by the researchers' unanswered questions concerning student support services provided in South African HEIs throughout WIL placements. It had been the researcher' experience and observation that some HEIs struggle to grasp the fundamental concepts and practices of student support services which may influence learning and affects progression of students in each discipline. South African Higher Education landscape has changed radically in the last two decades, with the

inclusion and implementation of WIL at all higher education levels of education to curb the rising unemployment rate. In this climate of change, there has been a growing interest among the higher education sector, with the potential new directions and outcomes that have invigorated and better aligned relationships between education and the world of work. This has raised growing concern by governments about the return on their investments in higher education, wanting to distinguish graduates' capabilities once the course is completed and how could this be measured.

The current configuration of the national Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) offers great potential outcomes for collaboration among HEIs for the benefit of the system, for its students, other stakeholders in which WIL plays an integral part (DHET, 2013) in the world of work. On the other hand, it wants to employ graduates who are already familiar with workplace culture and demands, and understanding of the intersection of theory and practice (Ferns et al., 2014). However, HE students need to find support in everyday relevance and practical applications to their studies for their life after graduation. The importance and success of student support services throughout WIL needs to address the gap between industry expectations and students aspirations. HE leadership understands that this is what the world of work and potential HE students require, and they are thus expected to mediate and deliver this with an appropriate WIL programme.

1.4   PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite many positive aspects and benefits of WIL identified in the background to this study, the sources and nature of support services provided to HE students prior to, during and post WIL placement, remain largely unexplored. Horstmanshof and Moore, (2016) stress the importance of more being done in terms of support, preparation and training for the WIL placement process for both students and the world of work. The preparation of the component includes ample resourcing and opportunities available for student support services throughout the WIL programme to be implemented and sustained (Horstmanshof et al., 2016).

Abery et al. (2015) expressed their concern with regard to the lack of information shared with students prior to WIL placement. Students' preparation for WIL placement

means defining expectations and ensuring that students have realistic hopes and anticipation prior to , during and post placement (Patrick et al., 2009). Additionally, the support services provided by HEIs ought to prepare and equip students prior to their placement, offering pre-information about the WIL processes to fully experience student placement (Ferns & Moore, 2012). Batholmeus and Pop (2019) concur that it is imperative in preparing HE students for WIL because of work variation, environments and mentorship. Therefore, student support services needto ensure that employability skills such as communication skills, leadership skills and time management skills are enhanced as these are required for employing students (Ferreira Rebelo et al., 2017).

Students who are not well prepared would have a poorer placement and which places a higher demand on the expert partner and HE placement co-ordinator (Chipchase et al., 2012; Parker, 2011). This confirms Du Toit and Serfontein's (2005) argument that processes and structures should be in place to ensure the efficacy of WIL student placement. Being fully supported and prepared for WIL placement, allows students the maximum learning experience and the opportunity to optimally utilise their time to practice, develop and enhance their skills and knowledge (Chipchase et al., 2012). However, researchers such as Abery et al., (2015) note that many students are not fully prepared to undertake WIL placement and are oblivious of the personal and professional requirements required to be successful. Preparation includes the ability of a student to present to the world of work as professional, competent and well prepared (Chipchase et al., 2012).

Placing unprepared students in the workplace could be risky and may impact negatively on all stakeholders, considering that there was a shared responsibility for preparation and planning between the student, the educational institution and industry to facilitate readiness (Chipchase et al., 2012). Sim et al. (2003) found that students who merely followed procedures during WIL placement or who worked on routine tasks that provided them little motivation to learn, might not fully develop their learning at placement, as expected. Again, students' learning could also be hindered if they are assigned projects for which companies expect unrealistic results. Without support and sufficient preparation for placement, Thonglek et al. (2011) found that unrealistic expectations from world of work could put students under stress, which has the

potential to interfere with their learning development. In contrast, students who organise their own WIL placement, lack student support services and do not spend time on work-related skills, but rather run unrelated errands, often do not develop the essential skills for which WIL was initiated to address those gaps (Winberg, 2006).

For this research, this study explored the type of student support necessary, challenges and constraints experienced by students throughout WIL placement process. The researcher looked at the following aspects:

- what support services *are expected* by the students,
- what support services *are provided* by the HEI, and
- what student support services *are required* to make the WIL placement process successful.

1.5   RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND AIM OF THE STUDY

The main research question was: *What are student perceptions of support services provided by higher education institutions throughout the WIL placement process?*
The following sub-question that logically flow from the main research questions were:

- What is the understanding of the concept 'student support' throughout WIL?
- What type of student support services are provided by HEIs to students prior to, during and post the WIL placement process?
- What are the perceptions and roles of the various stakeholders towards student support services throughout WIL?
- What are the students' lived experiences and challenges of these student support services?
- What strategies can be recommended to improve the existing student support services provided to HE students throughout the WIL placement process?

This study explored students' perceptions of support services provided throughout WIL placement process at selected universities in South Africa. In pursuing answers to the above research questions, the study was guided by the following objectives to:

- Determine understanding of the concept 'student support' throughout WIL.

- Ascertain the type of student support services provided by HEIs to students prior to, during and post the WIL placement process.

- Reveal the perceptions and roles of the various stakeholders towards student support services provided throughout WIL

- Establish the students' lived experiences and challenges of these student support services.

- Identify the strategies that can be recommended to improve on the existing student support services provided to HE students throughout the WIL placement process.

1.6   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Higher Education institutions are known to be the drivers of national development progression. Effective employability of students requires more than utilisation of HE expertise and resources. In this study, the researcher argues that student support is an essential section of WIL placement, which has been neglected and disregarded by most HEIs in South Africa.

As a result, the study was perceived to be significant as follows:
- This study uncovers the 'lived experiences' of participants who took part in the WIL process, in some way or form, in various disciplines in elected South African universities and as such could contribute knowledge to existing literature.

- The study identified important support that each stakeholder; that is, the government, higher institutions, and the world of work, should provide to the students before, during and post throughout within the context of WIL placement process.

- The results of this study might challenge a review of the current WIL placement process and support services provided by HEIs and the world of work prior to, during and post placement.

- It is anticipated that the recommended strategies that emanate from the research findings might assist HEIs, government and world of work to improve on their current WIL and student placement processes.

1.7   CONCEPTS AND THE THEORY UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

The concepts student support and WIL encapsulate a multitude of thoughts and included the students' perceptions of support service provided by the HEIs during WIL placement processes and practices and how they contribute positively towards it. Therefore, this study was conceptualised in terms of and grounded on the following concepts:

- Student placement
- Student support
- Support system

An in-depth literature study of relevant and contemporary sources on these concepts serves as background knowledge to this interpretative study. Therefore, concepts that shed light on the understanding of student support and WIL, including surrounding traits, was investigated. In addition, four components encapsulated within the Social Support Theory were considered for this study which incorporate: emotional, tangible, informational, companionship support, these different concepts being clarified and discussed in Chapter 2.

1.8   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section provides a brief overview of the research methodology followed in this research.

1.8.1   Philosophical Perspective and Research Paradigm

The research was conducted based on underlying philosophical perspectives or assumptions which accounts for the validity of the research and appropriate methodology used. Therefore, this section demonstrates the philosophical assumptions which were reviewed and reported. The main research question in this

study was: *What are students' perceptions of support services provided by HEIs throughout the WIL placement process?* This required understanding of students' perceptions and experiences of student support services provided throughout the WIL placement process, regardless the area of the study-discipline within selected South African universities.

By implication, student support and, the lack thereof, and how it could influence WIL placement was investigated in this study. This research was qualitative in nature; therefore, it was situated in the interpretivist paradigm which was deemed appropriate for this study as the researcher was able to make an interpretation of what was seen, heard and understood (Creswell, 2009). While not an exhaustive list, reviewing literature was a basis for broadening the understanding of factors of support services and the significant contributors to challenges of HEI, which the study aimed to investigate as it may contribute to knowledge. The preferred paradigm was able to establish the 'intent, motivation, and expectations' for the research (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006), allowing the researcher to liaise with the participants, gaining clear understanding and insight into the participants' lived experiences, expectations, perceptions and practices of student support for WIL placement within HEIs in South Africa, focusing for improvement of practice from all features and approaches.

The researcher approached the study with the following assumptions:
- Participants would read the letters approved by the University of South Africa (UNISA) Ethics Committee, which would introduce the research and request their participation;
- Participants would act positively in response to the request to participate and therefore volunteer to partake in the study;
- Selected participants in the world of work, would willingly participate in semi-structured interviews, and
- Participants would be willing and keen to participate in the focus groups and qualitative open-ended questionnaires.

1.8.2   Research Design

The research design may be interpreted as configuration of any scientific research. According to Creswell (2012), a research design is the researcher's choice concerning the study's components and development of the design. Additionally, Burns and Grove (2010), define it as structures within which the study is implemented by using a plan or blueprint indicating how the researcher intends to conduct the research. The researcher evaluates the 'what, where, when, how much and means' of an investigation or an exploration to address the research problem (Maree, 2016). In this research, the researcher selected a qualitative research approach considering its suitability for this exploratory study.

1.8.2.1   *Qualitative research approach*

Qualitative research is that which involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data to comprehend concepts, opinions and people's experiences. Bhandari (2020) states that this research approach is used to gather in-depth insights into how different people understand and respond to the world in which they live. A qualitative approach was followed utilising semi-structured, in-depth interviews, focus groups and qualitative open-ended questionnaires with relevant participants to collect the relevant data. Aspers and Cortes (2019) state that qualitative research is a multi-data collection technique that relies more on the interpretation of the collected data.

This means that, to avoid any sort of bias, the researcher has to make sure that the data collected is accurate and is interpreted correctly (Cope, 2014). There are means available to qualitative researchers to make sure that the data collected is correctly interpreted. This comprises a few checks and triangulation amongst others. In Chapter 3, these concepts are discussed in greater detail indicating how the data interpretation is devoid of any biases or preconceptions.

1.8.2.2   *A case study research design*

Creswell (2012), Maree (2016) and McMillan and Schumacher (2010) describe a case study as an in-depth analysis of a single entity. This research was a case study (Creswell, 2011) carried out with selected participants that participated in the WIL process, in some way or form, in various disciplines in selected South African

universities in greater Pretoria area, Gauteng, South Africa, that provided WIL in the academic programmes. Henning et al. (2004) suggest that a case study could be investigated in-depth by using different data-collecting sources, a system or a case, that could be a person, group of people with a common denominator or event.

A case study design was used to explore the necessary evidence of the much-required answer to the research question of students' perception towards higher education support services provided throughout the WIL placement process across various disciplines. The intention in this qualitative research centred the activities on an 'insider perspective on social action' while remaining sensitive to the context in which the participants operate and to their frames of reference and history (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

1.9   POPULATION AND SAMPLING

To collect a rich knowledge of information, the first step in research methodology was to identify the population, which in this study, were stakeholders and HE students that participated in the WIL process, in some way or form, in various disciplines (Walliman, 2011). The identification of the specific group that constitute the population was an early step in the sampling process and could affect the nature of the conclusions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Therefore, acquiring the most effective possible participants from the population for this research with knowledge and own experiences of student support services provided by HEIs throughout WIL process was crucial. From this population using convenience, purposive and snow-ball sampling, participants were selected.

The selection of the participants is best outlined by Creswell (2012) that the idea behind qualitative research is to deliberately choose participants that would best help the researcher to comprehend and interpret the research question. The participants were purposively selected, hand-picked based on their WIL participation, in some way or form, in their own area of disciplines (Stalmeijer et al., 2014). The sample for this research comprised thirty-six (36) participants located in the greater Pretoria area of Gauteng Province, South Africa.

Firstly, the *semi-structured interviews* involved eight (8) participants and this small group of various stakeholders assisted in clarifying their role and impact on student support service throughout the WIL placement. Eight (8) participants were selected and interviewed, five (5) participants came from the private sector and three (3) from the public sector, of which two (2) hold positions in government working with WIL, four (4) employers who took in WIL placement student and the last two (2) hold positions in HEIs, working with the WIL module. Even though the semi-structured interviews were conducted as discussions in which the interviewer elicited comprehensive information and comments from the respondents, the usage of the interview guide (Appendix C) suggests that the interviews had some structure (Bowen, 2005).

Secondly, the *focus group discussions* comprised eight (8) chosen participants who had completed WIL placement in their own study-discipline area. This focus group was conducted face-to-face involving eight (8) selected participants of which five (5) studied at public HEIs and three (3) studied at private HEIs. Additionally, two (2) had completed their diploma and the other six (6) completed their degrees.

Lastly, the *qualitative open-ended questionnaires*, were emailed to twenty (20) chosen participants who have completed WIL placement in their own study-discipline area. These selected participants of which thirteen (13) had completed their qualifications at public HEIs while seven (7) had completed their qualifications at private HEIs. Furthermore, eighteen (18) attained degrees and the other two (2) attaineddiploma qualifications. All twenty participants completed their WIL placement in their own study-discipline area.

Most important was that both the focus group and qualitative open-ended questionnaire samples consisted of various HEI graduates owing to their involvement in the WIL programme, in their assorted discipline areas of specialisation, which included a compulsory WIL placement component in their course at a public or HEI in the greater Pretoria area, Gauteng, South Africa.

1.10 DATA COLLECTION AND PROCEDURE

A qualitative research approach was used in this study, therefore multi-data collection techniques were employed, comprising semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and an open-ended questionnaire to collect data. The researcher was interested in investigating the similarities of the participants' views, therefore purposely choosing the multi-data collection technique to ensure a holistic analysis. These multi-data collection techniques were designed to encourage full, meaningful answers using the participants' own knowledge and experience in student support services throughout WIL placement practices at South African HEI which, it was hoped it offered rich data (Merriam, 2009).

In this research, face-to-face and telephonic semi-structured interviews were chosen to gather the rich information (Van Teijlingen et al., 2014) from the selected participants guided by structured topics and themes which had to be investigated. The interviewee used prompts or probes that urged participants to elaborate, but they negated the chance of derailing the questioning. The focus group interview was viewed as the most effective method for acquiring knowledge from one-of-a-kind conditions that could not be effectively achieved from other research instruments.

As a result of the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic, a few unexpected challenges arose which contributed to the choice of an electronic qualitative open-ended questionnaire to replace the second focus group interview, discussed at length in Chapter 3. The researcher used an open-ended qualitative questionnaire in this study as triangulation contributed to another method of collecting data. Additionally, the open-ended questions encouraged the participants to articulate their responses verbally or written in their own words Züll (2016). Porst (2011) found that the open-ended questionnaire provides participant the opportunity to offer criticism or comments.

Wide-ranging documents used throughout the WIL process by the different stakeholders were requested to contribute to this study, such as student hand-outs by stakeholders, policies and contracts between parties. Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014) are of the opinion that documents in an entire society or population must have at least one distinctive characteristic that is relevant to the research question.

1.11   DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Data analysis and interpretation proceed in a rational movement between the problem and findings (Mouton, 2011). Qualitative data analysis is about the location and the undertaking of characterising, sorting and conjecturing subsequently clarifying, investigating and mapping what is essential to the analyst. All semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed (that is, recordings transformed verbatim into typed text) before the data is analysed, whereas with the open-ended questionnaires, no transcribing was required. Henning et al., (2004) explained that the analysis of the data collected from the participants is organised into codes, similar or common information is grouped into groups which is then categorised as similarities and difference into emerging themes.

1.12   TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Qualitative researchers use trustworthiness to measure reliability and validity within a qualitative study (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Furthermore, Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., (2014) refer to 'Lincoln and Guba' models which reduces any bias in the results, which relies on the application of four criteria to ensure reliability, namely, trust, transfer, reliability and authentication.

The trustworthiness of this study was ensured by digitally recording the data and transcribing each interview session, the quality and credibility of the information gathered. The transcribed interviews, findings or results of this study were availed to all participants after its completion, in order to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the data collected. As a result, the research study's findings were considered trustworthy, reliable, relevant, and logical.

1.13   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics involves integrity on both a personal and professional level. It requires that the researcher acts with integrity through standing up to the ethical principles as well as the professional standards. Ethical considerations such as permission to conduct the

research, informed consent and confidentiality were adhered to and are discussed further in Chapter 3.

1.14   LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of any research are the issues that the researcher had no control over, whereas the delimitations were boundaries set or decisions to be embraced in the study. The first limitation of the study concerned paucity in South African research relating to student support services throughout the WIL placement process. The researcher found it difficult not having the adequate South African nor African literature as a foundation or basis for understanding student support services and WIL. Therefore, the researcher relied mostly on international literature. The second limitation was organising the second focus group discussion. The Covid-19 worldwide pandemic hit abruptly and disrupted the research study plan. Not only were the participants not available for face-to-face interviews or the focus group discussion, but all had left the city student accommodation and returned home. Lack of internet connectivity and coverage was a deterrent. The researcher discusses this matter in Chapter 3.

The first delimitation of the study was that the researcher decided to use convenience, purposeful and snowball sampling which limited the ability to generalise findings outside the area of Gauteng, South Africa. Secondly, this sample was selected from a group of students and a small group of stakeholders from the greater Pretoria area, who had experienced and actively participated in the WIL process, in some way or form, in different disciplines in selected South African universities. Anyone outside this perimeter was not represented by the sample in this study.

1.15   ORGANISATION OF THE DISSERTATION

This section provides a brief outline and layout of the five chapters that constitute the study:

CHAPTER 1: Orientation to the study provided an overview of this research study including the introduction, background, rationale and context of the investigation.

Furthermore, the chapter explained the problem statement, the scope, aims and objectives of the study, research design, approach and methodology of the study. The definition of key concepts of WIL and student support using the lens into HE students' perceptions on WIL practices, focused on improvement of student support and reflecting the theoretical orientation of the study on WIL.

CHAPTER 2: Literature review provides a comprehensive literature review of the various theories and concepts that explain the student support using the lens of WIL practices and the improvement thereof. Furthermore, it reflects the theoretical orientation of the study on Social Support Theory which is extensively explored. This chapter provides a review of support services in South Africa and other countries' HEIs using the lens to comprehend students' perceptions on student support throughout WIL processes and practices, working towards the improvement of practice. The impact of little or no student support, successes and challenges within WIL, the roles and implications of all stakeholders are also discussed.

CHAPTER 3: Research design and methodology consists of a discussion of the research design, an explanation of the methodology selected and used to conduct the investigation. Topics include the sample of this research, data collection methods, procedures followed to analyse and interpret the collected data which assist in finding the answer to the research question. The ethical considerations that are relevant to this study are described.

CHAPTER 4: Data analysis and presentation offers a report on the empirical research findings emerging from a comprehensive analysis. It includes the interpretation and discussion of the research outcomes of the students' perceptions on support provided by HEIs throughout WIL placement. The findings are presented in themes and sub-themes, substantiated with direct quotes from the participants and interpreted in light of the research questions raised under the statement of the problem

CHAPTER 5: Summary, conclusion and recommendations consists of the discovery in the study and summarises the whole study. Interpretations of data collected, literature findings and conclusions and limitations of the study and a summary of the key research findings from the empirical investigation are dealt with in this chapter. In

addition, recommendations that focus on contributing to the improvement of HEI students' support services throughout the WIL placement practices are provided.

1.16   SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

Very little research has been conducted in South Africa on HE students' perceptions and experiences concerning student support services provided and implemented throughout WIL placement practices and processes by South African HEIs. Therefore, this chapter provided an overview and context of the problem, the problem statement, the research questions, and the research objectives of the study. The research methodology was briefly presented, including research design, population and sample, data collection and analysis. The motivation for the study and the limitations of the study were also given. Relevant terms or concepts used throughout this study were identified and described, then the organisation of the study was finally outlined, and the chapter ended with a summary. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework of the study.

CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance" (Dewey, 1916:144)

2.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 provided an overview and background to the research study. This chapter discusses the literature and addresses the concerns, elaborating and drawing on threshold notions from theories, framing the research findings and highlighting the unanswered questions regarding students' perceptions of higher education support services provided throughout the Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) placement process.

It was through the literature review that researchers area able to develop an understanding of the perceived problems by identifying viable contributions important to the research questions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The study's conceptual or theoretical framework was developed because of researching the literature. In addition, recognising current literature enables the researcher to identify possible research designs and strategies for one's research efforts; it assisted the researcher in learning the formats and procedures for writing and communicating findings as contributions to new knowledge.

This chapter comprises two themes. Firstly, a brief overview of WIL is presented and investigated from a global perspective in its broadest sense narrowing down to focus on student support services throughout the WIL placement process within the South African context. What follows in this chapter is an account of the roles of the stakeholders and the student support services mechanism that was in place prior to, during and post the WIL placement process. Secondly, this chapter focuses on bringing together concepts from various existing theories, which served as the catalyst encompassing the concepts, using the Social Support theory to underpin the research. It offers an expansive sketch of the most significant traits of student support services in recent years, to serve as a backdrop to an exploration of the questions raised in Chapter 1.

The absence of student support throughout WIL placement, would emerge as problematic to confine or at least narrow the gap in this area. The aim and purpose of this chapter are thus to evaluate these aspects critically and identify the disparities that existed.

2.2 EARLY UNDERSTANDING OF APPROACHES TO WIL AND STUDENT SUPPORT IN THE CONTEXT OF WIL

The understanding of WIL is a placement in which the student is physically assigned to a workplace in the world of work which is combined with reflective activities that integrate learning into the work and class environment. Over the years, research have established that various titles such as "work placements, internships, fieldwork, sandwich year degrees, job shadowing, and cooperative education" were adopted when conducting WIL (Von Treuer et al., 2010:496). Currently, as it stands globally, there are more than forty different terminologies used for WIL.

2.2.1 Understanding of Approaches to WIL

Dewey (1859-1952) was an early educational theorist who believed that everyone learned according to their actions and that authentic education was achieved through experience. Dewey had no shortage of ideas, but his idea of vocation as helping people to learning through doing, his conception of a 'vocation' as a calling to a deeply felt and ethically grounded identity within a chosen profession included the importance of a critical and scientific approach to key issues of public life linking professional and professional competence. Later theorists like Kolb (1984) also pointed out that experience was part of learning, but it was not a sufficient condition for learning. Biggs and Tang (2011) argued in the context of HE that effective learning required a knowledge base, motivational context, learning activities and interactions. To learn, students needed to observe and ponder the experience, develop concepts for understanding the experience, apply and test those concepts through new experiences. Schön (1983) pointed out the importance of reflection and reflective practice in professional training. Recently, the empirical learning cycle of Kolb and the theoretical basis of Shane's 'reflexive practitioner' model has been questioned. People

do not always learn from experience and general reflection, especially if they do not think critically about it or are not responsible for its creation. When such learning is viewed only as a means of obtaining information about the workplace and linking technical knowledge to workplace applications, its effectiveness is not fully realised. Research on Work-integrated Learning (WIL) has a globally recognised history and widely supported practices, resulting in effective learning that presents students with the opportunity to apply knowledge ideas and concepts to practice-oriented tasks to improve employability. WIL makes sure that the students have the experience (Peach & Matthews, 2011). According to Park (1943) WIL was frequently been compared to cooperative learning. As the pioneer of cooperative education, Schneider's goals centre on helping students find employment as well as learning valuable work-related skills and values (Dressler & Keeling, 2004).

By drawing on the concept of WIL, Atkinson, (2016), Martin and Hughes (2009) and Coll and Eames (2008) demonstrated the integration of theory of the learning with the practice of work. Additionally, it was Sattler and Peters (2013) and Jackson (2015), who acknowledged that WIL was the practice in chosen professions to prepare students entering the world of work. Hence the concept includes and encapsulates the integral combination of both academic activities and learning that is applied in the industry (Jackson, 2013). However, Atkinson (2016) suggested that the duration of WIL placement differs with the discipline, which influences the type of student placement selected. Furthermore, Cooper et al. (2010), explained work integration learning as students that learn through experiential learning in the world of work, by interacting with experienced professionals and other employees.

Work-integrated Learning (WIL) was pertinent to the early artisan practitioners, who started serving their apprenticeship in Europe, which later took shape in various other countries such as Canada and USA. According to Wallis (2019), little attention was attributed to teaching and learning, it depended on efforts made by the apprentice. Furthermore, Wallis (2019:4), was convinced that relying only on the students *"observation, practice and initiative"* was debatable. Literature suggests that WIL was perceived as a 'blanket-approach or umbrella concept' encompassing a variety of terms used in the professional, vocational and education spheres (Cooper et al., 2010:36).

In general, a successful WIL programme adequately introduces and prepares students, provided learning processes that are structured and critically reflective, involving some degree of risk to facilitate learning and incorporating technology to complement the learning experience (Orrell, 2011). Other related terms and teaching modalities of WIL are illustrated in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: WIL terminologies and modalities

Philosophy/Approach	Time/Timing	Methods/Locality
Work-Integrated Learning	In-service learning	Experiential learning/training
Industrial placement training	Internship	Work-based Learning
Cooperative education/ multi-sited learning	Learnership	Articles
Service learning/ Job/field placement	Apprenticeship	Practicum
Practice-orientated learning/community placement	Apprenticeship	Work-related learning
Vocational/occupational/ work placement	Houseman ship	Field-based learning
Professional practice	Sandwich programme	Shadowing
	Simulated settings	Project-based learning
	Block release	Work exposure
		Workplace learning
		Community-based learning
		Simulated work
Pedagogical approach Pre-; In-; Post the qualification	Methodologies to enact learning	Site of learning

(Source: Forbes (2008)

Furthermore, WIL is professed to be a mechanism that provides an opportunity for all students to work with professionals in an authentic environment (Patrick et al., 2009). However, for WIL to be effective, organisational resources are necessary to ensure efficient learning, safety and equality for all students, including those with disabilities, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, the first generation to attend university, local and international students (Orrell, 2011).

2.2.2 Understanding Approaches to Student Support in the context of WIL

The literature emphasises the significance of student support in WIL programmes (Smith, 2012). Student support is primarily provided through help and assistance provided at the HEIs where the role of support is not only related to emotional, instrumental /tangible, informational and appraisal/companionship, but also the matter at hand. Nevertheless, there is a significant commonality between these roles and their responsibilities (elaborated on in Section 2.8).

Student support during formal theoretical learning provides the foundation for experience in practical skills and informal workplace processes, thus increasing the informed decisions applied in the workplace. Research on WIL and student support indicates the importance of wisdom, dependability, achieving set standards, transformation of support services and value for money as the world of work demands are met (Leo-Rhynie, 2006). WIL needs to be a holistic educational experience provided by stakeholders (Leo-Rhynie, 2006) if it is to be efficient. Jackson (2015) confirmed that the effectiveness of student support services in the context of WIL, prepares the students for entering the competitive world of work with relevance and fit for purpose.

Student support services during WIL placement provided by HEIs as experiences, both on-campus and during the workplace learning activities, integrate theory with practice (Jackson, 2013). According to the Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2011) conceptual frame for the Workplace Learning (WPL), alignment of academia and world of work is mutually advantageous to both organisations and the student by:

- Learning *for* work – induction of new entrants to the profession/vocation
- Learning *at* work – the integration of knowledge and competencies through experience
- Learning *through* work – work-related tasks as part of the curriculum

Therefore, the White Paper (DHET, 2013) encourages HEIs to build partnerships with employers, which endorse training in the world of work in areas where qualifications or professional registration depend on the practical industry experiences. The White

Paper (DHET, 2013) states that components are incorporated into courses which provide students with transferable skills and knowledge that could be taken into the world of work.

Billett and Choy (2013) suggest that students in the workplace ought to be advised of what is expected of them. Before entering the workplace, students need the abilities to embrace exercises sensibly as expected of them in the workplace. Monitoring of student progress and their results are essential to ensure student success and maintaining a good working partnership between the institutions and world of work. However, the difficulty of establishing and maintaining quality partnership is one of the main challenges for those working in the WIL placement module.

WIL takes the form of transformative learning which has been recognised as one of the learning forms which positively contributes to WIL as it incorporates 'reflective practice' and 'self-evaluation'. The use of reflection, assists students in improvement when engaging during WIL placement; it is a key trait of the work of academic advisors and could also be useful for improving resilience, which is important for reducing HE dropout. Taylor and Snyder (2012) suggest that participating in an amenable and responsive discussion leads to transformative learning if a trusting relationship exists between the student and the advisor/lecturer so that students get the most out of their experience and ensure a transformative experience.

Academic advisors are tasked with ensuring the safety and well-being of students by advising them on identifying and mitigating risks. Student support relates to risk management for both the student and the HEI, which embraces occupational health and safety risks (Bates & Sangra, 2011). It may be expected that monitoring of students' progress is part of the care provided by academic advisors in establishing workplace health and safety, especially when these matters are raised and identified by the students.

Student support is essential to ensure the success of all students but most particularly those students with disadvantage or special needs backgrounds (Bates et al., 2011; Patrick et al., 2009; Winchester-Seeto et al., 2016). Effective educators should be positive, accessible, adaptable, and accommodating to meet the diverse needs of students, particularly as WIL-associated courses are experienced differently

25

compared to the non-WIL courses. Boud and Costley (2007) suggest that student pastoral care is a vital part of student support that is often disregarded. A new challenging experience for students could be internship or placement. In fact, support may be necessary during this time because of the complicated nature of work placements, which is frequently a profoundly transformational learning catalyst that could result in significant shifts in perspective on cognitive, emotional and positive elements.

Disorientation is common in the WIL experience and could be stressful, cause students to request support and exacerbate underlying mental health issues in students (Huang et al., 2018). As indicated by Mohammed (2016), some students face anguish concerning their performance, their assessment tasks and even the time required to successfully complete their studies within a stipulated time. Given the increasing incidence of anxiety and other forms of mental illness among students in higher education (McBeath, et al., 2017), plans to resolve this issue should be included in the WIL programme. Life stressors such as health problems, personal or family crises could also affect students and increase their vulnerability.

Considering the above discussion, various types of student support are essential to ensure the success of the WIL programme.

2.3   CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

This study was conceptualised in terms of, and grounded on, the following concepts: student placement, student support, support system as mentioned in Chapter 1, Section 1.7. Some of the concepts such as work-integrated learning, stakeholders were discussed in detail in previous sections. This section focuses on the clarification of the concepts such student placement, student support and support system.

2.3.1   Student Placement

Students regard student placement as the first real job opportunity which helps in dealing with issues of holding down a real job (Fanthome, 2004). It is necessary to clarify exactly what is meant by 'student placement' as one of the many components

of WIL with its specific demands. The notion behind student placement is for purposeful learning at the workplace in the industry affecting the aspects of learning which link formal (in the classroom) and informal (outside the classroom, in the workplace) learning.

This type of learning encourages students to discover, construct and evolve as well as accommodate the interaction with experienced professionals, clients and consumers (Cooper et al., 2010). Employers encourage student support services during student placement, as described by Panayiotopoulos (2017), to address skill shortages. It forces students to develop different skills like technological skills, communication skills and leadership skills to be employable, thereby using WIL as a tool to gain a competitive edge in society. Drewery et al., (2016) state that students are expected to 'access to involvement' and achieve 'high competence'. Coll and Chapman (2000) and Calway (2006) have been major contributors in understanding learning in the context of WIL. They conclude that it is hands-on experiential training that takes place in the job market, through the job market and for the job market. Fanthome (2004) suggests that it is the insight it provides into the culture of the workplace and the opportunity it provides, which determines how well individuals could adapt to various environments.

Student support is a category within the WIL student placement framework that accommodates students by counselling and coaching on different topics and phases in the workplace, for example, areas in which students ought to work. The advantages of WIL ventures and projects done for the workplace are controlled by associations which serve as a vehicle for students to learn through a training setting as well as receiving feedback, which could be considered as WIL through the work environment. Therefore, it was most fitting and applicable to the curriculum in some disciplines which enable students to undertake WIL through or for the workplace (Natoli et al., 2013).

2.3.2   Student Support Services

Student support services is one of the many components of Social Support Theory. It is described and perceived as a service which relies on the support of people and

social networks. There are various supportive resources, although in this study the focus was on emotional, tangible, informational, companionship and intangible, emanating from many sources, such as family, friends, pets, neighbours, co-workers, organisations and so forth. As Sinclair and Winder (2016) state, the different methods used for providing support to students during WIL placement are counselling, mentoring, in-service training and consultation. The benefits of student support services are achieving educational goals and attaining advancement in their careers. These services include free tutoring and lending of textbooks and technologies like computers and laptops and opportunities for social and cultural engagement (Sinclair, et al., 2016). Different services provided in HEIs include helping students select their specialisation, making career choices, helping and supporting disabled students and supporting students with cash and scholarships.

