ABSTRACT

Africa’s leaders adopted the African Union Agenda 2063 as a collective vision and roadmap for the continent’s development and transformation in 2015. South Africa (SA) had published its National Development Plan: Vision 2030 in 2011, with internationalisation being embraced by SA higher education institutions as one of their priorities since the 1994 elections. These efforts have been endorsed by government, illustrated by policy commitments assumed through the 1997 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Education and Training Protocol and related instruments. In this process, several institutions came to appreciate the benefits of internationalisation: the learning opportunities provided by study abroad, the presence of international students and cross-cultural educational exchange. The value of teaching and learning issues required to turn graduates into effective practitioners in their professional and social endeavors.

This process has not evolved seamlessly at the level of implementation. Many SA students are finding doing a degree in SA great difficulty to secure their compulsory work integrated learning (WIL) placements, where these are part of the academic curricula, they are also integrated into a given society and national and international, as beneficiaries.

The paper examines the legislative and policy knowledge requirements of the higher education coordinators responsible for placing students into WIL workplaces, with a specific focus on the international student. The paper highlights the specific aspects of experiential learning theory and draws on both documentary analysis, surveys and interviews with selected international students.

The paper has implications for the approach to and conceptions of WIL. The study points to an international student resident in SA in 2013 (StudySA, 2015) who is an example of how international students are increasingly assuming the role of source of knowledge and distribution in the context of human resources development in the developing world identified: “‘the fact that some developing countries such as South Africa are increasingly assuming the role of source of knowledge and manpower development for other developing countries’ (Ramphele, 1999:5).

A solid understanding of the legislative and policy framework with respect to the legal governance in SA, as well as the key for WIL Coordinators, to enable them execute their roles underpinned by a solid knowledge base with students, both national and international, as beneficiaries.

1. INTRODUCTION

• HR development in SADC viewed against a regional unemployment and labour crisis. SA unemployment rate 25.5% (StatisticsSA, 2015).
• SA having a role to play in the development of skills for the region.
• Skills Development for the 21st century exist in an authentic and approved workplace as a formal part of an academic programme for all registered students in the programme.
• The OAU Agenda 2063: a shared strategic framework for the development of skills for the region and beyond.
• Work integrated learning (WIL), a term used for the process: from preparation of students for the workplace, identification and approval of suitable companies, placement of students, monitoring, evaluation and feedback. Literature reviews in understanding the professional development needs for WIL coordination (Lazarus, Olugbog & Howson, 2011; Oryx, 2011).

WIL programmes identified as one way of closing the skills gap, allowing industry and academia to work closer together to ensure that academic programmes support the demands of the workplace.

3. THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT: KEY CATEGORIES

Skills Development-related policies • Skills Development Act and amendments (SA, 1998), • Skills Development Levies Act and amendments (SA, 1999), • Skills Development Levy and Employment Services Act (SA, 2009), • Skills Development Strategy (SDE) 2012-2016

WIL-related theories and guidelines • Institutional WIL Guidelines • Work integrated learning: good practice guide (CHE, 2011)

Other national strategy and guidelines • National Development Plan: Vision 2030 (SA, 2011a), • Immigration Regulations and amendments (SA, 2014)


4. ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND SKILLS OF THE WIL COORDINATOR

Bread Roles

• Curriculum matters • Preparation of students/ companies for WIL • Placement of students • Approach of workplaces • Monitoring student progress • Assessment of logbooks • Reporting on WIL • Initial placement, skills development • Conflict resolution/ risk management

Skills • Legislative and professional • Presentation, CV, Interviews, Marketing • Inter-personal, Telephones • Discipline-specific • Meeting management • Administrative skills • Report writing, initial placement, risk management

5. CHALLENGES FACED BY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

From the literature:
• Lack of incentives for employers or receiving companies: no tax rebate/stipends for non-SA students (Taylor & Govender, 2013)
• Restrictive immigration laws. (SA, 2004)
• Poor alignment or synchronisation between internationalisation and human resources strategies at regional level: Skills strategies vs Education and Training protocols (SA, 2002, 2008)
• SA social conditions. Unemployment (StatsSA, 2015), Xenophobia (Taylor, 2013; Sehoela, 2015, Unionism in workplaces (Cape Times, 2015).

Guidelines for the Management of Work Integrated Learning/ Experiential Learning for International Students (Maphosa & Taylor, 2007) should be updated to serve as reference document for WIL Coordinators and employers.

From the international students themselves:
• ‘I do not feel comfortable to secure a WIL opportunity because almost 80% of the companies offering a WIL program mostly require that applicants must be a South African citizen or must have a South African ID of which I have none of those.’
• ‘The departmental WIL Coordinators play their part and had no control on securing a place for international students. I felt hopeless and depressed as most South African students had found placements or have no troubles to get right now.’
• ‘Local companies should hire students for WIL based on their merit and qualifications not on citizenship only.
• ‘The country needs to provide more job placements for both South Africans and international students.’
• ‘I have seen many South African company that operates in Africa who only employ people that are of SA citizenship and then they will not hire international students because of their citizenship even though they meet or exceed the requirements.’
• ‘It would be great if the university could make partnership with those companies that need foreign students for their special skills.’

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

• Value and importance of internationalisation of higher education is undisputed.
• Difficulties faced by international students seeking to complete their career-focused studies in programmes with a WIL component are real and often have a negative impact on the attainment of their qualifications.
• This is in conflict with the spirit of the 1997 SADC Education and Training Protocol, now nearly 30 years in existence.
• The rights and responsibilities of a country to educate, train and develop its own citizens is understood and supported.
• Recommendations made for a revision of the SADC Policy, for SA skills legislation to consider international students requiring formal WIL, specifically for SADC students.
• Advocacy of national, regional and African associations to support this would be welcomed. Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), Southern African Association for Cooperative Education (SASCE); International Education Association of SA (IEEAS); African Network for Internationalization of Education (ANIE).

Ongoing research is being conducted into whether professional development of WIL Coordinators and WIL coordination will make a difference - better understanding of legislation may allow for more effective marketing of WIL and enable coordinators to speak from a solid knowledge base, particularly for international placements.

Government, higher education institutions and employers all have a role to play in both the expansion of internationalisation and 21st century human resource development in the SADC region and beyond.

Effective WIL coordination is one of the golden keys to unlock the doors to skills development and economic upliftment.