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Elephant in the room: Placing of Technical and Vocational Training College students for work-integrated learning in Eastern Cape Province

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Abstract

Upon passing matric, countless students choose to study further at Technical and Vocational Training Colleges (TVETs). Nevertheless, some of these students seem to be unable to attain the qualification that they studied for as they struggle with placements for Work Integrated Learning (WIL), which is a requirement for completion of the qualification. Various research has been done investigating the importance of WIL in enhancing student employability and the acquisition of practical skills; however, few have focused on the placement of students in employment centers. This study's objective was to investigate the challenges that the selected TVET college faces when placing students. This research study adopted a qualitative research methodology. A case study design and constructivism approach were used. Data were collected through open-ended interviews and focus groups. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used. The study revealed that there was an elephant in the room. The students faced challenges such as a lack of funding, personnel shortages, geographic location of the colleges, etc. that led to other challenges, as explained in the study. The study concluded that the college had various challenges in placing students for WIL, and thus they had a huge backlog. These range from inconsistency in placement, the inability to prepare and guide students before and during placement, a lack of support, and a lengthy waiting period. A number of recommendations, such as a complete overhaul of the WIL placement process, the recruitment of competent personnel, and widening the pool of funders to fast-track the process and minimize the backlog, are suggested.

Keywords: *funding, placement supervision, assessment feedback, WIL, TVET*

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Introduction

TVET colleges were identified as institutions that should play a central role in the process of skilling and re-skilling the people of South Africa (Mpanza, 2017). In 2002, 152 technical colleges merged and brought to life 50 larger multicampus institutions that were named Further Education and Training (FET) colleges and later renamed TVET colleges (Mashiloane, 2019). TVET colleges offer both general vocational and occupational learning programs. One of the programs offered is the National Accredited Technical Education Diploma (NATED), also known as Report 191. It is delivered with the support of the Department of Higher Education and Training and quality assurance by the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training (UMALUSI) (Mesuswini, 2015). NATED programs consist of eighteen (18) months of theoretical studies and another 18–24 months of relevant practical application in the workplace (Ibid.). A total of thirty-six months (36) for the whole program is required. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), as cited in Sixabayi (2016), explains that engineering studies range from N1–N6 offered in trimesters, while Business and Utility Studies range from N4–N6 offered over a semester. These programs are registered on the National Qualification Framework (NQF). The Government Gazette (2007) states clearly that it is the responsibility of institutions that offer programs requiring work-integrated credits to place students into Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programs. Several scholars, such as Mabunda (2019), Hlubi (2018), and Du Plessis (2015), have conducted in-depth studies on WIL and its importance in producing work-ready graduates; however, they are silent about the process of placing students in industries. Although TVET College curriculum in South Africa is managed nationally, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has not yet standardized WIL practices. Each TVET college has its own unique policy that deals with how placements should be handled (Taylor & Govender, 2017). In a nutshell, each college has a different placement

policy. This paper investigated the challenges that are experienced in placing students for WIL.

Contribution

This study seeks to contribute empirical knowledge to the growing body of literature on WIL and work preparedness by looking at the challenges of placing students. Through this study, the researchers wanted to uncover challenges that affected the placement process and inform the administrators dealing with placements of loose ends to tie up if there was a need. The scope of this study is the NATED program. It was conducted at one of the TVET colleges in the rural Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

Statement of the problem

N6 is an exit-level certificate that TVET students must attain to be eligible to be placed in WIL. However, most students wait for a year or more for placements (Thakalekoalo, 2021) due to problems like long waiting lists, unavailability of funding, one person handling placements, and students not submitting their CVs upon successfully completing their N6 exit level. If students are not placed immediately after completing their N6, it implies that they will take more time than expected to complete their qualification because WIL is a significant and compulsory contributor to a student's future career (Gribble, 2015). This is the reason why this study looked at the challenges experienced during the implementation of WIL, with a special focus on placement, so that the problems mentioned above can be minimized. The questions to ask are:

- What are the challenges experienced during students' placement for WIL at College X?
- What measures could be employed to reduce the placement challenges faced by students at College X?

Literature review

Work-integrated Integrated Learning (WIL) has always been a distinguishing feature that makes technical graduates stand out from university graduates. Barends and Nel (2017) defined WIL as a comprehensive phrase used to describe a collection of teachings that combine academic and hands-on learning. Hlubi (2018) acknowledges

that although WIL has many benefits, it poses challenges for students, employers, and colleges.

