Factors influencing the participation of industry professionals in Work-Integrated Learning in Vietnamese universities: a qualitative approach

Factors Influencing the Participation of Industry Professionals in Work-Integrated Learning in Vietnamese Universities: A Qualitative Approach

Abstract

Purpose
This article explores factors influencing the participation of industry professionals in Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) in three Vietnamese public universities. The impact of the unique socio-cultural background of Vietnam on WIL is also addressed.
Design/methodology/approach
A qualitative approach that included three focus groups and 15 individual in-depth interviews was applied. In total, 30 key university and industry WIL stakeholders were involved. Thematic analysis was employed to identify enablers and inhibitors to the participation of industry professionals in WIL in Vietnamese universities.
Findings
Industry professionals faced more challenges than support when involved in WIL in three Vietnamese public universities. Four enablers of their participation in WIL stemmed from industry and nine inhibitors emerged from a variety of sources. The overwhelming number of inhibiting factors indicated difficulties associated with implementing WIL.
Originality/value
The rationale behind limited industry involvement in Vietnamese universities has not been explored previously. A holistic understanding of all key WIL stakeholders' perceptions of factors influencing industry participation in a non-Western tertiary context may provide leads for higher education policy in Vietnam and adds to the international literature.

Keywords: work-integrated learning (WIL), industry, professionals, higher education, Vietnam, employability

Introduction

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) is defined as "an umbrella term for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum" (Patrick *et al*., 2008, p. iv). WIL activities, either organised on campus or in the workplace, have been recognised as effective methods to enhance student employability (L. H. N. Tran and Nguyen, 2018). To maximise WIL effectiveness, students are encouraged to integrate academic knowledge into the workplace environment, make sense of it and relate professional practices to theory

when returning to university (Fleming and Haigh, 2018). A student's WIL experiences, therefore, are influenced by three key stakeholders: student; university, and industry (Patrick *et al*., 2008).

In WIL in Vietnam, there has been limited connection between higher education and industry (V. C. Le, 2014; V. N. B. Nguyen *et al*., 2019; T. T. Tran, 2015). It is common in Vietnamese universities for students to work with academic and work supervisors separately (Bilsland and Nagy, 2015). As Khuong (2016) showed, university-industry disconnection occurred in three stages; curriculum design, training implementation and learning assessment. There are studies confirming the disconnect between higher education and industry in WIL (Khuong, 2016; V. N. B. Nguyen *et al*., 2019; T. T. Tran, 2015), but the reasons behind this have not been explored previously.

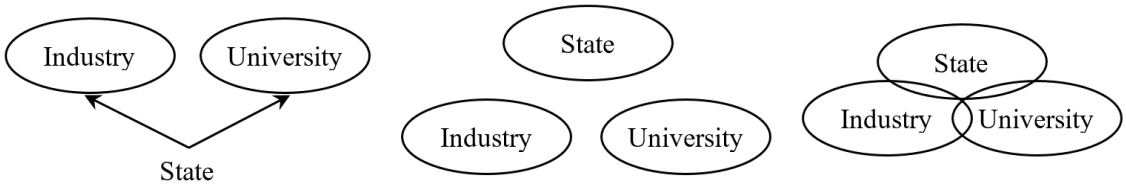
To respond to this research gap, this article reports factors influencing the participation of industry professionals in WIL in three Vietnamese public universities. The term industry professionals refers here to *those who practice in paid knowledge-based occupations relevant to their qualification(s) and engage in WIL in the three universities*. This study investigates the rationale behind limited industry involvement and addresses the impact of the unique socio-cultural background of Vietnam on WIL. This will benefit all stakeholders, especially those building, moderating and implementing WIL activities that involve representatives from the world of work. Findings also provide valuable insights for transitioning economies in the Asia-Pacific region, and perhaps globally for those working on strengthening university-industry links; as well as enhancing student employability.

Literature Review

Connections for Knowledge Production and Innovation

Knowledge production is no longer an activity exclusively dominated by universities, but a collaborative development based in and around the workplace (Roodhouse, 2010). The limitation of expertise and resources, the pressure of intense global competition, and rapid technological change and shorter product life cycles have pushed industry to seek different forms of inter-organisational cooperation to enable the continuous advancement of new knowledge and technologies (Santoro and Chakrabarti, 2002). Since the economic crisis in the 1970s, demand for more active engagement of universities in society has increased, ranging from awareness of the contribution of research activities to industrial innovations (Azagra-Caro *et al*., 2006). As Rõigas *et al*. (2013) summarised, "knowledge is increasingly being produced in the context of application" (p. 263).

