Work Integrated Learning: A Case Study of Chinese Students in an Australian University

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By

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Declaration of authenticity

I, Tien Cuong Nguyen, declare that the EdD thesis entitled *Work Integrated Learning: A Case Study of Chinese Students in an Australian University* is no more than 60,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

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ABSTRACT

International students make a major contribution to Australia, financially and through adding to human capital for a skilled workforce. Given the significant role that international students play in Australia's education, their employment and an understanding of their related issues requires further examination. In response to the demand for greater employability and graduate attributes, Australian institutions have increasingly embedded Work Integrated Learning (WIL) into their curricula. In order to conduct successful WIL programmes, it is of great importance to gain an insight into the experience and perceptions of key stakeholders, especially international students who are a valuable student cohort in Australian Universities.

In designing WIL models, Australian institutions largely assume that students, regardless of their background and context, desire the same certain outcomes which are often common to most, a 'one size fits all' solution. To date, the effectiveness of a uniform application of WIL models has attracted little attention, especially from the perspectives of international students who, on completion, return to their country where they encounter different working environments, and business protocols.

This study employs a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis and uses two instruments for collecting data, namely an online survey and semi-structured interviews. The two groups of stakeholders who participated in the study were Chinese graduates from Victoria University (VU) who undertook some form of WIL or work placement in Australia as part of their coursework, and VU staff who were engaged in the management, supervision, development or delivery of WIL programmes. Chinese students represent the largest international student cohort at VU; therefore, this particular student cohort was identified as a key focus of the study.

This study explores and interprets the experiences and perceptions of international students and staff from VU regarding the value of WIL programmes in terms of graduate attributes, graduate employability, challenges and institutional support. It reveals several main themes regarding the experience and perceptions of WIL by VU international students and staff. These themes revolve around the contribution of WIL to the development of international students' language, interpersonal skills, technical knowledge, cultural awareness, and personal attributes. For each theme, the study

analyses the expectations of international students, the development of relevant skills through WIL, and the extent to which these skills are transferrable to the work settings in their home country.

The study also examines the challenges that international students face as a result of their international student status, the lack of prior work experience, the lack of an understanding of the Australian labour market, and their financial constraints. It also explores the extent to which the University provides support for WIL and provides suggestions to improve the development and implementation of WIL programmes. These themes are discussed with specific reference to VU's Chinese student cohort.

Graduate employability for international students is the running concept that informs and connects emerging themes for the key findings of the study. It is found that VU's placement models have, to a large extent, been implemented in alignment with the University's core values and missions for graduate employability. However, mostly the same approach has been used to facilitate the delivery of WIL to students while the practical needs and circumstances of international students are not always attended to.

The findings of the research reinforce those of previous studies, which acknowledge the positive benefits of WIL to the outcomes of international graduate students. On the other hand, it also raises concerns over the multiple challenges that international students face during their WIL participation. These include language and communication barriers, inadequate knowledge of the workplace, cultural differences, and international student status. The study shows that there are some differences between the employment culture in Australia and China that suggest the WIL models for international students in general, and Chinese students in particular, by VU should be developed and implemented with more attention to the particular needs of students and take into account their possible context of employment following their graduation. The findings indicate that more support needs to be allocated to international students since the challenges they face are specific in nature, differing from those needs of domestic students.

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PREAMBLE

This study is conducted not only because of its potential contribution to the literature and to the research site but also because it is meaningful to me, the researcher, as an international student and as a professional in Australia. I still remember the day I received confirmation that I had been admitted to study at an Australian university twenty years ago. I was overjoyed and excited at the prospect. No words could have described my excitement. As much as I was curious to see another part of the world, I was thrilled to be able to pursue my education in Australia, my dream destination. I had always been a typical East Asian school and university student whose learning had been much driven by examinations, theoretical training, and a fixed mindset. I felt like I had not mastered my learning and that I had missed out on the opportunity to master soft skills as well as practise the knowledge I had learnt, communicate confidently in a foreign language, and meet people from other cultures.

My time spent living and studying in Australia has been a worthy investment as I have felt it has prepared me to transition to employment and to a professional career here. My employment has transitioned through many phases, but my deepest professional and research interest so far has involved supporting international students, especially with their employability. In my first professional position in Australia, I was in charge of administering research projects for a research office at Monash University. Frequent engagement with higher education topics allowed me to gain more insight and a broader perspective into issues facing international students in Australia, especially those from East Asian countries. I was motivated to conduct my own research that would shape changes to institutional policy for international students to enable them to benefit more from their courses. Later, I was fortunate enough to be part of a Making VU Project in the role of a planning officer whose tasks involved improving teaching and research outcomes to strengthen the University's brand name.

Learning in the Workplace and Community (also known as Work Integrated Learning) was one among the five targeted outcomes of the project, which required all the subjects offered by the University to include some practical application of theories and knowledge. The overall aim was to assist VU graduates to transition seamlessly into the workplace after their graduation. My research interest at this time was specifically

directed to international graduates from VU who would return to their home country for work or who would seek employment in countries other than Australia and this thesis has served as a tool for me to operationalise my research interest. My most recent working experience at RMIT University, which involved organisation and programme reviews, gave me insight into how WIL has received heightened interest and attention from a great number of Australian institutions.

Being involved in this research has personally been a valuable opportunity to engage deeply into research areas that I have found to be significant and professionally meaningful. It has also been an enriching experience to work on a research problem relating to WIL and master relevant skills to work towards the answers to the research problem. I believe that this case study, which investigates Chinese international students' experiences of using first-hand data, has contributed to stimulating new perspectives and insights particular to work integrated learning.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem statement

Students from overseas are a significant component of education in Australia, contributing to the country not only in financial terms but also in human capital to benefit and grow the country's skilled workforce. Providing education to international students is a $32-billion industry which creates hundreds of thousands of jobs across the country (Group of Eight Australia, 2014) and is the third-largest export (Universities Australia, 2018). As of April 2019, the number of international students across the country was 612,849, with 53% being enrolled in higher education institutions (Australian Government, 2019) and around half of the Australian universities have over 20% of onshore international students out of their total student enrolments (Australian Government, 2018). Given the significant role that international students play in Australia's education, an understanding of their related issues and employment requires further examination.

Higher education institutions are under greater pressure to address the training gap as both big enterprises and small and medium-sized businesses now prefer graduates with work experience. Bently (2018) notes that as of 2016, 99.5% of Australian businesses were of small or medium sizes with under 200 employees and these tended to offer less on-the-job training due to time and budget constraints. The expectation seems to be that universities are to train graduates that are capable of not only transitioning into the workplace, but also of building business productivity and competitiveness for their employment.

In response to the demand for greater employability and graduate attributes, Australian institutions have increasingly embedded Work Integrated Learning (WIL) into their curricula. WIL is a concept that embraces a series of approaches and strategies that combine theoretical knowledge with practical work within a 'purposefully designed curriculum' (Patrick et al., 2008, p. iv). In tertiary education, typical forms of WIL are industry-based projects, work-based placements, internships and service-learning, which are designed to help students improve and refine both their technical and non-

technical skills in a work-based context and to gain an insight into the realities of the workplace (Gribble, 2014; Jackson & Greenwood, 2015). Similar to other Australian institutions, Victoria University (VU) uses different models to facilitate the delivery of WIL to students regardless of whether they are local or international students. This raises a number of challenges from the administrative perspective as well as a concern about the relevance and practicality of WIL experiences for onshore international students who, once they achieve their Australian qualifications, will ultimately return and work in their own countries where the working environment and business context are sometimes markedly different.

To date there has been limited investigation into the effectiveness of a uniform application of WIL models. Australian institutions including VU in designing these WIL models largely assume that students, regardless of their background and context, desire the same certain outcomes which are often common to most, a 'one size fits all' solution. This study will examine the effectiveness of that approach, and go further in identifying the differentiation points that will help to understand the issues more comprehensively with a view to recommending a better approach in the design, development and implementation of future WIL for onshore international students at VU.

1.2 Aim

Given the problem stated above, this study seeks to investigate and interpret the experiences and perceptions of faculty and international graduates from an Australian university regarding its implementation of WIL programmes. The specific aims of this study are to (a) identify current practices related to WIL for international students at the institution; and (b) identify successes, challenges and concerns for faculties and international students in terms of their engagement in WIL programmes which may promote the improvement of WIL experiences for international students.

1.3 Scope

This study employs VU as a case study to acquire insight into the development and implementation of WIL activities for international students. As a case study, it focuses on VU's onshore Chinese student cohort and examines the relevance and practicality of

their Australian placement experiences in the Chinese setting, which might be impacted by traditional and localised practices and culture. The targeted student participants are Chinese students as they represent the biggest international student cohort at VU.

1.4 Research questions

Given the problem this study addresses, the research question is: **How are Work Integrated Learning (WIL) programmes perceived by onshore Chinese students and Victoria University (VU) staff?**

The following sub-questions support the research question:

[1] What are the Work Integrated Learning programs implemented at Victoria University?

[2] What are the opportunities experienced by onshore Chinese students and Victoria University staff in Work Integrated Learning programmes?

[3] What are the difficulties experienced by onshore Chinese students and Victoria University staff in Work Integrated Learning programmes?

1.5 Overview of the investigation into WIL for international students in Australia

This thesis consists of five chapters which contribute to answering the research questions.

Chapter 1 Introduction - The chapter first notes that WIL at Australian institutions has mostly been characterised in 'one size fits all' policies which tend to assume that WIL experiences are relevant and practical to domestic and international students alike. It then argues that this can disregard the particular needs of international students, especially those who will return and seek employment in their home country after completing their study overseas. The chapter views this as a research problem which requires further investigation by means of exploring WIL implementation from the perspectives of key stakeholders. The key research question and three sub-research questions serve to explore different aspects of the implementation of WIL programmes in the context of an Australian university.

Chapter 2 Literature Review - The chapter starts with an overview of the changing expectations and demands of the higher education sector in the world and in Australia, which have placed universities under increasing pressure to transform their operations and graduate outcomes. This is seen to set the context for the emergence of WIL as an educational imperative. The chapter then reviews practices of Australian institutions in embedding WIL into their curricula as well as the participation of international students in WIL programmes offered by Australian universities. The benefits, as well as the challenges for WIL participants, are discussed to serve as the ground for the discussion and evaluation of WIL models offered to VU students in the later chapters.

Chapter 3 Research Design - This study applies a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis and uses two main instruments for collecting data, namely an online survey and semi-structured interviews. The two groups of stakeholders who participated in the study were Chinese graduates from VU who undertook some form of WIL or work placement as part of their coursework, and VU academics who were engaged in the management, supervision, development or delivery of WIL programmes. As Chinese students represent the biggest international student cohort at VU, contribute most to the University's tuition fee incomes, and resource the University's offshore international partnerships, this student cohort was selected as the focal point of this study.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion - The study reveals several main themes regarding the experience and perceptions of WIL by VU international students and academics. These themes revolve around the contribution of WIL to the development of international students' language, interpersonal skills, technical knowledge, cultural awareness, and personal attributes. For each theme, the study explored the expectations of international students, the development of relevant skills through WIL, and the extent to which these skills are transferable to the work settings in their home country. The study also explores the challenges that international students face as a result of their international student status, the lack of prior work experience, the lack of an understanding of the Australian labour market, and their financial circumstances. It also explores the extent to which a University provides support for WIL, and provides suggestions to improve the development and implementation of WIL programmes. These themes are discussed with specific reference to VU's Chinese student cohort.

Chapter 5 Conclusion - In light of findings from the online survey and interviews, the chapter answers the research question and sub-questions to highlight the extent to which WIL models offered to VU international students have achieved the stated goals and met the needs of the key stakeholders. The chapter also compares the emergent themes concerning WIL experiences of international students against findings in current literature, and examines or enquires into their implications for theory and practice.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses literature relating to key issues underlying the concept, development, implementation and outcomes of WIL, and theories of learning, which underpins the development of mental model development, in order to highlight the gap in the literature concerning WIL models for international students.

This study examines the experiences of a group of international students undertaking WIL in an Australian university, through a case study of the perceptions of Chinese students at Victoria University. To suit this scope of the study, Chapter 2 also reviews Australia's higher education context for WIL, WIL practices at Australian universities and the participation of international students in WIL at Australian universities. As it has been confirmed in the literature that participation in WIL activities helps enhance students' graduate attributes and employability, these two concepts are also reviewed in the chapter. To serve the main aim of this study in exploring the extent to which WIL models have been implemented to meet the needs of international students and the extent to which they have successfully done so, the chapter explores the benefits that WIL brings to students, especially international ones, in terms of their personal, interpersonal and professional competencies and qualities that can enable them to be work-ready. The chapter then examines the challenges that international students and academics have reported to face during their WIL experience and certain issues around the implementation of WIL across a university. A review of the good WIL practices and successful experiences is provided in the last part of the chapter to provide the context for the discussion of the findings and recommendations of this study.

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Changing agendas for higher education institutions

Education is well-positioned as the key mechanism in driving human, social, and economic development. As education is considered as a means to an end, the general acknowledgement is that higher levels of educational attainments yield more practical benefits to workforce, societal and individual outcomes, thus placing higher education at the focal point in national agendas of governments around the world (Kyllonen,

2012). Under the impacts of globalisation and technological advances, tertiary education institutions are under increasing pressure to transform their operations in response to changes (Bridgstock, 2017; Culkin & Mallick, 2011; Ferns, Campbell, & Zegwaard, 2014).

The thriving world economy, and productivity, international mobility and technological capacities of the 21st century, on one hand, have increasingly demanded higher education institutions produce proficient, innovative, resilient and competitive graduates (Ferns et al., 2014; Ferns, Russell, & Kay, 2016b). The twin concern for many economies and institutions, at the same time, is how to tackle rising unemployment among graduates, especially in the time of massification of qualifications, democratisation of knowledge, changing workplaces, and intense competition for jobs due to oversupply in some areas and diminishing employment opportunities in others (Culkin & Mallick, 2011; OECD, 2018). Thus, the higher education sector is seen to be transitioning into a technology-enabled system with a mind-set of focusing more strongly on the demands of learners and the workforce (Bridgstock, 2017; Gallagher & Garrett, 2013). In the traditional model of the university, content is generally imparted to students who tend to consume rather than produce the knowledge, and whose capabilities are seldom assessed for the purpose of authentic professional settings (Bridgstock, 2017). The new model of teaching and learning that universities are shifting to, meanwhile, is characterised as being industry-focused, social and networked, and where learning strategies are applied, problem-based and self-directed (Bridgstock, 2017).

There are changing expectations on the capabilities with which higher education institutions are expected to equip their learners. The OECD (2018) emphasises that to be better prepared for a constantly evolving, volatile, and uncertain world, one needs to be supplied with a broad range of skills, ranging from cognitive or a more organised form of meta-cognitive skills such as imaginative or original thinking, learning to learn and self-regulation; social and emotional skills such as empathy, self-efficacy and collaboration; to practical and physical skills such as using new information and communication technology devices – which need to be reflected by affirmative attitudes and values such as motivation, absolute trust, respect for diversity and virtue (OECD, 2018, p. 4). These are soft skills needed for the workplace, which again emphasises the

importance of higher education institutions moving in the direction of instilling these attitudes and values in the students' minds.

The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) (2017) examined closely the recruitment requirements of different industries using big data analyses of 4.2 million unique job advertisements. It notes that strong enterprise skills are most sought after by employers. Problem solving, communications, financial literacy, critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, digital literacy, and presentations are categorised under the umbrella term *enterprise skills* which allow the navigation of challenges and engagement with a complex world. In particular, FYA (2017) observes that the demand for digital literacy and critical thinking has increased by 212% and 158%. Creativity, problem solving, presentation skills, teamwork and communication skills are the next desirable skills (p. 4). The demands of the workplace impact strongly on education and the training activities conducted by tertiary education. While universities are not solely responsible for ensuring that graduates are employed and employable, there is more of an onus on them to better prepare graduates for the workplace and for the future. The agenda is changing and higher education institutions need to embrace curricular and pedagogical approaches that are conducive to graduates' capabilities, and responsive to the requirements of the world of work into which graduates will emerge as professionals (Bridgstock, 2017).

2.1.2 Work Integrated Learning as an educational imperative

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is widely recognised as an educational strategy for enhancing graduate employability (Ferns et al., 2014; Forsythe, 2012; Knight & Yorke, 2004). A common expected outcome of students' WIL experiences is attaining unknown knowledge, understanding and capabilities, and the ability to competently cope with skills considered of paramount importance to particular workplace practices.

WIL traditionally has been largely associated with engaging students with workplaces and communities as a formal part of their studies (Smigiel & Harris, 2008). The interest in WIL is argued to have originated from a reaction against an overly didactic, teacher-controlled and discipline-constrained transmission of knowledge (Andresen, Boud, & Cohen, 1995) and the preference for more experiential-based learning, transformative learning and immersive learning (Andresen et al., 1995; Mezirow, 1995). WIL has been

advanced in a way that links theory and practice via purposeful experimental learning experiences. These experiences are constructed on the philosophy that participants ultimately acquire knowledge the most efficiently through active engagement in meaningful activities and that students are active learners and producers of knowledge (Campbell, Stewart, & Karim, 2018; Patrick et al., 2008; Treuer, Sturre, Keele, & Mcleod, 2011; Universities Australia, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, AiGroup, Business Council of Australia, & Australian Collaborative Education Network Limited, 2015). In other words, WIL is not only a process in which students are engaged in the workplace to develop their employability, but also a pedagogical approach that aims to maximise experiential learning and concretise the abstract learning into the classroom in the deliberate and lived reality of the workplace (Forsythe, 2012; Smith et al., 2009).

The main purpose of WIL is *learning to work* and *working to learn*. In other words, universities and employers 'work together to provide experiences that motivate youth to acquire high-level academic and workplace skills, which in turn can lead to rewarding employment and future learning opportunities' (Jones, 1997). More specifically, WIL provides work readiness, commitment to lifelong learning, advancement of human and social potential, internationalised thinking, knowledge transfer and career promotion (Murphy & Calway, 2008). WIL, according to the students' point of view, is seen as job readiness and is a pathway to lifelong learning (Delisle & Ebbs, 2019). It is expected of students to learn not only the technical skills of their selected job, but also enterprise culture and other interchangeable skills such as communication, organisation, or teamwork which are applicable to the ability to attain a successful and fulfilling career (Forsythe, 2012). This approach is taking on new importance in helping students make the school-to-work transition through service learning and experiential learning initiatives. In turn it has been claimed through graduate outcomes and employer satisfaction surveys that recruiters highly appreciate job experience in their new staff (Campbell et al., 2018; Universities Australia, 2019a).

Due to its employment-oriented nature, a WIL experience brings about academic credit for structured job experience. The Australian *National Strategy on Work Integrated Learning in University Education* was developed to increase students' participation in WIL positions so that WIL can serve as a tool for economic development and

competition. The Strategy emphasises that:

> WIL facilitates the transition between preparing for and operating in a high skills work environment. It empowers students to understand, adapt to and apply skills in the workplace [and] for students, WIL experiences such as placements and work-oriented projects […] can make a real difference to their skills and capacity. (Campbell et al., 2018, p. 19)

This statement highlights the importance of WIL as a strategic approach for universities around the world.

2.1.3 Different forms of Work Integrated Learning

Work Integrated Learning as a term surfaced in the 1990s in order to differentiate it from 'work-based learning' (Orrell, 2011) and can be referred to as Learning in the Workplace and Community (LiWC). WIL is a method of combining classroom-based education with work placements (Patrick et al., 2008). Various disciplines have adopted their own terms to describe a similar process, such as practicum, fieldwork, internships, cooperative education and clinical. Others use the same term for their programmes even if the delivery, objectives and expectations of these faculties are not exactly synonymous. Historically, WIL has been utilised for centuries through apprenticeships or practicums in teaching, nursing, medicine, law and accounting areas of study.

Growing popularity and diversity of WIL programmes have led to widespread use of WIL terminology, including both precise and expanded definitions. The World Association for Cooperative Education (WACE), as an example, adopted the term *work integrated education* to address the broad and comprehensive nature of WIL, comprising teaching and learning activities. Regarding the nature of partnerships and collaboration in WIL, Mawoyo and Robinson (2005) note that WIL programmes are able to be offered either as an autonomous model with separate responsibilities, in collaboration between the university and the workplace, or in an institution-led partnership where universities define WIL learning and assessment.

However, it is argued that given the wide range of terms in use for WIL, a focus on the defining features of WIL will allow for far easier identification of WIL programmes. Peach and Gamble (2011, pp. 174-175) identify the common features of WIL, based on

definite identified industry needs, and expectations of graduate students and employees (for example, professional accreditation), which are incorporated into the curriculum;

- inclusion of the work component as part of the overall curriculum design;
- involvement of industry partners who provide advice on curriculum design, and also provide a workplace for students to gain valuable experience; and
- providing an overall structure for management and appraisal of the final outcome for student work and experience.

WIL, in overall terms, includes:

> exposure to a professional and relevant workplace (community of practice), of a duration alongside practitioners (old-timers) long enough for enculturation to occur (the ideal duration being a topic of much need of discussion), where the tasks undertaken are authentic, relevant, meaningful, and purposeful, where students are able to learn the workplace norms, culture, and understand/develop professional identity, and integrating that knowledge into their on-campus learning. (Coll & Zegwaard, 2012, p. 43)

With the above characteristics, WIL can be more clearly distinguished from Work-Based Learning (WBL), especially when both WIL and WBL include some form of involvement with employers and industry. According to Atkinson (2016), the primary difference between the two is that learners in WBL are typically Vocational Education and Training (VET) students who have spent more time employed and located in the workplace than in the classroom while WIL learners are primarily students in the university sector located in the workplace as part of a wholly or partially embedded WIL programme for their discipline. In other words, WBL takes place predominantly in the workplace for students who undertake apprenticeships or traineeships or constitutes the majority of the institutional learning by means of simulation or practical activities. Meanwhile, though the emphasis on WIL is now to make it an important component in university education, helping it to mean more than work experience, WIL may still be viewed as a distinct element of the learning experience at university rather than an intrinsic part of the whole learning experience (Atkinson, 2016). Apprenticeships and traineeships pertaining to WBL are high in terms of intensity and frequency, and students acquire most of their skills during their intensive participation in the workplace; placements and simulations are both similar across VET and university

sectors.

Recent works to delineate WIL and establish taxonomies have had a tendency to focus on various models of practice, such as community, professional, industry, rather than on the activities (Groenewald, Drysdale, Chiupka, & Johnston, 2011). Institutions themselves have also initiated works to assimilate activity classifications into their WIL regulations. This has entailed the development of systematic classification for different types of WIL activities. The groupings are based on distinct approaches, including an anticipated homogenous classroom/workplace transition (Jones et al., 2009) and defined types of programmes and models, such as cooperative service-learning (Calway & Murphy, 2007; Cooper, Orrell, & Bowden, 2010); kinds of activities such as fieldwork, simulations (Zanko, Papadopoulos, Taylor, Fallshaw, & Lawson, 2011); pedagogical base (Guile & Griffiths, 2001); and purposes of the activity or course (Trigwell & Reid, 1998). Besides, they are established on evidential fact, including in depth case studies (Cooper et al., 2010); interviews (Sattler, Wiggers, & Arnold, 2011); theory (Guile & Griffiths, 2001); reviews of literature (Sattler et al., 2011); and experiential pedagogies (Groenewald et al., 2011). Various irregularities are often useful to clarify WIL activities: location, length and purpose of an activity, awarding academic credit where applicable, extent of community engagement, the type of industry/historical context, for example. Advancement of WIL models is made more challenging by these irregularities. The literature suggests a large range of differing activities for example: on campus activities fieldwork, community projects and placements.

Placements launched outside campuses are the most commonly reported and approved form of WIL activities (Rowe, Winchester-Seeto, & Mackaway, 2012). A broad range of formal and informal compulsory and optional placements suitable for WIL such as clinical placements, fieldwork, practicums, and internships introduce students to the workplace. Due to an increase in competition for places in WIL, particularly in disciplines such as nursing and teaching where they are a mandatory part of their curriculum, varying aims and purposes of WIL programmes are encouraging universities to broaden their WIL conceptualisations.

2.1.4 Theoretical framing of Work Integrated Learning

WIL programmes are undertaken and developed by educators and employers to form and build authentic learning environments in the classroom and workplace (Rook,

2015). It is acknowledged that learning takes place in different situations – either in an educational institution, a community or in the workplace – and various theories have been explored extensively in order to explain how learning takes place and how it can be optimally enhanced.

One learning theory, Constructivism, is particularly relevant to WIL. It argues that learning is shaped in an individual's perception of physical and social experiences (Kelly, 1963) and by means of mental models in which the individual builds blocks to make sense of the world (Kim, 2004; Rook, 2013; Senge, 2006).

A mental model, according to Rook (2013) is 'a concentrated, personally constructed, internal conception of external phenomena (historical, existing or projected) or experience, that affects how a person acts' (p. 10). In other words, by means of perceptions and actions, an individual employs their mental model to construct the reality and proceed to learn. Accordingly, enhancement of learning occurs when the individual is given the opportunity to engage in a wide variety of contexts, including the workplace. While learning is dependent on physical and social experiences, constructivists at the same time argue that the mastering of new knowledge and skills is not entirely context-specific, which allows for students to benefit from the transferability of their learning across contexts. Constructivism has promoted the popularity of constructivist approaches and paradigms to teaching and learning that see learning as an active, contextualised process of constructing knowledge and that view teachers as facilitators in educational activities.

Also relevant to WIL practices is Wenger's (1998, 2004) idea of 'community of practice' which highlights the importance of learners being part of, and engaged in, complicated social learning methodology. Wenger (2004) argues that each individual has certain competencies. By participating in complex social relationships, the individual is exposed to new outside experiences, which alter their competencies; also, the surrounding communities in which they are engaged become redefined. Rook (2015) notes the recent National WIL scrutinising study in Australian universities in Patrick and et al (2008). An example of this is when an individual institution's development of partnerships has enabled more awareness and appreciation of the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders themselves and assisted more productive, adaptable transformation in WIL practices. While one limitation of Wenger's (1998, 2004) work

is that it does not discuss how and why residents within a community learn (Illeris, 2003), the concept of 'community of practice' has elevated the significance of forming relationships and sharing of information within communities (Rook, 2015). The formation of a 'community of practice' is also one key ideology assumed by WIL practices.

A more detailed understanding of how and why an individual in a community learns is provided in the theories on models of the learning process, including experiential learning (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Nonaka, 1994). Knowledge is viewed as created by grasping experience and transforming it in a cycle of experiencing, reflecting on, conceptualising and actively experimenting with knowledge (Kolb, 1984). A number of propositions underlie such theories of learning, namely: (1) learning is a process and employing students in a process can best enhance their learning; (2) all learning is revising ideas and assumptions are brought to the surface so that testing and examination can be applied; (3) learning is an adaptive process in which students resolve conflicts between opposing models; (4) learning results from the dynamic relationship between individuals and the environment (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). In the same way as the constructivist paradigm, experiential learning by Kolb and colleagues emphasises the opportunity for individuals to experience and interact with the environment. Underlying WIL motivation states that a WIL student must be allowed actual experiences in the work environment, then transform them through various processes, and be afforded the opportunity to obtain real work experiences by receiving feedback from their mentors.

Other works useful for the understanding of WIL development relate to the interplay between implicit and explicit knowledge. Implicit knowledge refers to personal knowledge that is difficult to express verbally or transfer to other people; meanwhile, explicit knowledge can be expressed, stored, and transmitted often in specific steps and sequences (McShane & Travaglione, 2003; Polanyi & Sen, 2009). Nonaka (1994) terms the process in which learners create knowledge as 'the spiral of knowledge' but emphasises that it can only be enhanced in organisations, or 'communities of interaction' (p. 15), which many other authors reiterate in their works. Carus, Nogala, and Schulze (1992) assert that experience is both a precondition for action and a process that facilitates new insights and patterns to allow an individual to realise the gap

between real and expected situational conditions. It has been suggested that WIL programmes are developed to help students generate a dialogue between the tacit knowledge, which they learn in an academic institution, and the explicit knowledge gained from actual work experiences and interpersonal and professional relationships in the workplace (Abeysekera, 2006; Barrie, 1999; McIlveen et al., 2009; Rook, 2015) that can support their lifelong learning. Overall, the understanding of how learning takes place gives an insight into the nature of WIL experience for students.

2.1.5 Aims of Work Integrated Learning programmes

WIL has evolved and diversified for a number of purposes. These can be summarised as bridging the gap between tacit and explicit knowledge (Abeysekera, 2006), enhancing work readiness, employability skills and graduate attributes (Harris-Reeves & Mahoney, 2017; McLennan & Keating, 2008; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017; Smith et al., 2009), and benefiting and supporting communities (McLennan & Keating, 2008). According to Abeysekera's (2006) investigation into WIL in Australian undergraduate accounting degrees, WIL programmes are designed to give students the opportunity to link their implicit and explicit knowledge.

VU, for example, in the official policy documentation, clearly states this conception of WIL in its institutional statements to help students 'experience theoretical concepts as they are applied in practice and to learn in contexts which present them with similar challenges to their life after and outside VU' (VU, 2007, p 3). However, the role of WIL in equipping learners with essential attributes for their employment and professional pathways is well perceived as the primary incentive for enhancing WIL. A critical role has been played by tertiary institutions by preparing students for an evolving world of life and work by enabling them to apply discipline-specific and non-discipline specific skills. The constantly evolving employment climate and world has made this mean that the development of skills and knowledge alone is insufficient to allow graduates to make the right decisions in life and career and operate the range of life and employment opportunities (Coetzee & Beukes, 2010), for which WIL emerges as an effective solution (Harris-Reeves & Mahoney, 2017). Apart from this, more institutions are positioning their WIL programmes as a key means to engage with larger communities. The University of Western Sydney, for instance, states that:

> Engagement is viewed as a partnership for mutual benefit between the University and its communities, be they regional, national or global […]. Through such activities, working in partnership with our many and varied communities, we aim to contribute to the development, wellbeing and prosperity of the communities and regions we serve, starting with Western Sydney. (University of Western Sydney, 2017)

While Meanwhile, for Macquarie University, their teaching and learning is a community-based approach aiming to:

> develop partnerships, both local and international, which make valuable contributions to communities, and which are mutually beneficial. Programmes will be developed in conjunction with local community groups, regional and remote councils, Indigenous groups, and nations throughout the South Pacific and South-East Asia. (Macquarie University, 2008)

2.2 Australia's higher education context for Work Integrated Learning

Australia has been acknowledged as a success in the internationalisation of higher education by recruiting of students from foreign countries and as a leader in the high level of integration of these students into the Australian academic landscape (Australian Government, 2016; Mazzarol, 1998). Advantages that have enabled Australia to compete internationally in the education market as a well-established and well-regarded education provider are sound educational infrastructure, instruction delivered in English, and its position as an attractive and safe destination for study, migration and investment (Australian Government, 2016; Deloitte Access Economics, 2016). While the Australian higher education system is currently at the forefront of many processes of globalisation, it is hard to predict with any certainty its long-term prospects, especially given the shifting population demographics in many countries around the world, the constantly evolving knowledge and skillsets, the various strategies being developed by competing education systems to challenge Australia's market position, the growing availability and accessibility of educational services to increasingly informed students,

and the globally connected nature of contemporary education (Hazelkorn, 2015; Marginson, 2016; Universities Australia et al., 2015).

Graduate attributes have for a long time been a fundamental component of Australian higher education curricula, and there is now some general agreement by Australian institutions regarding what graduate skills are most sought-after by employers (Henderson, 2011). Every Australian institution, therefore, has a list of graduate attributes for each discipline, consisting of quality, skill and understanding, that are agreed upon by the university community as being desirable to be developed. Among the measures to prepare graduates with the essential qualities and experiences to enter the international market, Australian institutions have embedded aspects of work in their curricula, and in particular, work integrated learning initiatives. This emphasis on WIL is perceived as the key strategy underlying curriculum development (Hager & Holland, 2006) and contributing to the long-term economic wellbeing of Australia (Ferns, Russell, & Smith, 2015). The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry highlights the important benefits of WIL:

> There are many potential benefits to university students and employers from undertaking a relevant work placement programme during a course of studies. Programmes like these are important for building relationships between business, industry and higher education institutions, and ultimately for building the skills capability of Australia. The idea warrants further investigation at this early stage, especially in relation to addressing Australia's skills shortages. (Universities Australia, 2019a, p. 3)

It is also emphasised by Universities Australia et al. (2015, p. 1) that the country can only successfully respond to prospects and challenges brought by the rapid globalisation process on the condition of stronger linkages between enterprises, educators and the community:

> The extent to which Australia is able to adapt and develop and continue to deliver a quality of life that is among the best in the world will depend in large part on how well our institutions and business sectors collaborate. (Universities Australia et al., 2015, p. 1)

Such emphasis on the importance of WIL reiterates the key message in an earlier paper by Universities Australia, *A National Internship Scheme: Enhancing skills and work-readiness of Australian university graduates* (Universities Australia, 2008). The paper asks for universities, governments, organisations, and industry to jointly cooperate to work together for common aim/goals, and by doing so improve students' and graduates' employability skills. The paper asks with authority that greater support for international students to ensure their viability to enter the workforce both in Australia and their home country should be considerably heightened. Other national developments to enhance the understanding and effectiveness of WIL include the *Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement* (introduced in 2008 and revised in 2011), *Graduate Employability Skills* (2007), *Employability Skills Framework used in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector* (2002), *the National Association of Graduate Advisory Services (NAGAS) Project on Career Development and WIL in Australian universities* (2007), *National Strategy on Work Integrated Learning in University Education* (2015) and *Innovative Research Universities Australia's Reimagining WIL Benchmarking Project* (2019).

In the context of the country's skill challenges, together with the fact that the workplace can be an unmatched and valuable learning environment for students, partnerships with employers play a significant role in developing the professional and vocational skills for their students (Universities Australia et al., 2015). Placements and internships have been a mandatory part for certain disciplines such as engineering, nursing, and teaching long before the coining of the term WIL. However, as it is now a shared notion that WIL can be introduced into almost all disciplines to enhance learning and enhance graduate skills, more institutions have displayed their commitment to WIL by adding work-related components to their strategic directions and by re-shaping areas of their university governance to efficiently manage and support WIL provision (Universities Australia et al., 2015). There has been an escalation in the participation rate in WIL courses (Treuer et al., 2011) without an extensive backup of data on career preparation across the higher education sector other than that generated by Universities Australia's (2019a) first comprehensive collection of WIL implementation in 2017.

It should be noted that universities in Australia, which are self-accrediting institutions, are granted a high level of autonomy to act within the legislative requirements

associated with public funding. Thus, although it is the Australian Government's responsibility to fund higher education, there is a capacity for Government coordination at the national level to enable a better alignment of programmes across multiple institutions. Under such regulatory characteristics, the assessment of WIL and its success measured by students' outcomes ultimately remain the responsibility of education bodies.

Almost every Australian institution has clearly stated their interest in WIL. Early in the 2000s, Victoria University (VU) pledged 25% of the learning in its courses would be dedicated to student workplace or community experience. Meanwhile, Griffith University targeted for 70% of its degree programmes to comprise a component of WIL by 2010. The commitment that Australian institutions make about graduate employability has been documented in the country's first comprehensive study of WIL conducted by Universities Australia (2019a). Data collected from 39 universities regarding all types of work placements, internships, fieldwork, industry projects and simulations offered to students have revealed the wide extent and diversity of WIL activities across offering institutions. Among the key statistics for the year 2017, it was reported that approximately half a million students participated in 555,403 workplace experiences (Universities Australia, 2019a, p. 27). This involved 357,806 Australian students or permanent residents, 93,126 international students, 5,486 indigenous students and 67,116 students from regional and remote Australia.

2.3 Graduate attributes and employability

Graduate attributes and employability ideas are covered in this section as it has been shown previously how these are considered the main motivation of WIL programmes.

2.3.1 Graduate attributes

In the Australian educational system, generic or non-technical skills are incorporated in various ways. These include

- general capacities (Australian curriculum for schools),
- the employability skills framework (Vocational Education and Training VET),
- graduate credentials (university),
- the Australian core skills framework (cross-sectorial framework for dealing with language, literacy, and numeracy skills),

- the Australian plan or outline for career development (career management competencies), and
- the Australian Qualifications Framework (spans all education and training sectors).

Generally, mainstream graduate credentials or non-technical skills may involve language, literacy and numeracy skills together with other broader skills considered necessary to join in society such as ‘citizenship’ or ‘ethical behaviour’ and other related skills pertaining to their job career (Ithaca Group, 2012).

Evaluating graduate credentials is difficult. Broadly speaking, generic graduate credentials in Australia provide direction for educational outcomes used to construct relevant curriculum design and the arrangement of university learning experiences (Barrie, Hughes, & Smith, 2009). Categorically, generic graduate credentials are skills, knowledge and abilities of university graduates, beyond disciplinary content knowledge, all of which are pertinent to a range of contexts to the university students (Barrie, 2004). In reality, graduate credentials are generically listed by universities, highly regarded by employers and developed by students. Universities use these credentials in their course development, including WIL courses.

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is a national framework that manages national education qualifications (Australian Qualifications Framework, 2013). However, despite the fact that universities establish graduate credentials institutionally, the AQF plays a powerful role by providing input to the designing and accreditation of degree qualifications. Therefore, at the Bachelor’s degree level (level 7 of the AQF), it is understood that graduates will have mastered a specific and in depth level of knowledge and skills, and be in a position to apply this knowledge and skill. To summarise, it is stated that undergraduates upon graduating at the Bachelor level ‘[…] will have broad and logical knowledge and skills for professional work and/or follow up learning’ (Australian Qualifications Framework, 2013, p. 16). WIL can contribute to the achievement of these outcomes.

2.3.2 Graduate employability

As a result of employment and international world changes, employability has undergone different perceptions and shifted in an effort to emphasise individuality. Forrier and Sels (2003) note that the first publication of employability by Feintuch (1955) viewed this concept as a tool to achieve full employment and economic purposes; in the next three decades, employability was seen from a company level as a means of matching labour supply with demand; and more recently, under the pressure of intense competition in the era of downsizing and privatisation, it is one measure to ensure job security and career possibilities beyond the borders of organisations (Clarke, 2008). However, it is agreed that it is enabled graduates, rather than labour markets, employment and institutional performance, that the term employability focuses on (Oliver, 2010). Given the increasing competition among job seekers, ensuring job security means one should not only fulfil the requirements of a particular job but should also stand out in relative comparison with other potential employees (Forrier & Sels, 2003). This requires the obtaining of certain employability skills rather than the broad, general and holistic concept of employability, and demands individuals assume more responsibility in gaining and refreshing these skills themselves throughout their working life (Jackson, 2014; Oliver, 2010; Sheldon & Thornthwaite, 2005; Yorke, 2004).

