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The involvement of industry professionals and barriers to involvement in work-integrated learning: the case of the profession-oriented higher education framework in Vietnam

The Involvement of Industry Professionals and Barriers to Involvement in Work-Integrated Learning: The Case of the Profession-Oriented Higher Education Framework in Vietnam

This article explores the involvement of industry professionals and barriers to their involvement in Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) in three Vietnamese public universities that implement the Profession-Oriented Higher Education (POHE) framework. Thematic analysis of 15 in-depth interviews and three focus groups revealed that only WIL activities which were organized at the workplace resulted in industry professionals actively participating and contributing to students' work-based learning. Findings revealed that the involvement of industry professionals in designing WIL learning content and assessing students' workplace performance was limited. The university departments' focus on selecting industry professionals working in managing positions, the shortage of support from university departments and industry professionals' time constraints were identified as major barriers to the professional involvement in WIL. This indicated that industry professionals were not provided with favourable conditions to participate in WIL and thus, a lot of work needs to be done from the university side to welcome and involve professionals deeply in WIL. The article calls for more government support and greater initiative from Vietnamese universities to improve the university-industry linkage and the professional-lecturer relationship that lead to better WIL quality.

Keywords: work-integrated learning; industry; student employability; higher education; Vietnam

Introduction

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) has been globally recognized as an effective strategy to enhance student job readiness (L. H. N. Tran and Nguyen 2018). It covers a range of learning models – such as cooperative education, work-based learning or service learning – and activities which follow practice-based and experimental approaches (Rowe and Zegwaard 2017). On campus WIL activities include simulation, industry projects, panel sessions and lab work. In the workplace, WIL activities exist in the form

of work placement, internship, fieldwork, practicum, or mentoring.

In Vietnam, there has been a difference in WIL effectiveness between local and foreign-owned tertiary institutions. WIL was assessed as unsuccessful in both public and private Vietnamese universities, either located in regional or metropolitan areas (L. H. N. Tran 2018). A variety of causes were identified including poor design of WIL activities that hindered interactive learning, time constraints from work supervisors (Le 2014); unsustainable relationships between students, work supervisors and lecturers (Khuong, 2016); and student inactiveness in participating in work tasks (L. H. N. Tran and Nguyen 2018). Contrary to negative WIL outcomes reported in local universities, an optimistic WIL scenario was emphasized in the foreign university context. Due to the priority of the university over WIL strategy, students were satisfied with the WIL experiences (Bilsland and Nagy 2015), and WIL was evaluated as meaningful as it provided a chance for students to apply international knowledge in local contexts (Bilsland, Carter, and Wood 2019). Although there is a growing body of literature that investigates WIL in different Vietnamese higher education contexts, the research to date has tended to focus on student WIL experiences. Meanwhile, WIL experiences of industry stakeholders have been underexplored.

To respond to this research gap, this article explores WIL experiences of industry professionals in the Profession-Oriented Higher Education (POHE) framework. This is an initiative of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to respond to changing labour market demands and the shortage of employability skills in Vietnamese higher education students. Specifically, this article identifies how industry professionals have involved in WIL in three stages, namely curriculum design, training implementation and learning assessment; and the barriers that exist to their involvement. In this research, industry professionals refer to *those who practice in paid*

knowledge-based occupations relevant to their qualification(s) and engage in WIL with universities implementing the POHE framework. Findings from the qualitative analysis of 15 individual interviews with key university and industry stakeholders and three focus groups involving students produce an informative insight into WIL implementation in Vietnamese universities. More significantly, this article discusses implications for WIL stakeholders in designing and implementing WIL activities.

Literature Review

Learning in the Workplace

Knowledge is increasingly produced in and around the workplace (Roodhouse 2010). This is probably because learning occurs through the involvement of people facing similar situations in a community of practice. It is a "group of people [who] share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and deepen their knowledge and expertise in an area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002, 4). In a community of practice, there are few core and regular members who actively contribute to the community, while peripheral members who rarely participate in the activities make up a large proportion of the community (Wenger et al. 2002). Interestingly, the learning process happens through the legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger et al. 2002).

