Industry Perception on the Implementation of Work-Based Learning (WBL) in Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan

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ABSTRACT

Work-Based Learning (WBL) is a type of learning that integrates theoretical and practical learning in the context of real-life situations. In September 2013, Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan became one of Malaysia's first public higher learning institutions to use the Work-Based Learning technique in both teaching and learning in the tourism and hospitality management discipline at the undergraduate level. The objective of this study is to evaluate the feedback and perception of industry on the implementation of WBL. This study uses a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data collection was based on the students' performance appraisal form, semi-structured interviews during lecturer visits and meetings between polytechnic management and the companies involved. The main informants are companies who have gone through the WBL procedure. The data was analysed by employing a matrix of categories and categorising the evidence. There are five indicators for this study, which are the competencies of students, student discipline, competencies of industrial supervisors, communication between institution and industry, and the effectiveness of the WBL as a teaching and learning approach. According to the findings, the Work-based Learning technique is incredibly efficient in supporting students in enhancing their skills and knowledge while also raising their chances of finding work. However, the study identifies a number of concerns and obstacles that must be addressed, including information coordination, continuous cooperation, and the lack of teaching and learning competency among industrial supervisors. The study shows that supervisors should be academically prepared and have a thorough awareness of their role in implementing WBL. Besides, in future, it will be important for PIS to conduct a study to evaluate the feedback from industry at the end of the WBL session. This is to enable corrective action to be taken as soon as possible for improvement for the next WBL session.

Keywords: Work-based learning, industry perception, performance appraisal

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Work-based learning

Work-based learning (WBL) is a type of education that involves collaboration between a higher education institution and industry in the form of on-the-job training (Boud & Solomon, 2001). The principle of WBL is based on the idea that to success in learning, students need to be in a real workplace environment (Bahl & Dietzen, 2019). The conventional teaching and learning strategy requires institutions to commit to exposing students to three key areas: information, practical skills, and affective values, all of which are

essential in a given profession and are incorporated into the curriculum. Work-based learning (WBL) occurs in the industry with real working environment along with authentic work ethics and interactions among team members were the basis of knowledge transfer in vocational education and training. Work-based learning is a central tenet of VET, because it emphasises learning through practice in the workplace (Atkinson, 2016).

WBL has benefited not only the institution and industry, but it has also had a good impact on the teaching and learning culture (T&L). Work-based learning is included in the curriculum, and it might entail intentional engagement with those experiences for the goal of learning, as well as formal acknowledgement of the competences gained via those experiences (Atkinson, 2016). WBL may improve an organization's efficiency and inventiveness, as well as broaden career opportunities and propel students into grownup maturity, through developing social interactions in the workplace (Major, 2016). Thus, the internal organization, job structure, employee interaction and wage structures can all work together to promote learning-rich work, and increase productivity and innovation. WBL combines the strengths of both the industrial and educational sectors. When educators successfully and genuinely assess student learning from real-life scenarios, the benefits escalate to the production of value-adding and character-building of future-fit graduates, ready for the job (Govender & Wait, 2017).

1.2 Issues in WBL

There have been a number of challenges that have cropped up throughout the implementation of WBL. WBL is a component of general education programmes and it can be an attractive option for student and learning institution. WBL allow student to learn about work at a real working place (Musset & Mytna Kurekova, 2018). However, research found that there are some issues about the implementation and quality matters of WBL. Some work experience programmes failed to improve young people's prospects. There are concerns that WBL has been overlooked as a form of learning and that students do not engage enough in workplaces (Musset, 2019). According to Cunningham, Dawes and Bennett (2016), work based learning is by design and necessity concerned with knowledge which is often unsystematic, socially constructed and is action focused by the worker in order to achieve specific outcomes of significance to others.

Therefore, there are numerous techniques to enhance the amount of learning-rich labour in the workplace. The interaction and the quality of relationship between institution and industry are essential in building an effective WBL programme. It can be undertaken by teachers or lecturers with proper working conditions and industrial agreements, particularly when they are responsible for visiting and supervising students on work placements (Ferrandez, Kekale & Devins, 2016). Hence, the challenge for both employers and training providers is to ensure that communication lines remain open throughout the training or work-integrated learning experience, and that documentation does not become stagnant and is kept up to date (Atkinson, 2016).

