LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO OFFICE MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY STUDENTS DURING WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CURRICULUM

By

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DECLARATION

I, Thobekile Octavia Mkhize wish to declare that this dissertation is my own work and it has not been submitted for any other qualification to any other higher education institution except at the Durban University of Technology. All sources used in this study were acknowledged.

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ABSTRACT

The secretarial/administrative profession is faced with the challenge of rapid advancement in office technology, organisational restructuring and changes in the global economy. This challenge does not only affect employees who are already working as secretaries/administrative staff in the workplace, it also affects institutions of higher education and students who are studying towards an administrative profession. This requires both the institutions of higher education and industry to better prepare students to meet the requirements of the workplace.

Given this background, this study examines the current status of the Office Management and Technology curriculum to discover whether it meets the demands of the workplace. The study also investigates learning opportunities offered to Office Management & Technology (OMT) students during Work-integrated Learning (WIL) and the implications for the curriculum, with the aim of improving both classroom learning and workplace learning, and to suggest improvements in the OMT curriculum in Universities of Technology (UoTs).

This study investigates and provides information on the skills, attributes and competencies OMT graduates are required to possess in the 21st century world of work. It therefore provides the departments of office technology in UoT's with an in-depth study of the strengths and weaknesses of their current curriculum so that improvement can be implemented wherever necessary. This study is a case study that involves Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) and Durban University of Technology (DUT). The method used was very largely a quantitative method because it was based purely on questionnaires, however, there was a small qualitative element which grew up on the open ended questions. The qualitative questions were used to provide participants with an opportunity to express their own opinions and to clarify the quantitative data within the questionnaire. The study utilised two sets of questionnaires which were distributed to two different groups within the targeted population – to industry supervisors who supervise OMT students at DUT and MUT, and to third year OMT students from MUT who underwent work integrated learning in 2015.

The study shows that the current OMT curriculum is reasonably well in line with core industry needs. However, there was evidence that improvement is needed in both

classroom learning and in workplace learning. The study also revealed new skills and attributes that need to be incorporated in OMT curriculum in order to be more responsive and relevant in the 21st century world of work. The study recommends that the Office Management and Technology curriculum should be reviewed regularly and that both university and industry should play a significant role in better preparing students to meet the requirements of the workplace.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research project to:

God Almighty, my creator and my pillar. I also dedicate this work to my late mom Mrs T.P Mkhize for raising me. I know you would have been proud of me.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF APPENDICES **PAGE**

LIST OF FIGURES **PAGE**

LIST OF TABLES **PAGE**

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CHE	Council on Higher Education
DUT	Durban University of Technology
HE	Higher Education
IAAP	International Association of Administrative Professionals
KZN	KwaZulu Natal
MUT	Mangosuthu University of Technology
OMT	Office Management and Technology
OMTP	Office Management and Technology Practice
PSETA	Public Sector for Education and Training Authority
QMD	Quality Management Directorate
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UoT	University of Technology
WIL	Work Integrated Learning

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND THE BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This project was concerned with the issue of preparing students to be work ready through both classroom learning and workplace learning. It explains and recognises the importance of Work Integrated Learning (WIL), particularly in Universities of Technology, and the issue of aligning university curricula with the current needs of an industry. This chapter will therefore explain briefly the research methods used in conducting this study. It will also give definitions and clarifications of terms used, discusses the conceptual framework, and gives an outline of the dissertation chapters.

1.2 DEFINITIONS AND CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

This section provides the definition of terms relevant to this study.

1.2.1 Work integrated learning

Coll & Eames, 2004; Little & Harvey, 2006; Martin, Fleming, Ferkins, Wiersma & Coll, 2010 cited in Martin, Rees and Edwards 2011: 7 explain that Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is a structured educational strategy, which aims to merge theoretical knowledge gained in academic studies into workplace experiences by developing relevant professional skills in preparation for future career opportunities.

1.2.2 Curriculum

According to the Rhodes University policy document on curriculum development and review (1998:1) “the term curriculum is generally used to refer to the syllabus – the list of subjects, topics and the text included in a course of study. It also incorporates subject content and skills, the manner of teaching and assessment that is followed, the philosophical outlook of the teacher and who the learners are”.

1.2.3 Globalisation

Globalisation is the process by which the world is becoming increasingly interconnected as a result of massively increased trade and cultural exchange. The

biggest companies are no longer national firms but multinational corporations with subsidiaries in many countries (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2014).

1.2.4 Technology

The term ‘technology’ is defined as the tools, machines, equipment, and devices that aid human beings in numerous activities, especially work (OpenStax CNX, 2012).

1.2.5 Skills

According to the Business Dictionary (2017) skills are an ability and capacity acquired through deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to smoothly and adaptively carry out complex activities or job functions involving ideas (cognitive skills), things (technical skills), and/or people (interpersonal skills).

1.2.6 Administrative assistant

An administrative assistant is a person employed to aid an executive, as in a corporate department, by coordinating such office services and procedures as the supervision, maintenance, and control of the flow of work and programs, personnel, budgeting, records, etc., for the entire department (Business Dictionary, 2017).

1.3 CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

Institutions of higher education are faced with the challenge of rapid advancement in technology, organisational restructuring and globalisation in business. These challenges increase the difficulties involved in producing the kinds of graduates needed by employers in this constantly changing world of work. Concerns are often raised by employers about the type of graduates produced by universities in terms of skills and competencies. Therefore, universities need to look carefully at their curriculum to ensure that it is aligned with the current needs of the industry for the benefit of both students and employers. Given these realities, this research project was intended to assess the preparation of Office Management and Technology students for the world of work in both classroom based learning and work based learning.