When investigating learning processes at the workplace, Billett (2011) identified the role of routine and non-routine tasks in the production of new knowledge. At first, routine tasks which commonly occur within the workplace strengthen prior knowledge by progressively transforming various steps of the task into a single smooth procedure. This process is referred to as the compilation process (Anderson 1982). Routine tasks make room for developing compilation process by providing chances to repeat

performance. Gradually, by mastering routine tasks, employees can simultaneously engage in various tasks (Billett 2001). However, employees may have to deal with new tasks that they have not experienced before. In this case, they think consciously to apply existing knowledge to solve non-routine tasks based on tools, models, clues, cues or access to information (Lave 1990). As such, new knowledge is learnt even when the tasks are half-completed (Lave 1990). While routine tasks enable *near transfer*, non-routine tasks motivate *far transfer* (Billett 2001). According to Billett (2001), near transfer is "the ability to apply the knowledge to something quite similar to what is already known", while far transfer is "the application of knowledge to circumstances that are different from those in which the knowledge was first learnt" (xvii).

Industry Involvement in WIL

According to Patrick et al. (2008), student, university and industry are key WIL stakeholders. Under the government policy and higher education context, collaborations between student, university and industry play a decisive role in the nature and the quality of WIL. The important role of industry in WIL was reaffirmed by Billett (2015) who stated that both university and industry were responsible for WIL experiences of a student. The literature on WIL has highlighted the involvement of industry in three aspects of WIL, namely curriculum design, training implementation and learning assessment.

Curriculum Design

Although academics are the main developers of WIL programs (Reeders 2000), industry has become increasingly involved in curriculum design to make sure training programs align with labour market demands and employers' requirements (P. Gibbs and Garnett

2007; Khuong 2016). Dale and Robinson (2001) highlighted that the industry participation in the process of curriculum design considerably enhanced students' skills development and the quality of education. This view is supported by Poon (2014) who confirmed the importance of industry input in embedding industry requirements of employability skills into the curriculum. In spite of these undeniable values, industry engagement in the development of learning content may make the process lengthy, expensive and time-consuming (Lewis 2006). Challenges facing universities include balancing the common interests of both university and industry sides, collecting appropriate industry representatives amongst a diverse community to join in the curriculum design process (Lewis 2006); and organizing frequent university-industry meetings during the curriculum design process (Borys, Milosz, and Plechawska-Wojcik 2012).

Training Implementation

A large body of literature has investigated the involvement of industry representatives in the work placement and/or internship via the role of work supervisors (Bilsland, Nagy, and Smith 2014; Jackson 2015). This is because workplace environment plays a crucial role in the development of students' employability (Bowen and Pennaforte 2017); and more significantly, the students' workplace experiences in WIL are predominantly decided by work supervisors (Fleming 2015). Work supervisors are confident in developing positive relationships with students, effectively introducing and welcoming them in the professional environment as well as identifying the weaknesses of students (Mather, McKay, and Allen 2015). However, there are differences between academics and work supervisors in perceptions of responsibilities and duties during the placement process (Winchester-Seeto, Rowe, and Mackaway, 2016). For example, while work supervisors concentrate on workplace preparation and induction for students

and prioritise technical and professional issues, the central focus of academics is the student relationship with work supervisors and assistance for students' personal and emotional problems (Winchester-Seeto, Rowe, and Mackaway, 2016). Therefore, university departments should work closely with work supervisors and support students to achieve WIL learning objectives (Nevison et al. 2018).

Learning Assessment

As Abeysekera (2006) suggested, the power in assessing the students' performance at the workplace should be shifted from academics to employers. In detail, the assessment of a third party, a supervisor at the workplace, can capture and assess the complexities of the students' professional practice (Jackson 2018). Regular feedback and advice from workplace supervisors positively and meaningfully contribute to the learning process and job readiness of higher education students (Abeysekera 2006; Jackson 2015). Generally, work supervisors tend to give students good assessment for their performance at the workplace (Milne and Caldicott 2016). This claim is confirmed by Taylor and Geldenhuys (2017) who found that work supervisors tended to rate either *excellent* or *good* on all performance criteria and skills. Practices in workplace assessment also indicate the significance of academics in moderating and finalising the outcomes as well as in ensuring the validity and reliability of the results (Richardson et al. 2013).

