Study on Expansion and Sustainability of Work Integrated Learning in Australian Universities

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オーストラリアの大学における職業統合的学習の発展と持続可能性

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Abstract: This study aims to clarify the following three points through a review of the literature and interviews with academic and professional staff at Australian universities: (1) What has influenced the WIL to expand in Australia?; (2) What kind of common understanding do students, universities and companies have regarding to the benefits of WIL?; (3) What kind of human resources are allocated in relation to WIL? As a result, with regarding to (1), we confirmed that there is a strong demand from industry to universities for the development of students' employability. Moreover, this study revealed that there are four categories of WIL extensions process in Australia. In relation to (2), it became clear that WIL contributes significantly to the new graduate recruitment system in Australia and to the long-term career development of students. Regarding research question (3), we found that placement coordinators reduce the burden and pressure on academic staff and students in any category, and contribute to ensure the smooth operation of WIL program.

Keyword: Work integrated learning (WIL), Internship, Career development, Australia

1. Introduction

In recent years, internship has attracted attention in Japanese universities. According to MEXT [1], internship leads to deepening of students' learning and new motivation by linking study at university to experiences at workplace. MEXT [1] also mentions that it is useful practice because it provides opportunities for students to consider their suitable future career, and encourages their right career decision and the will to work.

On the other hand, the rate of Japanese students' participation in internships within the curriculum is particularly low internationally, and the quantitative expansion is an issue [2]. According to the survey of MEXT [3], 637 universities (81.6%) have accredited internships, an increase of 7.4 points over the previous year. It should be noted that among the 597,853 students (21.1%) who participated in the accredited internships, only 80,744 (2.8%) have participated in them not related to specific qualification acquisition.

Then, why do internships within the curriculum in Japan not expand? According to the survey of MEXT [2], the reasons for not conducting internships in companies and universities, and the reasons for non-participation of students are as Table1.

Table1: Reasons for Not Participating in Internships

	students	universities	companies
1	Busy because of other activities such as studying (29.7%)	Interferes with the students' academic work (curriculum is overcrowded) (28.0%)	In-house adjustment difficulties (64.4%)
2	Intend to participate in the future (26.3%)	Difficulty in program design / lack of know-how (19.6%)	Difficulty in securing human resources and workplaces (57.6%)
3	No attractive internships (22.6%)	Too few applicants (18.9%)	Not directly connected to employment (31.4%)
4	Bothersome to apply (15.7%)	Shortage of academic and professional staff (17.4%)	Difficulty in recruiting and selecting applicants (27.0%)
5	Due to a schedule conflict (12.8%)	Difficulty in securing placements (14.2%)	No knowledge of program design and planning (24.0%)

Some issues of Japanese internship at universities can be gathered from Table1. First of all, the contents of the first items indicate that the internship is not prioritized among the three stakeholders. In other words, the benefits of internship may not be understood by students, universities and companies.

Second, from the contents of the second place "Difficulty in program design / lack of know-how (19.6%)" in universities and the fifth place "No knowledge of program design and planning (24.0%)" in companies, we can find that program design is one of the challenges to expand internship in Japan. Table1 also shows that the lack of human resources is another big issue, with 4th in universities and 2nd in companies.

In contrast with Japan, in Australia, 451,263 students participated in formal work placements, projects with industry or community groups, fieldwork, and practical simulations of the tasks students will be doing in future jobs [4]. The number of university students in Australia in 2018 is 965,334 [5]. From this, it is shown that a large number of students participate in internship-like activities in Australia.

These activities mentioned above are called WIL (Work integrated learning) in Australia. We had three research questions related to WIL in Australia:

(1) What has influenced the WIL to expand in Australia?

(2) What kind of common understanding do students, universities and companies have regarding to the benefits of WIL?

(3) What kind of human resources are allocated in relation to WIL?

Then, this study aims to clarify the above three points through literature reviews, and interviews with academic and professional staff at Australian universities.