The National Diploma: Office Management and Technology (ND: OMT) is offered by several Universities of Technology in South Africa on both a full time and part time basis. This qualification was previously offered as the ‘National Diploma: Business

Administration' in the early 1990's, and was then later referred to as 'National Diploma: Commercial Administration'. In 2003, the qualification's name was changed to 'National Diploma in Office Administration'. The Office Management and Technology department in some universities is called the 'Office Technology Department' and in others the 'Office Management and Technology Department'.

The Department of Office Management and Technology, at Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) offers a three-year diploma in Office Management and Technology (OMT). The OMT diploma is intended for those students wishing to become administrative assistants at an intermediate level in any sector of the economy. The OMT programme structure includes studies in the field of business administration, information administration, communication, legal practice, human resource management, mercantile law and financial accounting. The course aims to produce graduates with professional administrative and communication skills who are a marketable product and fully capable of performing administrative office duties.

According to the MUT website the mission of this department is 'to meet the needs of its students by offering high quality, relevant, up-to-date programmes, which cover the needs of the fast-paced world of electronic commerce'. For the department to achieve its vision and mission, it needs therefore to also keep up with the latest knowledge and technology. This requires the OMT curriculum to be reviewed regularly in order to align it with industry needs. Utoware and Amiaya (2014:41) indicate that the quality of training given to individuals passing through a practical course should be such that can give adequate skills and information needed in the real world sense. These researchers also state that, if business education is to serve this purpose of providing for the needs of the learners and of society, there should be a continuous review of the curriculum in order to ensure that the quality of education provided is in line with societal demands.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many recent studies have shown that the issue of advancement in office technology and other skills necessitated by the prevalence of global markets have had a positive as well as a negative impact on the administrative profession (Onifade 2009; Utoware and Amiaya 2014; Sudarto 2008 and Azuka 2009). This challenge does not only affect secretaries in the workplace, it also affects institutions of higher education and

students who are studying towards the Office Management and Technology profession. Discussions with previous OMT students who have undergone WIL, and their mentors/supervisors, indicated to the researcher that there is a skills gap in the OMT curriculum which results in students failing to perform effectively during WIL and also being underprepared for the world of work.

The first new challenge of today's secretary is acquiring those high-level skills, knowledge and personal attributes without which they are not competitive, as the business world is getting more demanding and employers are becoming selective. Most executives now need fewer but better qualified secretaries. In this situation, a high level of administrative competence, or administrative professionalism, is the most likely key to success in the workplace (Sudarto, 2008).

1.5 THE PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is therefore to examine the current status of the Office Management and Technology (OMT) curriculum to discover whether it meets the demands of the workplace. By identifying potential gaps in the curriculum, and in the WIL programme, it is hoped that Universities of Technology will have a better understanding of what is required for the mutual benefit of students and employers.

The objectives of this study are:

- To assess the students' experience of WIL.
- To identify any skills gaps in the Office Management and Technology curriculum and any areas requiring development.
- To investigate the learning opportunities offered to OMT students during WIL.

The critical questions are the following:

- What administrative skills are in demand by today's employers?
- What learning opportunities are offered to OMT students prior to going on WIL?
- Is the OMT course content and curriculum in line with industry needs?
- Are the students given sufficiently demanding tasks during WIL?

1.6 RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH

In South Africa, work integrated learning programmes are used by all Universities of Technology with the aim of improving employability of graduates and preparing them for the world of work. However, it should be noted that there are OMT courses in UoT's which have not yet engaged in WIL programme. WIL provides students with the opportunity to apply the theory they learn in class to practice in the real work environment. It involves both classroom learning and workplace learning. Du Pré (2009:25) states that the principal advantage of having WIL in educational programmes is that students gain experience in a professional field during their formal studies and begin working life with some knowledge of the marketplace, and of organisational structures and employers' expectations. This author (2009:37) also sees the main characteristic of a university of technology as the relevance of its curricula and research programmes, which are related to the problems and concerns of industry, the community and society at large, while Azuka (2009:197) states that the realities of the current job market require institutions to do their own curriculum research and development in collaboration with the industry on a continuous basis.

Although Universities have for a long time incorporated WIL in their curricula as a means to enhance employability, it is also known that graduates continue to lack some of the necessary skills and competencies once they are employed. For instance, Mhlongo (2014:1) finds that higher educational institutions can be criticised for failing to produce graduates with the necessary skills to meet the needs of corporate business. Also the global nature of business, ongoing technological advances, and rapidly changing knowledge, all make it difficult for universities to produce the graduates employers want. The focus of this study was therefore on investigating to what extent students are being prepared according to the current needs of employers. This will enable UoTs identify gaps in the OMT curriculum, and for the course content and curriculum to be developed accordingly.