WIL in Vietnam

Relationships of Key WIL Stakeholders

In Vietnam, an effective cooperation mechanism amongst key WIL stakeholders has been witnessed in one foreign-owned university context (Bilsland et al. 2019). In that

university, a favourable WIL environment has been created to support related stakeholders, especially offshore students, and work supervisors (Bilsland et al. 2014). Alternatively, students in Vietnamese universities work with academic and work supervisors separately (Bilsland and Nagy 2015). As Khuong (2016) stated, the current key WIL stakeholders' relationships in Vietnamese universities are weak, superficial and unsustainable. In short, the engagement of key WIL stakeholders has been promoted more successfully in the foreign-owned university than in local institutions. This is because the foreign-owned institution has brought student WIL experiences into focus and academics in this university have actively involved in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the placements with students and work supervisors (Bilsland and Nagy 2015).

Current WIL Practices

There is a relatively small body of literature that explores current practices related to three aspects of WIL in Vietnam, namely curriculum design, training implementation and learning assessment.

Curriculum Design. In Vietnam, government authorities maintain tight control over curriculum design and the operation of both public and non-public local tertiary institutions (Do and Do 2014; Khuong 2016). Universities cannot make any changes even when the curriculum has been assessed being isolated from the requirement of the labour market and is focused on "mere academic achievement, [is] theory-oriented and scholastically driven" (Pham and Tran 2013, 8). Khuong (2016) stated that the invitations from Vietnamese universities to industry to contribute to designing WIL contents was "once in a blue moon" (154), and the use of industry feedback was questionable.

Training Implementation. In on-campus activities, industry representatives are invited to teach some practical subjects or be involved in professional workshops as guest speakers (Pham and Tran 2013). However, these activities are arranged personally by lecturers often without any notice and with no paid salary from the university department or firm (Khuong 2016). In the internship – the most common WIL off-campus activity in Vietnam, there are limited signs of academic supervision from universities (Le 2014; L. H. N. Tran and Nguyen 2018). Students shoulder the responsibility to secure internship places, with the support of the lecturers' personal network or the family's relations (Bilsland and Nagy 2015). Host companies have been criticized for not providing students with real workplace experiences because the most common tasks reported by students are printing, photocopying, typing or faxing, or other simple manual tasks (Khuong 2016). Student learning experiences vary case by case, and mostly depend on student attitudes and activeness in WIL learning (L. H. N. Tran and Nguyen 2018).

In the foreign-owned university which was chosen as a case study by Bilsland et al. (2014), a range of on-campus activities including pre-WIL coursework, Student Workshops and Personal Development courses are organized for students. In contrast to Vietnamese tertiary institutions, positive internship experiences and outcomes have been reported due to the good care of the university towards students during the internship (Bilsland and Nagy 2015). For example, students can make individual appointments with academic advisors for additional coaching support during the internship (Bilsland et al. 2014). In return, the seriousness and care towards students in WIL promote the university's industry image and increase the work supervisors' interest in future cooperation (Bilsland and Nagy 2015).

Learning Assessment. Khuong (2016) explained how Vietnamese tertiary institutions assessed students' performance in the internship. Commonly, work supervisors provide general performance comments and sign the feedback sheets, which ask about student attitudes as well as their professional knowledge and skills. Students are required to submit these feedback sheets, as well as the internship report or journal about their daily work duties to the university department for marking. There is no communication between academic and work supervisors about the students' attendance and performance at the workplace. Consequently, WIL assessment has not had any meaningful implications as students are automatically marked as passing the internship (Khuong 2016).

In the foreign university context, students are required to submit periodic blogs and complete a final reflection assessment, which show students' workplace experiences, personal learning development and their evaluation of the entire internship period (Bilsland et al. 2014). Based on the students' self-rating, Bilsland et al. (2014) found that the students' personal and professional skills such as listening, people relations, communication, drive to learn and collaboration across departments, were improved. The authors concluded that the WIL program, to a certain extent, succeeded in enhancing employability for students.

The POHE Framework

The POHE project funded by the Netherlands government was launched in 2005 (Phase 1). The heart of the project is the POHE framework, which was first piloted by eight universities. In Phase 2 of this project (2012 to 2016), more universities participated and applied the POHE framework.