2. The spread of WIL in Australia

Since about 2000, the Australian higher education institution has been receiving pressure from stakeholders such as government and industry to produce graduates with so-called employability[6],[7],[8]. WIL has attracted attention in this context. WIL has long been used as a pathway for work-readiness in professional education. Increasingly, however, WIL is being positioned as one of the key opportunities for improving the work-readiness of all graduates even in areas that have not traditionally been linked to clear employment outcomes[9].

It is the report published by BIHECC in 2007 that determined this trend. According to McLennan[9], the report made clear recommendations which emphasise the particular role that WIL can play in advancing employability skills in higher education. It highlighted the need to improve and increase access to WIL; encourage businesses to provide structured cadetships, and explicitly report on employability skills demonstrated through[10].

Given such burgeoning interest in WIL, in late 2006 the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN), including five state-based ACEN groups, was established to fill the need for a supportive network of WIL staff[11]. According to Patrick et al.[11], ACEN is well positioned to access other international WIL organisations through its association with the World Association of Cooperative Education (WACE), and well established New Zealand Association of Cooperative Education (NZACE). These international relationships are particularly important given the current focus on international benchmarking and the expectation that universities produce graduates who are global citizens.

In addition, Universities Australia published "A national Internship Scheme" in 2008. A National Internship Scheme will enable more Australian university students to undertake structured work-based learning in industry during their studies. Such a scheme will realise a potential for providing increased income support for students delivered in a way that complements their studies and increases their future employability and productivity[4]. Patrick et al.[11] provides an account of the first large-scale scoping study of work integrated learning (WIL) in contemporary Australian higher education.

Furthermore, In March 2015 five key stakeholders launched the National Strategy on Work-integrated Learning in University Education. This National WIL Strategy is designed to increase opportunities to participate in WIL, recognising the benefits to students, employers, universities and the economy.

3. Common understanding on benefits of WIL

(1) Benefits for students

How is the benefit of WIL perceived in Australian students, universities and companies? A lot of research was conducted benefit of WIL. According to a study by Patrick et al.[11], participants clearly identified that motivation for engaging with WIL are strongly centered on the educational benefits for students. First, Bates[12] listed the following three points as a benefit to students.

- Taking less time to find graduate employment
- Improving academic performance
- Improving self-confidence, self-concept and social skills as well as gains in practical knowledge and skills

In addition, Patrick et al.[11] summarized the benefits of WIL to students as follows: WIL helps students to engage more deeply as they create meaning from content knowledge in an applied professional environment. It provides direction for career choices, an understanding of workplace culture, and a relevance that drives deeper learning.

Other than above, there is also a previous study that cited increased graduate salaries as a benefit of WIL to students[13].

(2) Benefits for Industries and universities

There is also a certain amount of research on the benefits that WIL gives to industries or companies. Bates[12] gives the following four points regarding the benefits for the industries related WIL.

- Be able to motivate other employees within the organisation.
- Students' currency of knowledge
- Accessing motivated individuals for short-term projects.
- Be able to screen potential permanent employees in order to hire enthusiastic and motivated graduates.

In addition, the research by Patrick et al.[11] reveals the following: It was found that motivations and expected outcomes from

engaging with WIL differ amongst small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs), global corporations and NGOs and to government agencies. The data revealed that the motivation to engage with universities and students in WIL had much to do with previous experience (positive or negative) with WIL, and that it was important to take a long-term view. In some cases, engagement was driven by managers who had, themselves, been WIL students.

The benefits that WIL brings to universities have already been presented in prior researches. The biggest benefit to the university is the Education benefits for students. Besides, for example, Bates[12] points out the benefits of the university as follows:

－　　More likely to attract students by providing clear pathways to jobs and careers

－　　Work placements stimulate curriculum development

－　　Continuous feedback to the university regarding the quality of their degrees.

－　　Career development opportunities for university staff.

AWPA[13] cites opportunity to build / strengthen relationships with industry as one of WIL's benefits to universities.

Then, What kind of human resources are assigned to embed WIL into curriculum at Australian universities? What role do they specifically play?