Every year, third year OMT students at Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) and at Durban University of Technology (DUT) undertake twelve weeks of Work-Integrated Learning with local companies. The researcher has been told by previous OMT students who have undergone WIL, and by their work supervisors, that there remains a skills gap in the present OMT curriculum. Students particularly spoke about

their concern that they are not sufficiently exposed to different kinds of office equipment, employing the latest technology, before they undergo WIL. Daniel and Amiaya (2013) concur that a worthwhile curriculum of business education should provide learning experiences that will equip the graduate with requisite competencies in the use of the latest modern office technology. On the other hand, Donkor, Nsoh and Mitchual (2009:01) argue that "technologies keep on changing almost on a daily basis making it difficult for educational institutions to acquire all the necessary machines and equipment required for the training of their students". This paper indicates that within a changing economy business education students should be trained as far as is possible to meet the new market demands.

The source of inspiration for embarking on this study is the fact that the researcher is a lecturer in the OMT field in one of the Universities and she has noticed these problems and challenges. The study was therefore undertaken in order to examine the current status of the OMT curriculum with the aim of contributing in the achievement of the goals for the department. Particular attention was given to the learning opportunities offered during Work-Integrated Learning. The study focused on third year students who underwent WIL at MUT during 2015. The study also involved questioning the supervisors of WIL students from both MUT and DUT.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative method approach, however, there was also a small qualitative element which grew up from open ended questions in order to allow the researcher both to access the ideas of a large number of members of the population (through the quantitative approach) and, at the same time, to get rich personal opinions and insights from students and supervisors in their studies/work lives and from their WIL experiences. Questionnaires were used as the principal tool to collect data in this research project. Both closed and open-ended questions were used in the questionnaires to provide respondents with the opportunity to raise issues which the researcher may not have considered but that could be useful for the study. The target population was both the body of supervisors in private and public companies around KwaZulu-Natal where third year OMT students from both MUT and DUT underwent

work integrated learning in 2015, and the body of third year students who underwent WIL training in that year – but in this case only one university (MUT) was involved[1].

In the study, non-probability, convenience, sampling was used. Questionnaires were distributed by email to 80 industry supervisors around KwaZulu-Natal and 58 responded. Students' questionnaires were distributed to them personally in class at MUT. From the total of 106 students who did WIL in 2015, 98 students responded to the survey, the other students being absent on that day. All the questionnaires were accompanied by a covering letter explaining the aims of the study and assuring respondents of the confidentiality of the information.

1.8 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

It is anticipated that the findings of this research will benefit employers, lecturers in the Office Management and Technology department, and students studying towards the administrative profession in various ways. Employers should benefit by having better skilled and more work-ready employees and may also save on training. Lecturers will become more fully informed of the current skills needed in today's business office, and also be made aware of the curriculum areas that need improvement. Students will be trained more closely in accord with the needs of the industry, and consequently should possess greater employability skills and be able to function more effectively in the workplace.

The improvement in OMT curriculum and in students' performance can be achieved by getting feedback in the form of comments, complaints or suggestions from supervisors where students are given WIL experience. From the positive or negative feedback, the OMT department can gain an in-depth view of its strengths and weaknesses so that improvements can be implemented and good aspects strengthened wherever this is necessary. This will enable the course content and curriculum to be planned according to the demands by today's employers. This should help lecturers to develop the most innovative and appropriate ways to prepare students before they undergo Work-Integrated Learning. By so doing the department of OMT will be in a better position to produce graduates with up-to-date professional

[1] The original intention was to involve DUT students as well – but the timing of their WIL practice presented difficulties and it was decided to limit student respondents to MUT where the researcher is employed. The wide range of supervisors representing both universities however provided additional strength to the data.

administrative skills who are a marketable product and who enhance the reputation of the university, increasing its ability to be seen as an institution of choice in this field – and at the same time increasing the chances that employers will seek students from these institutions. Kheswa and Du Preez (2017:50) conclude that “consistently improving the curriculum and creating opportunities for exposure to real life situation is an investment in student development”.

1.9 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study was confined to companies around KwaZulu-Natal where third year Office Management and Technology students from two universities of technology in Durban underwent work integrated learning in 2015. The study did not include companies situated in other provinces. Although this study was a case study of two universities in KwaZulu-Natal, the findings from this study will be of relevance to universities of technology in other provinces as they also follow the same processes and procedures.

1.10 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Branch (1995 cited in Dube 2001:38) defines theory as an idea or set of ideas based on facts and observations in order to explain phenomenon, or opinions and suppositions about phenomena which have yet to be disproved. Work integrated learning is based on the theory of active and experimental learning, where learners transition from visualising and listening to actually attempting to ‘do’ what they are being taught (Kolb 1984; Bonwell and Eison 1991 cited in Jackson 2014: 3). It is believed that human beings learn better by doing. Therefore, work integrated learning provides students with an opportunity to be actively involved in the real work environment and experience what they are being taught. Kolb (1984 cited in Lee 2006:3) explaines that there are four stages of learning: (a) experience, which leads to (b) observation and (c) reflection, which leads to the development of new ideas and (d) experimentation, which leads to further experience.

1.11 STRUCTURE OF THESIS CHAPTERS

This study is divided into six chapters:

Chapter One provides the context of the study, definitions and clarification of concepts, and includes a statement of the research problem, purpose and objectives of the study, and critical research questions. The outline of the study, with details of each chapter, is also provided.

Chapter Two provides a literature review covering scholarly articles on work integrated learning practices and aligning university curriculum with current industry needs. This gives a background to the study. Various articles within the administrative field were also discussed to give an overview of the administrative profession and to determine the skills and competencies which recent research has shown to be required of students in the 21st century. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section provides an overview of administrative professionals and the review of the 21st century skills and competencies. The second section reviews the literature on Work Integrated Learning, the third section reviews the literature on curriculum alignment and the fourth is a review of the literature pertaining to the conceptual framework.