The key distinction of the POHE framework from normal training programs is the provision of various WIL activities for students, the strong connection to the world

of work and the involvement of industry stakeholders in training implementation (V. D. Nguyen et al. 2017). Table 1 summarizes the differences between the POHE framework and normal training programs. *[Table 1 near here].*

The Present Study

This present study provides an insight into WIL experiences of industry professionals in the POHE framework with the aim of improving the quality of WIL activities and student employability. Findings from the professional involvement are useful for WIL stakeholders globally, especially those who are directly involved in building, moderating, and implementing WIL in non-Western contexts.

Research Design

This article explores the involvement of industry professionals in WIL in the POHE framework, and barriers to their involvement from the perspectives of university and industry stakeholders. It reports on the qualitative phase of a larger research project. The qualitative design that included focus groups and individual interviews allowed to understand deeply the experiences of study participants (Patton 2014).

This article addresses the following research questions:

- How are industry professionals involved in WIL with Vietnamese universities implementing the POHE framework?
- What are barriers to their involvement in WIL?

Data Collection and Analysis

This research included three universities which have used POHE training programs (thereafter so-called POHE universities) for a stable period of more than 10 years. As most of POHE universities which can satisfy this requirement are public institutions and

located in the north of Vietnam, the researcher selected three public universities in this region but in three different provinces and implementing POHE in three different training disciplines to secure the multidimensional approach for this study. The limitation of this selection was that the findings could not be generalised to POHE universities located in other regions. The Engineering training program was selected at University 1, Agriculture at University 2, and Tourism-Hospitality at University 3. These programs aligned most closely with local industrial strengths which were carefully considered in this study because the availability of industry partners and professionals is important to WIL.

Key university and industry WIL stakeholders were chosen purposively (Creswell and Creswell 2017). In each university, the participants were recruited from three levels, namely managing (one university department leader and one company leader), teaching (one university lecturer and one professional), and learning (one university graduate and a group of five final-year students). Final-year (fourth year) students were invited to participate in focus groups (Curedale 2013). The other participants were asked to involve in individual in-depth interviews because they were usually committed to a busy working schedule (Marshall and Rossman 2006). In total, there were 15 participants involved in 15 individual interviews, and 15 students in three focus group interviews. Each interview was conducted face to face and audio recorded. The ethics approval (No. E17/005) was granted before the data collection stage was commenced from March to May 2017.

Detailed transcripts were produced in the original language (Vietnamese) and then were translated into English (Plonska 2014). Such a process facilitated reading of all transcriptions several times to become familiar with the dataset and gain a general sense of the data (Creswell 2019). The data analysis process involved identifying text

segments and labelling them with codes (coding process), examining codes to check overlap and redundancy, and grouping codes into themes and analytic concepts (Creswell and Creswell 2017). The aim of such a process was to "winnow" (195) the data and categorize focused parts of the data into three themes – three stages, namely curriculum design, training implementation and learning assessment (Creswell 2014). The name of the participating universities and participants was anonymized by using pseudonyms (G. Gibbs 2008) (Table 2). *[Table 2 near here]*.

Findings

The following sub-sections present findings emerging from the data analysis of the interviews and focus groups about the involvement of industry professionals in WIL and barriers to their involvement in the POHE framework in three stages: (i) curriculum design, (ii) training implementation, and (iii) learning assessment.

Professional Involvement

Stage 1: Curriculum Design

As shared by all participating department leaders, POHE universities commenced the curriculum design stage by exploring industry requirements. The primary purpose of inviting industry professionals in the curriculum design stage was to update new technology and techniques used in the industry to the learning content. The Engineering department leader explained with examples:

> …In the previous years, the clock pulse of Programmable Logic Controller (PLC) technology was just around 200… and now up to 1200. Another example, the integrated circuit (IC) mentioned in training programs is an old version with a very slow operating speed. (D1)

However, the departments kept these industry inputs as a source of reference and did not confirm if inputs from industry professionals were included in the curriculum. As indicated by the Agriculture department leader in the interview, the department became familiar with having no industry inputs for normal training programs and often "self-decides additional content to teach" (D2). The Tourism-Hospitality department leader stated that there was no force or pressure facing the department to apply industry recommendations. The utilisation of industry professionals' inputs was questionable as the use of learning content and topics that are outdated or irrelevant to the industry was reported by the participating industry professionals: "Currently I work with students based on learning content fixed by the department. But I think these content/topics are sometimes out of date or mismatch with the industry practices" (P1). The Agriculture professional shared a similar point of view: "…Many issues need to be investigated from the industry practices while the department studies many topics out of the application of the industry" (P2).