In the Australian higher education sector, the first framework that identifies the key competencies and skills which are compulsory to have in order to transfer from school to the workplace and the generic skills required in the workplace was developed in 2002 by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry with the Business Council of Australia in association with funding from the Commonwealth Government (Department of Education Science and Training, Australian Chamber of Commerce, & Industry and Business Council of Australia, 2002). This framework identifies eight employability skills and several personal attributes that, together, are seen to contribute to students' ability to be employed. Those involve communication, teamwork, problem solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self-management, learning and technology. Meanwhile, the personal traits which are recognised by employers as major elements of employability skills include loyalty, commitment, honesty and integrity, enthusiasm, reliability, personal hygiene/presentation, common sense, positive self-esteem, sense of humour, balanced and enthusiastic/attitude to work and home life,

ability to handle strain and tension, displaying motivation, punctuality and flexibility in order to cope with the demands of their participation in the WIL programme.

The 2007 *Graduate Employability Skills* report (Precision Consulting, 2007) analyses the graduate attributes from many Australian institutions and suggests that the eight employability skills listed in the *Employability Skills Framework* can be seen as a subset of graduate attributes (Precision Consulting, 2007). However, the report also notes that academics at Australian institutions claim to have more tendency and confidence to teach and assess critical thinking, problem solving and written communication while other skills such as teamwork, information literacy and ICT, which are regarded as important by employers and industry, are more difficult to teach and assess. The *Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth* conducted by Underwood (2007) for the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) reveals similar findings in this regard (Table 1).

Table 1. *Students' perceptions of employability skills from the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (Underwood, 2007)*

Skill areas	**Importance of job skills***	**Preparation from university studies ****
Communication	98.7	82.7
Teamwork	96.1	78.1
Problem solving	95.4	84.8
Initiative/creativity	88.8	79.3
Planning/organisation	96.1	82.9
Self-management	93.4	85.9
Learning skills	94.1	90.2
Technology	90.1	75.9
Average (%)	*94.1*	*82.5*

* Proportion indicating skill as being Very Important or Important

**Proportion of those considering skill to be Very Important or Important indicating that they were prepared Very well or Well

Barrie (2004) relates the reluctance among staff to teach graduate attributes to the incompatibility between their understanding of the nature of graduate attributes and their understanding of what teaching and learning are all about. Barrie et al. (2009) observe that the delivery of factual content in some courses still remains unchanged despite the rhetoric of graduate attributes policy and statements of learning outcomes.

2.4 Work Integrated Learning benefits for domestic and international students

There has been extensive research into the benefits of WIL in the literature, especially from the views of stakeholders. For employers, WIL offers short-term technical labour at low cost, opportunities to recruit new graduates, and access to university expertise and specialised resources that can help introduce fresh and additional perspectives and ideas into the sector (Ferns et al., 2014). For institutions, WIL provides a strong means of networking them with employers and at the same time establishing collaborative research relationships, which in turn can benefit teaching, research and learning outcomes (Ferns et al., 2014). According to Hodges (2011), WIL builds the capacity for both educational institutions and the industry. Since the main focus of this study is on WIL experience of international students, the following section discusses, in more detail, the benefits of WIL to students, especially international students.

2.4.1 Career benefits

Past documentation confirms that WIL programmes greatly assist graduates to enter directly into the labour market upon graduation (Tran & Soejatminah, 2016; Valadkhani, Worthington, & Houlbrook, 2001). It will be assumed that the possession of appropriate industrial experience gained prior to graduation will be by far more advantageous to graduates and accelerate their entry into employment in contrast to those graduates who have not had previous workplace appointments prior to graduation (Calway & Murphy, 2000). This speedy return of WIL graduates can no doubt be associated with the networks developed by the students via their work placements (Ferkins, 2002). Nonetheless, these students outweigh non-WIL students in terms of documented proof of their ability to apply their knowledge and technical skills in a hands-on setting whilst participating in a workplace team. Students who have had work

placements reportedly make better-informed decisions about their career direction and feel more confident of their career choices (Zegwaard & Coll, 2011). Graduates from WIL degrees have also reported that they were able to negotiate a higher starting salary (Sattler & Peters, 2012).

For international students, foreign qualifications and international working experience are particularly critical given the massification and proliferation of tertiary education. Students from top sending countries, notably China, require foreign study and work experience either to seek permanent residency in the developed world or to differentiate themselves in an exceedingly competitive local workforce on returning to their home country (Biao & Shen, 2009; Gribble, 2014; Li & Yang, 2013). Despite the increased interest in WIL, the popularity of the programmes by Australian institutions, and the major body of work on WIL in particular, there has been a perceived lack of adequate evaluation of workplace learning and workplace practices as a result of partaking in WIL programmes. Studies specifically examining the employability of WIL international participants have, to date, been limited. International students, for example, have not been requested to provide feedback in relation to their transition into the labour market of the host country or upon home country re-entry (Gribble, 2014). It is argued that traditional methods are used in the evaluation of conventional courses, while WIL programmes, on the other hand, do not afford themselves easily to this traditional type of evaluation (Truer et al., 2011).

2.4.2 Academic benefits

WIL students benefit by experiencing work placements in as much as it equips them with skills applicable to academic learning on campus. It was argued by Fleming and Eames (2005) that WIL increases students' research capabilities, critical and clear thinking, and time and motion management skills. Many WIL practitioners note that after completing work placements, students return with renewed enthusiasm for their studies. Mentally visualising on-campus learning into a relevant workplace helps students grasp and understand the reason behind the need to study certain topics within their curriculum and why those subjects have been included and deemed necessary. Students who have completed work placements possess improved ability to put instructed theories into practice according to past studies (Allen & Peach, 2007). These students tend to be able to isolate and determine the essential features in problem

solving (Freudenberg, Brimble, Cameron, & English, 2011), and have improved subjective or nominative thinking (Fleming & Eames, 2005). To draw direct links between WIL and increased academic performance is complex due to the difficulty of separating other perplexing variables and the inherent element of course influence. Nevertheless, higher grade points averages have been reported by some practitioners from those students who have undertaken WIL (Blair, Millea, & Hammer, 2004; Tanaka & Carlson, 2012), Also those WIL students performed better in their final year of undergraduate studies (Gomez, Lush, & Clements, 2004), and had a tendency to gain higher levels of end-of-degree results (Mandilaras, 2004).

2.4.3 Personal benefits

Various studies have confirmed that personal and interpersonal skills of participating WIL students benefit from and are improved as a result of their WIL participation. Importantly, an improvement in interpersonal communication skills has been noted by practitioners (Eames & Cates, 2011). The ability to quickly adapt to changes and make knowledgeable decisions (Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick, & Cragnolini, 2004) as well as undertake teamwork and organisational skills enthusiastically has been attributed, in part, to WIL participation (Ferns et al., 2014). It has also been widely accepted that positively undertaking an extensive project-based work placement, such as WIL, increases students' resoluteness while undertaking further lengthy research work (Zegwaard & McCurdy, 2014), improves determination and confidence when submitting applications for employment, and decreases inhibitions.(Esters & Retallick, 2013). As well as these positives, it is thought that work placements provide students with the freedom to develop professional identity (Trede, 2012) and accustom themselves to professional workplace ethic and values (Campbell & Zegwaard, 2011).

2.5 Challenges for Work Integrated Learning implementation and for international students

Development and implementation have certain constraints on the design facets of WIL programmes. Common obstructions faced by international students have been established by international students. The following section examines significant studies in order to gain insight into the perspectives of stakeholders in this regard.

2.5.1 Challenges for Work Integrated Learning implementation

The essence of WIL programmes as being resource-intensive and reliant on partnerships with the industry has resulted in the following challenges often expressed by stakeholders.

Firstly, financial pressure for the development and implementation of WIL programmes is the prime and persistent or ongoing challenge identified. Patrick et al. (2008) note that there is a fall in financial probabilities from the Federal Government and the Government's often rigid policies. This means many higher education organisations have to count on the number of students in order to provide relevant placement opportunities. This is a common situation which happens even in existing traditional disciplines such as nursing, education and engineering (Patrick et al., 2008). The result of this can be seen when WIL becomes more comprehensive, causing institutions to seize opportunities to obtain placements and look to other means (McLennan & Keating, 2008). These means range from increased workload and time pressure for both academics and employers, financial costs to employers, and students having to maintain part-time work while undertaking their obligations to participate in WIL placements. Among the institutional costs are administrative costs to maintain partnerships with numerous employers, sourcing of WIL opportunities, developing and evaluation of WIL curriculum and support of a student body that is often geographically dispersed (McLennan & Keating, 2008, p. 11). Lawson, Fallshaw, Papadopoulos, Taylor, and Zanko (2011) further comment that insufficient resource support for WIL can equate to insufficient resources being available for academics to develop and implement WIL programmes. This can occur when institutions view WIL to be of low priority and lacking academic intensity.

Voluntary placements can disadvantage self-supporting students and those with family responsibilities, especially if they have to leave paid employment to complete a voluntary placement (Patrick et al., 2008). Similarly, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are susceptible to disadvantages, where mandatory unpaid WIL placements might reinforce that disadvantage if elements exist such as additional travel costs and surrender of paid work at a time when they are finding it hard to afford to pay rent and cover basic living expenses. Murray, Blackmore, Gribble, and Hall (2012) suggest that international students are often averse to entering work integrated learning

programmes which are shaped as an extended element of their course, for instance, an industry-based learning placement often requires them to broaden the standard duration of their degree. Other than extended time, where there is extra embedded integration of work experience and learning, the cost for their degree could be a great deal higher than for the student without WIL.

Another barrier to mainstream WIL in Australian institutions is the entrenching of WIL in pedagogy and courses and/or curriculum. McLennan and Keating (2008) state that to install quality WIL practices into the curriculum, an institution should reframe its pedagogical approach to combine theoretical, professional and experimental models of learning. This not only requires resources and commitment to WIL but also is predicated on a changed view for academics and students. For academics, this means adjustments to different teaching and learning styles; for students, it is about realising the importance and relevance in applying WIL experiences to their future expectations and careers. Close scrutiny of the implementation of WIL reveals instances of ad hoc, unskilled, ill-structured and perhaps unnecessary or irrelevant content or programmes to students' studies or future career plans and a lack of a comprehensive use of study and programmes to boost work readiness (Universities Australia, 2008). The conclusion to be drawn is that both academic and workplace supervisors alike positively need to be comprehensively resourced and prepared throughout ongoing professional development to be able to meet the various requirements, in terms of time pressures and cultural awareness, so they can be involved in in dealing with international students (Smigiel & Harris, 2008). Gribble (2014) emphasises that a 'one size fits all' model is unworkable for WIL and international students participating in WIL programmes.

Keeping relationships among important stakeholders becomes a vital consideration when considering designing and implementing a WIL programme. Research found that there are challenges with managing the anticipations of stakeholders (Patrick et al., 2008), understanding each stakeholder's role (Rowe et al., 2012) and encouraging university-industry partnerships (Lawson et al., 2011; McLennan & Keating, 2008). Research has emphasised a clear miscommunication between stakeholders during the process of developing and delivering WIL programmes (McLennan & Keating, 2008; Patrick et al., 2008). It is the universities that have power over the content and kinds of learning activities and outcomes that serve the interests of the university but these may

fall short of adequately meeting the needs of the workplace and learners (Choy & Delahaye, 2011; Patrick et al., 2008). This disparity between institutional capability and industry expectations constitutes a significant obstacle to effective collaborations between stakeholders.

2.5.2 Challenges for international students participating in Work Integrated Learning

The literature has highlighted that skills and knowledge mastered in an overseas institution are not necessarily of immediate relevance and connection to the circumstances of returnees (Robertson, Hoare, & Harwood, 2011). A number of barriers have been identified in Australian WIL programmes, which contribute to students' often unmet expectations. Jackson and Greenwood (2015) name four major challenges: cultural differences and perceptions, assessment quality, structure and distribution, and language and placement support.

Firstly, the 'international' status of overseas students poses a challenge for them during their Australian-based work experience due to Australia being geographically isolated from the world's most populous regions. For students from Asia, there are challenges arising from a cultural and linguistic distance as well as different educational philosophies, practices, and systems (Neri & Ville, 2006; Tangen & Campbell, 2017). Cultural differences are likely to result in international students misinterpreting and having trouble adjusting to the Australian work settings (Jackson & Greenwood, 2015). Many studies (Agelasto & Adamson, 1998; Australian Education International, 2006; Henderson, 2011; Pearson & Entrekin, 2001), for example, suggest that certain attributes, qualities and socio-political paradigms valued by Chinese students are not perceived as important by the Australian curriculum. Vice versa, the Australian curriculum has certain graduate attributes that are perceived as unimportant or irrelevant to the Chinese context.

International students are also disadvantaged due to their lack of awareness of the local labour market, workplace rapport, local networks and job-seeking processes(Gribble, 2014; Robertson et al., 2011). This heightens their difficulties in identifying placement opportunities in the first place. Gribble (2014) further explains that employers are reluctant to recruit international students due to concerns about international students'

visas and ambiguous legal status. There is a common belief among employers that the recruitment process for an international graduate is complex, lengthy and costly (Gribble, 2014). It is also deemed dangerous because there is no guarantee that the graduate will remain in the country. Although the Australian government has post-study work visas for international students, it is unclear whether this sufficiently encourages Australian employers to take on international graduates. Reviewing the developments of the *Teaching Excellence Framework* in the UK, Hayes (2017) shares a similar concern that some forms of 'othering' and 'marginalising' against participating international students persists, though unintentionally.

Secondly, academic readiness, especially English language proficiency, is another challenging aspect for international students attending WIL programmes (Barton, Hartwig, Bennett, et al., 2017; Barton, Hartwig, Joseph, & Podorova, 2017; Bennett & Ferns, 2017; Gribble, 2014; Jackson & Greenwood, 2015; Smigiel & Harris, 2008). Gribble (2014) notes that international students have lower participation rates in WIL compared with domestic ones. On one hand, many international graduates are poorly prepared for the labour market but have unrealistic expectations of jobs (Blackmore et al., 2014). On the other hand, many employers set high entry requirements, demanding interns transition seamlessly into the workplace (Blackmore et al., 2014; Gribble, 2014).

With regard to English language skills, students who meet the graduation requirements do not generally have the language skills unique to their placement, while the ability to write and communicate in English is important in all WIL stages and aspects (Arkoudis et al., 2009; Birrell & Healy, 2008; Gribble, 2014; Gribble & McRae, 2017; Hawthorne & To, 2014; Robertson et al., 2011). Those with poor report-writing and communication skills often find it hard to immerse themselves in the host workplace (Jackson & Greenwood, 2015). There is also concern about the variety of settings in different programmes which are exposed to students who are deemed not yet qualified for a WIL programme. In a survey of international graduate outcomes and employer perceptions conducted by Australian Education International (2010), it was found that the performance of Australian international graduates is generally up to expectations yet their communication and English language skills are a major source of dissatisfaction for Australian employers.

Thirdly, international students tend to require more time to be familiar with placement settings. In fact, a survey of 20 employers from host organisations of a WIL programme reveals that international students are more in need of structured, detailed guidance and support than their domestic counterparts (Jackson & Greenwood, 2015). In another study conducted for the ICT industry, it was found that it takes time to address skill deficiency such as interpersonal and professional communications, discipline-specific awareness and problem solving abilities (Koppi, Edwards, Sheard, Naghdy, & Brookes, 2010). This entails more demands from academics and workplace supervisors but may clash with time and workload commitments of academic and workplace supervisors (Smigiel & Harris, 2008). Meanwhile, 12-week placements are considered too brief for intended outcomes to be achieved.

2.5.3 Good practices

Atchison, Pollock, Reeders, and Rizzetti (2002) have suggested 11 principles of good practice for the useful design and management of WIL activities. One condition of these principles is that WIL should be integral into the curriculum, accommodate diverse learners, and include both technical and generic learning targets (Atchison et al., 2002). Therefore, good WIL practice should include varied and novel tasks to build career plans for learners. During these tasks, all participants should take part in the preparation and evaluation of the WIL activity and should receive high-level support (Atchison et al., 2002).

In Australian higher education the national exploratory review of WIL shows that successful WIL systems have clearly defined and adapted methods of evaluation (Patrick et al., 2008). More specifically, effective successful WIL services would promote the use of tests involving reflection and combining theory and practice (Crebert et al., 2004). Richardson et al. (2009) emphasise that workplace supervisors' feedback is an integral part of the assessment of WIL programmes. More specifically, through the implementation of an evaluative system, Smith (2012) clearly articulates that the integration of tests within standardised learning outcomes is important for WIL curricula. According to Smith (2012), the systematic implementation of organised learning exercises and tests would help students combine theoretical knowledge with practical knowledge.

Cooper, Orrell and Bowden (2010) identify seven inherent features which are popular in all WIL programmes. Those consist of purpose, context (the workplace), integration, curriculum, learning, partnerships and backing. Cooper and his colleagues claim that all WIL programmes should set transparent and precise targets, expectations and planned results for all stakeholders, and be a true consolidation of academic learning and effective work via real-life problem solving, abstract thinking, and discipline-specific and vocational skills (Cooper et al., 2010). In addition, a supportive arrangement among workplace and learning should be set up in the curriculum while students are suggested to take part in a circle of learning where 'theory and practice are conceptualised and reconceptualised, with each spiral deepening the students' understanding' (Cooper et al., 2010). In conclusion, Cooper et al. state that there is no such effective WIL if an enhanced cooperation between industry and universities is not set up. What is more, during the procedure of WIL, students and workplaces need support (Cooper et al., 2010). Besides, Patrick et al. (2008) and Atchison et al. (2002) also propose that there is a need to have cooperation between stakeholders to develop WIL programmes.

Broadly speaking, the *National WIL Strategy in University Education* (Universities Australia et al., 2015) proposes action in eight key areas. These are:

- provision of national leadership to expand WIL;
- clarification of rules and regulations of the government to empower and scaffold development in WIL;
- establishing aids among students, universities, and employers across all sectors and governments to promote WIL participation;
- confirming that investment in WIL is well-targeted and enables sustainable, high-quality experiences, stakeholder participation and growth;
- the development of university resources, processes and systems to advance WIL and engage business and community partners;
- the development of capacity for more employers to participate in WIL;
- the handling of equity and access issues to enable students to participate in WIL;

- the increase in WIL opportunities for international and domestic students to study off-shore (p. 3).

2.6 Conclusion

The literature on WIL is rich and has explored different aspects in relation to the delivery of WIL programmes. From the perspectives of participating institutions, WIL is generally recognised as an educational imperative that allows institutions to be responsive to the demands on graduate employability. From the perspectives of participating students and employers, WIL has been highlighted as a means of enhancing students' professional, academic, and personal qualities. Successful WIL systems have been studied and principles of effective design and management of WIL have been introduced to guide and support WIL stakeholders. In such climate of WIL research, scholarly discussions on international students partaking WIL can be said to be limited. There is acknowledgement that language, cultural, and social differences cause international students to be disadvantaged against domestic ones in securing placements. There is, however, a lack of investigations into how institutions support international students during their WIL experience and what the outcomes of undertaking WIL for international students are, especially regarding their post-graduation employment in their home country. This research gap is addressed in this study.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

The chapter describes and justifies the selection of the research methodology that informed this study. Answering the research question '**How are Work Integrated Learning (WIL) programmes perceived by onshore Chinese students and Victoria University (VU) staff?'** entailed

- surveying and interviewing Chinese graduates who undertook placements as part of their course at the University regarding their Australia-based WIL experience and their perceptions of its usefulness; and
- interviewing the University's managers, course coordinators and academics regarding the implementation of WIL and their perception of the successes and challenges as well as areas for improvements.

This study was situated within a qualitative research paradigm. The collection and interpretation of data for the study adopted a case study approach and a programme evaluation approach. The literature on each of these approaches was reviewed, followed by the rationales how each related to and built the study.

The chapter also provides information on the development and administering of the two research instruments, namely an online survey and semi-structured interviews, in order to seek insight into VU's implementation of WIL for international students. Regarding data analysis, the chapter describes how the assessable data from the online survey was plotted for frequencies and how the qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were thematically coded and analysed. The chapter ends with observations on the rigour and precision of data collection and analysis.

3.2 Research methodology

3.2.1 Qualitative research

This thesis forms part of qualitative research which is performed in a natural context and derives its inference from rich data. These are the defining features of qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Morrison, 2007). Merriam (2009)

contends that qualitative researchers are interested in how the test subjects interpret their experiences, the sense that they apply to their experiences and eventually how they construct their universe. For this study, the researcher assumed that the perspectives of international graduates and academics from VU are significantly influenced by the context of WIL implementation at VU. The study, therefore, explored these perspectives in this setting to understand the possible causes of their outlook and the extent of the effects experienced by WIL participants. While an online survey was conducted, which provided descriptive statistics about WIL students, this study was not concerned with statistical analysis. Instead, it sought to gain rich information from a small sample of research participants.

Qualitative studies take different forms, such as ethnography, narrative, phenomenological research and case study. A case study was chosen as the basic approach for this exploration: that is, a research strategy focused on an empiric examination of a particular phenomenon in its natural setting. The basic approach used in this analysis is defined in the following section.

3.2.2 Case study approach

Case study methodology is well established in research as it helps to inform practice by illustrating what has worked well, what has been achieved and what have been the issues or dilemmas (Yin, 2013). It is also seen as a powerful tool to demonstrate causal relations between phenomena (Nock, Michel, & Photos, 2008). Veal (2005) supports the use of a case study as a methodology to examine ‘a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and rely on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion’ (p. 170) whereas Lucas, Fleming, and Bhosale (2018) and Pearson, Albon, and Hubball (2015) recognise the potential of the case study approach to provide a number of 'lenses' (Lucas et al., 2018, p. 216) with which to investigate a phenomenon.

For this work, a case study approach was chosen for the following reasons. Firstly, the main task of the study was to make sense of the experiences of international students with their WIL programmes in Australia, including how they benefitted them, what the challenges were, and whether their needs were met. Secondly, the focus of this research

was not on generalisable truths or firm predictions about the employment success of international graduates following their international workplace embedded course experience. Rather, the focus was on the discovery and description of international students' Australia-based WIL experiences. Therefore, it was not the intention of the analysis to form new theory for all international students participating in WIL, but instead to investigate the experiences of a small sample of Chinese students, from which an inference can be taken that may be useful to educators at the University. The study was positioned in the context of the Australian workplace, where international students gained their work experience, and of the Chinese labour market, where Chinese graduates from an Australian university were employed. The case study approach, therefore, served well to gain insight into the topic in its given context or, as Yin (2013) has put it, to collect in-depth data in a natural setting where the research has little or no control over the events. This study used a small group of research participants and relied on their narrative description of their WIL experience, which made the case study approach highly relevant to achieve an in-depth, thorough understanding of the subject.

The case study approach also enabled the analysis to collect data from various sources and collate the data to illuminate the case. As shown in the literature, case studies allow for the use of multiple data sources, which include interviews, documentation, archival records or observation, and can integrate quantitative data to enable better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2013). Yin (2013) affirms that case study designs are particularly useful for 'how' and 'why' research questions which can prompt very different answers from certain groups of respondents. Early on Eisenhardt (1989) observed the benefits of the case study approach to exploratory and explanatory research;

> Particularly well suited to new research areas or research areas for which existing theory seems inadequate. This type of work is highly complementary to incremental theory building from normal science research. The former is useful in early stages of research on a topic or when a fresh perspective is needed, whilst the latter is useful in later stages of knowledge. (Eisenhardt, 1989, pp. 548-549)

This thesis deals with the highly contextualised nature of WIL programmes and WIL experience at VU. It also involves investigations into a particular group of WIL

students, and the particular workplace setting of Australia. These are the features of qualitative research that have been identified by many researchers (Coll & Chapman, 2000; Lucas et al., 2018). These are among the features that have allowed for case study as a methodology to be used in this WIL research.

Some important considerations when using a case study approach include knowing the nature of the case to be solved and how the review and coverage of the case should be handled. Mills, Durepos, and Wiebe (2010) and Yin (2013) classify case studies into descriptive, explanatory and exploratory ones. Explanatory case studies are useful for explaining the causal links in real-life interventions such as how or why an experience took place; the exploratory type of case study is generally employed to investigate circumstances or conditions where there is no simple single set of consequences for the action being tested, or not been used to establish the context of a future study; descriptive cases studies, meanwhile, serve to describe a phenomenon in its context (Mills et al., 2010; Yin, 2013).

Case studies are also described in the form of holistic single case studies, single cases with embedded units, and multiple case studies (Yin, 2013). A holistic single case study involves either an individual or a group of individuals that work within a unique situation or context, whereas a single case with integrated systems helps the researcher to examine the circumstances of different individuals involved in different operations within the enterprise. Stake (1995) and Yin (2013) caution that when analysing single case studies with sub-units, it is important to establish the sub-units inside sub-units themselves, between different sub-units and within the larger case comprising all the sub-units. The distinction between a single case with integrated units and a multiple case study depends on whether the subject context or the environment is specific for each of the cases and whether this allows for an interpretation of the similarities and differences in different cases (Yin, 2013). Multiple case studies suit research that seeks to predict similar or contrasting results, usually in research replications (Yin, 2013).

This research had the following characteristics as a case study. Firstly, as this study examined the topic of WIL implementation for international students at only one site, the project as a whole was a single case study with integrated units rather than a multiple case study or a small, detailed stand-alone case study. This is perceived to be an appropriate approach for a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences

both within and between instances of WIL student involvement in the investigation (Lucas et al., 2018). The analysis of the WIL experience of international graduates and the WIL implementation experience of Australian academics in this study considered that from themes that emerged, both within the individual cases and across these cases, a broad understanding of the issue of WIL implementation for international students across the participating institutions was evident.

Secondly, the research was a descriptive case study that sought to explore the impact of WIL experience on international students where the outcomes could vary. Descriptive case studies are argued to uncover relevant matter and provide rich insights into the topic being studied (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2013) and findings from descriptive case studies can enhance the understanding of complex issues and add strength to what is already proven (Shen, 2009). The research questions that motivated the investigation were concise in nature, mostly targeting the 'what' and 'how' of international students' WIL experiences in Australia and were answered through two sources, namely graduate participants and academics, and by means of an online survey and interviews with the research participants. The analysis of the descriptive case study data was based on themes of related categories and explained through narratives on the findings.

Stake (1995) classified case studies into three kinds: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. The first type, the intrinsic case study, examines the complexity of the situation and aims for a thorough comprehension of a certain situation. The second type, instrumental, goes beyond only understanding the case itself by examining the reasons and associations. This kind of case study offers a method to a conclusion but does not form the conclusion itself. Meanwhile, the third type of case study, the collective, is concerned with the analysis and organisation of particular instrumental cases (Burns, 1991). On the basis of the balance of debate around research methodologies, it was determined that the most suitable for this analysis would be an intrinsic case study approach for several reasons. In the first place, the study questions, through their specific concern with the aspirations and knowledge of a single group of students and the analytical survey, are oriented towards a nuanced approach. Secondly, an intrinsic approach totally fits the openness of the research outcomes (Grandy, 2010; Stake, 1995)

3.2.3 Evaluation approach

Evaluation of educational programmes has been acknowledged to not only enable more effective programme delivery and implementation but also facilitate strong services and societal progress (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014).

In this thesis, an evaluation approach has been employed to examine and analyse the implementation of WIL programmes delivered at VU, and to the impact of the WIL experience on the Chinese international students. The research was conducted at the time when WIL programmes were relatively settled at VU and had produced effects of some extent. Evaluation and understanding of WIL at VU, therefore, can inform judgements and decisions regarding the worth of WIL programmes being evaluated. This serves to better meet the expectations and needs of the University, its academics, students, and industry partners and, with that, contributes to improving the University's educational quality.

Owen and Rogers (1999) equate *outcomes* with short-term and immediate benefits to participants during or after their involvement in a programme; these can be represented in terms of 'knowledge, skills, values, behaviour, condition or status' (p. 264). The motivation was to investigate the implementation aspects as well as casting light on the assumptions that WIL programmes at VU were delivered consistently with programme intentions and to provide possible explanations for the patterns of outcomes.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) define paradigms for evaluation as the 'basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator' (p. 105) and Alkin (2004) defines the evaluation models as a 'set of rules, regulations and prohibitions and guidance frameworks that specify what a good and proper assessment is and how it should be carried out' (p. 5).

Upon reviewing relevant paradigms and models, the current study was situated within the post-positivist paradigm and adopted Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) *Four Levels of Evaluation Model*. Ontologically, the post-positivist paradigm believes that there is only one reality and that reality can be known within a certain level of probability by means of scientific methods, the outcome of which can contribute to improving the society (Mertens & Wilson, 2018). It advocates the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods and demands some distance between the

investigator and the subject being study to maintain intellectual honesty, objectivity and careful gathering of empirical data (Jennings & Callahan, 1983).

For this study, the framework used to collect and analyse the data was Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) evaluation model. The first level in the model, *reactions*, served to measure how international students reacted to their WIL experience and what their level of satisfaction was. A survey was used to gather the participants' responses regarding how WIL programmes at VU was of relevance and appropriateness. The second level, *learning*, served to measure the changes in international students' skills, knowledge and attitudes following their attendance in WIL programmes. The third level, *behaviour*, helped examine the changes in international students' performance at the workplace upon their completion of the course at VU and returning to their home country for employment. The fourth level, *results*, served to relate to the ability of the programme to achieve its objectives.

3.2.4 Research setting

VU, a regional university, is located in the western suburbs of Melbourne. It attracts an ethnically diverse student body, including a strong international cohort. It provides both higher and vocational education. As the research setting for this study, it provides a rich case for examining WIL implementation, especially as it has been actively promoting an institution-wide WIL policy and hosting a wide range of WIL programmes. VU also has a large proportion of international students, many of whom have been prepared for the workplace by means of a WIL curriculum. This makes VU a rich case to examine the relevance and currency of WIL programmes for international students.

Understanding the research environment has been described in the literature as important in defining and bringing meaning to science. In other words, positioning a study in its research setting is an essential means to adequately understand the background of the study and illuminate what works in one and not in another (Crowe et al., 2011; Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014; Ragin & Becker, 1992; Robertson, Jepson, Macvean, & Gray, 2016; Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) in particular emphasises this significance if the research is an intrinsic case study, arguing that 'the more the case study is an intrinsic case study, the more attention needs to be paid to the contexts' (p. 64).

3.3 Sampling and participants

The two main groups of participants targeted for the research were VU's academic and administrative staff who had direct or indirect involvement with WIL programmes at the University, and Chinese students who graduated from VU and undertook WIL as part of their degree. An overview of the sampling size is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. *Sampling cohort size*

Research participants	**Number invited**	**Number participated**	**Response rates**
VU's staff (interviews)	14	14	100%
VU's Chinese graduates (survey)	unknown	18	unknown
VU's Chinese graduates (interviews)	18	8	44%

Establishing a basis to select participants is the crucial element of any research. There are well-established guidelines on how research participants can be sampled from the target population. Sampling can be divided into *probabilistic* and *non-probabilistic* approaches depending on whether a probability technique is involved in the selection of a participant from a population (Babbie, 2004; Evans & Rooney, 2011). Sampling types under *non-probabilistic sampling* include convenience sampling, purposeful sampling, quota sampling and snowball sampling (Evans & Rooney, 2011; Martínez-Mesa, González-Chica, Duquia, Bonamigo, & Bastos, 2016; Neuman, 2006).

The two sampling types relevant to this study are *convenience sampling* used for the online survey and *purposeful sampling* used for the semi-structured interviews. In *convenience sampling*, participants are selected in order of appearance based on their convenience accessibility until the total amount of participants or the time limit are reached (Martínez-Mesa et al., 2016). One shortcoming with this type of sampling is that the surveyed participants may or may not be representative of the population (Evans & Rooney, 2011). This characteristic of convenience sampling was considered for this study. However, the study was designed to explore the relationships between some manipulated variables, which was between WIL experience and graduate employability, rather than to generalise the characteristics of the population. Given this, the use of convenience sampling can be argued to still be valid. In addition, an

invitation to participate in the survey was made open to all graduates interested in order for this study to aim for a wide range of respondents to the online survey rather than just restricting the participation to only the newly graduated as in some other research on WIL graduates (for example Henderson, 2011). Meanwhile, *purposeful sampling* is employed when the conditions are such that the opinion of certain participants is essential to the topic under examination or when a diverse range of opinions from different fields is required (Martínez-Mesa et al., 2016). The rationale behind purposeful sampling for this study was that while the targeted participants from VU faculties, VU graduates and China-based employers of VU graduates might not represent the classification, they do represent the frontline of change so that in a situation they can provide relevant evidence to the topic being examined.

The following groups of participants were targeted for the research, namely WIL staff at VU, Chinese students who graduated from VU and undertook WIL as part of their degree, employers in Australia with whom those Chinese graduates from VU had their WIL placement, and China-based employers of the Chinese graduates with VU qualifications.

Chinese students who graduated from VU and undertook WIL as part of their degree were invited to participate in the research by means of email. The contact details of Chinese graduates were obtained via VU's alumni database. The questionnaire used in this study was designed to collect initial information from Australia-based employers with whom these graduates had their WIL placements and from the graduates' China based employers. Nevertheless, only a very small number of Australian or Chinese employers responded to the researcher's invitation to participate in the research. The graduates were then invited for further exchanges of information regarding their responses to the questions in the survey via the phone number and email address they supplied in the responses to the survey. Due to the privacy rules of the University, graduates' personal information, including their email addresses, was not allowed to be passed on directly to the researcher. Therefore, an email to invite VU's international graduates to participate in the online survey was sent to potential participants by the University's Alumni Office, with two follow-up emails reminding them to respond. The ethics approval also required the questions in the online survey not to have validated functions, meaning that the participants could skip questions or stop participating at any

time they wished. This accounted for the different response rate for each question in the survey and for the overall low response, with a total of 18 responses.

Question 4 in the survey asked about the course that the respondents had been admitted to at VU and Question 5 asked about their highest qualification at the time they participated in the survey. As shown in 3, 5 participants were enrolled in a Master's degree programme (27.8%), 6 in a Bachelor's degree programme (33.3%), 5 in a Diploma (27.8%) and two in a Certificate course (11.1%). The data about the graduates' age and employment status could help predict the course levels they entered at VU. The respondents who had been enrolled in an undergraduate qualification at VU were mostly under 24 while the respondents admitted to a master's degree programme belonged to the older age group of 35-44. In the Chinese education system, students complete their compulsory secondary education at the age of 17. Pursuing post-secondary education, therefore, does not start prior to the age of 18. The respondents who had entered a Diploma or Bachelor's degree at VU could, therefore, have undertaken their first undergraduate programme directly from their senior secondary school at age 18.

The graduation year of the participants ranged between 2002 and 2017, with more than three-quarters of the respondents graduating after the year 2010. The information about the respondents' graduation year was included in the survey to make sure recent graduates participated in the study, especially as this was the period of time when VU was making a stronger commitment for implementing and resourcing WIL. The respondents were based on different campuses while being enrolled in VU, either at VU's City Flinders (66.7%) or VU's Footscray Park (27.8%) campuses; one was based at Newport campus.

Table 3.*The demographic composition of surveyed graduates at VU enrolments*

Cross-tabulation		Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
Age group	20-24	9	4	13
	25-34	0	2	2
	35-44	1	2	3
Total		10	8	18
Employment status	Not working	8	4	12
	Working full-time	1	2	3
	Working part-time	1	2	3
Total		10	8	18
VU graduation year	2002-2009	3	1	4
	2010-2017	7	7	14
Total		10	8	18
VU education pursuit	Master's Degree	1	4	5
	Bachelor's Degree	4	2	6
	Diploma	4	1	5
	Certificate	1	1	2
Total		10	8	18
VU Campus	City Flinders	7	4	11
	Footscray Park	3	3	6
	Newport	0	1	1
Total		10	8	18

The participation of international students in WIL in this study had some similar patterns to the WIL data reported for Australia's international student cohort by Universities Australia (2019b).

The whole process of collecting the opinions of VU's WIL administrators and staffs regarding the effectiveness of WIL programmes followed the guidelines set by VU's Ethics Committee.The position and number of each participant type are presented in Table 4. All participants are referred to by a general title, such as *Central Administrator, Faculty-based Administrator, Lecturer,* or *Senior Academic Leader*, rather than their exact position title to ensure anonymity during transcription and reporting of data.

Table 4. *Summary of VU staff participating in interviews*

Position and responsibilities	**Number**
Senior Academic Leader	1
Central Administrator	2
Faculty-based Administrator	8
Lecturer/ Senior Lecturer	3

The respondents came from various offices and schools from VU and were either directly or indirectly engaged in affairs for international students, including work placements or internships. This dissertation employed semi-structured interviews in order to acquire rich data and detect arising concepts and categories.

3.4 Ethical considerations and ethics approval

It has been observed in the literature that qualitative research tends to be more intrusive compared with quantitative (Patton, 2015). Since the study involved human participants, attention was paid to ensure the procedure employed complied with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council, & Universities Australia, 2007).

The recruitment of participants for this study involved gaining ethics approval from VU (Human Ethics Approval Number HRETH 11-79) to address potential issues in relation to privacy, confidentiality, and risks while the research was conducted. This research was regarded as a low-risk research study as it involved informed and adult research participants. A low-risk human ethical clearance was obtained from VU's Research Ethics Committee. Participants were sent invitation letters, plain language statements and consent forms. These documents clearly explained the voluntary nature of participation to assist the respondents with their decision to participate in the research. The consent form supplied transparent information for the research participants regarding the nature of the exploration, the reason why they were selected to take part in the research, what they were required to do and some likely resultant impacts on them. The phone numbers and contact details of the researcher and the Ethics Committee were included in the explanatory documents should the respondents have any queries. The researcher aimed to present the research and invitation for participation in the most

professional way possible according to VU's ethics guidelines. This was also in line with fundamental ethical principles in psychological and educational research (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Neuman, 2006; Tisdale, 2003).

Anonymity was used as a safeguard for the graduate and academic participants in this study. Quotes from the graduates in the study were replaced by an alias (G1-8). The senior academic leaders' quotes were labelled as SAL1; central administrators as CA1-2; faculty-based administrators as FA1-8; and the lecturers as L1-3. The interviews with the graduates and academic were tape-recorded with the permission granted by the participant. The interviews were conducted one-on-one in a private location. All the data collected for this study were either stored in the University's computer files protected with a passcode or a sealed cabinet in the office of the researcher.