Figure 1. The Triple Helix Model (– adapted from Leydesdorff and Etzkowitz, 1998)



Statist version Laissez-fair version Interactive version

In an effort to understand the knowledge production and innovation process, Leydesdorff and Etzkowitz (1998) proposed the Triple Helix model. The authors not only emphasised the importance of university-industry interactions but also highlighted the role of government in knowledge-based society. There are three versions of the Triple Helix model (Figure 1). The statist version features top-down government control of industry and university, which shows a minimal need for cooperation and innovation between industry and university. In the laissez-faire version, university, industry and

government act separately and have few interactions. In the interactive version, the three stakeholders interact closely to enhance the cooperation and performance of each, which is the ideal model because university–industry–government cooperation creates favourable conditions for knowledge production and innovation.

The Triple Helix model was used to study the knowledge production and innovation process in countries which previously followed a planned economy (Varblane *et al*., 2008). Specifically, the replacement of the statist version by the laissez-faire version was identified in Soviet bloc countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s (Varblane *et al*., 2008). In Vietnam, the Communist Party has been the sole source of leadership of a centralized and bureaucratic management mechanism (L. Tran *et al*., 2014). Therefore, this research employed the statist version as an optimal theoretical model to investigate government-industry-university interactions and the influence of government over university and industry when implementing WIL in Vietnamese universities.

Industry Participation in WIL

WIL has been implemented traditionally in practice-based disciplines like medicine, nursing, education and law, but has expanded across many disciplines (Rowe and Zegwaard, 2017). This is because the provision of real-world experiences in WIL creates great value for students whether as part of a subject or the whole training program (Patrick *et al*., 2008). A plethora of studies confirm student advantages from WIL such as professional advancement, skills development, and improvement of confidence and independence (Le, 2014; Rowe and Zegwaard, 2017; L. H. N. Tran and Nguyen, 2018).

WIL activities can be organised on campus in the form of simulation, lab work and industry projects, or in the workplace such as field trips, mentoring and work placement. Although extensive research has investigated WIL, attention has focused on work placement activity in which industry representatives have participated as work supervisors (Jackson, 2015). Work-Integrated Learning benefits work supervisors in terms of learning pedagogical knowledge and sharpening supervision skills, even though they can hold senior and managerial positions and have years of experience in supervising staff (Mather *et al*., 2015). As Nevison *et al*. (2018) stated, work supervisors are encouraged in WIL when receiving support and guidance from the university as well as gaining learning commitment from students. The importance of having greater clarity concerning the roles and responsibilities of related industry stakeholders has also been highlighted as a way of producing more effective participation of industry in WIL (Le, 2014; Patrick *et al*., 2008).

Industry representatives face many challenges in WIL such as recruiting suitable students, taking the supervising role, knowing student learning objectives, and assigning appropriate tasks for students (Jackson *et al*., 2017). Insufficient training for work supervisors was also reported (Smedts *et al*., 2013). Work supervisors admitted that they lacked understanding about how students learn in classroom settings (Mather, 2012), and that they had little curriculum information about what the focus for students in the workplace should be (Mather *et al*., 2015). Challenges for industry include time constraints (Le, 2014), heavy workloads, the mismatch between theory taught at universities and industry practices (Heale *et al*., 2009), insufficient capacity of host companies (Khuong, 2016), and human resources, and complex issues in partnerships between industry and universities (Patrick *et al*., 2008).

WIL in Vietnamese Universities

Higher education curricula are prescribed by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and are compulsory for all public universities (Do and Do, 2014). WIL has been included as an internship for final year students in an effort to link academic theory and workplace experiences. As an option, lecturers may invite industry representatives to participate in on-campus activities as guest speakers (Pham and Tran, 2013).

