

Work-integrated-learning in International Business: Exploring Stakeholder Value for Regional Export Companies

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Abstract

Experiential learning approaches such as work-integrated learning (WIL) are an important international business (IB) educational tool yet can be challenging to implement. This exploratory research examines the value derived by regional Australian export companies from engagement with such programmes. The results suggest that firms perceive considerable benefit from involvement, particularly access to international market research capabilities. Additional benefits such as new market perspectives and extended local and international networks were reported. However, potential recruitment and reputational benefits received limited focus from the participants. The research therefore helps inform IB educators, potentially leading to the development of more accessible, effective and sustainable WIL programmes based upon a better understanding of the value of these programmes to this key stakeholder group.

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Introduction

University business schools have become increasingly conscious of the need to develop work-ready skills in their students (Ferns et al, 2016; Lawson et al, 2011; Freudenberg et al, 2011). Focus on student attainment of not only technical abilities but also important generic skills such as leadership, problem solving, team work and communication attributes has therefore grown (Freudenberg et al, 2011; Gremlar et al, 2000). The acquisition of these capabilities is seen to enhance student employment outcomes (Gault et al, 2010; Erselcan, 2015; Lawson et al, 2011). Hence, university business educators have sought to identify ways to achieve this goal. The educational approach termed experiential learning (EL) (Kolb & Fry, 1975; Kolb, 1984) is one method mooted to be effective in helping business students acquire such work-ready skills (Freudenberg et al, 2015; Gremlar et al, 2000). EL aims to develop student knowledge and abilities through engagement and experience with real-world situations and applications (Breunig, 2005; Kolb, 1984; Furco, 1996; Ramburuth & Daniel, 2011), seeking to extend student learning "...by providing them opportunities that go beyond textbooks and classrooms and address real-life issues and challenges" (Lester et al, 2005 p. 278).

As a result Business schools have embraced EL, with fields such as marketing (Dommeyer et al, 2016; Gremlar et al, 2000; Klink & Athaide, 2004) and accounting studies (Siegel et al, 2010) leading the way. Similarly, international business (IB) educators have adopted EL methods. As there is broad agreement that IB students benefit from developing skills beyond foundational concepts better preparing them to be successful in today's global business environment (Alon, 2003; Erselcan, 2015; Ferns et al, 2016; Ramburuth & Daniel, 2011).

Within the field of EL, a range of closely related variants have developed. Some approaches are predominantly classroom based, incorporating case studies/simulations and guest lecturers for example (Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 2005). However, others deliberately place the student outside the classroom in a real-world organisational context such as work-integrated-learning (Freudenberg et al, 2015), internships (Gault et al, 2010), co-operative learning (Fleming, 2012) and service-learning (Lester et al, 2005). IB educators have variously incorporated both class based approaches (Aggarwal & Goodell, 2014; Alon, 2003; Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 2005) as well as external placements (Alon, 2004; Charlebois & Giberson, 2009; Erselcan, 2015). However, given the nature of the discipline, challenges can be experienced in IB education due to implementation barriers and the costs associated with externally based methods (Aggarwal & Goodell, 2014; Alon, 2004). Furthermore, externally based approaches such as work-integrated-learning necessitate the development of robust, collaborative multi-stakeholder relationships based upon common understanding and an awareness of the expectations of all parties in order to be successful (Fleming, 2012).

This research evolved from a desire to enhance an undergraduate IB teaching program at a regional Australian university. Class based EL activities such as guest lectures and case studies were already proving beneficial for students, however an increase in externally based real world experience within an IB context was viewed as offering further opportunity to extend learning and develop critical "work ready" skills. However, resourcing and proximity challenges meant that external placement opportunities in either foreign markets or large multi-national organisations was problematic. A local solution was therefore sought. Engagement opportunities were thus targeted with the local export community, via the institutions work-integrated-learning programme (WIL). However, in seeking to build a successful and sustainable programme, it was considered important that a thorough understanding of the value such a programme offers this key stakeholder group be ascertained.