2.3.3   Support System

A support system is one of the components of social support. It is a system where one is cared for and relies on assistance from people and the social network. In addition, the support system includes a commitment to provide a level of accountability, communication, sharing shared experiences and accountability to benefit and achieve goals or overcome difficulties. The benefit of student support has been demonstrated by several studies (Freudenberg et al., 2011; Jackson, 2013) which have shown that, when provided during WIL placement, self-efficacy improved and generic skills such as critical thinking, correspondence and basic reasoning improve.

2.4   OTHER APPLICABLE THEORIES RELEVANT TO THE STUDY

There are other theories relevant to this study, which the researcher discusses very briefly below. Discovering and locating theories that underpin this study may be dated as far back as 1900. Theories and concepts may be deduced for the contributing strategies and the growing body of literature that recognises the importance of theories which integrate education and industry. The Greek word *theoria* signifies examination or theory, when investigating a subject, topic, or area. It was important to decide which theory to be used within the different disciplines.

According to Taheri (2016), theories were purposely created and formulated, but never discovered; they could be tested but never proven. When researching a discipline, region or topic, it is therefore critical to choose the appropriate theoretical or conceptual framework to be utilised through multiple disciplines. According to Fouché and Delport (2002), the researcher moves in the field with a framework for the research, and the design and method which would direct the research. The study was guided by the constructivist theory, experiential learning theory and situated learning theories.

2.4.1 Constructivist Theory

Constructivist theory postulates that human knowledge is based on human experiences. Similarly, students also gain knowledge about work culture and work expectations by working in different organisations. Student support in the industry could create a constructive environment for the student, a genuine and genuine learning environment that is well documented and could benefit WIL (Weisz & Smith, 2005). As explained by Juvova, et al. (2016), constructivist theory supports students in knowledge construction and not just receiving information. Dewey and Dewey (1915) refer to passive learning methods not being the only meant of instruction in the classroom, more so rather the starter and tester.

On the contrary, the students' whole body, mind and personal experience is vital throughout student engagement during the learning process, contributing to the origin of active learning. Bonwell and Eison (1991) base the ethos of WIL on Active Learning Theory whereas Kolb (1984) refers to it as experimental learning. Therefore, it is a transition from visualising and listening to physically demonstrating what is being taught. Although Schön (1983) acknowledged and recognised that the active learning was not new, Hettler (2015) argued that exploring, discovering and sharing knowledge is part of human nature. In other words, the Socratic method stimulates critical thinking and recognises the importance of engaging the student in the process of learning. Nevertheless, the relatively passive learning environment of the lecture room has been the dominant form of pedagogy, particularly in higher education, for hundreds of years. The constructive theory principles draw inferences on the role of student experiences

in the construction of knowledge, in this regard the application of learned knowledge in the practical workplace.

2.4.2 Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential learning theory was reviewed in literature as action that students learned through reflection. However, the reflection component was neglected in programmes which claimed to be of an experiential nature. Dewey (1933) found that experience was not necessarily educative, but rather the learning experience and reflection. The experimental learning theory and constructivist theory were somewhat similar in that human knowledge was based on human experiences. As alluded to in Chapter 1, Kolb's Experiential Model of Learning Design structures the discussion and the process of learning by gaining experience in the workplace.

The learning cycle concept divides the learning process into a cycle of four basic theoretical components: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. It was provided differently as internships, apprenticeship, field trips and field research (Kolb, 2014). It also encouraged students to apply their classroom knowledge immediately. The other benefits included supporting students throughout WIL placement by assisting them in developing reflective practice habits and increasing their motivation to learn and align their learning with the real-world (Kolb, 2014), therefore contributing to students becoming independent and self-sufficient. An example of experiential learning is to gain relevant work experience through observation and interaction as opposed to reading about it from a book; therefore, making discoveries and experiments with first-hand knowledge.

Recognising active learning is not new, as Hettler (2015) argued that exploring, discovering and sharing knowledge are part of human nature. The following theorists have contributed to the understanding of WIL: Vygotsky's scaffolding or supportive activities provided by the educator (1934), John Dewey as an early educationalist (1938), Jean Piaget's developmental theory (1953), Kurt Lewin's change project theory (1947), Bruner's discovery learning theory (1961) and David Kolb's theory of

experimental learning from which the proposed existence of a four-stage cyclical learning model originated (1984).

Other theorists were Boud, Keogh, Walker (1984), Boud and Walker (1990), Brookfield (1995), Moon (1999), Ghaye and Lillyman (2000), Mamede and Schmidt (2004), White et al. (2006). These were but a few of the theorists who had discussed and contributed to philosophy in education and experiential learning in their work and therefore pertain to this study, but of most significance to WIL was Schön (1983).

It is necessary here to clarify exactly what is meant by experiential learning as one of the many components of WIL with its specific demands. Billet (2011a) discussed experiential learning as challenging for a few students given their capabilities and self-esteem. Notwithstanding, Horstmanshof et al. (2016), asserted that effective and organised experiential learning during WIL training would be beneficial to all stakeholders. Therefore, concluding that experiential theory highlights the role of role of human experiences in their abilities to reflect on their experiences to stimulate their learning. Experiential learning examples is thus learning from practice, observation and application of learned experiences.

2.4.3 Situated Learning Theory

One conceptualisation of WIL is that of Lave and Wenger (1991) who developed the instructional methodology called the Situated Learning model, whereby learning is enhanced when participating in a community of practice, rather than in isolation from it. This model incorporates and enhances learning when one works in industry. Students' progressive tendency is to learn by effectively taking an interest in the learning knowledge and experience.

Situated Learning is an extensive assemblage of work which shares an emphasis on the significance of context in attaining knowledge and skills. Therefore, students are able to interact with the actual work context and perform valid work activities as part of the undergraduate experience. Effective WIL design requires careful consideration of several factors and is widely accepted as difficult and costly to implement (Abesecara, 2006b), but Billet (2011a) stated the need for robust educational practices, not the necessary strategies that require infrastructure.

Furthermore, Stein (1998) posits that Situated Learning involves making significant meaning from the genuine exercises of daily living, which in turn offer opportunities which include the social network replicating industry. Stein (1998) continued by suggesting that situated learning ought to urge students to refer to their prior knowledge which may aid them in challenging others in their community. Situated Learning is supported and underpinned by four key standards or suppositions, which could be condensed as high level learning up from regular work, educational encounters and experiences. Fundamentally, it is space and domain explicit for the improvement of ability, learning is a social procedure and learning is implanted practice and changed through objective goal coordinated movement. Situated learning theory explains WIL in relation to the learning that takes place in the world of work context.

The above-discussed theories were found to be popular in literature and were generally utilised when discussing WIL, but not much was found in these theories about examining support services rendered to students. The researcher's focus was to uncover the influence of support services provided to students, and therefore refrained from using the above theories. Therefore, the appropriate theory that underpins this study, Social Support Theory, is discussed in more detail in Section 2.5 as it was adopted to address student support services using components such as emotional support, tangible support, informational support and companionship support.

2.5   THE THEORY UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

The growing body of literature recognises the importance of theories relevant to this study and the integration of education and the industry. When researching a discipline, region or topic, it is critical to choose the appropriate theoretical framework that can be utilised through multiple disciplines. Student support service during WIL learning and training described the reasons which are comprehensive in nature, complex and individualistic, but influenced by many contextual factors (Eames, 2003). As a result of the many challenges regarding student support during WIL placement, a robust theoretical foundation is required. Therefore, the researcher concludes that a key

cognitive theory that provides a sound theoretical framework for this study is Social Support Theory, thus drawing on various tenets of social support theories of learning.

Social Support Theory was applied as the main theoretical framework, the lens to reinforce this study which has been used in different fields of research such as psychology, medicine, sociology, nursing, public health, education, rehabilitation and social work. This theory, which is examined from a provincial perspective and holistic approach to student support, emphasises the need for student support services throughout WIL placement.

The empirical literature findings from this line of enquiry focus on integrating formal learning and student placement during WIL, overlooking the support services entity. Nonetheless, student support is not a mere need but an essential piece of the puzzle in understanding the critical roles that graduates played in the world of work. Hays and Clements (2011) suggested that the absence of student support emerged as obstructed, therefore requiring the bridging of the experienced gap, skill and support required in this area. Social support varies through different needs and stages of life.

2.5.1   Social Support Theory

The theory of Social Support provided a useful justification, idea and concept behind student support services. WIL placement in the industry is instrumental in facilitating purposeful learning. Social Support Theory has a long history using different terminology, although over the years theorists have neglected it. In 1807, Hegel spoke about the idea that humans were "interdependent social beings" in the Phenomenology of Spirit (Westphal, 2019:57). Darwin's theory of evolution was published in 1859 although 'social animal' was a term used later on by Darwin (1871/1952) with reference to social needs and support for each other.

According to Williams et al. (2004), the commencement of the domination of 'social support' was in the 1970s; however, theorists could not agree on the terminology relating to social support resulting in a degree of uncertainty. In the 1980s, investing in human capital was written into education policies, thinking it would lead to high return rates, and thus outweigh the initial financial investment. Student support

services was not considered a priority at HEIs but rather the output of graduated students was placed on the priority list.

Before the WIL placement process starts, adequate elements of student preparation ought to have taken place for it to be a smooth and successful process. As described by Du Toit et al. (2005), students tend not to be career-orientated nor well informed concerning career choices. This means that many students investigate possible profession with some having to make future profession decisions and others having chosen a career (Sadewi et al., 2019). During WIL placement, acquiring some knowledge largely occurs in two settings: the educational institution and the workplace with the former being strongly theorised and well-researched. Social support is characterised and perceived as being cared for, relying on assistance from people and having a social network.

Therefore, this study aimed to understand Social Support Theory using the lens of student support services, delineating it into four behaviours:

- Emotional/Construct support - expressions of empathy, love, trust and caring,
- Instrumental/Tangible support - monetary aid and service,
- Informational support - advice, suggestions and information,
- Appraisal/Companionship support - information useful for self-evaluation.

Although Taylor (2011) suggested that social support emerges from an assortment of household, family, friends, neighbours, co-workers, companions and pets, in this study, it is related to organisations, that is, HEIs and network ties which are viewed as informal (family and companions) or formal (psychological wellness authorities or network association) sources (Hogan, et al., 2002; Maier, et al., 2017; Taylor, 2011). Support services assist in providing different types of support to students. *Informal sources* of support come from relatives, family, companions, friends and classmates which lead to a positive and optimistic attitude to enable students to achieve their career goals, whereas *formal sources* of support are psychological wellness authorities or network associations or within the management of the organisation, the immediate hierarchy of co-workers and students (Maier et al., 2017). An online social

support service is also available to students using various methods which is discussed later under informational support. Many support indicators are utilised to gauge how well the support measures up, to better understand the social processes connected to social support and, eventually, to develop interventions to improve the outcome. Long and Fynn (2018) state that student support addresses students' emotional experience as they develop essential general skills related to a professional identity as well as the context required by employers.

Moving from the known to the unknown, HE students may struggle to manage this shift from school into higher education institutions, therefore WIL training could support them through this transition phase where ability to adapt, change and innovate, are necessary qualities.

2.5.2 Application of Social Support Theory

Research suggests that the quality of the students' experience at work has an influence on their progress, although Dewey has argued that all learning emanates from experience but that not all experiences have educational benefits. As per De le Haye et al. (2011), due to the support available, it is the tendency of student to gravitate towards other individuals of similar levels of performance. The high number of student drop-out could be the result of little or no student support. Consequently, the theoretical framework for this research is embedded in the Social Support Theory and the WIL structure. Its purpose was to discover students' perceptions and experience of the support received throughout their WIL placement by their training institutions and employers in their workplace.

The discussion following covers the four pillars of the Social Support Theory and its relations to this study.

2.5.2.1 Emotional/construct support

Emotional support is often established by family or friends or their loved ones in their daily activities or personal care tasks (Ferraris, 2020; Revenson et al., 2016). Emotional support encourages HE students to live a stress- and anxiety-free life (Bell & Adams, 2016; Kolb 2014). Being supported emotionally has the benefit of providing

35

students with creating a work culture and expectations to prepare them regarding the atmosphere that is observed in the workplace (Schuster & Glavas, 2017), equipping them with the skills to adapt to different situations and conditions and helping them earn an income while studying thus developing independence and self-sufficiency (du Plessis & Van Niekerk, 2016).

Previous studies reveal that the pastoral role in which academics engage is primarily reserved when things go wrong or when students are struggling (Winchester-Seeto et al., 2016). It is expected that academics should be readily available and approachable to provide emotional support, be involved and accessible so that students feel comfortable seeking support. (Winchester-Seeto et al., 2016).

An academic support perspective predominantly guides students to bridge the gap between theory, practice and evaluate learning (Coll et al., 2011; Hays & Clements, 2011; Martin et al., 2011). Student support includes visits to the workplace, to assist students in building confidence (du Plessis & Van Niekerk, 2016). In addition, WIL equips students with skills to communicate with people in diverse roles, thereby increasing their engagement with the community. Ferraris (2020) claims that demonstrating support by means of verbal and non-verbal communication is of the essence in our daily lives.

2.5.2.2   *Instrumental/tangible support*

One of the many tangible support services is monetary aid as in providing scholarships and rewards for their performance and helping students solve problems related to loan indebtedness (Ferraris, 2020; Kolb, 2014). According to Jackson and Wilton (2016), WIL offers students short-term financial benefits, regarding which Fanthome (2004) notes as the significance of the link between earning and learning.

Offering student laptops and other resources for skills development is another tangible resource of support (Bell & Adams, 2016). Student welfare services also provide housing and accommodation (du Plessis & Van Niekerk, 2016) as well as health services to assist students in maintaining good health (Kolb, 2014).

Tanzania offers student support through practices like cost-sharing with the employers, whereby the central government supports scholars on internship by making available resources or even contributing to the costs for the training, monitoring, quality assurance and the required WIL coordination. The Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) offers tangible support by funding programmes via contributions and grants from the national government which would support student placements and training.

2.5.2.3 *Informational support*

Informational support consists of suggestions and advice given to students related to career choices (Bell & Adams, 2016). Investigation of profession choices is about self-attributes such as qualities and shortcomings, abilities and interests to fit the profession objectives (Zhang & Huang, 2018). Student support includes visits to the workplace which offers students an opportunity to acquire an overview of the work being done. By implication, it supports students with their chosen profession, progressing to achieving goals (Gestiada et al., 2017). The WIL scheme includes overseeing placement and addressing student wellbeing (du Plessis & Van Niekerk, 2016). An online social support system is available to students using various methods discussed later, which includes different methods such as online courses and e-learning providing students with different handouts and study materials through institutions that support them in preparing and qualifying for the interview anytime and anywhere (Maier et al., 2017), thus supporting improvements in their knowledge and skills. To manage student support, training must be prearranged for students in advance to prepare them for interviews and selection. Fanthome (2004) recognised that student placement is not only beneficial with the competition for jobs, but work experience is also an essential component of an applicant's Curriculum Vitae (CV).

The different student support services provided by placement institutes in WIL are accessibility that assists students in gaining specific skills to become employed and counselling and mentoring students to improve their wellbeing. The student support service includes student healthy living programmes and conducting seminars and events to prepare students to gain employment (du Plessis & Van Niekerk, 2016). WIL supports the student in identifying different employment opportunities available and building a network of contacts which would support them in the future.

Another purpose of WIL is to help institutions make improvements in their policies with regard to employers recruiting potential and talented employees and students applying theoretical learning in their workplace. According to the Government of Tanzania (2017), trainees are provided with benefits such as meals, accommodation and transportation. Dickfos (2019) maintains that appreciating WIL student support service means expanding learning and teaching methods which includes principles of WIL more extensively in ordinary teaching. Tanzania has been developing different WIL models to broaden student support and participation as well as ensure that scholars possess some access to company funding and learning involvement.

2.5.2.4 *Appraisal/companionship support*

The component mentioned in the Social Support Theory is *companionship* support, which was introduced in the work place. This included the sense of belonging, being part of a team and the buddy system. In addition, it offers business-related exercises with the students, giving them direction, supervision and advice in the work environment. According to Fleming (2015), the weekly contact that lecturers have with placement students at the HEI encourages students to discuss and reflect on their experiences. Drewery et al., (2016) expressed concern that students who complete their studies at HEIs are not employable immediately, but fruitful work experience upgrades the advancement of positive and realistic expectations which results in effective industry maintenance, as indicated by Dickerson and Kline (2008).

Companionship support offers information useful for self-evaluation, therefore increasing motivation whenever improvements are made in the students' performance (Bell & Adams, 2016). Li et al. (2014) posit that social support services increase motivation and performance and support the self-selected and arranged participation when performing a particular task (Stork et al., 2015). However, according to Bell and Adams (2016), some students experience employers as unsupportive of their personal growth, but rather make them work for the company's benefit.

The other benefit of appraisal/companionship support is developing a practical appreciation among students related to the profession chosen by them. WIL was mainly introduced to offer practical exposure and demonstration to students of the workplace (Schuster & Glavas, 2017), to support students in developing a professional

identity and to be professional in their approach (Schuster & Glavas, 2017). A source of uncertainty, as described by Long and Fynn (2008), is pressurising students to be creative with how they approach job opportunities and avoiding unemployment, hence encouraging a continuation of employment with the same employer. Various appraisal/companionship student support services include conducting counselling and training programmes for students to prepare them for work-based performance. This aspect of student support is very important for students to progress in their academic and professional careers (Warren & Hale, 2016).

2.6 WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The South African higher education system comprises universities (including research-intensive universities), comprehensive universities and universities of technology. While the higher education system is differentiated in the sense that different institutions offer different types of qualifications at different levels of the Higher Education Qualification Framework (HEQF), most South African higher education institutions (be they research-led institutions, comprehensive universities, or universities of technology) have Applied Science, Business, Education, Engineering and/or Health Science faculties, and many of their professional programmes (such as Architecture, Business, Engineering, Law and Medicine) are often the most prestigious and have the highest entrance requirements (Raelin et al., 2014).

In higher education there had been a long-held belief that theoretical certainties and practical knowledge is inconsistent with each other. In other words, the standards of higher education in general support scientific knowledge and aptitudes as opposed to proficient knowledge. The South African higher education system established WIL in its higher education institutions. However, the graduates entering the world of work, tend to lack the necessary knowledge and skills and as a result, credit-bearing WIL was created to address the issue, allowing students to put what they had learned into practise and gain experience. Universities provide career-focused education and ensure that students in higher education are ready for the world of work; however, utilising theoretical knowledge alone is inadequate as practical and situational knowledge, proficient experience and judgement is required. There are a number of

opportunities for students to link their classroom learning with the real-world of employment, including internships, learnerships, apprenticeships and traineeships (Dunn et al., 2018).

WIL is a programme that supports students in acquiring first-hand experience of the job in a particular discipline, giving them a clear picture regarding their expectations and the workplace culture and helping to bridge the skills gaps. Institutions have found it necessary and useful to prepare students for the world of work, and to support students in gaining practical experience through, for example, work placements or service-learning projects. WIL, in various forms, has always been a distinguishing feature of professional education, even if it had not been called 'WIL'. In the South African higher education system, professional education has been strongly influenced by professional councils, many of which contribute to curriculum development and the assessment of students in their respective fields (Joynes et al., 2019).

Many of the new professions have not yet developed full-fledged professional councils, but most have professional associations which guide and support good practice in teaching and learning (Joynes et al., 2019). While there are distinct knowledge differences between, for example, a two-year diploma and a four-year professional bachelor's degree, WIL, in various forms, has always formed an important part of technical, vocational and professional higher education. The training of health professionals, for example, frequently happens at the site of practice, such as a teaching hospital – and variations of this tradition are reflected in the curricula of courses in the Applied Sciences, Engineering and Business. The workplace is present in these programmes, both as a learning resource and as a site of knowledge production, and students are often simultaneously acculturated into academic and workplace knowledge systems. It has been recognised that for graduates to integrate successfully into work settings specific kinds of learning is required (Billett et al., 2013).

Globally, the workforce demonstrates that job readiness, skills and knowledge is becoming critical criteria for our youth. Therefore, Hines et al., (2017) argue that the dynamics of several occupations and skills has changed, requiring lifelong learning as well as the continuous development of skills and knowledge by the employees. This has enhanced the significant stature of WIL among the HEIs and, from this

perspective, one could deduce that certain challenges and gaps concerning student-support throughout WIL warrant deliberation.

2.7 RELATED LITERATURE ON WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Work-integrated Learning (WIL) placements refers to complex, focused activities, designed to integrate theory and work practices. However, in many cases students are deployed in the field – in real workplaces – these placement experiences vary enormously in terms of their quality, the educational value to students and the impacts that these have on them psychologically and educationally (Smith, 2012; Smith & Worsfold, 2014). Furthermore, Abeysekera (2006b) and Smith (2012) have identified the following WIL placement properties which empirical evidence suggests is important for describing student placement:

2.7.1 Authenticity

Authenticity is the degree to which the placement offers the student the opportunity for meaningful professional work, with appropriate levels of autonomy and responsibility and which have meaningful consequence of value to the workplace or organisation that hosts them (Smith, 2012). WIL develops a professional identity holistically, team working skills and building capabilities to make judgements with problem-solving skills (Fisher et al., 2018). Previous research has shown that authenticity plays a significant role in predicting learning outcomes and satisfaction for students (Smith & Worsfold, 2014).

2.7.2 Supervision

Supervision is the practice of keeping in touch with students during placement to monitor their learning and their reactions to the experience. Both the staff in charge of the subject and the workplace supervisor play a role in supporting the student and providing feedback on performance. This aspect of the WIL placement curriculum design is one of the most variable across disciplines and is affected by the degree of collaboration between universities and workplace placement providers.

Students often work independently without direct direction from their supervisor, allowing them to assume administrative and personal responsibility for their work at hand (Martin et al., 2022). However, supervision by workplace supervisors is more formalised in many health-related disciplines, and education, than it is in business, political science or sociology, as indicated by Ferns et al. (2014b), who outline differences between disciplines in this aspect of curriculum design.

2.7.3   Preparation

Placement experiences for students could be enhanced both psychologically and educationally by adequate preparation. Billett (2009) made the case for both preparation and debriefing to enhance the educational worth of placements, but it is also worth remembering that placements in some discipline's present significant personal challenges.

Preparation for the psychological aspects of placement could be seen to be a reasonable part of the duty-of-care of placement convenors (Bates et al., 2011). In the present study, questions about preparation focus on both educational and psychological aspects and also refer to the roles of both the university subject convenors and workplace supervisors. In preparation for WIL, students require a clear understanding of what student placement involves, the expectations, as well as the communication between the student and the supervisor (Lloyd et al., 2016).

2.7.4   Debriefing

Together with preparation, debriefing is the process of looking back and making sense of experiences after the fact, whether those experiences were of emotional or educational relevance (Billett, 2009).

2.7.5   Support Role

Research suggests that students and industry partners expect universities to provide substantial support to students before, during and post placements (Levin et al., 2010). However, Winchester-Seeto et al. (2016) report that just over 30% of university staff

talk about their work in offering emotional support to students and 20% mention problem solving. There seem to be different models of WIL, variable levels of support provided to students and different pedagogical approaches, with some types of projects, activities or placements requiring more support from the academics than others. In the analysis of their findings, these authors discovered that the approach taken by hosts and academics differed but, in some respects, was complementary. For example, the approach centres around building relationships with students, especially in making them feel comfortable and being available.

There was also emphasis on providing feedback and guidance, which is consistent with the mentor role. The development of mentees' careers and feelings of job satisfaction is significantly influenced by their interactions with mentors (Ali et al., 2022). For academics, there seems to be three parts to their role: to prepare students, support students emotionally by being nurturing and flexible and finally, providing the information, intervention and liaison with the host where required.

2.8   STAKEHOLDERS' ROLE IN STUDENT SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE WIL PLACEMENT PROCESS

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in partnerships between the four stakeholders, namely government, higher education institutions, world of work and students, which encourages stakeholder participation and input as a crucial role in considering the importance of WIL during the implementation of student placements (Dunn et al., 2018). A stakeholder is a person or institution known for the promotion and well-being of an organisation related to its community (Labanauskis, & Ginevičius, 2017). It was Freeman (1984), who in his management theory discussed the concept 'stakeholder', which are the groups that the organisation needs to continue operating. Customers, staff, suppliers, political action groups, environmental groups, local communities, the media, financial institutions, governmental organisations and more all fall under this category (Fontaine et al., 2006). Thereafter, this definition indicates that stakeholders are the ones crucial to the outcome and success of an establishment.

The importance of stakeholder participation and commitment to the development and support of students during placement and learning from the beginning to the end, is vital (Knight & Yorke, 2004). It is known that the aims of the industry are not always realistic and thus WIL training could be confusing to both the employer and student. Therefore, the students' ability to adapt, change and innovate is necessary for businesses and employers. This, in turn, would influence the return on investment in valid resources, time and money spent on work experience programmes (Horstmanshof et al., 2016).

For this to be effective, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 26000 (2010) clause 5.3.2 suggests that HEIs should investigate by questioning itself to identify who its stakeholders would be. Involving assorted stakeholders would assist in diminishing the lack of student support (Edomwonyi et al., 2016). It is recommended that universities determine who would be positively or negatively affected by their unilateral decisions about student education, including curriculum design. Such decisions are influenced by the world of work in which they need to invest in order to retrain graduates particularly as they do not have the required skills (Kanyane et al., 2017).

HEIs should recognise who would be negatively impacted by exclusion of the engagement. In this instance that might be the students themselves, they may be an essential stakeholder and they may have had their own expectations of education and training for their discipline. In addition, HEIs may ask who could help manage specific influences to meet their responsibilities. In this study, the roles that the various stakeholders may play throughout the WIL placement process, are identified and discussed in the following sections.

2.8.1 The Government as a Stakeholder

Governments ought to finance, deliver health care and oversee private providers' accreditation and quality assurance. However, governments frequently fall short of expectations. For research and analysis to guide policies in developing human capital, accurate measurement of education and health outcomes is crucial. This increases human capital locally, nationally and internationally (World Bank Group, 2020).

Workplace learning is defined by the CHE (2011) as learning that occurs when students are placed in a work context with the intention of learning. Students design, execute, assess and reflect on tasks that are found in the workplace, which results in this kind of learning.

The South African government promulgated the National Skill Development Plan (NSDP) of 2019, for students to develop and improve professional skills in line with the fourth industrial revolution (4IR). Six principles comprise the National Development Plan (NDP):

- Mobilising of all South Africans
- Actively engaging citizens in their own development
- Expanding and growing the economy and changing the ownership patterns
- Building key capabilities (human, physical and institutional)
- Building a capable and developmental state
- Fostering strong leadership throughout society (National Planning Commission, 2013:26).

In addition, the National Skills Development Plan 111 (NSDP), addresses the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) goals for the year 2030:

- *Prior:*
    - Provide quality learning opportunities in PSET
    - One in every six students will be a graduate
    - Improving PSETS, results in producing skilled, employable members of society
    - In turn create jobs for other South Africans
- *During:*
    - Offer support for under-prepared students
    - Promote performance-based grants
- *Post:*
    - Increase PSET employment rate
    - Increase funding to ensure job security and attract and retain skilled staff

      o   Strengthen relationships between PSET and world of work

      o   Facilitate graduates' absorption into employment

The DHET (2019) Skills Development Act (SDA) 198 (Act No.97 of 198) facilitates WIL for students, as described in the NSDP, which is the reaction to the White Paper policy on the relationship between HEIs and industry (GovGaz, 42290 No. 375, 2019). As a result, the SDA has been mandated to regulate the compulsory levy scheme to fund education and training in world of work. According to the Government Gazette 39363 (2015), the NSD is known to be the "overarching strategic guide for skills development, giving structure to the skills development levy and the National Skilled Fund (NSF), including the connections with other partners and stakeholders. The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) Act 56 of 1999 was established by government to provide student financial aid as a loan to pay for their tertiary studies until 2018, which had to be paid back once employed.

In 2015, the University of Witwatersrand (WITS), one of South Africa's elite HEIs, experienced the first exclusive student-led protests since the beginning of democracy by the South Africa's born-frees (Kgatle, 2018) - the first generation born after the end of apartheid, the Millennials, which instigated the #FeesMustFall movement. Classes came to a disruptive halt, lessons were terminated and the university was shut down. Other HEIs joined the protests and most in the country were shut down as students demanded a zero increase in fees under the #FeesMustFall movement (Dunga & Mncayi, 2016). Thereafter, due to the government committing to free education for students, the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) which distributes the funds, was established. According to Leeman et al., (2017), the role of the SETA in WIL is concerned with developing education, training, funding, grants and contracts for students.

The South African NSDP (Gazette 15 Dec 2017: paragraph 3.3.3) policy under the Goals and Principals describes support systems for students. Leeman et al., (2017) states that the different funding includes a grant to students, providing scholarships and giving incentives and rewards to students so that they could fund their education. Different grants are available such as pivotal and discretionary grants. A pivotal grant covers the academic, professional learning programmes and courses to support

students in developing professional skills while discretionary grants are prearranged with students based on a competitive process. Ranchhod and Finn (2016) indicate that South African students enrolled in WIL programmes are non-tax payers. Sayer et al., (2017) suggests that any company that has staff members registered for Pay As You Earn (PAYE) and has an annual payroll that exceeds R500 000 per year, has to pay 1% of the monthly payroll over to Skills Development Levy (SDL), which the SETAs distribute as grants.

Therefore, the White Paper (DHET, 2013) encourages HEIs to build partnerships with employers, which endorse training in the work place, in areas where qualifications or professional registration depend on the practical world of work experiences. One of the goals, according to the NSDP (No.375, 2019), is improving the relationship between education and training and work is a key policy goal.

The link between HEIs and industry assists in developing students in their personal and professional competencies to meet the market-demand, as indicated in Figure 2.1.

(Source: No. 42290 Government Gazette, 7 March 2019)

Figure 2.1: Linkage of education and workplace through SETAs

The White Paper (DHET, 2013) states that HEIs must incorporate components in their courses which provide students with transferable skills and knowledge that could be taken into the workplace. However, as WIL is a credit-bearing component of the

curriculum, it requires assessment and quality-assured work-related tasks in the world of work.

WIL fosters partnerships between higher education and industry, essential for designing a curriculum which is responsive to the needs of both the community and world of work (Smith, 2012). This means that exposure to the world of work could support students in adopting appropriate behaviours and adaptable skills and become transformative employees. According to Jackson et al. (2017), mapping the educational programme against the WIL standards offers student exposure to genuine situations and issues likely to be experienced in a work circumstance. The NSDP (GOV GAZ 39363 2015) is of the understanding that the absence of collaboration between the different HEIs and other stakeholders, is the absence of the expectation needed to enhance adequacy.

2.8.2 Higher Education Institutions as Stakeholders

Enhanced employability is another driving force behind HE providers' commitment to helping their graduating students advance in their careers. South African HEIs may learnt from the Yale University initiative called *We Invest In Your Success*, which aims to support students and create a culture dedicated to investing time in teaching future leaders how best to handle various situations that may arise while also encouraging collaboration within teams which could lead toward success both personally and professionally.

2.8.2.1 Increase in student enrolment

Enrolment may increase due to WIL as supported by reports indicating that many applicants globally are interested in attending a WIL programme (Ku & Thonglek, 2011). Three factors that attract students to enrol in the programme are its curriculum structure, employability enhancement and scholarship support, giving students the opportunity to be exposed to a real working environment at an early stage in their learning (Weisz & Chapman, 2004). In addition, students expect the experience in the workplace to assist them in developing confidence in job interviews and increasing their chances of receiving job offers (Ku & Thonglek, 2011). However, Phillips (2014) states that regardless of the sector or industry, the term 'WIL' is yet to be understood

by most employers, therefore influencing the intake of students in the world of work for WIL placements.

2.8.2.2 Curriculum and course development

The impact of WIL on educational development includes curriculum innovations, course initiations and course content modifications. The principles and practices of WIL are incorporated into different disciplines which enrol many students (CHE, 2011). A new WIL curriculum could be created as a joint venture amongst the world of work, institutions and government to produce graduates in fields where there is a shortage of human capital (Ku & Thonglek, 2011).

According to Jackson (2013), WIL in HEIs broadly refers to on-campus and workplace learning activities and experiences which integrate theory with practice in academic learning programmes. This type of course encourages students to demonstrate skills required for the workplace such as theory applications, teamwork and communications (Ku, 2007). By gaining experience from placement, academics could modify and update their course content in classroom. Academics' experiences are enhanced through working with industrial mentors and supervising students (Weisz & Chapman, 2004). However, this modification of course content depends on individuals since it has been reported that not all academics participating in the WIL programme adjust teaching materials in accordance with their WIL experiences (McCurd & Zegwaard. 2009).