There is a relatively small body of recent research that is concerned with WIL in Vietnamese universities (Khuong, 2016; Le, 2014; L. H. N. Tran and Nguyen, 2018). Although WIL potentially provides great value for students, previous research reveals the ineffectiveness of WIL activities in Vietnamese universities. For example, Le (2014) investigated a six-week TESOL practicum for prospective Vietnamese English teachers. The practicum was assessed as unsuccessful due to the lack of interactive learning for students, the hierarchical relationship between senior teachers and student teachers, and time constraints from senior teachers. Khuong (2016) studied WIL in tourism training programs in six Vietnamese higher education institutions including three public vocational colleges, one public university and two private universities. In all six cases, WIL failed to equip students with required demands from industry, mostly because of the poor, unsustainable and superficial relationships between key WIL stakeholders. In another study related to tourism and hospitality, L. H. N. Tran and Nguyen (2018) identified the limited engagement of Vietnamese students in work tasks during the internship and emphasised the role of students in making choices about their own WIL experiences.

Unsurprisingly, industry participation in WIL in Vietnamese universities has been assessed as ineffective (Khuong, 2016; L. H. N. Tran and Nguyen, 2018). For

instance, industry representatives rarely contribute to curriculum design (Khuong, 2016). In the internship, time limitations of work supervisors constrain students' workplace experiences (Bilsland and Nagy, 2015; L. H. N. Tran and Nguyen, 2018). Further, workplace assessment is used merely to fulfil the department's administrative purposes (Khuong, 2016). Therefore, understanding the rationale behind limited industry participation in WIL has become a pressing need to enhance the quality of WIL activities and student employability, especially at a time when the Vietnamese higher education system has been repeatedly criticised for low responsiveness to labour market demands (T. T. Tran, 2015).

Methodology

This article reports qualitative findings from a larger mixed-methods study which investigated the contribution of industry professionals in WIL in three Vietnamese universities. Qualitative research is an excellent option to understand the experiences of people (Patton, 2014). The article explores the rationale behind limited industry involvement in Vietnamese universities, an aspect that has not been explored previously. The main research question was: "What factors influence the participation of industry professionals in WIL in three Vietnamese public universities?". There were two sub-questions:

- What factors enable participation of industry professionals?
- What inhibits their participation?

The three public universities were located in three different provinces in the north of Vietnam. Findings may be relevant to local universities in this region but could have applicability to other universities in similar contexts. In each participating

university, one training program which aligned most with local industrial strengths was chosen. These were Engineering (University 1), Agriculture (University 2), and Tourism-Hospitality (University 3). The selection of three different training programs in three universities located in three provinces provided a multidimensional approach for this research.

Research participants were selected purposively (Creswell and Creswell, 2017) and were key stakeholders involved in WIL in the three public universities in three levels: managing; teaching, and learning. Each research site (university) involved 10 participants, including seven university stakeholders: one department leader (WIL quality manager), one senior lecturer (WIL coordinator), five final-year students (current WIL experiencers); and three industry stakeholders: one company leader (WIL host company leader), one industry professional (workplace guest/supervisor), and one graduate (former WIL experiencer).

Data collection was undertaken from March to May 2017. After human research ethics approval (No. E17-005), department leaders were contacted to obtain permission to conduct the research in their departments. From department leaders, the researcher gained contact details of lecturers, students and industry representatives who have cooperated with the departments in WIL. Final-year students were invited to participate in focus groups (Curedale, 2013). For other participants, individual in-depth interviews (Marshall and Rossman, 2006) were conducted. All participants were asked about enablers and inhibitors influencing the participation of industry professionals in WIL. Industry interviewees were encouraged to reveal underlying motivations behind their participation as well as challenges they faced in WIL. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, was carried out face to face, and was audio recorded.

A deductive thematic analysis was used to analyse data (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). First, audio recordings were transcribed in Vietnamese and then translated into English (Plonska, 2014). Each interview transcript was coded by identifying text segments explaining factors influencing the participation of industry professionals in WIL and labelling them with codes (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). These codes (factors) were then grouped deductively as enablers and inhibitors (as per the research questions). Table I presents details of participants related to the university, industry, and training program (pseudonyms were used) (Gibbs, 2008). ***[Table I near here]***

Findings

Factors influencing the participation of industry professionals in WIL in three Vietnamese universities are categorised in two groups: enablers and inhibitors.

Enablers

Four factors enabling the participation of industry professionals in WIL were identified:

- the ability of industry professionals to contribute to WIL
- the social responsibility of industry professionals
- industry professionals' respect for and relationships with lecturers
- the company's interest in collaborating with the university.