WIL model

Various countries worldwide have adopted a particular model for their vocational institutions. This is informed by the country's educational history, goals, and vision (Fawcett, Sawi & Allison, 2014). These models reflect how Work Integrated Learning in a particular country should be structured. Countries like Germany, Norway, and Switzerland use a system known as the dual model. This model is a sign of a strong alliance between industry and TVET institutions, as learners are trained in both colleges and a partner industry (Ibid.). In this model, a learner is contracted and given an employee with trainee status.

The dual system boasts partnerships between the state and the private sector. They each have detailed roles and tasks within the TVET system. Nevertheless, this model offers a limited number of internship openings. There are some aspects of the dual model that can be adopted in South Africa. Within the TVET sector in the South African context, industry is not actively involved in the theoretical training of students. This creates a disjuncture when students are employed in industry for their internship. TVET colleges are said to not always reflect the demands of industry and the economy as a whole (Fawcett et al., 2014). Currently, industry does not know nor trust the theory that TVET students have learned, as there have been claims that the TVET curriculum is outdated and does not add any value to what the industry currently offers.

Structure of the qualification

The NATED qualification was designed in such a way that a student can only be placed for WIL upon successfully finishing the eighteen months of theoretical training at a college. However, having finished the time that he or she is supposed to spend at the college, the student may not necessarily consider himself a student. While on placement, students are not assessed, nor do they give feedback at the end of their practical learning. Feedback is crucial to all stakeholders, as it affords them an opportunity to pick up challenges and be able to address

them. However, since there is no evaluation or feedback, the status quo might remain because organizers have no source of information to draw from.

Sourcing of host employers

Of the 50 TVET colleges, some are in rural areas where there is restricted or no industry, while others are advantageously placed closer to the areas that are industrial hubs of the country (Meyer, 2014). College X is one of the TVET colleges in the rural Eastern Cape. This places it in an environment that has a limited pool of possible host employers. Considering the number of students that complete N6 and have to be placed for their experiential learning, the demand for placements exceeds the employment hubs available, especially for rural-based colleges (Kraak, 2010). Due to the limited industry at the college's disposal, aspiring students sometimes want to leave the province to hunt for placement opportunities in cities; however, they are often discouraged from sourcing placements for themselves in other provinces as College X prefers to spearhead the placement process.

Personnel shortage

South Africa's WIL model assumes that all TVET colleges are equally resourced and have the personnel to handle the responsibility of placing students. Previous inequality in education means that certain colleges are already better resourced than others and therefore have an established footing on which to build and expand (Fisher, Jaff, Powell, & Hall, 2003). Previously advantaged colleges are able to align their financial and human resources with the newly formed administration. In such a case, students in that particular program have someone who has all his or her attention dedicated to and focused on receiving students' applications for placement. Well-resourced colleges and universities have placement officers at each campus working under the guidance of the institution's placement officer (Petersen, 2017). Although having an officer dedicated to a specific faculty is not a guarantee of a challenge-free placement process (Walters, 2018), it can eliminate a lot of hassles compared to having to stretch one individual across all faculties.

Funding model for WIL

Under the Skills Development Act (SDA) of 1998 and the Further Education and Training (FET) Act of 1998, TVET colleges were assigned the responsibility of developing the capacity to offer and manage learnerships under the relevant Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) (Needham, 2019). Thus, colleges have a responsibility to fund the workplace-based components of their programs out of their existing DHET conditional grants or from funds raised for this purpose from other sources (SSACI, 2013). However, colleges tend to rely on SETA funding to remunerate students undertaking work placement learning. The challenge with SETAs is that they have an age limit of 35, which then excludes students who reach this age before being placed.

South Africa's legislation demands payment from any student who is in vocational training (Maake-Malatjie, 2021). The implication is that colleges can only place students based on the availability of funds. This regulation creates a barrier to placements, as colleges must ensure that students' stipend issues are sorted out before placing them. The college's dependence on SETA sometimes demands deviation from the college's WIL policies because funders (SETAs) come with their own terms and conditions. These conditions range from the programs that the SETA wants to fund to the number of students they are prepared to fund and the age group they favor. Within these terms and conditions, students who are eligible for placements might be left out if they fall short of the requirements stipulated by the SETA. The most unfortunate part is that while funding is not yet sourced, the pool of students finishing N6 and eligible for placement widens.

Research Methodology

Research approach

Qualitative research methodology was employed by the researchers because it produces data that is derived from the participants' own words and experiences. It was chosen because in nature, a qualitative approach is centred on understanding people's opinions, experiences, attitudes, conduct and relations (Maree, 2007).