Chapter Three explains the research methodology used in this study, which includes the sampling method, questionnaire design, data collection method and data analysis techniques.

Chapter Four provides the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings for the study gathered from industry supervisors. The chapter responds to the question from the supervisors' questionnaire while Chapter Five provides the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings gathered from third year students from MUT and responds to the question on learning opportunities offered to students during workplace learning. This chapter also addresses challenges faced by students when participating in WIL programme.

Chapter Six is the final chapter of this study. This chapter concludes the research report by explaining how each objective was achieved and how each research question was answered. Recommendations for the development of OMT curriculum and WIL programme in both classroom and workplace learning are presented.

Conclusions, limitations and suggestions for future research are also discussed in this chapter.

1.12 CONCLUSION

This is the introductory chapter - it describes the type of research activities carried out in this study; the rationale for undertaking the study; the research objectives and the theoretical framework. This chapter also outlines the breakdown of chapters within the dissertation. The following chapter discusses the literature review.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A literature review is defined by Major and Savin-Baden (2010 in Mhlongo 2014: 9) as a critical overview of the relevant literature, in order to identify the current state of knowledge of a given topic and this chapter will provide a discussion of the recent literature published in the field which relates to the study. Some internally produced curriculum documents are also discussed.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section provides an overview of administrative professionals and a review of the literature relating to 21st century skills and competencies. The second section reviews the literature on Work Integrated Learning (WIL), the third reviews the literature on curriculum alignment, and the fourth is a review of the literature pertaining to the conceptual framework.

2.2 OVERVIEW OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS

Administrative professionals can be regarded as the backbone of any organisation, providing support at all levels of the organisation. Without them an organisation cannot function efficiently. According to the benchmarking survey by the International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP) (2013), these employees are the hub of any office and help business happen around the world. They are a significant point-of-contact for customers, co-workers, managers, executives and shareholders. Fulton-Calkins, Rankin and Shumack (2014:4) state that office workers are respected and valued in business, industry, government, education, law, medicine, science, and the arts. They explain that employees throughout the organisation rely on administrative assistants to keep offices organised and operating efficiently. Stroman, Wilson and Wauson (2014:3) add that administrative assistants act as a liaison between their managers and the rest of the company.

The International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP) (cited in Fulton-Calkins 2007:13) defines an administrative professional as an individual who possesses a mastery of office skills, demonstrates the ability to assume responsibility

without direct supervision, exercises initiative and judgement, and makes decisions within the scope of assigned authority. According to Cooperman (2009:15) an office employee needs to be a well-rounded individual who possesses the skills and personal traits required to succeed in today's office environment.

2.2.1 Changes in administrative professional roles and responsibilities

Several decades ago, the secretary's role was limited to answering the phone, greeting visitors, typing, filing, handling correspondence, scheduling meetings and making tea and coffee. Traditional senior secretaries were also expected to possess high-level shorthand and typing skills, and to have very good human and public relations skills. They often also had to be knowledgeable in bookkeeping and accounting. The skills and competencies required of traditional secretaries were however limited to within this range. While these skills are still required, constant technological advances and the globalisation of business has meant that their roles and responsibilities have changed and expanded. In the modern workplace, an administrative job has become very complex and dynamic while the responsibilities of administrative assistants have extended to things that were previously handled by managerial staff. They are now often expected to create documents using page layout skills, to troubleshoot problems using peripheral equipment (i.e monitor, printer, keyboard, hard drive, mouse scanner, etc.); to use project management software, design websites, manage budgets, manage social media, create presentations for meetings, train other staff, review resumes and interview candidates. As reported in the White Paper (America 2014: 1) "in today's business, administrators are taking on roles more similar to a management level employee. In addition to their clerical and office management skills, they are required to manage budgets, give business presentations and be innovative with business solutions".

The report by the American Society of Administrative Professionals (2014) states that "we are no longer the 9-5, type a memo and answer the phone, secretaries we once were". Secretaries have become business partners to the executive and within executive teams a senior secretary will often assume the role of project manager and even of chief of staff. According to the report (Office Team, 2015) the roles of administrative assistants have evolved from conquering spread sheets and memos to include areas such as accounting, payroll and Human Resource applications. Cooperman (2009:4) states that today's administrative assistants make decisions,

plan job tasks, and accept responsibility in addition to performing many other traditional duties. The implications of this increasingly demanding status must require specialised training within the workplace which could not be replicated adequately in the university lecture environment. Making a success of this will therefore require improved Work Integrated Learning systems.

2.2.2 The need for new technological skills

Several years ago Hartman *et al.* (2005) noted that one of the very important factors that was changing the profile of the new entry-level office administrator was the impact of rapidly changing technology. The rapid pace of change in the modern workplace has increased the need for graduates with high level of skills and competencies. As discussed below, many employers now expect graduates to demonstrate proficiency in a variety of technical spheres. This means that in order to stay competitive graduates are required to have strong technological skills and be able to adapt to new tools and trends. However, concerns have been raised by employers about a gap between graduates' skills and what industry requires. Chetty (2012:10) explains that these skills are currently described as either "hard", when they are associated with subject-specific knowledge, or as "soft", "generic", "transferable", "core" or "key" when they refer to the ability to do something based more on attitude or behaviour.