There was a strong consensus amongst all participants that industry professionals had an undeniable ability to contribute to WIL. The engineering lecturer confirmed the strength of industry professionals in professional orientation: "no one in the academic world could orient students about jobs and careers as good as them [industry professionals]" (Chung). The tourism-hospitality department leader highly valued the industry professionals' ability in updating rapid changes in the world of

work, especially as “books were written a long time ago” (Quynh). The hotel leader used metaphors when discussing the role of industry professionals in student learning processes: “I think it is unacceptable if industry professionals are not involved in WIL activities. It is like travel without having any tour guide or watching a film without having the sound” (Quang).

When interviewed, the hotel leader was a PhD candidate. He disclosed that PhD enrolment was not the reason he wanted to work with students and that social responsibility was his main motivation:

> … well… 20 years ago, I was a student too. When the country was in subsidy, predecessors were responsible for supporting successors. Previously, we did receive unconditional help, so now I want to do the same for the next generations with my knowledge and experiences. (Quang)

Likewise, the engineering professional revealed that his decision to participate in WIL was driven by professional responsibility: “Participating in WIL is not an urgent issue that requires me to solve immediately or try my best. For me, participating in WIL is my professional responsibility” (Cuong).

However, the tourism graduate Tam stated that the rationale behind the engagement of industry professionals was their respect for and expectation to strengthen relations with lecturers. This was reaffirmed by the agriculture agent leader in the interview: “Sometimes we want to ask lecturers to consult for us in some agricultural projects. We have demand to cooperate with lecturers. With students…uhmm… maybe… no” (Duc).

In the engineering discipline, there were clear signs of company interest in collaborating with the university. That was a supporting factor because industry

professionals needed approval from the companies to participate in WIL. The department leader explained the benefits for industry from WIL:

> Generally, they [industry professionals] are very enthusiastic because the companies need interns. The students can participate in working procedures and partly contribute to the productivity of the company. Secondly, the industry expects to cooperate with the department in terms of technology transfer. (Nghia)

Inhibitors

Nine factors inhibiting the participation of industry professionals in WIL were identified in the three chosen training programs:

- policy and procedure barriers
- loose university-industry cooperation
- time constraints and heavy workloads of industry professionals
- strict regulations of companies
- funding difficulties of university departments
- limited human resources of university departments to conduct WIL
- the lack of respect from lecturers to industry professionals during WIL
- the competitive nature of the labour market
- problematic understandings of Vietnamese people and students about higher education and employment.

Each is now discussed.

Policy and procedure barriers were reported in all three universities. This was confirmed by the engineering department leader: “there is no policy and procedure in regard to working mechanisms with industry professionals” (Nghia). The agriculture professional stated in the interview that inhibitors also lay in loose university-industry

cooperation: “the university-industry partnership is still limited, and opportunities have not been widely opened to attract the participation of industry professionals in WIL” (Hien). Significantly, university-industry connection in the three universities was created via personal relations of lecturers, and most of the industry professionals who engaged in WIL were department alumni. However, as indicated by the engineering lecturer, the university department must gain approval from the management board of the company to contact and work with industry professionals:

> Every activity related to industry we must follow the ‘ask-give’ mechanism, such as ask industry professionals to join or ask [for] internship positions for the students. Industry regards our requests as a burden for them… when involving in WIL, they [industry professionals] share time from their main working schedule and will not get paid for this amount of time. (Chung)

This could be the reason why the agriculture and tourism-hospitality students reported: “industry professionals give priority to their work and interests because they are so busy” (Thai); and that they “often come late and even cannot participate as scheduled” (Diu).

Even when industry professionals were able to participate in WIL, other challenges remained. In engineering training program, it was the company’s strict regulations: “Actually, the students cannot come to join our factory as it is a real manufacturing environment with strict work requirements. Students just come to observe the manufacturing chain, even final year students” (Cuong). In the agriculture training program, professional participation in WIL was constrained by funding issues:

> We don’t have funds for inviting industry professionals to participate. With our alumni, it is ok to invite just one or two times without funding. For the next time, we do not dare to ask again. So, we must find and invite other graduates. (Nhi)

In tourism-hospitality training program, the barrier lay in the limited human resources to conduct WIL. Lecturers were responsible for not only connecting and inviting industry professionals to be involved in WIL, but also establishing the foundation of a university-industry partnership, which should have been the mission of key managers (T. T. Tran, 2015). The participating department leader confirmed: "Obviously, lecturers cannot fulfil all tasks" (Binh).