(3) Assignment and role of academic and professional staff

The delivery of work-integrated learning (WIL) courses involves university academic and professional staff in specific duties[14]. Professional staff in WIL are often called "placement coordinators", whose importance is often pointed out in prior studies.

Coll and Eames[15] stated that for WIL extension, "for achieve this representable task, one in which role of the placement coordinator is paramount". They add "coordinators must be familiar with discipline's course offerings to ensure that the work experiences satisfactions the discipline's objectives". In addition, Cooper et al. [16] defines Work integrated learning coordinator's activities as shown in Table 2.

Table2: Work integrated learning coordinator's activities

・Identity, negotiate and coordinate learning opportunities with workplace.
・Induct students, mentors, supervisors and others in the workplace with orientation programmes.
・Work with students and workplaces to provide quality learning experiences for all parties.
・Provode educational supprot for students, and for mentors and supervisors in workplace.
・Monitor, assess and review student learning to ensure that students are achieving the agreed learning outcomes.
・Resolve difficulties that araise between students and the workplace, taking account of the competing interests of university, the workplace, students, clients and consumers.
・Manage the academic administration associated with programme.
・Promote the programme to potential students and employers.

According to a survey at Griffith University conducted by Bates[14], all academic staff emphasised the benefits of the support by professional staff they did receive, and the pressing need for ongoing administrative coordination with organisations and individuals.

4. Purpose of this research

From the literature review, the following points were revealed related to three research questions set up in this research.

－　　WIL has a long history in Australia. However, especially since 2000, universities have received strong pressure from industry and government to produce graduates with so-called employability. It was WIL that attracted much attention as an educational method to improve students' employability.

－　　There are many studies on the benefits of WIL, especially on the benefits for students. In addition, many benefits for companies and universities are presented. However, these benefits are also already well known in Japan. In other words, we could not find any differences between Japan and Australia regarding WIL benefits in the literature review.

－　　The role and importance of professional staff called "Placement coordinator" or "WIL coordinator" are pointed out in several

studies. However, there is not much research on their recruitment, tasks, roles and required abilities.

Therefore, we conducted qualitative research in order to clarify more details regarding the three research questions.

5. Data and methods

In February 2019, we visited Australia and conducted qualitative research.

In this study, we interviewed two types of experts. The first group we interviewed has 5 experts who are in a position to develop strategies for improving students' employability, such as the director of the career center or the director of student employability. The universities to which these 5 experts belong are Macquarie University, RMIT University, The University of Queensland, University of Technology Sydney and Victoria University. The other group is made from 10 experts such as the director or academic and professional staff who carry out WIL programs in central departments or in each discipline. The universities to which these 10 experts belong are Griffith University, Macquarie University, The University of Melbourne, The University of Sydney and UTS Business School. Three of the fifteen experts are board members of The Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN). During the interviews, field notes were kept and the interviews were recorded on IC recorder with the permission of the interviewees.

6. Results

(1) Background of the WIL expansion in Australian universities

In many universities, WIL has been recognized as the most important factor to improve students' employability and was implemented as one of the university-wide strategies. It seemed that there is a huge demand from stakeholders behind this, as pointed out in previous studies.

> "In Australia, there is a big emphasis on getting students ready for their graduate and job. Huge emphasis. The best way to do that is work integrated learning."   (Director, RMIT University)

For example, in the Employability Strategy (2017-2019) of Victoria University, a forerunner in deploying WIL, "embedding Work integrated learning as part of the course based on the development of graduate employment ability" is included as one of "key strategy elements". In addition, "increase % of courses with WIL" is one of the target indicators.
WIL has also been promoted as a university strategy at Macquarie University, where all bachelor degrees include at least one WIL unit called PACE (Participation and Community Engagement) unit. According to Macquarie University[17], it expands PACE as a signature program that distinguishes this University.

In addition, we found some cases that extend WIL at the discipline level. For instance, since 2012, the Faculty of Health Science at the University of Sydney has made itself possible to differentiate from other universities by making WIL components mandatory for all students. They have a policy that the quality of WIL enhances their academic presence. The Faculty of Arts at the University of Melbourne, WIL began as a one-day internship in the 1990s, and has now expanded to almost 600-700 students that are taking part in it.