Pop and Barkhuizen (2010a cited in Ori *et al.* 2013: 28) find that it is still the case that not enough is done to prepare graduates to adapt to the workplace, both from a psychological (soft skill) point of view and as regards technical capability. Consequently, employers are often not able to use new graduates to fill their skills requirements because of a lack of practical skills and experience, or else they find that graduates are not suited for the specialist positions which they require.

A report by Office Team (2015) points out that the technology and software skills administrative professionals should now possess include expertise with web-based tools like Concur for making travel arrangements and keeping track of travel expenses, knowledge of design and layout software such as Microsoft Publisher and Adobe Photoshop and InDesign, a working knowledge of social media (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, Instagram and Pinterest) to help companies build their online reputations, familiarity with database management software, such as Microsoft Access and FileMaker Pro and excellent Internet research capabilities.

According to IAAP the job outlook for secretaries and administrative assistants is expected to grow by 12% from 2010 to 2020, on a par with the national average for all occupations. It also found that employers are willing to pay more for specialised skills such as desktop publishing and database management.

2.2.3 The increasing significance of 'soft skills'

Over the past years, businesses have been involved in the move towards a global economy and society, which has resulted in increased international trade, while the evolution of globalisation also requires that graduates possess a combination of skills and set of competencies required to become successful in this global economy including a range of 'soft skills' (Frawley and Litchield 2009 cited in Samadi 2013; Fulton-Calkins 2011; Smith 2012; Kilcoyne and Redmann 2006)

In this context the administrative assistant's job often involves interacting with people every day both nationally and internationally by email, on the telephone, and in person. Therefore, it is important that they speak and write good English and be knowledgeable about other countries' currency. Some of the soft skills identified are (again) communication skills and interpersonal skills, along with related skills including teamwork and collaboration, problem solving and critical-thinking. He adds the need for better customer focus, greater professionalism and an enhanced productivity orientation. This study also shows that most employers agree that soft skills are important.

Further evidence comes from Thompson, Wood and Scutter (2011:1191) who believe that 'readiness' for employment is not just about having the appropriate knowledge and practical skills associated with a particular job – it also includes possession and internalisation of the 'right' attributes and attitudes for the job. They add that these attributes include sound written and verbal communication skills, ability to work in teams and solve problems, and to take initiative. This view is supported by several authors who identified the following soft skills as survival skills students need to master in order to succeed in the new world of work including: (1) critical thinking and problem solving; (2) collaboration and leadership; (3) agility and adaptability; (4) initiative and entrepreneurialism; (5) effective oral and written communication; (6) accessing and analysing information; (7) curiosity and imagination; (8) planning and organising; (9)

team work; (10) management skills; (11) creativity; (12) professional and efficient; and (13) and the attributes of being tactful and discreet (Office Team 2015; Gallagher and Creedon 2014; Wilton 2011 cited in Nenzhelele 2014; Hencock *et al*. 2009 cited in Leong and Kavanagh 2013; Calkins 2011; Wagner 2008 cited in Ainsworth 2010).

However there seems also to be a consensus amongst researchers that these soft skills are often lacking. Lekoa, Ngubane and Makhathini (2017: 46) find that the lack of essential skills such as business and academic writing, and other communication and interpersonal skills among exit-level university students remains a challenge for higher education institutions, disciplinary specialists and industry alike. The study done by Abdullah (2013:65) also finds that current graduates are not fully equipped with the necessary soft skills to survive successfully in the world of work and, in another study by Tiwari and Kaushik (2011:241), an employer who was interviewed explained his reservations about new graduates as follows: “We don’t go after new hires right after college all the time. They aren’t mature, they aren’t seasoned, and they don’t have the right combination of skills and experience”.

From the above, it can be deduced that Higher Education institutions are falling short of producing graduates who are fully work ready. To address the challenge of both the skills gap and the lack of work experience the quality of classroom learning and also of work place learning will need to be interrogated. Soft skills can start in classroom learning and move to workplace learning.

Cooperman (2009:2) emphasises that “your mastery of these three elements – office skills, office technology, and soft skills, will enable you to become a successful employee and advance in your profession”. Hartmen *et al.* (2005) believes that if educators are going to provide students with the office skills they need to be competitive in the workforce, they need to be aware of what skills and tasks employers expect of their employees. This requires that universities initiate and maintain a good relationship with industry.

2.3 WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING

According to the Council on Higher Education (2011:4) WIL is an educational approach that aligns academic and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of students and workplaces. It encapsulates the relationship between institutions of

higher education, their students, industry and the community. It involves both classroom learning and workplace learning and gives students an opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they learn in class to practice in the real work environment. It is a component of the curriculum used by most UoT's to improve the employability of their graduates but some programmes are still in the process of engaging in WIL.

The Mangosuthu University of Technology's (MUT) Co-operative education policy (MUT, 2009: 1) indicates that work based co-operative education programmes are designed to enhance student employability by means of a triangular relationship between the learner, the academic learning provider, and the WIL provider i.e. industry, the public sector or the community. It is through this triangular partnership that co-operative education strives to prepare learners academically and practically by implementing WIL programmes that will ensure their fitness for employment. WIL is a compulsory component in MUT's Office Management and Technology programme. Students do not graduate without work integrated learning training. They undergo WIL at third year level and they are expected to achieve specific outcomes relevant to their field of study. In his speech at Umhlali (KZN) in October 2014, Dr Blade Nzimande, the Minister of Higher Education and Training in South Africa, mentioned that 'It is absolutely essential that our UoTs continue to be in the forefront of forging a relationship between our educational institutions and the various workplaces. In particular, our UoTs need to ensure that our students receive the necessary workplace experience required for completion of graduate studies or to fulfil requirements for graduation'.

