



Integrating authentic assessment tasks in work integrated learning hospitality internships

Author

Nyanjom, Julie, Goh, Edmund, Yang, Elaine Chiao Ling

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Integrating Authentic Assessment Tasks in Work Integrated Learning Hospitality Internships

Abstract

Internship as part of work-integrated learning (WIL) is a critical curriculum component in higher education to better prepare for the future workforce. To assess WIL, educators typically select authentic assessments such as reflective journals and managerial reports to solve existing workplace problems. Despite the academic discourse supporting the use of internships, a paucity of studies has investigated the role of formal assessments embedded into internship subjects. In this paper, we evaluate the perceptions of hospitality and tourism undergraduates towards the effectiveness of assessments as part of their WIL internship program. Focus group sessions were conducted with internship university students (n=29) in Australia over a cross-sectional longitudinal period of three years. Our thematic analysis revealed three key themes: authenticity of assessment design, challenges with work-study-life balance, and the level of industry involvement in assessment. This study contributes to the body of knowledge in relation to how compulsory assessment tasks can be effectively integrated into WIL internships to positively influence the experiential learning outcomes of students.

Keywords: work-integrated learning; authentic assessment; internships; experiential learning

Introduction

Against the backdrop where more than 50% of university graduates struggle to find relevant and secure employment (Karmel, 2017), the higher education (HE) sector is increasingly concerned about preparing students to be industry-ready (Goh & King, 2020; Jackson & Collings, 2018). This situation has been exacerbated by the rapidly changing employment environment caused by COVID-19. Universities see work-integrated learning (WIL) through internships as the pathway to graduate employment (Silva, Lopes, Costa, Melo, Dias, Brito & Seabra, 2018). According to Jackson and Collins (2018), 77% of graduates with full-time employment attributed WIL as pivotal in helping them to secure a full-time job upon graduation.

WIL refers to experiential learning (EL) activities that merge theory and practice within the curriculum (Jackson, Fleming & Rowe, 2019; Jackson, 2015). There are many adaptations of WIL, including those that focus on work placements such as internships, where a student is placed at work as part of an academic program (Robinson, Ruhanen & Breakey, 2016). Given the perceived benefits of internships (Inceoglu, Selenko, McDowall & Schlachter, 2019), many universities have incorporated some form of WIL in their curriculum to increase students' employment readiness upon graduation (Goh, Nguyen & Law, 2017; Tsai, Hsu & Yang, 2017). However, the role of assessments in WIL units remains an underresearched area and in most cases is perceived as a low priority among industry partners (Lasen, Evans, Tsey, Campbell, & Kinchin, 2018).

Assessment is an integral but complex part of teaching and learning in HE. This complexity is amplified by experiential learning situations such as WIL, attributed to the holistic and contextual nature of learning within the workplace (Farmaki, 2018; Jackson, 2015). There have been calls for research to examine the role of assessments in WIL programs and alternative approaches to evaluate students beyond work performance (Jackson, 2018; Schonell

& Macklin, 2019). Professional associations such as Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN, <http://acen.edu.au/>) have also offered good practice guides for assessment within WIL. Despite such calls, limited research has been conducted in this space (Jack, Stansbie & Sciarini, 2017; Zopiatis & Constantini, 2012). Most WIL research has focused on the actual work experience rather than academic assessment as the main measurement of WIL outcomes (Lin, Kim, Qiu & Ren, 2017; Mak, Lau & Wong, 2017; Kim, Lin & Qiu, 2015). This is a key research gap that warrants further investigation as assessment tasks are commonly incorporated in WIL units (Kim et al., 2015; Maier & Thomas, 2013). Yet, how equitable robustness between classroom and practice learning can be assured remains a matter of ongoing debate (Jackson, Fleming and Rowe, 2019). Therefore, it is paramount that educators examine the effectiveness of assessments embedded in WIL to ensure the internship experience is designed with significant academic robustness. Given the increasing emphasis on quality assurance, accreditation requirement, and assessment reform within higher education (Goh & King, 2020; Lasen et al., 2018), the paucity of research on embedding assessment items into WIL justifies this study, which explores how the integration of assessment in internship influences the learning experience and outcomes of students. Specifically, this paper investigates the authenticity, effectiveness and challenges of assessment in internship from the students' perspectives.

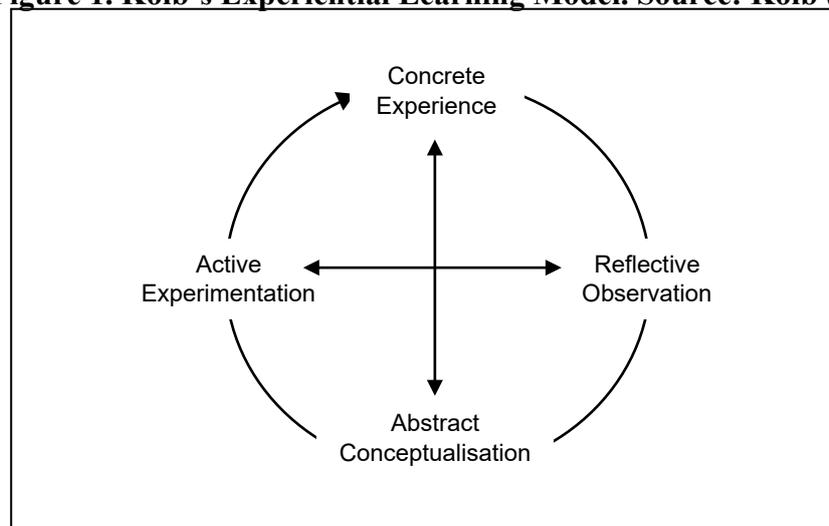
Literature Review

Experiential learning and WIL

The shift from teaching to learning paradigm and to a competency-based education has led to an increased emphasis on experiential learning (EL). EL is *'the process by which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience; knowledge results from the combination of understanding and transforming experience'* (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). As illustrated

in Figure 1, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model consists of four processes (i.e., concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation), which constitute a learning cycle stretching across two dimensions – nature of experience (concrete or abstract) and transformation of experience (from reflective observation to active experimentation).