Grobbelaar et al. (2017) reported that the value of WIL for world of work includes documentation of fruitful case stories as well as social marketing of the company's apprenticeships, targeting, public awards/recognition for devoted companies, tax breaks, wage subsidies, training and public-private cost-sharing schemes. According to Natoli et al. (2013) most HEIs are required to account for the success of their students' finding employment after completing their courses.

2.8.2.3 Development of institution- world of work collaborative research projects

Collaborative research is another valuable benefit that WIL programmes might offer, for example, new research could emanate from placement projects or new topics

proposed by academics. Since placement duration and student knowledge are limited, project outcomes tend to end up with preliminary results which at times do not make any impact in the organisation. However, to make the outcomes of these projects more valuable leading eventually to implementations and commercialisation, they should be further explored under collaboration between experts from institutions and world of work. Jackson and Collings (2018) states that HE providers constantly look for effective strategies to improve student employability to keep up with the evolving labour market and provide graduating students with the opportunity to stand out from the expanding pool of new graduates. This is one area where new collaborative research could take place and academics could devise new research ideas through WIL. Being exposed to a workplace environment and having worked with professionals might allow academics to better understand the problems facing the world of work. New collaborative research programme could be initiated in response to these challenges.

2.8.2.4   WIL implementation encounters

Although institutions benefit from a WIL programme, a couple of issues, namely academics' perception and financial problems, have been reported (McCurd & Zegwaard 2009; Thonglek et al., 2011). Some academics feel that their contributions to a WIL programme go unrecognised and are underappreciated, and these rather uncomfortable feelings could adversely impact the effectiveness of the programme's operation. WIL is frequently seen as a low priority and lacking academic rigor and, as a result, resources are not provided by the institution (Lawson et al., 2011).

Financial issues are another problem often facing WIL programmes. Since the nature of a WIL programme differs to that of conventional classrooms, the costs of running a WIL programme is higher than those operating a regular curriculum. Even if a WIL programme was subsidised by the government and funding agencies, a shortfall is often reported (Thonglek et al., 2011). In addition to the issue of cash flow, WIL programmes face the problem of long-term sustainability. To address these financial problems, strategies to solicit more money from world of work and WIL alumni warrant investigation.

WIL was introduced to HEIs predominantly for practical exposure and demonstration of the workplace to students (Schuster & Glavas, 2017). A growing body of literature recognises the importance of WIL and the opportunity to apply knowledge and the practical component gained during academic studies in the workplace, as illustrated by DHET initiatives (Martin & Hughes, 2009). As students are unfamiliar with the world of work, they are often unsure of what to anticipate from their jobs, how to interact with co-workers as well as their placement supervisor, and what organisational events ought to take precedence (Ali et al., 2022). Therefore, leadership guidance and career advancement are expected in the WIL programme from both HEIs and the world of work.

2.8.3   World of Work as a Stakeholder

The role of the world of work as a stakeholder in WIL assists and supports students in bridging the skill gaps in areas such as technological, mechanical and technical skills. The world of work is also responsible for ensuring that students make improvements within the scheduled time, ensuring that the faculty and placement coordinators are not indulging in any partiality and are helping students in developing a professional personality. As explained by Kamasheva et al. (2016), the world of work as a stakeholder, needs to ensure that students are motivated and guided properly to achieve their career and academic goals. To reinforce this process, Nicholas (2017) believes various recruitment models and strategies could be used by stakeholders such as screening of students based on their applications, which assists employers avoid students who submit irrelevant documents.

It is fundamentally important that government, the world of work and academia sustain an ongoing conversation regarding the skills and standards required during experiential learning, supporting and assisting to achieve the work readiness skills. However, as Horstmanshof et al. (2016) stated that no matter how students prepared for the placement, they were not prepared for the learning experiences. One of the major contributing factors of WIL has been student support with its employability expertise and encouraging employers to absorb those students into the business. However, Coll et al., (2008) express their concerns about the manner in which students obtain expertise during the experiential learning as it differs from organisation

to organisation in the world of work. In order for WIL to be successful, it is imperative that the experiential learning offers the student the opportunity to work with various staff members where the designated supervisor exposes the student to the entire experience of the workplace.

2.8.3.1 Benefits of placement

On placement with a host company, WIL students are responsible for two types of work: regular tasks and separated tasks. Regular tasks are routine work that is also performed by other permanent employees of the placement. Separated tasks are extra projects that are specifically assigned to WIL students. For instance, for engineering students, the latter is preferable. However, some placements allow students to cope with both types of tasks. Research conducted by Ali et al. (2022) confirmed that WIL students were motivated which was reflected in their quality of work and performance, as companies benefitted from the projects in which students were involved during placement. Companies were generally satisfied with fresh ideas proposed by WIL students and enjoyed working with WIL students who were energetic and highly motivated in learning. While supportive supervisors benefit students, existing leadership theories, such as leader-member exchange, suggest that not all students have high-quality relationships, which undermine their internship experiences and chances of converting theory to practice (Ali et al., 2022).

How the world of work perceives student project outcomes and work performance is important to any WIL programme's operation and sustainability. Research conducted by Ku (2007) and Ku and Thonglek (2011) found that a placement organisation tended to continue participating in and supporting a WIL programme if the project results were found to be useful. In addition, these authors also found that placement organisations considered WIL programmes as one of the channels for networking with institutions in the recruitment of future non-WIL students.

Another benefit of placement is that hiring WIL graduates could help industry minimise the education expenses of new employees. The internship experience allows WIL graduates to familiarise themselves with the company's structure, its organisational standards and the people in the workplace before graduation. Thonglek (2011) argues that 56% (45 out of 80) of employers admit that hiring WIL graduates who used to be

their companies' trainees, could reduce the cost of training for new staff. Amongst benefits provided by a WIL programme to a placement, indicated that the improvement of the company's image was ranked 13th out of 22 and 8th out of 11, as reported by Braunstein and Stull (2001).

2.8.3.2   The cost of placement

According to Ku (2007), the cost of a WIL placement could be divided into two categories: direct costs and indirect costs or benefits in kind. Direct costs include start-up costs, student salaries, student grants and project costs. Indirect costs usually refer to the time that company employees spend on project preparation, student support and general administration such as office space, housing and transport, however, a company does not have to bear all the costs. Ku (2007) states that the cost of student placement is negotiable and adjustable depending on the agreement between the university and the company.

Government has subsidies in place to address the costs of workplace training via the Workplace Skills Plans (WSPs) and Sector Skills Plans (SSPs), which is part of the NSDP (2019). The NSDP understands and determines the demand of the labour market and national priorities. This could be interpreted into the interventions from education and training institutions through their planning processes on the supply side, which could be implemented by the NSDP's interventionist processes (GovGaz, 42290 No. 375, 2019).

2.8.3.3   Placement concerns

Authors such as Choy and Delahaye (2011) and McLennan and Keating, (2008) determined that concerns during the time spent actualising WIL include encouraging organisations to participate and the capacity for the university to 'fit in' with industry needs. Workplace policies are often seen as tedious, portrayed as cumbersome as they regularly depend on partnerships with external parties (Lawson et al., 2011). A well-coordinated deployment of WIL models requires an organised office. The office must be supplied with the necessary number of staff members, resources, working policies, manuals, supporting documents and procedures. Providing space for a WIL centre or office is crucial for programme durability, visibility and staff and student recruitment (Lawson et al., 2011). Industry placement sponsors have noticed some

lack of knowledge in the codes of conduct of WIL students. For instance, most WIL placed students do not understand what is expected concerning their behaviour or their dress code for the workplace. It could likewise be proposed that fostering partnerships in WIL is a challenge considering the terminology and language issues identified by the employers (Phillips, 2014).

There are other concerns commonly raised by stakeholders during the internship: student support by HEIs, ambiguous or unclear roles and responsibilities, and student misconduct. Cooper et al. (2010) states that industry mentors may be confused about their roles and responsibilities, especially around student supervision and mentoring. In addition to academic duties, the placement supervisor play an essential role in a student's career development. They do not only act as role models and coaches, but they also provide a number of instrumental resources for students that could potentially lead to enhanced learning and potential placement within the organisation (Ali et al., 2022).

2.8.4   Students as Stakeholders

While many studies have discussed the various features of WIL, very little have emphasised the role and responsibility of the student, their position and contribution to industry and community. Paisey and Paisey (2010) stated that students perceived placement to be an opportunity to undergo real-life working experience. Students are the next generation of employees, employers, movers and shakers of industry. Additionally, without proper student support, students would increasingly need to differentiate themselves in a competitive job market through personal-added value, such as relevant experience, skills and abilities, in addition to academic credentials (Paisey & Paisey, 2010).

2.8.4.1 *Employability*

Employability is what students expect to benefit from the WIL programme as they become familiar with company culture as well as with the other colleagues. WIL placements act as a stepping-stone to full-time employment and a smooth transition from HEIs to the world of work. The fact that most organisations used WIL placement programmes to find and develop talent for full-time employment lends support to this

strategy (Ali et al., 2022). Students were often given job offers after WIL placement, prior to them graduating (Ku & Thonglek, 2011). According to these authors, firms hire their WIL trainees as permanent employees after the programme has been completed. It was from industry's informal feedback, that experienced WIL students perform with confidence at the interview in comparison with non-experienced students. Placement allows students to gain a better understanding of theoretical applications, career options and organisational structure, which enhance students' confidence during interviews with companies (Ku & Thonglek, 2011).

Therefore, it is of the essence that HEIs cooperate with industry not only to produce graduates who are well-equipped to find relevant job opportunities, but graduates that could successfully apply their knowledge and skills in the modern workplace, which would assist in achieving the employment outcomes they desire.

2.8.4.2 *Improvement in academic performance*

Students working with professionals in a business environment, which could be very inspiring, lead to classroom interest and high attendance. In Brooks and Youngson's (2016) findings, placement providers frequently offer students the opportunity for personal development that is not necessarily available to students who only work for the organisation on a part-time basis. This is one of the advantages of gaining work experience through a placement rather than working part-time while attending university.

After the WIL placement experience, students tend to perform at a higher level than those students without WIL placement experience (Thonglek, 2014), particularly in project management-related courses. Success in these courses may depend on student maturity, self-management, teamwork and real-world applications developed during the internship (Kramer et al., 2008).

2.9 STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES PRIOR, DURING AND POST WIL PLACEMENT

As discussed previously, with South Africa being an emerging economic country, the education landscape has transformed somewhat since the advent of the constitutional

democracy in 1994. This has brought about significant growth in student support and WIL among the South African HEIs. It has become evident that the changes and implementation of WIL in South Africa, since its inception in the new democratic dispensation, has portrayed pessimism and concern, as supported by Dawn (2002). Rapid increase in the number of study places, introduction of programmes has improved the equality of opportunities and greater accountability to society and governments for the impact of programmes on society, professional training, shortage of skilled workers and graduates as well as quality and social, economic and environmental sustainability. In recent years, higher education has shifted rapidly from elite attitudes to higher education.

In South Africa, the Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training (PSET) (DHET, 2012:3-6) relates to educating all who had left school and those who lacked education opportunities. The DHET wanted to create a policy framework whereby it displayed its strategies and plans for the post-school system (TVET Colleges, Adult Education, Skill Levy Institutions). On 20 November 2013, the White Paper was promulgated, with the aim of improving the PSET system and meet the country's education needs (DHET, 2013). WIL was introduced into the higher education curriculum under the Ministry of the DHET.

The White Paper (DHET, 2013) stipulated the need for a government education and training plan, which included an educational programme incorporating the close collaboration of knowledge, HEIs and the workplace. PSET was responsible for the arrangement of the placement of students in the workplace via the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). WIL gained traction and recognition globally, but there was no evidence that it was achieving its desired objectives. Cooper et al., (2010) suggested that HEIs were immersed in learning and assessment, compulsory, industry-specific or led by industry, and mostly off-campus for WIL to be effective in the workplace.

Drawing on research evidence from Australia, the United States of America (USA), and the United Kingdom (UK), Natoli et al., (2013) revealed that students who engage in student support throughout WIL, experienced positive support services and employment in their industry. Ferreira Rebelo et al., (2017) believed that human resource development in support services in WIL placement, ensures that all students

gain exposure and knowledge in their workplace, helping them in the advancement of their careers. Aragon-Sanchez et al. (2003) survey throughout the five European Union (EU) countries of the UK, Netherlands, Portugal, Finland and Spain reflected those industries that invested highly in their employees' training, resulted better in profitability and performance. Students' experience, motivation and self-promotional skills acquired during the WIL period supported them with their preference for employers.

Gomulya and Mishina (2017) emphasised that the ideal approach to achieving student support was using Billett's (2011a) support lens which enriches the process preceding preparation for student support and, finally, supports post-reflection of student placement. Furthermore, student expertise, perceptions and convictions are contributing factors to obtaining a job successfully; however, variation in skills is job dependent, proving the need to be a holistic employee. Should students receive vague guidelines without sufficient hands-on experience in the workplace, it may limit their ability to contribute to sound decisions. In addition, the fast-moving pace and the demands of the industry meant that there is no space to address interpersonal issues at the workplace (Bandaranaike & Willison, 2015).

The University of Maryland's Faculty Handbook for Service Learning, integrates the thoughts of learning theorists such as Piaget in 1970, Dewey in 1938, Perry in 1951 and Kolb in 1984 into the PARE model.
For this study the researcher adapted the PARE model to the student support services department model, for the staff members who work dircetly or indirectly with WIL placement as represented in Figure 2.2:
- o Prior – Preparation for student support service
- o During – Action taken during student support service
- o During – Reflection of student support service
- o Post – Evaluation of student support service

Figure 2.2: Service learning model

The first stage of the service learning model is *preparation* of the actual work the staff member needs to do within the timeframe, to implement student support service delivery directly or indirectly.

Secondly, in the *action* stage, staff member roll out the student support service undertakings which address student needs and objectives. Staff member monitor and observe which actions guide and assist the students.

Thirdly, in the *reflection stage* staff member assess the departments' progress concerning the which, how and why services are provided as well as identified problems and obtaining solutions.

Lastly, the *evaluation* stage, measures the achievable objectives and notes services rendered to students. Staff member establish if the criteria have been met, to assess the best and worse practices as well as areas for future improvement.

2.9.1   Student Support Services prior to WIL Placement

One of the components of student support provided before placement is informational support, whereby advice, suggestions and information are made available.

Furthermore, instrumental, and tangible student support is provided in the form of monetary aid, computers and data service.

Preparation prior to WIL placement includes background checking from the references provided by the students, and the academic area in which the placement coordinator could conduct programmes. This preparation includes conducting semi-structured interviews to assist the preparedness of students before the official interview to overcome anxiety and stress (Illeris, 2018). Reddan (2008) suggests that these mock interviews offer support to the student with practice and experience concerning various interview techniques. This exposure is important as employer's recruitment methods include pursuing and attracting interested and potential applicants, identifying and choosing the proficient student for the right position. Student placement success relies on the relevance of the student's expertise and the requirements of the industry (Dunn et al., 2018). In New Zealand's HEIs, staff members offer support services in finding appropriate student placement opportunities that would empower them to meet the learning outcomes during student placement (Testa et al., 2018).

The significance of the correct career choices would impact individual fulfilment, work pay, way of life and selection of companions (Dalimunthe et al., 2018). According to Wouters and Van Oostendorp (2017), motivation assumes a pivotal role in the learning process which combines with development of literacy such as the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy. It also includes information of the organisational concerns together with the values, objective, structure and characteristic of the workplace, and the lawful and moral literacy that consists of diversity, safety, equality and health (Cooper et al., 2010).

2.9.2   Student Support Services during WIL Placement

Student support services during WIL placement are prearranged and provided by the facilitator or supervisor, with commitment to educating and assessing students ongoing throughout WIL placement. the student support theory expresses the emotional or construct support, which is the expressions of empathy, love, trust and caring. Informational support, such as advice, suggestions and information are important at each stage. It was understood by Fleming and Martin (2007) that support

provided by both HEIs and the workplace often contributes to student satisfaction with student placement.

The intention of WIL is to familiarise students with various types of technologies and their usage to aid them in learning how to adapt to different work. Nduro et al. (2015) suggest that follow-ups should be done by the office placement coordinator to ascertain if WIL students or interns really receive the support which must assure that WIL exercises achieve their objectives. Supervisors ought to encourage HEIs to offered students the required support and also monitor the WIL process.

Panayiotopoulos (2017) suggests that students' confidence increases after WIL training; however, occasionally students must fend for themselves in the workplace. Sinclair and Winder (2016) suggest that different methods of student support could be used for providing support to students in WIL including counselling, mentoring, in-service training and consultation. These various support mechanisms should be in place and ongoing until the completion of WIL. This is seen as valuable to students from all different avenues, from observation of students and assessed by the industry experts as per proficiency requirements.

2.9.3   Student Support Services post WIL Placement

Effective and efficient monitoring would establish the necessary student support, attitudes and skills which ought to benefit the students. Appraisal and companionship support leads to information useful for self-evaluation, especially post WIL placement. As commented by Niskanen (2019), the WIL relationship and alignment of the academic and WIL programme should be mutually beneficial to all stakeholders. In the same vein, Mojtahedi and Oo (2017) posit that student support service post WIL placement assists employers in infusing new ideas and helping the organisations in achieving their goals and objectives.

After the WIL placement, the employers require skilled graduates who are equipped with professional skills such as critical thinking skills, problem analysing and problem-solving skills which influences the recruitment process. Sturre et al., (2012) state that these skills are important to employability. Hiring a talented workforce for the

organisation assists in improving productivity and the performance of the organisation. student placement.

Bullock et al. (2009) suggest that because of high fees at HEIs and the economic recession, students prefer to work and study part time which might influence the students' learning process. Nonetheless, according to Natoli et al., (2013), international HEIs are required to account for the success of their graduates and their subsequent employment.

Stakeholder meetings and reviews after each period of industrial training or attachment are a necessary strategy for the evaluation of WIL programmes, student expectations and the required support for the subsequent attachments or internships. To increase employment prospects and self-confidence, high-performing scholars are considered for the company's incentive programme.

2.10 EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES PRIOR, DURING AND POST WIL PLACEMENT

Entrenching student support service throughout WIL placement successfully extends beyond HE commitment; it requires commitment from stakeholders such as government, industry and professional discipline-specific organisations. Bosco and Ferns (2014) suggest that stakeholders are challenged in understanding their roles within WIL as well as nurturing HE-employer partnerships.

2.10.1 Experiences and Challenges of Student Support Services prior to WIL Placement

The initial challenge is embedding WIL student support into the courses and pedagogy of HEIs (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). The predominantly rigid government policies have seen HEIs rely on funding and scholar revenues, while offering placement. The policies are cumbersome and time-consuming because they hinge on partnerships with parties, especially the transaction expenses of employer partnerships. The absence of institutional backing for WIL has had considerable effect on government resources, on academics and the delivery and development of WIL student support services (Anderson & Sanga, 2019). For academics, it has required adaption of

different teaching and learning styles while for students it requires seeing the importance and relevance in engaging in WIL to enhance their prospects and careers (Lasen et al., 2018).

Aligning with Lewthwaite (2006), Martin et al. (2009:7) suggests that the "supervisory commitment of the organisation ought to be assessed". Perhaps the most serious disadvantage of the method, according to Du Toit et al. (2005) is that procedures and frameworks must exist to guarantee the effectiveness of student-placement. Coll and Lay (2001) stated that despite a good resume, if students donot perform well in their pre-placement interview, they would not be able to secure placement. This aligns with Reddan (2008) who stated that many students, due to the lack of interview experience, are unlikely to find suitable positions when they started looking for work. Expressing concern over the discrepancy at different career centres, Reddan (2008) concludes that student support services, processes and structures ought to be in place to ensure the efficacy of WIL standardisation in each discipline. It was reported that students are often sent away without support and career guidance interventions.

From this, one could deduce that embedding quality student placement practices into the curricula of HEIs needs reframing of the pedagogical approaches to comprise theoretical, experiential and professional learning models. However, the process of embedding support services throughout WIL placement requires commitment and resources as well as a change in students and academics' perspectives. By implication, the shortage of student support services is aggravated by the lack of the essential skills underpinned by WIL. This in turn could influence how student placement is delivered. A study by Johnson (2019) suggests that it is in students' interest to be part of the recruitment processes. However, Ferns and Moore (2012) and Bourne (2011) were concerned that HEIs do not adequately prepare students to survive in the workplace. However, it is not always possible to fully prepare students for the essential expectations of the both the workplace and the company.

The layout cost is the other challenge encountered prior to the implementation of student support services throughout the WIL placement process for every involved stakeholder (Henderson & Trede, 2017). Employers need to invest in the training of the students as well as consider the resources and time for mentorship and

supervision. HEIs carried the biggest cost in nurturing relations with the community partners, industry and the development of WIL programmes. The scholars' costs include unexpected monetary outlays as well as fair compensation (Winchester-Seeto & Rowe, 2019).

2.10.1.1 Summary of other countries' experiences and challenges of student support services prior to WIL placement

In a competitive job market, youth in Nigeria continue to face serious problems with employability and unemployment. However, they hope that the utilisation of WIL placement and student support would help close the gap by improving students' employability skills (Afolabi et al., 2019).

According to Kay et al. (2019), demand and supply is one of the challenges encountered in Canada with student support throughout WIL placement. WIL partners in Canada find it difficult to attain a suitable fit between WIL opportunities, distance and student needs during their placement, and balancing is more serious as WIL expands into the country-side. Notwithstanding the industry, size or sector, Nigerian employers are yet to acquire a comprehensive definition and construction of the terms 'WIL' and 'student support' (Pop & Brink, 2017:12).

Owusu-Agyeman and Fourie-Malherbe (2019) stated that companies in Ghana decry failed relations with HEIs such as relationships that limit placement in workplace programmes via student support services. An unequal relationship between the HEIs and the companies works against a mutually beneficial and sustainable engagement since one party feels unduly committed to the relationship and ends it.

2.10.2 Experiences and Challenges of Student Support Services during WIL Placement

Providing an adequate supply of student support services to meet the demand of WIL student placements is a continuous challenge which may limit the ability to contribute to sound decisions. Bandaranaike and Willison (2015) lament that the realistic fast-moving pace and demands of the workplace, student support and interpersonal relationships are not considered when implementing WIL. Students receive vague

guidelines without sufficient first-hand experience in the workplace which could limit their ability to participate in sound decision-making. As indicated by Ritter and Lemke (2000), time in addition to energy equals learning, which means that there is not a substitute for time on task. Appointed faculty members who supervise WIL and offer student support services rarely deal directly with the employers, community partners or government during student placement (Martin & Rees, 2019).

2.10.2.1 Summary of other countries' experiences and challenges of student support services during WIL placement

Hay and Dale (2014) reported that New Zealand tertiary institutions have their own criteria for favouring people to be field educators. Jackson and Collings (2018) state that administrative burdens are a challenge encountered in nations like Canada with student support services during WIL placement. Administering WIL programmes is labour-intensive due to the time-consuming procedures encountered by HEIs to support the WIL student and manage other school programmes. HEIs and companies in Ghana build a relationship which is essential to WIL student support in order for student to develop the appropriate skills and knowledge (Antwi et al., 2019). Ghana's WIL placement students only receive the support of the company when the HEIs offer the companies benefits like research and data while the companies offer internships and industrial attachments. Nduro et al. (2015:111) report that other strategy implemented in Ghana to deal with the challenges of student support services during WIL placement include follow-up meetings, to ascertain if training, support and developmental skills is specified to students during the WIL placement period.

2.10.3 Experiences and Challenges of Student Support Services post WIL Placement

There were recurring issues related to government, education experts and industry when agreeing to participate in the WIL programme. Thonglek et al. (2011) stated that some educators involved in WIL programmes have misconceptions about working with industry, dealing with administrative tasks, and advising HEI students on non-technical issues. This means they there is little understanding of the policy and process which caused delays when having to tackle the process with industry to support and complete the students' WIL portfolio.

It has been indicated that most educators consider the workload of participating in WIL to be less valuable and less appreciated. From an industry perspective, poorly defined roles of student guidance and ambiguous responsibilities in supervision of students are key issues (Cooper et al., 2010). As a result, HEI educators and the industry in general are reluctant to participate in WIL programmes and carry on with the process to the end. Consequently, the government should revise current policies to ensure that it meets the needs of HEIs students, staff and industry involved in WIL programmes.

2.10.3.1 Summary of other countries' experiences and challenges of student support services post WIL placement

Canada encountered challenges with measuring the outcomes of student support done by Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER) in 2016 in partnership with government. The unpredictable and varied nature of Canada's student placements often made it difficult for the government and partners to assess individual student support and performance throughout the placement. The variety of WIL and the differences over WIL's definition complicated efforts to measure the success of student support against the uniform WIL benchmark, therefore there was a need for collaboration between Canada's limitations in customary approaches to WIL student support assessments (Jones et al., 2019). Nduro et al. (2015) stated that Ghana had to deal with the challenges of student support service throughout WIL which was support follow-up of students, their wellbeing and their work.

Harun and Kamin (2019) stated that Nigeria's WIL student support structure did not have smooth continuity. The start of WIL student support remained uncoordinated. After primary education, WIL students receive their first orientation in technical colleges or secondary school with the understanding that they create opinions before exposure to WIL (Ugwoke et al., 2016). However, at such a late stage of introduction, student support and orientation was slow and lacked quality due to the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) using unorganised and uncoordinated material and human resources. Such a practice has resulted in student support inefficiencies and ineffectiveness as well as unemployable scholars or students. Besides meeting their content learning outcomes activities and interests, HEIs do not seem to meet the needs of the companies or industry (Pitan, 2016).

To sum up, there is a 'cultural gap' which is a challenge to effective collaboration amongst WIL stakeholders and student support. The unequal practices between the higher education institutions and companies challenge student support throughout the WIL placement process. Every party is focused on achieving an advantage from the arrangement rather than supporting the student in acquiring industrial placement and thus assisting the students in acquiring and developing the necessary practical knowledge and skills.

2.11   STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

In higher education institutions today, improving student support and employability is a strategic objective that is applied globally. There is still pressure on HE institutions to generate graduates who are prepared for the world of work so they are able to meet business needs. Industry is encouraged to offer student support services leading to explore and successfully drive innovation and guide nations in intensely competitive international marketplaces. Strategies both international and national are discussed below.

2.11.1   Strategies to Improve Student Support Services: Nationally

Conferences and colloquiums have promoted and encouraged educational institutions to strategise and pay attention to the learning outcomes of their qualifications. Research has revealed that student support services in the context of WIL have contributed to students achieving 'good' marks in their years of studies, compared to those students who were never supported and placed in the workplace (Rambe, 2018). The strategy of WIL permits a combination of professional work experience with lecture room studies (Jackson, 2018). In a world where incentives, perks, development, and motivation are used to both recruit and retain people, it is crucial for businesses to be institutions of learning that encourage and enable their staff to continually learn and profit from this new (acquired) information.

Zuboff's (1988:1) strategy of 'learning was the new labour' means that learning should not be done separately but holistically both in theory at the HEI and practically in the workplace. Designated assignment execution includes exercises that are formally

perceived as a trait of work and involves the capability of work for which students are specifically accountable (Druskat et al., 2006). Exposure to the workplace setting could support students in adopting appropriate behaviours (Dunn et al., 2018) and support them in developing into transformational, flexible and adaptive employees.

Bhatt's (2017) strategy highlights the role of the employee which is motivational, participative, decision-making, high morale and performance. The importance of participation ensures support and motivation of employees. Attracting the correct skilled person with the end goal in mind is deployed to enhance WIL, so that employment planning and projecting leads to successful recruitment. Steyn and van Niekerk (2013) are of the opinion that recruiting is a 'vital task' to meet the organisation requirements and thus a successful match ought to be identified.

As the lack of current and valid resources is a challenge, HEIs have to strategise and be more creative in their WIL models and placement process, holding stakeholder meetings, offering problem-centred projects which student groups could solve collectively. Subsequently, the DHET (2013) has encouraged HEIs to build partnerships with employers, which endorse training and student support in the workplaces as practical experience in the workplace could contribute to the completions of registered qualifications. To facilitate WIL, a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with employers must be signed prior to student placement. The WIL policy ought to be incorporated into the HEI's operational policies. According to the DHET (2013), the Ministry of Higher Education and Training has to encourage and promote WIL practice in both Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions and HEIs, whereby components are consolidated into their programmes resulting in learning in the workplace and the development of pertinent knowledge and skills.

In his research, Zembazemba's (2019) strategy of improved communication and clearer appreciation of stakeholder roles is important to offer adequate student support services to the WIL supervisors. To launch clear roles on WIL student support, the company supervisor should be trained. Maintaining good relations between stakeholders is imperative when planning and implementing a WIL programme, as it has been noted that there are difficulties with overseeing desires and addressing the

requests of stakeholders (Patrick et al., 2008). The employer and HEIs needed to agree on a conceptual analysis, the reflection instrument and the framework for HEIs and company supervisors. The other strategies for student support include competitions for skills for students in WIL, encouraging student participation in global competitions, tours in different businesses, scholarships for a WIL programme, WIL allowances, free training/learning materials and joint responsibilities.

Such strategies may lead to the development of valuable criteria whereby each stakeholder, including government, higher institutions and the industry, understand their roles and responsibilities regarding support within student placement during WIL, therefore offering a new contribution to knowledge and the community of practice.

2.11.2 Strategies to Improve Student Support Services: Internationally

Australia - A study by Jones (2005) examined the trend of increasing small business enterprise development due to the improvement of human resource advancement. The University of Sydney, Australia has been running a WIL programme, called The Major Industrial Project Placement Scholarship (MIPPS) scheme. This programme had been operating since 2000 to allow final year undergraduates and postgraduates to be exposed to real-life experiences in the workplace for six months. The workplace is located across Australia and overseas (Universities Australia 2008). This scheme increases human resource capacity which results in advantages to the employer. This view is supported by Hardy et al. (2005) who wrote that skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration in teams, effective communication, personal resilience, and professional conduct are essential in the industry. Levin et al., (2010) are of the view that stakeholders are interested in involving themselves with student support and development of students in their profession.

Canada - Improved data collection is a success factor of strategies implemented in Canada student support throughout the WIL placement process (Cameron et al., 2019). Canada now has current data on participation in WIL activities available to education institutions, students and employers. Such a practice offers a more reliable national approach to student support during placement using student research and

surveys as well as administrative statistics. Canada has also built a comprehensive evaluation mechanism or framework used to assess the success of student support throughout WIL placements and the general WIL initiatives. The capacity to build the framework is dependent on developing a consistent definition of WIL and consensus on WIL objectives. The subsequent framework is a tool for required adjustments as well as identifying the strengths and weaknesses in implementing student support throughout WIL placement (Fleming et al., 2018).

*__Ghana__ – WIL stakeholders were lobbying for the WIL idea to be an essential part of the curriculum in higher education which is driven by scholars nationally, the government as well as associations in the industry (Donkor et al., 2009). The chance to improve Ghana's educational systems and address issues brought on by the swiftly shifting international reality is the primary motivator. The choice for a supervised internship or industrial attachment emanated from the 1999 recommendations of Ghana's National Accreditation Board for Tertiary Education. The government of Ghana has since implemented numerous student support programmes, including Ghana Youth in Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Agencies (GYEEDA) and the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP). The initiatives were intended to offer WIL students attachment support; however, in 2013 the government launched a students' attachment programme, recruiting scholars for industrial attachment, offering them student support services, as well as work experience (Kyei, 2013).

Today, Ghana's vocational, tertiary institutions and the higher education institutions organise WIL student support services with companies and organisations (Spio-Kwofie, 2016). Ghana's improvement of industrial placement and the setting of industrial placement standards has ensured that students receive the necessary support and are trained in the skills required for the labour market and specific to organisations. Skills forecasting remains a crucial success factor in the follow-up process. Complete HEI-to-employer engagement is vital in implementing WIL student support and the authenticity of Ghana's WIL programmes (Dsane-Nsor et al., 2019).

*__New Zealand__ - The idea of WIL is to develop a highly skilled population that endures further learning (Vaughan, 2008). Furthermore, according to Zegwaard and Laslett

(2011), students embrace student placement which gives them an understanding of the work environment, where they could watch and practise to be an expert in their field. The idea of student placement is not restricted to 'work involvement' but rather to encourage guided and organised experiential learning (Cooper et al., 2010). The industry facilitators communicate directly with HEI educators. Any questions or issues relating to the practicum is communicated via different modes, such as email and telephone. The facilitators are given a handbook that covers the key necessities and desires of the practicum, the formats for the evaluation sections and material on supervision. The literature has identified various advantages for student coordinators that manage student placement; for example, employability, sensible objective setting for employability and comprehending the requirements and expectations of student placement positions. Early research examples of student placement (Braunstein et al., 2011; Murphy & Calway 2000) conclude that probable permanent employment may occur once the student has graduated.