One important ethical consideration for this study was related to the researcher's position in the research and his relationship with the participants, which may have posed potential ethical risks, power differentials or bias. The researcher considered himself both an outsider and an insider while conducting this study. Merton (1972) and Griffith (1998) define insider-researchers as those who are members of and familiar with the group under study, and therefore have 'privileged access to particular kinds of knowledge' about the research participants (Merton, 1972, p. 11). At the time of conducting this study, the researcher was a professional staff at VU and undertook some tasks related to overseeing WIL planning. Some faculty members were work colleagues of the researcher and others were introduced to the researcher by means of referrals. The insider role was useful for the researcher to build rapport with VU faculty members and WIL staff who participated in the study as interviewees. Arrangements for interviews with faculty members were effortless and all the interviewees shared their opinions openly. The researcher, meanwhile, played an outsider role when connecting with the Chinese graduates as none of them was known by the researcher and no relationship was established prior to the study. To maintain objectivity for both roles, the researcher's resolution was to report the voices, experiences, and views of the research participants in the most honest manner. Clarification was always sought when the interviewees' opinions were unclear to the researcher. The researcher also adhered to relevant ethical guidelines to maintain objectivity and accuracy for the data collected.

3.5 Research instruments

3.5.1 Research instrument 1: Online survey

The survey of Chinese students having undertaken WIL as part of their course at VU was set up, using *Survey Monkey* as an online platform, to evaluate the employability and practicality of experiences, including technical, cultural, personal and professional ones, that were gained from VU's WIL programmes. The questionnaire in Appendix 1 was an online instrument made accessible to all the student participants and available in both English and Chinese. The online survey contained the following major parts, namely

- respondents' demographic information, educational and employment background,
- respondents' VU coursework information and Australian work placement details,
- respondents' development/changes in terms of skills, knowledge, attitudes,
- challenges to respondents during an Australian work placement,
- respondents' perspectives on their best/worst WIL experience and on how VU's WIL programmes can be improved, and
- relevance and usefulness of VU's WIL experience to respondents' current employment in China.

Clusters of questions and their purposes are provided in Table 5. The personal attributes and work-related skills (Q12-14, Appendix 1) that the respondents ranked in terms of significance following their WIL experience were based on the *Employability Skills Framework* (Department of Education Science and Training et al., 2002). Respondents anchored their perceptions on a ten-point Likert scale, from 1 'lowest impact' to 10 'highest impact'.

Table 5. *List of key elements identified from the online survey*

Analysed items	Example characteristics	Purposes
Genders	• Male • Female	Practicality of WIL experiences by gender
Ages	• 15-19 • 20-24	Practicality of WIL experiences by ages
Previous employment status	• Not working • Working full-time	Practicality of WIL experiences of commencing students
Course undertaken at VU	• School name/ School/ Faculty/ Graduation Year	Practicality of WIL experiences by faculties
Qualification types	• Higher Degree Research • Higher Degree	Practicality of WIL experiences by level of qualifications
Sectors	• Higher Education • Vocational Education	Practicality of WIL experiences by sectors
Source of funding	• Own funds • Family	Practicality of WIL experiences by source of funding
Sites and Precincts	• City Precinct: City Flinders, City King St,	Practicality of WIL experiences by VU's locations
Australian work placements	• Business name/ Address/ Workplace supervisor's	To follow up with Australian employers
WIL employment sector	• Labourer/related worker • Elementary clerical, sales	Practicality of WIL experiences by industries
WIL duration	• Months/ Days/ Hours	Practicality of WIL experiences by experience
WIL experience	• Duties in the workplace • Workplace orientation	Different aspects of WIL experience
Developed attributes	• Loyalty • Ability to deal with	Attributes developed during WIL
Work-related skills	• Technical skills • Interpersonal	Work-related skills developed during WIL
Challenges	• English language skills • Physical appearance	Negative factors during WIL experience
Best/ worst aspects of WIL experience	• (Open-ended answers)	
Current employment/ Industry sector	• Labourer/related worker • Education & Transition	Contributions of WIL to employment by sector/industry

The following issues were considered during the development of the questionnaire:

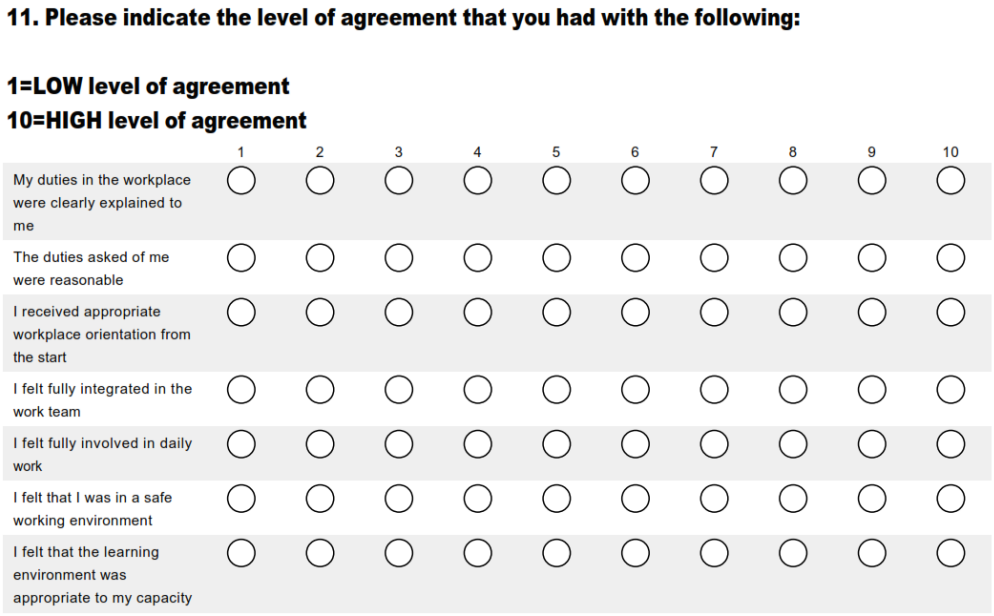
- the wording of the questions,
- the form and shape of the questionnaire,
- the guidance and explanation for items in the questionnaire,

- the expected scales for categorising and coding purposes, and
- pretesting

as recommended by Cavana, Delahaye, and Sekaran (2001) and Leedy and Ormrod (2001). According to Cavana et al. (2001), items in a questionnaire need to be checked for appropriateness in terms of content, language and wording, question types and format, and sequencing of information. The questionnaire used for this study was developed using plain language and was piloted with a small group of graduating Chinese students to ensure there were no redundant, ambiguous or offensive questions. Other purposes of the piloting were to ensure complete comprehension from respondents and to check for data appropriateness and adequacy as recommended by Baumgartner and Strong (1998).

The questions were arranged from general demographic questions to more specific ones and rephrased to contextualise them for Chinese graduates. Both open-ended and closed questions were used in the questionnaire to provide an opportunity for the respondents to add their other opinions and personal knowledge. Closed questions were used more in the questionnaire with the complete range of possible options to help the respondents provide their answers quickly and the researcher to code the data easily for subsequent analysis. Response choices for each question were checked to confirm that comparisons would be equal together with balance and mutual exclusivity as advised by Cavana et al. (2001) and Neuman (2006).

Figure 1. Example survey questions



11. Please indicate the level of agreement that you had with the following:

1=LOW level of agreement
10=HIGH level of agreement

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My duties in the workplace were clearly explained to me	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The duties asked of me were reasonable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I received appropriate workplace orientation from the start	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I felt fully integrated in the work team	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I felt fully involved in daily work	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I felt that I was in a safe working environment	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I felt that the learning environment was appropriate to my capacity	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

A double-translation and back-translated procedure was utilised in the establishment of the Chinese version of the questionnaire. According to Cavusgil and Das (1997), delivering the questionnaire in the domestic language is a sound practice to reduce cross-cultural differences, encourage a response, and assist with conceptual, instrument and measurement equivalence. After the development of the questionnaire in English, a NAATI (Australia's National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters) accredited bilingual translator was paid to translate the questionnaire into Chinese characters. Following this, a second accredited translator was invited to back-translate the Chinese version into English to check for consistency and accuracy between the two translations. As the English version of the questionnaire was written in plain language, there was no major contextual clarification for terms required.

After the questionnaire had been piloted and revised, it was sent directly to the respondents' email address in a link in English and a link in Chinese. As asserted by Babbie (2007) and Neuman (2006), several benefits of a web survey are that it is cost effective, an easy means to collect data, provides anonymity for respondents, and respondents have sufficient time for completion at their own convenience. The questionnaire was mailed to a database of 127 Chinese graduates and 18 responses were collected. The response rate was low but this was expected given the nature of the data collection as a self-reporting survey method (Sekaran, 1992). All the responses were

entered into SPSS 23 statistical software in order to have an overview of how the questions were perceived by the respondents.

3.5.2 Research instrument 2: Semi-structured interviews

The purpose of using semi-structured interviewing for this study was to provide important and vital information about WIL programmes from a small number of participants. Semi-structured interviewing also allowed the investigator to obtain a thorough understanding of the responses (Harrell & Bradley, 2009; Patton, 1990, 2015). This study did not employ unstructured and structured interviews as, by not focusing on the specific topic, they are not effective in gaining important insights from the interviewees (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). The study, instead, employed semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to encourage responses, especially concrete examples and perspectives, from the respondents. Potential interviewees were approached via the student researcher's connections and followed the steps recommended by Feldman, Bell, and Berger (2004), including making initial contact to explain the research and its significance, asking for approval to keep in touch with the respondents, and building some rapport with them before the data was collected.

Interview questions were based on suggestions for process-outcome evaluation projects from Owen and Rogers (1999). Interviewees were asked about different aspects in relation to the delivery of WIL programmes, including:

- Has the programme been implemented as planned?
- Have the stated goals of the programme been achieved?
- Have the needs of those served by the programme been met?
- How do differences in implementation affect programme outcomes?

The interview questions underwent several consultations with senior researchers and piloting to ensure the adequacy, relevance and appropriateness of the data expected to be collected. Depending on the respondents' answers, additional probing questions to follow up or clarify certain points in the answers were asked to allow for elaborated data to be gathered. The researcher adopted an informal conversational approach to encourage more interaction with interviewees. Each interview lasted between 45-60 minutes and was audio-recorded to facilitate archiving and data analysis.

3.6 Analysis of data

Likert scale data is regarded as significant in the process of data analysis. Likert data and Likert alternatives are widely used in measuring the underlying attitudes of research participants towards an object. An analysis of the surveyed data requires an understanding of some relevant concepts in relation to Likert-type and Likert scale data. A typical Likert question contains a 5- or 7-point scale which allows respondents to rate their level of agreement with a statement. The distance between the responses in a Likert-type question, for example between *strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree,* and *strongly disagree*, however, is not measurable and not necessarily equal (Sullivan & Artino, 2013). 'In the same way, any numbers that are assigned to the responses in a Likert-type question can show a *greater than* relationship but how much greater cannot generally be implied' (Clason & Dormody, 1994). 'Because of these characteristics, Likert-type items fall into the ordinal measurement scale' (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010).

Likert-type questions can be interpreted independently or presented in a single composite score during a data analysis process. In the latter case, these Likert-type questions are then referred to as a Likert scale. When combined, the items are used to provide a quantitative measure of an attitude, character or character trait. 'For stand-alone Likert questions, descriptive statistics recommended for ordinal measurement scale items include a mode or median for central tendency and frequencies for variability. Likert scale data, on the other hand, is analysed at the interval measurement' (Ary et al., 2010). Likert scale items are formed via counting a complex score (sum or mean) from four or more type Likert-type items. As a result, the composite score for Likert scales should be investigated at the interval measurement scale. At this point, it is highly recommended to use descriptive statistics for interval scale items which include the mean for central trend and standard deviations for variability. For the survey used in this study, data collected for questions 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 30 and 31 (Appendix 1) are analysed using the descriptive statistics as for Likert scales since each of these questions was manifested through a number of observable variables.

Once each interview session was completed, the transcript was documented and analysed. Relevant words, sentences or phrases were noted on the margins of the

transcripts. Common codes with similar meanings were brought together and given an abstract name. This process kept repeating throughout all the interview transcripts. Once a new set of data was transcribed, the researcher started to compare the emerging and existing codes. After a few rounds, there appeared to be higher-order categories or themes which were collapsed from common concepts. Once all the transcripts were coded, the insights and meanings were labelled in the form of themes as Table 6 shows.

Table 6. *Sample coding*

Participant comments	Code	Concepts	Category	Theme
'The Australian Curriculum is going to be different, for example, the contact hours that they have at university. There are fewer contact hours here than there are at the home university or in the home country that students are more familiar with.'	Contact hours	Academic differences	Challenges for WIL international students	International students have limited chance to network with local students due to limited contact hours.
'Perhaps the differences in pedagogy like teacher's role in their countries versus teacher's role here. We've got a different approach, we've got a whole student -centred, you try to work out what level students are at and try to teach according to their levels as you are gonna have a really diverse range within one class.'	Pedagogical approaches	Academic differences	Challenges for WIL international students	International students have to adjust to new classroom arrangements. They are also expected to be independent and responsible for their own learning.

A summary categorisation of data concepts is shown in Table 7 and

Table 8. Twenty-four conceptual labels emerged in the open coding stage and five categories – WIL implementation, outcomes of WIL implementation, challenges for WIL international students, support for international students, and suggestions for improvement of WIL programmes – were established at the axial coding level stage. The panellists who were responsible for each of the concepts and categories are shown in

Table 9. The analysis of the data revealed the saturation of some categories as some participants kept mentioning the same themes when replying to the questions asked. The different perspectives of the interviewees were exposed in the analysis due to the difference in expertise and role they held in relation to the introduction of WIL revealed in the study.

Table 7. *Sample categorisation of codes*

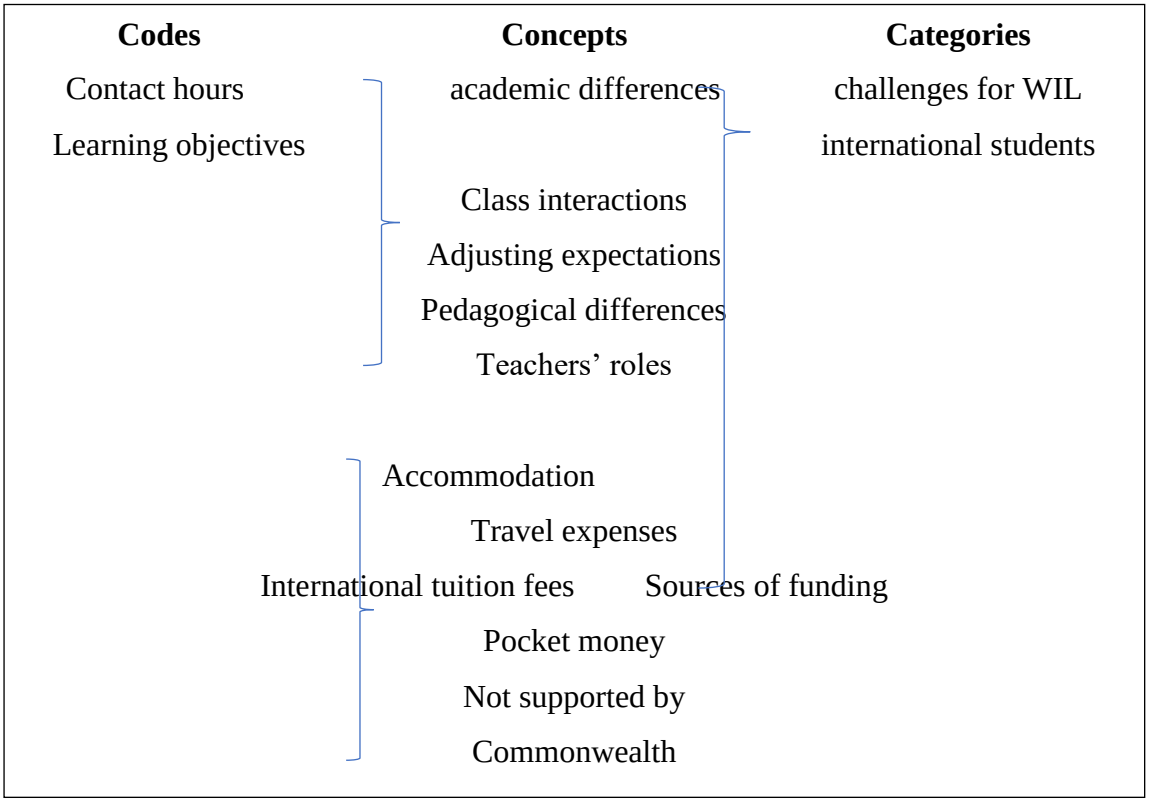


Table 8. *Summary of categories and sub-categories*

Categories	**Sub-categories**
WIL implementation	WIL models Available support for WIL international students Different implementation approaches
Outcomes of WIL implementation	Expected outcomes Needs of WIL participants
Challenges for WIL international students	Academic differences Cultural differences Sources of funding International status Placement opportunities Language issues Safety Social interactions
Support for international students	Pre-placement programmes On-going support services
Suggestions for improvement	Support network WIL policies

Table 9. *Data summary table*

Categories and sub-categories	**Number of interviewees responding to the categories**	**Number of references made by the interviewees**
WIL implementation		
WIL benefits	9	17
WIL models	5	5
Costs	6	9
Different implementation approaches	3	3
Outcomes of WIL implementation		
Expected outcomes	7	18
Needs of WIL participants	2	3
Challenges for WIL international students		
Academic differences	4	9
Cultural differences	7	13
Sources of funding	4	12
International status	7	18
Placement opportunities	9	23
Language issues	12	22
Safety	4	5
Social interactions	3	5
Support for international students		
Pre-placement programmes	10	40
On-going (academic, financial and life) support services	10	40
Suggestions for improvement of WIL programmes		
Support network	11	35
WIL policies	11	35

3.7 Representativeness and generalisability

This study is framed under the view that deep and meaningful interpretations of WIL implementation can be drawn out of the VU case study and can be extrapolated to other contexts where WIL for international students is the research topic. The study adopts Guba's (1978) and Kerlinger and Lee's (2000) view of generalisability as a continuum rather than an absolute. In relation to the relativity of generalisability, Guba (1978) argues that 'any generalisation is a working hypothesis, not a conclusion' (p. 125) 'to be tested again in the next encounter and again in the counter after that' (p. 70). Kerlinger and Lee (2000) hold a similar view that more emphasis should be on 'how much can we generalise the results of the study' (p. 474) rather than on whether there exists generalisation to other settings. This study contains useful insights that can be relevant and hold currency to other studies on the topic.

Given the large number of institutions in Australia and courses being offered by these institutions, the findings from this study do not aim for full generalisation to WIL programmes from other Australian institutions. Different interpretations of graduate attributes and WIL can occur due to the fact that the curriculum, content, delivery, and purposes and objectives underpinning curriculum design and delivery can vary between Australian institutions. However, this research, as a case study, is useful not only for VU but also for other practitioners in the fields related to WIL, such as educational policymakers, employers, industries and students, particularly international students, in identifying the needed skills, relevant qualifications and courses that are fit and applicable to students' career choices and how to work and communicate in workplace settings across disciplines. This study, which provides insights into an organisation's WIL implementation, is thus expected to be able to provide findings that are directly relevant to other Australian institutions, particularly those with a high number of international enrolments, especially those from China.

An effort has been made in this dissertation to allow for the transferability of the research findings as discussed in the early works of Lincoln and Guba (1985). Transferability refers to how the reader utilises the results of a research in a corresponding situation. In order to acquire transferability, Geertz (1973) promotes the use of dense explanations to concede deeper understanding and enable the reader to properly interpret the effects of similar situations. This study is devoted to in-depth analysis and discussion of the development, implementation and evaluation of WIL. The study also developed guidelines for work

practises that will promote better experiences for international students and provide more information that can support WIL developers and co-ordinators.

The study is transferable in that the research methods, the data analysis and the themes identified could relate to other international students' experiences of WIL.

3.8 Rigour and trustworthiness of data

To establish the quality of empirical social research, measures to ensure validity and reliability are essential. In qualitative research, *validity*, also referred to as the *truth value*, concerns the extent to which findings accurately reflect the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This quality of *truth value* is achieved when there is recognition of multiple realities that exist and when the researchers are aware of the methodological bias as a result of their personal experiences and viewpoints (Long & Johnson, 2000). Meanwhile, *reliability* concerns the *consistency* within the employed analytical procedures (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve the trustworthiness in the research methods undertaken, the collection and interpretation of data need to be clear and transparent so that an independent researcher can reach identical or corresponding findings (Long & Johnson, 2000).

The following section of this chapter names the methodological strategies which have been suggested in the literature to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research before detailing how they are incorporated in the current study.

- Recognising and addressing personal biases which may have impacted on the findings (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002);
- Recognising sampling bias and continually reflecting on methods to warrant adequate depth and relevance of data collection and analysis (Sandelowski, 1993);
- Keeping a record to ensure consistency and transparency in data interpretations (Long & Johnson, 2000; Sandelowski, 1993);
- Comparing between accounts to warrant different perspectives are represented (Morse et al., 2002; Slevin & Sines, 2002);
- Incorporating rich accurate descriptions of research participants' accounts to support findings (Slevin & Sines, 2002);
- Triangulating data by means of different methods and perspectives to produce a more comprehensive set of findings (Long & Johnson, 2000; Sandelowski, 1993; Stake, 2010).

To assist with the identification of the case study type, a conceptual framework is argued to be helpful, based on which the researcher is able to identify who will or will not be involved in the study and what relationships will be presented in the interpretation of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the same way, to assist with the interpretation and analysis of the data collected, it is recommended to stick with the propositions if there are any or with the research aims and research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2013). This is to ensure that the analysis is focused rather than diffused outside the study's scope and that the data sources can be converged for an understanding of the overall case rather than being treated independently as distinctive parts of the case (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Overall, the quality and trustworthiness of case study research will be enhanced if the analysis considers all relevant evidence, including rival interpretations, and is conducted in an unbiased and objective manner (Rowley, 2002, p. 24).

This study adopted Stake's (2010) suggestion for reducing the possibility of misconception by applying strategies like gathering redundant data and triangulating, utilising various perceptions to validate the possibility of repeating an observation or interpretation. During this comprehensive research, participants' impressions of their WIL interactions, and the factors that impact current WIL activities were collected. The result of this process offered the researcher a chance to acquire a holistic view of the case under study. Besides, to increase the objectivity of the empirical data and at the same time limit its subjectivity, the researcher applied replicative methods and followed strictly the disciplined practices during the process of analysing and triangulating (Stake, 2010), to distinguish between empirical knowledge and opinion and preference or, according to Cohen et al. (2007), knowledge versus inference. This study would be validated via these measurements.

As the researcher was a trainer at the site of the study, it was necessary to put consideration into the management of insider-outsider tensions. The researcher was aware of the challenges to remain distant from networks with other academics and colleagues within the research site. Coding was checked by the research supervisor at the time.

Semi-structured interviews with Chinese graduates and VU academics were audio-recorded to allow for the ongoing re-evaluating of the data to check emerging themes remained true to participants' accounts. Rich and thick verbatim quotes from VU academics and students have confirmed whether or not the final concepts of the research remained a true and informative account.

Yin's (2013) principles have also been incorporated in this research, including the use of several sources of evidence, the use of a case study archive and the preservation of a chain of evidence. Also, this participant reviewing strategy, including submitting interview transcripts to interviewees for validation, can assure the precise management of the research. This is triangulation of the data, a form of reliability, and tests the trustworthiness and rigor of the data collected.

The following are additional activities which were conducted to enhance the study's reliability:

- Building a comprehension of the subject via an in-depth literature review on work integrated learning, and the study of onshore Chinese students in the VU context. This step acted as a foundation for a framework for the exploration and was a reference point along with the entire processes of data collection and data analysis.
- Re-evaluating data and interpretation of results; keeping up to date about work integrated learning practices and policy changes at the site of VU; and numerous meetings to discuss the issues under study with colleagues, staff members, and managers at VU.

Certain findings and implications made in this study are based on students' self-reported data. Self-reported data, with its subjective nature, has been argued to be impacted by the ability of the respondents to supply the required information accurately (Archambault, 2011; Gonyea, 2005; Schacter, 1999). One issue with survey data concerns what is known as social desirability bias (Gonyea, 2005) as research participants can try to revise and make their responses look better to the researchers, particularly in cases in which they feel under pressure to maintain their self-esteem. Another issue with self-reported data is that respondents may interpret and consistently assess the survey questions in the same form as one broad perception of their overall employability rather than their competence in each individual skill (Archambault, 2011). Therefore, to maintain the validity of the data collected from the survey of the Chinese graduates, the preparation of the survey questions and the survey administration process followed the guidelines by Gonyea (2005, p. 84), which included ensuring that the questions were phrased clearly and unambiguously, the respondents had a base of experience to draw on while responding to the questions, and the respondents were informed and reminded of the merits of their thoughtful responses. There

was also a use of multiple data sources such as interviews with some of the graduate respondents and with academics to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings.

In short, the study implemented the above measures to uphold its reliability and trustworthiness.

3.9 Conclusion

This qualitative case study research employed an online survey and semi-structured interviews with 14 VU staff and 18 Chinese graduates to research the experiences of Chinese students in WIL programmes at Victoria University, Australia. This chapter has outlined the theoretical rationale for the use of the case study approach, qualitative research methods design, and programme evaluation approach in the study. The chapter has also detailed the main design of the research which involved information on the research participants, the sampling of the participants, the instruments for collecting data, and the procedure for interpreting and analysing the collected data. The chapter has discussed the ethical issues in the study and measures to ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of the research.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Employing the process-outcome approach to programme evaluation, this chapter examines how the needs and expectations of international students have been met through WIL. The chapter first examines WIL's contribution to technical and non-technical qualities of international students. Specifically, it explores WIL's contribution to international students in major themes that are presented in the order of priority to the research participants: (a) English language skills, (b) cultural awareness, (c) interpersonal communication, (d) hard skills, and (e) personal attributes. For each of these aspects, the chapter explores what international students expect from their course and WIL experience in Australia, how their needs and expectations are met through WIL, and how Australian institutions could improve their WIL design and implementation to better meet the needs of international students.

The chapter then examines how international students are prepared for their Australian WIL experience. In this respect, it explores the challenges that international students face as a result of (a) their international student status, (b) the lack of prior work experience, (c) the lack of an understanding of the Australian labour market, and (d) their financial status. It also aims to gain an understanding of the extent to which Australian universities prepare international students for the workplace and support them. Findings from the survey and interviews with the students and academics provide both broad and detailed insights into WIL's contribution to the graduate employability of international students.

Participants identified the development of their English Language skills as their greatest concern.

4.2 Work Integrated Learning and the development of students' English language skills

It is well accepted that international students bring particular expectations to their tertiary education in an English-speaking country. An analysis of the factors influencing student expectations by Andrade (2006) reveals that students' expectations are often straightforward. Studying abroad is a short-term experience in which students are motivated to learn what they

have not been taught well in their home country, including intercultural understanding and the English language (Andrade, 2006; Bordia, Wales, Gallois, & Pittam, 2008; Lobo & Gurney, 2014). In the long run, students can use the newly mastered skillsets to relocate to a foreign country to live and work (Andrade, 2006).

Findings from the online survey and interviews with graduates and academics from this study showed that developing the ability to communicate in English was both an obstacle that international students faced and at the same time a pull factor of Australian higher education. The English language competence that Chinese students expected to develop in Australia could be seen to be of a broad spectrum, comprising both conversational English that could help them mingle with the English-speaking community and academic and professional English that could help them complete their course and do well in their future career. The graduates surveyed mostly perceived WIL to have a very positive contribution to their English skill development. In the meantime, they acknowledged certain difficulties in speaking and writing confidently in English in order to secure their placements and perform satisfactorily at the workplace. However, in this respect, academics expressed more pronounced concerns about the inadequacy in international students' language competences. Suggestions from academics highlighted the need to upgrade institutional language support that can attend more specifically to the expectations of international students and better prepare them for their work experience. The following section details these findings.

4.2.1 Language needs and expectations of Chinese students from Work Integrated Learning

Globalisation in the world has confirmed the role of the English language as a means of international communication. As Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton (2000) emphasise, the English language, as the lingua franca, has become 'the central language of communication in business, politics, administration, science and academia, as well as being the dominant language of globalised advertising and popular culture' (p. 346). When language serves more practical needs across nearly all professional domains and almost in every nation in the world, the importance of oral skills is visible. Sawir (2005) notes the shift in what is perceived to be competent English language users from predominantly written communication to continued written communication plus oral communication. This is an aspect that English language education in East and Southeast Asian countries has not adequately prepared learners for, nor satisfied their need for – effective oral communication

(Sawir, 2005) – which make learners attracted to pursuing a qualification in an English-speaking country.

To understand the language needs of Chinese students at VU, it is necessary to understand how English language education in China prepared them for their study in Australia. China is known to have the largest number of English language learners in the world (He, 2017a, 2017b), a situation which has resulted from both the Chinese Government's planned policies and unplanned public demands. Acquiring English is highly desirable as it is inextricably linked to the Country's economic growth (He, 2018). For Chinese students, the motivation to learn the language is mostly extrinsic, firstly to perform well in English exams, since English is a compulsory subject in the curriculum, and secondly to be able to find a highly-paid job.

In this study, the graduates acknowledged that their learning of English, prior to coming to Australia, was to be able to obtain a high score in English examinations and pursue their study in Australia. This inevitably had a wash-back impact on how they learnt English, making them focus mostly on basic interpersonal communication, reading, listening and grammar. It was found from the interviews with the Chinese research participants that the prior English learning of these students was mostly filled with drills on English language grammar and other aspects of standard usage. English learning in China was seen as the learning of a scholarly skill so that students could read documents written in English and prepare for English language essays and tests, while there was little attention to the skills of conversations in English. Two graduates commented on the lack of a natural learning environment and qualified teachers to practise speaking in English, for which they blamed their weak oral English skills. The class size was either too big for students to practise communication skills in English or lacked opportunities for students to use English outside the classroom, both in structured school and community activities.

The literature on English language training in China shares similar findings. Many language educators (Du, 2012, 2016; He, 2018; Pan & Block, 2011) agree that despite recent reforms, English language instruction is not satisfactory. The country's national and institutional language policies and practices still characterise teaching and learning as the delivery and mastery of a body of knowledge. The consequence of this is a pedagogy which is textbook-based and teacher-centred and exam-oriented. At the same time, there is a lack of effective interaction-based and inquiry-based teaching strategies (Chen, 2018). Language curriculum tends to favour reading, grammar, oral-written translation and vocabulary learning over

communicative, productive skills, namely speaking and listening (Du, 2016). This occurs to such an extent that students' weaknesses in listening and speaking skills due to incompetent English language instruction have been described as 'deaf and dumb English' that 'students neither speak nor understand when they hear the language spoken' (Du, 2016, p. 9; He, 2018).

Coming from such a context of ineffective English language instruction, the Chinese graduates shared their expectations to improve both conversational English – which would allow them to enrich the personal and social experience – and academic and professional English – with which they could succeed academically and professionally. The graduates who engaged in a follow-up interview reported that studying at VU was the first time they travelled to an English-speaking country and were studied 100% in English. Therefore, their first expectation and also priority was to improve communication, namely listening and speaking skills, and confidently use the language in realistic contexts. They emphasised being able to speak fluently as their major goal. It could be argued that Chinese students started to develop more intrinsic motivation in learning the language. There was clearer awareness of the importance of English as a tool for personal development and for engagement in their new situation of studying and living in Australia.

4.2.2 Work Integrated Learning's contribution to language development for Chinese students

Findings from the survey revealed an overall positive perception of the graduates with regard to their English language skill development during their work placements. The lowest score given by individual respondents for the contribution of WIL to their language development was 4 on a scale of 10 and the highest was 10. Table 10 shows the frequencies of the responses and the distribution of the rating that individual respondents gave. The mean score given by the eighteen respondents was not reported since the data was highly variable and would not reflect the individualised nature of WIL experiences of participating students (Inceoglu, Selenko, McDowall, & Schlachter, 2019). Apart from two respondents who gave a score of 5 and below, 88.8% of the respondents believed that WIL contributed significantly to the development of their English language ability. Noticeably, ten respondents gave a high rating of 7 or 8 and four respondents gave a rating of 9 or 10, showing satisfaction with their WIL experience in this respect.

Table 10. *Graduates' perception of English language development through WIL*

Score out of 10	Frequency	Percent
4	1	5.6
5	1	5.6
6	2	11.1
7	5	27.8
8	5	27.8
9	2	11.1
10	2	11.1
Total	**18**	**100**

The contribution of WIL to international students' language development could be argued to be attributed to the authenticity of the materials, tasks and environment by which students acquired the language. Authenticity is a favoured concept in language teaching and testing following the advent of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach in the 1970s (Buendgens-Kosten, 2014). Publishers and language educators around the world have made efforts to bring into language curriculum, materials and assessments authentic representation of the targeted language. The underlying motivation is that students can experiment more with the language rather than simply manipulating linguistic rules and forms. The often-cited benefits of authentic learning activities are opportunities for engagement, meaningfulness and authentication by learners (Buendgens-Kosten, 2014; Gilmore, 2004). However, it is believed that the authenticity of language use within a classroom context can never truly be achieved (Breen, 1985; Cook, 2000). Breen (1985), for instance, argues that even though educational materials are written by native speakers of the language, the materials may not always be 'real' for learners and vice versa. Cook (2000) further points out that classroom roleplays eventually go back to the focus on language forms and involve repetition and rote learning.

Compared with classroom language teaching, especially traditional language teaching, WIL unarguably has 'authentic' features that make language learning much more practical and

meaningful. However, aside from the quality of authenticity, language use in WIL also has the strength of being 'genuine'. The concept of genuineness was introduced by Widdowson (1978) as the discourse designed to meet a communicative purpose, directed at people playing their roles in a normal social context (p. 89). Previous researchers have agreed on the impact of genuine learning on students' integrative and instrumental motivation (Allwright, 1979; Field, 2002; Shuang, 2014; Swaffar, 1985). These features of WIL particularly tapped into the shortcomings of English language instruction in China that were articulated by the graduate interviewees and complemented language use in VU courses.

In the Australian workplace, the graduates interviewed were reportedly required to communicate in English frequently. The graduates saw the benefit of doing so in learning expressions that textbooks and academic lectures did not teach them and, more importantly, in avoiding the habit of mental translation. Mental translation can be understood as the practice of second language users translating or reprocessing materials that are presented in the second language into their first language (Cohen, 2001). It is a shared agreement among applied linguists and language teachers that the mastery and fluency of a second language is best achieved when language users make an effort in thinking in that language rather than in their mother tongue (Falla-Wood, 2018). The Chinese and the English languages are notably distant from each other, either in phonological, sematic, or syntactic terms. Mental translation can be a coping strategy for Chinese learners of English but often only up to intermediate level of English language proficiency (Cohen, 2001; Gow, Kember, & Chow, 1991). One Chinese graduate in this study commented that prior to her placements, she researched and outlined her assignments in Chinese before converting them into English, which often resulted in erroneous and unnatural language use. By participating in WIL and immersing herself in the English-only environment in the Australian workplace, she was provided with the ability to switch to thinking in English. While other Chinese graduates did not particularly mention their mental translation experience, they articulated that they learnt to focus on the meaning rather than on the surface structure of the language.

It should be noted that the extent to which international students improved their language and communication skills was dependent on the nature of tasks that they were assigned to during their placements. The two graduates who gave a score of 4 and 5 argued that they were sitting behind their desk most of the time, which did not encourage many communication opportunities. They commented that changes to their communication skills should not be expected within such a short period of time. This finding highlighted the fact that language

development should be seen as long-term investment and practice. Studying language development from a neuropsychological perspective, Rosselli, Ardila, Matute, and Vélez-Uribe (2014) found that language changes correspond to brain maturation processes. In other words, language activities that mostly involve naming result in the development of lexical knowledge while activities that require language production result in verbal fluency.

Many researchers support the view that WIL benefits international students' language development (Jackson & Greenwood, 2015). Some studies reported the successful experience of international students when workplace supervisors help them improve their technical vocabulary (Pham, Saito, Bao, & Chowdhury, 2018). However, claims in other research are made based on the perceptions of the academics and students themselves rather than grounded on empirical data that could identify which aspects of language use are improved by WIL. This has an implication for future research to empirically compare the language growth of international students following their work placements.

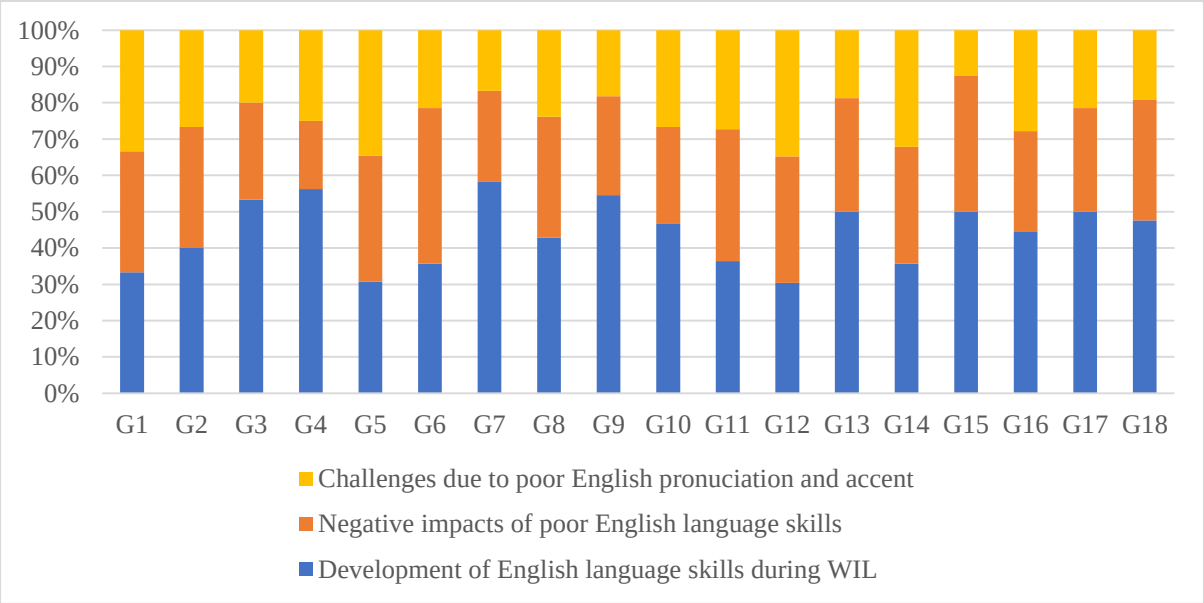
4.2.3 Challenges in language development for Chinese students through Work Integrated Learning

It is identified in the literature that the most noticeable challenge facing international students while participating in WIL is attributed to their low level of English. Inadequate English language proficiency often results in confusion, miscommunication and inaccurate interpretation of the instructions in the workplace (Birrell, Healy, & Kinnaird, 2007; Gribble, 2014). However, exploring the perspectives of academics and international students, this study came to interesting and somewhat opposing findings of the language issue. International students still acknowledged that inadequate English proficiency was a barrier to their placements. However, they did not perceive this as being seriously negative or much more negative than other challenges of their placements, such as cultural awareness or prior employment experience. Academics, on the other hand, seemed to identify this as the most inhibiting factor to international students and expressed very strong concern about the low level of English of international students.