Figure 1. Kolb's Experiential Learning Model. Source: Kolb (1984)



The key impetus of EL is about gaining concrete or authentic experience relevant to real-world situations, internalising the learned experience through reflection to generate abstract theoretical understanding, and applying this understanding to inform action (Goh & Ritchie, 2011). The *'learning by doing'* concept (Lin et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2015) encourages deep learning through active engagement and reflection, reduces the abstractness of traditional classroom teaching, and develops competencies for success in the real world (Dressler, Cedercreutz, & Pacheco, 2011). In particular, assessment in internship, such as the reflective journal and problem-based project, may facilitate the movement along the two dimensions (i.e., concrete—abstract and reflective observation—active experimentation) in Kolb's learning

cycle. Assessment compels students to be conscious of cognitive and skill development opportunities during the internship.

Studies have shown that EL enhances students' learning experience, satisfaction and employability (Frawley, Goh & Law, 2019; Jackson & Collins, 2018; Bosco & Ferns, 2014). The efficacy of EL beyond the classroom has been demonstrated in learning activities such as WIL, including internships (Dressler et al., 2011), field trips (Goh & Ritchie, 2011), organising events (Kim et al., 2015), community-based service learning (Mak et al., 2017), and location-based learning (Croy, 2009). While prior research has found a positive correlation between EL with higher levels of learning and improvements in generic competencies (Mak et al., 2017), Maier and Thomas (2013) cautioned that the acquisition of knowledge is lower compared to traditional classroom-based learning. Likewise, Lei, Lam and Lourenço (2015) pointed out that one challenge for EL is finding the right balance between theoretical knowledge and practical experience.

Limited research has examined the role of assessments in EL despite assessment tasks being a common element of EL units (Croy, 2009; Kim et al., 2015; Maier & Thomas, 2013). Studies have analysed students' assignments (e.g. reflective journals and learning portfolios) to gauge the effectiveness of EL (Lin et al., 2017; Mak et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2015). However, these studies did not examine the assessment design per se. One of the few exceptions is Ruhanen's (2005) study, which investigated students' perception of role play as an EL activity incorporated in the assessment task.

In summary, existing studies have mainly focused on the effectiveness of EL but assessment design remains an underresearched area. There is a dearth of knowledge about how assessments facilitate WIL students to achieve EL outcomes. Concomitantly, the assessment design for certain EL activities (e.g., internships) requires students to be immersed in the workplace over a prolonged period. This presents further complications because the assessment

outcomes are influenced by multiple stakeholders (i.e., industry partners, educators, students, and institutions), workplace dynamics (Robinson, Kralj, Solnet, Goh & Callan, 2016), and the level of assessment support at the workplace (Lasen et al., 2018).

Authentic assessment and WIL

Teaching, learning and assessment are inter-related components in a pedagogical process (Villarroel, Bloxham, Bruna, Bruna, & Herrera-Seda, 2018). Assessment involves making judgements about student learning and development in a systematic way, where feedback provided from the assessment process is utilised to adjust subsequent learning (Hains-Wesson, Pollard, Kaider & Young, 2019). The shift of paradigm from teaching to learning has given rise to the ‘*Assessment for Learning*’ movement, emphasising on knowledge application rather than memorisation of decontextualised knowledge (Villarroel, Bloxham, Bruna, Bruna, & Herrera-Seda, 2018). The movement sees the advent of authentic assessment, which emphasises assessment tasks that resemble real-world settings or professional practices (Gulikers, Bastiaens, & Kirschner, 2004; Villarroel et al., 2018).

The etymology of “authenticity” is comprised of two Greek words, “auto” (i.e., self) and “hentes” (i.e., doer or being) (Eddy & Lawrence, 2013). Applying the notion of authenticity in learning signifies individuals as learners and doers (Eddy & Lawrence, 2013). Authentic assessment can therefore be interpreted as the assessment of learners as doers. Authentic assessment, guided by a learning paradigm, is not underpinned by a single theory. Prior researchers have offered various conceptualisations and interpretations of authentic assessment. In particular, Rennert-Ariev (2005) conceptualised authentic assessment using Habermas’s (1972) three knowledge constitutive interests (i.e., technical, practical and emancipatory) and advocates for a reflective and dialogic approach to assessment. Villarroel et al. (2018) comprehended authenticity in learning and assessment as realism (i.e., real-world

resemblance), contextualisation (i.e., situated learning) and problematisation (i.e., problem solving). In brief, authentic assessment requires students to put knowledge into practice (Eddy & Lawrence, 2013) and be reflective of the process (Rennert-Ariev, 2005). Authentic assessment is particularly relevant to WIL, which aims to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice (Jackson, 2018).