In September 2013, the Department of Polytechnic Education (DPE) marked another step forward in TVET excellence by introducing a homegrown

Bachelors of Science (Hons) Tourism and Hospitality Management (BTH) programme at Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan (PIS). Until semester 6, students will follow a traditional teaching and learning (T&L) procedure on campus. During semesters 7 and 8, students will be assigned to certain companies to participate in a WBL session. The objective of this WBL is to give students exposure to the real job and give experiences to develop their problem-solving, critical-thinking and communication skills related to their in -class learning along with the future workplace challenges that they will be facing. While the main goal of WBL is to educate students, the benefits for participating companies are significant, especially from a strategic perspective (Pereira & Vijayaratnam, 2020). Companies participating in WBL have found new interests and opportunities for the professional development of all employees and have benefited from the creative and energetic spirit that students bring to the workplace (Anjum, 2020).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assess the feedback and perceptions towards WBL implementation in Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan (PIS) based on the industries' viewpoints and experiences. This study also attempted to suggest potential enhancements that may be applied in the future to ensure effective WBL.

2.0 Literature Review

WBL has grown into a body of knowledge, with a growing corpus of literature exploring into it from a variety of angles. The definition of WBL has, understandably, been a cause of debate. WBL means instructional programs that deliberately use the workplace as a site for student learning (Bragg, Hamm & Trinkle, 1995). WBL programs are formal, structured and strategically organized by instructional staff, employers, and sometimes other groups to link learning in the workplace.

2.1 Work-Based Learning

Work-Based Learning is an educational strategy that enable students to connect directly with work in the workplace. It will give them a real-life work experiences in which they can apply academic and technical abilities and develop their employability. It is a set of educational courses that combine the curriculum of a school or university with the workplace to develop a new learning paradigm. The process of integrating theory and practice, and tacit knowledge is the perception of work-based learning (Siregar, 2018).

The differentiation of meaning between work-based learning and workplace learning were first being introduced by Boud and Solomon (2001). The grey area between work-based learning and workplace learning is acknowledged by Workman (2011). It defines the former, emphasising the types of WBL that meet the requirements of vocational programmes and place a strong emphasis on on-the-job learning. Training programme should focus on the skill sets and competencies required by employers and fulfil the national standard. The training may take several forms, but it is critical to measure the learning that occurs.

Work-based learning is crucial in an organization. Therefore, according to Cunningham, Dawes & Bennet (2016), work based learning is the central and most important aspect of learning to impact on performance at work.

Work-based learning is a subset of experience-based learning (Nixon, 2008). However, within a rather narrow vocational education training, work-based learning refers to learning that takes place through the execution of actual work and the production of actual goods and services, regardless of whether the work is paid or not (Muhlemann, 2016).

Therefore, WBL has the potential to create graduates with the skills needed to meet the needs of the industry and workforce. Research on career development shows that work experience and exposure can help young people refine and clarify their career goals (Anjum, 2020).

2.2 Roles of Industry in WBL

WBL is another teaching method that supports the undergraduates and it demands that the students should be able to balance the requirements of being students and trainees while continuing to fulfil the roles at workplace (Pereira & Vijayaratnam, 2020). The WBL suggests all sorts of discoveries that occur in the real workplace. Apprenticeships (formal and casual), entry-level positions / internships, and hands-on preparation are the most popular forms of work-based learning (Miller, 2019).

WBL requires close collaborations between the TVET institutions, the industry and the curriculum planners. Work-based learning, as described by Atkinson (2016), is learning that takes place in a work context and is integral to vocational education and training. There are similarities and variations between the two concept in the two education sectors, but regardless of the sector, integrating the world of work into education and training is growing increasingly popular (Stainsby & Bannigan, 2012).