Figure 2 reports findings from the online survey, namely the scores that individual graduates gave when asked to rate how limited English language skills impacted negatively on their WIL experience. The Y axis identifies individual graduates (G1-G18) who totalled eighteen respondents in the online survey. Three different colours indicate the scores out of 10 that

individual graduates gave to articulate the degree to which limited English language negatively impacted on their placements in Australia, the challenges caused by their non-native English accent and the extent to which WIL helped international students develop their English language skills. The purpose of including this information is to see whether there was a perceived relationship between the language competence of international students prior to and following their WIL development.

Figure 2. Challenges to international students' WIL participation due to language barriers



Drawing on the information provided in Figure 2, Table 11 shows the frequencies and percentages of each score type that individual graduates gave. As can be seen from the table, there was significant variation in the graduates' responses when they were asked about the extent to which their Australia-based placements were negatively impacted by their English language skills. The lowest score given was 3 out of 10 and the highest score was 9. One-third of the respondents reported language to be a major issue for them. However, the majority of the graduates did not perceive language to be the most serious issue among the challenges they faced during their WIL placement.

Table 11. *Perceived language difficulties of international students*

Score	Frequency	Percent
3	3	16.7
4	4	22.2
5	3	16.7
6	2	11.1
7	3	16.7
8	1	5.6
9	2	11.1
Total	**18**	**100**

The survey particularly asked the respondents to identify if their English accents were the factor that caused them difficulties in the workplace. Correlation between the two variables, namely overall limited English proficiency and poor English accents, was checked. The result shown in Table 12 indicates that there was a significant correlation ($p < 0.01$) between these two variables. In other words, the graduates perceived that their poor English accents were responsible for their limited English capacity, which accordingly affected their work placements. More specifically, the similarly high ratings for the two variables were given by graduates G1, G5, G8, and G9. Likewise, the similarly low ratings for both variables were given by graduates G3, G4, G7, G9, G10, G11, and G17.

Table 12. *Correlation between overall limited English proficiency and poor English accents*

		Negative influence on WIL due to limited English proficiency	**Negative influence on WIL due to poor English accents**
Negative influence on WIL due to limited English proficiency	Pearson Correlation	1	.825**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	18	18
Negative influence on WIL due to poor English accents	Pearson Correlation	.825**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	18	18
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The study next explored whether there was a correlation between the two variables, namely overall limited English proficiency and the development of English language skills through WIL. The hypothesis was that graduates who had a low level of English language proficiency prior to their placement experience would experience more language growth during and after the placements. The hypothesis was rejected ($p = 0.104 > 0.01$) for the whole sample. However, a correlation was found for those who, in the beginning, had the most challenge with limited English language proficiency, specifically, graduates G1, G5, G8, G12, G14 and G18, who gave the highest rating to the negative impact of their limited English on their placements, also reported the most significant development of their English language skills.

It should be clarified that while the survey data, including the figures reported above, helped identify the similarities in the experiences of WIL students, the data was treated as individual student data to respect the uniqueness of individual cases. The fact that the ratings related to language difficulties and language development during WIL varied significantly among the respondents was a strong indication that WIL experiences are highly individualised and generalisation from the sampled graduates to the international student cohort partaking WIL should be treated with care. The literature on WIL also support the individualised nature of WIL (for example Hains-Wesson, 2012; Inceoglu et al., 2019; Jackson, 2018; A. Rowe, Clark, Bilgin, & Cantori, 2014; Sachs, Rowe, & Wilson, 2016).

To further understand language challenges facing international students during their placements, the study further explored the data from the interviews conducted with the graduates, especially those who claimed to be most challenged by language barriers. It was found that speaking and writing in the context of the workplace were the most challenging skills perceived by the graduates. Speaking and writing are often referred to as ‘productive skills’ by language educators because they involve producing words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs; meanwhile, reading and listening are known as ‘receptive skills’ or ‘passive skills’ as they involve receiving and understanding information. One comment from the graduate on the difficulty in expressing himself was that:

> I was often at loss of speech during school assembly or staff meetings. It was not because I did not know what to say, but because I did not want people to laugh at my grammar and pronunciation. [G3]

The graduates perceived more challenges if they had to deal with clients as they were under the pressure of giving instant and accurate responses. The graduates acknowledged that it was not sufficient to have 'just some' functional English language. Instead, they felt that they needed to have 'fully' operational English in order to participate in their placements since English was the language of all aspects and stages of the workplace. The graduates further felt they were not confident in writing correspondence or reports since these were not the genres in which they had frequently practised previously. Reading, however, was not seen as challenging as some graduates commented that if they were given a task to work on their own time, they had more time to read and understand documents.

The findings in this regard align with the literature on English language teaching. Kirchhoff (2018) emphasises that speaking is a 'highly complex' skill (p. 109) that 'demands knowledge of language and discourse, a sound mastery of the subskills of speaking and also a good command of communication strategies' (p. 110). Kirchhoff (2018) notes that being able to speak fluently and accurately does not follow naturally from grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Aside from discourse knowledge, it is vital for foreign language users to master sociocultural knowledge and be aware of their own culturally formed communicative behaviour and that of others (Baker, 2012). Speakers of English as a foreign language also need to equip themselves with communication strategies, such as paraphrasing, non-verbal communication, asking for clarification or even avoidance, to maintain a conversation. In the same way, writing is considered a very challenging skill for foreign language users (Hyland, 2003; Mahboob, 2014). Beare (2019) notes that writing is even more challenging than learning to speak fluently and this skill comes much more slowly even for advanced level learners. Beare (2019) reasons that spoken English allows for more spontaneity and mistakes do not necessarily impact the ability to communicate clearly. In contrast, a writer can only resort to words rather than any non-verbal language when expressing their ideas (Beare, 2019). Writing requires not only the mastery of grammatical and rhetorical devices but also conceptual and judgemental elements (Pratiwi, 2016).

Findings from the interviews with the graduates revealed further insights into the nature of the challenges related to English language skills and the reasons that caused these challenges. The Chinese graduates arrived in Australia with a good grasp of English grammar and some even claimed to be able to read English very well. Yet difficulties arose with their actual speaking as the tradition of teaching English in China rarely encouraged speaking aloud or communication in the language. It was found from the interviews with the Chinese research

participants that prior English language study by these students was mostly filled with drills on grammar and other aspects of standard usage. English learning in China was seen as a scholarly skill enabling students to read documents written in English, and prepare for English language essays and tests, while there was little attention paid to the skill of conversation in English. A large part of class instruction was devoted to the teaching of grammar, reading and then writing. The class size was often too big for students to practise communication skills in English or opportunities for students to use English outside the classroom, both in structured school and community activities, was lacking.

The issue with the accents of Chinese students when using English has been reported in different studies (Barton, Hartwig, Bennett, et al., 2017; Doan, 2016; Howells, Westerveld, & Garvis, 2017; Kelly, 2017). It has been found that Chinese students often experience difficulty with sounds that are not present in their native language. Mispronounced vowel sounds and /r/, /w/ sounds in particular result in more noticeable unintelligibility. It has also been found that Chinese students tend to be more familiar with certain dialects and accents, such as British and American English which are perceived to be clear and representative of world standards and are greatly challenged by localised English varieties (Doan, 2016). These could be argued to be the factors affecting spoken English of Chinese students during placements.

Findings from this study are generally consistent with the literature. Sawir (2005) finds China still relies heavily on a traditional English language teaching and learning paradigm. There is insufficient emphasis on the development of students' productive language skills. It is argued that classroom practices in East Asian countries are mostly didactic rather than conversational and were mostly confined to the teaching of grammatical rules. This is blamed for shaping some learners' beliefs that grammar is the most important part of English language learning, which becomes manifested in their communication behaviour, so that they are unable to communicate effectively, socially and academically.

Despite having met the level of English required by VU before being officially admitted to the course, the graduates perceived a considerable gap between the language skills they had developed in China and the language demanded to do well at VU. Like many other Australian institutions, VU decides whether an applicant satisfies its English entry requirements by means of internationally recognised English language tests. The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Academic Paper is among the most widely used

testimonies for students' English language competency prior to their entry into a VU course. All the graduates in this study reported having achieved an IELTS overall score of at least 6.0 or 6.5 to obtain an unconditional offer at VU. However, achieving the required IELTS score only means completing a very first, simple step in their study overseas. In fact, IELTS examination board's (2016) *Guidance for Educational Institutions* suggests an IELTS score of 6.5 as only being 'probably acceptable' for linguistically less demanding courses such as technology or computer sciences and as 'insufficient' for linguistically demanding courses such as medicine, law, linguistics or journalism. Many academics at Australian, UK or American universities have been concerned that students will not automatically improve their English language proficiency during their course (Andrade, Evans, & Hartshorn, 2014; O'Loughlin, 2015). Also, the IELTS assesses a student's general English language competence in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills to identify if the student is ready to undertake academic studies. It is not designed to assess the student's discipline-specific content in work contexts.

Compared with the self-perception of the Chinese graduates, academics expressed more pronounced concerns about the English language competence of Chinese students. They emphasised that the ability to communicate in English was critical to all the stages of the students' placement experience, from the application stage until the completion of their placement.

> Within an interview and within an application process, they [international students] have to communicate in English clearly. And they have to demonstrate good command of English in the interview. They have to because they need to be able to deal with clients in that language obviously, whether it is in a retail office or in a hospitality food mall. They are also forced to continue to develop your communication skills so that they can be competitive later on. [FA8]

However, the interviewed faculty members tended to believe that English language proficiency was the most noticeable weakness of international students in general and Chinese students in particular. Twelve out of fourteen faculty members and administrators who were interviewed identified this issue among international students.

> The language was a huge, huge [influencing] factor on what often happens with international students even when they come in with an IELTS of 6.5 or whatever. [CA2]

It was questioned whether the level of English language proficiency which international students used to enter their course had improved during their study. One interviewee commented that some students had difficulty not only with discipline-specific terminologies but also with the normal functioning of the language.

> We gave every student a small test in a particular subject matter. So, it was not a frivolous test or anything like that. And this particular student basically got nowhere, whether that was understanding or whether that was writing whatsoever. [FA3]

Further, on this language issue of international students, it is worth noting that this seems to be an issue across the higher education sector nationwide. The noteworthy incident of a survey of 12,000 skilled migration applications with graduates from Australian institutions comprising a large proportion who scored 6.0 and below in the IELTS test (equal or lower than the cut-off entry requirements for university entrance) reveals how international students have not necessarily improved their English language skills during their study in Australia (Birrell et al., 2007). Very few institutions develop their in-house tests to measure the English language proficiency of international students because relying on an independent testing organisation is a more cost-effective option. Certain courses such as nursing require an IELTS band 7, which is a ‘big filter’ of those interested in taking the course.

Tracing the cause of poor language improvement among VU international students, this could be attributed to the lack of social interactions that international students had with local ones. It is apparent that local students can speak verbally a lot better and know how to respond with social etiquette which students coming from a different culture may lack. However, the interviewees observed that local students rarely reached out to international students.

> I would say that it is an issue in the sense that we talk about international and local students together in classes. Our local students do not particularly stay on campuses, they come in, they attend classes and lectures and the tutorials, and they dash off home or go to work because most of the local students are supporting themselves [FA1].

What this means is that international students who had come distances to gain a local experience at the University were probably finding that they were mixing with other international students more often than with their local Australian peers. The faculties similarly observed that more international students were using on-campus services such as learning support or libraries while local students generally come only during exam periods. Therefore, from a social aspect, international students at VU did not have that chance of developing networks and interacting with local students. This issue came through in national students' parameters surveys. In this regard, the view that international students tend to confine themselves to their home country peers should have further light cast on it by the fact that international students did not adequately have the chance to mingle in the local culture. When it comes to the fact that international students must take the onus for developing their language skills by seeking chances for themselves, this raised another issue of the extent to which international students undertook self-initiative to do so. There would be ones that were brave enough to mix with local people as well as those who tended to be too shy to do so. The challenges in communicating in the English language were claimed to be among the reasons for some Chinese students to seek employment from Chinese businesses in Australia or to accept low-paid jobs where communication was not a major hindrance.

> They might work in Chinatown, for example in a restaurant or in a hotel, and deal predominantly with people from that market that might have management or supervisors who do not require them to speak in English. [FA8]

Many studies share similar findings of the limited opportunities for international students to interact with local ones (Benzie, 2010; Rosenthal, Russell, & Thomson, 2006; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008). When surveying 800 international students, Rosenthal et al. (2006), for example, found that almost a third did not have contact with local students on-campus and a larger number had none off-campus. Accordingly, most of the speaking in English by international students was done with other international students; their exposure to colloquial spoken English with local peers was very limited.

4.2.4 Recommendations for Victoria University

It has been found in the literature that while domestic and international students face academic and social transition issues in their university life, they do so with distinct differences. International students have been found to struggle more than domestic ones;

academic adjustment problems, in particular, have been found to be attributed to language issues (Andrade, 2006). In one study, 76 per cent of international students enrolled in one department at an Australian university were judged to require intensive English language support as based on a writing sample, compared with only 20 percent of domestic students (Ramburuth, 2001). In another study (Ramsay, Barker, & Jones, 1999), it was found that international students at an Australian university had difficulties understanding lectures in terms of vocabulary and speed; and international students articulated their strong needs to get support with their speaking and writing in English. Overall, such evidence highlights the fact that for international students to be adequately prepared for their university experience, which includes WIL, their language skill development needs more attention.

The issue of developing English language proficiency for international students does not only pertain to WIL but instead is a common issue that most Australian universities have to address. In her report, Arkoudis (2014) emphasises that international students expect outcomes from their investment in Australian education, and, increasingly, English language proficiency is one of the outcomes. International students need institutional support to develop their oral and written communication as well as workplace interactions (Arkoudis, 2014, p. 5).

As a result of the report and outcomes of the National Symposium organised by Australian Education International in 2007, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) commissioned the development of the Good Practice Principles Report by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) in 2008. This report outlined ten principles as a guide for universities to address language concerns of international students and to provide support for developing their English language proficiency. VU can learn from the practices of language support for international students, such as Griffith University, which adopted a mandatory English language enhancement courses (ELECs) in 2010. The ELECs are discipline-specific courses designed to develop academic English language and communication skills that are particularly targeted at international students' specific fields of study. This language enhancement programme is integrated within faculties and is a credit-bearing course like most other academic courses offered at Griffith University. In the context of high failure rates in the attainment of academic English around the world (Berman & Cheng, 2001; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012), such language support for international students is a positive and relevant response to international students' particular needs for cultural, language, and communication development.

VU could also employ the *English Language Proficiency and Employability Framework For Australian Higher Education Institutions* proposed by Arkoudis (2014). Arkoudis (2014) argues that higher education institutions need to map their curricula along an English language proficiency continuum from entry to exit rather than just assessing the satisfaction of entry English requirements. What VU can learn from the framework is to define its English language proficiency exit standards more clearly and then align them with its learning, teaching, assessment and WIL practices in order to ensure that students graduate with the English language skills needed for employment after graduation. For international students, developing employability skills can be difficult, as they tend to focus more on their studies than their future careers, and employability is something they might only consider towards the end of their course of study (Arkoudis, 2014, p. 6). Therefore, it would be beneficial if VU could increase its international students' awareness of developing their professional identity throughout their study. International students can then plan their post-university careers and take responsibility for developing their English language skills. It would also be useful if VU could integrate English language proficiency and employment support services in its disciplinary teaching and learning from entry to exit. Currently, English language support is placed mainly with support services, outside the faculties' core teaching and learning curricula and usually occurs towards the end of the course of study. Arkoudis (2014) suggests that one way of achieving integrating English support in curricula is through course mapping, where faculty members and support services collaborate and define what graduate capabilities students should develop by the end of the degree, and where these capabilities will be taught and assessed across the course of study.

4.3 Work Integrated Learning and the enhancement of cultural awareness

The second ranked issue from the students' survey responses was cultural awareness. Pursuing an academic degree in an English-speaking country is beneficial to international students not only in terms of language skills development as discussed above. The benefits also lie in the development of intercultural competence when international students interact with people from different cultural backgrounds (Hazelkorn, 2009). Studies on international students in English-speaking countries have found that developing intercultural competence is one reason international students are attracted to foreign higher education institutions (Trede, Bowles, & Bridges, 2013; Zhang & Garcia-Murillo, 2018). This is given the

importance of cross-cultural communication and understanding as an asset in today's global economy and interconnected world (McRae, 2012; McRae & Ramji, 2011; McRae, Ramji, Lu, & Lesperance, 2016; Soria & Troisi, 2014; Trede et al., 2013).

Campinha-Bacote (2002) defines intercultural competence as comprising five domains, namely cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural skills, cultural encounters, and cultural design (p. 181). Developing intercultural competence is known as the 'process of improving attributes, skills, degrees of knowledge, policies and strategies which together enhance the ability to communicate across cultures' (Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, 2019, p. 3). Among the domains of intercultural competence, cultural awareness is regarded as the foundational component, without which it is virtually impossible to acquire the attitudes, knowledge and skills essential to cultural competence (Judkins & Lahurd, 1999; Owens, 2005; Quappe & Giovanna, 2007). Cultural awareness, according to The Health Education and Training Institute (HETI) (n.d.), refers to the 'sensitivity to the similarities and differences that exist between two different cultures'. It can be shown on a spectrum which Quappe and Giovanna (2007) term as ranging from the parochial stage ('my way is the only way'), to the ethnocentric stage ('I know their way, but my way is better'), the synergistic stage ('my way and their way'), and the participatory stage ('our way').

Being a culturally and linguistically diverse nation has allowed Australia to be an attractive study destination (Jackson, 2017). The Australian Government is also supportive of developing intercultural competence for students in its higher education sector. As part of the government's policies, the Office for Learning and Teaching has sponsored projects that support the development of students' global perspectives (Jeong & McMillan, 2015). Many Australian universities that deliver WIL programmes consider cultural competence for their graduates among the learning outcomes of those programmes. Charles Sturt University, for example, develops its *Standards for Professional and Practice-Based Education* (Higgs, 2011), to guide structured work experience in developing cultural competence for its students. Likewise, placements offered as part of health professional education by the University of Newcastle aim to develop students' ability to accommodate cultural diversity, demonstrate sensitivity and cross-cultural awareness and notice the salient aspects of therapeutic interventions in a novel context of practice (Jeong & McMillan, 2015, p. 2). Gaining an insight into the extent to which WIL contributes to the intercultural competence of international students is therefore useful and important to the implementation and evaluation of the effectiveness of WIL programmes.

It would be a larger study beyond the scope of this thesis to examine how international students might have acquired their intercultural competence by means of their Australia-based work placements. As the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (2019) contends, there is no point at which intercultural competence is 'achieved' since culture is a constantly dynamic and evolving construct. This section of the thesis therefore focuses on the extent to which cultural awareness of international students has been enhanced as a result of their WIL experience. While cross-cultural communication could be broadly categorised as one part of intercultural competence, it will be discussed in a separate section that comes later in this thesis.

4.3.1 Chinese students and cultural expectations

In this study, the cultural expectations of Chinese students from their Australian work placements were easily discerned. The graduates interviewed shared agreement with regard to the importance of developing cross-cultural awareness. One clearly articulated that

> Cultural awareness is very important. We are all likely to work with people from different cultures throughout our career, so it is essential for us to see the world from different perspectives. Doing placement in such a multicultural country like Australia is an ideal opportunity to do that. [G1]

> As the world becomes smaller, we all need a cross-cultural awareness to move ahead. In Australia, there are students and businesspeople from every different background: Muslim people, Asians, Africans, Europeans, South Americans, I can find them all here. An understanding of working with people from different cultures is crucial and VU values that. [G3]

One graduate pointed to a shortcoming in the Chinese education system to argue that a work-embedded education experience in Australia would compensate for what was not provided for in Chinese universities:

> China is an emerging market in Asia. Chinese universities are trying to give students some workplace experience, but it is hard for them to bring in multicultural perspectives when they only have local interns from mainland China. [G4]

> Exposure to different workplace issues should only be seen through face-to-face interaction, not from the book. But many universities in China are still teaching to the

> book. It is only when they let their students work with people from other cultures that the students understand what is happening in other countries. [G11]

Another interviewee contended that only by equipping themselves with add-ons could graduates compete with others in job seeking:

> I have always thought about what exactly the advantages of being a 'haigui' [Chinese students who return to China having studied abroad] are. It is hard to compete with mainland graduates in terms of technological know-how. They are getting stronger in technology and many young Chinese students now can speak much better English. There are also more courses taught in English in China. The only difference a 'haigui' could add to his resume is an international mindset. [G3]

On top of that, some desired to connect with local culture and the Australian work culture by means of having local colleagues and maintaining both short and long-term contact. According to one interviewee,

> By interacting with professionals from different backgrounds, I may discover good things from other cultures, and I may even find good companions. [G2]

Most interviewed graduates expected to gain a better understanding of the Australian culture and workplace culture from their placement experience. This involved having knowledge of Australian business practices and workplace communication styles. However, it could be argued that experiencing Australia and Australian workplace culture for Chinese students was instrumentally linked to graduate employability more than to psychological and physical wellbeing or growth in personal domains. Intercultural competence served more as an add-on or built-in element in the educational and graduate outcomes that Chinese students anticipated to benefit from. This was so that they could improve their employment prospects when they went back home and develop strategies to improve their effectiveness in the Chinese workplace.

4.3.2 Work Integrated Learning's contribution to Chinese students' cultural awareness

On the cultural awareness scale by Quappe and Giovanna (2007), WIL could be seen to have contributed to positioning the Chinese students on a synergistic stage ('my way and their way') where they were aware of and appreciated the differences in workplace practices between the two cultures. It was, however, not often the case that the Chinese respondents

were engaged in a participatory stage where there were deliberate efforts to make personal changes to achieve a so-called ‘our way’ understanding.

Apparently, the Chinese graduates valued Australia’ diversity and multiculturalism despite the fact China itself is a country of multi-ethnicity:

> China is big and very diverse, but this is a totally different story, you know. This kind of understanding about cultural differences, I do not feel it strongly here [in China]. [G5]

Compared with the academic setting they had been engaged in, the workplace seemed to give them a clearer sense of multiculturalism. Those who took Business-related studies, for example, argued that in their courses, Chinese students significantly outnumbered local students and students from other nationalities. This gave them the feeling of being in a mini-Shanghai or mini-Beijing international school where lectures delivered in English did not stop them from communicating and discussing the lecture content in Chinese. Being in the Australian workplace gave a rather different experience where the Chinese respondents had to mingle with other speakers of English.

Gaining cultural awareness for the Chinese graduates was a process that required constant reflection on their own identity and culture and perceiving their self against ‘others’. The initial period of the placements seemed to be useful for the Chinese students to understand ‘on the surface’ practices and expectations of the Australian workplace. Differences in organisational structures or business etiquettes were rather easily noticeable and became quite quickly revealed at this stage. Underpinning assumptions and beliefs and less visible concepts such as business ethics or professional values took longer to come. It was often only by means of meaningful and intentional conversations with workmates and supervisors that the Chinese respondents felt they gained awareness of more subtle concepts related to cultural groups, religions, values and perspectives that were different from their own.

The respondents still tended to rely on generalisations about their Australian colleagues and supervisors rather than thinking in the direction that respected individuality. They also anticipated unfamiliarity and differences more readily. Among differences between the Chinese and the Australian workplace, the graduates noticed that the Australian workplace tended to be more friendly and relaxed and there was more equality between senior staff and junior employees. In contrast, there was more hierarchy in the Chinese workplace as juniors

were inclined to keep quiet as a way of showing respect for managers and seniors. It was also harder to say no in Chinese work culture, especially to senior or older staff members.

> In China, it is not appropriate to question the instructions of a senior employee. It is very different in Australia. [G13]

Noting the friendliness in the Australian workplace, some graduates commented that

> I could find quite often an Australian colleague or even the big boss taking the time to talk to the receptionist, the cleaner, or the security guard. They even join staff for a smoke. That is not something top managers would do in my country. Maintaining some distance with the junior is a way for them [seniors in China] to keep 'face'. [G14]

The responses of the interns demonstrated growth in maturity and appreciation of cultural differences.

> Chinese workplace is more elastic when it comes to time while Australian employers and employees adhere more strictly to timetables and deadlines. I have come to appreciate this concept of time from my placement. [G14]

Some graduates showed an appreciation of their Australian placement experience as a means with which they were able to gain increased confidence as a result of an improved cross-cultural understanding.

> I grew a greater understanding of others. I learnt a lot more about how people interact with one another. This has helped me become more confident in my career choice. [G3]

> Working with a diverse group really helped with my collaborative skills, empathy, and self-confidence. [G4]

> I had a chance to reflect on my own beliefs about teaching and I was able to enhance my use of conversation strategies when I interacted with other teachers. [G17]

The benefits of placements to international students were also acknowledged by VU faculty members. It was pointed out that placements gave international students insight into a corporate business through different cultural lenses and increase their awareness of the

differences in practices between their home country and Australia. An example of this could be seen in teaching placements where Asian student teachers got a clearer understanding of the contrast in the pedagogies and teachers' roles in Western education systems.

> In Asian countries, the teachers are up at the front and the students just listen. We have got a different approach here [in Australia]. We have got a whole of student-centred learning. You try to work out what level the students are at and teach according to their level. So that is why they are doing a placement to understand how that works in the Australian setting. [FA3]

> Our international students have been teaching in India and China. The teaching strategies in many of those less developed countries is very much teacher-centred. They teach in front of 50 or 60 students and the students are all very quiet because culturally what the teacher says is very important and one way through. [CA 2]

Being involved in practical activities, understanding different systems, and working out an optimal approach, make the process of being placed a reflection opportunity for students. Once students have made meaning out of their learning experience, they can plan and transfer new learning to their future work or practice and their personal and professional life in general. The reflection process will also activate students' thinking about setting learning goals for themselves and developing strategies to learn new skills and concepts.

> They can do an overview. They can discuss or share how teachers teach in their countries or what the view of teachers is and all sorts of things. [FA3]

Many studies have revealed similar findings with regard to the role of WIL in improving international students' cultural awareness. For example, a number of case studies looked at non-English-speaking-background student teachers who participated in community-based service-learning projects at US state universities (e.g. Atlamaz, 2018; Droopert, 2013; Palpacuer-Lee, Curtis, & Curran, 2018; Palpacuer-Lee & Curtis, 2017; Regalla, 2013; Reyes, Iddings, & Feller, 2016; Rodríguez-Arroyo & Vaughns, 2015). When asked to reflect on their experiential learning, the student teachers shared how stepping out of their comfort zone allowed them to realise their cultural misconceptions and occasionally reconstruct their own beliefs and identities. In Atlamaz (2018), the research participants realised that they had stereotyped people from other cultures; from then, they drew implications for refraining themselves from making generalisations, focusing on individuals' unique ideas and beliefs

instead. The research participants reported having improved their understanding of the multicultural communities, developed their collaborative skills with diverse communities and improved their own perceptions about their dispositions.

The above findings show that the Chinese students managed to overcome a sense of superiority ('my way is the only way') which occurred when one viewed their own culture as superior and other cultures as abnormal and degraded. However, despite recognising the value in learning more about the host culture, many Chinese respondents did not appear to go as far as making efforts to engage themselves deeper in the new workplace or social culture.

> Where I did my internship, the atmosphere was rather relaxed. There was a lot of joking and laughter, and staff members did not think that it was a problem. I felt more comfortable with this relaxed workplace communication as I moved on, but I was not part of it. [G2]

> It was not about knowing how things work differently. It was really about me and what I was going to do with the differences. Well, I have to admit that I did not adapt my approaches when understanding other cultures increases in complexity. [G6]

Oberg (1960) argues that international students are more likely to see themselves only as short-term visitors rather than those who come for the purpose of permanently residing and settling in the country. Gomes (2015) further clarifies that international students generally identify themselves based on their visa status and perceive themselves as foreigners living and studying in Australia for the duration of their study. Therefore, they tend to feel a sense of belonging in communities made up of fellow international students and foreigners who do not feel a clear need to connect to the Australian society or culture. This helps explain the low degree of social and cultural investment that international students are willing to make. Seen from this perspective, placements are also short-term encounters of workplace cultures. This makes it less likely for international students to actually span their cultural boundaries beyond the extrinsic purpose of gaining some familiarity with the new workplace culture.

Studies by Turner (2005, 2006) on Chinese students in the UK, though situated in the general academic rather than a WIL context, share similar findings. She found that the Chinese students familiarised themselves with study practices and expectations in the UK but only to the extent that they could describe them and develop 'surface skills' rather than using them skilfully. Turner (2005, 2006) argued that since many students never reached an

understanding of the underpinning assumptions and beliefs, it was very unlikely for them to develop dynamic global perspectives.

4.3.3 Cultural challenges in the Australian workplace

While the Chinese interns gained more understanding of the Australian culture and workplace culture, cultural differences could make it challenging for them to derive maximum benefits from their work placements. In the online survey, the Chinese graduates were asked to rate the extent to which cultural differences negatively impacted on their workplace experience in Australia. Table 13 shows the distribution of the rating that individual respondents gave. There was wide variation in the perceptions of the Chinese respondents, with the lowest score being 3 and the highest score being 9 out of 10. This variation again highlights the individualised nature of WIL as discussed in the previous theme. Notably, 27.8% (5 respondents) gave a score of 7; 22.2% gave an 8 and 5.6% gave a very high rating of 9, indicating major difficulties with cultural differences.

Table 13. *Graduates' perception of cultural challenges during work placements (Score Frequency)*

Score out of 10	**Frequency**	**Percent**
3	2	11.1
4	1	5.6
5	2	11.1
6	3	16.7
7	5	27.8
8	4	22.2
9	1	5.6
Total	**18**	**100**

To identify whether there existed a relationship between the age and prior work experience of the respondents and the cultural challenges they perceived in the Australian workplace, a closer look at the ratings given by respondents in different age groups was done. It was found that the group of younger graduates, aged 20-24, appeared to encounter more cultural challenges. The challenges could be seen to lessen in the perception of the older age groups of 25-34 and 35-44 years old. The rating for the challenges was significantly lower between the oldest and the youngest groups of respondents. In other words, it seemed likely that fresh graduates from high school lacked adequate cross-cultural encounters to engage in Australian work culture. Older graduates may have accumulated cross-cultural knowledge, understanding or skills to transition more smoothly to the Australian placements. They could also have been more tolerant and open to cultural differences and accordingly tended to be less likely to report cultural differences as challenges compared with younger Chinese respondents. The data also shows a clear indication of the potential relationship between a graduate's prior work experience and their perception of cultural challenges during their Australia-based placements. The group of respondents who had not previously engaged in any paid work prior to their placements tended to experience more difficulties in fitting in to the Australian work culture. Those who had been either part-time or full-time employees self-reported a much lower level of difficulty in managing cultural differences.

To explore further aspects of cultural differences, the respondents were invited to share in a follow-up interview to express the challenges they faced when undertaking their placements. Cultural awareness was one expected outcome of WIL, and it was cultural awareness itself that was a challenge for WIL students. In fact, the lack of familiarity with Australian culture and Australian workplace culture was among the most frequently reported difficulties. The Chinese graduates generally felt that they should have been better informed of workplace conducts, behaviours, norms and terminology prior to their placements. Since they did not always have an adequate understanding of the way things were done in the Australian workplace, problems and misunderstanding were inevitable.

'Learning about cultures will increase your cultural intelligence, but it will not make you completely immune to blunders' remarked Caprar (2017) in his article 'Telling Chinese students to conform won't fix cross-cultural issues' on The Conversation. The remark fits in well with the discussion in this study about the challenges that Chinese students face at the Australian workplace due to cultural differences. Despite reporting on how they gain more understanding of the Australian way of work, Chinese students have been known to be

unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the processes used to facilitate work in Australia (Billett, 2011; Elliott & Reynolds, 2014; Jackson, 2015; Meredith, 2010). The workplace culture in Australia, for instance, requires some resorting to different skills that Chinese students are frequently weak at, such as critical thinking, initiative-taking or self-reflection. Therefore, although WIL is a valuable platform for developing these skills, cultural ideology clashes can make it difficult for Chinese students to engage in this process of learning (Jackson, 2015; Zegwaard & Campbell, 2011).

Many studies have pointed to such difficulties of international students in adjusting to the Australian work culture (Barton, Hartwig, Joseph, et al., 2017; Gribble, Ilg, & McRae, 2015). Doyle (2015b) from Swinburne University of Technology gave an example of a culture-related problem of a Chinese intern during her Australian placements due to the lack of an understanding of Australian workplace expectations:

> 'My manager asked me to get the quarterly sales figures. I requested them from Mr Lee, General Manager of China operations. My manager said they were not accurate and blamed me for not checking them. I explained it wasn't my fault as Mr Lee provided the figures – I didn't want to show a lack of respect by questioning his work. My manager said I wasn't showing any initiative.' (A Chinese intern, as cited in Doyle, 2015b, p. 20)

In the case above, the Chinese intern resorted to her Chinese mindset of workplace hierarchy and deep-rooted Chinese cultural values when having to deal with uncertainties in the Australian workplace. The act of not challenging her senior was clearly seen to be influenced by Confucian values of respect for authority and seniority. This way of thinking, however, did not work in the Australian workplace as it was a socio-cultural system which was so different from her own. Her actions were more related to a set of cultural norms which her Australian supervisor and industry may not have been aware of, which may have caused them to interpret the Chinese intern as lacking initiative and engagement in what she was doing.

It should be further added that hierarchy has a critical role in Chinese culture where the listener and speaker roles are determined by status and position (Lei, 2003; Rublik, 2018). This extends to the Chinese workplace culture where active listening is believed to prevent misunderstanding and direct conflict, whereas too much talking can result in misunderstandings and disrupt harmonious communication (Gao, Ting-Toomey, &

Gudykunst, 1996). This, however, is seen by Australian employers as disengagement, lack of confidence and passiveness (Howells et al., 2017). Chinese students are likely to have difficulty engaging with their workplace when they fail to show the ability and motivation to question existing practices and generate new ways of thinking (Clements & Cord, 2013).

The source of the challenges for the Chinese students in their Australia-based placements could also be attributed to the lack of opportunities for cultural exchanges in the academic setting itself. For one thing, the Australian curriculum was structured with fewer contact hours compared with courses offered in China that the Chinese students were familiar with. This could be an issue since it deprived the Chinese students of opportunities to develop social interactions and network with domestic students.

> Just the way that Curriculum might be implemented is quite different from what students are used to in their home countries. So those sorts of learning objectives and interactions in a class environment are quite different, so it is a major issue. [FA1]

For another, the Chinese students reported that the outside-classroom environments were not accessible for them to meet and get to know local students and students from other cultures. This was despite the fact that VU implemented services and events to help overcome these ongoing issues for international students. The interviewed academics tended to view this as an issue of Chinese students themselves as they often chose to stay with their Chinese friends who shared their first language, culture and values. This could be seen as being due to the ease in communicating and managing misunderstanding and group conflicts. The Chinese students, meanwhile, felt it was local students who did not want to extend their social circles. Some researchers (Arthur, 2017; Heng, 2018; Leask, 2004; Marginson, 2012), on the other hand, argued that this was largely attributed to the history or tradition of treating international students as 'inferior others' (Leask, 2004, p. 186) who need to be filled with Euro-American knowledge despite their own identities (Sancho, 2008). Apparently, it is the case that international students are the ones to make the adjustment and assimilate in the Australian professional conventions rather than the other way around, where they can gain sympathy from their Australian employers.

Gribble and McRae (2017) studied the challenges of international students' WIL experiences in Australia and found that those who possessed a confident disposition were able to elevate their cultural competence to the level of negotiating the diversity of cultural values, power

relations and norms. Those who missed out on this quality tended to encounter difficulties in obtaining a placement or deriving the maximum benefits from their WIL experience. Gribble, Rahimi, and Blackmore (2016), who examined the cases of two Chinese graduates, came to the same findings. There was a clear link between the efforts and investment in connecting with the Australian culture and work experience, and international students' development of key competencies desired by Australian employers.

As revealed above, the Chinese respondents in this study did not extend their socio-cultural investment beyond the mere purpose of understanding how the two culture systems work. This resulted in their perceived challenges when fitting in the Australian workplace.

4.3.4 Chinese returnees and the issue of workplace culture fit

The graduates were asked about the extent to which it was challenging for them to apply the new learning gained from their Australian work experience in the Chinese work setting. This question required the graduates to reflect on differences in Chinese and Australian work cultures. These could be related to corporate culture, work ethics and values, organisational structure, workplace communication styles, role-playing or any other issues that could obstruct the graduates' performance. The graduates responded to this question in the online survey on a scale of 10. A score of 1 indicated the lowest level of obstruction while a score of 10 indicated the highest level of obstruction. The findings presented in table 14 showed that most returnees faced rather significant problems transitioning back to the Chinese work culture. Noticeably, more respondents gave a score of 8 (27.8%) than other score categories. Three respondents (16.7%) claimed cultural differences to be very obstructive.

Table 14. *Graduates' perception of cultural challenges on returning home*

Score out of 10	Frequency	Percent
3	2	11.1
4	2	11.1
5	1	5.6
6	2	11.1
7	3	16.7
8	5	27.8
9	3	16.7
Total	**18**	**100**

A statistical relationship between prior work experience and the capacity to transition to a different work culture was identified based on the data collected (Table 15). In other words, the more experience the Chinese graduates had gained from previous employment, the less obstruction they would feel when applying the knowledge gained in Australia to their current job in China. Those who had previously been employed on a full-time basis tended to encounter less cultural obstruction in the Chinese workplace compared with those who had only worked part-time before.