Stage 2: Training Implementation

The professional involvement in implementing both on-campus and off-campus WIL activities was confirmed in all three participating universities.

On-campus activities. In all participating universities, industry professionals were involved as guest speakers in professional orientation activities organized for first-year students such as Career showcases or Student dialogues. In University 3, lecturers invited industry professionals to join as industry speakers in some units "to make the lectures more practical and interesting" (S10). According to the participating Tourism-Hospitality lecturer, industry professionals had different teaching approaches from lecturers: "…in human resources management, while lecturers teach the theories,

professionals go straight to their practices such as how many staff are there in the company, how qualified they are, what problems exist and how to solve issues" (L3).

Off-campus activities. At the workplace, POHE students were offered three kinds of activities including (i) field trips in the first and second years, (ii) a work placement in third year, and (iii) a graduation internship in the final year.

A field trip was the first off-campus activity that students were provided in the POHE training programs. As the student participants explained, students came to the workplace where industry professionals introduced the fundamentals of the company, an outline of the work procedures and techniques, and key departments. This activity was regarded as an excursion because students visited, mostly watched, and listened during the activity. It was confirmed by one Engineering student: "…In the first two years, we mostly observe" (S1).

In the third-year work placement, technical aspects stood out as the focus of the students' learning. Under the instruction of industry professionals, Engineering students got familiar with technical tasks: "Professionals at first instructed us [students] how to read the technical drawings, then how to make electrical connections, how to operate, maintain and solve electrical problems" (S3). Hospitality students experienced the practical view of tasks and duties in the workplace: "They [industry professionals] teach me [student] how to shorten the work process in the fastest way. It means the work is not only effective but also timesaving" (S11). Agriculture students were involved with industry professionals in routine duties: "…Professionals briefly introduced the procedure, listed in detail technical steps from the beginning to the end of the plant's life cycle and [used] hands-on instruction when students got stuck" (S6).

A graduation internship was arranged for final year students to apply all knowledge and skills learned from university into workplace contexts, and to collect

data for the graduation thesis. The participating Engineering graduate described the procedure: "Professionals listen to the students' proposals and orient how to work with the project, then we can decide to follow or not. They observe and instruct when necessary for each student" (G1). Notably, Agriculture students were assigned non-technical tasks such as meeting partners or farmers, preparing presentations for meetings or developing and revising working documents. During the graduation internship, industry professionals stimulated and valued the students' independence and responsibility: "they [students] need to acknowledge that they must self-study, self-research and self-perform" (P2). This was confirmed by the participating Engineering lecturer: "industry professionals stimulate students to self-research and only explain more when issues arise" (L1).

Stage 3: Learning Assessment

During the work placement and graduation internship, industry professionals assessed the students' performance during the entire placements rather than focusing on specific tasks or duties: "I assess based on their progress. For me, work results, work attitude such as being hard-working are important" (P3). Other evaluation criteria were added by one of the participating Engineering students: "…professionals also assess work attitude, ability to work as part of a team, honesty and activeness" (S3). In the focus groups, students shared that the industry professionals' feedback was general, supportive and constructive as they considered students in the position of interns rather than real employees.

Returning from the workplace, POHE students were required to submit (i) assessment from the workplace and (ii) the project report (third-year work placement) or graduation thesis (graduation internship). Lecturers marked the students' project report/thesis and combined the two scores. In other words, the learning outcome of WIL

off-campus activities was determined by lecturers because there were no formal guidelines on how the industry professionals' assessment was weighted and how it contributed to the students' learning outcomes. Surprisingly, "the outcome depends on the project report and the thesis" (L2). Thus, departments only used the industry professionals' assessment as a reference to mark the students' learning performance.

Barriers to Professional Involvement

Stage 1: Curriculum Design

The university departments' focus on selecting industry professionals working in managing positions was identified as a barrier to the professional involvement in WIL in the curriculum design stage.

According to the participating Engineering department leader, the minimum selection requirements were: "…professionals with strong professional knowledge and skills which are highly relevant to the department's training disciplines, having long working experiences, five years or above" (D1). However, the focus of the departments was industry professionals who worked in managing positions because "they not only have valuable professional experiences but also impose a wide vision of industry requirements" (D2). The Tourism-Hospitality department leader had a similar opinion: "Do not worry that the managers cannot see practical or technical issues. My experiences show that they contribute great opinions from micro to macro levels" (D3).