WBL programmes typically feature six characteristics, according to Boud and Solomon (2001): a partnership between an external organisation and the learning institution; learners who are employed by an external organisation; and a learning programme generated from the demands of businesses and their employees; learners who are engaged in a process of recognising their present knowledge, abilities, and competencies; learning that is incorporated into job duties; and learning that is assessed by the industry and institution. In addition, both parties must be committed to contribute throughout the collaboration (Mikkonen et.al, 2017). According to the OECD (2020), WBL is intended to pique the attention of young people and maintain and encourage continued participation in the labour market. Inappropriate placements may actually obstruct this purpose. Quality assurance techniques must be linked to placement.

Developing partnerships between institutions and industry is seen as an important factor in identifying learning needs, improving educational relevance and facilitating access to education and learning (Ferrandez, Kekale & Devins, 2016). In this context, the curriculum includes employers and work facilities and needs to respond quickly to the industry changing needs. Futhermore, organisations with experience in mentoring initiatives are ready to adapt quickly to the needs of WBL and provide efficient support throughout the programme (Muhlemann, 2016). Therefore, it is critical to arrange guest lectures, maintain good ties with lecturers and internship coordinators, and manage mutual expectations (Kleefstra, Altan & Stoffers, 2019).

3.0 Methodology

This study used a mix method of qualitative and quantitative approach. There are five indicators for this study which are the competencies of students, students' discipline, competencies of industrial supervisors, communication between institution and industry, and effectiveness of the WBL as a method of teaching and learning. The feedback was collected through meetings that were held every early of the semester and from the industrial supervisors' report. Generally, the meeting agenda consisted of three main components: companies' feedback about the implementation of WBL from the previous semester, WBL Coordinator presentation about the syllabus or course content and evaluation and ended with discussion or question and answer. Apart from that, during WBL observation by WBL lecturers at least three times per semester, a structured interview was used as the instrument. Structured interviews were used to get thorough information on a phenomena (Chua, 2012; Creswell, 2012; Sekaran, 2000). An interview session with the person in charge will be held during observation by the WBL lectures. The interview will focus on the students' performance, problems and welfare. Written feedback was collected using the industrial supervisors' report and performance appraisal form.

In the selection of the respondents, all 17 companies that were involved in WBL throughout the year of 2014 to 2018 were selected. Interviews were employed by the researchers to delve deeper into the effectiveness of WBL implementation. The technique enables researchers to ask straight questions while allowing participants to react to the questions in an open and honest manner. At the beginning of the interview, an open question was used to acquire in-depth information on the study (Norazilawati, Noraini, Nik Azman & Rosnidar (2013).

The data was analysed using a matrix of categories and placing the evidence within set categories. Each of the indicators produced from the interviews and survey research is then grouped based on the themes that emerged from the data, with the themes serving as the foundation for industry perspective. The purpose of respondent validation is to see how well the researcher portrays the respondents' point of view. Given the large number of interviews done as part of this study, it's critical to guarantee that all of the data has been validated and can be trusted. After the respondents have been interviewed, the discussion that reflects the substance of the talks is turned into a word-processed transcript and provided back to the respondents for validation. Furthermore, the minutes of the meeting were distributed to all companies involved in WBL within seven days after the meeting to ensure the prompt action taken by all parties.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Respondents / Participants

The participants of this study comprised of the companies that involved in WBL in PIS for the year of 2014 – 2018 (Table 1). There are 17 companies which are hotels, travel agencies and theme parks in Johor Bahru and Kuala Lumpur. As such, it is essential to learn about their feedback, thoughts, and perspectives on the WBL programme that had been implemented in their firm or companies. Feedback are collected through meetings, interview during

WBL visit /observation (at least three times every semester) and industrial supervisor's report and students' performance appraisal.

Table 1: Background of participants

No	Nature of business	Total
1	Hotel	5
2	Travel Agency	8
3	Theme Park	4
	Total	17

Table 1 above detailing about the background of participants involved in the study with 5 hotels, 8 travel agency and 4 theme park around Johor Bahru and Kuala Lumpur participated in the survey.