*__Nigeria__ - Uchenu et al. (2019) stated that there is a healthy relationship between the WIL stakeholders; that is, the national government and companies (employers). Throughout WIL, the higher education institutions offer student support constantly with both the office supervisors as well as the students. While the nation previously had inadequate ITF funding, technologies have now made it possible for the institutions of higher education to pay the WIL student and host the employer for more than one visit every term/semester (Sada et al., 2016).

As proposed by the students, the industrial placement supervisors could regularly video conference, visit or make telephone calls to the workplace supervisor and student to check on the WIL placement. According to the ITF (2020), the Nigerian government has decreased the amount of documentation required from employers and the WIL student to acquire support or funding. Employers and students could download off the website, fill and file their levy discount and WIL student support applications online (Afolabi et al., 2019). The removal of several blockages has decreased the time initially wasted on bureaucracy and provided students immediate support for their industrial placement or operative education (Uchenu et al., 2019).

Tanzania - Anderson and Sanga (2019) state that collaboration between the HEIs and Tanzania's private sector ensure good monitoring of WIL experiences and financial backing for sustainable growth of Tanzania's internship programmes. With regards to monitoring and evaluation, the secretariat services of the apprenticeship programme provided by the department responsible for skills development in the ministry responsible for labour and employment, is in charge of monitoring and evaluating WIL and student support in Tanzania (Government of Tanzania, 2017).

The other success factors in Tanzania include skills forecasting, setting industrial placement standards, flexibility and full coordination (engagement). These are measures that have resulted in accountability and an increase in WIL student support turnover.

2.12   SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

It could be concluded that HEIs in South Africa are trying to implement student support throughout WIL placement, thereby enabling students to gain practical exposure to the workplace, resulting in increasing the employment rate of the country. Therefore, it may be established that among the different policies undertaken by the South African government to support WIL was the introduction of the Skills Development Act and training centres.

This chapter explained the benefits of the combination of student support service and WIL to stakeholders in the development of professional identity, recruiting talented and skilled employees and motivating more students to enrol for WIL. As noted in the chapter, educators and supervisors of WIL play a key role in supporting students to achieve their career goals. More importantly, the WIL model and placement process aims to support students in preparing for the profession by applying their disciplinary skills in the work environment, as well as building the potential of students in the work environment. The next chapter describes the research methodology which guided the research in this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

"A qualitative researcher also will design a study, collect data, analyse data and interpret data the same as a quantitative researcher does." (Choy, 2014:100).

3.1   INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented a review of the literature, provided concepts and theories related to student support, which was ideal for understanding support services provided to students throughout Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) placement process in institutions of higher learning. WIL placement (for example, apprenticeships, experience placements, internships, work-based learning) is perceived to be a mechanism that provides an opportunity for all students to work with professionals in an authentic environment. WIL offers students the opportunity to develop work skills that are vital to their future careers but are difficult to obtain through solely lecture-based teaching (Jonassen et al., 2006).

The main research question, *What are student perceptions of support services provided by higher education institutions throughout the WIL placement process?* invites the understanding of student support holistically. To acquire an epistemological argument, the researcher needed to investigate in-depth experiences. The objective of this research was to gain deeper understanding what 'student support services' *is expected* by the students, what student support service *is provided* by the HEI, and what student support services *is required* to make the WIL placement process successful. Furthermore, the researcher sought to investigate the similarities of the various participant views regardless their differences in the study-discipline area.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline and discuss the research methodology design and process which guided this research. In this chapter, the context for this research study is outlined, starting with the philosophical perspective and research paradigm as well as the research approach and design. Additionally, the chapter explains the selecting of the population and the sampling method, site selection and data collection methods and data analysis.

The chapter ends off with a discussion on the trustworthiness of the research and the ethical considerations that were applied prior to using the intended research design.

3.2   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The practical approach to conducting research through data collecting and analysis is known as the research technique. The tools and methods used to investigate the research problem is provided by the research methodology. The intended design and research methodology is used to gain insight into and understanding of the main research questions as referred to in Chapter 1, Section 1.5, therefore inviting the understanding of student support holistically.

3.2.1   Philosophical Perspective and Research Paradigm

The research paradigm, which is based on certain assumptions about the world and the identification of the philosophical assumptions, guided the researcher while conducting the study. The concept of paradigm refers to a collection of beliefs, values, techniques shared by members of a particular community (Maxwell, 2013). Subsequently, researchers ought to have an awareness of the beliefs and philosophical assumptions that they bring to any study in which they engage (Creswell, 2013), as these philosophical ideas influence the research practice.

A research paradigm is a set of common beliefs and agreements between researchers and how problems ought to be understood and addressed (Scotland, 2012). A paradigm impacts a person's worldview, which could change the person's perceived facets of reality. Neuman (2006) and Scotland (2012) describe the common research paradigms as philosophical approaches.

There are four dominant paradigms in educational research namely, positivism, constructivism/ interpretivism, transformative and pragmatism that guide researchers while conducting their respective research studies (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2005). Various researchers use these paradigms differently to describe the basic beliefs and

73

assumptions that guide research inquiry on phenomena of the natural and social structures (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln et al., 2011; Mertens, 2010).

Accordingly, a paradigm comprises four philosophical assumptions, namely, ontological assumption (nature of reality of the problem under examination, or view of how one perceived reality), epistemological assumption (how knowledge was known, or the philosophy of knowledge, or how one comes to know, or how we know what we are aware of about the topic of the study /research), axiological assumption (values and ethics systems related to the topic under study) and methodology (procedures and processes required to be employed while conducting research/study on the issue under investigation) (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln et al., 2011), as shown in Table 3.1[1].

Table 3.1: Selected methodological context and methodology

PARADIGM	POSITIVIST	INTERPRETIVIST	CRITICAL INQUIRY
Research Question	Measure objective facts	Construct social reality	
Research Purpose	Exploratory	Descriptive	Explanatory
Methodology	Quantitative	Qualitative Case Study	Mixed- Method
Theory	Theory and data/ information are separate	Theory and data/ information are fused	
Sampling	Probabilistic - focus on variables	Non-Probabilistic - focus on interactivity	
Data	Numerical	Verbal/Visual Text	Observation
Analysis	Statistical Analysis	Thematic Analysis	

(Source: Babbie, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neuman, 2006)

To put this research into perspective, the interpretivist paradigm was most appropriate for the research which focused on a multi-layered and complex single phenomenon that could have had many interpretations. This study provided a deep understanding

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[1] Table 3.1 only presents three paradigms

of the benefits of integrating the student support services, the WIL model and placement process. Scotland (2012) posits that the interpretivist research paradigm is aimed at understanding phenomena from an individual's perspective and by investigating interaction among individuals.

The explanatory philosophical assumptions for the purpose of this research study could be viewed "as the underlying epistemology which guided the research" (Saurombe, 2014). It is important to describe the concept 'epistemology'. Epistemology is one of the core components of philosophy, which also refers to the theory of knowledge, especially regarding its methods, validity and scope. It is the study of knowledge and justified belief. Epistemology demonstrates two parts, that is, theory of knowledge - what is known and a theory of knowledge acquisition - how it comes to be known (Saurombe, 2014). 'How do we know what we know as knowledge or what we believe to be true?' was best explained by epistemology, the philosophical basis from which researchers begin qualitative research (Saurombe, 2014). In his paper, Leavy (2017) discussed the theories of epistemology, which is a philosophical perspective on how research continues and what is considered knowledge. The moral elements of the researcher-participant relationship in the context of research, is inseparably linked with the epistemological in that they form the framing principle by which the researcher-participant relationship is understood. Therefore, epistemology guided the interpretation of students' understanding of different types of student support throughout the WIL placement process, under the assorted study disciplines.

In this research, interpretivism was the paradigm of choice supporting a qualitative case study research design (Creswell, 2014; Morgan, 2007). It was Bowen's (2009) understanding that the constructivist or interpretivist model (or paradigm) captures the lives of participants to understand and interpret meaning. Unlike the positivist paradigm, which advocates for a single truth and single reality, the interpretivist paradigm supports the view that there are many truths and multiple realities. The interpretivist paradigm underpinned this study and focused on the holistic perspective of the person and the environment which was more congruent with the social discipline. In this paradigm, multiple explanations and descriptions are provided for people's actions. According to Bokgola (2015), an interpretivist paradigm is underpinned by observations and interpretations where the mind is active in the

construction of knowledge. Views, decision-making, perceptions, judgements and beliefs, as well as an understanding of humankind, underpin and reinforce the interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist research method allows participants to interact with each other to draw out their feelings and viewpoints. This is usually used in social science and education research since it focuses on interpretivist inquiry, which was understood as knowledge. In the interpretivist paradigm, the researcher interrogates the conclusions based on the opinions, viewpoints and feelings of the participants. As stated in Chapter one, the purpose of this research was to find out and understand which support services was provided to students throughout the WIL process in higher education. The curiosity to investigate the participants' responses, was wanting to understand students' lived experiences, their views and perceptions. To understand this, the interpretivist paradigm was deemed most appropriate for the research.

As per the introduction of this chapter, this research focused on a qualitative research design, adopting the interpretivist paradigm focusing on the theory of knowledge, the assumptions and beliefs that one has about the nature of knowledge.

3.2.2   Research Design

A research design describes a holistic approach to using the various components of a research study in a comprehensive, integrated and logical manner. According to Akhtar (2016), the research design could be seen as a glue that holds the structure of research and everything together. It has been interpreted by Maxwell (2012) as a plan or a menu of standards or designs in which one must carry out a task in a study. A research design could be defined as answering research questions for the selection of topics, research sites and data collection methods (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). In addition, these authors emphasise that the research design dictates when and where and how participants are to be interviewed. Furthermore, Akhtar (2016) argues that the research design could be classified as searchable, explanatory, exploratory, descriptive or practical. This research considered that an explanatory research design would be flexible and inexpensive and provide a possible foundation for future research.

This research study was exploratory as it aimed to understanding students' lived experiences related to the student support services provided by HEIs throughout the deployment of the WIL placement process. In this study, the qualitative explanatory research approach provided a logical and organised process that would corroborate a phenomenological research approach using a case study that derived knowledge from actual experience rather from theory or any belief (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The theory of knowledge helped in gaining information related to the workplace culture and expectations, as well as the adapting of changes and application of academic knowledge.

Another purpose for choosing an exploratory research approach was the support it offered in proving in-depth data from the sample in a short span of time. As noted by Fletcher (2017), an exploratory research approach assisted the researcher in defining problems associated with the research question. Getting information from participants about their thoughts and how they experienced the trend was an important aspect of the study. This determined the selection of appropriate research instruments for data collection and analysis (Maree, 2016), which was prescriptive and meticulously followed and executed.

3.2.2.1 *Qualitative research approach*

Weinberg, Butt, Knight and Perritt (2001) state that qualitative research focuses on the way people understand and make sense of their experiences and their life. Qualitative research has numerous research methods to gather and analyse data. Crotty (2003) describes research methods as the precise methods and procedures used to collect and analyse data. Kumar (2005) believes that the research process essentially is to find the answer to a research question. The focus of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the 'how' and 'why' questions underlying the main research question resulting from the problem statement outlined in Chapter 1.

The qualitative research method adopted for this research framed this study focusing on a narrative inquiry consisting of conversations between participants and the researcher (Flick, 2018), and implementing critical theory for analysing the experiences of participants. To achieve the objectives of this research, the researcher wanted to elicit unanticipated responses generated from semi-structured interviews,

focus group interviews and open-ended questionnaires which provided possible answers to the research question of the study.

This study explored the participants' perceptions of student support services provided throughout WIL placement process at selected universities in South Africa. In pursuing answers to the research questions, the study was guided by the following objectives to:

- Determine understanding of the concept 'student support' throughout WIL.
- Ascertain the type of student support services provided by HEIs to students prior to, during and post the WIL placement process.
- Reveal the perceptions and roles of the various stakeholders towards student support services provided throughout WIL
- Establish the students' lived experiences and challenges of these student support services.
- Identify the strategies that can be recommended to improve on the existing student support services provided to HE students throughout the WIL placement process.

3.2.2.2   *Qualitative case study*

A case study is one of the many ways to research social science, which aims to understand and interpret human beings in a group, community or event. A case study is also known to be both the method and the tool for the research. As stated by Creswell and Creswell (2017), in case study research, the researcher commences with a qualitative research phase and explores the views of participants. A case study could be used to describe the actual setting in how it takes place in real-life. In a case study, the researcher tries to put together evidence to support the proposition. In this study, the aim was to investigate the participants' views on student support services throughout WIL placement regardless the study-discipline offered at HEIs. Yin (2014) stated that a case study is an investigation of a contemporary event in its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between event and context are not clearly defined.

A qualitative case study framed this research as a method that explores and investigates contemporary events without having to manipulate the participants nor be part of an experience. Yin (2014) suggested these criteria specified are qualitative case study methodology's traits. Yin further suggested that a case study relates to the case being investigated, which is this case is the understanding of the support services provided to students throughout WIL placement process and not necessarily about defining the population nor the selection of the samples. A qualitative case study method, addresses and analyses the wide range of data within real-life contexts. The unique strength of the case study is its ability to deal with a wide variety of evidence – artefacts, interviews, surveys and observations (Yin, 2014), various forms of which were used in this research study to collect data.

A case study is an empirical inquiry to understand and examine the phenomenon of the real-life context within the group being investigated. A case study may be interpreted as contributing various methods towards qualitative data collection and analysis and through the methods of "participation-observation, in-depth interviews and longitudinal studies" (Choy, 2014:102-103). Additionally, Choy (2014 citing Gable, 1994) explained that penetrating questions may be asked and rich organisational behaviour may be captured, yet the conclusions are linked to context and cannot be generalised.

The advantage of utilising a case study when collecting data for this study, was that it the sample is made up of a smaller group of participants whereby it is practically viable and easier to draw a conclusion. Creswell (2013) suggested that the emphasis is on describing the phenomenon in such a way that it provides a more understandable reality, providing a much-needed insight into how the participants experienced the phenomenon. The researcher identified the key issues of this case study, student support offered to students throughout WIL placement process, with significant theoretical concepts and questions, collected relevant data, analysed and discussed the findings. As Yin (2014) described, a reliable case study includes the overview of the research study, goals and topics, procedure, data to be collected and to access the field and feedback on the case study results, a draft covering the case design and discussed procedure.

For this study, multi-data collection techniques were used that included semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, which is discussed in detail in a subsequent section, a qualitative open-ended electronic questionnaire were further instruments used. Following Creswell's (2013) method, this study allowed for natural settings, the significance of participants as well as the use of various sources of data collection and data analysis. Therefore, this assisted the researcher in the collection of data, which allowed for analysis in line with the objectives of the research.

3.3   POPULATION AND SAMPLING

A research population is a large group of people or things that are the focus of an empirical scientific inquiry. In this study, the population comprised universities students from various disciplines who participated in the WIL process. Since the researcher wanted to investigate and find out what kinds of student support *are provided* by public or independent HEIs in the greater Pretoria area, Gauteng, South Africa, to make the WIL placement process successful, a sample was selected from the large student population. Secondly, the researcher wanted to find out what support services *are expected* by the students, who studied in different disciplines, and if there would be much of a difference. The sample was identified to collect information concerning their lived experience.

The literature describes the term sample in qualitative research as the research participants or selected participants (Lewis, 2015). A sample in research is referred to as a group of people, objects or items taken from a larger population for measurement. Dang and Pheng (2015) were of the opinion that more than one sampling method could be used. Therefore, the researcher decided to use the combination of all three sampling methods, convenience, purposive and snowball sampling, in this research:

- Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which it is straightforward for a researcher to select participants who are easily reached and willing to participate in a study.
- Purposive sampling is a non-random method of sampling which identifies participants who provide convincingly information-rich data for the study.

- Snowball sampling or chain-referral sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the researcher pursues the samples that have certain characteristics that are rare to find. One participant gives the researcher the name of another potential participant, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so forth

Convenience sampling identified participants in close proximity and in this case, residing the same region of Gauteng. Convenience sampling assisted in collecting primary data from stakeholders and students that participated in the WIL process, in some way or form, in various areas or disciplines. According to Lewis (2015), the advantage of using convenience sampling in this research is that it assisted in collecting data from participants who were easily available and accessible to take part in a study.

Purposive sampling was used to collect in-depth information from all participants due to their knowledge and lived experience (Lewis, 2015). Furthermore, purposive sampling was used as it was vital for the researcher to contact participants for in-depth information and data related to their lived experience in WIL placement and the support thereof.

Snowball sampling was used as a starting point through placement to make contact and reach out to different participants who could contribute to this study. Addition information-rich participants were selected for in-depth study through snowball sampling (Strydom & Delport, 2005). Subsequently, the sample was decided based on maximum variation, all participants either contributed or were involved in some way in the process of student support services throughout WIL placement. This gave a clear indication of what is *expected,* what is *provided* and is *required* to make the WIL placement process successful.

3.3.1   Participants selected for Semi-Structured Interviews

Eight (8) participants were purposively selected and interviewed to assist in achieving the aims and objectives of this study. This research aimed to explore student support

services provided throughout WIL placement process. Sampling was conducted according to the following criteria:

- Participants who worked in the applicable sector related to WIL placement;
- Participants who understood student support and the WIL placement process;
- Participants who worked hand-in-hand with the WIL placement process in their sector.

These participants were recruited to participate in this study due to their direct or indirect involvement in the WIL placement process, it was felt that they could richly contribute to the expectation of student support in each of their respective sectors.

3.3.2 Participants selected for Focus Group and Qualitative Open-Ended Questionnaires

The first focus group interview carried out, was face-to-face involving eight (8) selected participants. The researcher conducted purposeful sampling by selecting participants according to the following criteria:

- Participants who studied and graduated from HEIs;
- Participants whose qualifications covered the WIL component;
- Participants' WIL placement was done in the applicable Industry.

However, constraints arising from the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic, required flexibility, which involved using a further qualitative data collection instrument, an electronic qualitative open-ended questionnaire. For this study, the researcher wanted to obtain in-depth and rich information to a point of saturation. Thus, using the same focus group questions, an electronic qualitative open-ended questionnaire was developed which was emailed to the second group of twenty (20) selected participants. For both the focus group interview and the qualitative open-ended questionnaire, the sample comprised various higher education graduates who were involved in the WIL programme and had completed a WIL placement component for their qualification.

Participants for both the focus group interview and the qualitative open-ended questionnaire were recruited on the bases that they studied in different disciplines, which included a compulsory WIL placement component in their course at public or independent Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in the greater Pretoria area, Gauteng, South Africa. The idea of this large yet multi-disciplined course sample, was to extract their understanding and own unique lived experiences and information related to the student support service experiences provided by the HEIs and throughout the WIL placement process. Therefore, this research relied on participants' holistic and lived experience to discuss effective and ineffective strategies of student support.

3.4   DATA COLLECTION

Various types of research instruments are used to conduct qualitative data such as literature reviews, surveys (quality open-ended questionnaires, email and postal mail), interviews (telephone, social media, face-to-face or focus group, observations and notes) and experiments. Best and Kahn (2006) describe data collection as a systematic research process through the collection and analysis of empirical data. Data collection is perceived as a necessary part presiding over research; however, it is an often difficult and demanding exercise (Kajornboon, 2005). In fact, it is very difficult to identify the best data collection method as data collection is dependent on the research plan as there are different techniques designed to encourage a full, meaningful answer using the participants' own knowledge and experience.

In this research, supported by the interpretivist paradigm, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and an open-ended questionnaire were employed to collect data. Houghton et al. (2013) stated that the use of a multi-data collection technique strengthens the case study and enriches the data credibility via triangulation. In addition, the narrative inquiry, which was assisted by Social Support Theory in analysing different problems and challenges associated with the study, was used to analyse the problems and challenges faced while preparing the research project.

Tustin et al. (2005) point out that data collection could be interpreted as 'fieldwork'. Data collection methods are the processes and procedures used by the researcher to answer the research question by collecting information from relevant sources. Drew,

et al., (2008) describe pre-planning of data collection as an indicator of the validity of the data collected. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the researcher should consider a few pointers when collecting data: participants, instruments to use, ethical consideration, secure storage of data, analysis methods and reported the findings. As Creswell and Creswell and Elo et al., (2014) (2017) point out, researchers tend to use more semi-structured interviews, focus groups and open-ended questionnaires in qualitative research, as encapsulated in Figure 3.1
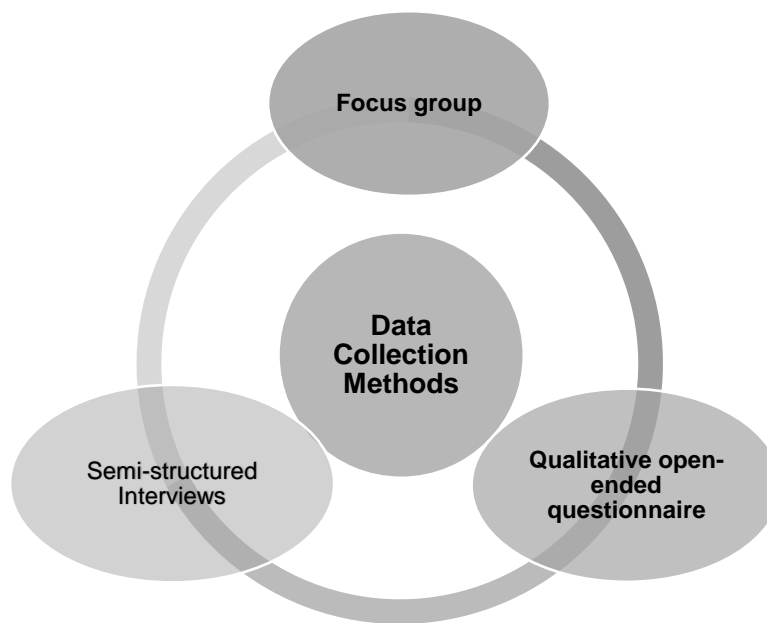
(Source: Elo et al., 2014:26)

Figure 3.1: Data collection methods

This research study aimed to contribute to the development and improvement of student support services, the system and process in the interest of those involved with student support services throughout WIL placement processes. By using qualitative research, the researcher sought to gather in-depth meaning of the phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore, multi-data collection techniques, which contributed to providing a compelling and correct case study, were used. Qualitative multi-data collection techniques offer a range of methods, resulting in the collection of rich uninterrupted descriptions of the phenomenon, producing a wealth of detailed data with a small number of participants who contribute rich and in-depth descriptions.

The researcher used primary data-collection methods for this study in order to collect subjective views from the participants without interpreting the acquired data. This encouraged the participants to voice their views on challenges on student support services, their frustrations and the opportunity to answer unrestrictedly. Permission to record the interviews was obtained from each participant prior to both semi-structured interview and the focus group interview, which meant that the researcher could listen and reflect on the interview. In addition, hand-outs relating to the WIL process were shared freely with the researcher. Finally, the qualitative open-ended questionnaire was distributed to participants either via their mobile phone or emails. The most appropriate method of collecting data was therefore one that was dependent on the aims of the research and its advantages and disadvantages (O'Leary, 2004). Furthermore, these methods contributed to the saturation of the data.

The interviews conducted for this research, were a made up of a series of semi-structured interviews, focus group and due to the COVID-9 global pandemic, a qualitative open-ended questionnaire anticipating in-depth and rich answers. A comparison of the three types of qualitative interviews techniques used in this study is presented in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Comparison of various qualitative interview methods

Comparison Criteria	Semi-Structed Interviews	Focus Group Interviews	Qualitative Open-Ended Questionnaire
Participants	One to one	Group of four (4) to eight (8)	Depends on the designated Group 5-50
Type of Question	Oral-Verbal	Oral -verbal	Written (electronically)
Response	Immediate response – Subjective: reactive	Discussion – each contributes own view	More time to respond – Objective: pre-recorded
Questions	Open-ended and extendable	Open- ended and probing	Open-ended
Sequence	Committed and extendable	Committed	Committed
Interaction	Synchronous and personal	Synchronous and personal	Asynchronous and impersonal
Nature	Conversation	Discussion with in the group	Survey

Firstly, *semi-structured interviews* were conducted primarily to elicit the knowledge and experiences of the participants, who were invited by the researcher to participate in this research due to their wealth of knowledge and experience. It allowed the researcher to arrange the sequence of questions according to the need to answer the research question (Corbetta, 2003). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a detailed one-on-one interview consists of free-form questions to obtain data on the meaning of participants' life views. The selected participants received a briefing before the meeting to assist them in preparing and feeling comfortable throughout the interview. Each participant was interviewed individually, and the interviews were recorded using a voice recorder. The semi-structured interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes which gave the researcher the option to ask additional questions as the participants responded.

Secondly, the *focus group interview* was designed to encourage comprehensive and meaningful feedback using the knowledge and experience of participants. The choice for focus group interviews conducted with participants, was to gain a better understanding of student support services at HEIs throughout the WIL placement process. These focus group participants represented the group interpretation of HEIs and workplace experience. The participants received the invitation to take part in this research. Thereafter, as soon as the invitation was confirmed and accepted, the researcher proceeded with the process of briefing each member of the group before the meeting. Each participant was assured of confidentiality, and the date, time and mutual meeting place was acceptable to all participants. All participants arrived on time, at the designated venue, where the researcher received and acknowledge each participant. Once participants were comfortable, the purpose and expectations of the meeting were explained by the researcher. The focus group interview was recorded using a voice recorder and lasted for approximately 70 minutes allowing each of the participants to contribute significantly.

Lastly, the *open-ended questionnaire* as previously discussed, was used in place of the second focus group due to the global pandemic. An open-ended questionnaire was prepared for the participants. The questions did not include an answer option, which was also known as free-form questions. The second focus group were contacted and briefed on the open-ended questionnaire and forwarded the electronic

version to their email address for completion. The participants were not guided in a particular direction by the predefined answer categories (Züll, 2016). Once the questionnaire was completed by the participant, the automotive programme returned the questionnaire to the researcher. No names nor email addresses of the participants were exposed to protect participants' identity - no one besides the supervisor and the researcher had access to the data.

In the qualitative research method, the researcher engages with relevant documents as another form of inexpensive method of collecting empirical data analysis. Yin's (2011) view is that documents are a great data sources due to their scientific value and important detailed information that could be extracted, which many qualitative researchers regard as meaningful and appropriate. The various official and non-official documents included newspapers clippings, minutes of meeting, personal journals and letters, policies and other text recordings of an organisation (Creswell, 2008) which were collected from the participants to assist in the verification of data collected in the interviews and open-ended questionnaire.

Most documents were on letterheads, therefore, assuming it was all authentic (De Vos et al., 2005). As indicated by the researcher, additional notes were taken as the interviews proceeded and hand-outs collected from the participants, which included the policies, contracts between parties and hand-outs to students. The different methods that were used by the researcher for the interpretation of data included initial reviews of students taken in the form of preliminary notes and memos (Etikan et al., 2016). This had to be done so that participants had a clear idea of the career they wanted to follow and what they could anticipate in the workplace.

These were particularly useful in this study for achieving clear indications and expectations of support provided in the world of work by HEIs and other stakeholders. Subsequently, the researcher decided on the selected group of chosen documents due to their importance in the WIL process. Collecting the relevant and accurate information related to the ideology of the workplace and also contributed to the understanding of the purpose of opting for WIL. Lastly, Etikan et al., (2016) suggested that different methods of analysis used by researchers to interpret data should include initial reviews of participants taken in the form of preliminary notes and memos.

3.5   DATA ANALYSIS

In qualitative research, data analysis is an ongoing process, where the role of the researcher is to look for recurring patterns when comparing different situations or settings. Therefore, in order to gain an overall understanding of the students' perception of student support services provided at HEIs, multi-data collection techniques were conducted to collect data from thirty-six (36) participants located in the greater Pretoria area, Gauteng Province, South Africa. The primary data were collected by the researcher by means of semi-structured interviews, a focus group interview and an open-ended questionnaire, however only the semi-structure interviews and focus interviews were recorded (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015) and later transcribed, the open-ended questionnaires were electronically sorted out.

There are many examples in the literature of how to perform qualitative research, but there were not many discussions regarding how to conduct a thorough and pertinent thematic analysis (Nowell et al. ,2017). Thematic analysis is used to analyse data and find answers to research questions. According to Guest et al. (2017), the main issues identified through thematic analysis are opinions and perspectives on student support services received throughout the WIL process. The thematical data analysis procedure used was data preparation and data interpretation methods. Guest et al., (2017) state that data analysis and interpretation proceed in a rational movement between the problem and the findings and therefore the saturated process would close all gaps.

The thematical analysis could be used in either an inductive or a deductive way. Both inductive and deductive analysis processes involve three main phases: preparation, organisation and reporting of results (Elo et al., 2014). The inductive approach was recognised in qualitative research studies, generating a new theory from the data collected. On the other hand, the deductive approach is utilised in quantitative research areas, starting with a statement or hypothesis which is pursued to be proven through observation. Since no theory was needed to inform the analysis, an inductive approach was used in this study.

Various methodologies are used to comprehend the same phenomenon thanks to the use of multi-data collection techniques and the practice of triangulation, which refers to the use of two or more methods of research (Cohen et al., 2000). Although triangulation did not require consistency or repetition, it is a crucial tool to use when looking at complex phenomena. Consequently, problem areas were addressed, issues were resolved, and improvement plans were provided through the use of triangulation in this study, which included a review of the literature, interviews and a questionnaire. By using many perspectives or positions, triangulation gives the researcher a platform from which to describe the complexity and depth of human behaviour. The researcher was able to guarantee an accurate depiction of the research study by applying multi-data collection techniques. Viewing the event from multiple angles increased the validity of the research study and ensured the full validity of the data collected.

Thematic analysis is a method used to analyse non-numeric data such as audio, video, text or interview transcripts. The entire transcript is examined looking for meaningful patterns of themes in the data. The participant responses were grouped as per each question asked, as well as an information document generating generic groupings. The data preparation included coding the transcripts into different themes that were generated before analysis through the coding process. During the process of thematic analysis, the collected data is read and re-read which includes providing preliminary codes as the process progresses. Marriott and Goyder (2009) states that data analysis is conducted by coding – this means that meaningful sentences, quotes and statements related to the research topic or research question are identified and coded. The codes are clustered and grouped into conceptual categories which lead to the development of themes and sub-themes. Analysing and reporting data produces significant evidence concerning the problem under study. Thematic analysis is also used to analyse problems and find solutions to problems, which provides a great deal of flexibility in interpreting data, and grouping large datasets into broad thematic areas which makes them more easily approachable.

3.6   TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Measuring trustworthiness relates to validity and reliability. Trustworthiness of data is associated with authenticity, neutrality, conformability, consistency, applicability, credibility, transferability and dependability, each of which is linked to external validity, internal validity, reliability and objectivity in quantitative research design (Elo et al., 2014). Validity refers to how sound and valid the research has been. As explained by Bell et al. (2018), the different factors that helped the researcher in measuring validity were population characteristics and data collection methodology. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) stated that the concepts validity and reliability are generally applied to quantitative rather than qualitative research. Winter (2000) recommends trustworthiness and relevance as the replacement for the concepts of validity and reliability. Therefore, the qualitative research considers the accuracy and trustworthiness of the instrument (Bernard, 2013).

The data analysis and interpretation methods included the transcription of interviews and initial reviews which helped the researcher in measuring trustworthiness. The following subsections describe the breakdown:

3.6.1   Credibility

In qualitative research, the term credibility is synonymous with validity and reliability. Credibility means testing the rigour of the qualitative research to validate the data and analytical procedures. The data analysis and interpretation methods include the transcription of interviews and initial reviews which helps the researcher in measuring trustworthiness. In addition, Maree (2012) suggests that the involvement of several investigators or peer-to-peer researchers help interpret the data which then increases credibility and trustworthiness.

The other method used by a researcher to measure trustworthiness is measuring reliability. According to Walliman (2017), reliability refers to the extent to which some answers are obtained using different instruments. This study was reliable as a number of different instruments to collect data and information were used, such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups and an open-ended questionnaire. In this instance,

the researcher took care and consideration when planning the questions and ensured that they related to the experience of the participants who understood the research questions and were able to freely express their opinions. The data collection methodology used by the researcher was the epistemology methodology with the emerging method to measure trustworthiness being the reliability of research, by resources of digitally recording the interviews (data).