Table 153. *Correlations between graduates' prior work experience and work culture challenges in China*

		Prior work experience	**Cultural fit on returning**
Prior work experience	Pearson Correlation	1	-.865**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	18	18
Cultural fit on returning	Pearson Correlation	-.865**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	18	18
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

It should be noted that prior work experience mentioned here was gained by the research participants at Chinese companies that they worked for before arriving in Melbourne to pursue their study at VU. Therefore, for these graduates who had part-time or full-time work experience in China before their Australian placements, experiencing the Australian work culture and then returning to the work culture in China served as an enlightening and reflective process. No assumptions should be made that these graduates now work in organisations with fewer differences to the Australian work culture. Instead, it would be more reasonable to argue that by switching back and forth between the two work cultures, the graduates may have been more tolerant or less judgemental to work culture differences. The extent to which a respondent might feel less obstructed by different work cultures might have been influenced by the extent to which they were willing to embrace or appreciate the positive sides of each work culture.

Regarding the challenges perceived by the Chinese graduates to impact on their work performance in China, two major issues were singled out.

On one side, there was some dissatisfaction with regard to management and decision-making styles in Chinese companies. One respondent [G3], for example, described how in his placement experience at an accounting agency in Melbourne, the supervisor always calculated accurately what workload each employee should be assigned and always checked work progress of individual employees. This helped the work to flow well and the targeted goal to be achieved. In contrast, the respondent argued that his current Chinese supervisor just handed out the work. The problem with the lack of clearly defined roles and individual responsibilities results in the expectations of the Chinese employee to work extra hours. In this respect, the Chinese graduate felt less prepared and willing compared with local graduates, '*I feel it is not fair that I have to work over-hour and I do not get paid for those hours' [G3]*. Another respondent relayed his experience where he received different instructions from different departments on the same matter.

> It is annoying because it is a waste of time and efforts chasing what the bosses want. Because all the officers in the company have a part to play in the project, they all give out instructions, but there is no guarantee that that the instructions mean the same thing or stay the same. [G9]

On the other side, there was the issue of hierarchy and bureaucracy that was very frequently raised by the Chinese graduates. In their experience, senior staff members in Chinese offices were treated with the utmost respect. There was also an emphasis on maintaining traditional protocols, respecting authority and forming close bonds. The graduates when freshly returning from Australia expected meetings to be opportunities to exchange and discuss ideas openly with their colleagues. However, meetings often ended up being one-way, top-down instruction from senior to junior staff members.

> I find Australian workplace to be more open. You can talk to your boss more easily. You can discuss any work or even personal problems that affect your performance. You simply need to knock on their door. My Chinese workplace has much more layers. I report to my manager and he reports to his senior manager but the top ones, I never have a chance to discuss with them in their offices. [G6]

> Unless you are a senior, you do not often have much voice. Ideas of seniors are more important. Since I was a new staff, they never accepted to have a discussion with me. If I suggested them doing this or that, they would say that was not suitable for the context in China. They trusted their knowledge and experience more. [G5]

> New and young employees here need to be quiet and complete their tasks. If they talk a lot, they will be considered impolite to others. [G13]

The challenges in adapting back into the society in China, also known as 'reverse culture shock', have been documented in the literature (Hao & Welch, 2012; Hao, Wen, & Welch, 2016; Szkudlarek, 2010). The 2018 Graduate Employability Survey conducted by the British Council (2018) at 350 companies in China reported the cultural gap when Western-trained Chinese transition back into a traditional, hierarchical Chinese working environment. When an employee is not willing to work extra hours, Chinese employers would consider this as an attitude and loyalty issue. They generally perceive Chinese returnees who are used to Western work culture to be difficult to manage and less loyal. This has been shown to impact on Chinese returnees' employability.

Blackmore, Tran, and Rahimi (2019) examined the employability of Chinese accounting graduates Exploring the perspectives of Chinese employers, they found that international graduates tended to be perceived to lack long-term and genuine work commitment, demand unreasonably high pay and Western-standard work culture, and to adapt less satisfactorily to the local environment. One employer who was interviewed by Blackmore et al. (2019) commented that:

> They [international graduates] refuse to work late, and they just focus on the responsibilities that we set. They would not want to take any more responsibilities. And some staff even say that's too much. I can't finish all the tasks today. I will work tomorrow. […] Local graduates are […] more passionate and willing to work late, willing to take more responsibilities, willing to work under high pressure, to squash their time to finish as many tasks as required and even more. Some graduates who are used to working in Australia said, 'Oh, it's Friday afternoon. We need to take a break and should take an early off" […] but for some local graduates, there's no difference whether it's a Friday or it's Monday. (Marketing Director of a Shanghai international education agency, as cited in Blackmore et al., 2019, p. 48)

In her study, Truong (2017) found that in a hierarchy-oriented society, senior employees might feel their positions, reputations and ego were threatened by changes. Therefore, they tended to reject ideas or knowledge shared by new returnees.

However, acknowledging the above challenges due to work culture differences should not be equated with devaluing the cross-cultural competence that Chinese students acquire overseas. In this study, the graduate interviewees argued that the transitioning period between Australian work culture and Chinese work culture was daunting but only in the initial stage. As long as they overcame that period, the international mind-set that they had acquired would help them climb the career ladder faster in the long term. The survey by British Council (2018) shared this view, pointing out that Chinese returnees who are not contented with Chinese-owned companies are likely to find employment opportunities in large multinational companies or work for foreign nationals.

4.3.5 Recommendations for Victoria University

McRae and Ramji (2011, pp. 347, 348) argue that 'cultural intelligence' is achieved by means of four elements, motivation, cognition, meta-cognition, and behaviour. Motivation concerns mobilising attention and energy towards culturally diverse interactions. Cognition, meanwhile, is about the learning of norms and practices of different cultures whereas meta-cognition concerns being aware and actively developing strategies before and during intercultural interaction. Lastly, behaviour concerns appropriately adapting verbal and nonverbal behaviour for culturally diverse situations. For international students, the preference to work with peers from a similar cultural background and the reluctance to engage in cross-cultural communication may cause them to miss out on benefiting from learning about a different culture. Breaking out of their own comfort zone (Volet & Ang, 1998) and negotiating the crossing of cultural barriers (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991) require deliberate determination, commitment, and efforts. This is a shared responsibility of both international students and the host institution.

The findings from this study confirm the need to enhance the cultural awareness of Chinese international students in preparation for their WIL experience at VU. To support VU's onshore Chinese students in becoming more versed in the expectations and norms of the Australian workplace culture, the study recommends both cultural immersion strategies and intentional pedagogies to be taken by VU.

Cultural immersion as an educational strategy refers to the act of placing students in a social environment where they have little or no prior familiarity (Canfield, Low, & Hovestadt, 2009). It has been used as a method for enhancing cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity for international students and has been praised for its effectiveness, for example in international clinical placements (Balandi, Lincoln, Sen, Wilkins, & Trembath, 2007). For VU, an ideal route would be to devise opportunities for Chinese students to mingle with English-speaking peers, socialise in English, and immerse themselves in the language as a daily-life routine. This can be in the form of university-based social programmes such as mentoring programmes, student associations, or volunteer opportunities at a community or the campus. UK universities have reported success by promoting social integration for international students within and beyond their campus with initiatives such as *Welcome Crew* (an integrated approach to orientation), *Ellerslie Global Residence* (an intercultural residential experience), *eVOLve project* (weekly charity and volunteering projects that involve UK domestic and international students), *Global Campus* (student-led forums for discussing cultural challenges) or *International Family Link Scheme* (cultural exchanges between international students and local residents) (Spencer-Oatey, Dauber, & Williams, 2014). These are practices that VU could learn from.

While VU currently has dedicated orientation programmes for newly admitted international students, creating inclusive orientation programmes that facilitate interaction between domestic and international students would be a more effective option to achieve cultural immersion purposes. This is also a remark by Catherine Gomes (2014) who observes that many Australian universities organise a separate orientation series for new international students prior to the institution-wide orientation day. According to Catherine Gomes (2014), the result of doing so is that international students will already have formed a friendship with other international peers, mostly their co-nationals, by the time new local students arrive at the campus. What VU could learn from this is to actively involve local students in its international student orientation programme. VU could also encourage mixed living arrangements where Chinese students could mingle with local students or those from a different nationality. While this may appear difficult to implement, the outcomes will be powerful if it does.

Despite the benefits of cultural immersion, researchers generally agree that introducing immersion and increasing placements alone are simply insufficient for enhancing cultural competence for international students (McAllister, Whiteford, Hill, Thomas, & Fitzgerald,

2006; Trede et al., 2013; Webber, 2005). Intentional pedagogical approaches need to be in place. These refer to the purposeful planning and preparation of students for the cultural competence expected of them (Trede et al., 2013). Intentional pedagogies to support the development of intercultural competence for international students have been used by many institutions. University of Victoria, Canada, for example, launches the compulsory *Introduction to Professional Practice* course, delivered in a flipped-classroom mode, for its students prior to their first WIL experience. Students participating in the course are provided with skills and knowledge related to cultural diversity, cultural intelligence development, job search practices in the Canadian workplace culture, travel, mitigation of risk, health, and safety. McRae and Ramji's (2011) 'cultural intelligence' model is employed as the underpinning for University of Victoria Canada's curriculum development that target the above topics and for designing tools for students to self-assess and monitor their intercultural competencies before, during and after their WIL experience. After completing their WIL experience, students participate in a face-to-face workshop where they tell the challenges encountered in relation to their job search and career development and reflect on the cultural competencies they have gained.

Currently, at Australian higher education institutions, including VU, there appears to be an issue of unrealistic expectations of briefing international students on cultural topics and 'magically' switching them to rational processing of information at the workplace (Gribble, Blackmore, & Rahimi, 2015). For VU, as found from the interviews, faculty members were not all fully aware of the expectations of international students as well as the challenges they faced in their academic study and in the workplace. This caused some faculty members to equate issues that international students faced with the common challenges also faced by local students. Also revealed in interviews with VU academics, intercultural pedagogy appears to be used only minimally in the planning of experiential learning for international students. Addressing socio-cultural priority for international students may seem beyond the remit of a WIL programme yet VU is responsible for the provision of mechanisms to assist international students with cultural aspects throughout their course of study.

From the lessons learnt from other institutions, including the example of University of Victoria Canada above, and drawing on VU's specific context, VU needs to create and implement an intercultural competency development curriculum for its students in general and international students in particular to achieve its stated goals above. That curriculum necessarily spans from students' entering to exiting from a VU course rather than being

confined only to students' placement duration. Both independent modules and embedded modules which link to parts of a course are needed to create a cohesive and integrated intercultural competency development pathway for international students. Currently, VU has published rather comprehensive study guides, such as *My VU: A Guide for International Students Studying at VU* (Victoria University, 2018), that help international students navigate living and study in Australia. VU has also, to some extent, embedded work conduct and ethics into its programmes yet it seems to lack a coherent and cohesive intercultural competency development pathway that spans over a student's whole of university life.

VU still needs to make diverse workplace perspectives explicit to international students. Support could be provided in the form of pre-placement information and workplace supervision. For example, since initial weeks and transitional stages of WIL programmes are a critical time for international students, structured input could be provided. This should begin with the provision of unambiguous information about the requirements and expectations of undertaking placements as well as WIL programme structures in Australia. As T. Pham et al. (2018) contend, international students need to be equipped with a clearer understanding of how non-technical skills are used in different socio-cultural settings. Each specific workplace context has its own explicit and tacit rules to define what it means to be 'active', 'critical', or 'confident' (T. Pham et al., 2018). Since this is an area where Chinese students tend to struggle most with to engage in their Australian work experience, such diverse perspectives need to be embedded in disciplinary programmes to all graduates.

In an intercultural competency development curriculum, a dialogical approach will be useful for VU to raise students' cultural awareness. Roleplay, for example, can be used to simulate behaviours and interactions in the targeted WIL context and stimulate observations and thinking about strategies to handle certain circumstances. Shearer and Davidhizar (2003) describe role play as a cost-effective and useful strategy that has been used to develop cultural competence for nursing education. With its institution-wide implementation of WIL, roleplay that targets raising intercultural awareness can be embedded in many disciplines at VU in place of the current informal discussions and ad-hoc advice about cultural expectations or instead of simply asking students to be open-minded and appreciative. VU could follow suggestions by Volet and Ang (1998) to set up group-based projects where students initially worked on highly structured tasks with set roles with students from other cultures and later on worked on more open, creative and ill-defined tasks. Inquiry-based learning could be embedded to help international students understand that there can exist different worldviews

towards a common issue and that those worldviews should be respected although not necessarily accepted (Stathers, 2008).

Regarding reflective practices, international students will benefit from exploring appropriate behaviour, values, and practices in the Australian workplace and the workplace in the home country from their cultural lenses that may have been taken for granted should they only be informally introduced to such knowledge. VU needs to introduce a self-assessment scale with which Chinese international students could identify areas of improvements and set corresponding goals. Both academic and workplace supervisors should be made aware of the goals and the progress based on the goals that the students make during their WIL experience. Upon the completion of their WIL experience, students should be provided with an opportunity to reflect on their areas of growth and achievement. McRae (2012) introduced a 20-item assessment that can be useful for VU's students and academics. This can be used in combination with the recommendation by Jackson (2015) that supervision meetings need to be regularly organised to cement new learning and enhance an understanding of workplace culture.

4.4 Work Integrated Learning and the enhancement of interpersonal communication

Interpersonal communication has an important role in one's personal, social, and professional domain. For international students, interpersonal communication plays an even more critical role since all aspects of their college life are, more or less, dependent on their ability to communicate with others. Contributions of interpersonal communication to international students are not only shown in interpersonal domains such as collaborative learning and problem solving which are highly valued skills among graduate employability (Aidoo, 2012; Astin, 1993; Light, 2001). Equally important are the personal enrichments as a result of interpersonal communication. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), for example, note that interpersonal communication promotes 'self-understanding; expanding personal, intellectual, cultural, and social interests; confronting dogma and prejudice; and developing personal, moral and ethical standards' (p. 213).

Interpersonal communication for international students in the Australian academic, social and professional settings largely involves interacting in cultural and linguistic diversity. The ability to communicate with others for international students can therefore be seen as part of

their intercultural communicative competence. Chen and Starosta (1996) define intercultural communicative competence as the 'ability to negotiate cultural meanings and to execute appropriately effective communication behaviours that recognise the interactant's multiple identities in a specific environment' (p. 359). For international students undertaking WIL, interpersonal communication is necessarily grounded on linguistic competence and cultural awareness. Besides, interactions at the workplace occur in different channels, from social to professional spoken interactions to formal written work. This makes workplace interpersonal communication for WIL international students become an encompassing skill set which involves many qualities such as good communication, active listening, empathy, initiative, or emotional intelligence (Doyle, 2015a). One lecturer in this study highlighted the importance of interpersonal communication skills to student teachers during their teaching practicum:

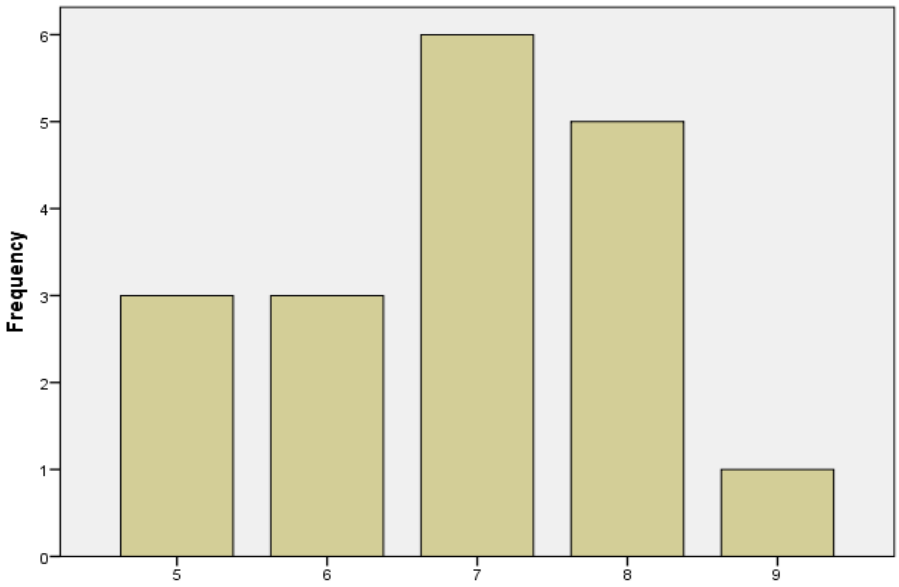
> Have you developed positive relationships with the students? Can you develop clear and engaging teaching strategies? Can you communicate well with the students? You cannot deliver engaging lessons and do a good relationship without good communication. [FA3]

The following section reports on how WIL was perceived by the Chinese graduate respondents and VU academics to have contributed to Chinese students' interpersonal communication.

4.4.1 Work Integrated Learning's contribution to interpersonal communication skills

The self-reported data showed that the Chinese respondents positively perceived that their interpersonal communication skills benefited from their placements in Australia. When asked to rate the benefits of WIL to their interpersonal communication, the respondents generally gave an above-average rating. The lowest score that the respondents gave was 5 and the highest was 9 on a scale of 10. Quite a number of the respondents selected a score of 7, indicating high appreciation of interpersonal communication benefits from their placements. The distribution of the graduates' rating for WIL's enhancement to their interpersonal communication is given in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Graduates' perception of WIL's contribution to interpersonal communication skills



The follow-up interviews generally showed consistency with the online survey with regard to the respondents' positive view of WIL's contribution to their interpersonal communication. The respondents acknowledged the benefits of WIL in enhancing their understanding of different communication modes in the Australian workplace. With this, the respondents perceived that they were able to translate their cross-cultural understanding into some useful communication strategies.

Producing work-related written work was the first aspect that the respondents noted as being useful. Some respondents, for example, noted that they learnt to adjust to new expectations in responding to work emails in Australia. This included writing in appropriate, clear, and concise language. One respondent relayed that after switching from his Chinese writing style to the Australian norms, he learnt to 'keep the ideas short and to the point'. The respondent saw the benefit of doing so in managing the workload and conveying the intended message. For some other respondents, their written English benefitted as they had to adjust to the writing and reporting style to suit their work colleagues and clients. One comment from a respondent was:

> After entering my placements, I learnt much more how to communicate with others, even things that may look simple such as how to send a proper email. Many technical terms that I learnt from my lectures just got activated at work. I guessed I got all the contexts to understand the meaning of the words and also because they were often repeated. [G18]

Listening and contributing to professional and social conversations in the workplace were the second aspect of communication many respondents noted as being useful. The respondents revealed that during their placements at Australian firms, they particularly valued the exposure to and the use of both daily life and office English. The respondents generally agreed that they were exposed to different work-related communication such as interacting with their teammates and supervisors, participating in team activities and meetings, and sometimes serving customers. This gave them the motivation and also the need to listen more actively and also contribute their ideas. For some respondents, their verbal communication was seen to improve as a result of being surrounded in English and having the opportunity to listen and speak in English every day. One respondent noted the ability to seek clarification when interacting with his workplace supervisor:

> In the first week, I felt quite overwhelmed with what to do. But my supervisor was extremely helpful. She had supervised Asian students before, so she knew that I was shy to ask, so she always checked on me first. But then I learnt to ask questions if there was something I didn't understand. I find that useful for me, much more useful than if I tried to keep the shyness and figure things out on my own. [G15]

Some respondents also perceived that aside from work-related talks, engaging in informal workplace conversations was a useful part of being in a placement. One respondent noted that she learnt to initiate and maintain a conversation by choosing common topics to talk to workmates during the break.

The third aspect among the interpersonal communication benefits of an Australian placement experience concerned the use of non-verbal language. This was perceived as less tangible than written or spoken language used for communication at the workplace; therefore, it came to the Chinese respondents only when the non-verbal behaviour was rather explicit.

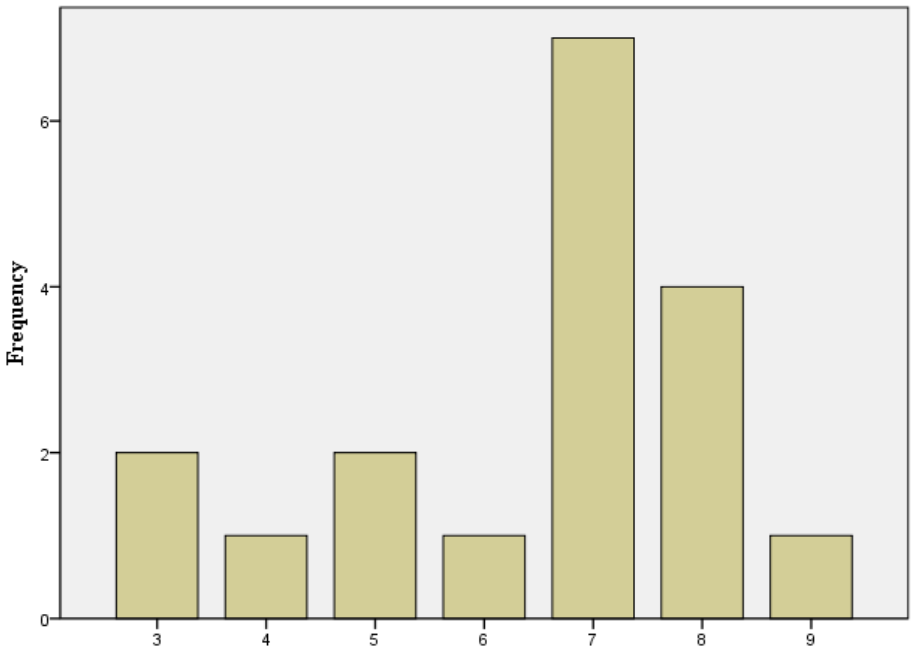
> At first, I didn't understand the importance of eye contact. Looking directly into people's eyes feels like staring at them and confronting them to me, so I didn't want to be rude. But I gradually noticed this thing about eye contact when I talked to my supervisor. Even though she finished off what she wanted to say, she seemed to look into my eyes and waited for some kinds of confirmation that I understood what she had said. [G15]

The literature shows the advantages in interpersonal communication gained from placement experience. For example, in placements for student teachers, it has been found that the participants have to interact and form relationships with the school community. This helps them learn how to communicate with different stakeholders, namely with students, student parents, classroom teachers, and teacher supervisors (Dlamini & Martinovic, 2007; Nallaya, 2016; Yun & Le, 2011). Informal workplace conversations in the Australian workplace are commonly seen as a means to build rapport for team environments, and international students who are engaged in small talk in the workplace are also seen to develop their confidence in communication (Doyle, 2015a).

4.4.2 Interpersonal communication challenges in the Australian workplace

The benefits of placements to communicative competence were not synonymous with effortless or unchallenging communication for the Chinese respondents. When asked to rate the extent to which they encountered communication challenges during their Australian placements, the respondents gave a rather high score. As shown in Figure 4, a score of 7 was given by most of the respondents, followed by a score of 8. This showed that for most respondents, engaging in written and spoken workplace communication was challenging.

*Figure 4.*Graduates' perception of communication challenges during work placements



VU academics also shared this view. For example, one academic noted that

> Our Chinese students may have good technical skills, but there are always problems caused by differences in communication or lack of cultural understanding. They do not often join office talks and their emails and letters very often come in an inappropriate and unprofessional style. [FA2]

To determine whether there was a correlation between the perceived language and cultural awareness enhancement and the perceived interpersonal communication improvement as a result of undertaking placements in Australian, a bivariate correlation was performed. Table 16 showed a statistically significant relationship between the perceived language skills and interpersonal communication skills development (p=.015<.05). In other words, graduates who felt strongly that their language skills improved as a result of undertaking placements in Australia were also likely to feel strongly that their interpersonal communication skills improved. Those who felt less confident in their language skills were likely to report higher challenges in interpersonal communication. There was also a fairly large correlation between the perceived cultural awareness and interpersonal skills development (p=.043<.05). That is to say, those who perceived that their cultural awareness was enhanced owing to their placement experience also tended to perceive that their interpersonal communication skills improved.

Table 16. *Correlation between Chinese graduates' perceived interpersonal communication, language and cultural awareness development*

		Perceived interpersonal communication development	**Perceived language development**	**Perceived cultural awareness enhancement**
Perceived interpersonal	Pearson correlation	1	.563*	.482*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.015	.043
	N	18	18	18
Perceived language	Pearson correlation	.563*	1	-.198
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.015		.430
	N	18	18	18
Perceived cultural awareness	Pearson correlation	.482*	-.198	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.043	.430	
	N	18	18	18
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				

In the literature, there is a lack of empirical studies that investigate the statistical relationship between the three constructs – language skills, cultural awareness and interpersonal skills. However, there is rather extensive qualitative research, including case studies, that investigates this aspect even though different and sometimes opposing conclusions are drawn. Holmes (2006), for example, conducted a study on Chinese students' interpersonal communication with New Zealand nationals. The study found that the respondents were reluctant in their communication if they were not confident in their linguistic competence. Some decided to delay their interaction with local and foreign nationalities until they obtained more linguistic confidence.

In contrast, Xia (2012) suggests a rather different explanation. By surveying and interviewing young Chinese nationals working in Melbourne, she found that neither language competence nor personality was to be largely held accountable for the difficulty in maintaining social communication. Instead, she argued that engaging in workplace small talk, including greetings in the corridor, chatting over a coffee or responding to humour, was a new social experience for Chinese speakers. The underlying problem, according to Xia (2012), was due to the differences in the views of Australian and Chinese towards interpersonal relationships. The Australian context, for example, allows for more loosely connected relationships between individuals, which means small talk can occur more easily. Chinese interpersonal relationships, meanwhile, are structured on a scale ranging from the closest familial to the furthest stranger. Therefore, apart from formal interactions required by work and basic courtesies, Chinese speakers tend to feel awkward with small talk in the Australian workplace.

Understanding cultural differences between the two countries also may not suffice since some deep aspects of culture are deep-rooted and change may threaten the students' identity and worldview. Apparently, the Australian and the Chinese cultures stand far apart on a cultural spectrum (Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Shanka, Quintal, & Taylor, 2006). Findings from previous research (for example Agelasto & Adamson, 1998; Australian Education International, 2006; Henderson, 2011; Pearson & Entrekin, 2001) suggest that Chinese students are impacted upon by certain traditional attributes and qualities and a socio-political paradigm that may not be perceived as important by the curriculum offered by Australian institutions. Vice versa, the Australian setting has particular attributes that are perceived as less important or relevant to the Chinese context. For example, as revealed in

discussion with the graduates, a Chinese workplace can be very much influenced by the Confucian values where employees respect the authority and avoid any conflict.

> Working in a team here [in China] and in Australia is both different and similar. People here can take your disagreements during a team meeting very personally, so young people like me would choose to avoid confrontation. I do not want anything at work to affect personal relationships. [G2]

4.4.3 Interpersonal communication challenges as Chinese returnees

Among the Chinese returnees, there was a perceived issue of relationship-based culture and they had to learn to cope with complicated interpersonal relationships. There was a perceived credential inflation and a tense competition in the Chinese labour market. Being able to find employment in China and securing it, therefore, had to depend on how wide and far one's social network was. One graduate commented that

> No matter what kind of company you go to, a joint venture or a government-owned one, a relationship is all that matters. Forget about your good foreign degree. [G12]

> If I apply for a job at a foreign company [in China], they will look at my qualifications and experience. If I want to work for a Chinese company, then they will look at qualifications, experience plus relationship. Suppose there are two equally good applicants for the same position, the one who has a relationship with someone in the company – the higher [the position is] the better – can easily get the job. [G18]

The respondent [G18] further added the differences in the role of interpersonal relationships in doing business in China and in Australia:

> In Australia, people care more about how good you are with your job. Business is business. Business is not confused with personal relationships. There is no 'special consideration' just because you have a personal bond with someone. In China, you need to have personal ties with your colleagues and managers. [G18]

The respondent said that because of such a business culture in China, he felt more pressure to improve his 'guanxi' so that he would 'get a job' or 'get the job done' more quickly. In the meantime, he felt doing so would be the same as circumventing regulations and bribing, which was against the Australian business ethics he had learnt and wanted to practise.

The literature on Australian and Chinese business culture is rather extensive and generally has similar implications to this study. Some literature (Blackmore et al., 2019) has pointed to 'guanxi' as the first cultural barrier for Chinese returnees that makes the applicability of Australian work experience less a clear-cut advantage.

'Guanxi' can be understood as a form of social capital built on kinship or personal connections that can offer an individual a more competitive advantage in the social and career ladder (Chua & Wellman, 2015; Lin, 2001; Small, 2009; So & Walker, 2006). Chinese employers attach more value to 'guanxi', treating it as 'a type of interpersonal skill needed for the job, the ability to engage and make connections with work-related purposes and therefore a resource' (Blackmore et al., 2019, p. 6). 'Guanxi' is grounded on 'trust' and it is trust that underpins business expectations and recruitment practices in China (Chua & Wellman, 2015; Small, 2009). Therefore, this capital needs to be constantly cultivated (Chua & Wellman, 2015) with the expenditure of time and money (So & Walker, 2006). Occasions such as the Chinese New Year, birthdays, or weddings are good opportunities for gift-giving to lay the groundwork for personal relationships (So & Walker, 2006). As Brunner, Chan, Sun, and Zhou (1989) put it,

> A guanxi may diminish in closeness with the passage of time as the need for the closeness ceases to exist, and the time and energy to maintain it cannot be justified […] frequent interaction is essential or its closeness may wither and decline. This emphasis upon social interaction necessitates pressures on the financial capacities and time of the persons required to maintain close guanxi. Of these, time is the most crucial. Obviously, one cannot have an unlimited number of guanxi established with many persons and be able to develop each of them to the degree expected. (Brunner et al., pp. 17, 19-20)

In the context of the rapid economic growth in China, Chinese graduates or professionals who are trained overseas hope to maintain their local 'guanxi' while at the same time developing some transnational 'guanxi' that could build and strengthen China's relationship with the rest of the world (Centre for China and Globalization, 2017). However, it is not always apparent that having Australian workplace exposure brings about this dual 'guanxi'. A survey conducted by the Centre for China and Globalization (2017) and the 2018 Graduate Employability Survey conducted by the British Council (2018) revealed that many Chinese returnees were plagued with a lack of an understanding of the local workplace and corporate

trend. Two-thirds of the 1,821 overseas-trained Chinese who were surveyed claimed that they lost an advantage over locally trained ones (Centre for China and Globalization, 2017). This was since they were not updated with most recent corporate trends and the domestic workforce in China and missed career recruitment seasons.

Blackmore et al. (2019), who examined the employability of Chinese accounting graduates, found that locals could build up their guanxi more quickly by doing an internship for Chinese accounting firms. Chinese students trained overseas often miss out on such guanxi opportunities as semester arrangements in their foreign university do not overlap with accounting and auditing periods in China. The above comment gives the implication that Chinese returnees need to be better aware of expectations and norms in the Chinese workplace. Adopting strategies to maintain 'guanxi', for example, could be useful in much the same way as adjusting expectations and being open-minded to cultural differences.

4.4.4 Recommendations for Victoria University

The tangible and intangible aspects of interpersonal communication at the Australian workplace for the Chinese graduates were a synergetic compilation of language and intercultural competences. As seen above, the graduate respondents saw the benefits from an Australian placement experience in developing their interpersonal communication in written and spoken domains. This includes an improved awareness and some useful strategies to respond to written works in a clear and direct manner, participate in work-related and informal workplace conversations, and attend to non-verbal cues. There were at the same time communication challenges for Chinese students in the Australian workplace due to language issues and lack of cultural understanding. The transferability of an improved interpersonal competence and Chinese returnees' general graduate employability to the context of China was, meanwhile, challenged by the complicated nature of 'guanxi'. Specifically, the returnees need to be aware of and engage in networks of trust and mutual obligations in order to secure employment. This gives the implication that VU needs to attend to both communication needs of Chinese students and their professional and social networking needs upon returning to their home country.

Not many studies have investigated the challenges of international students who accomplish their study in an English-speaking country and return to work in their home country. L. Pham (2019) and Truong (2017) are among few studies that research that topic. Truong (2017)

studied the knowledge transfer of academic returnees in Vietnam and noticed that international graduates often face various obstacles in using the skillsets mastered overseas. Her recommendation for higher education institutions is that

> It would be less challenging for graduate returnees to transfer knowledge if during their learning they are encouraged to reflect, and integrate practice at home and the institutional differences between home and host countries. It means that higher education institutions might need to consider to include such integration and reflection in learning assessments. Institutions should also offer support services and training to international graduates on the skills to not only adapt to new working and living environment upon return, deal with reverse cultural shock, but also to recontextualize knowledge and share knowledge in suitable ways. (Truong, 2017, p. 84)

In her study on employability of Vietnamese returnees, Pham (2019) found that postgraduates tended to fit better into their home country's workplace since they had often had the personal networks or prior work experience to help them find employment. However, undergraduates who relied on financial support from parents for their overseas study had often not had prior work experience and accordingly had no leverage to gain recruitment. For Vietnamese students in Australia, Pham (2019) argues that Australian universities could help to arrange internships in Vietnam, with Vietnamese-owned companies, rather than in Australia, with multinationals. Students would benefit from making useful connections, sharpening relevant technical skills and being acquainted with the Vietnamese work culture.

Some Australian universities have managed to adapt the curriculum, creating some good links and eventually organising offshore work experiences for international students following this direction. The University of Sydney, for example, organises its China Industry Placement Programme 2020 (The University of Sydney, 2019) in partnership with the Australian Chamber of Commerce Shanghai for its Chinese students to work in central Shanghai and participate in professional networking activities there for 40 hours a week for six weeks. The programme expects the placement to provide students with comprehensive academic, professional and cultural experience that can enable the students to position themselves well for a global career (The University of Sydney, 2019).

From relevant literature and useful lessons learnt from other Australian institutions, VU might need to reconsider integrating in its curriculum opportunities for Chinese students to reflect on different cultural and employment expectations, norms, and behaviours between their home and host countries. Critical reflection if regularly used as an exercise will usefully help Chinese international students recontextualise their learnt skills and knowledge appropriate to the contexts of use. However, students should not only be made aware of the differences; they should also be trained to build on similarities and seek mutual understanding since regardless of cultural differences between China and Australia, the key to successful transitioning into any employment settings is to establish trust. . VU could also consider arrangeing internships for Chinese international students in China or with Chinese-owned companies so that students can be familiar with the Chinese work culture. Prior to Chinese graduates' transitioning back to their home country, relevant resources or alumni networks should be actively introduced so that the returnees could receive more updates on corporate and workforce trends and networking opportunities in their home country. Workshops on the new developments in the field of work occurring in the graduates' home country and support services and training on dealing with reverse culture shock, possibly by means of support from the University's alumni networks, would also be a powerful measure to help support returnees.

4.5 Work Integrated Learning and the development of technical skills

Employment around the world is increasingly competitive, thus graduates are under greater pressure to differentiate themselves from other job applicants. Acquiring technical skills is one part of achieving this goal. While it is generally agreed that long-term professional success is dependent largely on soft skills (Business Council of Australia, 2017; Litecky, Arnett, & Prabhakar, 2004; Reeson, Mason, Sanderson, Bratanova, & Hajkowicz, 2016), the importance of technical skills – or hard skills – to effectively perform within the workplace is undeniable. More importantly, they serve as the ground for multitasking, innovating and performing more challenging and complex roles.

Technical skills refer to the ability to perform tasks that are associated with specific roles or work settings, such as engineering, accounting, science or information technology ("Career directions," 2003). Drawing on the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) database, Reeson et al. (2016, p. 14) identify technical skills to comprise equipment maintenance, equipment installation, financial resource management,

personnel management, operation and control, operations analysis and troubleshooting. Computer use, mathematics, programming, scientific rules and methods, systems analysis, technological design, and engineering principles, techniques, and procedures are classified under STEM skills. Within the context of this study, technical skills include both the use of technical skills plus STEM skills and knowledge. For example, data analysis, coding and programming are often an integral part of technical operations (Busby, Brunt, & Baber, 1997).

The following section details the expectations of Chinese students for technical skills development through their placements and the extent to which the technical skills gained from Australian placements have contributed to their performance in a Chinese workplace.

4.5.1 Chinese students and expectations for graduate employability

Chinese interviewees appeared to have high expectations of their placements as a means of enhancing their technical skills, knowledge and attributes. For one thing, they believed that experiencing the workplace would provide authentic, real-life and practical applications of the knowledge and skills learnt from lectures and books. For another, this would be an opportunity for them to acquire new useful technical skills, knowledge and attributes. From the perceptions of the Chinese respondents, regardless of the disciplines, only being able to observe how tasks are performed would encourage real learning and internalisation of knowledge to occur.

The Chinese respondents generally believed that with a practical workplace experience, they would be in a more favourable position compared with China-educated graduates in the labour market. They perceived that the problem with the Chinese tertiary education system was that it lacked professionals who had practical industry experience to teach as lecturers. Therefore, local Chinese graduates might be very strong in theoretical knowledge but lack the ability to apply knowledge in practical situations. One graduate commented that

> Chinese universities concentrate more on theories, so students are less likely to learn how to apply their learning in practice. [G8]

Most of the interviewed in this study were fresh graduates from high school at the time of entering VU (72%) and did not have prior work experience (61%). Doing a work placement in Australia would, therefore, be an eye-opening, critical experience that could provide them

with a competitive advantage compared with local graduates and those who do not have hands-on work experience during their study. One interviewee shared his thoughts on the importance of gaining hands-on technical competence when highlighting the tough labour market and the number of graduates overseas who flooded back home hunting jobs:

> Being able to find a job in China now is tougher than taking the national university entrance exam. If you are busy working on a thesis or taking tests, then you are likely to miss out on networking with firms and understanding how they work. Missing out on seeing how actual tasks are handled means losing half your chance in job interviews and doing poorly in a job probationary period. [G6]

In a survey conducted on 307 tourism and hospitality interns in Hong Kong, Lam and Ching (2007) also found that technical skills were ranked third among the top expectations of the students from their internship programme and were ranked second as the area that the students improved most significantly in during their internship. Performing job duties in hotels and interacting with guests were perceived as eye-opening since students did not have the chance to practise those skills in schools.

4.5.2 Work Integrated Learning's contribution to technical skill development

In the survey, the Chinese respondents were asked to select the option that best described their placement employment in Australia. To guide an answer to this question, nine options were given based on the nine major groups of occupations described in the Australian Standard Classifications of Occupations (ASCO) Job Classification Guide (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997). The nine major groups of occupations are differentiated from one another on the ground of skill levels required to enter an occupation and are arranged in a hierarchical order (Table 17).