2.3.1 Definitions of WIL

Billett (2009a cited in Peters and Julie 2012:10) describes WIL as the process whereby students come to learn from experience in educational and practical settings and to integrate the contributions of those experiences in developing the understandings, procedures and dispositions required for effective professional practice. A variation of this definition is given by several researchers who define WIL as an educational approach that provide students with practice in the real world work place to add to the theory they learn in class, and help them to develop a better understanding of their future career path, personal and relevant professional skills, to extend their knowledge of the world of work, and to enhance their employment opportunities (Cameron 2013:136; Kramer and Usher 2011:2; Donkor, Nsoh and Mitchual 2009:02; Purdie *et*

al. 2013: 117; Leong and Kavanagh 2013:3; Martin and Hughes 2009:8). Martin, Rees and Edwards (2011:9) add that the WIL experience provides the opportunity for the student to develop both personal and professional attributes.

2.3.2 Types of WIL

According to the Higher Education Monitor 12 (2011), a CHE publication, there are four types of WIL. They are:

- Work-directed theoretical learning (WDTL) brings theory and practice together in meaningful ways. This type of WIL involves inviting guest lectures from the workplace or professional practice into the academic practice.
- Problem-based learning (PBL) involves the inclusion of real world scenarios for problem-based activities, assignments, projects, and so on. This type of WIL helps students to develop effective and efficient problem-solving skills, self-directed learning skills and team skills.
- Project-based learning (PJBL) involves real research based projects located in the world of work. These projects require students to develop and apply essential skills and knowledge to solve problems. Such projects are supervised by both university and workplace supervisor or mentor.
- Workplace learning (WPL) involves placing students in work environments for the purposes of learning. Students are involved in planning and implementing and activity, in reflection on and evaluating the activity, and making adjustments for future action. This type of WIL aligns workplace and academic practices.

2.3.3 The purpose of WIL in the OMT qualification

Bates and Bates (2007 cited in Rakoma 2013:3) describe the function of WIL as providing a pre-induction experience prior to the student's graduation and to provide students with an opportunity to test the theoretical knowledge learnt at university and to put it into action in the complex world. According to the Department of Office Management and Technology at MUT, "the purpose of experiential learning in the OMT programme is to ensure that the learner can function as an active member of an office team by providing hands-on experience of the office environment, thereby reinforcing the theoretical concepts encountered in the academic environment with applied practice". In other words, experiential learning promotes the application of knowledge, the development of skills and the formation of a professional attitude

towards work. Hodges and Birchell (2003 cited in Keating 2012:93) mention that work-integrated learning programmes have the purpose of preparing students for the workplace by identifying and developing the important competencies employers believe employees need. Lee (2006:25) explains that work integrated learning programme is able to enhance skills demanded by employers such as their critical thinking, communication, team-work and problem solving skills. De Lange (2002 cited in O'Mahony *et al* 2013:05) agrees that WIL contributes not only to the development of technical skills and competences but also to the development of skills and competences in communication, teamwork, organisational effectiveness and leadership, information management, creative thinking and problem solving.

Some researchers state that the aim of WIL is to provide students with the opportunity to apply their discipline specific skills to a real work situation (ALTC 2009 cited in Jackling, Kaider and Clark 2013:85; Blake, Wong and Grace 2011:6; Martin, Rees and Edwards 2011:9). Others (for instance, Treuer *et al.* 2011:197; Jackson 2014:01) say that it aims to improve graduate employability. (Some MUT students secure permanent and contract jobs during the WIL period and as a result they change their registration status from full time to part time).

Du Pré (2009:25) states that the added advantage of experiential learning for both students and employers is that students can 'hit the ground running' when they enter the workplace. He also points out that it should be highlighted that graduates who are job-ready are in high demand with small and medium enterprises, since the latter do not always have the capacity nor the money to invest in experiential training or on-the-job training of graduates.

2.3.4 The challenges of WIL

One of the challenges of WIL is the placement of students. With the large numbers of students Universities take, it is not always possible to place all students at the same time. The duration of the WIL period is also a challenge, and most employers complain that the WIL period of 12 weeks does not provide adequate learning experience while some companies do not provide students with learning opportunities specifically relevant to their field of study. Smith (2013:211) argues that WIL may, or may not, expose students to just the right mix of experiences for them to achieve the learning intended. Samadi (2013:38) explain that appropriate placement for students is a real

concern because many of the placements are ‘token placements’ and not ‘quality placements’. The WIL program must be properly managed by universities to ensure that the learning received by students in the workplace is consistent with the program learning objectives and also ensure that students receive appropriate supervision. Any work performed by students in the workplace must be relevant to their field of study. WIL programs should give students the opportunity to achieve their own learning outcomes. Smith 2012 (in Jackson 2014:05) also confirms that academic practitioners should ensure that a WIL design incorporates authentic learning activities aligned to learning objectives with appropriate learning support, while Samadi (2014:49) agrees that it is necessary to monitor the nature and relevance of work offered to students by workplaces participating in WIL programmes and in the research activities in this field. O’Mahony *et al (*2013:05) suggest that the evaluation of learning in work placements should focus on what learning has actually occurred, rather than on an evaluation of the WIL programme or its operational outcomes.