Research design

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The study focused on the case study design. A case study is a great way to learn more about complex situations, and one can evaluate how various people responded in that situation. Case study research refers to an “empirical inquiry about a case, set within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). This design enables the researcher to look at a person, program, or event in considerable depth. The design of this study allowed the researcher to focus on the phenomenon of WIL placements in depth. Furthermore, this approach assisted the researchers to study the processes and procedures used by the college in placing students and the challenges experienced in implementing these processes. This is in line with the aims of this study, which was to learn of the challenges in the implementation of work integrated learning for Report 191 students at College X in the Eastern Cape Province.

Population and sampling

Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method where the choice of the sample is left to the researcher, was used (Ertikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016; Roy, 2019). It would have been time-consuming and costly to track all students that have been placed by College X; thus, this sampling technique was a viable option. In order to guarantee enough participants, snowball sampling was also incorporated. Snowball involves asking participants to recommend someone who would be willing to partake in the study (Johnston & Sabin, 2010). This was done to safeguard the data collection process while avoiding stagnation in the project due to the unavailability of sampled participants. The target population of this research encompassed academic staff, work placement administrative personnel, and students enrolled in College X who had either completed WIL or were currently on WIL at the time the study was conducted. Students that were part of the population were limited to those who had been placed within the past 5-year period (2015–2020). The study comprised 15 students sourced from all 5 campuses, 2 administrators of the WIL program from the central office, and 3 lecturers sourced from different campuses as well. The college employees involved in the study had 5 years of experience being involved in the placement process.

Biographical background of participants

A fair representation of the programs offered by the college was maintained. Student participants ranged between twenty-three (23) and fifty-two (52) years of age. It is also crucial to note that the data were collected from students who had enrolled in NATED on a full-time basis. Of the 15, only six (6) were still on WIL when the data were collected, while the rest had successfully completed WIL. Most participants hail from the rural outskirts of the Eastern Cape, some within the district municipalities where the research site is. College personnel involved in WIL had vast experience shouldering this responsibility. All interviewed staff members had been involved with WIL for a minimum of 5 years and above.

Data collection

Since the researchers wanted to discuss with the participant, hear their opinions, thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes, open-ended interviews were used in this study. Interviews are two-way conversations where both parties partake, during which the interviewer prods the participants to acquire more and understand their thoughts, belief systems, opinions, and behavioural patterns (Burkholder, Cox, Crawford & Hitchcock, 2019). Focus groups were also employed. Unlike interviews, focus groups facilitate a dialogue between the participants and not between a researcher and participants. The advantage of focus groups is that they produce more complete data from the participants given that the comments and statements of each participant could serve to provoke memories, interpretations and greater depth of information.

Interview collection procedure

Interviews with participants were spread over a 4-week period. For the focus group interviews, a virtual session was held. It was impossible to gather all students in one venue due to the location where some were based, their work commitments, and safety procedures, as the study was done during Lockdown Level 1. Based on the above-mentioned reasons, the focus group sessions were held using the Zoom application. To enable the researchers to see all participants and be able to read their non-verbal gestures, participants were asked to link via video for the duration of the session.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis (reflexive) was used because it gave the researchers an opportunity to understand the potential of any issue under study more widely (Marks & Yardley, 2004). Reflexive thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that can be used for categorising, scrutinising, structuring, labelling, and describing themes contained by a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The data-analysing process started right after the discussion with every individual or group that contributed to the study. The recorded interview data were transcribed and kept as hard and electronic copies. Once the entire interview process was concluded, the recorded data were added together to produce basic themes.

Ethical considerations

Prior to the data collection, the researchers obtained written permission from each participant, as well as from the TVET college where the participants were employed. Ethical principles were upheld when the study was conducted. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary; no incentive was promised or provided to any of the participants. All participants were assured that their confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained, as no names were used to address them. Each participant that was interviewed was briefed. Pseudonyms were used for students, and college employees were referred to as CE1-CE5.

Findings of the study

Presentation of data collected from college employees

Primarily, the subsequent research question is addressed: What are the challenges experienced in placing students for WIL? Several questions were directed to various participants, and their responses were matched for similarities and dissimilarities. The information drawn from the material was reinforced by quotations sourced from the interview transcripts.