The contribution of industry professionals to WIL in University 3 was inhibited by other factors. Unlike the other universities, this university provided financial support for industry professionals, but this did not increase their interest in participating in WIL. Notably, the participating professional emphasised a *sensitive* cause – the lack of respect from lecturers during WIL:

> For me, respect is a matter. Many industry professionals or practitioners visiting universities do not have [as] good social positions as lecturers who are doctors or professors. I can feel that they do not actually respect our contribution to the training activities. (Tuan)

As the participating tourism graduate verified, the university and department prioritised the relationship with educational management bodies, especially the MOET, while partnership at professional level was limited. Responses from student participants in the tourism-hospitality training program revealed insight into another issue. This was problematic understandings of Vietnamese people and students about higher education and employment that has been taken for granted:

> It is popular in Vietnam that the future job or career of students will be already arranged by their parents even before they start to study a bachelor's degree. For example, when I decided to study hospitality, I have my parents or one of my relatives working in a hotel or in that field. Thus, my future job position for me is already secured when I graduate. (Manh)

The tourism graduate Tam also highlighted that for a long time, the internship was regarded as a *break* in which students did not have to go to campus and had time to relax. One hospitality student explained: "internship places were only available when hotels or travel companies lacked employees, as they recruited interns rather than casual employees to reduce costs" (Nhung).

Discussion

Thirteen factors influencing the participation of industry professionals in WIL were identified. Four enablers stemmed from industry, and nine inhibitors were linked to a variety of sources.

Enablers

Four enablers included three directly connected to industry professionals (ability, responsibility, relationships) and one related to a company (interest). These are supporting factors because ability, responsibility, and interest form necessary conditions for industry professionals to participate in WIL. The absence of enablers from university and government may result in a low level of industry commitment and involvement in WIL.

Industry Professionals: Ability to Contribute to WIL

Consistent with a conclusion by Allen *et al*. (2017), this article confirmed the ability of industry professionals in providing valuable inputs to increase the responsiveness of universities to labour market demands, orienting students about jobs and career, and instructing and helping students to apply theoretical knowledge in the workplace. Such significant industry contribution was reported in different fields of study such as medical sciences and tourism-hospitality in many education systems (Allen *et al*., 2017;

Huang, 2014). In Vietnam, Bilsland and Nagy (2015) confirmed that the professional participation and experiences were utilised and transformed into positive student WIL experiences in a foreign-owned university (Bilsland and Nagy, 2015). It indicated the strong ability of industry professionals to contribute to WIL in Vietnamese public universities.

Industry Professionals: Social and Professional Responsibility

This enabler could be derived from Vietnamese historical, cultural, and moral values which have been preserved for generations. Being dominated by Chinese feudal dynasties for one thousand years, a century of colonisation by the French, and invasion by the US has compelled Vietnamese people to unite and hold collective values, especially in considering the community as a large family and treating others as family members (M. Nguyen *et al*., 2018). Culturally, traditional virtues of Tam cuong, Ngu thuong (Three bonds: king-subject, parent-child, husband-wife, five principles: love, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, faithfulness) which were associated with Confucianism guide the people to believe in the goodness of human nature and harmonious society (M. Nguyen *et al*., 2018). Buddhism, which has a strong nationwide impact on the beliefs of Vietnamese people teaches that moral thinking and behaviours will be rewarded (McHale, 2004). Confucianism and Buddhist spheres of influence extend across Asia, especially East Asian countries such as China, Japan, and Singapore. Participating in WIL is therefore a likely way for industry professionals to devote and share their professional and social responsibility.

Industry Professionals: Respect and Relationships with Lecturers

As Huang (2014) suggested, the alumni network is a vital channel for connections between university and industry, as well as a primary source of industry experts in WIL.

As the interviews revealed, lecturers utilised their personal relations to invite industry professionals who were department graduates to be involved in WIL. Respecting teachers was a key social principle in feudal times; and before 1945, teachers were considered as "a moral guide to students and a source of unlimited wisdom" (H. T. M. Nguyen and Hall, 2017, p. 246). Teachers still have a high social status in Vietnam and many countries influenced by Confucianism. This cultural tradition explains why industry professionals, as former students, tended to join WIL when receiving invitations from lecturers.