Prior research has validated the positive impact of authentic assessment on learning, especially in improving students' motivation, metacognition, commitment and autonomy for learning (Rennert-Ariev; 2005; Villarroel et al., 2018; Wu, Heng, & Wang, 2015). Studies have provided evidence of authentic assessment in improving students' employability as it equips students with skills and competencies to succeed in the workplace (Villarroel et al., 2018). Despite its plausible potential, the challenges of implementing authentic assessment lies in the ambiguity with the concept and the lack of pedagogical framework in evaluating the quality of authentic assessment (Bosco & Ferns, 2014; Villarroel et al., 2018). To address this gap, Gulikers et al., (2004) proposed a five-dimensional framework to evaluate the degree of authenticity between the professional practice and assessment characteristics, which includes the task, physical context, social context, forms of output, and criteria. Bosco and Ferns' (2014) Authentic Assessment Framework (AAF) provides an evidence-based evaluative lens to assessment design in WIL. AAF consists of four criteria that require engagement in professional settings, high order cognitive skills, reflexivity, and industry partners. A recent study by Lasen et al. (2018) added further criteria to existing frameworks of authentic assessments by underlining the importance of aligning the assessment tasks with learning outcomes, having clear task descriptions, and implementing moderation processes.

Albeit the presence of frameworks for authentic assessment, limited empirical research exists on the use and quality of assessment in WIL curriculum (Bosco & Ferns, 2014; Lasen et al., 2018). A recent review by Lasen et al. (2018) identified only 20 studies (published

between 1990 and 2015) that investigated the quality of WIL assessment design, and not all studies met the AAF criteria set out by Bosco and Ferns (2014). Furthermore, authenticity is a subjective and relative concept, with educators and students holding different perceptions about the authenticity and relevance of assessment (Gulikers, Kester, Kirschner & Bastiaens, 2008; James & Casidy, 2018). When students perceive assessments as more authentic, they are more likely to engage in deep learning as opposed to surface learning, and develop more professional skills (Gulikers et al., 2008), although some scholars have questioned whether deep learning is necessarily equivalent to good learning and vice versa (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). Student perception is crucial because most assessments are designed from the educators' perspectives and often without consultation with students. Likewise, students' perception of assessments may change as they gain more professional experience (Gulikers et al., 2008).

The subjectivity of WIL assessment is further complicated by the involvement of multiple stakeholders. For example, hospitality students who enrol in a WIL placement are normally evaluated by their employers at the end of their internship (Nghia & Duyen, 2019). In many cases, these professional partners have limited training in providing constructive and formative feedback to assist student learning (Lasen et al., 2018). From an institutional perspective, the increasingly regulated HE sector renders WIL assessments a compliance practice instead of facilitating student learning (Bosco & Ferns, 2014; Lasen et al., 2018). This is especially the case in an Australian context where the assessment design is constrained by compliance with accreditation and assurance of learning, and reporting requirements as a result of the assessment reform movement (Bosco & Ferns, 2014).

In response to the gaps identified in the literature and practice, this study adopted an assessment partnership approach (Lasen et al., 2018) by investigating how students perceive the authenticity, relevance and challenges with assessments while participating in internship programs. In particular, the present study examined how assessments during internship

facilitates students to develop along Kolb's EL process. The investigation adopted a longitudinal approach spanning across a three-year period to investigate student perception in pre- and post-internship, considering that students' perceptions evolve as they gain more professional experience.

Methodology

Case context settings

The focus of this study was a hospitality internship program where students worked full time for six months. The internship was part of the hospitality management degree, a three-year full-time program that required the completion of 360 credits (i.e. 24 units of 15 credits each) in an Australian university. The hospitality internship was undertaken during the 2nd year of the program and equivalent to 4 units or 60 credit points. The internship program was not a core unit and students had to go through a formal application process to ensure they met certain requirements such as completing a minimum of 60 credit points prior to commencing the internship. Rather than following a pass/fail format, the internship was numerically graded in the usual continuum like other units within the program. Consequently, the outcomes of the internship would contribute significantly to student final grades.

The assessment tasks in this internship program (Table 1) were developed in collaboration with the hospitality and tourism teaching team, including the Unit Coordinator, the Course Coordinator, the Work Integrated Learning Coordinator, and the Academic skills Advisor. The suite of assessment tasks was designed to navigate students through Kolb's EL process where students internalised the internship experience (Task 1) through reflective observation (Task 3 and 4), from which to generate abstract conceptualisation (Task 2 and 4) that informed action (Task 2 and 4). The level of authenticity of each assessment task was judged according to the four criteria stipulated in the Authentic Assessment Framework (AAF)

by Bosco and Ferns (2014). Each assessment task had guiding frameworks outlining assessment information and criteria. Generic rubrics, deemed most appropriate to capture the contextual nature of WIL situations, were developed for each assessment task in alignment with the WIL learning outcomes. All assessment paperwork was made available to the WIL coordinator, the student and the employer as part of comprehensive WIL guides. Prior to commencing the internship, the students took part in a two-week induction program covering intricate work-placement issues such as WIL expectations, assessment processes and workshops to close competency gaps such as critical thinking and reflective practice.

While the assessment design was informed by the literature, it is important to examine how students perceive the effectiveness of the assessment in order to close the perceptual gaps (if any) between the developer of the assessment (i.e. educators) and the actual user (i.e. students) to optimise the learning experience and outcomes.