3.6.2 Transferability

Transferability is justified if the results are applicable to similar contexts. Many researchers practise transferability using the findings of their studies to assist them understand their own research more effectively (Bowen, 2014). Statistical generalisation is the ability of a statistic to generalise from a small sample to a large population. Aggregate generalisation is the ability of a statistic to generalise from a large population to a small one. The former is consistent with a quantitative method that relies on statistical significance; the latter relates to a qualitative method. The assumption in aggregate generalisation is that, if a deep and rich description is provided for a population, qualitative researchers could generalise to each individual in that population.

3.6.3 Dependability

The dependability of a quantitative term is its consistency over time, which is concerned with the data. Credibility looks at the data to see if it could lead people to believe in the person or idea (O'Leary 2004) as the study is conducted to verify the reality of the situation. In order to make sure the data are reliable, all relevant sources of data are included. As much data as possible should be collected and this could relate to data that is recorded digitally or by hand. In order to exclude unconfirmed views of participants, data reduction was used. In addition, the researcher should indicate a clear instruction of the various steps for data collection and analysis.

3.6.4   Confirmability

In qualitative research, confirmability refers to the characteristics of the data (Bowen, 2014). Its main purpose is to verify that the research findings are the result of the research and not the assumptions and biases of the researcher. Therefore, all discussions and conclusions in this study were based on information from multiple sources. Numerous sources and types of data instruments, including interviews, focus groups and open-ended questionnaires, and data created for monitoring by one of the instances, have been used to ensure the accuracy of the data. Therefore, by cross-checking the findings against literature and participant confirmation, it ensured the trustworthiness and creditability of the interpretation.

3.7   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is crucial to protect research participants and be sensitive to ethical concerns. The preservation of participants' rights and interests is a concern in the subject of research ethics (Mouton, 2011). By respecting and taking into consideration the needs and interests of participants, research ethics helps prevent harm to those involved in the process. In alignment with the university's ethical code, the following considerations were considered:

3.7.1   Permission to Conduct Research

The researcher was subjected to the ethical rules. For the first ethical measure for this research study, ethical clearance was applied for and granted from the Ethics Review Committee of the College of Education at the University of South Africa (UNISA), to conduct research (Appendix A) whereby informed consent was required. This procedure provided the participants with detailed research-related information concerning the study. This, in turn, allowed the participants to make well informed and voluntary and rational decisions to participate in the research.

3.7.2   Informed Consent

Written consent was requested from the institutions and workplaces (Appendix B) indicating their acknowledgment and willingness to take part in the study. Once

permission was granted, participants were invited to participate in the research and the researcher communicated the overview of the research study, expressing specific information in relation to the role of the participants in detail, before the research process started (Appendix B). Creswell (2012) postulates that participant information letters included the duration of the prospective participants dependent on their underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes and feelings regarding the research problem and voluntary participation. The researcher clearly expressed and indicated that this research was for academic purposes only. All participants were aware that their participation was completely voluntary. No one was forced to participate, thereby determining *voluntary* participation.

3.7.3   Confidentiality

A written guarantee included with the consent form stated that all gathered information would be kept confidential and anonymous; only the researcher and the supervisor would have had access. The confidentiality of study participants must be protected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Therefore, confidentiality was ensured by implementing anonymity, confidentiality and proper storage of data. As explained by Flick (2018), the researcher through issuing confidential documents, gives assurance to participants that their information and identity would remain secret and would not be uncovered by any other individual (Appendix B). Mouton (2011) suggests that research ethics should be carried out as a protection of individuals in society and not at the expense of the participants' right to privacy. According to Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., (2014), participants need the researcher's assurance that their identity would remain secret and would not be revealed to anyone else. As a result, a number coding system was used to ensure the privacy of the participant's responses. No names nor personal identifiers were exposed nor appeared in the transcripts or reporting. All information was administrated in a strictly professional manner.

3.8   SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter introduced the qualitative research approach and the interpretivist paradigm which underpinned the case study design. The case study design was found to be the most appropriate for this research study. This chapter also discussed the

various sampling methods that researchers used to select participants such as convenience, purposive and snowball sampling. Primary data collection methods which included semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and an open-ended questionnaire were described and justified. The interview guide (Appendix C), which consists of open-ended questions, was introduced as a research tool used to collect data in semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and in the open-ended questionnaires. This was significant to this study as participants expressed both positive and negative opinions about the support services provided during the entire period of their WIL placement process. The descriptive research approach assisted in identifying different problems associated with student support services of WIL placement process, assisting the researcher in collecting relevant information for the purposes of the study. Data analysis strategies, such as thematic analysis was described with the chapter ending with a discussion on the trustworthiness of the study and ethical considerations applied throughout the research process.

The next chapter, Chapter 4, focuses on the presentation of the data substantiated with verbatim quotes from participants. This chapter also contains an explanatory summary of the collected data and findings.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

"Data analysis in qualitative research will proceed hand-in-hand with other parts of developing the qualitative study…" (Creswell, 2014:195)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 3, the research methodology was discussed which included the paradigm, the approach and the design. The chapter also explained how the data for this study were gathered via semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and an open-ended qualitative questionnaire that were analysed using thematic analysis. This chapter presents and interprets the findings which are discussed, triangulated and presented under the themes and sub-themes, which assist in answering the research question. The chapter provides a far-reaching report and understanding of how the research question is answered to achieve the research purpose. In other words, the chapter highlights the participants' perceptions of student support services provided throughout the WIL placement process.

4.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This study sought to address the main research question, *What are student perceptions of support services provided by higher education institutions throughout the WIL placement process?* As stated in Chapter one, by reporting on the findings of the participants' perceptions, (experiences and expectations) of HEIs' support services (prior to, during and post) throughout the WIL placement process, at selected universities in South Africa.

The section below covers the sub-questions used in this study which this chapter covers:

- What is the understanding of the concept 'student support' throughout WIL?
- What type of student support services are provided by HEIs to students prior to, during and post the WIL placement process?

- What are the perceptions and roles of the various stakeholders towards student support services throughout WIL?

- What are the students' lived experiences and challenges of these student support services?

- What strategies can be recommended to improve the existing student support services provided to HE students throughout the WIL placement process?

4.3   PRESENTATION OF DATA FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The data findings are presented according to the themes derived from both the participants' descriptions of their 'lived experience' and existing literature, reported in Chapter 2. The themes and sub-themes emerged from the analysis of data, as discussed in Chapter 3, together with the symbolic codes which were listed accordingly. The participants were categorised and labelled according to their involvement in the semi-structured interviews, focus group interview and open-ended questionnaire as follows: "P" stands for the participant:

- the participant of semi-structured interviewees (PSS1, PSS2, etc)
- the participant focus group (PFG1, PFG2, etc)
- the participant open-ended questionnaire (POQ1, POQ2, etc)

4.3.1   Biographical Information

The presentation of participants' profiles and biography was acquired during the initial couple of moments of each session. This profile relates to their background which includes their gender, professional qualifications and expertise.

4.3.1.1   Biographical information of semi-structured interview participants

The researcher conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The the researcher handpicked the participants who took part in the semi-structured interviews included eight (8) stakeholders who did so against the backdrop of their understanding, experience and working within student support and WIL placement day-to-day as reflected in Table 4.1

Table 4.1: Comprehensive information of interviews participants involved in student support and WIL placement process

PARTICIPANT	GENDER	RACE	QUALIFI-CATION	JOB POSITION	SECTOR	STAKE-HOLDER	LABEL
Participant 1	Male	White	Artisan	Acting Dept Director	Public	Government	PSS1
Participant 2	Male	White	Degree	Head of Campus Education & Training	Private	HEI	PSS2
Participant 3	Female	Black	Degree	Head of HR	Private	Employer	PSS3
Participant 4	Male	White	Artisan	Head of Education & Training	Private	HEI	PSS4
Participant 5	Female	White	Degree	Head of Education & Training	Private	Employer	PSS5
Participant 6	Male	Black	Degree	Head of funding	Public	Government	PSS6
Participant 7	Female	White	Degree	Head of Institutions	Public	Employer	PSS7
Participant 8	Female	Black	Degree	Head of Education & Training	Private	Employer / HEI	PSS8

The researcher collected biographical data from the eight (8) participants who were described and introduced in Table 4.1, which reflects the participants as four (4) males (PSS1, PSS2, PSS4, PSS6), and four (4) females (PSS3, PSS5, PSS7, PSS8). The eight participants were chosen through purposive sampling and in accordance with the standards gave in Chapter 3, section 3.3.1:

- Participants' degree of understanding of student support and the WIL placement process;
- Participants' employment in the relevant WIL placement sector;
- Participants' involvement in the WIL placement process in their industry.

The qualifications of the participants indicated that they all had the important scholastic prerequisites expected of those who would be able to offer information about student support, WIL and they had the required experience considering their skills. The

method of reasoning behind the assortment of their academic strengths was to meet the research aim, which was to develop strategies to assist stakeholders with the implementation of student support prior to, during and post processes and procedures.

Table 4.1 reflects that out of the eight (8) participants, six (6) had degrees, while the other two (2) participants were artisans. Both participants PSS1 and PSS4, were male and both were qualified as artisans active in positions of leadership, change, student support and WIL placement. Participants PSS2, PSS3, PSS5, PSS6, PSS7 and PSS8 had a minimum of higher education degrees, holding positions as heads of training and education in the industry.

Table 4.1 also presents the professional qualifications in the experiential foundation of participants in their expert field and industry. Three (3) of the eight (8) participants worked in the public sector whereas the other five (5) participants worked in the private sector. The significance of this data was to furnish the reader with the non-exclusive setting and experience of the participants who were associated with this study.

4.3.1.2 Biographical information of focus group and the open-ended questionnaire participants

As previously mentioned in Chapter 3 Section 3.3.2, due to the outbreak and restrictions of the COVID-19 global pandemic, a further focus group meeting could not be conducted as planned. The researcher wanted to acquire sufficient data to the point of saturation, and therefore utilised the same research questions asked in the focus group interview, and applied them to another qualitative research method, the open-ended questionnaire.

The next two groups of participants for the focus group interview and the open-ended questionnaires were handpicked for sharing their lived experience, views and perspectives on student support services. For this purpose, for both the focus group and the qualitative open-ended questionnaire, the sample included graduates from various HEIs with their qualifications in various disciplines, due to their participation in the WIL programme and the completion of the WIL placement component in their

qualifications. The researcher used deliberate and snowball sampling, as discussed in Chapter 3 Section 3.3.2, and subjects were chosen using the following criteria:

- Participants must have had attended and graduated from a higher education institution,
- Participants have had credentials that cover the WIL component of their profession, and
- Participants have had WIL placements in industries that were related to their field of study.

For convenience, each participant was assigned a label to distinguish what was said, why the response was made, and who made the comment. This later helped to select passages that contained the comments and responses of all participants, which allowed their lived experiences to be heard.

4.3.1.2.1   *Focus group participants*

The participants of the focus groups were made up of eight (8) participants who studied in different disciplines areas but had completed the WIL placement component as part of their qualifications. The motive for choosing participants in the different disciplines was to investigate if student support was essential across all disciplines or if it was discipline-specific, as reflected in Table 4.2

Table 4.2: Comprehensive information of focus group participants involved in student support and the WIL placement process

PARTICIPANT	GENDER	RACE	DISCIPLINE	QUALIFI-CATION	HEI	STAKE-HOLDER	LABEL
Participant 1	Female	White	Sciences	BSc Degree	Public	Student	PFG1
Participant 2	Female	Mixed Race	Marketing	BCom Degree	Public	Student	PFG2
Participant 3	Female	White	Education	BEd Degree	Private	Student	PFG3
Participant 4	Male	White	Medical	BSc Degree	Public	Student	PFG4
Participant 5	Female	White	Design	BA Degree	Private	Student	PFG5
Participant 6	Male	White	Electrical Engineering	Dip – Diploma	Public	Student	PFG6
Participant 7	Male	White	Web Design	Dip - Diploma	Private	Student	PFG7

PARTICIPANT	GENDER	RACE	DISCIPLINE	QUALIFI-CATION	HEI	STAKE-HOLDER	LABEL
Participant 8	Male	White	Industrial Engineering	BEng Degree	Public	Student	PFG8

These participants contributed to the discussion and shared their lived experiences. Table 4.2 reflects the information captured from the participants who participated: four (4) were females (PFG1; PFG2; PFG3; PFG5) and four (4) males (PFG4; PFG6; PFG7; PFG8). Captured in Table 4.2 was the list of participants with completed qualifications in their designated areas, in which six (6) had completed degrees and two (2) obtained diplomas. It was reflected that each participant studied in a different discipline with a WIL component in their qualifications. The table reflects that five (5) (PFG1, PFG2, PFG4, PFG6, PFG8) of the participants studied at a public HEIs whereas three (3) (PFG3, PFG5, PFG7) completed their qualification at a private HEI. As indicated in Table 4.2, all participants engaged in work placement, and therefore were qualified to share their lived experiences and were experts so whatever information they provided was perceived to be from the position of expertise.

4.3.1.2.2 *Biographical information of qualitative open-ended questionnaires participants*

Lastly, the open-ended questionnaire respondents comprised twenty (20) participants who responded electronically, as indicated Chapter 3 Section 3.3. The data were submitted to the researcher by the respondents via the open-ended questionnaires. There were twenty (20) respondents who answered questions on the qualitative open-ended questionnaire, of which twelve (12) were female and the other eight (8) were male, as indicated in Figure 4.1.
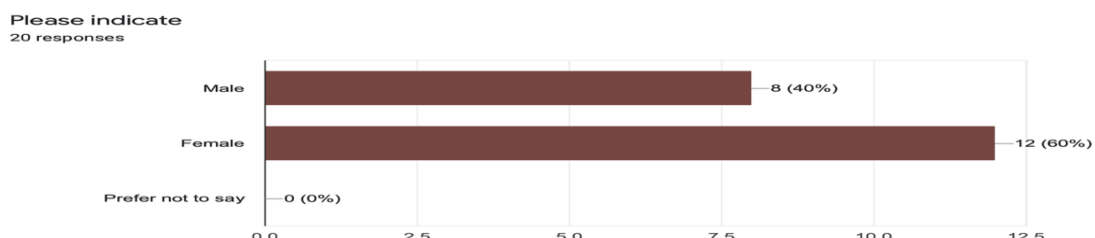
Figure 4.1: Respondents for the open-ended questionnaires

Indicated in the graph, in Figure 4.2, out of the twenty (20) participants the different race information below was displayed: Asian: 1, Black: 4, Mixed Race: 2, White: 12 and Other: 1

Please indicate
20 responses
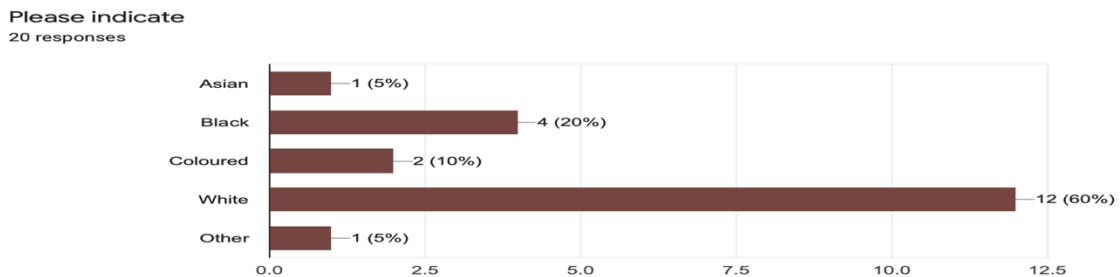
Figure 4.2: Race of participants for the open-ended questionnaire

A considerable number of participants - eighteen (18) - completed their degrees and the other two (2) (POQ9 and POQ12) completed their diplomas. The table reflects that out of the twenty (20) participants, thirteen (13) studied at a public HEI whereas seven (7) completed their qualifications at a private HEI. Table 4.3 illustrates the extent to which the twenty (20) participants varied in terms of race, gender, qualifications.

Table 4.3: Comprehensive information of questionnaire participants involved in student support and WIL placement process

PARTICIPANT	GENDER	RACE	DISCIPLINE	QUALIFI-CATION	HEI	STAKE-HOLDER	LABEL
Participant 1	Female	White	Law	BCOM Degree	Public	Student	POQ1
Participant 2	Female	White	Law	BCOM Degree	Public	Student	POQ2
Participant 3	Female	Black	Business Sciences	BSc Degree	Private	Student	POQ3
Participant 4	Male	White	Business Management	BCom Degree	Public	Student	POQ4
Participant 5	Female	Mixed Race	Economics	BCom Degree	Private	Student	POQ5
Participant 6	Female	Black	Business Management	BCom Degree	Public	Student	POQ6
Participant 7	Female	White	Financial Advisor	BCom Degree	Private	Student	POQ7

PARTICIPANT	GENDER	RACE	DISCIPLINE	QUALIFI-CATION	HEI	STAKE-HOLDER	LABEL
Participant 8	Male	White	ITC	BSc Degree	Private	Student	POQ8
Participant 9	Female	Black	Electrical Engineer	Dip Diploma	Public	Student	POQ9
Participant 10	Female	White	Design	BA Degree	Public	Student	POQ10
Participant 11	Male	White	Commerce	BCom Degree	Public	Student	POQ11
Participant 12	Male	White	ITC Dip	Dip Diploma	Private	Student	POQ12
Participant 13	Male	White	Financial Management	BCom Degree	Public	Student	POQ13
Participant 14	Female	White	Education Senior & FET	BEd Degree	Public	Student	POQ14
Participant 15	Female	Mixed Race	Education	BEd Degree	Private	Student	POQ15
Participant 16	Female	White	Education	BEd Degree	Private	Student	POQ16
Participant 17	Male	Asian	Chemistry	BSc Degree	Public	Student	POQ17
Participant 18	Female	Other	Mathematician	BEng Degree	Public	Student	POQ18
Participant 19	Male	Black	Physics	BSc Degree	Public	Student	POQ19
Participant 20	Male	White	Electric Engineer	BTech Degree	Public	Student	POQ20

The data were collected through the qualitative open-ended questionnaire from participants as indicated Table 4.3 that reflects that of the twenty (20) participants, twelve (12) (POQ1; POQ2; POQ3; POQ5; POQ6; POQ7; POQ9; POQ10; POQ14; POQ15; POQ16; POQ18) were female and the other eight (8) (POQ4; POQ8; POQ11; POQ12; POQ13; POQ17; POQ19; POQ20) were male. The open-ended questionnaire was exploratory in nature and presented rich, qualitative data. In essence, it provided the researcher with an opportunity to gain insight into all the opinions on topic relating to WIL placement and student support.

4.4   FINDINGS EMERGING FROM DATA ANALYSIS

Any collected data should be evaluated because it could not explain or convey all on its own, and the message must be extrapolated. To achieve the aim and objectives of

the study, a multi-data collection technique was used which included semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and an open-ended questionnaire. As discussed in Chapter 3, thematic analysis was used to analyse the data whereby codes were carefully chosen from the various records using open coding. The codes were then categorised into classifications falling under five themes that were related to the research sub-questions and objectives. These were presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Themes and sub-themes

RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION	GENERATED THEMES	SUB-THEMES
RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 1: What is the understanding of the concept 'student support' throughout WIL?	4.5.1.1 Understanding of student support and WIL	4.5.1.1.1 Student support 4.5.1.1.2 Work-integrated Learning 4.5.1.1.3 Support during WIL
RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 2: Which type of student support services are provided by HEI to students prior, during and post the WIL placement process?	4.5.2.1 Institution support provided throughout WIL placement	4.5.2.1.1 Informational support 4.5.2.1.2 Financial support 4.5.2.1.3 Academic support 4.5.2.1.4 Placement support
RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 3: What are the roles of the various stakeholders in the implementation of support during WIL placement?	4.5.3.1 Role of stakeholders in implementation of support during WIL placement	4.5.3.1.1 Stakeholders Relationships 4.5.3.1.2 Partnerships 4.5.3.1.3 Work policies
RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 4: What are the students lived experiences and challenges of these student support services?	4.5.4.1 Students' experiences and challenges of support	4.5.4.1.1 Student placement readiness 4.5.4.1.2 Restricted timeframe 4.5.4.1.3 Availability of current and valid resources 4.5.4.1.4 Student placement disconnect 4.5.4.1.5 Interest in improving own skill
RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 5: What strategies can be recommended to improve the existing student support services provided to HE students throughout the WIL placement process?	4.5.5.1 Recommended strategies for improvement of student support	4.5.5.1.1 Institutional assistance 4.5.5.1.2 Expectation of student support throughout WIL 4.5.5.1.3 Workplace experience 4.5.5.1.4 Institutional relevance to industry needs

To uncover and understand the generated themes and sub-themes, a discussion supported with direct quotes from the semi-structured interviews, focus groups and qualitative open-ended questionnaires iss presented. Each theme is discussed in detail below.

4.5   DISCUSSION OF THE GENERATED THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

This study set out with the aim of exploring the importance of student perceptions of student support services which are essential for navigating the WIL placement process at universities in South Africa. The students reported on a variety of expectations, challenges and constraints during their WIL placement process. These included the need to manage HEI expectations, the line of authority at the workplace, environmental adjustment, time, money and other resources while also adjusting culturally in order to successfully complete the WIL placement.

This study then wanted to explore and understand certain properties that contributed to the holistic finding of this study: what student support services *are expected* by the students from HEI prior to, during and post WIL placement. Additionally, the researcher wanted to further investigate which student support services *are provided* by the HEI. Lastly, the study sought to discover what student support services *are required* to make the WIL placement process successful. The researcher discussed the interpretation of the results and findings from the collected data, which were aligned to the literature in Chapter 2, pursuing the answers to the research question and research sub-question as reflected in Chapter 1. Section 1.5.

4.5.1   RQ 1: What is the understanding of the concept of 'student support' throughout WIL?

4.5.1.1   Generated Theme: Understanding Student Support and WIL

The theme 'Understanding Student Support and WIL' revealed how various participants interpreted certain concepts significant to this study. Expectantly it would reveal the participants' level of perception and insight into both concepts, student support and WIL. This study aimed to gain insight into how various stakeholders perceived student support and WIL. Therefore, students and various stakeholders were part of the semi-structured interview to disclose their knowledge, awareness or limitation thereof, concerning their role and the role of others throughout WIL placement, as well as the start and end of student support. Who was accountable and responsible, you may ask? Jackson (2013) broadly describes student support services

during WIL placement provided in HEIs as experiences, both on-campus and workplace learning activities, which integrate theory with practice in academic learning programmes. The findings may assist planners in developing best practices for supporting students, as well as providing them with opportunities they need during their education process which ensures equitable access among all members of society

It was in this context, using only the focus group and open-ended questionnaire, the findings as presented under the theme *Understanding Student Support and WIL* established the students' perceptions, the implementation of student support and WIL which was exhibited under the sub-themes:

- Student support;
- Work-Integrated Learning;
- Support during WIL.

4.5.1.1.1 Sub-theme: Student support

The data gathered from this research reveals that many participants had their own understanding, expectation as well as misinterpretations of skills they experienced through the holistic approach of HEI. Entering the world of work to carry out WIL placement has its own challenges, even more so without the support from HEIs during the process. Therefore, the researcher regarded the participants' perception of the concept of student support as vital to this study.

Some of the participants believed that student support was the encompassing and holistic approach whereby both parents and educators play an important role together with academic support for all qualities of wellness including information on their class experience, including up-to-date knowledge of various skills, resources and up-to-date information required which could help them learn more efficiently. Participants' views were as follows:

To guide students if they struggled (POQ1)

Student support workers are tasked with providing support for students encompassing all aspects of learning and development (POQ2).

.... students that get support are more knowledgeable and are up-to-date information (POQ4).

*Working with students to improve academic performance as well as to support them with their social and emotional well-being, in class to better their learning experience. In my opinion, student support should come from both parents and educators as it could develop the student in such a way that they are able to reach their full potential as well as mould them into becoming a long-life learner (*POQ16).

Most participants, referred to student support throughout WIL as skills and resources in their discipline of study to help them cope emotionally.

... providing students with skills and resources that will enhance their learning and reduce stress (POQ 6, 8, 9, 10, 13, 15, 16. 17).

Data collected from the focus group participants revealed similar views, however, they expressed their frustrations of their understanding of what was student support and that it was not always readily available, and that time was an issue when students needed assistance or had a query...

Your best option is to go into campus but then even if you go into campus if you don't go at like seven o'clock or at five o'clock before they open you going to stand in a massive line in order to get helped (PFG3).

A couple of hours for a response or of any and that's not even just like for student support that used to go into campus but that's not just for student support that's for any enquiry that you have... (PFG2).

What the participants reported regarding student support was also shared by Long and Fynn (2018) who stated that student support addresses the students' emotional experience as they developed essential general skills related to professional identity. Participants had various levels of expectation of student support from HEIs, from the

day they started to getting a placement for WIL. This was reflected in the expectations that employers had for student skill levels and appointments. Students were ill prepared, lacked the confidence and were naive about the workplace expectations. Furthermore, based on the above analysis, it was therefore concluded that it was expected that academics ought to be readily available and approachable to provide student support, be involved and accessible so that students felt comfortable seeking support (Winchester-Seeto et al., 2016).

4.5.1.1.2   Sub-theme: Work-integrated learning

The participants had a general understanding of WIL, which entails working while training was taking place, and applying the theory learnt combined with practical experiences gained at the workplace. Participants suggested that the coursework helped prepare students not only academically but also gave insight into what was expected when taken in by a company for WIL placement. Likewise, they appreciated that this covered all facets of life - from being able to integrate what was learnt into everyday tasks or relationships as well integrating it within other areas which would ensure students were more effective when placed. The participants had a great appreciation that WIL reflected the actual job and prepared them for the workplace, offering them the experience of being an employee, colleague and team player. The experience and skills gained while completing their qualification were particularly beneficial. The participants contributed:

Being exposed to work experiences while in the process of completing a degree. Practical examples of what your coursework is teaching you (POQ1).

WIL provides students with the opportunity to apply their learning from academic studies to relevant experiences and reciprocate learning back to their studies (POQ19).

WIL gives an indication of what is involved in actual jobs and helps prepare the student for the workplace (POQ2).

The marketing and media role was seen to be ensuring students were equipped not only mentally but also physically because without such skills and preparation, things could be challenging during placement. One participant commented:

> *Ensuring that students have the necessary resources to have an efficient learning experience. Resources such as libraries, counsellors, career fairs etc* (POQ19).

Additionally, in the open-ended questionnaire, participants perceived WIL as a process that leads to continuous learning on the job, gaining experience and combining both practical and academic knowledge.

> *Continuous learning that takes place while at the workplace* (POQ6).

> *Allowing a student to bring in their prior knowledge and experience into what they are learning. This will assist the student in coming to an understanding of what they have experienced themselves. I also think it is a more practical way of learning* (POQ16).

> *I think that my course has provided with me a good foundation of theoretical knowledge but not enough knowledge of how business is done in the real-world outside of the textbook theory* (POQ9).

The focus group participants had a general understanding of WIL, working while training took place and applying the theory learnt combined with practical experiences gained at work, which was vital to ensure that graduates were holistically equipped for the world of work. Furthermore, they appreciated that their course reflected the work that they did in their job, therefore preparing them for life as an employee or colleague.

> *I have more or less an idea of it .... basically, work integrated learning meaning what you actually studied, how do you apply it, um, how do you get work after what you studied in the particular field and um yeah, that's basically what I understand* (PFG1).

I think it.... how it was explained to us, as we getting exposure in our industry, um, obviously working for people who are doing what you are studying and you basically just learning what it would be like as an employee of the company (PFG5).

The participants' views aligned with Schuster and Glavas (2017), who indicated that WIL was introduced in HEIs predominantly for practical exposure and demonstration of the workplace to students. However, grooming and preparing students in higher education for the challenges of the world of work, required more than just academic knowledge. Furthermore, Panayiotopoulos (2011) suggested that student confidence increases after WIL training; however, occasionally students had to fend for themselves in the world of work. As pointed out by Niskanen (2019), the WIL relationship and alignment of the academic and WIL programme were mutually beneficial to all stakeholders.

From these findings, it could be concluded that WIL required practical and situational knowledge, proficient experience and judgement. As observed by Sinclair and Winder (2016), the different methods that could be used for providing support to students throughout WIL were counselling, mentoring, in-service training, and consultation.

4.5.1.1.3   Sub-theme: Student Support during WIL

University life provided an opportunity not only to develop but also to support students' talents through different channels such as clubs or sports teams which gave students ways of expressing themselves creatively outside academia. The participants showed that they understood support throughout their educational careers and achieved the required skills with the correct current resources. These findings indicated how students' needs were met by the WIL programme as it provided them with the opportunity to gain work experience. The student needs included gaining work experience while still being supported by educators with whom they interact daily on a person-to-learn basis. The participants stated:

Assist students through their education career (POQ11)

When there are dedicated individuals that assist students with helping them regarding the course that they are doing (POQ12).

Student support is providing students with skills and resources that will enhance their learning and reduce stress (POQ2).

Ensuring that students have the necessary resources to have an efficient learning experience. Resources such as libraries, counsellors (emotional and career-wise, career fairs, etc (POQ3).

My understanding is that you work while you study so that you can apply what you've learned (POQ7).

Helping students gain experience in their specific field whilst finishing their studies (POQ11).

Engaging with stakeholders is an important way to diminish the lack of quality student support services and employment in the industry.

.... firms are fussy in taking in students, especially because they were seen as a liability to the company because we have to work with an engineer for the six weeks and we could cost them a lot of productivity so they are hesitant to take us in so I feel the university could try to build relations with companies to take us in because we have to apply ourselves (PFG8).

An analysis of all the definitions provided by the participants in this study reflected knowledge and the importance of student support. Student support has been defined by Warren and Hale (2016) as the progression of students in their academic and professional careers. It was found that those who engage with this throughout their career experience positive outcomes both academically and professionally (Natoli et al., 2013).

Based on the above analysis, it was therefore concluded that offering students the necessary skills and preparation was one way to diminish the lack of quality in student support services throughout WIL provided by universities. Participants believed that universities should build and engage with various stakeholders, offering the participants future opportunities.

4.5.2   RQ 2: What type of student support services are provided by HEIs to students prior to, during and post the WIL placement process?

4.5.2.1   *Generated Theme: Institution support provided throughout WIL placement*

The benefits of an education at a university extend beyond the classroom. Students could benefit from meaningful interactions with faculty members, professional development opportunities and support after graduation as well - all designed to help them live out their dreams in this competitive world where nobody is exactly the same but everyone wants something different from life (Levin et al., 2010). For universities to deliver on these promises, they have to be ready to provide significant pre-placement services, so students know what kind of career/workplace awaits them during the WIL placement process. The students and industry partners expect universities to provide significant support before, during and post placement. These services should have prepared WIL students entering the competitive world of work with relevance and fit for purpose (Beckles et al., 2002). Sub-themes generated from the above theme include:

- Informational support
- Financial support
- Academic support
- Placement support

4.5.2.1.1   *Sub-theme: Informational support*

When introducing the WIL workplace to students, it is important that they are prepared for what was expected of them; they needed to understand what it meant and realise how their skills are to be used. Effective communication includes knowing how to listen mindfully and pay attention while also understanding. Researchers Elmuti et al., (2004) and Morse (2018) showed that WIL establishes a positive working relationship between all involved stakeholders, where communication is known to be the 'cornerstone'. One of the many themes that emerged in the research was a sense of isolation amongst students in coming to terms with their future careers as most information was received at the school level. The lack of proper information or

communication concerning career guidance could contribute greatly towards this feeling, as most have never been told by anyone else what kind of profession would suit them best, all of which makes it difficult for the students resulting in little or no direction whatsoever.

They made it seem like school-related stuff and not career-related stuff (POQ8).

My high school guided me (POQ5).

Therefore, sending out the correct CV is a non-verbal means of communication which is a reflection of the student. Many CVs were sent out without the assistance of HEIs but relied on other sources – family, friends, and social media. Ten POQ participants had to do their research using YouTube videos and the other seven participants relied on their families to assist with their CVs. Three POQ participants reported that the university provided help with CVs; however, YouTube videos and tutorials were much more easily accessible.

Relied on CV examples found on Google (POQ12)

The interview preparation and process service were available from the HEIs and offered to six of the POQ participants:

... but again, it is the student … remains a responsibility to seek help (POQ15).

The other fourteen POQ participants reported that they had not received any support or assistance concerning their preparation for their interview process.