2.3.5 The role of the University

Although modern technology plays a vital role in improving the secretary’s job which in turn increases productivity, it also causes concern for educators who must educate future administrative staff. A study done in Australia by Jackson (2014:9) indicates that students criticised their classroom learning as not adequately preparing them for their placement, particularly in their ability to use technology and speak comfortably to a public audience and with clients and co-workers. One respondent stated, ‘the more one works in industry, the more it becomes obvious that very little of what is taught in class is applied in the real world”. This means that this problem is not South African only, it extends to other countries too. According to Archer and Chetty (2013:135) universities are increasingly responsible for producing employable graduates to contribute significantly to a knowledge-driven economy. The disconnect between what universities produce and what employers want is problematic, with universities under increasing pressure to close the gap. Benkler 2006; Wood *et al* 2011; Hodge and Collins 2010 cited in Stokes-Thompson, Wood and Scutter 2010:1191 all emphasise that the critical role that higher education needs to play is not only positioning graduates for integration into a knowledge community, but also in facilitating learners’ employability skills.

Placing students in an appropriate learning environment, where they will get quality workplace training relevant to their field of study, is however not always possible with the number of students universities take. Therefore it is often the case that universities fail to place all students, and some have to find placements on their own.

Students are given logbooks by their universities when they undergo WIL. The logbook indicates suitable work activities to be performed and states specific learning outcomes relevant to WIL training. It is however also important that the university engages with the industry supervisors where students are placed in order to generate further common understandings of their respective roles and responsibilities. This will help to ensure that specific learning outcomes are being achieved on completion of the training. Van Rooijen (2011 cited in Ferns, Smith and Russell 2014:3) sees that universities should be 'a hybrid with society' to ensure the educational experience provide a blend of theoretical knowledge with authentic experiential opportunities. On the other hand, the employer provides learners with an opportunity to apply their technical and theoretical knowledge to real world problem situations, while exposing learners to typical organisational culture, human relations and work conditions.

Orrell (2011:20) states that when implementing good WIL programs, universities are responsible for ensuring that students are sufficiently prepared and fit for the workplace demands and that they receive appropriate support in their WIL placement. WIL programs are designed to be mutually beneficial to all stakeholders and are integrated into the curriculum so that they have clear educational expectations, and are a vehicle for integrating theory with practical learning.

2.3.6 The role of the industry supervisor/mentor in WIL

The role of a mentor can be defined as counsellor, advisor, encourager, subject matter expert, friend, guardian, leader, motivator, role model and knowledge developer (McNamara 2013: 186; Coetzee and Stone 2004 cited in Keating 2012: 91). The role of the industry supervisor, is to guide and assist the student with their transition to the workplace in their chosen profession, and allow the student to develop their professional identity (Trede 2012 cited in Vaughan 2014: 01). Ayling (2004 in Samadi 2013:37) sees industry supervisors or mentors as "teachers of ethical values and decision-making" and indicates that they should delegate work, so that the student

learns by doing and at the same time receives feedback and guidance from the supervisor.

Griesel and Parker (2009:20) warn that one needs to be realistic about the extent to which higher education can reduce the gap between higher education outcomes and employer expectations, and that employers need to also consider their role in providing 'on the job' training and continuous development. Martin and Fleming (2010 in Martin, Rees and Edwards 2011:22) believe students learning must be supported through appropriate industry and academic supervision while Afonja *et al* (2005 cited in Donkor, Nsoh and Mitchual 2009:03) contend that even when students are accepted by employers for industrial attachment, they are often not well supervised or assessed. It is the responsibility of both the university and the industry to ensure that students are well supervised in the workplace and are exposed to various aspects of work that are relevant to their field of study during workplace learning. Institutions of higher education should initiate a positive relationship with industries to create relevant workplace learning opportunities.

Peach, Ruinard and Webb (2014: 242) find that there is a particular need for clarity around the role of the industry supervisor who "fills the roles variously of manager, educator, mentor, administrator, and coach, vis-à-vis the student". The university needs to construct its relationship with industry conscientiously and with care, and similarly, they should prepare the workplace supervisors well for the WIL experience. Vaughan (2014:3) states that to ensure that the students are receiving quality instruction and education as part of their WIL experience, it is necessary to evaluate the performance of the workplace educator and the quality of their teaching. This author (2014:4) adds that academics and educators who lead WIL experiences at their respective institutions should develop, investigate and report their endeavours to assess the quality of teaching and learning provided by the workplace educator. Although the researcher agrees in principle that this would be advantageous it is not always possible in practice as employers are doing universities a favour by taking students. This could be difficult to put in practice.

Martin and Hughes (2009:28) state that employer supervisor responsibilities are to meet with the student prior to the placement, in order to define their learning objectives and orientate the student to the context of the organisation and its clients. The supervisor should also schedule the student's work responsibilities, oversee all

activities, and thoroughly review the student's performance (based on objectives agreed in the placement proposal) with the student at the halfway point of the placement and again at the end of the placement. These researchers further advise that supervisors should expose the student to a variety of learning experiences, constructive rather than menial tasks, and provide the student with constructive criticism, on-going feedback, guidance and instruction. They should also discuss their performance with the student on a regular basis involving regularly scheduled meetings.