Table 4. *WIL employment by occupation group*

Occupation groups	**AQF skill levels**	**Formal education and training corresponding to AQF skill levels**
Managers and administrators	1	A bachelor's degree or higher qualification; or at least 5 years relevant experience; or relevant experience in addition to the formal qualification
Professionals	1	
Associate professionals	2	AQF diploma or advanced diploma; or at least 3 years relevant experience; or relevant experience in addition to the formal qualification
Tradespersons and related workers	3	AQF Certificate III or IV; or at least 3 years relevant experience; or relevant experience in addition to the formal qualification
Advanced clerical and service workers	3	
Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers	4	AQF Certificate II; or at least 1-year relevant experience; or relevant experience in addition to the formal qualification
Intermediate production and transport workers	4	
Elementary clerical, sales and service workers	5	Completion of compulsory education; or AQF Certificate I
Labourers and related workers	5	

(Commonwealth of Australia, 1997, pp. 7-9)

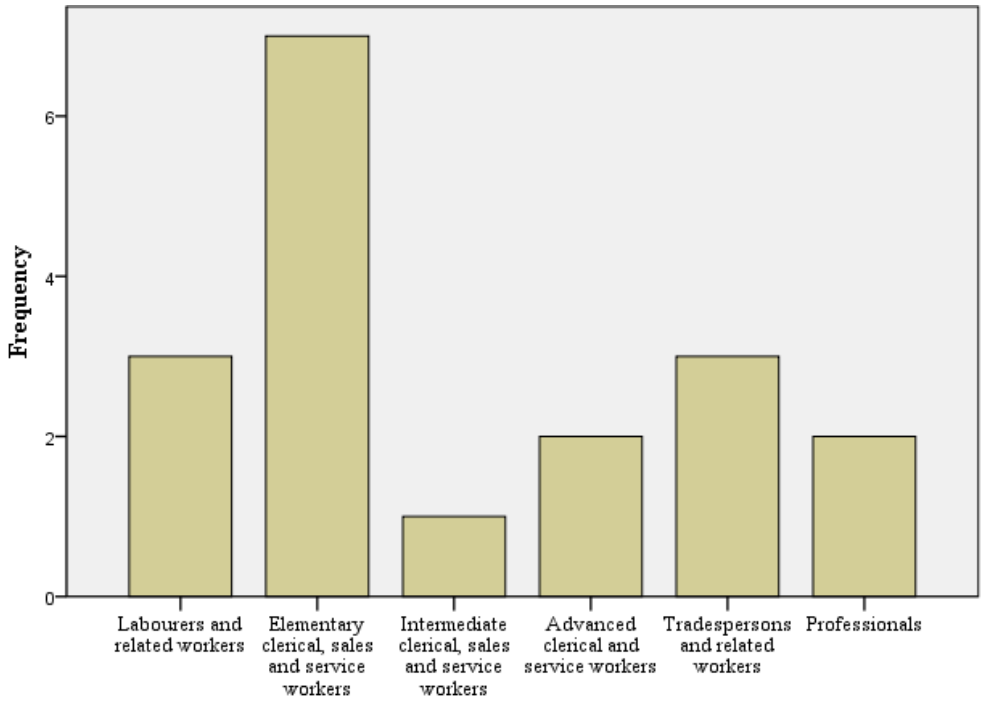
The skill levels, in turn, refer to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2013) and are 'determined by the application of a secondary set of criteria' (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997, p. 6), namely

- the breadth and depth of the knowledge required,
- the range of skills required,
- the variability of operating environment,
- and the level of autonomy as determined by the degree of discretion and choice which may be required to perform the set of tasks.

As shown in Figure 5, quite a significant number of the respondents were assigned to positions where they performed routine tasks and worked under close supervision; in other

words, performing tasks categorised for labourers and elementary clerical, sales, and service workers. Over one-third of the respondents reported having been assigned to elementary clerical, sales and service positions which involved providing basic services. One respondent self-reported to work as an intermediate clerical worker, typically dealing with recording basic financial and statistical information and maintaining records. Two respondents performed both secretarial and technical tasks and therefore categorising themselves as advanced clerical and service workers. Three respondents who were engaged in the operation and maintenance of machines identified themselves as tradespersons and related workers in an Australian workplace. Only two respondents were assigned to professional positions during their placements: one was assigned to advise clients on legal matters, and one was assigned to teach school students. Professionals, classified as Skill Level 1 under ASCO descriptions, are required to have at least a Bachelor's degree and often relevant experiences. Since the majority of the respondents in this study, prior to undertaking their placements, were fresh graduates from Chinese high schools, it was clear that not many among these would be assigned to demanding positions for their Australian placements.

Figure 5. Distribution of WIL employment by occupation categories during WIL



The respondents were asked to elaborate on the extent to which their placement experience in Australia had helped them improve their technical skills and industry knowledge. The responses were highly positive. As shown in Table 18, except for one respondent who gave a

low score of 3, the remaining 17 respondents perceived WIL helped them apply theoretical and abstract learning into practical examples in the workplace.

Table 185. *Graduates' perception of technical skill development through WIL*

Score	Frequency	Percent
3	1	5.6
6	3	16.7
7	7	38.9
8	5	27.8
9	1	5.6
10	1	5.6
Total	**18**	**100.0**

From the side of VU faculties, the faculty members believed that WIL students gained a practical understanding of the industry and were given opportunities to apply theories into practice. The competition for skilled labour has become more intense around the world. The mobility of students to attractive economies and destinations, especially more countries now having policies to attract highly educated and skilled individuals from developing countries, has caused 'brain drain' and other serious constraints on the development of poorer nations. Many foreign governments and companies are targeting their students in Australia requesting them to return to partake in developing their home country.

> You know Sunway from Malaysia. They are now spending a lot of money. They are going around all universities in Melbourne to target Malaysian students to say 'come home, we need you'. [CA1]

> Our Chinese students are told 'you need to go home after doing the degree', 'get some relevant working experience here as a skilled migrant and come back'. [CA1]

Firstly, WIL was seen to help students meet the prerequisite for the industry. For teaching degrees, for example, placements are mandatory by Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) so that graduates can do their teaching in Victorian schools. All placements are documented through reporting between students and their mentors regarding the lesson plans students need to do and the lessons they have conducted in each year level.

> That is why the report is written and that is how most students are assessed whether they have got their skills and knowledge demonstrated in the school setting. [FA3]

Secondly, placements give students opportunities to translate their learning into practice. Students might have the expertise of their field but being able to use the expertise in more specific settings requires a combination of organisational, planning, interpersonal and other skills. Student Teachers for example, who are required to do lesson planning and micro-teaching to get feedback from their fellow students and supervisors, have to learn different teaching models so that they manage their time well during a 50-minute lesson and engage the class. Another example given by a faculty member regarding the teaching of some mathematical concepts shows how teacher students have to convene different strategies to teach concepts that may appear to be easy.

> If you are talking about the hexagon, even if they [school students] speak English, they might not even know what hexagon means. The [teacher] student has to use some objects and go through the whole class and talk about it, then ask someone to come up and draw what they think it is and talk about it. [FA5]

It can be seen that the primary focus of WIL is to help students develop their relevant skills.

> Our focus is not the difference. They [students] need to be competent, but they need to have theoretic understanding. They need to know about research, and using the best evidence in their practice. And they need to be able to put forward an argument, and to stand up for themselves, work in a team and all that sort of thing. So that is what we are trying to do in our programmes; so when they go into the hospital, they are able to use the best of their ability in research for the patient. [FA1]

Some faculty interviewees commented that with all the skillsets and mindset developed through WIL, there would be more employment prospects for students. Some interviewees noted that they were a referee for their students who sought employment and many of these students were offered jobs. Some student projects that WIL students participated in were even translated into practical uses in the workplace.

> I let my students do a work-based business project. They had to solve an organisation problem. They identified the problem, what the cause of the problem was to the company, they had to look at the root causes of the problem. Then they had

> alternative solutions and did the cost-benefit and then return on investment. The outcome was phenomenal. They showed their ability to their employer. The company offered a young student a job and was prepared to sponsor her. Now she moved into human resources. She was a real value to the company. [CA2]

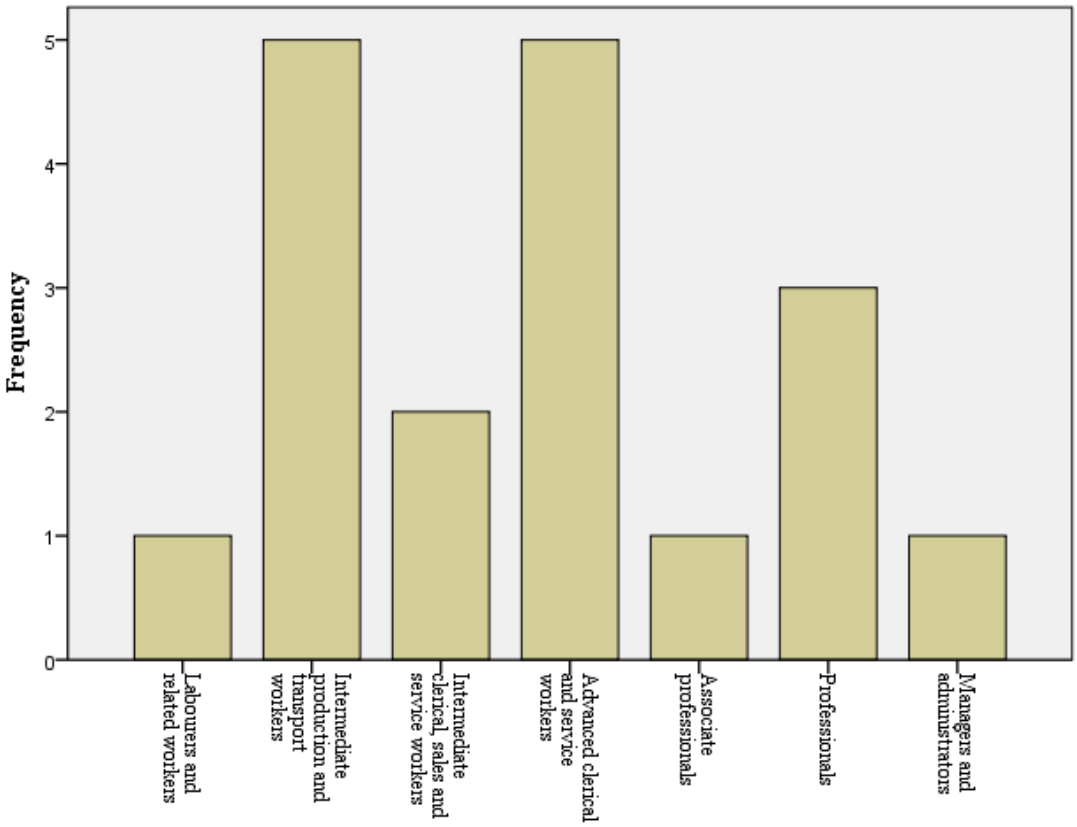
In this regard, the literature shares the view that WIL provides the students with an opportunity to gain an insight into workplace operations and put into practice what has been learnt from their university course (Alpert, Heaney, & Kuhn, 2009; Andrews & Higson, 2008; Blackmore et al., 2014; Clark, 2003; Clinton, 2005; Cook, Parker, & Pettjiohn, 2004). Placements by the University of South Australia (Nallaya, 2016), for example, help international student teachers understand the Australian school context and the differences in the education system, including learning and teaching approaches between Australia and students' home country. International student teachers in Australian school placements then implement the curriculum in the classroom and develop strategies to link theory and practice.

4.5.3 Technical skills and knowledge transfer to Chinese workplace

Upon returning to China, the Chinese graduates worked for three different types of companies. Of the 18 respondents, four worked for foreign-owned companies; among these, three worked for small or medium-sized businesses, and the remaining one worked for a large multinational company which was branched out in multiple sites in China and in the world and employed more than 100 employees. Six graduates were recruited by small and medium state-own businesses that operated at a single site. The majority of the respondents worked for Chinese private companies.

The Chinese returnees were asked to identify their current occupation category by selecting one of the nine occupation majors identified in the Australian Standard Classifications of Occupations (ASCO) Job Classification Guide (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997). As seen in Figure 6, the returnees were employed in high-ranking positions when they completed their degree and returned to China. Only one respondent was reported to work as a labourer. None reported to be in elementary clerical positions. One respondent had a managing position upon returning to his home country.

Figure 6. Distribution of WIL employment by occupation categories after WIL



The respondents were asked to rate the extent to which different work conditions, such as technology and infrastructure, negatively impacted the application of overseas-acquired technical skills and knowledge. The lowest score that the respondents gave regarding the degree of obstruction was 3 out of 10 while two respondents gave a very high score of 9. Noticeably, 8 among the 18 respondents, accounting for over two-fifths of the total figure, gave a high score of 7. This indicated both significantly perceived differences in the work infrastructure between the two countries and at the same time the high level of perceived challenges that obstructed the application of new learnings gained from Australian work experience in the Chinese work settings.

Comparing the differences in the rating across the groups of the respondents who worked for foreign companies, Chinese private companies, and Chinese state-owned companies, it was found that those who were employed by state-owned companies perceived more challenges in applying overseas-acquired technical knowledge and skills compared with those employed by Chinese private companies. The group of Chinese graduates who were recruited by foreign businesses based in China perceived the least obstacles in applying technical knowledge and skills gained from their Australian work experience among the three groups. Among the

respondents who perceived the least obstacles, one worked for Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, one for TESEQ Electromagnetic Compatibility Systems, and one for a New Zealand clothing import company. These three respondents were engaged in financial and economic services at their Companies. Two respondents who perceived the most obstacles were employed in the education and training sector.

When asked to talk about the difficulties in applying the technical skills and knowledge acquired from their Australian work experience, the Chinese interviewees seemed to have different views. Those who were employed to do financial and economic tasks, especially in foreign-owned companies, said they were able to apply technical knowledge and skills readily. This could be because China's financial services were able to follow Western practices more closely compared with other sectors. The returnees, for example, claimed that they could use the knowledge they had learnt from their placements, such as corporate lending, accounting or financial valuation, in their Chinese workplace.

> I did my placements in an accounting firm in Melbourne. This offered me direct usage of accounting terminologies, concepts and techniques that I need for my current job. [G7]

A qualitative study on placement experiences of UK international graduates by Andrews and Higson (2008) shares this finding. It was found that for business graduates, hard-business knowledge and skills were highly relevant between work-based learning and current employment. One example of how a graduate in the study perceived the usefulness of their placement experience was:

> I use every module in my daily work. I develop smart objectives to work from and towards. In every case I begin with a PEST [Analysis of the Physical, Environmental, Sociological and Technological factors] and a SWOT [internal Strengths and Weaknesses and external Opportunities and Threats] analysis. (As cited in Andrews & Higson, 2008, p. 414)

In the same study, when Andrews and Higson (2008) explored the perceptions of employers, they found that employers recognised work readiness among graduates who had been engaged in a work placement scheme. Some of the employers who were interviewed even held the view that any forms of work experience were better than a good degree without

actual workplace exposure. In the study, one Austrian and two UK employers shared the view that

> The students who've had real experiences of the work environment come out on top in the employment stakes.
>
> The work placement scheme […] is invaluable in my experience. Students get valuable experience working in a business and understand how business works.
>
> We took on a graduate who had undertaken a formal internship […]. This individual had specific skills in venture capital and finance acquired during his internship. (as cited in Andrews & Higson, 2008, p. 418)

One difficulty for some Chinese returnees when applying the new learnings from Australia occurred when the technical content taught or practised in the Australian context was different from the technical content aspired to by the Chinese work context. Some of the returnees perceived that they learnt technical content from their placements that was specific and specialised to Australia's economic environment. Meanwhile, in China, an employee would need to understand the Chinese business context and Chinese industry knowledge. The hierarchical workplace culture in China also meant that even though the returnees were aware of the need to improve certain workplace practices, they could only apply new methods to their own tasks rather than spreading the new practice to their colleagues who had never experienced a foreign work culture. It was not always ideal to apply the Australian way of doing business into the Chinese context, as shared by one interviewee

> Because I did my placements in the Australian environment, I understand how it works, but it is difficult for my colleagues in China to imagine what I experienced so that for them to apply my experience into their work. [G16]

The finding above resonates with the results from a study on the relevance of overseas-acquired skills and knowledge in Vietnam (Pham, 2019). One Vietnamese returnee who worked for a pharmaceutical company in Vietnam commented that

> What we can apply at home [from overseas education] is procedures rather than the overseas learning content. The factories here are different. The products are different. Many of our employees who studied overseas do not use any of their overseas

> learning. They have good work attitude but they do not know the product line. (A Vietnamese returnee, as cited in Pham, 2019, p. 140)

Examining cross-border transfer of knowledge and skills, Szulanski (1996) identified four factors impacting on the ease with which acquired knowledge and skills can be transferred to a new context. To be specific, this process is dependent on whether the knowledge and skills to be mobilised are explicit enough; the recipients are motivated and open to receiving new knowledge and skills; the transferor is knowledgeable and trustworthy; and the market, political, socio-economic and cultural conditions, structures, procedures, systems and relationships in the recipient place are facilitative for knowledge transfer. As noted ealier, there were noticeable differences in the perceptions of the three groups of the Chinese returnees when it came to the applicability of new learnings from overseas to the Chinese context. Employing the model by Szulanski (1996), these differences could be understood as being partly attributed to different conditions, structures, and infrastructure among the three types of businesses, namely state-owned enterprises, foreign-owned companies and Chinese private companies, where the Chinese returnees were employed.

Chinese state-owned enterprises play a significant role in the economy, especially in the banking and strategic sector. Before 2000, two in every five Chinese state-owned enterprises were criticised for being highly unprofitable, relying on obsolete technology and producing out-of-date products (Warner, 2001). In the past ten years, despite public reforms, the general performance of the state-owned sector still declines and lags behind the no state sector (Jia & Nan, 2019; Song, 2018). Explaining this, Warner (2001) blames State-owned businesses for being enormously bulky, centralised, monopolistic and inefficient in responding to market demands. Milhaupt and Zheng (2015), Jefferson (2016) and Song (2018) further add that many state businesses are set up to perform the Government's political and public policy functions, such as maintaining social stability, socialist harmony, macroeconomic stabilisation or crisis response. Accordingly, they lack the motivation to innovate or compete in the market. Coupled with heavy dependence on the state budget, Chinese state businesses are constrained in implementing changes. These could be the reasons why the Chinese returnees surveyed in this study found it challenging to apply the new learnings from Australia. Compared with state-owned enterprises, private companies and foreign-owned ones seemed to be a better option for Chinese returnees to apply their new learnings. These are often seen to be more market-oriented and more willing to invest in infrastructure that can drive changes (Grimsditch, 2015). Multinationals often have world-standard technology and

infrastructure, which is more likely to facilitate the direct application of technical knowledge and skills.

Aside from factors of businesses, the challenges of the new returnees in the Chinese labour market could be seen to result from increasing competition from local graduates. A survey conducted by the recruitment website Liepin.com in early 2019 (Bermingham & Wang, 2019) showed evidence that overseas-educated graduates are no longer seen to have a noticeable advantage over locally trained employees. According to the survey, 80 per cent of the returnees expected to earn above 200,000 yuan (US$29,652) a year while in reality, more than half the respondents were earning less than 100,000 yuan. This huge gap between the expected pay and the actual earning of foreign-trained Chinese showed that the level of expected skills and knowledge required by local businesses was not comparable to the level of skills and knowledge that returnees could supply. The survey reported that employers are now keener to recruit graduates from top local universities where the quality and work ethic of locally educated talents are becoming more reliable. Peking, Fudan, and Tsinghua universities are thriving strongly as credible testimonies of education and training quality and can produce graduates of comparable technical competences (Hao et al., 2016).

4.5.4 Recommendations for Victoria University

It can be observed that the quality of students' experience in WIL depends largely on how the experience is organised for them with clear outcomes, procedures, and support. An academic who was interviewed cautioned that for some placement models, students stayed with a business for six months but were moved between the departments after every three weeks.

> The students have commented that this sort of approach in placement is terrible because they do not learn much about the work they are supposed to be doing because they are too busy trying to understand the culture and how things work and getting to know people. [FA4]

Apparently, WIL programmes that are extended over a reasonable amount of time with regular frequency appear to benefit international students more. Shorter fly-in-fly-out programmes demand more adjustment for students, which may cause the outcomes to be superficial.

4.6 Work Integrated Learning and the development of personal attributes

The graduates were asked to rate the extent to which they developed key personal attributes during their work placement in Australia. The key attributes asked about were based on the key competencies and attributes identified by the Department of Education Science and Training et al. (2002) that were reviewed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. These attributes are loyalty, the ability to deal with pressure, a sense of humour, personal presentation, honesty and integrity, adaptability, a balanced attitude to work and home life, positive self-esteem, reliability, commitment, motivation, common sense and enthusiasm. The graduate respondents were asked to provide comments on any other personal attributes that they thought were developed from their Australian workplace, but none added an additional attribute to the list.

Table 6 presents the ratings that the Chinese graduates gave for the attributes that they perceived to have improved owing to their WIL experience at VU. These include the lowest, highest, median, and average ratings across the eighteen respondents. The ratings given by individual graduates varied noticeably as seen in the lowest and highest ratings, indicating that WIL experience and the graduates' perception of their personal growth are highly individualised. The median and the average ratings across the graduates, meanwhile, leant towards the top of the scale, signifying that the graduates generally perceived their WIL experience to impact positively on their personal qualities. Since there was no statistical different between the attributes, there was a strong indication that all the attributes were considered equally important.

Table 6. *Chinese graduates' perspectives of personal attributes gained from WIL*

Personal attributes	Average ratings	Median ratings	Lowest ratings	Highest ratings
Loyalty	7.5	9	5	10
Honesty and integrity	8.1	8	7	10
Commitment	8.3	9	3	10
Motivation	7.7	9	2	10
Reliability	7.5	9	3	10
Balanced attitude to work and home life	7.8	9	3	10
Adaptability	7.5	8	4	10
Common sense	7.6	8	4	10
Enthusiasm	7.4	9	1	10
Positive self-esteem	7.4	8	4	10
Ability to deal with pressure	7.3	8	5	10
A sense of humour	7.3	8	5	9
Personal presentation	7.5	8	4	9

Loyalty was one important attribute gained and commitment was also an attribute ranked high in the list. One graduate commented that while working with his Australian employers, he learnt that although one was not expected to remain with the same firm for their whole life, they were expected to maintain their employment for a certain period of time to recoup the training costs the firm invested on new employees [G1]. Loyalty seen from the view of some other graduates is the commitment and devotion that an employee has to the company and while this does not mean whole-life commitment, the employee needs to direct his thinking and effort to contribute to the success of the company [G5, G6]. This perception of loyalty is closely related to the qualities of honesty and integrity which were the next important attributes selected by the graduate respondents. These qualities, as described in the Australian Core Skills for Work Developmental Framework (Australian Government, 2013), are important for an employee to recognise, respond to and work with roles, rights and protocols. Being honest was considered important by the respondents not only in terms of their assigned tasks but also when they dealt with customers. Learning to provide honest advice and information to clients based on available facts was seen to be equally important as providing efficient and timely service. The interviewed respondents shared the agreement that they would not succeed in the workplace by cheating.

> There is no shortcut to success in the workplace. If you want people to trust you with what you are doing, you have to keep your promise. Even little consequences can easily cause you to compromise on smaller things. Be honest and you will get respect for it. [G4]

> I know that I have to take responsibility for what I do, whether it is being good or bad. If I make mistakes, I admit it. If I am weak in something, I admit it. If I see people do something not right, I will have to speak up and report it to someone. If I do not do that, people will not know where the problem is and how it can get fixed. [G5]

The graduates selected reliability as a quality WIL had equipped them with. One commented that in order to be reliable, one would need to plan and organise their workload and connect and work with others in a consistent manner. WIL was seen to have provided the respondents with the opportunity to observe how their workplace supervisors and seniors perform not only in a timely way but accurately.

> Although I was a trainee, I would not let myself be a 'yes man'. And if I said yes to a task, I would make every effort to complete it as completely and thoroughly as possible. I did what I said I was going to do because everybody else did. [G3]

Most of the respondents claimed motivation to be an underpinning attribute for all skills areas as it was argued that unless one was motivated to do the job, they would just handle the quantity rather than the quality of their product and services. A balanced attitude to work and home life, adaptability and the ability to deal with pressure were the three other important qualities that the respondents believed they had gained from their placements. Some respondents noted that they saw their seniors and colleagues at the workplace being required to readily switch between different tasks and clients.

> Unless you have excellent organisational skills and can deal with a lot of pressure, you will feel a lot overwhelmed and confused. [G3]

The quality of adaptability received an average score of 8 with most respondents expressing their strong agreement with the outcomes in terms of adaptability from WIL programmes. Some commented that they were acquainted with the changing and uncertain nature of their profession and acknowledged that their WIL experience helped them prepare for continuous learning and professional development at all the stages of their careers.

> If you are adaptable, you can be more flexible in your work. You can solve problems more easily. [G2]

The respondents saw the benefits of their experience with the Australian workplace in helping them learn about balancing their life and work.

> Almost all my colleagues go to the gym to have exercise. Now I also have the habit to go to Yoga class, which I think is a good way to balance work and life. For the overdue work, in China, it is too normal for work until 8 or 9 in the evening. But in Australia, there is no such kind of culture. Working overtime means you are inefficient. [G1]

Positive self-esteem is another important attribute that was ranked high by the respondents and eight respondents gave this attribute a score of 7 and above. It was noted that placements enabled students to overcome their initial shyness and even drove them to take more initiatives in exploring their placement organisation. A sense of humour and personal presentation were also perceived to be important qualities from the placements for the respondents. However, they tended to see these two attributes to be more about building rapport with others.

4.7 Chinese students' readiness to connect with the Australian workplace

The following section explores the extent to which international students are ready for their placement and challenges other than issues related to language, cultural awareness, communication and technical skill as discussed in the previous section. An understanding of the challenges that international students face could help the development and delivery of WIL programmes at VU.

By means of survey and interview data, the following four challenges were identified as impacting negatively on international students' readiness and performance at their placements. These include the issue of their international status, prior work experience, understanding the Australian labour market and financial issues.

4.7.1 The issue of international student status

The reluctance of some employers to include international students in their internship programmes has been found to be attributed to a so-called 'fear of the unknown' and misconceptions (Braithwaite, 2017; International Education Association of Australia, 2016, p. 6). Among these misconceptions, employers may perceive that international students do not qualify for a visa that allows them full work rights in Australia. Even for international graduates who are eligible for a two-year working visa after graduation, there is a concern among Australian local companies that these employees may return to their home countries after two years, making the cost of interviewing and training new employees discouraging. Australian employers might also think that international students cannot speak English and would not fit in a workplace where there are no other non-Australian staff.

It has been documented in the literature that the ambiguous legal status of international students to employers, including their visa and work right conditions, poses certain difficulties for their placements in Australia. According to Jackson (2016), the perception that placing an international student is an expensive, risky, lengthy and complicated procedure is not limited to a few cases of employers; instead, this is a widespread perception among different industries. Some respondents believed that firms tended to prefer local students who are citizens or permanent residents of Australia.

> I went to a career expo. Most employers were not interested in looking at me or other international students. If they ever did, they would ask for the permanent residency status first thing. [G3]

The student commented that there could be more information for employers at the career expo about new migration and employment regulations for international students and the benefits of adding international students to increase the diversity and experience of their workplace culture. In fact, not all international students are novice in their field. Some are highly qualified and multilingual and could be a substantial asset to Australian businesses, especially companies that have a global focus.

VU faculty members, however, expressed different views on this matter. On one hand, some faculty members acknowledged a disadvantage against international students due to their visa status. It was, for example, noted that while employers hardly explained directly to

international students about the perceived risks involved in placing them, recruiters were generally concerned about potential legal complications and complexities.

> ANZ told me that they used to employ international students. Now their lawyers advise them that it is potentially risky. I imagine what they mean is the students may be terminated and cannot stay in Australia anymore because of the sponsor visa. That is what I am imagining but they will never say that to international students, to their face. [CA1]

> You have to look at the self-interest of employers. It is usually a recruitment tool for them and some employers, particularly the smaller ones, are off the mindset of sponsoring an international employee because it does require some extra step. [CA2]

> Some places required the status of the visa, which is very difficult, and there is a PR [permanent residency] requirement in many cases for ongoing employment. So I perceived it is a significant gap between employer's willingness to recruit international students and the demand and interest that the students have. [FA8]

It was argued that businesses are not social services or education agencies but have business imperatives behind them, which makes it essential for recruiters to look for most prospective employees rather than simply those who can do the work cheaply. International students were argued to be at a disadvantage against local ones since they did not have the connections and understanding of the working culture in Australia. This is among the challenges that the graduate participants of this study have reflected on. Employers may also have misconceptions about the skillsets that international students have.

> If you grow up here, you know people who work in organisations and you got all of that. The students who come from overseas have no connections. They are working in an absolute isolation of that. [CA2]

> If there is an occupation skill shortage, the company will consider international students. That is a different story. But when they do not have occupational shortage, from the company perspective, they would be thinking why they would be bothered about international students. The local candidate is easy. They do not have to do anything. There is just the ID that they have to check. [CA2]

> Doing that [accepting international students] is putting them into, I suppose, a disadvantage because they have so many more issues and challenges that they have to face than with domestic students who know how to get around. I think the domestic students definitely, for placement, have it all a lot easier, and workplaces would most likely, you know, prefer to take domestic students. [FA4]

The stringent policy of recruiting interns was noticeable in certain industries and services. Even the door for volunteer activities was limited to international students. There was a perceived structural impediment for international students to access as volunteers.

> Banks, for example the high end in finance, start open their door welcoming Australian to do voluntary to gain experience, which is extremely strict in terms of legal matter and other matters, like privacy, or all sort of issues. So even if we are saying the university directors have many contacts with big four banks in Melbourne or elsewhere, the number of documents and impediments to even voluntary engagement has been quite significant. And that is for Australian residents let alone trying to introduce international students into the occasions. So, with the high proportion of international students in those courses that have in-built impediments, their international status makes it more difficult to access. [FA8]

However, it was noted that once international students were accepted to a placement, there was generally no discrimination against their foreign status.

> I haven't really heard any really bad stories of total exploitation or sexual problems or anything of that nature. I'm sure they exist occasionally [but if they do] they exist for domestic students too. [L2]

> On the other hand, some academics saw the issue of international students was more about their [international students'] personality and attitude and their capabilities rather than being about their international status. [FA6]

This is in line with some studies on predictors of success of internship programmes. For example, Beard and Morton (1998) found that students' attitudes towards internships are more important predictors than prior course work and GPA. Similarly, Braswell and Cobia (2000) found that career self-efficacy, which concerns belief about successful career

performance prior to students undertaking internships, was the best indicator of internship success.

4.7.2 The issue of prior work experience

An important task for students to present themselves as prospective employees or interns is to gain work experience, especially any that is relevant to their discipline. This means students will need to start seeking ways to enhance their portfolio of skills and experiences as early as their school or university years. Most of the respondents in this study started their WIL placements with limited employment experience both in their home country and overseas. This included paid employment as well as voluntary or community engagement. However, even this aspect of gaining experience is much related to international students' cultural profiles. Some of the Chinese graduates in this study traced this to the teaching and training traditions in their home country that emphasise the mastery of theoretical knowledge and formal education over work experience, as seen in the following comment from one interviewee:

> While I was at university [in China], I did some casual jobs to gain work experience. My mom did not completely object to it, but she did not like it at all. She said it was a waste of time and working while I was still studying made me distracted. She kept on encouraging me to finish my study and graduate quickly to get a salary from my official work. [G1]

Some interviewees explained that many Chinese students and families equate gaining high scores in national examinations and being admitted to a prestigious university as a success. These national examinations are remarkably high-stakes and competition is intense, demanding considerable effort to be spent on drilling for the examinations. This also means other tasks outside school subjects, including work experience, are moved to a secondary goal (R. Kirkpatrick & Zang, 2011).

> [In China] I usually have to study about eight or nine subjects each semester and there is a lot of homework and tests too. It is really difficult to find an internship or even a part-time job during the semester. I have a summer holiday for about a month and a half, but it is too short for a company. They usually ask for at least three months. The bad thing is they do not often open doors for students. [G4]

From the literature, surveys of Chinese students participating in WIL programmes in Canada also reveal that the Canadian population of international students often does not have prior experience of volunteer or paid work during their school years, which makes it hard for them to make their resume stand out among local students, all of whom have had volunteer or work experience from the age of 12 (Gribble, Ilg, et al., 2015).

The respondents shared the agreement that they were encouraged to look for work experience in Australia by their lecturers as noted in the following comment:

> My lecturers here [in Australia] said to me get into volunteer work, get into a sport, do things outside of my degree. I will be more likely to get a job if I am an all-rounded person. [G4]

Some of the respondents claimed to work part-time while they were studying in Australia, but the main purpose was to support themselves financially. One student noted that he tried to apply for some work experience here but was told that due to the working hour restrictions of his student visa, he could not be hired.

4.7.3 The issue of understanding the Australian labour market

Having a professional network and understanding the local and workplace culture facilitate the full participation of students in any work-based activities. This is however a major challenge that international students face when they enter their placements in Australia, realising that they are not familiar with the workplace culture and practices, as well as the expectations of their professions in Australia. Workplace culture is a sum of many interdependent elements, ranging from codes of conduct, expected behaviours and norms, traditions, organisational structure, corporate values, workplace practices, to established workplace processes (Pham et al., 2018). Some of these elements, such as workplace processes and organisational structures, are more visible while others are intertwined or underlie other aspects and require more time and exposure to gain an understanding of.

The data collected for this study show that more than half of the respondents did not feel they had adequate knowledge of the Australian job market and workplace culture at the time they started their placements. This was seen as having affected their ability to source appropriate placements and maintain a successful experience of their placements. This was also seen to

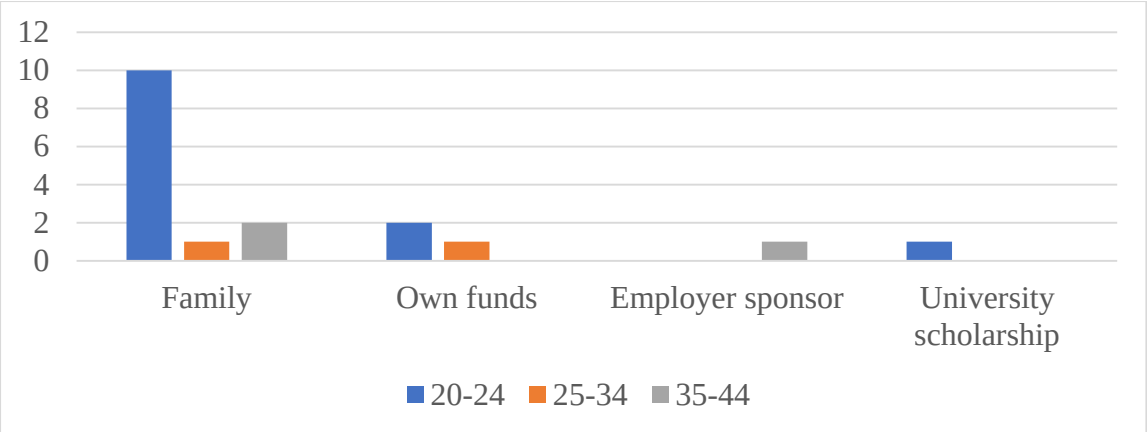
have disadvantaged them against local students who often had a more similar background and familiarity to the existing workforce.

Knowledge of the workplace also involves other more technical aspects of the tasks. From the literature, Jackson (2017) notes that many Engineering students lack local knowledge and expected protocols regarding workplace safety and risk management. Meanwhile, for the health sector, international students have been seen to lack familiarity with local jargon, thereby undertaking activities and tasks considered taboos, which confuses and causes trouble for clients and hosts (Jackson, 2017). The respondents in this study noted that the University had embedded work conduct and ethics into its programmes. However, they perceived that more initiative should have come their own side in exploring the professional societies of their field.

4.7.4 The financial issue

Regarding the source of funding for their study in Australia, the majority of the respondents (61.1%) relied on family funding to pay for their tuition fees and living expenses. There was a strong correlation between the respondents' age or employment status and how their study was funded (Figure 7). A majority of respondents aged under 24 (77%) got their family to support them financially during their study in Australia. The only respondent who received employer support for their tuition and living costs in Australia belonged to a more mature age group of 35-44. Only one respondent received a VU scholarship to cover their study.

Figure 7. Sources of funding for study in Australia by age group



Among the literature on the financial capacity of international students, a study by the University of Melbourne (Vinales, 2016) has revealed that nearly a quarter of overseas

students in Australia are experiencing extreme financial hardship. The financial circumstances of international students from developing countries are especially affected by the fluctuating and often unfavourable exchange rates against the Australian dollar (Universities Australia, 2013). There were 88.5% of undergraduate students and 81.1% of postgraduate students who have their course fees paid for by themselves and family; however, it was noted that these were debts that they have to repay, either to their family and friends or to their home government (Universities Australia, 2013). This is contrary to the general assumption that international students are financially secure or well off (Vinales, 2016).

Depending on their visa types, international students are allowed to work up to 40 hours per fortnight. This provides an opportunity for those who need to earn money to offset their living expenses during their stay in Australia and for those who would like to gain work experience in their field of interest while they study. However, considering the fact that international students pay up to 400 per cent more for higher education courses than local students (Braithwaite, 2017), the struggle they already face when arriving in Australia to work and study multiplies.

There also tends to be a lack of empathy for international students. From the perspectives of international students, their financial circumstances are constrained by visa regulations and they are not able to enjoy student concessions, for example to use public transport (Universities Australia, 2013). From the views of policymakers, however, the Minister for International Education, argued that international students have to demonstrate their financial capacity as part of the visa application process and the right to work up to 20 hours a week is already very generous for international students; therefore there would be no further assistance or concessions offered to them (Vinales, 2016). The high cost of living and studying in Australia has been found to have a significant impact on students' study decision, such as their choice of university (Universities Australia, 2013). It can be argued that the costs related to engaging in WIL can be a prohibitive factor for international students, which will be discussed in further depth later in this chapter.

When asked about the incurring of additional costs during their placements, 6 out of 18 respondents claimed that several types of extra expenses impacted on them. Travel expenses were regarded to be the most significant, followed by spending on accommodation, food, communication, and visa processing. Gribble et al. (2015) also comment that most industries

are located in industrial estates, which makes public transport an issue and students often have to be able to drive themselves to their work placement. As shown in the profiles of the participants earlier in this chapter, a majority of those WIL students had to cover their tuition fees and living expenses in Australia which meant that they travelled by public transport.