Given the regional Australian context, the local export businesses available for the programme were predominantly SMEs (Freeman et al, 2012). Such organisations are recognised as lacking access to resources, market information, skills and networks (Freeman & Styles, 2014), with a lack of knowledge about international markets representing a key impediment to the successful internationalisation of these organisations (Johansen & Vahlne, 1977, 2009; Oviatt & McDougall, 2005). In fact, the export ability of such firms is often limited by a lack of export knowledge in general in areas such as logistics, modes of entry, trade agreements etc. (Kahiya & Dean, 2015; Paul et al, 2017). Furthermore, small growing firms in locations with limited local demand are more likely to need to seek out international growth opportunities (Murrmann et al 2015). Thus, research suggests that export related knowledge, skills and information is of value to a regional SME export community such as the target stakeholder group in this WIL programme.

Universities are widely acknowledged as playing an important role in knowledge transfer within regional economic development (Audretsch et al, 2005; Goddard & Chatterton, 1999; Huggins & Thompson, 2015). Moreover, research supports the notion that WIL programmes have the potential to deliver value to all key stakeholders including local business partners (Fleming, 2012; Lawson et al, 2011) being particularly beneficial in regional and rural contexts due to the lack of key resources in these locations (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000). Therefore, attempting to expand IB based WIL activities targeted at the local export community appeared to have merit. However, there is a paucity of prior research examining the specific value of WIL to a regional Australian SME export community. Hence, this project was initiated, seeking to better understand the value of an IB focused WIL engagement for regional export industry partners and in so doing increase the chances of achieving a successful and sustainable programme for all key stakeholders.

The paper proceeds as follows. Firstly, an overview of WIL as an educational approach together with the value the approach delivers to key stakeholders is examined. Next, the projects methodology is reviewed before the findings are explicated and discussed before the main implications of the study are detailed. Finally, the concluding comments further identify the limitations of the project as well as opportunities for future research.

Work-integrated-learning (WIL) and stakeholder value.

A variant of the educational philosophy and methodology known as experiential learning (EL), work-integrated-learning (WIL) is an umbrella term incorporating terminologies often used interchangeably such as co-operative learning, professional learning and internships (Ferns et al, 2016; Fleming, 2012; Freudenberg et al, 2015; Gault et al, 2010; Lawson et al, 2011; Rowe, 2015). As such WIL is a teaching approach that looks to integrate and apply the classroom with real world experience by exposing the student to experience in industry, community or professional bodies (Ferns et al, 2016; Lawson et al, 2011). Such learning environments importantly promote a range of generic skills for the student including teamwork and team building, team leadership, oral and written communication skills as well as critical thinking and problem solving (Freudenberg et al, 2015). In fact it is argued that "students who undertake WIL as part of their degree consistently achieve better employment outcomes" (Ferns et al, 2016 p. 363).

To be successful, industry based experiential learning programmes such as WIL require a number of enabling factors to be present. These include; institutional support, teaching passion and the ability to engage industry partners (Lawson et al, 2011). Similarly, impediments to such programmes can be their time consuming nature and cost. These constraints apply to both universities and industry partners and should not be underestimated (Lawson et al, 2011). Therefore, to be successful WIL programmes require aligned, multi-stakeholder collaboration based upon common understanding of partner constraints and goals (Fleming, 2012).

When successful, considerable benefits accrue to students from WIL programmes (Rowe, 2015). This includes the acquisition of not only academic but also critical generic abilities such as teamwork, problem solving, leadership and communication skills (Lawson et al, 2011; Freudenberg et al, 2015). Given the ever changing complexities of the global business environment this is important for IB students (Ferns et al, 2016; Ramburuth & Daniel, 2011). Moreover, these approaches can result in the specific acquisition of tacit and explicit knowledge of foreign markets for IB students (Alon, 2004; Erselcan, 2015). As a result students “develop capabilities to enhance employability” (Fleming, 2012) and as such, these programmes can be viewed as “crucial in providing an effective transition from education to employment” (Lawson et al, 2011 p.67).

Similarly, EL programmes like WIL also offer value to other key stakeholders. For example, the educational institution and its academics benefit through enhanced engagement and relations with the community, including potential collaborative opportunities (Charlebois & Giberson, 2009; Klink & Athaide, 2004; Lawson et al, 2011). Universities may also benefit from enhanced attractiveness of their programmes and resultant higher student intakes (Lawson et al, 2011) given that they gain a learning approach that positively impacts student employment readiness (Freudenberg et al, 2015).