Challenges in placing students

Participants were asked to respond to the question, ‘What challenges do you encounter in placing students for WIL?’ Because this study focused on the challenges faced by the college, the researchers were more interested in obtaining the views of those who were involved in

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the administration of WIL. Much was revealed on this subject and, which may be summed up by the following:

CE1: *Our sole dependence on SETA funding is our main challenge because SETAs have their own criteria, which sometimes do not match what we have at that particular moment. Also, the number of students who pass N6 exceeds the available resources. Extra funding would give us a little boost.*

Funding seems to be a common challenge, as all college employees interviewed mentioned it. As if that were not enough, **CE1** also raised the challenge of students who are unreachable.

CE1: *When it is their turn to be placed, they are called using the number on their CVs but cannot be reached. If a student loses a phone or changes their number, the college struggles to reach them. With dismay in the tone of his voice, CE2 added that: Our college's geographical setting is challenging us because there is not enough pool of industries in our area, and some programs require establishments that we do not have.*

The researchers then asked about the strategy that the college embarked on to counter the challenge of geographic location and accessibility to host employers, and the response from **CE2** was: *We do not limit ourselves to the region nor to the province; we place our students even beyond the borders of our province.*

Finding host employers

In response to answering the question on how student host employers were sourced, **CE1** highlighted that:

students were previously allowed to source placement for themselves, but now they have a centralized and controlled process. CE4 stated that: Sometimes campuses get a call from the central office requesting students in a particular program; some students are called by the central office sourced from the database, while others place themselves or resort to volunteering.

This response revealed a contradiction to **CE1's** response about placing students on a first-come, first-served basis. It appeared that

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lecturers were sometimes requested to give names of students, and they would recommend newer students who had just completed N6, while there might be some who had finished earlier and were still awaiting placement. **CE4** was asked what volunteering was, and he explained it as:

A process whereby a student opts to place himself or herself in an employment center, knowing very well that he or she will not be receiving any stipend. Students, he said, chose to do this just to finish their experiential learning and not wait for a time when funding would be available.

Support for students before placement

All college employees interviewed mentioned that work readiness workshops were conducted at each delivery site for N6 students. According to **CE5**, *at the end of each semester, we conduct exit workshops for students who are finishing and are eligible to be placed upon passing their N6 exams.* When asked to dwell more on the content of the workshops, **CE3** said: *In these workshops, students are given skills to compile a CV, prepare reports, and learn general work etiquette.* Four of the college employees made no reference to any other induction except the exit workshop. However, **CE1** was adamant that: *Before placement, they (students) are called to the central office and informed of the expectations of the college or receive an induction with their host employer. Program-specific logbooks that serve as guides on the tasks that a student is expected to do while on placement are also handed out to students before they go to their respective placement centers.*

Contradiction was evident in responses between lecturers who mentioned exit workshops as the only preparation (**CE3 and 5**), while administrative personnel mentioned that students were called to the central office just before they were placed and orientated regarding what was expected of them (**CE1**).

Measures to be taken by the college to lessen the challenges.

The last objective was to investigate measures that could be taken to reduce the challenges faced when placing students for WIL. Several

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questions were posed to the college employees, leading to responses such as the appointment of full-time campus coordinators or at least a coordinator dedicated to a specific program (**CE3**). **CE4** felt that when one person is responsible for placement for the whole college across all programs, a lot can go wrong. This view was shared by **CE5**, who said: *The section needs to be decentralized because the workload that WIL demands can be overwhelming for one person.* Again, the funding issue was not left out. **CE4** said: *Colleges cannot solely rely on the funds allocated by SETAs; they should also source sponsorships and have a pool of funds to cater for larger numbers.* **CE1** added to the proposal and said: *Other sources of funding would limit the dependence on the SETAs, and so they would be able to cater for other students who do not meet SETA criteria.*

CE2 added: *The model used to compile the database must be relooked.* This was suggested because some students did not submit CVs. *Some students do not submit their CVs, and thus they end up not appearing on the database; however, if the data were electronically sourced based on who passed N6, then no student would be omitted.* **CE1** added that *students should be given a set time limit for when WIL should be completed, after which the college will not be liable to place them.* **CE1** added: *Unfortunately, after passing N6, a handful of students ignore WIL; they go and work for years, and when things are not going well for them, they come back to the college and request to be added to the list. This means that we always have unplaced students. If we had a specified time by which WIL could be done after N6, we would be able to curb this behavior.* Restructuring of the NATED program was also suggested. **CE2** said: *WIL must not be a stand-alone program; it must be incorporated with on-course learning so that when the student finishes, s/he is done with both theory and practical.*

Data presentation from students' focus group

In pursuit of a more comprehensive look at the challenges in implementing WIL, the researchers also asked similar questions of the

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students. Some questions posed to the college employees were by nature more administrative and could not be posed to the students. There were some questions which sought to understand how students were affected by WIL which could only be asked of students.