Some students come equipped with it and some of them have to do, what we call Employability skills where they also have to learn how to do their CV, most of them don't come prepared for that.

Findings indicated that all participants suggested that information concerning WIL placement and what it involves, expectations and communication between the student and supervisor ought to be clear before taking part in this type of exercise. This

description is synonymous with that of Abery et al., (2015) who refers to the lack thereof. This has been a concern of many, as it is an important aspect of both academic successes as well as professional growth. The basic role that informational and communicative skills play in both academic and professional accomplishment has been widely acknowledged over the past ten years in various tertiary organisations. These skills are linked with creating training lack of or imprecise expectations prior to WIL placement. Saltzstein et al. (2001) who further stated that before taking part in WIL placement, students should have embraced positive attitudes, attitudes and behaviours that employees express in the workplace, as expected by the employer at work.

Based on the above analysis, it can therefore be concluded that it is important for educators at all levels to foster student support services and that communication between students and the supervisor should provide clear guidelines concerning expected behaviour in both academic settings and professional workplaces.

4.5.2.1.2   Sub-theme: Financial support

It is due to industry involvement and financial support that many HEIs are able to offer practical skills training for the future workforce. It is therefore important that industry feels confident in what HEIs have proposed or risk walking away from partnerships altogether because there is not enough value placed upon them by either party involved. The matter of concern that emerged from the findings was the issue of financial support. To attract partners or acquire access to industries where HEIs participate as both provider and consumer, some short-term measures might require adapting approach quickly. Having trained higher education students could help generate funds from the industry by having joint training programmes.

The importance of having a good working relationship with the industry could not be overstated. When considering financial support for apprentices, interns and learnerships, it became clear that there was a difference between these three types of relationships. It seems most stakeholders such as HEIs, companies and others do not understand the type of relationship required until late into the discussion which causes confusion among those involved.

This leads to an issue of concern where some students have no choice but to become self-sustainable by generating their own funds because they did not receive funding from either the HEI or industry. Participants asserted:

There were no finances involved by the universities (POQ1-5; 7-20).

Only one POQ participant reported on support from funding and bursaries:

As a student, yes. NSFAS in undergrad and NRF in Honours, but not while working my hours in the industry (POQ6).

As discussed earlier, as part of the student support system, most participants did not receive any monetary aid nor financial support, money grants or other forms of tangible benefits from the various stakeholders. Ninety-nine percent of the POQ participants had to support themselves during this time:

My parents support me financially until such time that I find a job and earn a salary (POQ4).

These findings were consistent with Support Theory and the views of Jackson and Wilton (2016) who argued that one of the purposes behind WIL is to offer students short-term financial benefits. The workplace experience of an individual is largely determined by their success in the industry. Therefore, it is important for employers to invest time and money in upgrading employees' skills so that they can continue improving their skills. However, the government has provided grants to cover the cost of workplace training through the Workplace Skills Programmes (WSP) and Sector Skills Schemes (SSP), which is part of the NSDP (2019). NSDP applies to the understanding of labour market needs and national priorities. This could be demonstrated in the interventions of educational and training institutions through their supply planning processes, made possible by the NSDP intervention processes (Gov Gaz, 42290 No. 375, 2019). This suggests that offering financial and monetary support to students during training and WIL is important where financial assistance could relate to assistance in acquiring technology resources like laptops.

4.5.2.1.3   Sub-theme: Academic support

For quite some time, educators have been utilising the traditional procedures of educating and motivating students. In many cases traditional strategies, tend not to be as effective - a clear sign that a change needed to occur within the education system. Student support for both motivation and learning, go together mainly because some researchers agreed upon the importance of this aspect of achieving successful outcomes without failure or frustration (Franche et al., 2005).

The participants suggested that *during* WIL placement, none or very little academic support was provided or if it was offered, it was with the belief it was the student's responsibility to obtain student support. They responded:

None (POQ1).

Minimal (POQ9).

Support wasn't really given (POQ18).

... was of the opinion that HEI student support contributed academically (POQ4).

My university offered much support; however, it is the student's responsibility to seek support and the university does not proactively engage with the student when it comes to student support (POQ3).

Yes, a bit from the career centre (POQ17).

The academic support perspective was created to bridge the gap between theory and practice, although it was not always practically delivered, as reported by participant (PRG1).

I asked why we don't have more practical time this is what we were supposed to be doing; yes, we studying theory but now practical in the real-world... they said to us: NO, you're too many students for the facilities that we have... (PFG1).

115

Based on the above analysis, it could therefore be concluded that academic support in HEIs reflected in this study, did not have the capacity to carry out their duties. However, they were able to use their full potential to influence students and evaluate their learning by providing guidance for what they were doing. There were many facet that could not be taught at university or be learnt through books alone, students needed to have lived experiences which developed real-world skills like communication techniques, teamwork, collaboration and critical thinking (Coll et al., 2011; Hays & Clements, 2011; Martin et al., 2011). For academics, there seemed to be many parts to their role: preparation, emotional support, flexibility and lastly the intervention and liaison with Industry, which is all essential to ensuring students' success.

Grounded on the above analysis, as Zembazemba, (2019) highlighted, WIL programmes offer better communication by providing adequate student support and guidance through improved appreciation of stakeholders' roles, including an increased awareness of what they need from employers or clients alike to assist in developing those vital skills and thus being equipped, find employment opportunities within this field.

4.5.2.1.4. *Sub-theme: Placement support*

Before participating in the WIL placement exercise and before they could safely and efficiently assume the responsibilities of a workplace, students need a clear understanding of where it would take place, what those positions entail and the basic job communicative competence used with others.

Participants felt that very little or no assistance was provided when it came time to explore Wil placement, and these issues needed addressing by stakeholders who are expected to provide student support, proper guidance and information relating to WIL placement, an issue that needs to be addressed. Participants confirmed:

> *I find that it is very important that from the very beginning of the association that you make, everyone's role very clear and that you make their role clear and make it a positive role, and sketch it out so that they understand all the benefits to them (PSS7).*

116

Not much assistance (POQ2,5,8,14,17,18).

Minimal (POQ1,7,11).

Very little assistance from the university (POQ10).

However, students were aware that this was a compulsory phase of their course:

They make it a requirement for us to get our degree … we have to do those two batches of six-week training, so for, us we are forced to do it otherwise you don't qualify (PFG7).

Student placements is a great way to gain experience, and it also assists students in improving their resume although the support provided at university was delivered via handouts. Participants reported that they were given welcome packs and information booklets and various emails and messages were sent out by the HEI, which was one form of support prior to placement.

This research indicated that most of students were sent out on their own to find a company which would offer them practical knowledge during their WIL placement; therefore, students acknowledged the value of WIL placements as part of their university course.

... especially in undergraduate when you did have practical's … it's sort of maybe explain one certain thing in the course work but it really prepares you for how you could apply that work, um, but in my Postgraduate where we have, it's largely more a practical based (PFG4).

During the semi-structured interviews with the participants, it was revealed that many students were unprepared about working in their chosen field as they were not groomed for workplace experience and needed to be fully prepared with a clear explanation of the roles that they would be expected to take on during placement. This what one participant said:

You know the experience that we have with students, is that most of them are not prepared for the workplace and in most cases, you have to spend a lot of time trying to familiarise them with the workplace (PSS3).

A lack of guidance and information relating to WIL placement was mentioned by participants as a major issue that needed addressing by the HEIs. Communication relates to practices which could assist people with communicating their wants and needs, and thus accomplish their objectives.

Even if it's not a career day, where they bring people from the industry to just show you what you can do ... (PFG5).

The evidence suggested that HEIs must provide more than just academia but should consider providing student support services. These would help prepare the future workforce for employment opportunities in their field of study by teaching them practical skills such as how to interact with others on different levels.

Respondents likewise described work experience as removing a break from school/university and getting an opportunity to develop as desired from WIL. (POQ11).

Universities cannot not determine how well the students are able to master what we've learnt (POQ14)

The findings from this study point out that there is a need for HEIs to obtain feedback on WIL placement from both the students and industry *post* WIL. The data reflect that minimal or no contact was made afterwards, which was the response from most participants …

No contact made (POQ9)

No, they just sent me an email to say that I completed my studies (POQ13).

Yes, but not in detail (POQ15).

A further analysis of the placement support in this study revealed that the expansion of student careers and feelings of job satisfaction were significantly influenced by their interactions with their placement supervisor. It was worth remembering, however, that placements in some disciplines present students with significant personal challenges. These could be addressed through both preparation and debriefing, but further work could be done on the supply side to improve the quality of placements. Engagement with stakeholders could diminish the lack of quality student services currently seen at many institutions. For academics, it requires the adaption of different teaching and learning styles, and for students it requires seeing the importance and relevance of students engaging in WIL to enhance their prospects and careers.

Reddan (2008) argues that student placement support is beneficial because it gives students work that is related and could be applied in their future career path. Therefore, student need to have realistic expectations in their WIL placement and positive support services during their placement.

4.5.3   RQ 3: What are the perceptions and roles of the various stakeholders towards student support throughout WIL?

4.5.3.1   *Generated Theme: Role of stakeholders in the implementation of support during WIL placement*

In the literature, Knight and Yorke (2004) emphasise that the importance of stakeholders' participation and commitment to the development and support of students during placement and learning could not be overstated. Regarding the effectiveness and understanding of WIL placement, the participants revealed that the implementation was not effective as there were bottlenecks that hindered the success of WIL implementation.

Stakeholders were an integral part of the educational process, especially regarding how students learned. In fact, it was essential that they participated from day one in order to provide a foundation upon which successful learning was built throughout every stage. The importance was their commitment and participation throughout all stages from placement through to completion. The industry aims are often not realistic,

so the goal may seem unattainable or even confusing in some cases when it comes to fulfilling requirements. This cause challenges because guidance about what needed to be done with regards to career development was not offered. Sub-themes generated from the above theme include:

- Stakeholder relationships
- Partnerships
- Work policies

4.5.3.1.1   Sub-theme: Stakeholder relationships

The discussions revealed that the lack of positive, little or no relationship between the HEIs and industry was evident in this study. When working with WIL, it is important to consider the needs and desires of all stakeholders involved. This could be difficult because some people may have had more power than others regarding what happens next or how much attention they receive from the organisation.

There did not seem to be much value attributed to student placement. When wanting to offer placement opportunities, it was found that there was a lack of awareness among parties concerning HEI programmes that incorporated WIL; no one really seemed to know what they were looking for, nor understood what the qualification entailed. Stakeholders are the lifeblood of any successful programme, as was discussed by the participants in the focus group:

> *I think that's where the HEIs should have done their research, yes, because as a university... should it not be your responsibility, especially if you are promoting, oh we will give you such and such training and stuff like that. Shouldn't they also do the research and make those connections* (PFG1).

> *I found that with, um, my HEI had these very much broad bold claims, very much like throwing out... the ninety percent of all graduates will have jobs after the first six months, all these sorts of facts, but then being in my third year now and coming across … like well, actually the institution is not technically guaranteeing you this job themselves, it's very much them telling you that listen if you don't do this you wouldn't pass your course so you must do your internships...* (PFG7).

120

Universities ought to engage stakeholders while implementing new programmes or processes. Developing networks and relationships with industry might support and provide additional resources for the HEIs on managing WIL placements. As it is a challenge to foster relevant partnerships in WIL, the DHET particularly urged HEIs, in collaboration with policy, to develop these relationships. For example, White paper (2013) encourages partnerships with industry.

In addition, open communication will ensure that information is communicated widely before committing any time, ensuring that the students are well prepared. However, in some cases, the lack of partnerships had consequences. Participants explained what happened to both student and industry:

I am struggling to find the right job for me. It is my responsibility to find the right placement for me and the university has not assisted (POQ9).

So, in that way, you only have an agreement with the learner, not with the training provider or the institution (PSS3).

An analysis of the participation accounts was consistent with the view of Patrick et al., (2008), who reiterate that relations between applicable stakeholders were imperative when planning a WIL programme as several different levels need to be coordinated between parties. These levels include South African government policies, administrators or supervisors in industry who handle day-to-day operations, lecturers who are responsible for implementing educational targets within their lessons, parents who play an active role in monitoring support and finally HEIs's role in supporting students in each phase.

Therefore, it was imperative that the responsibility of every stakeholder during the time spent in the WIL process should be cultivating associations between the HEIs and host association to ensure alignment with industry needs (Ferns et al., 2016; Rowe et al., 2012).

4.5.3.1.2   Sub-theme: Partnerships

Understanding the responsibility of every stakeholder during time spent working and how it relates to their specific industry, as well as cultivating associations between HEI needs with host organisations, is important. The goal of this process was for stakeholder needs to be met while also meeting industry standards. To do so, it helps to understand what everyone wants and needs from the organisation and how they could benefit in meeting those goals; for example, by working on projects related to their specialities. This meant their needs are to be coordinated between applicable stakeholders for everything to run smoothly and without controversy, but this could not happen unless all parties involved agreed on what they wanted out of their involvement with the initiative.

The participants were told that the WIL placement module was part of the qualification, which had to be completed to achieve the qualification. However, there was not much guidance given to the students on WIL placement which was required by the module. Many students reported that they did not know what to expect from it, as expressed by the PFG1 participant:

> *My university didn't offer anything to help for us get into practical sort of experience... so after I finished, I had to do that on my own. So, I have to go and find or search for internships that is specifically in my field and then from there, um, see where I end up, so it's nothing. I didn't receive any guidance in terms of that, I'm just doing everything on my own...*

There were many potential challenges and complications involved in completing this part of the qualification. It seems that little information and support was known to the students on what was expected. It also seems that threats were made, and placements were done without proper procedure. Participants suggested that:

> *More visuals could have gone a long way* (POQ2).

> *We got a quick rundown of everything we will learn* (POQ11).

In the same way, another participant reported on the threat:

122

... their mindset behind it is that it is part of your course so if you do not do this, you wouldn't get the marks, meaning you will not pass your year or your semester ... (PFG7).

The discussions validated the importance of these partnerships. Participants expressed concern about placement in prospective companies with very little or no assistance provided by HEIs. Students had to take responsibility themselves and/or approach an agency, leaving participants feeling frustrated and abandoned. Most students had little idea about whom to contact. Some of the participants contributed as follows:

... searched for their own placement (POQ1,2,4,5,8,14,15,16,17,18,19 20).

... got placed by external agency (POQ3,5,6,7,10,12,13).

University sends out emails to prospective companies (POQ11).

Furthermore, if the student had no interview skills, then there is no chance for them during pre-placement interviews which meant an unlikely chance of getting placed in WIL. The participants stated:

No interview, they are saying if your practical is good enough, then you go for induction that is where induction is, you are fine to come and work here (PSS8)

These findings were consistent with the views of Phillips (2014), who stated that a range of terminology is used among employers which makes it difficult to develop relationships with them individually because they do not fully understand the concept of WIL and what it involves. Secondly, since this field was fairly new, handling collaborative efforts between teams from different organisations or departments within an organisation could be challenging. Additionally, any mistakes could lead to serious issues when attempting to implement change into existing systems without being aware of how things were done earlier, which would affect the number of students accepted for WIL placements.

In view of the above analysis, in this study, it could therefore be concluded that HEIs were encouraged by the DHET, to build partnerships with employers that endorse training and offer student support in the workplace, especially as practical experience in the workplace contributes to the completion of the registered qualification (DHET, 2013a).

4.5.3.1.3 Sub-theme: Work policies

There had been to date no systematic attempts to build up a working definition or policy that envelops WIL components and their interrelationships. The need exists for a policy that encapsulates each period in which the learning process takes place. However, many different systems had been trialled to ensure that WIL is effectively implemented to meet the goal.

The WIL placement policies define professional identity, the teams involved and the problem-solving skills required for effective performance in the workplace. These were not always readily available, according to focus group participant (PFG8)

> *... in terms of other things like that, the systems and stuff isn't really there as much as well as I said, so a lot of it you're pretty much on your own.*

As the participant noticed, there were no policies distributed during placement by the companies. Students suggested that these ought to be in place to guide them during WIL placements. They commented:

> *... do not understand various work policies as none was shared with them while at the company. These are some of the challenges that can be faced by WIL (POQ7).*

> *No policies were shared, but the company has very supportive individuals (POQ17).*

Participant (PSS3) from the semi-structured interviews mentioned that policies and/or procedures are in existence.

In the workplace, there is a process that policies need to be followed, you know procedures, in the workplace.... young people don't always understand

As previously discussed, some students did not receive any information about the policies in place at their companies which might have affected them during their training sessions.

An analysis of the policies revealed that there should be policies in the workplace which support and assist student improvement in terms of academic and skill quality (Fisher et al., 2018). Although there are different definitions of policy capability available in scholarly literature, Lawson et al., (2011) found the regulations to be onerous and complex. For WIL to be successful, relationships with outside parties are necessary and policies with a clear understanding of the kind and extent of career development needed, is what gives light to WIL placement.

From the above analysis, it could therefore be concluded that effective WIL placement experiences could only occur through work policies that set out objectives and guidelines on how best to accomplish and support students. It should offer insight into the various individuals, what makes up their professional identity, team working skills and building capabilities to make judgements with problem-solving skills.

4.5.4 RQ 4: What are the students' lived experiences and challenges of these student support services?

4.5.4.1 Generated Theme: Students' experiences and challenges of support

The WIL experience is a valuable opportunity for students that allow them to interact with professionals in an authentic environment. WIL placement provides all participants, regardless of their academic level or career interests the opportunity for real-world application through collaborative study sites where no grades or tests are given but rather educational opportunities based on skills that could be developed. This offers people outside the education system insight into how the academic component equips students with the theory to be applied in practice, drawing on many to develop the students and prepare them for the world of work. This is supported by literature that indicates that WIL is perceived to be a mechanism that provides an

opportunity for all students to work with professionals in an authentic environment (Patrick et al., 2009).

When we think about how to better prepare students for their future careers, there is no better place than working with professionals in an authentic environment. The WIL system allows everyone - from low-income families all the way up through to the CEOs - to access and experience working on real projects that benefit them later when they apply for jobs or try to ascertain what kind of career path would suit them best. Employers encourage students to use their time during WIL placement as an opportunity for development by engaging in activities that would help them gain skills such as technological know-how, communication abilities and leadership qualities. These are all key elements for finding employment after graduation, and using this method could equip students with a competitive edge when competing against others seeking jobs, vital in today's world of work.

When we think about learning in the workplace, it is hard not to imagine a classroom or university setting. However just as learning could happen anywhere and at any time, this process takes on different forms. Learning with support has become an essential part of work today. It was Zuboff (1988:1) who wrote, "learning was the new labour". This idea could be seen as both creative and educational because it provides insight into how people learn at their jobs or even during other activities - learning becomes integral to what we do every day whether it is away from HEIs or work settings. Sub-themes generated from the above theme include:

- Student placement readiness
- Restricted timeframe
- Availability of current and valid resource
- Student placements disconnect
- Interest in improving own skill

4.5.4.1.1 Sub-theme: Student placement readiness

WIL placement is considered part of the course to qualify in a particular discipline. Student placements are an innovative way for students to gain work experience and acquire an idea of what type of industry they would like to work in. According to Reddan

126

(2008), not many applicants have interview experience when seeking these positions which makes it important that students to perform well during pre-placement interviews, particularly if they want to be successful in being hired. It was deduced from this research that most of the HEIs were expected to prepare students to be ready for the WIL placement in the world of work; however, most participants disagreed with the former statement, claiming that little or no support was provided to prepare them, except during the orientation week. The respondents replied:

High school gave me guidance (POQ8).

None, expected maybe orientation week (POQ6).

No support was given (POQ16).

... no, I felt a bit underprepared (POQ18).

These views were validated further by other respondent reflecting feelings of demotivation and frustrations as they expressed their perceptions of not being heard.

Not good as it demotivates a person who has so much passion and fresh ideas to share. Rather than being looked down upon (POQ16).

With little preparation and support, it was no wonder that many beginners struggle. The lack of proper guidance, student support and sufficient practice time seems like an issue which needs addressing as these students are looking forward to improving their skill. The participants described their experiences:

... well one of the excuses that I got was, cause I asked why don't we have more practice time, this is what we supposed to be doing like, yes we studying theory but now practical in the real-world this is what you going to be doing and they said to us, no we too many students for the facilities (PFG1).

My university didn't offer anything to help us to get into a practical sort of experience (PFG 2).

127

Um, you have your own obstacles and things even with having to do the six weeks placement, but at least you have those six weeks whereas someone like me, I don't have that. I now need to go and find my own six weeks without any other guidance. I just have to do everything on my own and find not a specific company but any company for that matter that has a graduate programme or an internship or whatever the case may be (PFG4).

The findings further confirmed what was found by Dunn et al., (2018), who had reported that WIL placement success relies on relevance and industry requirements for everyone's expertise, which was why it is important to provide students with the necessary resources so they thrive as future employees or professionals within today's world. Some participants felt that their lack of preparation led to a poor result:

Unqualified individuals to be mistreated and taken advantage of due to a lack of gap in knowledge for less pay than those who have some qualifications (POQ2).

In view of the above analysis, it may be concluded that due to lack of student support and students' lack of familiarity with the organisation, students were confused with what to expect from their professions, how to engage with co-workers and their placement supervisor, and which organisational events should take precedence as well as a lack of knowledge and preparation for the position in the world of work.

4.5.4.1.2   Sub-theme: Restricted timeframe

Learning to utilise one's timeframe well is a life skill that every student ought to acquire. It could help them become more efficient with their studies and the offer opportunity for success in whatever they strive to do, be it school or career-wise, managing their schedules, priorities and resources as well as creating an environment where they could learn without distractions. A successful person expends energy doing something worthwhile rather than just wasting time on unimportant tasks. Students need assistance in learning effective time management. Apportioning practical measures to the timeframe suggests effective learning for students and effective teaching for educators.

It was established from the findings that the allocated timeframe for practical training was insufficient and restricted. This could be seen as an issue since it meant that students were not receiving adequate hands-on experience and as a result, would find difficulty adjusting when they were faced with more complex tasks outside their field of expertise later on in life, as discussed by the participants:

The freedom at university is something people aren't generally used to and therefore was hard to jump from restrictive times in school to so much freedom in university (POQ16).

PSS7 indicated that there were timeframe constraints place on them, which meant certain assignments required to be completed within deadlines:

There is a certain assignment on a certain component and the times in which you have to complete the learning in the particular component.

The above finding suggests that some students face difficulty in succeeding in assessments or finishing studies within a stipulated timeframe. This was especially true for those who had difficulty with focus and attention span because it felt as if there was no way these individuals would make progress on their work to achieve an acceptable grade, let alone excel at something else in life. Ritter and Lemke (2000) believed that one should never underestimate how important energy levels become during intense study periods; whether it is mental or physical effort which counts towards the result. Focusing solely upon task-related features would not suffice when trying to improve learning outcomes, instead, Ritter and Lemke (2000) recommend incorporating a balance between effortful labour (timeframe) and mental engagement, which includes things such as creativity and self-exploration.

The study revealed that regardless of whether students attend a greater part of scheduled classes where they could succeed, some were not completely mindful of the significance of appropriately dealing with their learning time. It was revealed that some students did not know how to deal with their learning timeframe, and this would affect them in the future. The importance of managing the timeframe was not only

understood but also appreciated by all students, no matter for what part or degree they were enrolled.

Grounded on the above analysis, and in line with Horstmanshof et al., (2016) the return on investment in resources, timeframe or money spent would increase when work experience programmes are implemented because it supports students' employment search more easily after graduation as they tend to be more holistically prepared for the world of work.

4.5.4.1.3   Sub-theme: Availability of current and valid resource

This problem of lack of resources at HEIs is a huge obstacle which hinders the successful implementation of WIL. Additionally, the lack of attention specified by governments and leaders towards strengthening the HEIs means there would always be weaknesses within any reform process that could have been implemented if only more resources were available.

For these systems to work properly, lecturers needed to be knowledgeable about the theory but also be adequately skilled with WIL practical teaching methods, in order to enhance students' ability to convert the theory learnt into a practical application in the workplace. Another issue noted as affecting availability of current and valid resources, was how WIL was acknowledged and interpreted by the institutions. WIL is recognised by many to be a hot topic in the business world, determining how much funding they are able to receive, with some even going so far as saying that WIL is an unnecessary cost. Underestimating WIL compared to other academic roles, such as research and teaching in the classroom, has led to reduced valid and current resource accessibility, as stated by one focus group participant:

> *Ensuring that students have the necessary resources to have an efficient learning experience. Resources such as libraries, counsellors (emotional and career-wise), career fairs, etc.* (POQ11).

> *... most of our lecturers are also medical doctors so they do work for the government mainly at the, um, Medical Laboratory but then at the beginning of the year we had a course guardian, who then left, so for the majority of the year we didn't have a specific course guardian on our own* (PFG4).

130

Participant responses related to Lawson et al., (2011) who stated many HEIs have not provided adequate current resources for the WIL training module, resulting in low priority and a lack of academic rigour, even though these WIL courses provide an essential learning experience for many students who want more than just theoretical knowledge from their studies. A study by Horstmanshof et al., (2016) reveals that there could be a positive correlation between spending more resources for training employees with certain qualifications versus others since both outcomes yield similar levels of productivity but differ dramatically when it comes down to just one single factor: satisfaction level.

The need for a change in the way students are taught and support students has been highlighted by numerous studies. One such study conducted by Du Plessis and Van Niekerk (2016) found that while there was currently no uniform student support services curriculum across South Africa's universities, student support training included healthy living programmes, adaptable skills and conducting seminars providing more career-oriented lessons as well as teaching adaptable skill sets, This prepares individuals for entering the world of work after graduation and more could be done through holding events for students where they learn about conducting themselves professionally in interviews or on job sites.

From these findings, it could be concluded that academics are required to adapt their teaching and learning styles while students have to understand the importance and relevance of engaging in WIL to enhance their careers and prospects. WIL is often underestimated when contrasted with other academic roles such as research and classroom-based teaching, which have resulted in reduced availability of current and valid resources for educators.

4.5.4.1.4   Sub-theme: Student placement disconnect

The current economy requires employees who are flexible and adaptable with an entrepreneurial spirit and can cope with technological advancements and not become obsolete when new technologies emerge over time. Such students need to be prepared for such encounters for their well-being and they ought to have had the option to deal with these circumstances. The ability of students to manage their emotions in challenging situations assists them in being prepared when they inevitably

face such cases. The opinions of participants were that student ability to adapt, change and innovate is necessary for businesses and employers to be sustainable. For continued employment prospects and professional recognition, career and promotion opportunities involve skilling for the workforce (Murphy & Calway, 2008)

This study found that most students walked into the unknown without any preparation or ideas on how best to handle themselves and with a sense of fear or anticipation and in many cases, with little or no support. This is not something that should be ignored; it is important for students to know that they had options. This was what one respondent said:

Rather turbulent in the beginning due to the adjustment (POQ3).
*I think it's crucial to be guided or be prepared properly before entering the world of work (*POQ6)

Consequently, educational practices ought not to differ from the practices and exercises required in the real-life environments for which the students must be prepared. Therefore, skills that students learn in the university classroom should be similar to those they would use when faced with a real-life situation. Most instructors only offered a modest participation in student support, particularly around WIL, yet this support role is regarded as being fundamental to higher education. This is what the participants said:

You can be in the classroom, spend your days in the classroom but then coming back to the workplace where a person has to show you the work, you will find students that are not willing to do that... (PSS2).

... I think with most of them, just send students out, go and gain experience, this is what you have to learn ... send them with some notebooks and say to them go and find a workplace that can be able to give you that kind of learning (PSS3).

The participants acknowledged that students, through the WIL process developed not only the practical skills but also the ability to adapt, change and innovate which is necessary for businesses and employers to be sustainable. This view was also shared

by Smith (2012), who indicated authenticity was the degree to which the placement offered student the most appropriate opportunity to do meaningful professional work, with appropriate levels of autonomy and responsibility and which had the meaningful consequence of value to the workplace or organisation that hosted them. One participant had this to say:

> … *in the real-world, nothing's going to be handed to you especially in an office or an organisation so you must definitely go out there and make something of it* (PFG7).

An analysis of the participants' responses revealed that the supervisors play a crucial role in student support as they act as role models and coaches, providing a number of instrumental resources for students, which could potentially lead to enhanced learning and placement within the organisation (Ali et al., 2022). The way in which employers interact with students during the hiring process could have had a profound impact on their future choice of employment. For example, some students only experience 'good' moments while others face difficult situations that could lead them towards quitting or staying in the industry. Higher education should incorporate the securing of area-specific knowledge with practical knowledge and expertise; for example, social abilities, correspondence and innovation aptitudes which was in line with 21st century skills vital for success in the world of work (Tynjala et al., 2003).

4.5.4.1.5 Sub-theme: Interest in improving own skill

The findings of this study show that the participants' understanding of improving their skills was similar in that they all see it as an opportunity for ongoing development that ensures improvement through continuous lifelong learning. Student support is a form of professional development that helps students enhance their skills. Most participants believed it was important for developmental improvement and spoke about the significance of enhancing their skills and retraining via online courses as part of professional development programmes:

> *I feel like I have the basic skills and I can build more on them, especially in this job* (POQ6).

... the work readiness could've been more emphasised in varsity... (POQ4).

I was re-trained as the role was very specific, whereas the university curriculum was broader (POQ3).

Educate yourself by doing short courses and reading up about the company you're going to (POQ13).

... I also did extra online courses, while studying (POQ6).

... if the company has any sort of training to gain more knowledge in the workplace, I sign up for those (POQ11).

Student were aware that the university degree or diploma was just the first step, offering them the foundation for their careers. In some cases, more specific training was required to ensure that they were adequately equipped to fill the position.

Also, because of the profession of the company, if they would like to share their secrets, they would obviously give in-house training and explain how certain systems work. It might be that is staff training, but they're actually doing Java at the company so that in-house training still happens, although I don't think that companies are going out on in-house training that much, if the student is not employed permanently. So, I don't think they focus too much on in-house training with regards to short placements (PFG 2).

The focus group participants agreed that students could increase their knowledge, skill and abilities through student support, which was a type of professional development. Working in industry was not static but as technology develops, it was vital to further develop and upgrade skills which could have had an insightful effect on one's future career. And this is what they said:

Well in somewhat the way I feel as though I could, but in other ways, I know that we didn't get enough lab work experience too, be able to for example I wanted

to specialise in Virology and in Microbiology they only gave us, we were only allowed work with plant viruses (PFG1).

I just feel that, um, universities should encourage students, they should co-operate with companies, so that make connections with companies, large companies like BMW or Mercedes so that you are guaranteed a post for at least six months, in the work field so that you are not left stranded, once you've got your degree or your diploma (PFG6).

These findings were consistent with the views of Dickerson and Kline (2008) who maintained that allowing feedback from others about how well-suited certain skill may ultimately prove itself against other job requirements. Various types of industries would benefit most from having more employees with those specific skills available in that particular discipline.

In view of the preceding analysis, it could therefore be concluded that the issue of improving own skills is vital. Billett and Choy (2013) contend that students experience different encounters during WIL placement. Certain support interactions assist students in making a decision about their career path to keep on doing what they were doing before and improve their skills or change direction. No one type is more influential than the other for every individual's life path, but it still pays off knowing and understanding everything about the potential career paths.

4.5.5 RQ 5: What strategies can be recommended to improve the existing student support services provided to HE students throughout the WIL placement process?

4.5.5.1 Generated Theme: Recommended strategies for improvement of student support

One of the most important things in life is having people who care and want what was best. This correlation could be seen with social support as well. Research findings may lead to a better understanding of the social processes involved in social support and the development of interventions to improve outcomes. A variety of support indicators may be used to assess if the support was effective or not. These research

results would not only help to understand the social processes associated with support but also guide interventions that could improve outcomes. Social support ought to correspond with the conceptual definition that characterises it, and this could be done by checking for any other dimensions not previously mentioned. Sub-themes generated from the above theme include:

- Institutional assistance
- The expectation of student support throughout WIL
- Workplace experience
- Institutional relevance to industry needs

4.5.5.1.1 Sub-theme: Institutional assistance

The logistics of arranging a placement could be difficult for some universities. Developing an appropriate assessment standard that would satisfy all stakeholders was one of the challenges. The discussions with participants yielded a wealth of useful information that could be implemented immediately and provide students with the opportunity to find WIL placements in their desired field. Recognising WIL may imply that there is a deeper understanding of WIL as well as expanding learning strategies to incorporate WIL standards more broadly in everyday teaching. The focus group participants explained as follows:

I would like for my institution or any institution actually to have, to give more experiential training... (PFG4).