However, the benefits to industry partners from involvement in these programmes has attracted limited research to date. The most significant benefit identified for industry is the recruitment of talent (Gault et al, 2010). As Rowe states “employers consistently report that they participate in WIL in order to attract and recruit potential full time employees” (2015 p. 104). A point supported by Lester et al (2005) who further report that employers may also attract reputational benefits from their involvement. Access to resources is another possible industry partner benefit (Fleming, 2012), seen to be of particular importance in regional/rural contexts (Ferrari & Worrell, 2000). From an IB perspective, Erselcan (2015) suggests that industry partners may benefit from the identification of potential new international markets. Thus, although research identifies potential benefits for these key stakeholders, to successfully recruit and retain external organisations for WIL programmes it is critical for educators to fully understand the costs and benefits associated with industry partner involvement (Fleming, 2012; Lawson et al, 2011). Moreover, although WIL may “deliver many benefits” these will only be realised if the various stakeholders involved possess “the commitment and vision to see these potentials realised” (Freudenberg et al, 2015p.92).

Methodology

This exploratory project incorporated a case study approach, a qualitative technique that examines phenomenon at an individual, group or organisational level (Yin, 2011). The participants in this study, located in regional Australia, included twelve export focused business leaders purposefully chosen to complement the phenomenon being examined (Yin, 2011). Case studies enable the investigation of real world perceptions and interpretations on reality from a variety of sources and are well suited to the study of small export businesses such as those selected for this research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 2009). As they seek to identify or amplify new and emerging topics, through inductive theory development prior to the testing of new concepts via the use of quantitative analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2011).

To collect data the project utilised semi-structured interviews allowing focused but informal communication as well as providing the interviewer enhanced control of the interview process (Creswell, 2009). This approach draws out participant experiences, views and perceptions thus eliciting respondent insights that provide a richness of information, enabling the identification of key themes from the data (Eisenhardt, 1989; Punch, 2005). The interviews, lasting between 30-60 minutes, were recorded with note taking occurring during and immediately after each session and proceeded until

theoretical saturation was reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data was then manually coded and analysed to identify key themes and emergent patterns (Saldana, 2010). Themes were clustered according to their correspondence with the literature and the research goals, thus attributing meaning and enabling analysis of the aggregated case study data (Saldana, 2010; Yin, 2011).

Findings

This research sought to explore the value derived by regional Australian export SMEs from engagement with an undergraduate IB WIL programme. The respondents demonstrated a clear understanding of the value that they perceived as available to their organisations from such involvement, nominating a number of commercial benefits as the key drivers for engagement by their organisations. The emergent themes, with associated supporting participant comments, are now presented before being discussed in the following section

Access to skills, knowledge and information.

There was strong and consistent acknowledgement through the data of the perceived value of access to knowledge and skills that IB based WIL programmes may deliver to a regional Australian export business. Not surprisingly, given the context, this was centred upon access to research about international markets. The technological abilities of the students was also highlighted as beneficial.

The following respondent observations are indicative here;

“The information and learnings you have access to....it is incredibly valuable...I see extreme value in that knowledge” stated an experienced international business professional.

Similarly, “...information is critical...” the students help in “...knowledge and capability building” declared another established exporter.

Perhaps emphasising the specialist information that is important to export orientated operations another CEO expressed, “...we give them work experience and we get insights and important intercultural knowledge”.

Within the overriding theme of accessing knowledge and skills there was a further distinct emphasis on the specific acquisition of information about foreign markets. As one expert declared “...the students deliver targeted research that provides awareness about export opportunities” that he prosaically likened to “*export radar*” for the region. Likewise, another export specialist declared that as “...very few companies have dedicated export managers”....students usefully have “...access to information about markets, are good at investigation and can do important research of potential new markets”.

“The value to us is gaining a whole lot of research.... information we would otherwise not have...insights into other markets...little gems... is definitely a big value point” declared the CEO of a fast growing SME.

Similarly, a high profile CEO observed that student involvement “... really assists in gaining information....as a small growing company we are switching to export....this is where companies like us need assistance... we don't have the budgets so working with the university really helps us focus on where we should be going”. Another experienced entrepreneur further identified that the scope of the research was also important stating that a key value comes from acquiring information and analysis “...not just about new markets but also how to go about entering those markets...”.

Other skills and knowledge were also viewed as important. Some participants highlighted the salience of the technological know-how of the students as the following quotes illustrate;

“Students offer up to date tech savvy... as well as business theory and research” was how one CEO expressed this, whilst another explicitly observed how “tech savvy” students can impact their marketing communications; “...students can help with insights re marketing strategy...via Facebook or You tube...”. Similarly, another respondent, saw value in that students “...have the capacity to learn new technology more quickly...if something has to be picked up...they pick it up at an accelerated rate around technologies”.