Table 1: Outline of Assessment tasks and alignment with AAF criteria

Assessment tasks and weightings	Task Descriptions	Alignment with AAF criteria during assessment design (assessed as high, medium or low)
Task 1: Internship proposal – 10%	<p>Student creates a resume, outlines internship objectives, and suggests organisations aligned with stated objectives.</p> <p>The proposal is assessed in consideration of the student’s ability to align self-development goals with the selected establishment.</p> <p>WIL coordinator then arranges for student to interview with one</p>	<p>(1) medium – Student collaborates in organising for work placement, along with WIL coordinator</p> <p>(2) medium – student demonstrates alignment between stated objectives and identified workplace.</p> <p>(3) low– limited critical reflection required or assessed</p> <p>(4) low – Passive industry involvement in placement. Student</p>

	proposed establishment and student is placed if successful.	participation in interview not considered part of assessment.
Task 2: Internship learning report (the project) – 40%	<p>Students select a workplace research problem in negotiation with the industry mentor and WIL coordinator.</p> <p>The project includes an overview of the problem, targeted literature review, critical analysis in consideration of actual practice, and recommendations to improve organisational practices.</p> <p>A generic rubric is used to assess the quality of the selected issue, the synthesis between theory and practice, and quality of recommendations.</p>	<p>(1) high – workplace-based project selected in consultation with industry mentor and WIL coordinator</p> <p>(2) high – application of high order cognitive skills to produce a comprehensive report.</p> <p>(3) high – critical reflection and analysis on practice to inform recommendations</p> <p>(4) high – Collaboration between student, industry mentors and WIL coordinator.</p>
Task 3: Reflective journals – 30%	<p>Student maintains a personal reflective journal and draws on the journal to submit 4 reflective summaries.</p> <p>Submission dates for the summaries, each with equal weightings, are staggered through the internship period and scaffolded feedback is provided to encourage continuous improvement in reflective practice.</p> <p>Generic rubrics are used to assess the student’s ability to demonstrate self-development and reflective skills.</p>	<p>(1) high – student engages with daily activities to critically reflect on potential for personal and professional self-development.</p> <p>(2) high – student involved in high order cognitive thinking</p> <p>(3) high – student critically reflects on performance</p> <p>(4) high – student reflects on activities taking place in the workplace</p>

<p>Task 4: Employer evaluation (10%) and student's reflective commentary (10%) – 20%</p>	<p>Employer submits an evaluation of the student. In view of the employer evaluation, student evaluates their personal and professional strengths and weaknesses and develops action plans for self-improvement. A generic rubric is used to assess the student's ability to apply critical reflection on received feedback and create a plan for self-development.</p>	<p>(1) high – all stakeholders involved in assessment task. (2) high – analysis, evaluation synthesis of performance (3) high - student involved in critical evaluation of performance (4) high - industry partner involved in assessment.</p>
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Note: The four criteria of AAF include: (1) engage with authentic audience; (2) demonstrate high quality intellectual engagement (i.e., analysing, evaluating, creating, performance enactment); (3) engage in reflexivity; and (4) involve industry partners in assessment.

Research method

Focus groups were conducted with students (pre- and post-internship) and analysed longitudinally over a three-year period to explore student perceptions on the effectiveness of assessments undertaken during the internship. The aggregation of data over three years allowed sufficient data to factor in variations by WIL students and contextual characteristics, and to provide insights into shifting perspectives over time. Focus groups are appropriate for the exploration of under researched phenomenon as the method enables the researchers to produce concentrated data and in-depth understandings on the topic of interest through synergetic interaction within the group in a regulated setting (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Given the paucity of research in the area under study, it was more important for the study to generate ideas from the group about the perception of, and experience with, assessments, rather than collect information relevant to specific individual participants.

Sampling and data collection

All students (n=29) enrolled in the internship unit during the data collection period agreed to participate in the study. This sample size satisfied the recommended number of participants (n ≥ 25) for qualitative elicitation frameworks (Ajzen, 1991). Furthermore, the 28th respondent reached data saturation as similar answers and no new insights were elicited (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The participants included 12 domestic and 17 international students comprising of 19 females and 10 males. The gender ratio is an accurate representation of the hospitality workforce with more female employees compared to males (Goh & Lee, 2018). Upon agreeing to participate in the research, students were briefed on the research topic, signed a consent form, and concurred to participate in both pre- and post-internship focus group sessions. As shown in Table 2, 10 focus groups, each with 4–8 participants and lasting 45–60 minutes were conducted coinciding with the beginning and end of each internship period.

Table 2. Characteristics of focus group participants

Focus group session	Internship stage	Number of students in each focus group
PR1	Pre-internship	4
PO2	Post internship	4
PR3	Pre- internship	4
PO4	Post-internship	4
PR5	Pre- internship	5
PO6	Post-internship	5
PR7	Pre-internship	8
PO8	Post-internship	8
PR9	Pre-internship	8
PO10	Post-internship	8

Two open-ended questions formed the anchor of the focus group discussions: 1) How do you think the assessments are going to help you to achieve your learning objectives? (pre-

internship focus groups); and 2) How did the assessments help you to achieve your learning objectives? (post-internship focus groups). Follow up questions probed the participants' full range of perceptions regarding significant issues raised. All focus group discussions were audio recorded and transcribed after each session to ensure accuracy and reliability.