Company Interest in University-Industry Cooperation

This enabling factor was only reported by Engineering participants. The first reason for a company's interest was the responsibility of industry to share the training mission with the university, which is vital in Vietnam where probation is an inevitable step in employment practices (Saito and Pham, 2019). Second, the study confirmed that the department cooperated with various technology and engineering firms in the local area to help them advance core technologies. Thus, the company's interest was an enabling factor because approval from the management board was required for the industry professionals to participate in WIL. This finding corresponds with that of Smedts *et al*. (2013) who noted that in Australia, company willingness was a necessary condition for the availability of places and supervision of WIL activities.

Inhibitors

Nine inhibitors were classified into four groups relating to government, industry, university, and labour market and society factors. These inhibitors explained a minimal need for cooperation between university and industry, and indicated the enormous impact of the government's top-down control over university and industry on the

implementation of WIL.

Government Factors

Findings are consistent with the work of Khuong (2016) who identified the diminished responsibility of the Vietnamese government in providing guidelines or regulatory settings for the implementation of the internship, and the reluctance of universities and firms regarding this important WIL activity. Internationally, policy-related frameworks have been established at different levels (national, industrial, organisational) to support partnerships and WIL implementation (Allen *et al*., 2017). In Vietnam, university and industry have tended to move the responsibility to the government, rather than being active and identifying possible solutions.

The rationale behind the inactiveness of university and industry lies in government top-down control. As Leydesdorff and Etzkowitz (1998) highlighted in the Triple Helix model, statist governance causes limited university-industry cooperation. Varblane *et al*. (2008) identified a developmental trend from a statist (government control over university and industry) to laissez-faire (university, industry and government act separately) and an interactive approach (university, industry and government interact closely) in countries which previously followed a planned economy. In Vietnam, transition from central planning to a market-led economy has occurred but a top-down governance approach remains dominant (T. T. Tran, 2015). Data confirmed that Vietnamese universities prioritised the relationship with educational management bodies, especially the MOET, rather than industry. The limited partnership reported here is another inhibitor to the participation of industry professionals in WIL. Undoubtedly, reduced university-industry cooperation cannot produce favourable conditions for WIL implementation, which include creating

opportunities for industry professionals to participate and fulfil their responsibility in WIL.

Industry Factors

In line with the findings of Heale *et al*. (2009), this research confirmed the hindrance of time constraints and heavy workloads for the participation of industry stakeholders in WIL. As Santoro (2000) emphasised, firms generally have a limited amount of time and money for cooperation activities with universities, even in developed countries where university-industry partnerships have been active. In this study, the contribution of industry professionals in WIL was primarily driven by their own willingness. Even in the Engineering case where the company expressed interest in cooperating with the university, there was no mention of support from the company for the participation of industry professionals in WIL. For this reason, industry professionals tended to prioritize time and effort for their official work.

This research also found that inhibitors may come from the strict regulations of companies that limit access for students during WIL. As this was mentioned only by Engineering participants, the question is whether this constraint is widespread across different disciplines. When studying WIL internship in tourism training programs in Vietnam, Khuong (2016) identified that students were able to work directly under the supervision of industry professionals, but employers were not willing to offer students authentic work. They worried that interns might create trouble and hinder the general operation and productivity of the companies. As such, the most common tasks reported by tourism students are printing, photocopying, typing or faxing, or other simple manual tasks. Although not completely consistent with the finding of Khuong (2016), this study

affirmed the influence of company restrictions on the participation of industry professionals in WIL.

University Factors

University participants in Engineering and Agriculture training programs reported a lack of funds for WIL implementation, including payment for the participation of industry professionals. Recent research by Dao (2015) revealed that in Vietnamese public universities, 40% of university revenue came from the national budget, 40% from tuition fees, and 20% from cooperative projects. While 20% of the national budget was spent on education, the focus was on early childhood, primary and secondary levels; and the other source of revenue, tuition fees, was also limited due to regulation of the maximum rate of tuition fees (Dao, 2015; Do and Do, 2014). In this context, funding for WIL implementation, including the participation of industry professionals, is most likely inadequate.