Access to “affordable” resources and capabilities.

Also within the theme of access to important resources and capabilities, another topic to emerge from the data was a focus on affordability issues for resource poor SME s and the investments required to access important resources. This is illustrated by the following respondent observations;

“We are all time poor, access to resources is critical for SME s that simply can t afford the cost of accessing research data....the university and the students provide a research resource for exporters...a wonderful resource that can generate real value...” summarised an experienced export manager.

Echoing this comment, another simply remarked that involvement allows SME s “...to receive targeted research in an affordable way”. Which, as one small export business CEO observed is “...particularly important for start- ups”.

More specifically, an experienced regional export authority declared that the export community gains access to “research resources that would normally cost many thousands of dollars”. This respondent further observed that WIL programmes have a bigger role to play in a regional context as “... in a regional situation...the student input can make a bigger impact than if they do work for a multinational...the SME s need you much more”. Fully endorsed by a successful CEO stating “...being a small company we simply don t have a multi-million dollar budget for research”.

Another respondent whilst also noting how WIL programmes “...provide data and research skills that is out of the reach of most SME s” importantly further detailed an alarming lack of awareness amongst the local export community about the latent opportunity on offer to it, stating that “...in fact they often don t even know it is available!”. This lack of awareness theme was echoed by a number of the respondents. “Most local exporters are simply not aware of the potential value on offer” stated one CEO.

Another experienced exporter developed the theme further stating that “...most exporters do not know what is available ...the challenge therefore is how to make them aware of the research potential... the first job is to build awareness”. This respondent went on to suggest that the way forward would be to “...hold a regional workshop for the export community”. Along these lines another influential participant emphasised the need to understand the specific needs of regional export SMEs and to “... develop a sales kit to sell the benefits to the export community”.

Thus, importantly the respondents emphasised the importance of the educational stakeholders having a clear understanding of what the business community values from involvement in WIL.

“Need to align any perception of what the students can bring....with the reality of what the export community needs...business will dismiss it if it does not see value....as an exporter, I am interested in outcomes” declared an experienced export executive explicitly.

Or as another participant stated "...put the company firstwe think about student outcomes....but not always about what the company needs... so I am a good social citizen...but unless they are delivering value for me they don't get a guernsey". Finally, and somewhat surprisingly, cost effective access to potential future employees through involvement in the WIL activities was not found to be a major theme in the data. However, two respondents touched on this issue with one CEO stating that "...the hiring process definitely becomes easier and we do get the chance to secure future employees" with a second observing that it is "expensive to find the right skills...interns provide an opportunity to source good people...we are a small team and must get the right fit".

New mindset/perspectives

Another emergent theme was the less tangible but clearly highly prized organisational benefit of gaining new business perspectives and insights from the students. Additionally, the specialist, experience and knowledge that foreign students on the programme brought to the organisations about global markets was deemed useful. This was characterised by the respondents in a variety of observations including the following;

"Students come with a new set of ideas....a positive attitudethey also ask questions...and force businesses to re-evaluate" stated one experienced professional. Moreover, another experienced exporter remarked, "...we get different perspectives, ones we would never usually get as we are so entrenched....we get important fresh insights...we learn how to do it better".

Another respondent appreciated the "...flexible perspectives" the students bring, with one CEO going so far as to indicate an appetite for "...the criticism" and "...fresh angles" that the students provide.

Thus, resultantly there was an appreciation of the influence the process has on organisational self-reflection given that the students are often "challenging assumptions" and "actually forces the organisation to reflect". Or as another experienced CEO expressed it "...the questions we get asked get us thinking....which promotes reflection on our business....makes us focus on where we are going.... or should be going".

Finally, the participants also expressed the broader benefits that they felt foreign students specifically bring. For example "...the student brings a new mindset and... particularly if they are an international student, they bring diversity". Similarly, another stated that the "...experiences of international students is beneficial to our business.... as international students bring a unique skill set". Including important "intercultural perspectives" as one CEO noted. More specifically, a successful international marketer identified how foreign students "bring insights with a global perspective" that deliver marketing benefits in terms of brand development.