Challenges with placement

Significant disgruntlement was detected when students were asked to mention the challenges they had experienced. These challenges varied from intrinsic problems like fear of the unknown, lack of confidence in coping in the employment sector and just being overwhelmed by emotions. Extrinsic challenges mentioned were: waiting period, discrimination based on age, method of submitting CVs and favouritism.

Siyakha said: *I was not sure what to expect; I was also worried about being bullied at the workplace and not doing as expected.* It was strange that students did not know what to expect in the workplace when college employees had said they were well prepared and informed about what to expect in the workplace. **Busi**, a 42-year-old student, had much to say: *I have been waiting to be placed for the full five (5) years. Many students were placed before me while I had finished earlier than them. I was told that I was too old to be placed.* One could sense the anguish in her voice. **Themba** was also a casualty because of his age. He said, *This story about age traumatized me a lot. I felt discriminated against, and I remember how I thought I had wasted my time by going back to school. This age barrier needs to be addressed from the onset.*

As we continued, students referred to the system used to submit CVs as another contributing factor to their wait, claiming that there was not standard practice for everyone. **John** said: *After receiving my N6 results, I submitted my CV to my campus coordinator, who would compile a list of received CVs and forward the compiled list and CVs to the central office.* This statement left some students mumbling. When asked to explain what the disagreement was about, it seemed like campuses farther from the central office had the special privilege of submitting CVs to their respective campuses, while students closer

to the college's central office had to submit their CVs at the central office.

There were students who did not experience any waiting. **Chwayta** was among the fortunate ones. She said: *Immediately after passing N6, I took my CV to the administration center, and within two (2) months, I received a call informing me to report to my workplace on a specific date. My friend, whose cousin had finished before me, was with me at the time, and she was a bit confused as to why I was placed while her cousin was still waiting, yet she finished first. Well, I had no response to that;* she narrated this with a smile all over her face. Contrary to what was said by **CE1** about students being placed on a first-come, first-served basis, inconsistencies in placing students were unearthed. One could not establish whether the inconsistencies were a result of favoritism or just pure luck. This left researchers numb asking themselves whether this was the elephant in the room.

What can be done to reduce challenges with placement?

Evidently, in as much as participants (students) encountered challenges with WIL, they were satisfied about WIL as part of their training. However, **Mandisa** had this to say: *Campuses must handle placement of their students; I get the feeling that students from some campuses are prioritised while others are neglected.* This comment from **Mandisa** concurred with **CE5's** proposal to decentralise WIL. Students also advocated for more funding. **Busi** said: *The college cannot only rely on SETA funds even though they know that some of their requirements exclude the students in their college. I feel the college must source own funds so that they are able to accommodate 'over age students.* Information sharing was also suggested. **Thulani** said: *Had I not continued pushing for placement, I would not have known about Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Information must be made available to students so that they know the options that they have.* **Kegan** thought: *Students must be given an option to source placements for themselves. I completed mine a long time ago and I feel that it was because I was self-placed. Had it not been for that*

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maybe I would still be waiting for placement or still busy with. I finished mine 2 years ago.

Noxolo's proposal for an online platform for submitting CVs concurred with **CE1's** proposal. She recommended an electronic system that would enable students to upload their CVs to the college database, wherever they are. **Luxolo** supported this when saying: *The online method of submitting CVs would aid in avoiding CVs being misplaced by the office and/or not being submitted by the students due to financial constraints.* Another proposal that was raised by **Siyakha** was that: *The college should employ more people in the section and maybe have someone dedicated to assisting students in a certain program. My sister told me that at their university, WIL was handled by a specific faculty, not by the university.* Similarly, this proposal for the employment of more personnel in the section was also proposed by **CE3**.

Discussion

Challenges experienced in placing students

The study revealed that indeed, there was an elephant in the room that the college experienced when placing students. All participants (college employees and students) agreed that among a number of challenges experienced, insufficient host employers, funding, and human resources were the major contributors to the challenges with which the college was faced. The study revealed that the WIL placement section lacked manpower (human resources). They were operating with only one placement officer responsible for serving all students across all five campuses and from all programs offered by the college. For a section as crucial as this one, it would seem as if the college was not paying enough attention to how critical WIL was, not only for the academic path of students but also for the integrity and status of the college. One failed to imagine and process the possibility of being thorough and effective when faced with such a titanic workload. As Petersen (2017) suggests, the use of placement officers in different faculties under the guidance of the college placement

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officer eases the workload on one person and thus ensures that every student is given attention and is not lost in the pile of paperwork.