The Tourism-Hospitality department did not face a funding barrier but was confronted with limitations in human resources. The literature review highlighted an increase in the workload of academic staff who participate in WIL (Jovanovic *et al*., 2018). WIL tasks, which added an average of three hours to the academics' total working hours per week, were not listed in the allocated workload of academics in early childhood programs in Australia (Jovanovic *et al*., 2018). In Vietnamese public tertiary institutions, the implementation of WIL activities relies on lecturers (Khuong, 2016). Significantly, lecturers in Vietnamese public universities, besides being in charge of teaching regular programs and doing research, are heavily committed to non-regular programs such as part-time and distance education to enhance their incomes (Dao, 2015). Even when lecturers make use of the department's alumni network, their heavy

workload might have been negatively impacted the participation of industry professionals in WIL.

One of the unanticipated findings was a concern raised by the Tourism-Hospitality professional (during an interview), about the lack of respect from lecturers during WIL. This is likely to be related to the significant esteem and social status in which teachers/lecturers are held in Vietnamese society and others influenced by Confucianism (H. T. M. Nguyen and Hall, 2017). Another possible explanation is the current practices of the department in inviting only industry professionals holding managerial positions to contribute to the WIL learning content. While this concern was not representative of all industry professionals, it signalled an important issue for future research. As many industry professionals participating in WIL are former students of these universities, this seemingly unreported issue could negatively impact the quality and success of WIL.

Labour Market and Society Factors

This research highlighted the difficulty for students in securing a place in industry to undertake WIL placements due to the highly competitive nature of the labour market. Globally, there are large supplies of graduates each year, and the graduate labour market is increasingly competitive (Jackson and Collings, 2018). In Vietnam, the volume of tens of thousands of students each year (Do and Do, 2014) seems beyond the capacity of industry to arrange enough WIL placements as required. The situation has been increasingly difficult because the higher education system has expanded significantly, but the quality of WIL has not been properly monitored (Do and Do, 2014). Consequently, WIL has been unprofessionally implemented (Khuong, 2016), and students in Vietnamese universities have to secure a place in the industry by themselves

(Bilsland and Nagy, 2015). This practice may adversely affect the seriousness and effectiveness of professional participation in WIL.

This study also revealed an inhibiting factor related to society. Parental involvement in student career development has been widely reported, with the level of involvement high in Asian societies such as China and Korea (Lee and Kang, 2018; Young *et al*., 2003). This is probably because Confucian cultures emphasise the value of parental authority over children (M. Nguyen *et al*., 2018). It is also common in Vietnam that future jobs or careers of students are decided and pre-arranged by their parents even before they study a bachelor's degree, especially in urban areas. Therefore, Vietnamese students tend to prioritize passing the units and getting the degree rather than equipping themselves with required knowledge and skills (L. Tran *et al*., 2014). In the same vein, universities appear to underestimate the importance of student skill development and job readiness. For instance, the curriculum focuses on academic achievement and is scholastically driven (T. T. Tran, 2015). Meanwhile, WIL has been implemented without considering industry requirements (Khuong, 2016). It is likely that these issues in higher education and employment are widespread in Vietnamese society, which can negatively affect the willingness of industry professionals to participate in WIL.

Conclusion

This paper explored enablers and inhibitors influencing the participation of industry professionals in WIL in three Vietnamese public universities from the perspectives of key university and industry WIL stakeholders. The findings confirmed that industry professionals faced more challenges than support when involved in WIL. Four enablers stemmed from industry and nine inhibitors emerged from a variety of sources. These

factors indicated the influence of the government's top-down control over the public sectors of higher education and industry, as well as the inactiveness of public universities in cooperating with industry and facilitating professional participation in WIL. Therefore, more action from the MOET and more initiatives from Vietnamese universities in building policies and procedures for industry-university cooperation in WIL are required. This study also endorsed the role of university department leaders, company leaders and lecturers in creating favourable conditions for industry professionals to participate in WIL activities. The contribution of industry professionals to WIL no longer depends on their willingness if other stakeholders share the responsibility in enhancing student employability. The findings of this study may be limited because the data relied on participant self-report, and interpretation of the findings may have been influenced by the researcher's background and experience with WIL practices in Vietnam. Hence future research should include the voice of key WIL stakeholders from non-public tertiary institutions, especially foreign universities to explore factors influencing industry participation in WIL in Vietnam.

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