In line with findings from the survey of international students, the interviews with WIL staff also reveal that international students in general and those undertaking their placement at an Australian company in particular struggled with financial issues. Most international students were claimed to be self-funded or have to take loans from their home government to cover tuition fees and living expenses in Australia. Those students may have support from their family, yet this was generally only sufficient to cover tuitions and basic living expenses. Not all international students have got that financial assistance from family and friends, or have a choice where they live.

> One of the big issues for international students is getting part-time work to support themselves so they can pay the fees and live. Every year, some international students [come to me and] say 'Can I extend the time to pay my own fees?' or 'Can you help me to find a job?' because it is almost so desperate for some of them. If we do have students withdraw, very few of them will start again, maybe because they just found it financially too difficult after Semester 1. I think the financial burden in international students in my experiences is very high, but most of them manage the time to do some sort of part-time work and many of them rely on parents to support them through. [FA3]

> We have got a financial aspect as an issue. Local students do not have to pay the international fee. They are Commonwealth supported so they do not have to pay the upfront fee. They do not have to pay for living expenses and the work that they do is for pocket money and travel money. International students have got just 20 hours of work a week and they have to pay all their way to get here. [FA1]

One interviewee gave an example of a student who financially struggled due to his personal circumstances in the home country, to comment on how unstable it could be for international students in Australia.

> Another student who is from Iran got into accounting at the start of the year, and because of the political issue in Iran, they have shut down any money coming out of the country so he cannot pay his fees. [FA3]

Undertaking placements inevitably means additional expenses, such as travel costs or accommodation.

> Most of them do not have cars; it is expensive to run. And public transport is also expensive. I am sure they are not going a way that students are doing placement at one place that can all travel together. It is not like that at all. [FA1]

> The work limitation of 20 hours is hard and where they live in relation to where they work is another thing. If we look at international students perhaps who live in Maribyrnong and have got work somewhere on the other side of the city, the travelling time or cost of travel and coming home late at night is considerable. [FA1]

The concern was that students may have to work extra hours to compensate for their expenses, which may compromise the quality of their study and placement, and they may be exploited by accepting low-paid jobs.

> Finance is the big issue and how much they [international students] are working and how much they need to put into time of study is another clash. Often it is the study that suffers because they are in the situation that they have to work, they have to study. They are here on a visa; that means they must comply with their visa conditions. [FA1]

> They [Chinese international students] are so desperate to get work. They are accepting very, very poor pay like $8, $10 an hour to go and work in a Chinese shop just to try to get some of Australian experience. I think as their culture group, they are being exploited. [FA3]

It was noted that competition for Australian work experience was getting tenser due to the limited number of vacancies as opposed to the number of applicants. International students who were self-funded or wanted to have some Australian workplace experience would willingly seize available chances.

> They would never fight; they never argue with their employer; and they just accept everything. Employers know that there are international students willing to do their job for $12 an hour. That is why they all want jobs here on campus because it is safe and it is very good pay, $26 an hour, if they can get a position in the University's programmes. We advertise for one day and we got six applicants. If we have placement here at VU, our international students would really love that. [CA1]

Regarding this issue, one WIL staff expressed the expectation that the university takes a more active role in supporting students.

> Employers do not follow our minimum pay rules; they just pay cash and some on the book. It should not happen. We should do more site visits to check upon students, simply by telephone but I do not think that telephone is as good as to see by your own eyes. [SL2]

> Students find themselves falling into being paid cash under the table because that is what they were able to access, because their own community or friend of a friend says yes I can get you a job but they are only paying $12 cash an hour, no holiday or sick pay. We clearly have an issue with that because once the university is involved in giving credibility to the activities, then legal data says we have to ensure that we are meeting all the legal requirements in the Australian legislative environment. There have been issues in the past and it is something that is raised regularly. [FA8]

4.8 Institutional support for Work Integrated Learning international students

Support for international students is an umbrella term that covers a wide range of aspects, from academic and professional readiness to mental and physical wellbeing and includes both pre- and post-placement follow up and reflection. Different findings (Inceoglu, Selenko, McDowall, & Schlachter, 2019; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Neill & Mulholland, 2003; Patrick et al., 2008; Robinson, 2000; Rothman, 2007) have pointed out that the success of WIL programmes is enhanced by the level of academic support offered to students during their placement. This is in addition to mentoring arrangements between WIL-offering institutions and WIL industry partners and ample resourcing and opportunities made available for WIL programme implementation and for WIL students.

Gribble, Ilg, et al. (2015) explain further that due to the limited places that universities can find for their WIL students, the onus then goes to the students themselves to seek potential employers. However, it is widely acknowledged that independent learning is not sufficient for students (Abery, Drummond, & Bevan, 2015). This necessitates the support from the university for international students, especially since they are not often in equal competitiveness with domestic students. Academics are also argued to play a critical role in promoting students' soft-skills, including self-management and interpersonal skills (Harvey & Knight, 2005).

4.8.1 Institutional support for international students during placements

To gain a further understanding into the perceptions of WIL participants during their Australian workplace experience, the respondents were asked to rate different forms of support that they received during placement. These included both workplace and university supervision and support. In particular, the survey questions asked how the students perceived the duties at the workplace, their safety during placements, the appropriateness of workplace learning to their capacity, the availability and support from both workplace and university supervisors, workplace orientation, and applicability of the learning from the university. On average those graduates surveyed rated above average on the items. While some respondents showed their strongest agreement with the quality of their WIL experience and the quality of the workplace and institutional support, a couple of respondents strongly disagreed with this. The scores between the items did not differ significantly and there were no particular items that received an odd pattern of response. In other words, the respondents did not view any particular aspect of their WIL experience as being extremely positive or extremely negative. The average scores that the items received were between 6.0 and 6.9 on the scale of 10.

Regarding workplace duties, the general perceptions of the respondents were that the duties were reasonable and clearly explained to them. It was believed by a respondent that there had been effective discussions between her faculty and the company. However, there appeared to arise an issue of expectation when it came to the assigned duties and the nature of the tasks that students were involved in. Among the respondents, one noted that her WIL programme was boring and not as she had expected.

> I was thinking I would be placed in a large, famous company but they told me that the option available for me was a small-tier business. I would have learnt more being with a big firm, and it would be better for my profile. [G5]

This is among typical differences in the expectations of students prior to, during, and after their enrolments in WIL programmes. It has been found by academics, particularly in the field of business, that international students tend to have unrealistically high expectations (Jackson, 2016). Many tend to overrate their profile, which leads them to believe that they should be placed in high-profile organisations and they become disappointed to realise that they are placed in small, less well-known workplaces. Regarding this topic, a WIL coordinator from an Australian institution in a study by Gribble, Ilg, et al. (2015) gives an example that some accounting students found their daily tasks involving doing spreadsheets boring and had expected to be speaking to clients instead. A study by Andrews and Higson (2006) also reveals that the most frequently assigned tasks for international students during their placement work activities are report writing, low level administrative duties, general office work such as filing and answering email, post and telephone enquiries, or low-level entering of data into databases. Only a small number of interns are assigned to managerial level tasks including leadership, teaching and training and project management (Andrews & Higson, 2006).

Differences in expectations can be argued to account for the reason why certain WIL students in the current study were discontented with their WIL arrangements. Adjusting expectations for employment and professions is generally a challenge for international students and for WIL coordinators. Abery et al. (2015), Chipchase et al. (2012) and Parker (2011) observe that many students are not fully prepared to undertake a placement, unaware of the personal and professional requirements needed to be successful. Peach and Gamble (2011, p. 171) make the point that even though students have strong expectations about where education will take them, they may still have an underdeveloped understanding of the requirements of their selected profession. Students also may not possess the skills and knowledge specific to their WIL employment (Abery et al., 2015). Students who are not well-prepared are reported to have a poorer placement and a higher demand on the industry partner and university placement coordinator (Chipchase et al., 2012; Parker, 2011). Therefore, it is advocated that preparation for students include clearly defined expectations from all stakeholders (Chipchase et al., 2012; Jackson, 2016; Patrick et al., 2008).

Findings from the graduate respondents reveal that those who had to organise their own placements saw this as a lack of support from the University. They believed that with more support from their faculty, they could have increased their participation in WIL and improved their employability. The graduates noted that in the case of self-organisation of their placements, they leaned on suggestions from previous Chinese graduates; however, it was noted that alumni offices could have elevated their roles by supporting the sourcing of appropriate placements. Some of the respondents said they did not use paid employment agencies since they were unaware of them. As for the University's support services such as careers and international student offices, the respondents felt they did not take the initiative to see them but mostly depended on support from the faculty. The respondents were aware that there were accessible resources on the websites of the University or of their faculty yet claimed they would prefer more individualised support. In this regard, Jackson (2016) comments that students could be directed to local businesses, local community groups, professional bodies, preferably from different international regions, and charitable organisations to help create more contacts that benefit international students.

The graduates identified a number of areas that they would need support with. For preparation, these included, firstly, early provision of information about the labour market, the industries and the sectors that are hiring. This was seen to give them an idea of where their job would be positioned in a sector and where they needed to gain relevant skills. Some respondents noted that they got the information piecemeal from their lecturers and from the orientation sessions, but generally what was provided at the orientation was more about their post-placement. More information was felt to be needed in terms of the codes of conduct and workplace values so that they at least could fit in comfortably in the first weeks. It can also be argued that this could help deal with the issue of mismatched expectations as noted previously. The respondents emphasised the issue with their language and communications but admitted this to be more of a long-term investment from their side by using the resources from the University.

Regarding the support from workplace supervisors, some respondents commented that their overall impression was that the supervisors were friendly and helpful; however, their supervisors did not necessarily understand the particular challenges faced by international students. It is therefore apparent that cultural differences are not the only issues that international students need to be aware of. The respondents all commented that they received some form of induction on initial placement within the business. They were briefed on work

responsibilities, work hours, organisation structures, reporting and other safety procedures. A respondent specifically noted that the weekly informal catch-up that she had with her supervisor was really helpful for her to raise issues and receive support.

One message to come through from all the interviewees was that international students, regardless of what categories they fall into, do need support and need to know where the support is and how to access it. Faculties claimed that they have policies to pick up quite early on those students that are struggling and to help point them to the right direction. The approach is to meet and discuss with them the situations they are in and why they were falling behind and what actions to take. In this regard, some schools run events for international students each semester at different time, commonly during the fourth week, rather than at the beginning of the semester since the beginning of the semester is a crucial time for students' assessments. This alleviates overwhelming students with loads of information during welcome and orientation weeks.

Different arrangements were claimed to have been made to create favourable WIL experience for international students.

> The university is making sure that students are well-prepared, and that we have done some really good orientations so that they are more comfortable. If international students are prepared for their first learning in the workplace, they would do things at the university first so that they would never get thrown into on a placement until the third year. Hopefully by second year they've done projects for workplace sort of thing, which mean they've worked at the university so that they are used to the workplace culture. [FA5]

These schools also involved academics to find out if they found current WIL arrangements satisfactory and whether they would need any further support services.

> The university has a lot of free support services and our jobs are to make students aware of these supports and constantly remind them of these throughout the semester. [This is] because at the beginning of semester, they [students] are bombarded with so much information. [We need to make] students aware throughout time that if they are struggling, these are the people they can see. [We need to] reinforce the facts that the services are there and are free. [FA1]

These sorts of social interactions were argued to be timely to handle arising issues.

> At the end of the first semester, first-year students who might be in trouble with failing subjects come to me to change their load. I counsel them about the resources available. I am also involved in international students advising at that time and try to counsel some students out of the course. [L1]

> In conjunction with the colleges, we have arranged special workshops for international students or students with English as a second language to participate in. That is one strong need that we identified some years ago and have deployed for several years now. [FA8]

WIL staff emphasised the support for international students in particular since

> Work integrated learning recognise the fact that international students do require the supporting areas that local students don't need as much of, most local students have got their family foundation here. The majority of international students are here on their own. Our job is making sure that, as they are a Victoria university student, we are there for them by providing them the support that we can. [FA1]

> International students deserve extra support because of the fact many of them are making huge sacrifices to come here to study and spending a lot more money on tuition fees than local students. Many of them are coming from non-English speaking backgrounds and are not familiar with Australian working culture. [FA3]

This support was also significant since the university has established reliable networks with placement organisations, as commented on by an interviewee.

> From my experience, the key thing that works in this particular environment when students come to me and talk about what they are going to do, and then we are going to find an organisation to sit them. The reason it works is because VU is contacting the organisation. They made 25 phone calls, nothing happened. I made 2 phone calls and they've got placement. It is [about] the relationship between Victoria University and organisations. [FA6]

WIL coordinators claimed to have well-established and efficient procedures to assist students in a timely way.

> Our process is very good here. On My Clinical Learning, students can get online and see whether they are going to be placed into clinical. All our subjects and our clinical subjects are on the web. When a student goes into the clinical workplace, the student is advised where they are going and when they are going. It is up to them to check on the database whether it is current or whether it has changed or anything. It is rare that international students do not turn up. [L1]

4.8.2 Challenges in implementing Work Integrated Learning from an institutional perspective

Having a clear and thorough understanding of WIL is vital to the successful development and implementation of WIL programmes. This understanding is not limited to the mission that WIL programmes carry and the values they will create for the learners, the institution, the industry, and the society. It should also cover an understanding of the different forms and nature of WIL, the roles, and expectations of WIL stakeholders, what constitutes quality and how quality can be achieved. The importance of having a clear understanding of WIL was emphasised by academics in that faculties have to be able to articulate in the first place why WIL was developed for VU. Likewise, faculties need to articulate the role of VU and its perceived position in both a generic and specific sense, thus empowering those who implement or participate in the programme. One comment from a faculty member was that:

> If we cannot come up with a definition or a test for WIL that fits all disciplines or is truly generic, then we have really got nothing to say. All we have to say is 'you can do WIL as a placement or simulation' and people say, 'we get that', but what else have we got? We do not have anything else. [FA2]

The interviews with VU academia, however, revealed the ill-defined nature and representation of WIL among faculties and academics of the Institution. There were opposing views as to whether WIL programmes were implemented as planned. The School of Education, for example, believed that their plans were operationalised and met expectations. Other faculties, however, doubted the feasibility of implementing some intensive and extensive WIL facets and the changes that the University's WIL policy has brought about. One respondent who had prior experience implementing WIL when working for another University argued that compared with the other university, VU would need more extensive research and detailed planning in order to realise its goals for WIL.

> [At another University], they researched the sort of policies that would be suitable for [that University] for three years and a half. They came up with what the policy should look like. For units that do not have placement, students can always do a minimum of three units of study with a project that is worth 80% or more. We really need some sort of five-year change plan for us [VU] to have a major change in the culture. [CA2]

WIL as a component needs strong leadership, incorporating intense and focussed training to make sure every agent for change is on board with a shared understanding of what the aims and values are. Adequate research should be carried out to ensure that a major policy such as VU's WIL programme is fully operational. This idea was reflected in one respondent's comment on the current stage of WIL at the University:

> We need to look at the system that is in faculties' place, but we do not have that yet. [CA1]

The data revealed that such doubt originated from the uncertainty that faculties had when defining and interpreting WIL. Noticeably, half of the interviewees expressed their concern, attributing this to the fact that staff were not equipped to employ the policy and interpreted it differently. Frequent comments from faculty administrators were:

> People are still unsure about what exactly constitutes WIL, what it looks like and how to actually implement it in courses. [FA2]

> It all goes back to the fact that we are not be able to effectively define what WIL is; therefore, we cannot measure it. Students who are placed go out and we, other than standard student appraisal of the unit they are learning for all courses, are not aware of any other forms of measurement tools that we can actually use to measure the effectiveness of WIL even though it is one of our major focuses. [FA2]

The University has established WIL offices and allocated human resources to enhance its institutional capacity in delivering WIL programmes. However, it was noted that

> Such faculty is really falling apart because we do not have a really common solid understanding of WIL that everybody shares. As a result, WIL is not seen as being important. Instead, it is an add-on; it is something that the university has to do, and we have to do it. We have left some sort of justification [for what we do]. We just tick the boxes and then move on. [FA1]

The lack of on-going dialogue and channels for communication of WIL's nature and issues was blamed for causing the confusion among practitioners.

> Who are actually responsible for delivering quality for WIL curriculum so there is no real conduit? There is a central WIL committee but there is no formal structure to link that with faculty-based and school-based WIL personnel so there is no up-and-down communications. [FA2]

> I mean it is just growing up so people would do different things. Everyone has got their own database and no one really knows who is where. I think the university knows that we want a system where we can have a good idea of who is in what organisation. [FA5]

The University's policy of mandating WIL at 25% of the courses means a considerably larger amount of work will be loaded onto unit coordinators and unit designers. Their concern was that they did not have enough understanding of WIL to carry out the extra workload.

> My work has involved looking at different units from within the faculty and across the faculty to make sure that [the University's WIL policy of mandating WIL in] 25% [of our courses] was being adhered to. One of the things that came out was the lack of information, not only on CAMS but also in unit guides. I found it very difficult to really ascertain whether or not some units should qualify as WIL or not because there just was not enough information. Unit designers need to feel empowered to design the course so that they can demonstrate that it actually achieves the WIL outcomes. [FA2]

It was believed that to address the issue above, more professional training and more effective communication between WIL personnel are needed; however, this was deemed a demanding ongoing process that requires efforts and investment of resources.

> That does not happen overnight. Professional learning strategically should involve essentially training people within the faculty and within schools to then deliver their own sort of professional learning for other people. We also need create a really effective communication channel and create professional learning forms all the way through the unit coordinator and through that professional channel. [FA2]

Presently, the implication of a low level of understanding of what WIL is and looks like across the University means that there will be some issues with the ability to develop courses

in a scientific manner and implement quality assurance for the University's courses, as noted in the following remarks:

> We have got it the wrong way around – instead of mapping all the learning objectives and designing the activities that match with the other way, we are creating activities and try to mix them all up. [FA2]

> Different disciplines will say the quality cannot be measured because WIL does not apply in our discipline. [FA3]

The success of WIL is dependent on a multitude of factors but most importantly it needs to be grounded on the motivation and commitment of those who are involved in doing it. The University as a whole has shown its institutional commitment, but a faculty commitment and approach are not always present. As revealed above, many faculty members still found it a challenge in having a clear and shared understanding of WIL. The consequence could be felt when unit coordinators did not feel empowered to design WIL programmes that could drive learning. Unless WIL is structured around capability development and from a learning and teaching development angle, it will remain an add-on to educational outcomes. In relation to this aspect, Billett (2009) emphasises that practice-based experiences should be placed at the central stage of educational provisions but only by overcoming persisting orthodoxies that hinder the embracing of learning through practice as an legitimate and productive component. To address the current issue of faculty commitment, professional development for faculties as well as creating effective communication channels between faculties are needed. This resonates with the comments by one faculty-based administrator that:

> We have got to be able to articulate in the first instance what our WIL is, what it looks like in a generic sense, so that people then can look at that through their own subject lens and see what that means. Professional learning should involve essentially training people within the faculty and within schools. [FA2]

The second major challenge for faculties to implement WIL concerns its resource-intensive nature. The greater emphasis being placed by different industries on graduate attributes and practical work experience for graduates has made the competition for placement opportunities more intense among Australian institutions. VU's policy to have WIL implemented institution-wide means greater difficulty in finding placements for its student

cohort not only for disciplines that have traditionally involved WIL but also for emerging new majors both in regional and the metropolitan areas.

> Whether we like it or not, we are in competition with other universities to find an appropriate authentic environment that students can go to or be involved with. That is largely contingent on building relations through universities and those organisations. [FA1]

Securing more placements for VU in this fierce competition required establishing strong relationships with the workplace. On one hand, many professions are not ready to have on board a large number of placements due to the time and cost involved, which means the University may struggle to keep employers interested. The University would need to constantly negotiate with employers on supplying programmes that can benefit both sides and operate its WIL programmes effectively. On the other hand, penetrating into new partnerships was challenged by the fact that other institutions may have developed some special relationship with those particular employers who would say they could only offer placements for students from those universities. Some faculties commented that certain partnerships had to be built from a personal networking level.

> We have to put a cap on it [placement numbers] because we could not find the placements. Students, their colleges, and their schools are stressed out because there are still over a hundred students that should have been placed in March. It is stressful for students, stressful for staff but there is no way around. Some schools just say we only take Deakin University; we only take The University of Melbourne. [FA5]

Given the number of tasks involved, staffing was seen as needing urgent attention. Staff generally claimed that they were already overloaded with teaching and research duties. It was found that WIL was not necessarily perceived as an academic activity by staff who saw teaching in a regular format and obtaining workload hours as an enhancing incentive. Staffing was required to oversee all the stages of implementing WIL as seen in one comment from a faculty member:

> This is labour-intensive. We have to look after and manage the relationship between the student teachers and the school and respond to any needs and concerns that either party has to make sure that it is running okay. It is about maximising our existing mapping and maximising our existing relationships, making sure that we have got

> structures in place to approach people and to deal appropriately with enquires coming in. [FA2]
>
> We need resources here in St Albans campus. I have been in this position for 18 months and I have been fighting to get somebody here. Sometimes the students have to go over there in Footscray Park campus. [These are] failing students we need to counsel about their progress. I said to them 'if you would like to see our counsellor in Footscray, she can talk to you about that'. But I mean students have to travel between campuses, which I do not think is a good thing, you know when they [the students] are distressed. [FA1]

An important part of resourcing was also to provide support for struggling students. Two academics noted that in this regard, it did not matter whether the student who needs help is local or international; the University still had to make sure it allocated the right people to attend to the issue and assist the student. However, the resource-intensive nature of WIL programmes often makes it a challenge.

> If we have extra resources, I would love to make sure every student will play with really supported mentality in a really supportive school environment. We cannot do that yet; we can do in some degrees but that is not enough. [FA3]

Noting the costs, Russell, Nguyen, Wyder, and Avenell (2010) confirmed that placements were the most costly WIL model. This resonates with the respondents' comments that limited available spaces were affecting some faculties in a vicious circle.

> For those reasons I mentioned, it is so hard to get places. They have had to ask us for extra money, the 40% increase in the payments to try and get a placement. The worst thing in the School of Education is we were just waiting for the students to sue us that we cannot place them. That is part of the contract that if they are doing this course, they should be able to be placed in the schools. For us, we really have to reduce the number that we take to be able to have it, which then reduces our income. Then we put a lot of money into those university colleague visits, like I said it is a lot of money. [FA5]

Regarding staffing, more onuses were being placed on the University. A staff member noted that

The University needs to make sure that it supports the appropriate resources and staffing because otherwise we have experienced people here, but absolutely unreasonable levels of anxiety and stress are still happening. [FA3]

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has presented six main areas of findings regarding the WIL experience of Chinese international students at VU. In particular, the chapter has discussed the outcomes of WIL programmes for Chinese international students in relation to their expectations for improving their language skills, cultural competence, interpersonal capabilities, technical knowhow, and personal attributes. From the perspectives of participating students, their WIL experience at VU enabled them to improve their English, particularly expanding their English vocabulary and developing their ability to think in English. This was attributed to an opportunity to be immersed in the authentic and genuine language use in the Australian workplace. VU's Chinese students also reportedly enjoyed an enhanced awareness of certain workplace etiquettes and communication culture in Australia and were able to reflect on these in reference to their post-study employment in China. With this, the Chinese students were able to develop more confidence in workplace communication, both in producing work-related written works and engaging in professional and social conversations. In relation to hard skills, Chinese students saw the benefits in gaining a practical understanding of the industry and applying the technical skills and knowledge learnt into practice. Finally, the students valued WIL for developing for them an array of important, transferrable personal qualities, such as loyalty, honesty, reliability, or positive self-esteem.

Chinese international students' readiness for their WIL experience and to benefit from it, however, was challenged by several main factors. Firstly, many students did not have a fully operational English, prior work experience, and a sufficient understanding of the Australian workplace culture and the Australian labour market in order to wholly engage in their WIL experience. Chinese students were also disadvantaged against domestic ones due to the visa restrictions placed on them in finding paid employment and due to the perceived risks that employers assigned to their 'international status'. The transitioning of Chinese international students to the workplace context in their home country, meanwhile, was challenged as they tended to miss out on opportunities to exercise 'guanxi' and develop the professional connections with local businesses.

From the perspectives of VU faculties, the issues that Chinese international students faced were real, but the current mechanism needs to be improved in order to better support international students. WIL was perceived to be resource-intensive, be it related to having dedicated and committed WIL staff, a transparent university-wide WIL policy, a coherent WIL-embedded curriculum, intentional WIL-friendly pedagogies, or sustained industry-partnership strategies that served VU's WIL commitment important improving VU's WIL experience for international students. Relevant recommendations have been suggested in the chapter in response to the obstructions identified.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This study examines the effectiveness of a uniform application of WIL models for onshore international students, who return to work in their countries upon completion, through the research question *How are Work Integrated Learning (WIL) programmes perceived by onshore Chinese students and Victoria University (VU) staff?* Ultimately, the research outputs are to determine what make WIL experiences more effective and relevant to international students, particularly Chinese students as a focus of interest. The four chapters presented so far have drawn on relevant literature and the survey and interview data to cast light on the implementation of WIL programmes at VU and their impacts on the employability of Chinese international students. The topic was specifically explored from the perspectives of VU's Chinese graduates and staff members who had been involved in WIL activities. Employing an outcome-impact approach throughout, the study has unpacked the expectations, the successes, as well as the challenges of participating in WIL programmes in response to the three sub-research questions set out at the beginning of the thesis, namely:

> [1] What are the Work Integrated Learning programmes implemented at Victoria University?
>
> [2] What are the opportunities experienced by onshore Chinese students and Victoria University staff in Work Integrated Learning programmes?
>
> [3] What are the difficulties experienced by onshore Chinese students and Victoria University staff in Work Integrated Learning programmes?

5.2 Summary of investigation into Chinese students and Work Integrated Learning programmes

Chapter 1 states the problem that motivates the conducting of this research and articulates the key research question and sub-questions. Chapter 2 discusses relevant WIL literature to provide the contextual understanding of WIL definitions, historical context, models and development in higher education. Chapter 3 illustrates and defends the approach of the study, introducing the methodology, data collection tools, research participants, and data collection and data analysis processes. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the perspectives of VU

graduates and academics regarding the relevance and currency of WIL-embedded programmes. Finally, Chapter 5 draws together the key findings, contributions, implications and practical solutions of the research before deliberating on the limitations and implications for future studies.

5.3 Research questions and key findings

5.3.1 Research question 1 - What are the Work Integrated Learning programs implemented at Victoria University?

VU, like all other universities, faces the challenge of responding to labour market trends and ensuring graduates are job, career, and future ready. The University is also in the process of re-imagining and re-positioning itself in response to the global changes that are creating persistent skilled labour shortages in Australia and Asia.

VU has developed and practised a range of models to cater to the need of students in WIL. These range from pre-course experience to post-course internship and extend across a continuum from low to high levels of authenticity and engagement, such as predominantly off-campus and predominantly on-campus WIL. Specific examples of WIL at VU include placements, internships, professional development programmes, cooperative education, professional and clinical practice, industry projects, volunteering, problem-based learning, case studies, scenarios, and trades college. WIL experiences at VU have been able to authentically engage students with the practices and experiences of the workplace, locate within an intentional discipline-centred curriculum, and focus on graduate learning outcomes and career pathways.

Placements, in particular, are maintained in disciplines that traditionally emphasise hands-on practice, such as nursing or teaching, and are increasingly emphasised for other disciplines. The University observes more difficulty in embedding placements for certain disciplines, such as the Bachelor of Arts due to its a large number of specialisations or Literary Studies due to placements not fitting into the nature of reviewing literary works. The placement model that is recommended by both students and academics is the one in which students visit their placement site regularly throughout the semester starting. School of Education, for example, has been sending its students to do placements at Victorian schools one or two days a week for the whole school year right from their first year of study. Compared with this type

of placement arrangement, the fly-in fly-out placement type, in which students stay with an organisation in a-few-week blocks, is perceived as not equally effective in engaging students in the workplace.

VU is applying a one-size-fits-all approach to deliver WIL regardless of whether students are local or international ones. VU sees placements mostly from the perspective of the educational objectives to be achieved. According to one academic, an objective of placements is to assess students' skills and knowledge and prepare students for the desired skills and knowledge in their profession. Aiming to meet industry criteria, therefore, means that international students and local ones should be treated in the same way.

There exist two opposing views from VU staff regarding this approach to delivering WIL to international students. Some faculties view the issues that international students face to be particular and support tailoring WIL delivery to the needs of international students. Meanwhile, some other members, including the university's central managers, view that domestic and international students should receive similar treatment in placements and in other forms of WIL. The argument is that issues for international students only happen occasionally plus the fact that international students are under-represented in WIL.

5.3.2 Research question 2 - Opportunities as experienced by onshore Chinese students and Victoria University staff in Work Integrated Learning programmes

WIL experiences are valued and desired by Chinese international students. For one thing, this comes from the unmet expectations of education provision in the students' home country in language, intercultural competence, and industry experience. For another, there is an expectation that unique and transferrable skills and knowledge can be gained from work experience as part of the training degree. This is instrumentally linked to students' employability since a foreign work experience and cross-cultural perspective could help them secure their employment after graduation, especially in the time of tense competition for employment in China as well as in the world.

The study provides evidence that largely aligns with existing WIL literature regarding the contribution of WIL to the graduate employability for international students. There is a consensus from both Chinese international students and VU academics that WIL offers international students meaningful career, social, and personal attributes. Firstly, WIL has enabled a strongly reinforced introduction to industry practice and its relevance with

students' theoretical learning. Students have reportedly been able to see how the theoretical knowledge from their course is used in reality and, to a good extent, enhance an understanding of course materials. WIL has also enabled students to consolidate and apply their prior academic learning in a professional context.

Secondly, WIL has contributed to heightening student awareness of their personal-professional identity in their discipline arena. For students who previously had work experience in China, WIL offers them an opportunity to reflect on business practices in China and in Australia. Following their WIL experience, the students report to be better versed in what is expected by the industry and local and international market. In personal domains, students have understood more about important attributes such as loyalty, reliability, resilience, adaptability, and positive self-esteem. They see these as desirable qualities for their employment back in their home country.

Thirdly, WIL has developed for international students confidence in themselves as a professional practitioner and useful professional capabilities. Students have claimed to be exposed to authentic professional practices, cultivate a professional network, operate outside of their personal comfort zone as well as working autonomously and developing teamwork and learning to take an initiative in their tasks. Being exposed to workplace communication also helps international students improve their language and their written and verbal communication as well as enhancing their cultural awareness and sensitivity. In fact, language skills and cross-cultural competence are ranked highest among the attributes that were gained out of WIL for the Chinese students in this survey. This is because WIL students are given the opportunities to mix with people of different cultures and develop both soft skills and discipline-specific ones.

In short, it can be said that WIL activities organised by VU have achieved some fundamental goals in alignment with the University's objectives for WIL, particularly its mission to train job-ready graduates and enhance graduate employability for its students.

5.3.3 Research question 3 - Difficulties as experienced by onshore Chinese students and Victoria University staff in Work Integrated Learning programmes

Despite the benefits brought by WIL, the study reveals that international students remain inadequately prepared and informed about the nature and requirements of their WIL experience to effectively adapt to the Australian work culture and to transition back to their

Chinese workplace context. The study provides some insights into the factors impacting on students' learning outcomes during the WIL experience and on their employment after the WIL experience.

The challenges that international students face during their WIL participation are the outcomes of different mingling factors. The most prominent themes of challenges that emerge from the research data are Chinese international students' low level of English proficiency, limited understanding of the Australian workplace culture, and limited networking resources in Australia. These factors are described as barriers stalling their full integration in their work placements. The lack of readiness for WIL by international students could be seen as attributed to their cultural background. The Chinese international students come from an exam-oriented academic culture where gaining work experience during study is not required or expected. Language learning is part of the compulsory education in China but focuses heavily on the teaching and drilling of grammar, reading and vocabulary.

Regarding intercultural competence, Chinese international students lack an understanding of the prevalent values, practices, and attitudes which are undertaken in the Australian work culture. Going through a WIL process seems to start constructing a hybrid identity in the Chinese graduates where they perceive themselves as 'the other Chinese' as opposed to local Chinese graduates when competing for employment. However, either the WIL experience is too short or the deliberate social and cultural investments of the graduates are not yet adequate for them to elevate their cultural awareness from a stage where they are aware of work culture differences to a stage where they actively transform their practises to best perform in each context. This also negatively impacts students' self-confidence and participation in the Australian workplace.

There are also certain conditions particularly pertaining to international students which obstructs their WIL participation. In the first place, visa regulations impose a cap on the number of working hours that international students are entitled to. Workplace employers are often hesitant to take on international students for this reason, which could make it challenging for international students to obtain meaningful and useful work placement for their future employment. This is also found to add to the difficulties for international students who would like to seek paid work to financially support themselves. In particular relation to the financial issues of international students, the study refutes the common assumption that international students can easily manage their tuition and living costs in Australia. In addition

to those expenses, the incurring of additional costs for students' WIL participation can be challenging for international students to maintain a quality WIL experience.

Regarding students' ability to apply and transfer the skills and knowledge learnt from their WIL experience, the study identifies several challenges for VU Chinese graduates who return to China for work. These challenges lie in the differences in certain technical, professional, and interpersonal practices between Australia and China. While the transitioning issue for VU graduates is often limited to the early stages of adapting or transitioning back to the Chinese work culture, the study highlights the needs to be considerate of Chinese students' needs in learning about and establishing connections with employment in their home country. 'Guanxi', for example, is among the challenges identified.

5.4 Recommendations for practice

As summarised above, the choice of study that Chinese international students make at VU is strongly driven by the opportunity to acquire language, culture, and work experience in Australia. The same motivation contributes to the high demand for professional experience in Australia among VU's Chinese onshore students. As commented by one academic from VU International Careers Office, a number of students are even willing to pay up to twelve thousand dollars to be enrolled in Professional Year programmes offered by external providers so that they can get up to three months of work experience. The increased demand for Professional Year programmes indicates that international students are still not receiving the practical discipline-related work that is desired by the workplace from their studies.

In the literature, it is widely acknowledged that international students experience more difficulties than their domestic counterparts in sourcing suitable work placements. In this study, the need to better listen to the experience of international students during their placement is imperative and this is echoed in almost all the responses from the interviewed academics. Reviewing the support schemes for the benefits of students is of vital importance to Australia's international education, as seen in the following remark by one academic who was interviewed in this study:

> Australia would like to consider ourselves as a global place. Education is something that we are taking seriously, and it is also an industry that we are quite permanent in and have so far good reputation in. Quality and assurance are something that we want

> to live up to. If we want to continue to have a strong presence in the international arena, it is important that a support structure and programmes like Learning in the Workplace are reviewed because it is about recognising what we can provide for the learners. [CA2]

It is important to reiterate that VU's sustained success in its international education must be associated with its understanding of and attending to the issues of work experience, employability, and support services for international students. This study adds evidence to support WIL literature that a 'one size fits all' model does not suffice for VU's 'inclusive education' mission when considering the provision of work experience for international students. Instead, WIL programmes and support schemes need to be better tailored to the need of international students since the challenges that international students face are often particular and different from those of domestic ones.

Specific recommendations have been made in response to each particular issue identified as obstructions for international students during WIL participation in the previous chapter of this thesis. To maximise WIL benefits for international students, VU's WIL policy should adhere to the principles of best practice and should be regularly evaluated by stakeholders involved in WIL programmes. Meanwhile, in order to enhance the overall educational experience at VU for international students, there need to be improvements on at least four aspects of VU course delivery, namely administration, curriculum, pedagogies, and support schemes. Below are six recommendations both specific to WIL and beyond WIL that are relevant to those four aspects.

5.4.1 Improving Work Integrated Learning administration

In order to manage and implement WIL policies and programmes, VU is currently using a combination of centralised and decentralised approaches. The University has a central WIL team that oversees WIL policies. It, at the same time, has a decentralised structure with five different management systems assisting several faculties in operating WIL activities. The perception around interviewed academics is that the existing structure can do the job but much more is needed to fulfil the expectations. According to one senior academic who was interviewed, the consequence of having five management systems operating simultaneously is that the University may not be sufficiently robust when measuring the effectiveness of WIL programmes.

Another obstacle encountered by the University is a lack of a tool to manage and evaluate the effectiveness of its WIL programmes. Faculty members, for example, point to the lack of a university-wide placement or WIL database to manage the growth of WIL and assure the consistency in applying WIL across the University. This can be seen in the following remark:

> I would not say the current structure is effective. I mean it is just growing up, so people would do different things, and everyone has their own database, and no one really knows who is where. We need a really detailed database. I think the University knows that we want a system where we can have a good idea of who is in what organisation and that sort of things. If everyone kept their own record, and if someone left sometimes, we would not lose the whole filing of all those placements. [FA4]

One recommendation for VU regarding its current administrative structure is that the centralised WIL management team should be resourced and empowered. Improving on the current WIL administration can allow the University to be more efficient in evaluating its WIL programmes, devising a risk management plan, and planning for placement requirements and support. The effective administering and managing of VU's WIL programmes will be then hugely beneficial to not only students but also international students. This recommendation is made in line with suggestions by WIL scholars. For example, observing universities implementing WIL, Wardle (2014) notes that staged implementation and centralised structures prevail in successful practices. Collaboration across one university allows the sharing of scarce resources and time. Faculties can also have more flexibility in adapting WIL initiatives to particular industry needs and standards. Wardle (2014) recommends having a specialist team to manage administrative support due to the complex nature of WIL. WIL team members should also be provided with specialised training and resources to be more conversant in assisting different disciplines.

Another recommendation for VU concerns the development of a comprehensive and responsive WIL database or management system that can be monitored centrally and accessed and updated locally by faculties. The management system should be able to map out different WIL activities in VU courses in a coherent manner. It should also be designed in a manner that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of WIL programmes and plan for short and long-term strategies. In addition to the above benefits, the management system should serve as an awareness-raising tool, especially given the fact that issues related to international students tend to be placed aside faculties' attention. The development of a management

system necessarily entails defining more clearly VU's WIL policies, guidelines, and support mechanisms for international students. It also involves training WIL support staff and faculties for handling WIL issues or general issues of international students.

5.4.2 Improving the support structure for international students

There are different conceptual frameworks regarding support for international students engaged in WIL. The Work Placement for International Student Programs (or WISP) Model of Effective Practice (Department of Education and Training, 2016, p. 72), for example, was developed in a national research project surveying work placement experiences of international students across six Australian universities. The WISP Model recommends certain activities to be undertaken by stakeholders to support WIL. From the university side, it is recommended that universities should host meetings between university staff, workplace supervisors and international students before and after placements. They should also encourage international students to participate in volunteer activities to experience the Australian cultural and professional settings as well as organising diverse educational activities, for example in the form of role plays, videos and critical reflection, in order for international students to gain a deeper understanding of the Australian workplace. It is also advisable to connect students in a multimedia community to encourage communication during their placement and share the responsibility of feedback and assessment to understand more fully the progress of international students. From the side of international students, it is recommended that students should be encouraged to utilise the available services at the university; join volunteer activities to experience the new culture and industry; join the university's educational activities to understand more deeply about the Australian work setting; reflect on their own professional experience and on their home-country work context; share their professional experience, cultural knowledge, and skill sets in a community of learners; and regularly seek feedback from their supervisors and act on their plan for improvement.