Data analysis

Data analysis was undertaken simultaneously with data collection to allow researchers to anchor the interpretations of the participants' experience and how they made sense of it. The researchers performed open coding to unpack and assign codes to the qualitative data. Codes with similar characteristics were clustered into more abstract categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Next, thematic analysis was conducted to extract recurrent categories into three themes concerning assessments during internships based on the frequency of the elicited responses. Frequent discussions were held between co-authors to reach consensus on theme interpretations. Participant illustrative quotes are used in reporting the findings to offer sufficient detail for the reader to make informed judgement of the students' perceptions. To ensure anonymity, a unique code was assigned to each focus group session and is used in reporting the findings. For example, PR5/14 indicates pre-internship focus group number 5.

Findings and Discussion

Three themes in relation to the integration of assessment tasks during internships emerged, namely, authenticity of assessment, work-study-life balance, and level of industry involvement. The analysis also included comparisons between pre- and post-internships as discrepancies in student expectations of internships outcome can lead to satisfaction/dissatisfaction of academic programs (Richardson, 2009). Overall, findings highlighted rather similar responses and concerns between male and female participants as well as domestic and international

participants. One key difference, however, between domestic and international participants was the barrier of language competency as international students perceived they spent more time on completing their assignment tasks and sometimes had difficulty in communicating with their industry mentors.

Theme 1: Authenticity of Assessment Tasks

The findings revealed that pre-internship groups understood the objectives to undertake assessment tasks during internships and were aware that authentic assessments would assist them achieve their learning and developmental goals. Some participants commented, *'the assessments will help guide internship success'* (PR5/14) and would *'help you link whatever you learnt in the classroom to the job'* (PR7/15). The connection of assessments to practice is a common expectation of hospitality students given the practical-based curriculum (Goh & Scerri, 2016).

Assessments were perceived as providing the opportunity to *'keep track of your experiences so at the end you can go back and see what you started with and how you ended up'* (PR5/14), providing an affirmation that *'you've actually learnt something'* (PR9/15) and *'how you have grown through the internship'* (PR3/14). The findings suggested a need for assessments that encourage reflexivity, which is criterion 3 in the AAF framework (Bosco & Fern, 2014). One pre-internship participant anticipated the effectiveness of keeping a reflective journal:

'Without assessments, I wouldn't really pay much attention to personal growth. Obviously, I would know whether I am more competent at the end but I would not personally reflect on how it has changed ... Keeping a journal of what's happening might also be better for personal problem solving as well ...' (PR5/14)

The effectiveness of assessments was further influenced by how authentic or relevant the assessment tasks were perceived. The findings revealed preference for assessment tasks explicitly resembling the real world. One pre-internship student commented on the authenticity of the assessment: *'It depends on the relevance of the assignments to the actual internship, and not just more learning about the concepts'* (PR7/15). Pre-internship participants also expressed concerns about the clarity around expected competencies and how assessments were evaluated. One participant commented:

'I think it would be better if [the university] gave us certain competencies that we had to tick off whilst we were working such that you clearly know what to do. Also, this makes it clearer for the hotels to know what exactly you need to accomplish'. (PR9/15)

These findings were in line with prior authentic assessment research that underlines the importance of having a clear task description (Lasen et al., 2018) and assessment criteria (Gulikers et al., 2004). The findings also suggest that authenticity can be improved when the assessment task is designed to explicitly direct students to performance that encourages the application of knowledge to practice and relates clearly to competencies that are valued in the workplace. Assessment tasks explicitly targeting the development of graduate attributes and key employability skills can enhance the development of work-ready skills desired by industry and at the same time increase the perceived authenticity of assessment tasks by the student.

The post-internship groups affirmed positive elements of authentic assessments during the internship. In particular, students perceived assessment tasks that were more intricately aligned to practice (e.g., Task 3: reflective journal) to be more authentic, than those that had a higher level of theoretical application (e.g., Task 2: the project). Congruent with the pre-internship group, the reflective assessment was emphasised by post-internship students as most beneficial because it helped make sense of their internship experience. The reflective journal equipped students with *'the ability to go back and revisit that situation and think about the right decisions and what did I do wrong'* (PO2/13). Students also found reflections valuable in

clarifying thoughts about professional identities. The findings provided evidence of how reflexivity in authentic assessments (Bosco & Ferns, 2014) facilitates the transformation of experience and creates changes in actual practice (Kolb, 1984).

On the contrary, the project, which focused on higher order cognitive skills (criterion 2 in AAF), was viewed by the students as less authentic and misaligned with actual practice in the workplace. Participants preferred assessment tasks that provided '*opportunities you would only get in the real world*' (PO8/15) as opposed to '*having to do a literature review*' (PO6/14), which was perceived as '*all about theory*' (PO4/14). Furthermore, the participants believed that the project required managerial knowledge, but most interns were employed in frontline positions. Therefore, students felt they did not have '*that kind of [managerial] inside view*' (PO10/15), which made it '*very hard to do the project... and link to the management perspective*' (PO6/14). However, students who were assigned to managerial positions were able to approach the task holistically and reap benefits from the task:

'I feel that I did add value to the company report. I was part of a management team and we came up with solutions to a problem. Yes, I think it is useful to do a project on a hotel that I worked for because it is based on your work. You don't have to spend extra hours on it as you are already thinking about [it] while working.' (PO4/14).