...If you don't do your practical training module and submit your report within the first semester the following year, you literally can't, you can't progress to the following year and in the end, you can't get your degree. It's a requirement (PFG8).

For students who find themselves struggling with the demands of finishing their WIL placement portfolios, real work examples should be provided during training, as a participant declared...

More information on the real work environment and assistance in connecting students to organisations (POQ2).

In one of the semi-structured interviews, the participant suggested that a lack of WIL strategy which involved managing both HEI stakeholders and student support, hindered WIL progress:

An absence of support through an institutional framework made it hard to convey WIL (PSS8).

WIL encourages students to apply their knowledge through real-world problems while also allowing for personal development. These types of experiences support and strengthen the ties between lecturer and course material and have a positive effect on retention rates. WIL in HEI is a type of on-campus and workplace learning activity that integrates theory with practice (Jackson, 2013). The academic programme is made up primarily of lectures, readings or watching videos or doing exercises to enhance understanding as well as field trips so students could see what they were learning about first-hand.

In view of the preceding analysis, it could therefore be concluded that the purpose of WIL was to support the student with the transition from theoretical education to practical employment. This experience includes developing awareness among students about workplace culture and expectations to prepare students regarding the atmosphere observed in the workplace. This conclusion is in line with the findings by Schuster and Glavas (2017) who indicated that WIL in HEI should be perceived as a learning activity that integrates theory with practice.

4.5.5.1.2   Sub-theme: Expectation of student support throughout WIL

WIL placement could be a confusing module to take, not only for the student but also for their employer. Industry goals are often unrealistic as WIL's model may seem counter-natural in that students have not been not fully prepared for the job. All things considered, motivation is powerful, which prompts students to ensure their learning. This participant acknowledged the value of gaining experience during the WIL placement:

And also, it come to think of it, you need experiences to gain experience (PFG8).

In some cases, students faced challenges during WIL placement and had an effect on the successful implementation of student support. However, participants provided some suggestions for improved student support:

... systems need to be in place to facilitate effective communication of students towards facilitators. An open channel to understand their respective experiences, what works and what doesn't etc. (POQ13).

Help the students with workplace interviews and help with workplace and CV (POQ6).

From data collected through the semi-structured interviews, participants' perceptions evoke thoughts of the motive behind the WIL programmes, and the benefits in preparing and knowing the culture of the various organisations, for HEIs and students. Various means of communication and understanding between the different stakeholders were vital:

... students should walk into that organisation and make the organisation fit with you, you should have known the organisational culture before the time (PSS7).

If there is a line of communication between the company and the institute, the possibilities are there whatever experience the student should have, could be communicated to the company, and the other side of the company could communicate with the training provider and say as an institute we have had so many of your learners and this is the positives or problems that we have encountered (PSS3).

The above analysis seems to be consistent with the views of Berman's concept of a (2008) 'cultural gap' which had been depicted as a huge barrier to fruitful collaboration among stakeholders. Choy and Delahaye (2011) identified concerns that arose during the time spent actualising WIL which included encouraging organisations to participate

and encouraging HEIs to develop the capacity 'fit in' with industry needs (McLennan & Keating, 2008).

From these findings, it could be concluded that students expect that student support and assistance would develop their practical knowledge and skills. During the WIL programme industry professionals could assist students so that they learn about what it takes to succeed in the industry after graduation. This would help the student grow professionally while still being supported by the company through training opportunities, tutoring or mentoring. When it comes to applying for jobs, they would be more confident.

4.5.5.1.3   Sub-theme: Workplace experience

The experience of working in an industry could have a profound effect on one's future career. Fruitful work experiences fulfil positive expectations and lead to the development of practical knowledge and work-specific skills. This suggests that WIL student placements accompanied by improved skills are important for graduates' employability as well as industries. Relevance is essential so that employment opportunities are beneficial to students. These views were also corroborated by the respondents:

> *Yes. Students who receive support are better prepared and equipped for the working world* (POQ4).

> *Any activity that helps students complete their degrees successfully. It can be financial, academic, emotional and or spiritual support. Mentorship is also included. Continuous learning that takes place while at the workplace large, the practice to date is shown by credit hours; however, this old practice isn't completely fulfilled except if the normal student learning time is likewise spelt out in the syllabus/curriculum* (POQ16).

> *Educate the student on the work environment they will place in* (POQ11).

Jacobs' (2015) study came to similar conclusions on the value of WIL in improving student placement. Participant opinions were divided, while some believed that

students would be able to find placement, others reported that the difficulty was findings WIL placements for all students which resulted in them not being prepared for the world of work:

> *… the main problem, find those companies where you can actually place these students, and you get a head ratio of maybe of wanting companies, so you can imagine if you had two hundred students, and you have to find placement for these guys, what would you do, it became a big problem from the educational institution, um, to the employer eventually (PSS2).*

Participants highlighted the downside to WIL, one of balancing time with theoretical learning at the university and time with practical labour:

> *I'm getting experience and I am working, but now it is a problem cause I'm not attending class* (PFG5).

> *If companies are going to be taking learners for cheap labour and the students do the work, once the company is done with them then they chucked out, then it's not fair...*

An analysis of participants' accounts about the influence of workplace experience on the learning process revealed that with support from employers and supervisors, WIL placement had great value in preparing students for future employment. However, as indicated by du Plessis and Van Niekerk (2016), student support during the process was vital to assist students in building confidence in their knowledge and skills. In some cases, though, students work as labourers and are not given the opportunities needed for personal growth.

4.5.5.1.4   Institutional relevance to industry needs

There was concern from participants about the teaching and learning provided by HEIs in preparing students to take up positions in industry. The concern related to the relevance of what is required in the workplace and whether this was being addressed by the curricula, which included WIL. Standards and evaluation criteria ought to be in line with institutional policy (Cook, 2021). When students understand that the way they

study prevents them from learning what they should be learning, a certain type of tension becomes apparent (Fletcher, 2005).

Subsequently, some of the participants during their semi-structured interviews suggested that higher level of skills in teaching and learning was required to equip students with discipline-specific skills as well as 21st century skills (Hodges & Lear, 2011) to ensure that they were able to take up positions in the world of work:

> *... at the university level, right, they need to remain relevant and that means taken into the industry, understand what are the skills that the students require* (PSS5).

> *I think I would ask them to invite a lot of providers into the institution so that they introduce the learners whilst they are doing the learnership into the working environment and how the economy industry, how the market industry, and business opportunities mostly into the sectors, into the different sectors* (PSS3).

> *...learners have complained to say that okay, we are not getting adequate exposure in terms of what we need to get, some of them said that we don't know our programme, we enrolled for, which already tells you that there is a break in communication, there is a problem, some that they came in to say that there was no proper induction to tell them that what the programme entails* (PSS6).

> *… business is struggling to remain relevant, and universities I don't think have remained relevant in terms of the curriculum, because they don't think that they integrate well enough into the business world to understand the impact on the foundations that they teach the students, to be honest with you. First thing like relevance, secondly like if you obviously if you want to increase job placements* (PSS5).

The above findings support the research findings of Choy and Delahaye (2011), which show that while the traditional role and power that HEIs had over the curriculum, types of learning exercises and results served the interests of the university well, but they fall short of fully meeting the needs of the workplace and students. White Paper

(DHET, 2013) make it clear that HEIs have an important role to play, even more so when contributing to the growth and stainability of the country and as a result, need to be relevant.

It can be concluded, based on an analysis of participants' accounts, as suggested by Phillips (2014), that greater pressure and effort from the government, business organisations, and leading HEIs was required to establish a foundation that is endorsed and communicated to ensure that the standards of student support throughout WIL is shared by all industrial sectors. In higher education, there has been a long-held belief that theoretical certainties and practical knowledge are inconsistent with each other. Higher education requirements would often favour scientific knowledge and aptitudes above expert practical knowledge which may influence the approach to the WIL process.

4.6   SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This study aimed to gather information and understand students' perceptions of the support services at HEIs. This chapter presented the research findings in terms of themes supported by verbatim quotations supported by relevant literature. When theoretical learning is substantiated with practical application in WIL placement, it becomes much more memorable and sustainable, particularly with the development of skills. WIL activities helps students apply what they learnt in class by interacting with professionals who share similar challenges as their instructors do on an everyday basis.

The participants of this study put forward several suggestions to improve the student support services at HEIs which provide useful information that could serve as guidelines to stakeholders in the implementation of educational reforms and programmes. To do this, researchers would look at the research results and use them as input for developing interventions that could improve outcomes in future studies, allowing an improved understanding of what is required for students to have a positive educational experience. This could only happen if students are supported throughout their entire journey, prior, during and even post-WIL placement. The more stakeholders engage in partnership with each other and provide quality services,

better results regarding progression within academic and professional careers would emerge.

In the final chapter, Chapter 5, a summary of the findings is presented, conclusions are drawn, and recommendations are made.

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CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"*Phenomenological research is a qualitative strategy in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants in a study"* (Creswell, 2009:231)

5.1   INTRODUCTION

An in-depth study was conducted to investigate and comprehend the understanding of student perceptions of support services provided by higher education institutions throughout the Work-integrated Learning (WIL) placement process at selected HEIs in the greater Pretoria area, Gauteng Province, South Africa. Chapter 4 presented the findings emerging from the analysed data collected from various selected participants and respondents using multi-data collection techniques - semi-structured interviews, focus groups and an open-ended questionnaire to answer the research question, aims and objective of the study.

This chapter concludes this study by presenting a summary of all the chapters. It links the research rationale and research questions with the final findings, emphasising the key findings to draw conclusions and make recommendations for practice. This chapter also presents the limitations of the study as well as suggested areas for future research for student support prior to, during and post WIL placement process. The contribution of the study to academic knowledge is also highlighted. Lastly, conclusions, recommendations and proposed strategies to HEIs for the implementation of student support services to be provided throughout the WIL placement process are stated in this chapter.

5.2   SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 provided an orientation to research, the purpose of the research was presented; the rationale for the study was explained, and it also discussed the

background to the problem, the problem statement and the research question: What are student perceptions of student support services provided by higher education institutions throughout the WIL placement process?

In providing answers to the above research question, this study was guided by the following objectives of this research:

- Determine understanding of the concept 'student support' throughout WIL.
- Ascertain the type of student support services provided by HEIs to students prior to, during and post the WIL placement process.
- Reveal the perceptions and roles of the various stakeholders towards student support services provided throughout WIL
- Establish the students' lived experiences and challenges of these student support services.
- Identify the strategies that can be recommended to improve on the existing student support services provided to HE students throughout the WIL placement process.

Likewise, this chapter discusses the scope of the research and the overall purpose and provides a brief introduction to the research design and methods. The qualitative research approach, underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm, was guided by a case study research design. The methodology included convenience, purposive and snowball sampling followed by multi-data collection method using semi-structured interviews, a focus group interview and an open-ended questionnaire.

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature study outlining concepts and possible theories relating to student support and Work-integrated Learning (WIL). This chapter further captured the essence of student support, while examining the various concepts and theories behind WIL and how it relates to student support throughout the WIL placement process. The theoretical framework underpinning this study, Social Support Theory, was examined and discussed by providing the theoretical framework which explored how Social Support Theory and its four pillars were a key factor in the implementation of student support throughout the WIL placement process which included emotional, tangible, informational, companionship support. This was done to

conceptualise and contextualise HEI's student support throughout the WIL placement process in the South African context.

The chapter proceeded to pursue the structure and connection between the student and various stakeholders, HEI, industry and government organisations as well as related literature on student support services prior to, during and post WIL placement process. The chapter further reported various ways in which to prepare students for the world of work and the profession through an educational programme. This enables and empowers students to apply their disciplinary skills to work placement situations while building valuable abilities in the work environment.

Furthermore, the chapter looked at workplace supervisors and leadership to guide, shape, transfer skills and support students during their WIL placement. It also explained the shortfalls and benefits of combining student support services and WIL, and the effect on students' academic and workplace development. The chapter concluded by discussing the need to recruit recognisable, talented and skilled staff, motivate more students to register for WIL and other possible strategies to improve student support services.

Chapter 3 discussed the research methods used and the design of the study. The introduction prepared the audience for more in-depth discussions on the research's design and methods, the study's issue, and a description of its purpose. Furthermore, Chapter 3 presented the qualitative case study and research design, multi-data collection techniques which was the choice of research instruments, the description of the population chosen for this study and sampling methods employed. It also presented the interpretivist paradigm which assumes that knowledge could only be created and understood by individuals within a particular culture or organisation.

A dialogue followed on the worldview based on the perspectives of people living and working in that culture. It further discussed how this study's triangulation procedure was carried out and the researcher's part was described. Thematic data analysis and data interpretation was extensively discussed. Measures to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study were presented and finally, this chapter dealt with issues of ethics, confidentiality, and validation.

Chapter 4 presented the findings of the data gathered through focus groups, open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Chapter 4 began with the profiles and biographic data of the participants, providing the context of the study, the profiles of the thirty-six participants and their demographical data, and their lived experience in terms of their role with regards to the research question: *What are student perceptions of student support services provided by higher education institutions throughout the WIL placement process?*

Additional emerging themes and sub-themes related to the research questions were specified in this chapter. These themes and sub-themes emerged during the data analysis phase of the study. In the findings were presented in six themes and nineteen sub-themes to answer the research questions relating to how student support was experienced throughout the process of WIL placement. The findings of this study were supported by the relevant literature.

Chapter 5 presents the study's conclusion bringing this research study to an end. The findings from the empirical study and the conclusions drawn from the literature review are presented, demonstrating how the research contributes to knowledge in relation to student support throughout the WIL placement process at HEIs. It offers evidence of participants' *expectations* of student support throughout the WIL placement, what student support services are *offered* by the HEI, and what student support systems are *required* to make the WIL placement process successful. In the research's concluding sections, recommendations based on the study's key findings are made, and potential research topics were suggested.

5.3   SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents a summary of the research findings in terms of the themes and sub-themes linked to the research questions. This research was an exploration of student support services or the lack thereof, provided by selected universities to students throughout the WIL placement process in various disciplines. This study was underpinned by Social Support Theory which provided a lens for the research.

5.3.1 Understanding of the Concept 'Student Support' throughout WIL

Participants who had actively participated in the WIL process, in some way or form, in various disciplines, held a range of views and understanding of the concepts 'student support' and 'WIL'. Better clarification and understanding from the HEIs were expected as participants were only given a pamphlet or information brochure to inform them about WIL placement. Not all participants understood the various systems and procedures applicable to support throughout WIL placement, which was designed to provide them with practical exposure in their courses.

Coursework helps prepare students academically providing them with the theory; however, in some cases, it also gave them insight into what was expected when starting their WIL placement. However, students disclosed that they were disappointed with the HEI support service as many students were tasked with finding their own WIL placements in the workplace. Students felt they had not been adequately informed and prepared, and were thus not supported. Brenner (2000) contends that the effort students put forth during the process ultimately determines the experience they acquire in WIL placement. This implies students who had experienced WIL placement, took responsibility for their studies, applied the theory and developed their skills.

5.3.2 Student Support Services provided by HEIs prior to, during and post WIL Placement

Student support *prior to* WIL placement was minimal. As indicated above, not all students felt they had been adequately informed and prepared for WIL placement, which included properties such as preparation for business communication, interviews, CV writing and financial support. Student support services provided was in the form of communication via emails, SMSes, welcome packs and little booklets advising of different places to apply for WIL, more of a marketing tool for the HEIs. Students were tasked with seeking their own support within HEIs as it was considered their responsibility to ask for support. In some cases, students had financial constraints and were not supported by either the HEI or industry during WIL placement as there were no financial systems in place which meant that students had to depend on their families for financial support. Certain participants highlighted that they were not all

placed by HEIs and they themselves were not always successful in finding placement in the correct study discipline.

Student support *during* the WIL module was either infrequently or non-existent. Orientations on the background of the WIL, the significance of WIL, and how to relate services to learning objectives were seldom accessible to students and industry partners. There were insufficient processes in place to provide feedback and encourage reflection on students' learning outcomes *post* WIL placement, based on their fields of study in various disciplines.

5.3.3 The Perception and Roles of the Various Stakeholders towards Student Support Services throughout WIL

There is a need to form a solid relationship with all stakeholders, ensuring successful completion of the WIL placement process, ensuring that it is beneficial and would enhance the qualification. Most university structures did not cascade down to the office or college level to mobilise instructors, students and industry agencies in WIL. It seems that there are insufficient staff and minimal WIL policy structures to maintain collaboration with industry. Lack of funding, quality, logistics and audits for WIL activities, as well as lack of professional development training for educators in applying WIL, all contribute to poor performance. The planning, implementation and assessment of WIL placement were not done in a strong collaborative manner since relationships with industry were short-lived.

While it is well recognised that stakeholder input and comprehension of the WIL placement component is necessary, the findings indicated that partnerships, site approval and collaboration between training institutions and industry should have been in place, before students enrolled at the HEIs. Such practice would ensure that HEIs provided students with the support, assistance, direction, and the opportunity to be placed in industry for WIL placement, which is a requirement of the qualification.

Industry in many cases, is prepared to take in students for WIL placement; however, workplace policies, paperwork and training are a challenge and often hinders the process. Industry would have to consider the cost implications of allocating a staff

member as a student mentor to provide training and student support throughout the WIL placement training.

5.3.4 Students' Lived Experiences and Challenges of Student Support Services

To ensure ongoing skill development and improvement, students in a variety of disciplines are tasked with putting theory into practice during their WIL placement. This ensures advancement through ongoing, lifetime learning. However, governments and leaders had disregarded the necessity to strengthen and support HEIs, which exposes flaws in any reformation initiatives and process.

As a compulsory component of certain courses in various disciplines, students are placed in industry for WIL module. Hence, HEIs are expected to support students throughout the WIL placement, especially practically while students were in the industry; however, most participants reported that apart from the orientation week, there was no or minimal support. Student support benefits students by supporting them while they improve their skills, thereby ensuring well-trained graduates. Insufficient guidance and support with developing vital skills such as effective time management skills, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and civic understanding, required prior to placement, were reported.

Students' capacity to learn and develop was also hampered by a lack of essential tools, resources and services. The outdated condition of several university workshops and labs was a major factor affecting students' future employment. In addition, the allotted time for practical training, both on campus in workshops and laboratories or during WIL placement during the timeframe, was inadequate and restricted. This was problematic as it meant students were not given sufficient hands-on experience and found difficulty adjusting when faced with more complex tasks. Additionally, placement supervisors, who were aware of the student's abilities, did not always assist or encourage them in locating employment in their profession.

Time management skills were valued, especially the skill of being on time and showing up regularly. However, there were difficulties with students being on time, and working

more at efficiently managing their time. Similar findings were made in a study by Jacobs (2015), who also emphasised time management as a crucial quality needed in the workplace.

Student support also relates to the assistance and encouragement given to students in times of need such as tempering their ability to manage their emotions in difficult situations when encountering challenges. Most students enter the hectic stage such as assignment deadlines, examinations, and WIL without any preparation or idea of how best to manage themselves.

5.3.5   Strategies to improve Student Support Services during WIL Placement

Internal and external factors affected participants' perceptions and expectations of government policy, industry WIL placement and student support services. To transform the abovementioned priorities and improve student support and WIL placement model, stakeholders must address the skill mismatch of what the employer values and what HEIs are willing to include in their curriculum (Zegwaard et al., 2003). HEIs act as an important link between students and stakeholders and based on the education and training, industry would be able to recruit talented employees for their organisation who could contribute to producing fresh and innovative ideas. The addition of industry job examples during lecturers would support and prepare students for WIL and later assist them with the demands of completing their WIL placement portfolio. WIL student placements contribute to and are important for graduate employability and industry, along with improving participants' skills.

However, students encountered challenges prior to, during and post WIL placement which could have been avoided by an effective HEI student support service. These work experiences are beneficial reinforce positive expectations and lead to realistic expectations for effective service and development in the business environment. Industry targets are often unrealistic, and the WIL placement model may seem counterintuitive in nature as the WIL placement process does not always support nor prepare students for work.

5.4   CONCLUSIONS

The results of this research were in line with those reported in numerous other studies on student support and WIL, articulated in different ways. This study shed important light on the design, implementation and assessment of HEI student support during the WIL placement process. The following sections each comprise a conclusion drawn from the study's findings:

5.4.1 Summary of the Theoretical Basis of the Study

This study revealed that generally university departments offer no or minimal appropriate student support during the WIL placement process. The concept of 'student support' was introduced to students using the Social Support Theory, and 'WIL' from long-term and short-term WIL models, encompassing provider (HEI) visits to WIL placements. The literature provided a summary of areas related to this study: Credit-bearing WIL modules are created and incorporated into HEI curricula, offering students the opportunity to apply their learning to gain practical experience, also serving as a vehicle to bring together HEI and the world of work, through creating new learning opportunities in the workplace. Experiential skills such as Internships, learnerships, apprenticeships and traineeships have been identified as various channels to support students in integrating their classroom learning with workplace learning and experience. Consequently, it could be said that while the motivations for its implementation are new, WIL itself is not a new phase of HEI studies.

This study identified certain challenges and gaps in student support which merit consideration. Social Support Theory was used as the theoretical framework to underpin this study, and it is through this lens that a comprehensive strategy of support should be developed;

- **Emotional/construct support - Expressions of empathy, love, trust and caring**

During WIL placement students, which is considered a transformative learning experience, students ought to benefit from support to ensure that they adopt suitable behaviours and adaptable abilities as they become exposed to the working

152

environment. Within a transformative learning environment, students will need support as they change their understanding of self, change their behaviours and change their belief system. Samadi (2013) claims that with adequate student support and supervision, students could be given the independence to work freely and therefore be exposed to and taught the value of strong work ethic, as demanded by the workplace.

WIL placement may be stressful and anxiety-provoking as students experience the workplace and attempt to put the theory learnt into practice. The expectations and the fast-paced environment offer no room for interpersonal conflicts. However, a supportive mentor, knowledgeable staff members and support from the university who offer care and compassion for the novice worker will allay any fears. This emotional support can be verbal or non-verbal but develops confidence in the student and prepares them for the demands of the workplace.

- **Instrumental/tangible support – Monetary Aid and service**.

WIL placement is also known as experiential learning where students gain knowledge and skills while working with knowledgeable staff members, co-workers and customers. This form of social support could enhance skill development through the direct ways that people assist one another. Tangible support also refers to the provision of financial assistance. Various forms of funding are available to students, including grants such as pivotal and discretionary grants, scholarships, and providing incentives and rewards to students so that they can fund their education. A pivotal[2] grant assists the student in achieving an occupational qualification through academic and professional learning programmes. A discretionary grant is where a student is awarded a grant based on merit and eligibility.

- **Informational support - Advice, suggestions and information**

Informational support is the provision of advice, guidance, suggestions or useful information. This relates to the service, skills and knowledge transferred from the experienced workforce to the novices about the task at hand. WIL placement offers

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[2] PIVOTAL = Professional, Vocational, Technical & Academic Learning.

students who were not knowledgeable about their available career options the opportunity to learn more on-the-job. Students at HEIs learn the theory but lack the practical industrial knowledge required to make a wise choice that would be beneficial to their future.

The transition from student to an employee is far from straightforward and the expectations of students before they enter the workplace are often vague, inconsistent or irrational. The goal of the world of work is not always achievable, and WIL training can be confusing for both the employer and the student. According to Billet (2011), employers' ultimate expectations for student placement and skill level often leave them disappointed.

- **Appraisal/companionship support - Information useful for self-evaluation**

Assessment of the HEIs theoretical courses is vital to ensure learning outcomes are achieved. WIL portfolios also offer the opportunity for assessment by the workplace and the HEIs. However, the authenticity of the WIL experience and the incorporation of integrative learning, defined as the "integrating of discipline learning and workplace practice or application" (Smith, 2012:248), also needs to be appraised. Dunn et al., (2018) recommend the development of a framework that includes criteria which enable the assessment of workplace WIL activities where the criteria relate to the pedagogical features of the WIL activity. This approach may give clarity to how work readiness is developed through WIL and could offer evidence of how to strengthen approaches to WIL (Dunn et al., 2018).

In addition, students should be supported in developing the skill of self-evaluation where they reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. This will offer students a better idea of what they have done and how they can work to make improvements. It could also enhance their self-awareness, confidence and ownership of their work. To sum up, different strategies should be taken into consideration by all parties involved to achieve this goal.

5.4.2   Summary from the Empirical Research

The importance of student support in all its forms cannot be overstated if one of the most important outcomes of higher education and training, is the development of a solid workforce. WIL is the interception of knowledge and skills gained in HEIs and the workplace. The objective of practical training for students is an opportunity to develop significant aptitudes which would assist and guide students into becoming professionals in the future. The notion of student support throughout WIL placement encapsulates the integral combination of educational approaches in which one internalises knowledge, gains insights, acquires skills and abilities through exposure to the workplace and achieves specific outcomes applicable to employment.

Student support is a crucial element in ensuring that students learn through theoretical training and in accordance with the practical work experience of WIL placement, that they are prepared as the industry requires. Student support relates to information, theoretical and practical abilities and experience which ensure that students are prepared for their role in the world of work.

Students expected the university experience which included genuine encounters to provide them with the ability to satisfactorily set themselves up for the world of work. Although the WIL module was part of the university curriculum and qualification, some universities stepped away from their responsibility to assist and support students in obtaining their WIL placement to complete their qualification. Students expected support, guidance, skills and the criteria to be filled by both the university and workplace. However, some students were sent out into the world of work ill-equipped, ill-skilled as well as unprepared academically, practically and emotionally.

Lack of student support services, practical exposure and preparation at HEI facilities could contribute to students' lack of preparedness and lack of self-confidence in the workplace. Lack of student support restricts the way in which students collaborate and communicate with one another as well as staff members in the pursuit of knowledge.

The shortcomings in HEIs' relationship-building with stakeholders are echoed in the findings, a shortage of placement identification and a desire to cut expenses which

resulted in some students being compelled to obtain their own hosting organisations, typically those in their own neighbourhood, which were inconsistent and unstable. Therefore, this research advises against individual-based WIL placement since it weakens WIL pedagogy by preventing contact and support from knowledgeable, informed people such as educators, supervisors and mentors. Individual-based student placement should therefore be avoided, and universities ought to instead improve institutional ability to manage placement assessments and partner agreements for successful WIL involvement.

It can be concluded that the participants assumed that support throughout WIL placement is beneficial and advantageous and that they would be supported as part of one of the services provided by HEIs throughout the WIL process. As part of student support, the placement supervisor was to play a major role in supporting and moulding the students while developing professional skills and identity in the application of theoretical knowledge in the workplace, mentoring and monitoring them while they gained practical exposure and built networks, contacts and relationships with people in diverse roles in the organisation.

5.5   CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This study's findings are offered as a contribution to knowledge with the development of framework delineating the roles of the four stakeholders and the significance of their connections.

Student support throughout WIL placement is regarded as a significant part of most courses presented at HEI, as was previously described and discussed in Chapter 2 of this research. This study identified a variety of contributions to the student support services provided by HEIs across WIL and provided a preview of stakeholders' perspectives on student support in HEI. These partnerships are vital to the practice of WIL placement for students in HEIs.

The four stakeholders include the government, HEIs, students and world of work, as illustrated in Figure 5.1.
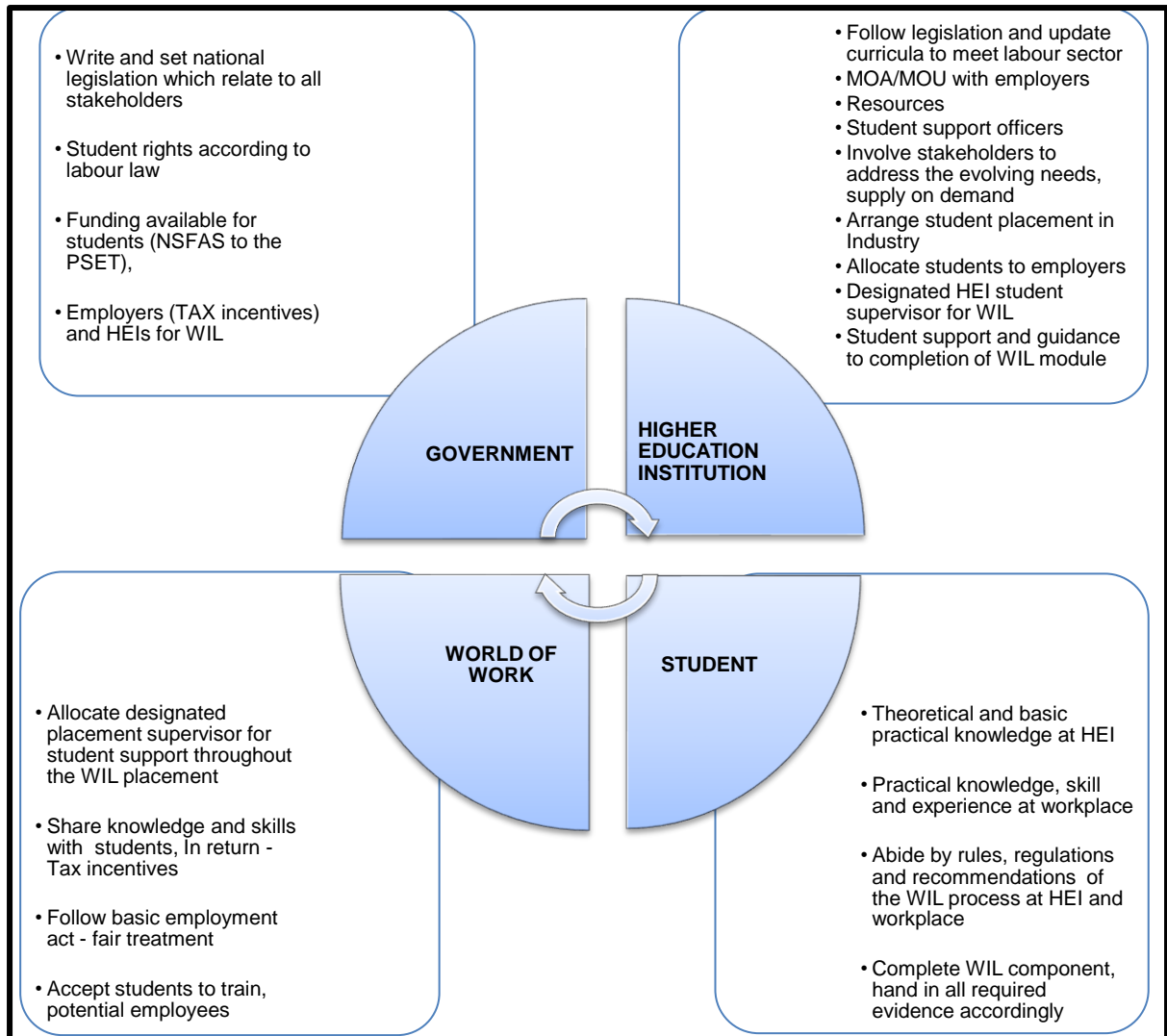
Figure 5.1: The role of stakeholders in student support during WIL placement

The design and implementation of WIL programmes are directly impacted by several factors one of which is the connections between stakeholders and their fundamental involvement and contribution to ensure its success. According to the findings, all stakeholders, as described in the subsequent sections, should maintain open and continuous communication in order to achieve their defined and overlapping duties.

5.5.1   The Government

- *Write and set national legislation which relate to all stakeholders*

The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013) was never declared a national policy and any other document has replaced it to date. This research could contribute to a few positive changes in the White Paper concerning the national WIL

agenda, which is in line with the National Skills Development Plan of 2030 as well as the globally competitive country. Encouraging continuous engagements between all stakeholders is crucial as HEI systems transformation remains the responsibility of governmental education departments. There is a need to create policies that would strengthen the country and enhance the economic and social well-being of society.

- *Student rights according to labour law*

The government's declaration of supporting students could be demonstrated by specific laws outlining student rights and protections during WIL placement, regardless of the duration. Aside from the legally binding Apprentice contract, basic labour legislation applied in a general manner is too vague to protect student rights or aid at work.

- *Funding available for Students (NSFAS to the HEI)*

The expectation that all students should have had the opportunity to study in higher education and participate in WIL placement is growing because of South African government funding and initiatives. The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) offers support to students but there are drawbacks with allocation and its repayment schedule. This research indicated the need to make other types of funding available to students as grants, scholarships, incentives and awards so students are able to fund their education. These include critical and discretionary funds and pivotal and discretionary grants which should be readily available.