Drawing on the findings from this study and referencing against best practices, VU needs to sharpen the operational strategies and ample resourcing for WIL in general and WIL for international students in particular. VU needs to better prepare and debrief international students for their placements. This is to ensure that students know what to expect at the future workplace, how they can learn in workplace complexity, and what resources they should equip themselves with for reflecting on and monitoring their placement experience (Boud,

2009; Boud & Walker, 1990). This is especially necessary for international students who often do not have familiarity with the Australian workplace. This is also important as it has been observed by VU academics that Chinese international students are often used to raising issues that they face. The University currently offers varying levels of pre-placement preparation for students from different disciplines and faculties. This includes support for interview preparation with potential host organisations, on-campus information sessions and workshops, pre-briefings and online pre-placement modules, handbooks outlining roles and responsibilities, and less formal provision of resources for students seeking placements. However, these are often one-off rather than coherently and consistently structured in the university experience of international students.

Additionally, what VU can do to improve its support structure is necessarily to raise the awareness of international students. This study has found that university services are available for international students to access yet very low participation rate of international students in WIL preparation activities has been recorded. This suggests that there needs to be a mechanism to promote the services to international students, possibly including demanding compulsory attendance and active initiation from students. Also, as revealed in the interviews with VU academics, students need to be supported to become more independent in the placement process. Currently, the University takes care of finding placements for students. However, this is viewed as spoon-feeding and causing students to miss out on their learning of job-search skills which are the key part of making themselves more employable. It would be of more benefit to international students if the University also develops workshops to prepare them for the skills of seeking a placement, contacting the organisation, following up on the emails and so on.

Ensuring that international students have the right expectations is also key to successful WIL experience. International students should be encouraged to thoroughly re-consider their expectations and reflect on available options rather than have a blinkered focus on high-profile, multinational organisations which are more demanding than smaller business in taking them aboard for placements. The University also needs to be more open to is regarding the flexibility needed for extended travel and ‘think outside the box’ to increase their chance of attaining a suitable work placement, especially in a competitive environment.

5.4.3 Providing simulated and authentic professional settings

Boud (2016) remarks that higher education institutions often do not have control or influence over potential placement sites. For example, placement sites tend to prioritise the conduct of substantive work over an intentional, structured, and systematic provision of learning. What this means is that even if enough placements are made, students may not be engaged in specific practices in a meaningful manner to learn from those to the depth and range of the desired outcomes. This makes authentic and simulated initiatives within the institution's curricula of vital importance.

Scaffolding students in their exposure to the industry is strongly supported in the literature (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; McGill & Beaty, 1995; Nulty, Mitchell, Jeffrey, Henderson, & Groves, 2011; Wardle, 2014; White, Bloomfield, & Cornu, 2010). It is further recommended that, ideally, students should be provided with multitude placements of various durations in different industry settings to allow for the reinforcement of skills and knowledge and to reflect the industry diversity (Nulty et al., 2011; White et al., 2010). Wardle (2014) explains that scaffolding of WIL goes from an early controlled introduction to the industry for students to check their compatibility to additional placements towards course completion for students to connect details into a bigger picture of the industry. Boud (2016) advises institutions to design deliberate practice-based activities. Institutions, for instance, can become placement sites themselves or establish their own work organisations that can engage their own students. By that means, students can participate in authentic practice and, at the same time, enjoy a higher degree of supervision compared with the supervision they receive in external workplaces.

For VU to better prepare international students for work placements in Australia, providing them with an opportunity to gain experience of the Australian work culture early, preferably from the first year of coursework, would be useful. The contents necessarily include the Australian workforce and its code of conduct, organisational positioning and structure, language narrative rules and governing legislation, and values. Expecting and managing certain situations that may arise as a result of placements are also essential. It will also be useful to provide a broad insight into the areas in which the students may be exposed to and the variances in terms of funding, culture, and work practices (including Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) protocols. At VU, these contents are already part of the University's WIL orientation. However, these have not yet been delivered with explicit and deliberate attention

to international students. VU could introduce a compulsory 'Introduction to Professional Practice' module or course, similar to the one currently taught by University of Victoria, Canada, in a flipped-classroom mode to introduce job-search skills and knowledge as well as strategies to handle cross-cultural communication, health, risks, and safety.

VU has recently embarked on its 'VU Block Model', in which students complete one unit of study delivered over a three to four-week period before moving onto the next. The University has claimed improvements in students' academic performance as students benefit from the small class size and complementary academic and job-search activities. If VU could further gear this Model in the direction of a practice-oriented curriculum, there could be more benefits from scaffolded instruction into the Australian work practice for international students. Towards that end, VU curricula should provide a clear progression of practice situations for international students. This can start as soon as the first year of a degree programme with simple simulations of workplace practices, progressing to more complex one, and then to fully self-regulated practice-based learning. Introducing WIL early will contribute to increasing the confidence for both international students and employers.

Different forms of simulated and authentic WIL can also be done by the University by means of connecting students with their industry and communities. Firstly, inviting guest speakers to visit classrooms is both cost-effective and easy to arrange among WIL initiatives. Traditionally, guest speaking has been known to have the benefits of engaging learners in real-life meaningful conversations and knowledge updating (Fawcett & Fawcett, 2011). It is important that guest speakers should be informed of the course objectives and targeted students, especially international students, so that good integration can be made between guest lectures and the curriculum.

Secondly, connecting students with industry can be done through industry-based projects, role plays and replications without having to assign students to a specific organisation for work placement. This can be useful in combatting high levels of competition for restricted placement opportunities. International students who are often in a less competitive advantage with local students can also have more chance to engage with industry in an authentic and true learning experience (Jackson & Greenwood, 2015).

Thirdly, the University can introduce international students to service learning, a form of WIL in which they are based in the community to develop civic responsibility and a wider

understanding of societal values. This permits students to develop an understanding of the Australian society and customs and builds communication and teamwork skills. This can be considered a common-sense stepping-stone for international students to gain preliminary exposure to a new cultural environment. This can also be a podium for fostering their confidence, communication, and cultural visions, followed by a placement in a professional environment later in their studies.

5.4.4 Enhancing international students' language skills and cultural competence

Enhancing cultural awareness and developing intercultural communication skills contributes to dispelling misconceptions that could cause anxiety for international students at the start of their placements. This also has life-long, transferrable value that students can benefit from in their personal, academic, and professional life. From a curriculum-design point of view, Boud (2016) argues that students need significant facility in collaborative work, yet current course design practices do not suffice. According to Boud (2016),

> This is unlikely to happen through the injection of a few group tasks or group assessments added to the curriculum. Working collaboratively involves more than working with a limited group of academic peers or with a single work group on a placement. A pedagogic culture needs to be established that sees working together as part of everyday work and study through higher levels of cooperation during study programs and through more diverse forms of relationships through working phrases of courses. (p. 162)

The implication that this has for VU is that the University should further build on the strengths of its current teaching and learning culture so that international students are given meaningful and hands-on collaborative learning useful for their employment. VU should also develop and embed in its curriculum intentional pedagogies and activities that develop intercultural competence for international students coherently and consistently throughout their university life rather than only strategies for international students newly arriving in Australia.

To foster intercultural competence for Chinese international students, the University should encourage and facilitate a more active role for them to get involved and work in teams with local students and international students from a culturally diverse background. This should be done throughout international students' coursework experience and early enough to provide

them with the cultural awareness and cross-cultural understanding facilitative to an effective WIL experience. Increasing cross-cultural contact, for example in the form of peer-to-peer learning with students from other cultural groups, could bring greater opportunities for Chinese international students who were often reluctant in expanding their social circles. Other pedagogical strategies that can be useful are roleplay, critical reflections, and dialogical inquiry-based learning activities.

Also, as suggested in Chapter 4, supporting living arrangements for international students to mingle with Australian students and avoiding the clustering of Chinese students together, despite being challenging to implement, will have a powerful outcome once implemented. VU could also organise orientation days that involve both local, interstate, and international students rather than separate orientation programmes for international students only. VU could also organise for students to have an intercultural residential experience, weekly charity and volunteering projects that involve both local and international students, student-led forums for discussing cultural challenges, or cultural exchanges between international students and local residents. Doing so will help avoid the tendency of Chinese international students forming a Chinese community within the university community, which will, in returns, increase the opportunities of Chinese international students learning Australian social norms of behaviour and culture.

Regarding language skills development for international students, it is recommended that the University defines its English language proficiency exit standards more clearly and then align them with its learning, teaching, assessment and WIL practices in order to ensure that students graduate with the English language skills needed for employment after graduation. Currently, the University's policy only stays at assessing whether students enter their course with a satisfactory level of English based on the students' scores in a standardised English language test. The University should also involve international students in taking responsibility for developing their language skills and plan activities for the improvements in their skills for post-university careers.

5.4.5 Maintaining industry partnership and supporting industry partners

Finding placements for the international student cohort is a common challenge across the Australian higher education and VET sectors. This is due to an imbalance in the available placement opportunities offered by industry and the number of students wanting to engage in

placements (Department of Industry, 2014). The limited number of placements are reportedly reserved for 'preferred groups' such as those excelling academically, local students, and those who are capable of sourcing their own placement opportunities (Cate Gribble, 2014; Jackson, 2018b). From the side of VU's faculties, academics note that placing students is most challenging for graduate certificate programmes. These are predominantly enrolled by international students from a non-English speaking background with low English literacy skills.

Following good WIL practices for international students in the literature, VU could take a number of steps to ensure accessibility to WIL for international students. Firstly, establishing and maintaining contact with industry is vital for the success of WIL programmes and for the benefits of international students. Establishing contact with industry partners involves communicating about WIL pedagogy, explaining about WIL benefits, and detailing expectations in terms of workspace, induction, support, or assessments. These can be done by means of guidelines, information brochures, templates, and checklists.

Secondly, it is recommended that the University provides support and, ideally, supplementary training for its WIL partners in managing placements for students. The reason for doing so has been identified in the literature. Wardle (2014), for example, argues that 'proficiency as a practitioner does not automatically translate into competence as a trainer or indeed English language proficiency and this has implications for WIL and the teaching of WIL' (p. 188). One university staff in Wardle's (2014) study commented that

> You have some of the best practitioners in the world, but they are the worst educators because they have never been taught how to communicate their wonderful skills to other people. Many people out there have done absolutely no training and been successful via a good streak of luck along the way and then they suddenly become icons or recognised as pillars of the industry and they get to espouse what they believe to be correct and subsequently get proven to be wrong but in the meantime other people have followed along for the ride. (University Educator, as cited in Wardle, 2014, p. 188)

VU's support for its industry partners in managing international students involves explaining clearly information related to international students to help overcome the bias towards hosting international students and to better facilitate workplace learning for them. Workplace

supervisors should be supported in understanding cultural differences and utilising the unique cultural knowledge and experience of international students in the workplace. If necessary, workplace supervisors could also be supported in using suitable strategies and processes to manage effective communication, feedback-giving and managing the differences.

VU can also learn from other successful examples of other institutions in expanding the professional networks that can allow for greater WIL opportunities for its international students. There are various ways to build networks to aid international students in finding placements as suggested by Jackson and Greenwood (2015, p. 36). The University, for example, can inaugurate partnerships at university and faculty levels with prospective employers who have global operations and may benefit from the cultural insights and linguistic abilities of international students. These prospective employers could be identified and contacted via local business and professional associations which serve members from international countries other than Australia. The University can also introduce and enhance the role of student societies in acquainting international students with local community groups, professional associations, businesses and charitable organisations. In case of an absence of industry partnerships, VU can encourage international students to engage in community and volunteer programmes.

5.4.6 Connecting with students' home employment

The study reveals the importance of local industry knowledge and professional networking for international students. The relevance and currency of WIL to international students will be enhanced when their expectations are aligned with both the context of employment in Australia and their country of origin. What this means for VU can be to build its curriculum to include industry knowledge in the local context of international students so that they can master some local networks, know-hows, and intercultural skills. International students should be encouraged to update themselves on current labour market trends and to gain insights into the types of organisations, industries and sectors that are employing new graduates (Jackson & Greenwood, 2015). This will broaden their understanding of market trends and where the available jobs are, particularly in a soft graduate labour market and one where not-for-profits, local government, and small- and medium-sized organisations play an important role in employing graduates.

VU could make use of alumni associations to facilitate networking and professional collaboration. VU could also learn from the initiatives by other Australian institutions or promote its current offshored placement programmes that allow international students to apply work-ready attributes and industry knowledge in actual workplace in their local economies. The China Industry Placement Programme offered by the University of Sydney, in which students are sent to Shanghai businesses for their six-week placements can be a useful, practical example in this regard. This is particularly useful for Chinese students to develop personal and professional relationships in China, where business practices are still largely dependent on informal, personal ties.

In sum, extra resources are inevitably entailed in organising WIL for international students. However, many of the concerns appear to be manageable given the University exercises due care in preparing international students for WIL, designing specific WIL objectives, arranging relevant engagement activities within suitable timeframes, and ensuring compatible expectations and values.

5.5 Limitations of the study

It is recognised that the viewpoints and insights of the participants transformed into the research data, and this is described by (Chan, 2006) as *perspective specificity*. In her assessment of both a Chinese and a British University that were being internationalised, she noted that if other participants had been included, it was possible that different findings could have been possible. That is to say, different participants might have produced a different conclusion and one which could be generalisable.

This study is restricted to a small sample of Chinese graduates who commenced WIL-embedded courses at VU and VU personnel and academics who were partly or fully involved in the development, delivery and monitoring of WIL programmes at VU. The demographic data collected from the online survey were noticeably too small to be representative of VU's Chinese or international graduate cohort. This has been explained in Chapter 3 to have resulted from the University's privacy restrictions regarding information on its graduates. From a statistical perspective, a sample size which is too small decreases the statistical power of a study and increases the margin of error, which can cause inferences made based on statistical data to be biased or meaningless (Hackshaw, 2008). The highly variable survey data in this study acknowledges potential deviation among individual results. The researcher

has, therefore, chosen to report and treat the survey data as individual student experience to best reflect the highly individualised nature of WIL.

The VU graduate sample was restricted further by age and focus. Concerning age, the majority of Chinese graduates surveyed commenced the study without prior experience in the labour market and upon starting at VU, and only a few had some work experience. This makes it extremely likely that older and therefore more experienced participants would experience WIL in a different way and would express a different set of expectations and perspectives regarding the applicability and practicality of their Australia-based placement.

With respect to selection of participants, this study concentrated on Chinese graduates who had completed their study in Australia and returned to their home country for work. Most of these respondents upon returning to China operated in the business sector in small to medium-size enterprises. The focus on the business sector, however, may not necessarily reveal perspectives generalisable to other sectors such as health sciences, where requirements can be more stringent and on which the WIL literature somewhat prevails. The study is therefore limited by its generalisation to other contexts outside Australia and China. It would have also been useful to extend the investigation to a wider group of participants by involving graduate participants from many other disciplines and who were involved in a wider spread range of WIL models. The inclusion of graduates from a wide range of faculties and with varied WIL experience would have allowed the study to extend the scope of the findings to include other important constituents of the Australian based WIL experience for international students. The extension would have also enabled the study to draw a greater number of stronger and valuable conclusions about the perceptions and experience of WIL students.

Whilst it is acknowledged that it is difficult to make generalisations due to the small group of participants in the study, the study is ardently concentrated on some in-depth analysis and discussion of the development, implementation, and evaluation of WIL. As well as generating guidance for work practices that will advance an improved WIL experience for international students, it will provide greater beneficial knowledge and information for WIL developers and coordinators. Whilst this study does not aim to focus on generalisability, an effort has been made here to allow for the transferability of the research findings as discussed in the early works of Lincoln and Guba (1985). Transferability pertains to how the reader can utilise the results of a study in a relative and similar situation. To achieve transferability, this study provides detailed description as advocated by Geertz (1973). Being thoroughly

descriptive allows for a deeper comprehension of the material, which can assist the reader to better relate the information to other situations.

Further limitations of this study are related to aspects of the qualitative research design. Qualitative studies are commonly subject to researcher partiality. Questions such as type of sample use, source of the sample, and ultimate analysis and interpretation of the data collected are regularly affected by the subjective bias of the researcher. This bias from the researcher's perspective may negatively impact the overall study outcome. This problem was addressed by the researcher in a number of ways. As recommended by Merriam (2009), the study provides necessary clarification of the expectations regarding the research process from the beginning. Then, as advocated by Denscombe (2010), the researcher was always aware that the data may be misinterpreted. To avoid this, when the data that did not match expectations, the researcher had an open mind to what was found and actively investigated possible causes or reasons to explain for the findings.

5.6 Contributions of the study

This study makes several theoretical and methodological contributions to the WIL literature.

Firstly, the study confirms and extends an understanding of the benefits and necessity of WIL that have been discussed in the literature. The study provides an insight into perceived contributions of WIL in academic, personal, and professional domains both from a student and a faculty perspective. While studies have been conducted regarding student benefits of WIL, few have examined the WIL benefits for international students, especially investigating subsequent employment options on return to their home country upon completion of their study.

Secondly, the study confirms and extends an understanding of the barriers that have inhibited international students from participating in WIL and applying WIL knowledge in their post-graduation employment. The study reveals contextual factors and differences between the employment culture in Australia and China. These differences are explored as challenges for international students to engage in the Australian workplace and in applying the acquired skills and knowledge upon return to China. While international students gain improved understanding of and enhance their personal attributes and work-related skills from their Australia-based placements, it would be useful for these qualities to also be relevant to the

context of use in their home country. The awareness of the differences is particularly important for the development of WIL programmes.

Thirdly, the study spotlights areas for improvement and upgrading. This allows it to make recommendations about the relevance of VU's WIL models for international students in general and Chinese students in particular. The study argues that VU's WIL models should be developed and implemented with more attention to the particular needs of international students and consider their possible context of employment following their graduation. The study also recommends that larger-scale and more comprehensive research should be conducted to more effectively design and implement these models. These findings can be directly relevant to other Australian universities, particularly those with high number of international enrolments from China. The findings can also be useful for other practitioners in the fields related to WIL such as educational policy makers, industries, and employers in identifying skill, communication, and qualification gaps in workplace settings across disciplines.

Fourthly, the study exemplifies the use of qualitative research in educational research and programme evaluation. Under the qualitative research paradigm, the study employs a single case study and a process-outcome evaluation approach. Both enables an investigation into the relationship between WIL participation and the perceived outcomes and impacts on WIL students. The case study methodology allows the investigation not to be limited to the student population or discipline. Meanwhile, the method of designing the research instruments under the process-outcome approach to programme evaluation is a useful tool for other evaluation studies that seek explanations for the outcomes of programmes delivered. The design of the instruments to investigate the experience and perceptions of VU academics and international students regarding VU's WIL programmes could be applied in investigating the perceptions and experience of staff and graduates involved in other coursework. The techniques of analysis employed in this study showcase how different methods can be combined to capture the general trends and details and complexity in the exploration of education issues. A questionnaire survey, in-depth interviews, and document analysis are used in combination in this study, allowing the topic to be research in an insightful manner.

5.7 Future research

This study of Chinese international students' experiences relating to their Australia-based

WIL suggests some positive directions for further enhancement to the research topic.

First, this study offers a glimpse into the degree to which international students, after the completion of their study in Australia, and upon returning to their home country for employment, perceive the usefulness of their Australia-based work placement. Further qualitative and quantitative studies would be beneficial to extend the findings of this relatively small-scale work. Quantitative studies involving a much larger representation which are focused on wider fields of disciplines or sectors of employment, may reveal that international students engaged in WIL in Australia that are more specific to the respective industries, have quite different feedback on their experience. Quantitative studies concentrating on other service and non-service sector industries such as education, healthcare or manufacturing are also highly relevant and should not be overlooked in the Chinese economy.

Second, this study has made recommendations to improve certain aspects of WIL experience for international students. These include improving the support structure for international students partaking WIL to enhance their language development, cultural awareness, interpersonal communication capabilities, and their transferring of the acquired skills and knowledge into the context of use in their home country. Future studies can implement the interventions suggested or test the effectiveness of these interventions. For example, work can be done around developing an English language proficiency and employability framework for VU international students and aligning teaching and WIL practices with it. Research can also be conducted to test several intentional pedagogies that have been suggested to increase students' awareness of the Australian workplace culture and strategies to handle culturally diverse situations. Roleplay, simulated WIL, part-time non-WIL work, or reflective practices, if examined further, could be empowering for VU and its international students.

5.8 Conclusion

The study provides a nuanced understanding of the experiences of the international student cohort in undertaking WIL and of faculty members in the development, delivery and evaluation of WIL programmes. This understanding of their perceptions, and those of the VU staff working with the WIL programmes, contribute to the forming of an enhanced model for WIL, from which they and other students, especially international students, can benefit. An

understanding of the students' and faculty's perspectives on both the opportunities and obstacles while participating in WIL will also benefit course administrators, lecturers, industry employers and students. The study – with findings that provide insight into VU's WIL implementation and Chinese International students' challenges and successes – is expected to benefit many other Australian Universities with a high number of international enrolments.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Survey sample for graduates in English

Introduction

This survey seeks information about your work placement experiences in Australia and how effective these experiences are in your current job in China.

A process-outcomes approach of impact evaluation will be used in this research. Your responses will be analysed to understand the effectiveness, limitation and what you would like to see being included in future placement programs that involve international students.

Information collected from you will assist us greatly with our evaluation. This will allow further enhancements of Victoria University's work placement programs to having more practical and relevant placement programs for international students studying at Victoria University.

It is important that you are open and honest in your responses. This will ensure that we get an accurate picture of the range of your experiences throughout your placement period and how these experiences impact on your current employment and job performance in China.

Your individual responses will not be identifiable; all results will be aggregated. The data will be kept in the strictest confidence and will only be accessible to staff in the research team.

We appreciate your taking the time to complete this survey. It which should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

If you have any queries about this survey please contact the student researcher, Cuong Nguyen (School of Education, Victoria University), on + 61 3 9919 8465 or via email at wil.research@vu.edu.au

Thank you.

1. Are you male or female?

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female

2. Which category below includes your age?

- ◯ 15-19
- ◯ 20-24
- ◯ 25-34
- ◯ 35-44
- ◯ 45-64
- ◯ 55-64
- ◯ 65-Over

3. Please indicate your previous employment status (prior to undertaking a course at VU)

- ◯ Not working
- ◯ Working full-time
- ◯ Working part-time
- ◯ Working casual
- ◯ Other (please specify)

Other (please specify)

4. Which course did you undertake at Victoria University? [If you studied multiple courses, please identify the one that is relevant to your most recent or current employment]

Course name	
School	
Faculty	
Graduation Year	

5. What is the highest level of study you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- ◯ PhD, Professional Doctorate, Master by Research
- ◯ Master by Coursework
- ◯ Bachelor
- ◯ Diploma
- ◯ Certificate

Other (please specify)

6. How was your course funded?

- ◯ Own funds
- ◯ Loan
- ◯ Family
- ◯ Employer
- ◯ Chinese government scholarship
- ◯ University scholarship/bursary
- ◯ AUSAID
- ◯ Exchange agreement between Institutions
- ◯ Other scholarship
- ◯ Charity or trust
- ◯ Other sponsor

Other (please specify)

7. At which campus was your course based?

- ◯ City Flinders
- ◯ City King
- ◯ City Queen
- ◯ Footscray Nicholson
- ◯ Footscray Park
- ◯ Melton
- ◯ Newport
- ◯ St Albans
- ◯ Sunbury
- ◯ Sunshine
- ◯ Werribee

Other (please specify)

8. Please specify your Australian work placement's details:

Business name	
Address	
Workplace supervisor's name and phone/email	

9. Please indicate which would best describe your Work Integrated Learning employment in Australia:

- ◯ Labourer/related worker
- ◯ Elementary clerical, sales or service worker
- ◯ Immediate production or transport worker
- ◯ Advanced clerical and service worker
- ◯ Tradesperson/related worker
- ◯ Semi-professional
- ◯ Professional
- ◯ Managers/administrators

Other (please specify)

10. Please indicate the duration of the Work Integrated Learning experience:

Months	
Days	
Hours	

11. Please indicate the level of agreement that you had with the following:

1=LOW level of agreement
10=HIGH level of agreement

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My duties in the workplace were clearly explained to me	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The duties asked of me were reasonable	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I received appropriate workplace orientation from the start	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I felt fully integrated in the work team	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I felt fully involved in daily work	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I felt that I was in a safe working environment	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I felt that the learning environment was appropriate to my capacity	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My university supervisor during the work placement proved to be helpful	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My workplace supervisor was always available	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My workplace supervisor always gave me good advice	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I was regularly able apply my learning at Victoria University during my workplace experience	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other (please specify)

12. To what extent have you developed each of the following personal attributes during your work placement in Australia?

1=LOW extent
10=HIGH extent

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Loyalty	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
An ability to deal with pressure	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
A sense of humour	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Personal presentation	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Honesty and integrity	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Adaptability	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
A balance attitude to work and home life	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Positive self esteem	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Reliability	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Commitment	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Motivation	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Common sense	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Enthusiasm	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other (please specify)

13. To what extent have you developed each of the following work-related skills during your work placement in Australia?

1=LOW extent
10=HIGH extent

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Technical skills required in my profession	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Interpersonal communication	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Teamwork	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Problem solving	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Self-management	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Planning and organising	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Technology	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Life-long learning	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Initiative and enterprise	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
English language	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other (please specify)

14. To what extent do you think the following impacted negatively on your workplace experience:

1=LOW level of impact
10=HIGH level of impact

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
English language skills	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
English speaking's accent	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Physical appearance	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Employment experience	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Limited knowledge about Australian job market	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Lack of intercultural communication skills	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Cultural differences	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Racial discrimination	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Lack of technical skills	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
International student status	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Visa conditions on work placement	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Other	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Please specify "Other" and/or further comment

15. Did you incur additional costs during your work placement period in Australia?

◯ No ◯ Yes, additional costs incurred

Comment

16. If Yes, what was the level of that impact on you?

1=LOW level of impact
10=HIGH level of impact

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Travel to and from work	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Food/Drink	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Visa/working permit	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Communication (telephone, internet, etc)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Accommodation	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Other	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Please specify "Other" and/or further comment

17. What were the best aspects of your Work Integrated Learning experience? Please explain this response.

18. What were the worst aspects of your Work Integrated Learning experience? Please explain this response.

19. In what ways could your experience of Work Integrated Learning have been improved?

20. Based on your impressions, would you recommend the Work Integrated Learning Program to other international students thinking of applying?

- ◯ I would actively encourage people to apply
- ◯ If asked, I would encourage people to apply
- ◯ I would neither encourage nor discourage people to apply
- ◯ If asked, I would discourage people from applying
- ◯ I would actively discourage people from applying

21. Please rate how satisfied you were with overall Work Integrated Learning Experience in Australia

1=LOW satisfaction
10=HIGH satisfaction

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Rating of satisfaction	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Comment (please specify)

22. Please provide your current employer's details

Business name

Address

23. Please indicate which would best describe your current employment

- ◯ Labourer/related worker
- ◯ Elementary clerical, sales or service worker
- ◯ Immediate production or transport worker
- ◯ Advanced clerical and service worker
- ◯ Tradesperson/related worker
- ◯ Semi-professional
- ◯ Professional
- ◯ Managers/administrators

Other (please specify)

24. To which industry sector does your business belong?

- ◯ Cultural & Creative Industries
- ◯ Education & Transition
- ◯ Engineering & Infrastructure
- ◯ Financial & Economic Services
- ◯ Health
- ◯ Human Services
- ◯ Law & Legal
- ◯ Management & Marketing Services
- ◯ Sport & Recreation
- ◯ Tourism & Hospitality
- ◯ Transport & Logistics

Other (please specify)

25. What is the size of your business?

- ◯ Micro (5 or fewer employees)
- ◯ Small (6 to 20 employees)
- ◯ Medium (21 to 100 employees)
- ◯ Large (more than 100 employees)

26. How many sites does your business have?

- ◯ Single site
- ◯ Multiple sites

27. What is the scale of your business?

- ◯ Provincial
- ◯ National
- ◯ Multi-national

28. What is the organisation type?

- ◯ For-profit
- ◯ Non-profit

29. By whom is the business operated?

- ◯ Chinese-government
- ◯ Chinese-private
- ◯ Foreign-company

30. Please rate the impact on your current job, of the learning you gained during your Australian work placement.

1=LOW level of impact
10=HIGH level of impact

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Technical skills	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Interpersonal communication	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Teamwork	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Problem solving	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Self-management	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Planning and organising	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Technology	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Life-long learning	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Initiative and enterprise	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
English language	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Comment

31. In your current job in China, to what extent have the following obstructed your applying the new learnings gained in your Australian work experience?

1=LOW level of obstruction
10=HIGH level of obstruction

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Differences in technology and infrastructure	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Differences in regulations, standards, policies and procedures (compliant requirements - work have to be done in ceirtain ways & to meet certain standards)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Differences in work practices (similar work but to be done differently in China)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Differences in working cultures, eg teamwork, employee-employer relationship, ect)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Other	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Please specify "Other" and/or further comment

32. If you are willing to engage in follow-up activities, please confirm by providing the email address

On behalf of the Research Team and Victoria University we would like to thank you for taking time to complete our survey. It is greatly appreciated.

Appendix 2. Survey sample for graduates in Chinese

简介

这项调查是为了查询您在澳大利亚的实习经验以及这些经验对目前在中国工作的效性。

调查的分析结果将影响未来的规划项目。您的回应将被分析，以便了解实习计划对外地留学生的的效力、极限以及在未来计划有需要补充的地方。

您所提供的资料对我们所进行的评估有极大的帮助。这将允许维多利亚大学进一步增强实习活动计划，以为在维多利亚大学求学的外地留学生带来更大的利益。

公开和坦诚的答复对我们极之重要。这将确保我们了解您实习经验的范围而这些经验将如何影响您目前在中国的就业和工作表现。

这调查结果将被汇总，个别的回应将不会被识别。调查数据将被保密，只有该研究小组的工作人员可接触。

我们感谢您抽出宝贵的时间来完成这项调查。这项调查需要大约十至十五分钟完成。

如果您对此调查有任何疑问，请拨电 +61 3 9919 8465联络学生研究员，Cuong Nguyen (维多利亚大学教育学院)或电邮 wil.research@vu.edu.au。

谢谢。

1. 您的性别是什么？

- ◯ 男性
- ◯ 女性

2. 您的年龄在以下哪个范围内？

- ◯ 15-19
- ◯ 20-24
- ◯ 25-34
- ◯ 35-44
- ◯ 45-64
- ◯ 55-64
- ◯ 过于 65

3. 请注明您在维多利亚大学就读之前的工作状态？

- ◯ 不在工作
- ◯ 全职工作
- ◯ 兼职工作
- ◯ 散工

其他（请注明）

4. 您在维多利亚大学就读什么课程？[如果您就读了多个课程， 请注明与最近或目前工作有关的课程]

课程名称	
学校	
学院	
毕业年份	

5. 您已完成的课程中最高级别或您荣获的最高学位是什么？

- ◯ 博士，专业博士学位，研究硕士
- ◯ 授课式硕士
- ◯ 学士学位
- ◯ 文凭
- ◯ 证书

其他（请注明）

6. 您如何资助课程？

- ◯ 自付资金
- ◯ 贷款
- ◯ 家庭
- ◯ 雇主
- ◯ 中国政府奖学金
- ◯ 大学奖学金/助学金
- ◯ AUSAID
- ◯ 机构之间的交换协议
- ◯ 其他奖学金
- ◯ 慈善机构或信托
- ◯ 其他赞助商

其他（请注明）

7. 您的课程在哪个校园进行？

- ◯ City Flinders
- ◯ City King
- ◯ City Queen
- ◯ Footscray Nicholson
- ◯ Footscray Park
- ◯ Melton
- ◯ Newport
- ◯ St Albans
- ◯ Sunbury
- ◯ Sunshine
- ◯ Werribee

其他（请注明）

8. 请注明您在澳大利亚实习的工作资料：

公司名称	
地址	
工作主管的名字和电话/电邮	

9. 请说明最适合描述您在澳大利亚实习的工作性质：

- ◯ 杂工/有关人员
- ◯ 初级文书，销售或服务工作者
- ◯ 即时生产或运输工人
- ◯ 高级文职及服务人员
- ◯ 技工/有关人员
- ◯ 半专业
- ◯ 专业
- ◯ 经理/行政人员

其他（请注明）

10. 请注明您实习工作持续的时期：

月	
天数	
小时	

11. 请说明您对以下事项的协议度：

1=低协议度
10=高协议度

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
工作主管明确地向我解释我在工作场所的职责。	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
工作主管要求的职责是合理的。	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
我从一开始就获得适当的工作场所取向。	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
我觉得我完全被融入在工作团队里。	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
我觉得我充分参与于日常工作事项。	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
我觉得我在一个安全的环境下工作。	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
以我的学习能力，我认为我工作的学习环境是适当的。	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
我在实习期间的大学主管有给予极大协助。	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
我工作场所的主管经常督促我	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
我工作场所的主管总是给我很好的建议。	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
我经常能够在实习工作上套用在维多利亚大学学习的知识。	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

其他（请注明）

12. 在以下所列的个人属性事项，请注明您在澳大利亚实习期间学获的个人属性发展程度：

1=低发展程度
10=高发展程度

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
忠诚	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
处理压力的能力	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
幽默感	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
自我表现	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
诚实与正直	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
适应能力	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
工作和家庭的均衡	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
正面思考的心态	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
可靠性	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
遵守承诺	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
意志力	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
常识	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
积极性	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

其他（请注明）

13. 在以下所列的事项，请注明您在澳大利亚实习期间学获的工作相关技能的进步程度：

1=低进步程度
10=高进步程度

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
工作需要的技术技能	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
人际沟通技巧	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
团队合作能力	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
解决难题的技能	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
自我管理技能	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
策划和组织能力	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
科技方面的技巧	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
终身学习态度	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
主动性和进取心	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
英语沟通能力	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

其他（请注明）

14. 以下所列的事项在何种程度上对您的实习经验带来负面影响：

1=低级影响

10=高级影响

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
英语语言技能	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
会讲英语的口音	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
外貌	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
工作经验	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
对澳大利亚就业市场的了解有限	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
缺乏跨文化交际技能	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
文化差异	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
种族歧视	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
缺乏技术技能	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
国际学生身份	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
实习工作上的签证条件	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
其他	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

其他（请注明）

15. 请问您在澳大利亚实习期间需要付额外的费用吗？

◯ 没有额外费用　　◯ 需要付额外的费用

评论

16. 如果您需要付额外的费用，请评级额外费用对您的影响：

1=低级影响

10=高级影响

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
工作交通费用	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
食品/饮料	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
签证/工作准证	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
通讯（电话，互联网等）	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
住宿	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
其他	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

请注明‘其他’与/或发表进一步的评论

17. 在您实习经验当中， 哪一方面的经验是最佳的？请解释您的答复。

18. 在您实习经验当中， 哪一方面的经验是最差的？请解释您的答复。

19. 您的实习经验可在哪些方面得到改善？

20. 以您的观感及印象，您会将此实习计划推荐给其他想申请的外地留学生吗？

- ◯ 我将积极鼓励他人申请
- ◯ 如果被询问，我会鼓励他人申请
- ◯ 我既不鼓励也不阻止他人申请
- ◯ 如果被询问，我会阻止他人申请
- ◯ 我会积极劝阻他人申请

21. 请评价您对于在澳大利亚整体实习经验的满意度

1=非常不满意
10=非常满意

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
满意度	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

评论（请注明）

22. 请注明您目前工作资料：

公司名称

地址

23. 请说明最适合描述您目前的工作性质：

- ◯ 杂工/有关人员
- ◯ 初级文书，销售或服务工作者
- ◯ 即时生产或运输工人
- ◯ 高级文职及服务人员
- ◯ 技工/有关人员
- ◯ 半专业
- ◯ 专业
- ◯ 经理/行政人员

其他（请注明）

24. 您的公司属于哪个工业部门？

- ◯ 文化及创意产业
- ◯ 教育与类似转移服务
- ◯ 工程和基础设施
- ◯ 金融及经济事务
- ◯ 有关健康服务
- ◯ 人事服务
- ◯ 法律事务
- ◯ 管理与营销服务
- ◯ 体育与娱乐事务
- ◯ 旅游与酒店款待
- ◯ 交通运输及物流

其他（请注明）

25. 您的公司规模是什么？

- ◯ 微小型(五个或少过五个员工)
- ◯ 小型(六至二十个员工)
- ◯ 中型(二十一至一百个员工)
- ◯ 大型(一百个员工以上)

26. 您的公司有多少个分行？

- ◯ 单支
- ◯ 多个分支

27. 您的业务范围是什么？

- ◯ 省级
- ◯ 国家
- ◯ 多国

28. 您的公司组织类型是什么？

- ◯ 营利性
- ◯ 非营利

29. 由谁来经营业务？

- ◯ 中国政府
- ◯ 中国私营
- ◯ 外商公司

30. 以您在澳大利亚实习获得的学习经验，请评级这些学习经验对目前工作的影响：

1=低级影响
10=高级影响

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
工作需要的技术技能	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
人际沟通技巧	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
团队合作能力	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
解决难题的技能	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
自我管理技能	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
策划和组织能力	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
科技方面的技巧	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
终身学习态度	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
主动性和进取心	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
英语沟通能力	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

其他（请注明）

31. 以您目前在中国的工作，您认为您在套用在澳大利亚实习获得的新学习知识时有何种程度上的阻碍？

1=低级阻碍
10=高级阻碍

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
在技术和基础设施的差异	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
在法规，标准，政策和程序的差异（符合要求，工作必须在一定的方式进行以符合一定的标准）	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
在工作实践中的差异（类似的工作，但在中国使用不同方式完成）	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
工作文化的差异，如团队精神，雇员和雇主的关系之类）	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
其他	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

请注明‘其他’与/或发表进一步的评论

32. 如果你愿意参与后续活动，请在此提供电子邮件地址以示确认。

我们代表该研究小组和维多利亚大学感谢您抽出宝贵时间来完成我们的调查。在此表示万分感激。