This comment provides an example of a complete EL process, moving from concrete experience, abstract conceptualisation to active implementation (Kolb, 1984), facilitated by the internship learning project. The finding also showed that students might perceive the authenticity, relevance and effectiveness of the same assessment differently due to different positions and social context within which the internship takes place.

The insights into which assessment tasks were perceived as meaningful and which ones contributed most to student learning proved useful in informing improvements in assessment design (see Table 1 & Table 3). Overall, students appreciated most the assessment tasks that

provided them with an explicit opportunity to ‘learning by doing’. Specifically, students perceived Task 1 favourably, appreciating the involvement in workplace identification and selection. It was surprising that, although alignment with AAF for Task 2 was high, students perceived this task as the most problematic and in need of improvement, suggesting that assessment tasks judged as high in authenticity during assessment development may not necessarily be fit-for-purpose. Task 3 was the most appreciated and viewed as best suited for personal and professional self-development. Educator feedback on early reflective pieces was deemed beneficial in culturing critical analysis and reflective practice. The integration of key stakeholders in the employer evaluation (Task 4) was appreciated by students and the involvement of these key audiences mitigated issues of validity and reliability that may impact workplace supervisor ratings.

Theme 2: Work-Study-Life Balance

The second theme revealed the influence of assessments on the students’ work-study-life balance. The findings revealed that doing assessments during internships, albeit being perceived as a valuable learning experience, was quite stressful for most students in the already stressful hospitality work environment (Goh & Okumus, 2020; Goh & Lee, 2018; Robinson et al., 2016). Predominately in the pre-internship focus groups, the students were excited and positive, yet apprehensive about the impending experience. There were expressions of optimism such as *‘I think most of the assignments are manageable...I think we should be able to do them [along] with work’* (PR3/14) but also recognising that *‘at the same time it could be a little full on ... and can be a little overwhelming’* (PR7/15).

At the post-internship stage, there was affirmation of the challenges presented with time management and adjusting to the nature of hospitality work while doing assessments. Some participants mentioned that *‘assignments could drive me crazy at some stages, especially the*

reports...*I would often just go blank*' (PO6/14), *'it's so hard*' (PO2/13) working and doing assessments, because *'being in the hospitality industry you have to be there whenever they need you to work*' (PO8/15). The participants highlighted the identity struggles in which they felt they needed to be both student and employee and identified the challenges in balancing the two identities. This dual identity sometimes leads to conflicting priorities. For example, one post-internship participant commented:

'You get carried away working full-time and then, you've got a couple of days to do your assignments. Suddenly, you are called in to do some extra shifts. This puts behind your assessment schedule but you can't turn your manager down as this could affect his overall evaluation on your performance.' (PO8/15)

On the other hand, getting into the frame of mind to tackle assessment tasks deterred students from the purpose of *'being employees'*:

'When you are working you are feeling like...oh my God, I need to have lots of energy so that when I go home I can do my assignment so you kind of pressure yourself when you're at work thinking that you have to do the assignment after your shift work.' (PO4/14)

One participant summed up the stressful nature of doing assessments while working full-time:

'Doing assessments was pretty challenging especially in an industry where, you're not expected to, but you are more than likely going to do more than eight hours a day... It's hard to do 12 hour days, 5 or 6 days a week. Then on your day off you have to scan through articles to find useful information to use, and write a decent assignment to hand in. It's not impossible, I mean we've all done it, but it still is quite difficult to manage.' (PO6/14)

The findings highlight the need to prepare students to handle assessments during internship. The hospitality workplace presents a variable physical and social context (Gulikers et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2016) that will influence the assessment process and students' perceptions towards these processes. Further, the nature of work in the hospitality industry presents occupational challenges and often results in burnout (Farmaki, 2018). A study by Wang, Chiang and Lee (2014) found students in the student-to-staff transition phase often suffer from anxiety. Koc (2018) found that 63.4% of such students face occasional social avoidance and 54% face mild social anxiety. The current study shows that students on internship are not immune to the challenge of work-life balance, and that the inclusion of assessments tasks during internship exacerbates this situation to work-study-life balance and may prevent students from achieving maximum learning benefits.

Theme 3: Industry Involvement

Specific to this study and as highlighted in Table 1, industry involvement was integrated into assessment design. High level of involvement was required in the project (Task 2) and the employer evaluation (Task 4). The pre-internship groups expected industry professionals to provide support as it had been outlined in the WIL assessment guides. Students anticipated that *'there will be opportunity to work with mentors on our projects'* (PR3/14), and that *'maybe we will get project ideas from the hotel manager...they might guide us knowing we are interns'* (PR1/13). There was optimism that industry professionals would be available so that *'you can pick their brain...before you go into your assessments, so you are more comfortable, more confident when you are doing them...'* (PR7/15).