Collaborative Networks

There was also a recognition amongst the respondents that the WIL process may deliver important new relationships and networks for business partners associated with it. The importance of collaborative networks was emphasised. Moreover, interestingly the value of these relationships and networks was not restricted to a local context but also seen to have valuable down-stream international potential when foreign students return to their home markets. Illustrative quotes are as follows;

An experienced CEO broadly identified involvement in the programmes as providing "...useful networking and reciprocity benefits". Similarly another CEO described in general terms how involvement in WIL "...led to the development of new relationships and contacts". More specifically a respondent highlighted the importance of "developing

links with local Council and government” to extend the impact of the programs. This resonated with an experienced professional who observed that “...given the costs involved from organisations we need a regional framework to connect us...a team approach is best”.

Finally, another experienced international business expert specifically highlighted the value of networks associated with foreign students declaring “...downstream networks... networking and investment opportunities from relationships developed with international students, that may extend the regions connections internationally when they return...through their trusted networks overseas”. This was endorsed by the marketing specialist of a fast growing exporter who emphasised the “...big value of word of mouth when the international student travel s back home”.

Discussion

The value to students of experiential learning in IB education is widely acknowledged (Aggaewal & Goodell, 2014; Alon, 2003; Erselcan, 2015; Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 2005; Ramburuth & Daniel, 2011). EL variants such as WIL, involving the student undertaking industry based, real – world experience, are viewed as providing business students the opportunity to develop important work-ready skills that go beyond foundational concepts (Ferns et al, 2016; Lawson et al, 201). The acquisition of such skills deemed important for IB student success in today s fast changing global business environment (Erselcan, 2015; Ferns et al, 2016; Ramburuth & Daniel, 2011). However, the delivery of EL approaches such as WIL are generally costly and time consuming, requiring considerable industry partner commitment (Lawson et al 2011) with implementation in an IB context particularly challenging (Aggarwal & Goodell, 2014; Alon, 2004). Nevertheless, limited research attention has been given to the application of WIL in an IB setting. This includes the benefits derived from such programmes by the industry partners that are fundamental to their progress and success. Particularly in relation to the application of such programmes in a regional export community context. This is despite research suggesting that a key determinant of the success of WIL programmes is stakeholder commitment and that considerable investment is required by all key stakeholders, including industry partners, to enable these programmes to successfully operate (Fleming, 2012).

This research is therefore salient. On the one hand, it highlights an accessible WIL approach for IB educators, particularly those in regional locations that may provide discipline specific exposure to developing critical real world work skills and enriched learning through engagement with a local export community. Moreover, by enhancing the understanding of the value derived by the industry partners in such programmes, educators will be better placed to develop successful and sustainable programmes. Importantly therefore the findings suggest that Australian regional export operators possess a clear awareness of the value that engagement in such programmes can bring to their enterprises. Both supporting and extending prior findings the results reveal insights into the organisational benefits that the export businesses see as accruing as a result of their involvement in WIL initiatives. Confirming prior research the participants acknowledged the value of access to important resources and capabilities that WIL involvement offers (Fleming, 2012). Moreover, the participants were very specific in terms of precisely what resources and skills were of importance to them. Access to research resources and capabilities were deemed the key benefit that engagement offered. Furthermore, and building on Erselcan (2015), the findings identified a clear focus by these regionally based, internationally focused firms on the value of research inputs that aid in the identification of foreign market opportunities. This runs counter to prior findings, albeit of a more general nature, that suggest that industry partners predominantly view WIL as beneficially providing access to resources and skills in the form of new recruits (Lester et al, 2005; Rowe, 2015). Recruitment benefits were not identified as a key driver for engagement in this study, perhaps due to the specific nature, location and size of the organisations involved.

Furthermore, and again in line with previous research (Freeman & Styles 2014) the respondents identified that as regional export focused SMEs they typically lack the critical resources and skills necessary to undertake such important market research activities themselves. Moreover, and perhaps indicating broader regional potential for these programmes, there was a general recognition amongst the respondents of a broad lack of awareness amongst the regions export community of the latent research capabilities available through engagement with a University and its IB programmes. Another insight to emerge in the findings was the specification of additional, less tangible commercial benefits reported by the group. The respondents expressed a perception of value from the diversity of perspectives that the IB WIL student brings to their businesses. This was seen as particularly valuable in not only supplying fresh ideas and skills but also importantly inducing self-reflection amongst the SME managers regarding the operation and marketing activities of their enterprises. In particular, foreign students undertaking IB programmes were marked out as important here, as they were seen to provide very specific first-hand local knowledge and insights into a variety of global markets.