- *Employers (TAX incentives) and HEIs for WIL*

All businesses, regardless of the type of work placement, should be able to make use of the tax benefits provided by the South African government to enterprises for hosting students during WIL placements. This means that more employment possibilities would be available and student professional advancement would be enhanced. There is, of course, the issue of 'red tape', which has caused a decline in the quality of WIL for students since employers must adhere to many official procedures when students are on placement.

5.5.2   Higher Education Intuition

- *Follow legislation and update curricula to meet labour sector*

The Government Gazette has reported that the South African economy's expansion, growth and development are critically dependent on addressing the skills gap. The benefits of doing work placement before graduating is becoming clearer as competition for graduate career options increases, therefore HEIs should continually evolve to meet the needs of industry nationally and globally. Student support throughout WIL placement must be incorporated into the curriculum rather than being an afterthought. The supervisory role is vital to ensure that placement is better understood with a shared understanding of the meaning and goal of WIL between institutions and industry.

- *MOA/MOU with employers*

WIL is a tool for cultivating talent since it equips students with the relevant knowledge and skills to become successful in the workplace. Employers and industry are required to follow the rules set forth by the Skills Development Act and other laws. One of these requirements is the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with stakeholders. The signed MOU/MOA outlines what is expected of each party outlining plans for a common line of action that could facilitate a successful and enduring partnership. This partnership would then allow the parties to mutually establish and align their goals.

- *Resources*

It is well-recognised that universities serve as catalysts for societal advancements. The relationship between shareholders is necessary for the efficient use of universities' expertise and resources. The availability of valid resources allocated to promote and strengthen students' development throughout the theoretical knowledge component is vital so that this theory and knowledge can be applied in the WIL placement to ensure success for the students.

- *Student support officer*

HEI student support officers are the first point of contact for students assisting with all aspects of administrative support. In this case, the student support officer should be conversant with the WIL placement model and be equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills to support students. This relates to how and who they collaborate with, recognition and incentives compared to other jobs and institutional support and monitoring of the placement through a tiered model of service delivery.

- *Involve stakeholders to address the evolving needs, supply on demand*

The involvement of the various stakeholders enables HEIs to achieve the goal of WIL placement. Clear expectations should be set from the WIL programme's inception in order to ensure the smooth running and its effectiveness. The roles of industry and HEIs in the WIL placement process need to be aligned to ensure that the needs are met and there is supply on demand.

- *Arrange student placement in industry*

Working with industry, HEIs with the student support officers need to collaborate with industry, form partnerships and sign an MOU. This will ensure that each student has an industry placement. HEIs should be aware of the requirements of the various industries and organisations and ensure that there are WIL placements for all students enrolled for them to fulfil their requirements for qualification.

- *Allocate students to employers*

It is important that HEIs allocate students to the most appropriate employers in industry. This would relate to appropriate placement and meeting industry expectations through best-aligned WIL placement settings.

- *Designate HEI student supervisor for WIL*

During WIL placement in industry, each student is assigned a supervisor or mentor from the HEI who supports and assists in defining and achieving goals. while they were in the workplace. In instructing and coordinating students, the supervisors' responsibility is to make sure that they carry out their responsibilities effectively and efficiently.

- *Student support and guidance to the completion of WIL module*

Prior to WIL placement, an appointment should be scheduled with the student and the potential employer. To prepare for the interview, the supervisor supports and mentors the student and supports him/her through the process. Additionally, during this initial stage, the supervisor will support the student with any paperwork that needs to be completed prior to placement. During placement, the supervisor continues to offer support and guidance, collaborating with the industry employer to monitor the student's performance. A WIL portfolio as evidence of work, needs to be completed and handed in for assessment. as proof of work during placement.

5.5.3   Student

- *Theoretical and basic practical knowledge at HEI*

Students registering for certain programmes have academic theoretical modules presented by the HEIs and a WIL placement which must be completed to successfully attain their qualification. These programmes are broadly defined as on-campus and workplace educational activities and experiences that amalgamate theory with practice in theoretical learning programmes.

- *Practical knowledge, skill and experience at workplace*

WIL placements in industry aid in the development of students. WIL placements encourage students to consider their own learning and their understanding putting theory learned at the HEI and putting it into practice in a variety of situations. Students develop their practical knowledge, competency, and skills through experiences at the workplace.

- *Abide by the rules, regulations and recommendations of WIL placement at HEIs and workplace*

There are rules and regulations that students need to follow with WIL placements. Students must be mindful that based on their experience with WIL placement, recommendations might assist the student in finding employment. Student placement offers students the opportunity to join a professional network and gives them access to a wider range of contacts. Student conduct, behaviour and work performance are

guided by rules and regulations which relate to organisational culture, processes and procedures.

- *Complete WIL component, hand in all required evidence accordingly*

The WIL concept encompasses the integration of academic and workplace learning including educational activities and academic learning implemented in the workplace., Students are assigned relevant tasks, are closely monitored and supported in achieving workplace knowledge, skills and behaviours. Every service action performed by students ought to be linked to academic learning and WIL practical knowledge through reflection. Students complete a WIL portfolio which is evidence of what has been achieved during the WIL placement. This is assessed to enable the student to achieve the qualification.

5.5.4   Industry

- *Allocate designated placement supervisor for student support throughout the WIL process*

Designated placement supervisors should support students throughout their WIL placement. In an effective working environment, industry supervisors are portrayed as good examples for students.

- *Share knowledge and skills with student, in return for tax incentives*

WIL placement in the industry requires professionals, guided by industry supervisors to assist students to gain real-world work experience. They provide a clear image of industry expectations, describe the profession, workplace culture and bridge the skills gap between theory and practice. Governments offer a Tax Incentive Rewarding System available to those industries, smaller firms and sole traders who offer work-based learning.

- *Follows basic employment act - fair treatment and support*

All businesses should abide by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, a framework of legislation that regulates and governs the working conditions for everyone who is employed. The Act was created with the intention of upholding fair labour laws and

practices. The Act supports peace through procedures for dispute prevention and settlement.

- *Accept students to train, may lead to a potential employee*

All students should be given the opportunity to engage in WIL placement. New students bring fresh, creative ideas to the company that could be used to improve performance, thus the organisation gains from workplace learning. Successful WIL placements could open up opportunities for future employment.

5.6   RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE STUDY FINDINGS

Taking into consideration the major findings of this study, this research offers the following recommendations, which could assist university leaders and educational officials in understanding the value of collaborative, networking continuous development activities in boosting student support and bringing about significant organisational changes. Additionally, all stakeholders are responsible and essential in contributing to filling skills shortages, promoting innovation and growth in organizations, and fostering economic expansion.

WIL was historically associated with the TVET sector, therefore HEIs encountered challenges as they expanded and developed this relatively new trend in student support. Theory-based focused learning, a lack of resources and relevance to industry needs were just a few of the issues that HEIs face. The findings of this study indicate that various elements should be adopted in order to streamline student support throughout WIL at HEIs.

5.6.1   Six-Phase Student Support Model

As a result, it is critical that all stakeholders be aware of the roles that they play in WIL placement involvement, as communication and collaboration ensure its success. There is a process that employers need to accommodate, attending meetings with HEI, approval of the facilities and sites, checks of the placement supervisors' qualification and experience etc which thereafter the HEI update their WIL database with approved placement employers in the industry. To facilitate the process and

ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the process of WIL placement, the following Six-Phase Student Support Model is proposed, as presented in Figure 5.2.
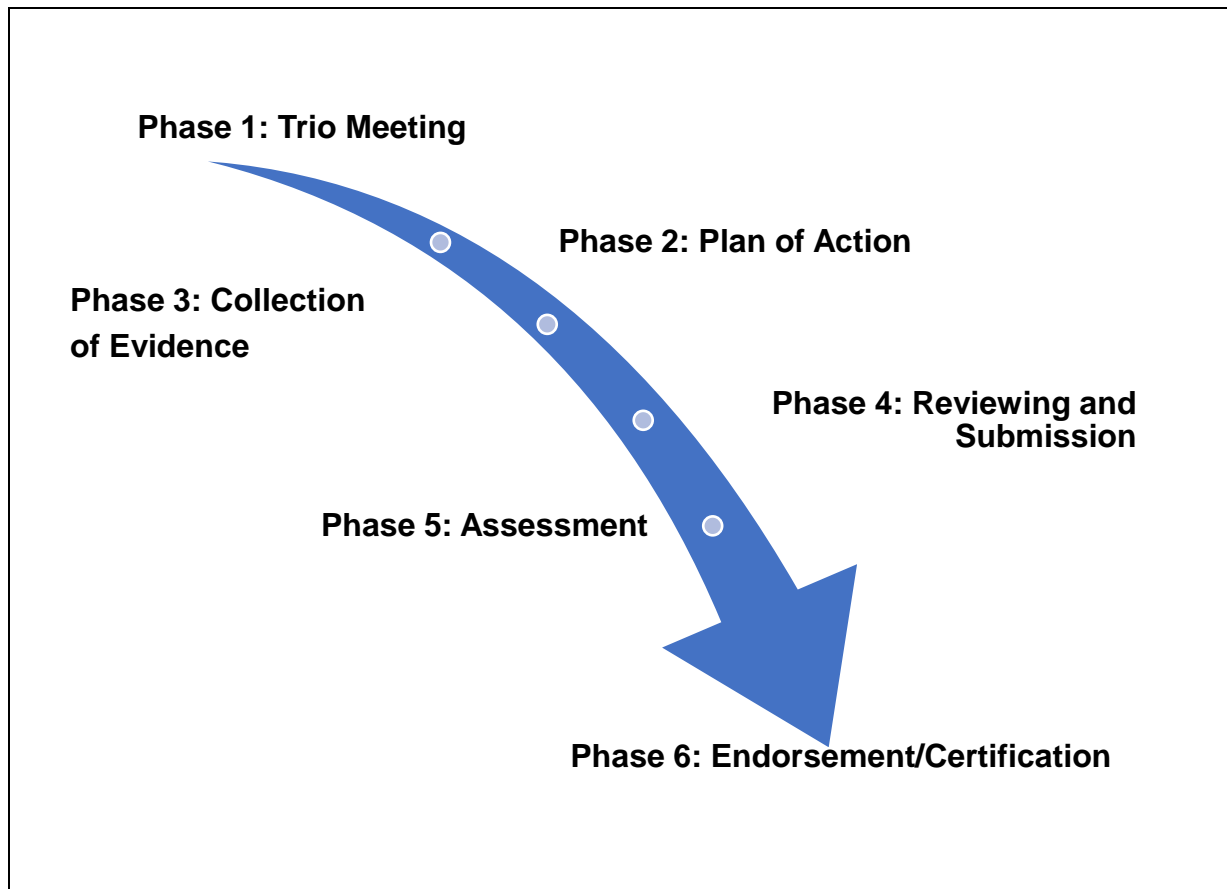
Figure 5.2: Six-Phase Student Support Model

Phase 1: Trio Meeting

The result of this research advocates that when a WIL placement is proposed either by the HEI or student, the HEI ought to assume responsibility for contacting the employer, forging a working partnership and site approval for the placement. Meetings between the HEI student support staff/ supervisor, workplace supervisor and students, which is critical especially for placement during this phase. Industry mentors should provide a detailed explanation of workplace protocol. It is expected that the employers, HEIs and students fully comprehend the student support process, risk assessment and compliance as well as the WIL placement process as well as their respective roles and responsibilities at each stage in collaboration with the academic term.

Therefore, it is recommended that:

- Students should be offered a WIL readiness workshop as part of pre-preparation for this module. Pre-placement interviews, prepared by the HEI would enhance

self-efficiency in preparation for the type of questions to be expected in formal interviews which offer students the opportunity to formulate correct answers and inform them regarding the company

- Adequate prior-placement meetings, which are scheduled with the students, employer/workplace supervisors and HEI, support and prepare students with sufficient information and guidance on the expectations of WIL placement. Students expect student support to be one of the services provided by HEIs throughout the WIL placement process as it contributes to developing professional skills and identity in the application of theoretical knowledge in the workplace, therefore gaining practical exposure and building networks, contacts and relationships with people having diverse roles is vital.

Phase 2: Plan of Action

The analysis of the data suggested that it is imperative to address student support when organising and mapping each student's work placement to meet industry requirements and ideally the student ratio per workplace supervisor should not be more than four(4). Furthermore, the log sheet or portfolio, the assessment expectations of each area against the discipline standards, which should display transparency, reliability, validity and independence should be explained and understood.

Consequently, the research suggested:

- The HEI supervisor needs to ensure that the student has prepared and guide to fulfil the prerequisites for their WIL placement within a specified timeframe. Therefore HEI must be more flexible in their approach, supporting, guiding and accommodating all stakeholders while addressing the expectations of the qualification. Hence, any concerns or different issues regarding student support services, such as student experience at HEI and the workplace should be raised and resolved as soon as possible.
- Industry experts in the workplace was said to play a significant part in supporting and guiding students who participate in WIL placement to meet the necessary criteria, discuss the barriers to learning and students' progression route. Therefore, professional information, policies and critiques enhance student learning

significantly and ensure that students were exposed to skills and resources. Their role includes the facilitation of the student's professional development, which includes the development of student knowledge, skill and comprehension of their responsibility

Phase 3: Collection of Evidence

This study revealed that there were several areas whereby student support was vital to reflect the significant progress towards the end result. Students are required to collect evidence that demonstrates their knowledge, skills and behavioural development within and beyond the workplace. There are various categories such as written or recorded observations and statements, reports, conversations about a project, presentations, or assessments and feedback all of which make up the WIL portfolio.

Hence, the study recommends:

- The main focus of WIL is the application of knowledge in a training-based environment therefore, the assessors' academic capacity (HEI) must be evident through collaborative work, problem-solving and sanctioning of professional conduct in a real-world situation. Assisting students to work on S.M.A.R.T targets, objectives and goals.

- Industry coordinated effort and opportunities are best when supported by organisations whereby tasks are simply conveyed. Students are encouraged to collect evidence of achievements in the form of witness statements, visual recordings, documents and artefacts. Student support at the workplace includes discussion of their S.M.A.R.T. target, reviews and appraisals, target setting, assessing progress towards goals, technical skills and interpersonal skills. The workplace supervisor adds comments to the assessment plan and assessment process, giving input on student presentations in the workplace.

Phase 4: Reviewing and submission

The results of this study reflects, that in order to support the student, the training provider (HEI) and the workplace supervisor, had to first determine whether the student had complied with all the criteria and requirements before allowing the student

to submit their application for assessment. The opportunity allowed for corrections, revision and improvement of certain areas which had not achieved the expected standard. Furthermore, it confirmed the notion that reviewing enabled students to deliberate on their recent and present experiences, and the program requirements, explore options and techniques and gain a deeper understanding.

The researcher recommends that:

- The commitment and support of the workplace supervisor is beneficial for staff, students and institutions as this may assist with workplace observation or the assessment procedure. The use of evaluation methods, creating assessments showing performance-based mirroring WIL which were generally compromised in traditional universities, discouraging innovative approaches to verifying students' performance.

- The training provider (HEI) and workplace supervisor review and give placement feedback on students' progress as proven by evidence that the student uploads onto the portfolio, as well as on-the-job hours, during final reviews, which should occur once a year or every term, depending on the area subject/discipline of the programme.

Phase 5: Assessment

The study also indicated supporting students in the understanding of assessment protocols for WIL placement which required redefining to deal with assessment planning, organisation and approval, regardless of whether at campus or workplace, which must be meticulously aligned to the professional role including knowledge, skills and behaviours as well as fit for purpose. Protection and student rights need to be reviewed as students become vulnerable to the point of being deprived of national human rights as they enter and work with the harsh realities of the workplace

As a result, the research suggested that:

- Student support is useful particularly to prepare students for the final assessment, which looks at various assessment methods, including written tests, a work placement portfolio, practical assessments, an interview or conducted on the live assessment day, amongst others. It examines the student's ability to demonstrate

the knowledge, skills and behaviours which is tested through memory, work and various activities.

- Students at times left alone to work in the workplace is one of the ideal learning results of a WIL placement is the capacity to work with professional groups, bringing about experiential and transformative learning.

Phase 6: Endorsement/Certification

The research suggests awarding certificates of achievement and completion to students who have fulfilled the evaluation and assessment. It is increasingly apparent that the primary goal of education is to meet the demands of the labour market.

Thus, the following recommendations are made:

- The training provider (HEI) and workplace supervisor review and give post-placement feedback on students' results. To create a workforce that is manageable, dynamic and accessible to all, through a relevant education system that is adaptable and flexible to the changing demands of the industry.

- Rigorous, robust and independent final assessment is essential to ensure employers that students are competent to perform the duties and tasks required. Therefore, student support during assessment needs to be a pertinent issue in the WIL placement process. Various stakeholders may add to the complexity of WIL assessment which may influence student results.

5.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research followed a qualitative approach, which did not allow for the generalisation of the findings. In Breakwell's (2004) findings, the world could not be understood without the interpretive work of the researcher, who tries to make sense of what the participants are saying. Although it provided the necessary information about student support services provided to students by selected HEIs, the expectations, including its downfalls. Moreover, contributing limitations were time and resources (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

5.7.1   Limitations

Firstly, the researcher acknowledged that the sample drawn was from one province and was therefore limited but that it still remained useful as valuable information was derived which could improve the understanding of student support throughout WIL process. Subjectivity and potential bias in the participant data were possible limitations of the study. Another limitation of this study was accessibility; the Covid-19 global epidemic made some individuals inaccessible at the time of data collection. The time available for conducting research was shortened and participants returned home and consequently were not available. Teams meetings were attempted, but due to the lack of internet connectivity and coverage, a decision was made to develop an open-ended questionnaire to send electronically to participants. The link was sent to the participants' mobile phones, and once completed, it was automatically returned to the researchers' email. In addition, resources such as money and participants were also very limited.

5.7.2   Delimitations

The delimitations of this study were identifying student support services within the concept of WIL and identifying and determining different challenges faced in the WIL placement process. The current Government policy concerning this matter is minimal and vague. The other delimitation assisted in identifying different stakeholders affected by student support and the implementation of the WIL model and placement process. Although interviewees mentioned universities campuses outside of Gauteng province, those campuses were not included in the study. The literature study revealed that there is a paucity of studies on student support services provided by South African HEIs during WIL placement, regardless of the area of discipline, which could be seen as a delimitation.

5.8   SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This research focused mainly on students' own perceptions of student support services throughout WIL placement process at universities. As previously discussed, this was a limitation, which could be addressed in future research by taking a holistic

view of all the stakeholders. Aside from teaching and research, student support services are currently not a key performance indicator for staff selection and promotion at South African universities.

Consequently, for a better understanding of student support and the WIL placement process, it was important to conduct further research on the following, as recommended:

- Firstly, adapt strategy and procedures, terminology, and communication methods which could make it easier for universities to support students in their WIL placement process.
- Secondly, proving non-exclusive access to the world of work may prove challenging with the customary ways to deal with teaching, learning and assessment, therefore research on sourcing WIL opportunities and research, creating and assessing educational programmes for WIL and supporting a body of students who were geologically scattered in South Africa could be conducted.
- The social responsibility of education could be successfully shared by many stakeholders, leading to knowledge creation and addressing developmental issues. This is something that could be investigated and researched.
- Research is necessary on the Code of Conduct, safeguarding the rights of the student in the workplace as well as the obligation of the stakeholders, especially applied when students were assigned to placement.
- Research could be conducted using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or the mixed methods approach to gather a holistic view of student support services provided by South African universities throughout the WIL placement process.
- Further research should be conducted on stakeholders' challenges concerning their expectations in their role and responsibility of taking in and training students while contributing to the country's economy.
- Lastly, research could focus on an employability plan which has become a conspicuous element for HEIs, authorising an educational programme that could become a platform for employability opportunities for the students.

5.9   CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study's goals, research questions and significance were all addressed in the conclusion, which represents an addition to knowledge. Hereby, this study sought to understand how student support and WIL placement could better meet professional and social needs in the 21st century, such as assisting students in building critical thinking skills that could be used throughout their careers and fostering dynamics for equality and equity in the workplace. Although the efforts made by the government to assist students with access to the workplace to complete their WIL placement through various grant programmes, lack of financial support and resources hinder them. Additionally, according to the South African Higher Education Council (2001), one of the missions of higher education is to provide society with trained individuals to meet the demands of knowledge-based professions and to demonstrate the skills required to participate. The knowledge and abilities developed via active teaching and research must be used as inputs for enhancing the calibre and scope of universities' main functions. Despite the skills development training provided by some HEIs, student support services which promote the WIL module in their various disciplines, has been recognised as the weak link. The harsh reality is that HEIs essentially need to address the link between its primary client – the student, the secondary client – industry that absorbs these students and the tertiary client – the government. More importantly, more research might be able to help devise improved ideas, models and approaches for WIL placement and student support.

Students benefit from the support they receive from HEI student support staff during their work placement experiences which enhances their positive evaluation of their field and industry. Although improving employability is what drives students the most when they complete a WIL placement, industry analysts believe that the WIL programme could create graduates who are ready for the world of work. Participants wanted to see greater improvement in the level of student preparation. To identify areas of success and those that need improvement, HEI WIL coordinators should value feedback from both students and the industry. While it is acknowledged that changing the programme's design is expensive and time-consuming, the advantages would outweigh the expenses. The study's data findings revealed that ongoing communication and support between all parties is required, not just when students

171

were placed but constantly. They also suggested that industry and student organisations should work more closely together.

While specific recommendations of how to enhance the WIL and student support were made, it may be concluded that students continue to have difficulty in achieving designated WIL placement and adequate support during the process. It is the very same students that also significantly contribute to closing skills shortages, fostering innovation and corporate expansion, and promoting economic prosperity. This study provides evidence of participants' expectations for student support throughout the WIL placement, the services the HEI provides for student support and the types of student support required to ensure the success of the WIL placement process. Therefore, student support services requires consideration and should be addressed to tackle the expected support to students throughout the WIL process. We look forward to the dawn when all the student support throughout WIL processes function as they should.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethical Clearance

UNISA | university of south africa

UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2018/09/12

Dear Mrs Fernandes

Decision: Ethics Approval from
2018/09/12 to 2023/09/12

Ref: 2018/09/12/30806887/48/MC
Name: Mrs FAP Fernandes
Student: 30806887

Researcher(s): Mrs FAP Fernandes
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Title of research:

A framework for the management of Student-Placement Support within Work Integrated Learning (WIL) in Gauteng, South Africa

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Qualification: PhD in Educational Leadership and Management

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2018/09/12 to 2023/09/12.

*The **low risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2018/09/12 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

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200

2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.

3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.

4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.

6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.

7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2023/09/12**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number **2018/09/12/30806887/48/MC** *should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,

Dr M Claassens
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
mcdtc@netactive.co.za

Prof V McKay
EXECUTIVE DEAN
Mckayvi@unisa.ac.za

Appendix B: Letter of Consent to all Participants

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH   Date:

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Dr/Prof

Add:

Tel:

Request for permission to conduct research with ……………..

Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms/Dr/Prof,

I, Fatima Fernandes am doing research under the supervision of Prof Sello Mokoena, a Senior professor in the Department of Education, Leadership and Management, towards a PhD at the University of South Africa (UNISA). We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: Understanding Support Services provided to students throughout Work-Integrated Learning placement process: case study of selected Higher Education Institutions in South Africa

The aim of the study is to collect and contribute important information that could improve the management of student support throughout the WIL placement, as it is an imperative segment of WIL within the process by all stakeholders in South Africa. The study will entail semi-structured interview, face-to-face, telephonically interview or open-ended questionnaires as per your preference and convenience. The benefits of this study are collect and contribute important information that could improve the management of student support within student placement, at workplaces and Training Providers - the stakeholders.

There are not potential risks as the researcher will not request any of the companies Intellectual Property (IP) but only the interview own personal experiences. There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research. Feedback procedure will entail email with the transcribed interview for your approval.

Yours sincerely

_____ (insert signature of researcher)

_____ (insert name of the above signatory)

_____ (insert above signatory's position)

DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT   Date:

I, Fatima Fernandes am doing research under the supervision of Prof Sello Mokoena, a Senior professor in the Department of Education, Leadership and Management, towards a PhD at the University of South Africa (UNISA). We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: Understanding Support Services provided to students throughout Work-Integrated Learning placement process: case study of selected Higher Education Institutions in South Africa

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Effective employable students, requires more than utilisation of HEI expertise and resources. In this study, the researcher argued that student support was an essential section of WIL which had been neglected and disregarded by HEI in South Africa. Hence, *the purpose* of this study uncover the "lived experiences" of students who had completed a WIL placement process in various disciplines within South African HEI, in order to elicit student perceptions of placement expectations prior to, during and post the WIL placement experience.

Therefore, contributing to the aim of this study which was to determine their lived experiences to ensure a positive WIL outcome. This study set out to extrapolated the deepen understanding of the experiences of students who had completed WIL placement in various disciplines within South African HEI.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited because your wealth of experience and knowledge in the field of interest – student support throughout the WIL placement process.

You were referred to me by your manager/supervisor as the expert of knowledge in this field. Your identity will remain confidential and will at no time be revealed.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves focus groups /semi-structured interviews. Please afford me 20-35min. Venue will be confirmed once you sign the consent and agreed to the process.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AROUND THE INFORMATION REQUIRED:

There are four common functions of social support: Emotional; Tangible; Informational and Companionship support

1)***Emotional support*** is the offering of empathy, concern, affection, love, trust, acceptance, intimacy, encouragement, or caring (CV, interviews, esteem support or appraisal support). It is the warmth and nurturance provided by sources of social support. Providing emotional support can let the individual know that he or she is valued. It is also referred to as "esteem support" or "appraisal support."

2)***Tangible support*** is the provision of financial assistance, material goods, or services (equipment, uniform, class and boarding fees). Also called instrumental support, this form of social support encompasses the concrete, direct ways people assist others.

3)***Informational support*** is the provision of advice, guidance, suggestions, or useful information to someone (workplace situation expectation). This type of information has the potential to help others problem-solve.

4)***Companionship support*** is the type of support that gives someone a sense of social belonging (and is also called belonging). This can be seen as the presence of companions to engage in shared social activities. Part of a team, expectations from both student and supervisor.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Your name will not be recorded anywhere, and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give (this measure refers to anonymity). Your answers will be given a code number, or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings (this measure refers to confidentiality).

While every effort will be made by the researcher to ensure that you will not be connected to the information that you share during the focus group, I cannot guarantee that other participants in the focus group will treat information confidentially. I shall, however, encourage all participants to do so. For this reason I advise you not to disclose personally sensitive information in the focus group.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS / RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted or/ and f you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact my supervisor Prof S Mokoena, Department of Educational, Leadership and Management, CEDU at mokoesp@unisa.ac.za . The findings are accessible for 2023.

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Fatima Fernandes at fatima37990@gmail.com for further information and confirmation.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Regards.

_____

FATIMA FERNANDES

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY (Return slip)

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the qualitative research interviews

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

_____

Participant Name & Surname (please print)

_____   _____

Participant Signature   Date

_____

Researcher's Name & Surname (please print)

_____   _____

Researcher's signature   Date

FOCUS GROUP/OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRES CONSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I_____ grant consent that the information I share during the focus group/open-ended questionnaires may be used by Fatima Fernandes for research purposes. I am aware that the responses will be digitally recorded and grant consent/assent for these recordings, provided that my privacy will be protected.

I undertake not to divulge any information that is shared in the group discussions to any person outside the group in order to maintain confidentiality.

_____

Participant's Name (Please print)

_____   _____

Participant Signature   Date

_____

Researcher's Name: (Please print)

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   Date

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Main research question and sub-questions

What are student perceptions of support services provided by higher education institutions throughout the WIL placement process?

The following sub-question that logically flow from the main research questions are:

1 What is the understanding of the concept "student support" throughout WIL?

2 What type of student support services are provided by HEIs to students prior to, during and post the WIL placement process?

3 What are the roles of the various stakeholders in implementation of support during WIL placement?

4 What are the students lived experiences and challenges of these student support services?

5 What strategies can be recommended to improve the existing student support services provided to HE students throughout the WIL placement process?

Semi-interview questions:

1. Please indicate gender
2. Please indicate race
3. In which area of specialisation was your qualification?
4. In which HEI did you complete your qualification?
5. What is your understanding of "student support"?
6. What do understand from "Work integrated Learning" ?
7. Who organises the MOA/MOU between stakeholders?
8. Who supports the students between provider and workplace?
9. What has your experience been with the new students joining your team?
10. Are you content with the level of skills that the student had when started WIL?
11. Has the student shown interest to improve their skills when entering in to WIL?

12. In your working environment, would you say that student that partake in WIL placement are different to the student that comes directly once completed the qualification?

13. Do you think there is a difference between students that receive support from other stakeholders comparing to student that have not received any assistance at all?

14. Are student given the various form support? EG: Emotional– preparing their CV and Interviews

15. Who gives them the financial support?

16. Is there someone at the workplace that inducts the students beforehand or do they arrive and takes if from there?

17. Are student taught to work in groups or teams?

18. What is workplace policy? Is it discussed with the student?

19. What would you say stood out for you about these students?

20. Do you the student's professional competencies have improved or stayed the same after receiving the necessary support?

21. Do students have to be re-trained by the company?

22. Is there in-house training is given to students as add on?

23. Do the company's request the students back to work or was it just for the hours?

24. How can the student be better prepared for their placement in WIL?

25. What challenges are experienced by stakeholders with the implementation of WIL?

26. What challenges has been experiences with the implementation of student support during student placement?

27. Does the company conclude some type of Assessment?

28. What advice would you give HEI to improve student service support before sending students out into the workplace?

29. Who offers supports the to the students between HEI and workplace?

30. As a student, what is your view on " placement is Cheap labour"

31. What was the relationship between HEI and Employers?

32. Did companies absorb students into the workplace based on skill

33. What advice would you give to different stakeholders to improve student support during student placement in the workplace?

Focus group and open-ended questionnaires questions:

1. Please indicate gender
2. Please indicate race
3. In which area of specialisation was your qualification?
4. In which University did you complete your qualification?
5. What is your understanding of "student support"?
6. What do understand from "Work integrated learning" ?
7. What support did you receive from the university when you arrived as a new student?
8. What kind or type of student support service did you receive from the university in preparation before entering the WIL placement?
9. Were you satisfied with the preparation and student support service you received from the University before WIL placement? What else could have been done?
10. Who assisted you prepare your CV?
11. Were you guided through the Interview process?
12. Who organised the "WIL placement" job for you?
13. Did you receive financial support? If so from whom?
14. Was there a staff member or workplace supervisor from the company that provided YOU induction before you started working?
15. Were you encouraged to work in groups or teams in the company?
16. Were you satisfied with YOUR own skills level, going into the workplace, compared to when you started your course? Explain why
17. What has your experience been as new students joining the team at workplace?
18. In your working placement environment, would you say that YOUR skills is different to the student that comes directly from university once completed the qualification? What is the difference?
19. Have you shown interest in improving YOUR skills when entering in to WIL placement? Which skills?
20. Were YOU appointed a mentor/supervisor during your placement? If so, what support where you provided?

21. Did you contact the university for student support services anytime during your placement? If so, for what reason?

22. Did you get provided any workplace policy?

23. How would you describe yourself as a student in WIL placement?

24. Is there a difference between students that receive student support service from various stakeholders, comparing to student that have not received any assistance at all? Why?

25. Has YOUR professional competencies improved or stayed the same after receiving the necessary student support? If so what?

26. Did the company have to re-train YOU or was your skills taught at university sufficient on entry level?

27. Was there in-house training provided to you as add on skill? What was it?

28. Were you requested to go back to the company as an employee after the placement training, or did you just complete your hours at the company?

29. How can the student be better prepared for their placement in WIL?

30. Did the company conclude Assessment? If so what?

31. Did the HEI offer YOU student support services during the period of placement in the workplace? What support?

32. Did the HEI have a POST placement meeting with you? Is so, what was discussed?

33. In your opinion, do you think WIL placement was worth the time spent at the company? Why?

34. What advice would you give University to improve student service support before sending students out into the workplace?

35. What was the best student support services you received, discuss?

Appendix D: Language Editing

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To whom it may concern

This letter serves to confirm that editing and proofreading was done for:

FATIMA ARAUJO PEREIRA FERNANDES

Doctor of Philosophy of Education

Education Management

University of South Africa

UNDERSTANDING SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED TO STUDENTS THROUGHOUT WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING PLACEMENT PROCESS: CASE STUDY OF SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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May 2023

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UNDERSTANDING SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED TO STUDENTS THROUGHOUT WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING PLACEMENT PROCESS: CASE STUDY OF SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

By Fatima A.P Fernandes