By contrast, the Tourism-Hospitality professional stated that inputs from managers were not practical: "…managers provided general ideas and recommendations which were not effective and close to the professional practices" (P3). In the interviews, the lecturers presented neutral point of view on the selection requirements for industry participation in the curriculum design stage because, as the participating Engineering

lecturer explained, lecturers often followed the university direction. However, the Agriculture lecturer suggested that it was better if the department could invite more industry professionals, not only managers. In fact, industry professionals who directly worked with students in the placements might not work in managing positions. The department leaders could understand and improve WIL quality better if these industry professionals were involved in the curriculum stage.

Stage 2: Training Implementation

Barriers to the professional involvement in the training implementation stage included two factors: the lack of support from university departments and industry professionals' time constraints.

The lack of departmental support was found as an inhibitor to the involvement of industry professionals in WIL activities. In on-campus activities, industry professionals struggled to attract students' interest: "At the beginning, he [industry professional] planned to make a presentation because he prepared slides; however, students did not pay attention" (S10). This was confirmed by the participating Engineering lecturer: "they [industry professionals] have strong professional competencies, but pedagogical skills are weak" (L1). Pedagogical support might be necessary, especially for industry professionals who were invited to play a teaching role in specialized seminars. In off-campus activities, there was no support for industry professionals from the university departments. There was no contact from lecturers to industry professionals to discuss about the suitability of learning topic for the workplace settings or the difficulties industry professionals might face during the placements because: "The funding of the department is low, thus we cannot provide any support for professionals" (D2).

The second barrier related to the limited time industry professionals had to support students during the WIL placements. The common complaints from student and graduate participants were "the professionals are too busy" (S5); "ignore, do not respond in time or even forget" (S7); and "give priority to their work and interests" (G3). Explanations from the participating professionals were: "I know I need to discuss with students immediately, but I cannot arrange time" (P1) and "the working schedule is already fixed" (P2). The impact of industry professionals' time shortage on the effectiveness of WIL activities was described by one of Engineering students in the focus group: "… It's hard to meet directly with professionals. For example, when working in a manufacturing chain and a problem happens but the professional is absent, I have to leave the position so as the productivity speed won't be affected" (S2).

Stage 3: Learning Assessment

The lack of supervision from lecturers during the placements inhibited the professional involvement in assessing students' workplace performance.

In this stage, lecturers coordinated, managed and finalized the students' WIL learning outcomes because industry professionals "cannot manage both their work and the students at the same time" (L3). In fact, "lecturers only care how we write the report" (S13) – one of the participating Tourism-Hospitality students complained. As confirmed by the Agriculture professional, lecturers rarely called to ask about the students' performance and progress because "they totally believe and feel no worry when students are at the workplace with us [industry professionals]" (P2). This was reaffirmed by the participating Hospitality professional who disclosed that even though he requested assistance from the department to supervise students more closely, there was no response from the department.

It appears that industry professionals needed support from lecturers in supervising students' workplace performance during the placements to ensure the accuracy of students' workplace assessment. Without supervision from lecturers, "the hotels have a tendency not to give interns a low mark, as hotel X automatically gives mark 8, general feedback such as good practice, good attitude" (S11). In a rare case, as shared by the participating Tourism graduate who despite not undertaking the graduation internship still secured a good assessment report from the host company: "…the feedback from the companies is usually good, but it is not real because I didn't do anything…. This is just the administrative requirement for the graduation" (G3).

Discussion

Findings of this research provided an insight into WIL experiences of industry professionals in the POHE universities. This research also identified major barriers to the professional involvement in WIL in the POHE universities.

Professional Involvement

Of the three stages that industry professionals were involved in, they participated actively and contributed to student learning to the greatest extent in the training implementation stage, especially in the WIL placements.

Curriculum Design

Although industry professionals were involved, it appears that POHE universities did not make the most of professional input in the curriculum design stage. It is worth noting that POHE universities are public universities that use normal and POHE training programs concurrently (Table 1). While the POHE framework is a new initiative piloted in few universities, the normal curricula which are developed by

national academic committees comprising discipline-based scholars have been used for all relevant programs across the higher education system (Do and Do 2014). The academic-based, theory-driven approach in designing normal curricula may have an impact on the participating universities in developing POHE curriculum as professional inputs were regarded by the departments as a source of reference, and the use of learning content and topics that were outdated or irrelevant to the industry was still reported by participants.