Similarly, benefits attached to the relationships and networks accruing from involvement in WIL programmes was another strong thematic amongst the respondents. Interestingly, these relational advantages, whilst including collaboration with the University and as identified by previous research (Klink & Athaide, 2004; Lawson et al, 2011) also extended to potential international network and marketing opportunities from the relationships developed with foreign students on the programmes. However, there was scant identification of the importance of community relationships and the potential reputational and social benefits as identified by previous research (Lester et al, 2005). Again, this is perhaps due to the respondents being regional SMEs rather than larger organisations that may pursue structured CSR strategies seeking broader reputational advantages.

Thus, the research provides important insights into the organisational value of WIL programmes as perceived by industry partners in a regional Australian context. The findings both confirm and extend prior research identifying resource and skill acquisition being salient. However, very particular emphasis was apparent amongst this export focused cohort. The respondents detailed research resources and capabilities, and the potential they offer to deliver important international market information and analysis as the key value for resource poor regional SMEs. Additionally, new insights emerged identifying less tangible benefits such as access to new and diverse perspectives that stimulate and extend business thinking and advantageous relationships and networks. Along these lines, the further diversity and relational benefits from exposure to foreign students involved in IB WIL programmes was also highlighted. However, contrary to earlier research recruitment and reputational benefits were not emphasised as key benefits by the group.

Implications for practice

Stakeholder involvement in WIL programmes incurs cost and requires considerable commitment from all parties, including key industry partners. Not least in the context of IB education. To develop successful and sustainable programmes it is therefore essential that educators ensure that the value of engagement in these programmes for all key stakeholders is understood and articulated and beneficial outcomes are attained by all key stakeholders. As such, this study provides important insights for IB educators, particularly those developing international business courses situated in regional Universities seeking to develop such programmes.

First and foremost, the research identifies the latent potential for IB educators to engage with a local export community to develop relatively accessible and discipline specific WIL initiatives. Further identifying that the SME export businesses typically

found in regional locations have a clear view of the potential commercial value available to them through their engagement in WIL activities. This value is specific and highly contextual, centred on the value of international market research and other less tangible benefits such as advantages from networks and the introduction of new ideas. As such, this study indicates considerable potential for viable and sustainable regionally based WIL programmes for IB university cohorts based on mutually beneficial stakeholder engagement.

The research thus further amplifies the opportunity for regional University IB programmes to deliver significant value to all stakeholders including the broader community. However, to do so requires both an understanding of the export community itself and the capacity to effectively communicate with this group to ensure awareness of the latent organisational benefits for SMEs available through collaboration in targeted WIL activity. Active engagement is therefore required by IB academics with both the local export community as well as appropriate export focused government agencies, particularly at a regional level, to ensure a broadened awareness of the benefits and potential of WIL activity. In so doing key collaborative relationships can be developed that enable the ongoing creation of value for all stakeholders offered by engagement in these programmes.

Conclusion, limitations and future research

This exploratory research examined the potential value attributed by a regional Australian export business community to engagement in a local University IB WIL programme. The results suggest that this key stakeholder group perceives considerable commercial benefit from involvement in such activity, not least the cost effective access to important research capabilities to aid growth. Additional organisational benefits such as access to new and diverse perspectives as well as local and international networks were also reported. However, contrary to prior research, recruitment and reputational benefits received limited focus by the participants. The study therefore identifies potential for IB Educators to develop, accessible, effective and sustainable WIL programmes at regional Universities based upon aligned, stakeholder collaboration and mutual benefits. The research further identifies latent potential to extend the opportunity by increasing awareness of the benefits associated with these schemes amongst the local export community.

However, given the exploratory nature of this study the ability to generalise from the results has limitations. To allow generalisation, these qualitative findings need to be extended and tested through quantitative methods utilising a larger sample. The sample should be broadened to include exporters that are unaware of or have not been involved in a WIL programme as well as including participants from other regions in Australia, and potentially internationally to gain international comparison. The role of government bodies and intermediaries could also be investigated. Thus future research could usefully test the initial results developed here, by surveying a larger sample across multiple regions to test and extend the findings and support the development of a successful regional WIL framework for IB students and the wider export community. From such a base, longitudinal research could then seek to measure the stakeholder impact of the programmes over time.

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