Post-internship discussions highlighted the different experiences in terms of assessment support that students obtained from the industry. The level of support was dependant on the company and individual contexts. For example, there were students who perceived receiving

adequate support as they were given *'insight into tasks I needed to do'* (PO2/13) and *'a good understanding of the company that helped me with my project'* (PO8/15). In particular, projects undertaken together with industry professionals where the assessment outcomes would mutually benefit the organisation were perceived as more valuable:

'For my project I joined a team in the hotel... and the operation manager worked together with us. We focused on the guest experience index survey and grouped the good and bad comments. We then formulated recommendations on how to improve future hotel guest experience... It was really good'. (PO2/13)

However, our findings also indicated student dissatisfaction with the engagement and interaction from industry mentors. The data revealed that inadequate attention was given despite efforts from students to involve practitioners in their assessment activities. One student expressed that *'my mentor didn't really know anything about my project'* (PO2/13). There were also doubts about whether the industry professionals held good topical knowledge on the projects selected by students, with students expressing that discussions with their mentor *'didn't make any difference [to the report]'* (PO10/15). Others suggested they received inadequate support and *'it would have been nice... to get more support from my mentor...and see their perspectives [on the report]'* (PO8/15). One student summed up the lack of support with the following comment:

'The hotel did not care much about my assignment...it was more important for the hotel to see you communicating with the guests...but if you talk about a literature review on communications, that won't make any difference to them'. (PO6/14)

Industry professionals play a significant role in assisting student to bridge the gaps between theory and practice (Nghia & Duyen, 2019). This interaction encourages

contextualisation of learning and assists students to transform industry perspectives into intended EL outcomes through completing the assessments. While active participation from industry professionals enhances student learning and performance with assessments, the effect is dependent on the level of support and involvement. The value of industry involvement can be restricted if students encounter challenges with industry support in helping them to relate and apply theory to real-world situations (Dagsland, Mykletun & Einarsen, 2015).

There was little mention of the grading process, suggesting that this aspect of the assessment design had little impact on the students' perception towards assessment effectiveness. In summary, findings indicate that the perceived level of authenticity of each assessment task, the ability of students to manage the assessment load within individual social contexts, and the perception of adequate support received influenced most the students' perception of assessment efficacy and the overall level of authenticity. Table 3 summarises the student perceptions of assessment quality and outlines proposed improvements on assessment design based on the current study's findings and good practice from literature (ACEN, n.d.; Bosco & Ferns, 2014; Gulikers et al., 2008; Lasen et al., 2018).

Table 3: Student perception of assessment tasks and proposed improvements

Assessment tasks and weightings	Student perception of assessment quality	Proposed improvements to assessment design
Task 1: Internship proposal – 10%	Assessment task perceived as appropriate - involvement in workplace identification appreciated	- Integrate active engagement with workplace to ensure student-organisation fit
Task 2: Internship learning report (the project) – 40%	Assessment task perceived as in need of improvement - Practical component of the project appreciated but not the	- Recognise and close competency gaps in students e.g.

	<p>requirement for a literature review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessment objectives perceived as misaligned due to variability of workplaces - Lack of adequate support from industry mentors experienced 	<p>ability to apply theory to practice; enhanced reflective practice skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider how equitable the assessment task is across variable contexts from both theoretical and practical perspectives. - Conduct orientation and training of industry mentors and supervisors
Task 3: Reflective journals – 30%	<p>Assessment task perceived as most appropriate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High personal and professional self-development appreciated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give and receive early and timely feedback
Task 4: Employer evaluation (10%) and student’s reflective commentary (10%) – 20%	<p>Assessment task perceived as appropriate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involvement of key stakeholders in assessment appreciated - Opportunity to reflect on employer evaluation and level of personal and professional development appreciated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage engagement and interaction from industry mentors to facilitate valid and reliable evaluations - Provide opportunity for critical reflection on attainment of graduate attributes and industry relevant skills

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the pivotal role of assessments in WIL through internships. Internships are a valuable aspect of hospitality and tourism education, and assessments are a major conduit through which intended learning outcomes are affirmed. Despite such

importance, limited research has investigated the assessment component of EL and much less in internship. The current study addresses this knowledge gap by adopting an assessment partnership approach (Lasen et al., 2018) to investigate how students perceive the effectiveness, authenticity and challenges of assessments during internships. By understanding the perspective of students, educators are in a better position to identify areas that require concerted efforts and interventions to improve the assessment experience during internships. Such targeted interventions may prove effective in ensuring the EL outcomes anticipated from internships are achieved.

A key contribution of this study is the use of assessments designed according to Bosco and Ferns' (2014) Authentic Assessment Framework, and how the perceptions of students on doing assessments during the internship can lead to improvements in assessment processes. The findings reflect the growth and development that students can attain from authentic assessment tasks undertaken during internships. In particular, the study contributes to existing literature by providing evidence of how authentic assessments facilitate students to progress through Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, where students transform concrete experience into a higher level of understanding that informs action. Based on the findings, it is recommended that authentic assessment tasks become an integral part of hospitality and tourism internships. The pertinent focus should be on the authenticity and relevance of the assessments, and the articulation of the intended purposes to all stakeholders involved, including students and industry partners. More importantly, educators must provide clear guidance to students about how the assessment tasks contribute to their overall learning, and how industry mentors can facilitate this process.

Practical implications

The study presents several recommendations to design more effective assessments for internship programs. In line with prior research (Bosco & Ferns, 2014; Gulikers et al. 2008), the findings suggest that students may perceive the level of authenticity and effectiveness of the same assessment differently, depending on the physical and social context within which the internship takes place. Further, assessments judged as highly authentic by assessment designers may not be perceived as authentic by students. This varied perception about the authenticity in the assessment task aligns with Bosco and Ferns' (2014) assertion that authentic assessments can be moving targets if not given diligent consideration within assessment design. A simple solution will be for educators to ensure that assessment learning outcomes are clearly cascaded from course learning outcomes to unit learning outcomes to assessment learning outcomes.