Moreover, some experts pointed out that WIL expansion depends on the background of the university.

> "I think UTS like our university, it's sort of, I think there is the historical   link to work experience and internship because UTS use to be more like a technical college, so I think it always has a strong connection to industry."
> (Professional staff, University of Technology Sydney)

Tanaka and Zegwaard[18]   pointed out the same situation in Japan as follows:

It needs to be pointed out that, in contrast to the poor performance of universities, colleges of technology do well in setting up work experience programmes due to their educational philosophy which originated from vocational education.
From the above mentioned, we revealed that the strategy of WIL's implementation at the university level or at the discipline level is essential to apply.

Furthermore, this study verified that the university originated from vocational education or the discipline which has strong connections with industry have an advantage for the expansion of WIL.

However, regarding the second point, we should note the case of Macquarie University. According to a material provided by them, 6659 students participated in the PACE in 2016, with 47% of the Faculty of Business and Economics, 25% of the Faculty of Human Sciences, 18% of the Faculty of Arts, and the Faculty of Science and Engineering 10%. This indicates that Macquarie University spreads WIL not only in departments which have strong connections with industry but also in departments such as arts or human sciences which tend not to have strong connections with industry. Their practice is considered to be a very good model for other universities, including Japanese universities.

(2) Direct connection with employment

In addition, we found a factor that came from the difference between Japanese and Australian new graduate recruitment system. An expert described, regarding the question "Did you do internship as part of your degree?" in the GOS (gradual outcomes survey) of Australia as follows:

> "…of the students who do have a full-time employment or a happy with there are amount of the employment, what parentage under took in internship as part of their degree, to then they try to do some analysis, we would say… could be 87% students to a working full-time within 3 months graduating under took internship as part of their degree."　(Professional staff, University of Technology Sydney)

With regard to the background above, a Japanese academic staff, who is one of the interviewees, pointed out a remarkable difference related to the transition from university to work in Japan and Australia.　According to her, in Australia, even if he/she is new graduate student, they are required to have a work experience related to the job. In other words, it is no exaggeration to say that they cannot get a job without a work experience. Then, for young students who had no work practice, WIL works in favor of employment, because it gives them an opportunity to put it in their resume.

Another professional staff also agreed on this point as follows:

> "Few students every trimester, get a job through the internship, which is　the best case scenario from my perspective. They placed by university, internship there, perform really well, and then they were offered employment. It might not be full-time employment, 2 to 3days a week, but you know, the most difficult thing for students is that the first job. So, this will be their first job."　(Professional staff, Griffith University)

In Japan, meanwhile, students are usually not required to have work experiences or internship-like activities in order to get their first job, except for special occupations such as teachers and doctors. This difference should not be overlooked in comparing the development of WIL in Japan and Australia.

(3) Specialist personnel related to WIL

As mentioned above, specialists personnel related to WIL include academic staff and professional staff called "placement coordinator". Placement coordinator are called by various other names such as WIL Coordinator, Academic Coordinator, Subject Coordinator, WIL Officer, Liaison Officer, etc. In any case, placement coordinator seemed to be mainly responsible for connecting students with the employers and workplaces. Moreover, their role is not only to explore placements. They sometimes do career counseling to students and deal with issues in WIL programs. Therefore, they are acquired not only the ability of administration but also advanced communication skills and the ability of problem solving.

As shown below, it was verified that placement coordinators greatly contribute to reducing the burden on students and academic staff in WIL.

> "When I was running a course by myself, I have to organize to send the letter to industry partners. (Now,) I can

concentrate my academic side, designing curriculum, assessment, and try to innovate, so always I go to the seminar to learn something new in apply to make the course better, so very valuable to have professional staff."

(Academic staff, Griffith University)

"I think it's very valuable having professional staff because from personal experience, if there is none there, there is a lot of pressure on students to find internship."　(Professional staff, Griffith University)

Moreover, some experts emphasized the importance of collaboration between academic staff and professional staff in discipline level, or between WIL team and the central career center in university level.