This study also identified those challenges with funding emanating from the dependence of the college on SETAs to fund them in order for the college to be able to pay stipends to the placed students. However, the study shows that College X did not have reserves to use as an add-on to SETA funding; instead, it solely relied on SETA funding, and that was creating a bottleneck in the placement process. According to a WIL facilitator, the college placed their students based on the criteria set by the funding SETA. This meant that the college could not adhere to its placement plan, owing to the fact that the college could not predict what criteria the funding SETA would require. It emerged from the study that this haphazard, unstructured, and unplanned placement situation was the root of all discrepancies and inconsistencies in placement, and it is a reason for some students being placed much earlier than their classmates.

The study further discovered that College X employees encountered difficulty tracing students when the college had funds. The study revealed that due to lengthy waiting periods and other reasons, students were often unreachable on the telephone number supplied to the college, and thus many students missed the opportunity because they were inaccessible. Unplaced students add to the number of drop-outs who do not complete the qualification, even though they might have finished their N6. Drop-outs add to the already high number of unemployed youths.

Adding to these challenges, the students who participated in this study had their fair share of challenges. These included limited access to industry due to the geographic location of the college, exclusion from placement on the basis of age, long waiting periods, the method of submitting CVs, and inconsistency in placements. Due to the geographic location of College X, the WIL unit was often compelled to place students far away from the college or their homes. Being far from home meant students had to rent, pay for meals, and buy basic necessities with their stipends. Most of the students come from poor economic backgrounds, and thus these financial burdens might be a

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barrier to their placement journey and may possibly lead to dropouts. A study conducted by Malale and Sentsho (2014) concluded that the scarcity of employers was one of the challenges faced in placing students.

Data sourced from students revealed that while some students were not placed due to age, ironically, some were placed and funded by the SETA even though they were over 35 years old. The rationale behind this inconsistency was not clearly defined. Likewise, another inconsistency was identified in the CV submission method. Although the college employees spoke about a database as the source of drawing eligible students for placement, the study found that CVs on the database were not the only source of identifying students to be placed. Lecturers mentioned that occasionally they would get calls from the placement officer at the central office requesting the names of students who had passed N6 at their respective campuses. The unstructured and inconsistent method of placement created a platform for random placements, which saw students who finished last being placed earlier than those who had finished their N6 ahead of them. The framework for providing work-integrated learning in TVET colleges, as stated in the literature, suggests that for WIL to be effective, there must be planning, preparation, placement, and post-placement stages, respectively. The absence of the plenary stage (planning), which is the first stage in the WIL cycle, could mean that the whole process is compromised. If there is any truth to the saying ‘if you fail to plan, you plan to fail’, then some reinforcement in planning WIL placements is a must. None of the participants (students) remembered being inducted by the college or taken through a process that spelled out expectations. It seems as if exit workshops were seen as adequate preparation.

Preparation is the second stage of the WIL cycle. In a paper presented by Jacobs (2016), he states that the preparation of students for WIL should ideally start during the first year of study and be a continuous process for the duration of the study. This practice ensures that WIL is part of the curriculum and not a stand-alone, meaningless occurrence.

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WIL must be brought back to the curriculum and not just be a matter of compliance.

Contribution of the study (future study)

The results of this study provided an understanding of what ought to be studied further. The researchers recommend further research that looks at the challenges faced in implementing WIL. The recommended study can look at these challenges in a province or sample a few colleges in different provinces. A comparison of rural and urban colleges could also help to see if geographical location has any bearing on the challenges. A study conducted with a wider population would have given a better perspective on whether the challenges identified at College X are also experienced at other colleges or whether they are only applicable to the selected college.

Conclusion

To conclude, the researchers want to mention that the college is doing its best to produce a skilled workforce, although there is an elephant in the room that sometimes hinders progress. The irrefutable findings based on this study are not to undermine the hard work and strides that the institution has made, but rather an opportunity to support and expand the structure of WIL at the selected college. This therefore provides an opportunity to improve the placement of students for WIL across the TVET sector. The researchers believe that this study provides a thought-provoking research focus for other scholars in the field of Work Integrated Learning.

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