Furthermore, prior research cautioned that the acquisition of knowledge can be lower in an EL setting (Maier & Thomas, 2013). This aligns with the findings in this study, which show that students tend to devalue assessment tasks that involve a literature review and associated theoretical application. Therefore, finding the right balance between theoretical and practical components of authentic assessments remains a challenge in assessment design (Lei et al., 2015). Although it is tempting to steer away from theories and literature reviews to keep students happy, educators can be creative in applying exploratory literature reviews in specific areas that relates to a practical problem. For example, asking students to search for articles relating to workplace sustainability and assess how their interned hotels are adhering to sustainability issues (Goh, Muskat & Tan, 2017).

The key is to ensure WIL assessment tasks demonstrate relevance, flexibility and opportunity for feedback (Lason et al., 2018). The quality of WIL assessment design needs to be of high standard targeting multifaceted experiential learning, involving engagement with key stakeholders (including industry partners and students) earlier on from assessment

conceptualisation to implementation, and encouraging high quality intellectual engagement with the assessment. This can form part of the agenda during student interviews prior to signing an internship work contract, thus ensuring that both employers and students feel comfortable about the placement and assessment requirements.

In particular, assessment design should take into consideration how students feel their learning can best be assessed. Engaging students as active partners addresses the emancipatory knowledge constitutive interest (Habermas, 1972) where students have control over how they will be evaluated and the conditions and context of an assessment during internship. What students do in practice need to be central to the assessment task, as this is what will demonstrate relevance from the student's perspective. At the same time, the assessment tasks need to ensure students are achieving intended learning outcomes.

In general, assessment tasks that are perceived as more authentic and relevant can lead to deeper levels of learning. Also, given the variability of internship experiences, creating relevant assessment tasks that capture the intricacies of each intern's learning experience can be challenging. Therefore, educators must identify and devise a strategic approach to authentic assessment that can be adapted to different workplace contexts. For example, students can be involved in the design of their own assignments such as identifying a problem in the workplace and developing practical solutions to improve the business performance of the hotel, or even interviewing the General Manager of the hotel to understand leadership traits and how different leadership styles can be used to motivate employees. Nevertheless, the extent of "emancipation" or flexibility to facilitate authentic and reflective learning without jeopardising fairness with assessment warrants further discussion.

A further implication for practice is the preparation of students prior to internships. More focus should be given on the social and personal dimensions of doing assessments during internships. Competing work, study and life demands can impede the completion of assessment

tasks and may prevent students from achieving maximum learning benefits. This may even lead to academic misconduct such as plagiarism (Goh, 2015; 2013) due to external pressures. Furthermore, if students are disengaged with their working environment, patterns of deviant behaviour such as employee theft could arise (Goh & Kong, 2018). Challenges with work-study-life balance as experienced by students should be addressed as part of internship inductions to create awareness of the issues and prompt mitigating strategies. During pre-internship inductions, students must be made aware of coping mechanisms offered by the university to assist students better assimilate into their roles as both full-time interns and students. To achieve the ethos of assessment for learning, assessment design should take into consideration the social context and ensure that the assessment tasks are directly relevant to the internship experience so that the assessment will not be perceived as a burden.

There is also a crucial need to enhance and further clarify the involvement of industry partners in the assessment process. Collaborative efforts between industry and educators can achieve reciprocal and mutually beneficial outcomes where key graduate attributes and employability skills are enhanced. Through well-coordinated WIL that adopt innovative authentic assessment initiatives, students can develop and maximise their work-ready skills. This involvement is particularly critical given the immersive nature of a full-time internship. Many employers have little training in assessment practices (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2012), and lack adequate resources to engage fully in the assessment processes (Sauder, Mudrick, Strassle, Maitoza, Malcarne & Evans, 2019). However, industry practitioners have HR skills and capabilities that provide a fundamental competency base for assessing key graduate attributes and employability skills relevant for industry. Formal and informal strategies between educators and industry mentors to build upon these competencies and facilitate comprehensive learning processes is essential. These strategies could include educators initiating and maintaining regular communication with industry partners. Industry mentors must also be

provided with both mentorship and train-the-trainer guidelines, which can equip them with competencies to more effectively engage in the assessment process with interns. Another recommendation could be to maintain an optional diary of events by both students and industry mentors to increase accountability and engagement during the assessment process.

Limitations and future research

The participants for this study were limited to students enrolled in a hospitality program in an Australian university. Therefore, the ability to generalise these findings to other institutions or larger populations may be limited. Second, the current study is limited to students' perception of assessments within an internship program. However, it does not objectively assess how these assessment tasks affect the performance and actions of students who participated in the WIL experience and their actual behaviour in their future employment upon graduation. Further longitudinal study is warranted to track the effect of assessments within the internship program on student performance in the workplace that extends beyond graduation.

This study suggests future research be conducted to examine students as active stakeholders during assessment design processes to legitimise the purpose of assessment in developing life-long learners. When students are engaged as active partners in directing their own learning assessments in relation to specific learning outcomes, their reflections on learning and conversations about progress with both educators and industry partners may become deeper and more meaningful. Nevertheless, this proposition needs to be validated by further research, especially one that investigates the correlation between the level of student engagement in assessment design and learning outcomes. Finally, it would be valuable to include industry practitioners' input on assessment design to deepen industry involvement in

facilitating student learning and optimising the learning outcomes of future internship programs.

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