Moreover, the government retains tight control over other fundamentals of public universities such as the training budgets, enrolment quotas, tuition fees and staff recruitment (Do and Do 2014; T. T. Tran 2013). As the MOET launched the POHE framework and selected the participating universities, it is likely that POHE universities relied on the MOET's instructions and hesitated about including professional inputs to improve the responsiveness of the training programs. In this case, the professional involvement in the curriculum design stage was the participating universities' response to meet the framework's requirement.

Training Implementation

In this stage, industry professionals participated more actively than in the curriculum design stage and played different roles in implementing WIL activities.

Workplace Welcomer in On-Campus Activities. In POHE universities, the department and lecturers appeared to underestimate the value of on-campus activities and the participation of industry professionals in the role of guest speakers in these activities. In fact, industry professionals shared their own experiences and provided valuable information on practical issues and current practices in the industry which, as Rampersad and Zivotic-Kukolj (2018) stated, are important to students in WIL. More

than guest speakers, the role of industry professionals would be as workplace welcomers, as from such non-placement WIL activities, students could become familiar with workplace contexts (Jackson 2017), and imagine themselves working in such environments (Wenger 2010).

Workplace Introducer in Field Trips. Not just an excursion, a field trip marked the students' transition from outsiders to peripheral members of the community because they were introduced to the company's professional community by industry professionals. By observing and listening, students had their own insights into the workplace, and could gain a sense of the profession and the professional community (Wenger et al. 2002). This activity smoothed the increasing engagement of students with the professional community at the workplace and supported them to make use of the upcoming WIL activities – the placements.

Workplace Mentor in Third-Year Work Placement. In this activity, industry professionals worked directly with students and focused on technical aspects of the work. By assigning students real routine work tasks, they not only created chances for students to repeatedly perform different steps of the task, but also supported them in transforming various steps into a single smooth procedure. Industry professionals provided students with close guidance (Billett 2001), as they shared their knowledge with students by joining to solve the tasks. Therefore, the third-year work placement was important to students' job readiness because, as Billett (2001) suggested, employees were free to simultaneously engage in various tasks once they mastered routine tasks at the workplace.

Workplace Supervisor in Final-Year Graduation Internship. Only in the graduation internship, industry professionals stimulated the students' independence and responsibility because final-year students were seen as more mature and could independently seek solutions (Bowen and Pennaforte 2017). While the most common tasks reported by students from other Vietnamese universities were printing, photocopying, typing or faxing (Khuong 2016), industry professionals assigned POHE students authentic routine and non-routine tasks such as participating in internal meetings, consulting customers, developing and revising working documents. The difference probably stemmed from the close connection and trust between POHE students and host companies through previous WIL activities such as field trips and the third-year work placement. Arranged in the last semester of the training program, the graduation internship was an ideal chance for POHE students to transfer their knowledge and skills learnt in the university into workplace contexts.

Learning Assessment

This research investigated the contribution of industry professionals' feedback to the students' WIL learning results. Although WIL placements were organized at the workplace, the results relied on the academic submissions marked by lecturers. This practice is explained by the exam-oriented, theory-driven, and outcome-based learning approach in Vietnamese education (Pham and Tran 2013; T. T. Tran 2013). As such, lecturers were more concerned in WIL placements with the data used for the report or thesis, and how students reflected their knowledge in these submissions. This may be because in WIL, academic assessors "tend to assess what is easy to assess and do not assess core employability skills" (Richardson et al. 2009, 28). In line with findings from Taylor and Geldenhuys (2017), this research found that industry professionals provided general and supportive feedback for POHE students. Apparently, such workplace

assessment challenged lecturers' ability to assess the students' individualized and situated reflection of diverse workplace experiences. Therefore, the professional-lecturer connection is important in assessing students' workplace performance.

Barriers to Professional Involvement

This research identified three major barriers to the involvement of industry professionals in WIL in the POHE framework.