There are five session of meetings throughout this period of time which are conducted every early of semester 7 which started in September. The agenda of the meeting between PIS and all companies involved are as below:

Table 2: Meeting agenda

No	Meeting agenda
1	Welcoming speech by PIS Director
2	Companies feedback on the implementation of WBL from previous semester/session
3	Presentation by PIS WBL Coordinator (WBL syllabus and evaluation)
4	Discussion / question and answer session
5	Closing

Table 2 indicated the meeting agendas starting with welcoming speech, getting companies feedback on the implementation of WBL, presentation from WBL Coordinator on the syllabus and method of evaluation towards the students, followed by discussion session and the closing where the meeting chairmain will conclude all the feedbacks get from the industries.

Figure 1: Meeting between PIS and companies involved in WBL

4.2 Competencies of Students

The participants stated the following about the quality and competencies of WBL students:

Table 3: Competencies of Students

No	Companies feedback
1	88.2% or 15 companies agree that students are confident to communicate and have a good literacy in English.
2	100% of the companies recommend that students have a strong interest in the subject and the capacity to learn quickly.
3	100% of the companies satisfied with students performances even though some of them show discipline issues.
4	100% of the companies suggest that students must be flexible and not too selective in studying and they need to have willingness to learn something new.
5	94% of the companies said that students show good ability in preparing report.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the feedback and perceptions of WBL implementation in Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan (PIS) based on the perspectives and experiences of the industry. Therefore, from Table 1 it shows that 88.2% of the companies agreed that the students can converse well in English and able to communicate with confidence. All of the company suggest that students should have interest in doing their task and able to learn quickly, the students must also be flexible and not too selective in studying and they need to have willingness to learn something new. 100% of the companies also satisfied with students performances even though some of them show discipline issues. Lastly, 94% of the companies said that students show good ability in preparing report.

4.3 Students Discipline

Table 4: Students discipline

No	Companies feedback
1.	11.7% companies mention about students have attendance problem.
2.	5.8% companies report about students problem in terms of medical certificate fraud.
3.	More than 90% companies agree that students are punctual and show good discipline.
4.	100% of the companies suggest that students must be flexible and not too selective in studying and they need to have willingness to learn something new.
5.	94% of the companies said that students submitted their log book or report on time.

In Table 4, the companies feedback were on the students discipline. 11.7% companies mention about students have attendance problem, the particular student has been identified by the institution and further action has been taken. 5.8% companies report about students problem in terms of medical certificate fraud, this is a very serious matter and the student involved has been given advice and appropriate action has been taken. More than 90% companies agree that students are punctual and show good discipline. 100% of the companies suggest that students must be flexible and not too selective in studying and they need to have willingness to learn something new. 94% of the companies said that students submitted their log book or report on time.

4.4 Competencies of industrial supervisors

The responses to the questions about industrial supervisors' competencies for WBL teaching and learning are shown in the tables below. The issue at hand involved the use of WBL teaching and learning as well as the evaluation of industrial supervisors' competencies.

Table 5: Competencies of Industrial Supervisors

No	Companies feedback
1.	More than 60% companies agree that industrial supervisors are not able to give 100% focus on teaching students because of time constraint (especially in hotel operation which are busy all the time).
2.	70.5% companies mention that their supervisors didn't know the techniques of teaching.
3.	More than 60% companies agree that they are not able to fully follow the syllabus or course content because of time constraint and the nature of the business (they need more manpower in operation).
4.	100% of the companies agree that they cannot fulfil the requirement mention in the WBL guidelines about supervisors education background but all Human Resource Manager or Training Manager at least are first degree holders.
5.	100% companies agree that PIS has provided enough information about course content and students' assessment.

Table 5 is about competencies of industrial supervisors. Not all the companies were agreeing on these the three statements mentioned about the supervisor's ability in guiding the students, this is because the background of majority of the supervisors working in the industry were not up to degree level thus it will make it extra difficult for them to guide the students based on the syllabus provided. The nature of the industry at doing thir business also affecting how they treat our students. All of the companies agree that they cannot fulfil on the supervisor education background and they also agree that PIS has provided enough information about course content and students' assessment.