(4) Challenges in WIL

This research revealed three challenges of embedding WIL programs into curriculum.

The first point is the difficulty in providing WIL programs uniformly to diverse students. One professional staff pointed out the issue if all students were required to participate in at least one WIL unit as follows: For example, if we compere an older student who has been in the workforce and a foreign student who does not have any work experiences in the same discipline, the WIL program of the discipline will be complex.

In addition to WIL delivering to these diverse domestic students, there seems to be room for consideration of WIL for students studying in offshore campuses. The difference in the readiness of students to go to the real workplace and their cultural background, are the crucial points to be considered in the process of extending WIL programs.

Lastly, some interviewees have indicated the need for perspective in which position WIL as an educational method for not only improvement students' employability but also development students' career identity or lifelong career.

"I do like 'career identity' because means the student ... is in control of their career. Employability has a not exactly passive, but you know, waiting to be offered aspect so I think it's more developing 'career and professional identity'".　(Director, Macquarie University)

An academic staff pointed out that WIL should be positioned as an activity in the student's life cycle, which, for example, starting with the activities of the extra curriculum, internship, WIL, Capstone, and returning to university for lifelong learning after graduation.

Several previous studies have already analyzed the alignment of WIL and career development learning[19],[20]. However, more research will be needed regarding the role and curriculum design of WIL programs from the perspective of students' lifelong development.

7. Discussion and Future Research

In this study, we had three research questions related to WIL in Australia below:

(1) What has influenced the WIL to expand in Australia?

(2) What kind of common understanding do students, universities and companies have regarding to the benefits of WIL?

(3) What kind of human resources are allocated in relation to WIL?

Then, we conducted literature reviews, and interviews with academic and professional staff at Australian universities to clarify the above three points.

With regarding to (1), in this study, it was confirmed that there is a strong demand from industry to universities for the development of students' employability. Especially in these 20 years, WIL has been rapidly expanded in this context. Moreover, this study revealed that there are several categories of WIL extensions process in Australia, as shown in Figure 1.

		Position of WIL in the University's Stratege	
		Included	Not Included
Connection with Industry	Strong	Category 1	Category 3
	Not Strong	Category 2	Category 4

Figure 1: Categories of WIL extensions process

In category 1 are those universities whose connection with industry is traditionally strong, and WIL is included in the university's strategy. Among the four categories, this category is the most advantageous for WIL expansion. In Category 2, WIL is included in the university's strategy, although this type of the university does not always have strong connection with industry. In Category 1 and Category 2, cooperation between the Central Career Center department and the WIL team tends to be organized. Furthermore, resources are strategically planned to be used for WIL.

Category 3 is a university (or a particular discipline) that has a strong connection with industry, although WIL is not embedded in the university's strategy clearly. Category 4 is a university whose connection with industry is weak and WIL is not part of the university's strategy. Some universities or disciplines in category 4 may have made the decision not to extend WIL due to their discipline's characteristics. In these two categories, WIL is usually implemented with the aid of the connections of academic staff with industry. Therefore, there might be a risk in these 2 categories that the WIL programs would be abolished due to personnel changes of academic staff and so on. In addition, the burden on academic staff and students tend to be high compared with category 1 and 2 because of luck resources.

In relation to (2), WIL contributes significantly to the new graduate recruitment system in Australia. In addition, we found that the benefits of WIL are also commonly understood from the long-term perspective of students' career development and Australian economic growth. It is conceivable that these are one of the factors that make Australian WIL sustainable. From above, it became clear that the process and benefits of WIL for each stakeholder would differ depending on the country's new graduate recruitment system or the human resource demands. This analysis is for further study.

Regarding research question (3), we found that placement coordinators reduce the burden and pressure on academic staff and students in any category, and ensure the smooth operation of WIL program. They are required to have a wide range of skills, and sometimes a degree or knowledge related to the discipline under which the WIL program is implemented. However, the priority tasks vary by category. This point also should be studied in the future.

Acknowledgements

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