The university departments' focus on selecting industry professionals working in managing positions

The centralized and bureaucratic management mechanism in Vietnam was a possible reason for inviting industry professionals in management positions to be involved. Politically, the Vietnamese Communist Party has been the sole source of leadership and the government retains tight control over the fundamentals of society. In education, important decisions for a public institution such as enrolment quotas, tuition fees and staff recruitment must be approved by the MOET (Do and Do 2014). At the institutional level, any actions must follow the direct command or guidelines from the higher levels (L. H. N. Tran, Phan, and Tran 2018). Under the impact of this management mechanism, university departments might find connecting with industry managers or leaders more feasible and valuable than with those who must have an approval from the companies to participate in WIL. Therefore, POHE universities tended to invite firm management team members and they likely valued the feedback of managers or leaders more highly than that of industry professionals working in non-managerial positions.

Lack of support from university departments

In On-Campus Activities. In Vietnamese universities, it is hard to provide pedagogical support for industry professionals because the universities and their lecturers themselves have struggled to reform outdated teaching and learning methods. The teacher-centered teaching method which is described as "the teacher [talk] most of the time and the students [take] notes most of the time" (T. T. Tran 2013, 639) is still predominant (V. N. B. Nguyen, Nguyen, and Phan 2019; L. Tran et al. 2014). Even when pedagogical support was provided, industry professionals still faced other challenges such as large tertiary classes with more than 40 students per class (Le 2014), and the exam-oriented learning styles of Vietnamese students (V. N. B. Nguyen et al. 2019).

In Off-Campus Activities. It seems that the lecturers' heavy workload was the underlying reason behind the limited departmental support in WIL. Lecturers in Vietnamese universities continuingly commit to teaching not only normal programs but also part-time and distance education (Dao 2015). It is challenging for lecturers to concentrate on WIL, especially when their little remaining time must be shared with research and other tasks. The lecturer-professional disconnection in WIL off-campus activities in the POHE universities may stem from a common perception of Vietnamese academics that learning only occurs in the classrooms (L. Tran et al. 2014). Therefore, despite the fact that the success of WIL relies greatly on the collaboration between the university and industry (Patrick et al. 2008), it appears in Vietnamese universities that the department's priority was academic issues and responsibility was limited to the campus boundaries.

Industry professionals' time constraints

Although barriers relating to the POHE universities were lifted, time constraints still hindered professional involvement in WIL. In Vietnam, the university-industry cooperation mechanism has recently been assessed ineffective (V. N. B. Nguyen et al. 2019). While universities pay much attention to teaching, most firms in Vietnam express minimal interest in research and development because state-owned enterprises dominate the economic system (Fatseas 2010). For these reasons, lecturers in Vietnamese universities often utilize their personal relationships to arrange WIL activities, especially those with industry involvement (Khuong 2016). It appears the same in POHE universities, and that the participation of industry professionals in WIL was derived from their willingness. The difficulty in arranging time and schedule for students reported by the participating Engineering and Agriculture professionals also indicated the lack of support from companies to industry professionals to contribute to WIL. Accordingly, they tended to prioritise their official work and lacked time for students in placements. As the students' workplace experiences are predominantly decided by industry professionals who act as work supervisors (Fleming 2015), time constraints should be addressed to facilitate the involvement of industry professionals in WIL.

Conclusion

This article explored the involvement of industry professionals and barriers to their involvement in WIL in three POHE universities from the perspectives of key university and industry WIL stakeholders. It highlighted a university-industry disconnection in WIL in the three stages of curriculum design, training implementation and learning assessment. Industry professionals were involved in curriculum design and learning

assessment only to fulfil the mandatory requirements of the POHE framework. However, students were assigned with authentic routine and non-routine tasks, and industry professionals could contribute to students' WIL experiences when implementing off-campus activities which were organized at the workplace. This article confirmed the connection and trust between students and industry professionals as well as host companies which were built through a range of off-campus activities namely field trips and work placements. Three major barriers to involvement including the university departments' focus on selecting industry professionals working in managing positions, the lack of support from university departments, and industry professionals' time constraints were identified in this study. These barriers indicated a need to create favourable conditions to develop both university-industry and professional-lecturer connections. Significantly, the participation of industry professionals in WIL should stem from universities' willingness to improve training quality and student employability, rather than a compulsory requirement of the training programs. In future work, non-public POHE universities could be included to provide a more comprehensive understanding of WIL implementation in Vietnam.

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