4.5 Communication between Institution and Industry

Table 6: Communication between institution and industry

No	Companies feedback
1.	100% companies agree that PIS has provided enough briefings on the WBL initiative in workshops and meetings, according to the companies.
2.	100% companies agree that PIS has provided enough information about course content and students' assessment.
3.	Only 5.8% companies mention about miscommunication between companies and PIS regarding students' project 2 collection data process.
4.	100% of the companies agree that they can contact WBL coordinator and supervisors easily.
5.	100% companies said that getting a briefing on how to teach from the WBL coordinator was crucial.
6.	Only 5.8% companies disagree with the WBL observation / visit three times per semester as this can interrupt the companies operation.
7.	100% companies revealed that they understand the information in the WBL Handbook.

In Table 6, the feedback were on the communication between institution and industry. Only slight miscommunication occur between the institution and the industries where the 5.8% taken place regarding students' project 2 collection data process. About 5.8% of the companies were isagree with the WBL observation / visit three times per semester as this can interrupt the companies operation. PIS has look further into this matter and will take into consideration about industrial visit of at least one time for each semester as per physical meeting and the other two visit can be done via online or phone call. All of the companies were agreeing on of all of the other five statements about the sufficient information provided by PIS, delivery of informations, easily contactable, the importance of briefing from WBL coordinator on WBL implementation in the industry and also on the ability to understand the content of WBL Handbook.

4.6 Effectiveness of the WBL as teaching and learning approach

Table 7: Effectiveness of the WBL as Teaching and Learning Approach

No	Companies feedback
1.	100% companies agree WBL enhance students' competencies.
2.	100% companies agree that one year attachment is better than 6 months as student can learn more.
3.	100% companies agree that WBL should be continue in future and to all higher learning institutions.

4.	100% of the companies agree that students supposed to focus on one speciality rather than jump from one department to another department throughout the WBL.

In Table 7, the companies feedback were on the effectiveness of the WBL as teaching and learning approach. All the companies participating in the survey provide 100% positive feedbacks on all the four statements given. The industry realize on the importance of WBL towards student's competencies, the length or duration of the attachment were giving more benefit towards the industry and also the students, the companies also agree that students should be specialized in specific field rather than jumping from oe another and lastly all of the companies agree that WBL should be continue in future and to all higher learning institutions.

5.0 Conclusion

Work-Based Learning (WBL) complements rather than replaces traditional classroom learning and experience-based teaching approaches, bridging the gap between the workplace and the classroom and fostering increased interest and involvement in career development. The good collaboration between the institution and the industry was noted as one of the strengths recognised in the implementation of WBL in PIS. However, there are flaws in the execution of WBL that must be addressed, such as the insufficient time available to industrial supervisors to instruct students, particularly during peak season. Furthermore, the polytechnics and industrial management failed to establish a comprehensive monitoring system for the performance and competency of industrial supervisors. Researchers also revealed that the WBL program's monitoring and evaluation were not carried out in a systematic and comprehensive manner. To overcome the obstacles, WBL must be carefully implemented as part of a continuous quality improvement process that focuses on learning outcomes and evaluation methodologies. Lack of prioritisation from departments and programmes, inadequate communication to promote the WBL approach, lack of presence from the institution's 'bigger picture,' and lack of force and endorsement for a hierarchical collaboration to conduct training are all factors that limit institutional understanding of WBL. PIS management should give training on a regular basis to improve employees' comprehension of WBL. To avoid miscommunication, communication between institutions and businesses must be enhanced. To ensure that all supervisors are academically qualified, it is important to have an in-depth discussion with industries to enable them to understand the program aims and requirements. A meeting should be held for all supervisors to acquire a thorough grasp of their role in adopting WBL. In future, PIS should conduct a study to evaluate the feedback from industry at every end of the WBL session. This is to enable corrective action to be taken as soon as possible for improvement for the next WBL session.

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