2.3.7 Workplace Learning

Hodges, Eames and Coll (2014:202) state that workplace learning is complex and is influenced by a number of factors, such as: the sociocultural nuances of the practice setting; the expectations of competence within the particular workplace; the past experiences, abilities and sociocultural history of the student; the nature of the work students undertake; and the quality of the guidance and support students receive. They go further to suggest that the student's performance in a work placement is the result of a combination of the individual student's problem solving ability, their willingness to learn and the quality of the guidance given to them. Bates, Bates and Bates (2007:123) note that learning opportunities often occur randomly in the workplace and that they are more likely to occur in an environment that allows students to seek out particular experiences and become active decision-makers in their own learning. They also explain that opportunities for developing autonomy can be identified when students begin to take charge of their own learning so that placements should begin with an assumption that each student has the ability to decide what they need to know, to see opportunities when these are presented, and to choose learning activities that will fill the gaps in their knowledge.

The workplace should provide opportunities to gain knowledge and understanding of the organisational and operational aspects of an organisation or group of individuals; integrate and apply knowledge, theory, and understanding from academic courses to other life experiences. The workplace should also provide opportunities to experience contacts with professional workers on the job and analyse the organisation or group of individuals. Students should also be able to discover strengths which may be developed and weaknesses which can be improved, and develop the following skills and techniques, which are common practice within an organisation: communication

skills, motivation of others, marketing skills, and related organisation skills (Martin and Hughes 2009:31).

Jensen, Lahn, and Nerland (2012, cited in Trede, Mcewen and Sheehan, 2013:95) believe it is essential for academics, workplace learning supervisors and students all to understand what constitutes an effective workplace learning experience if universities are to ensure that students can make the most of knowledge sources in the workplace, beyond the student – supervisor relationship. McNamara (2013:191) recommends a collaborative approach to learning where the student's learning goals are agreed by all parties (the student, the workplace supervisor and the academic). However, the primary responsibility for devising the learning goals should lie with the student. One way to implement a collaborative approach is for the academic to establish broad learning outcomes for the subject: the student, in consultation with the workplace supervisor, to develop particular learning goals (that relate to the subject learning objectives) and specify how those goals will be achieved. The resulting learning plan would be agreed to by the workplace supervisor and would be subject to approval by the academic supervisor. O'Mahony *et al (*2013:16) suggest that to ensure vocational education and training are as relevant as possible, employers must be closely involved in the design, delivery, and accreditation of the education. Martin cited in Kaider *et al* (2009:504) agrees that the best placements are those where industry and universities are seen as equal partners involved in the planning of the overall experience and students' professional development.

The literature is therefore in agreement that both higher education and industry should play a vital, and collaborative, role in better preparing graduates for the world of work through classroom learning (academia) and workplace learning (WIL).

2.4 DEFINING CURRICULUM

"The term 'curriculum' is generally used to refer to the syllabus – the list of subjects, topics and the text included in a course of study but educators agree that it is more than that". It incorporates subject content and skills, the manner of teaching and assessment that is followed, the philosophical outlook of the teacher, and who the learners are. Curriculum is both the planned process, the actual implementation of the teaching and the students' 'experiences' of the learning process" (Rhodes University Curriculum development and review policy, 1998: 1). Oliva (2005 cited in

Ainsworth 2010: 3) defines curriculum as a number of plans, in written form and of varying scope, that delineate the desired learning experiences. The curriculum, therefore, may be a unit, a course, a sequence of courses, or even the school's entire program of studies. Ebert ll, Ebert and Berntley (2013) see curriculum as the means and materials with which students will interact for the purpose of achieving identified educational outcomes.

2.4.1 Office Management and Technology curriculum structure

The OMT diploma is offered by several UoT's on a full-time and part-time basis. The OMT programme structure includes studies in the field of business administration, information administration, communication, legal practice, personnel management, mercantile law and financial accounting. This diploma 'is designed to equip the student with supervisory skills to work independently and still be an important member of the executive team' (DUT Office Management and Technology document 2016). This document also states that the OMT diploma provides students with a wide background of business management and office administration and that it develops a good understanding of general business principles, concepts and practice. According to Du Toit (2008 cited in Hollis-Turner, 2008:6) the name OMT reflects the course of study which includes the middle management level of any office, human resources, legal, financial, information technology theory and practice, and communication functions and skills.

Within the broad fields listed above, the OMT curriculum at MUT consists of thirteen specific subjects, which are: business administration, information administration, communication, legal practice, personnel management and office management and technology practice. All these subjects are compulsory. At first year level, students are required to do five subjects, which are information administration I; business administration I; communication I; legal practice I and human resource management I. At second year level, students are required to do five subjects which are information administration II; business administration II; communication II; legal practice II and human resource management II. At third year level, they are required to do three subjects which are Information administration III; business administration III and office management and technology practice III. In addition, students must undertake work-integrated WIL training. The WIL period is determined separately by each university. At MUT it is done over a period of twelve weeks, and at DUT over a period of nine

weeks. The Cape Peninsula University of Technology and Tswane University of Technology, both have a WIL period of six months, and some universities are in the process of migrating to six months. WIL is a compulsory component of OMT the diploma. Business administration and information administration are the major subjects in the OMT curriculum, and these subjects are taken from level one up to level three. Information administration is a computer based module, it comprises both theory and practical computer experience, where students learn to use a variety of computer software programs including internet and Email. It should be noted that other UoT's offer legal practice, financial accounting, personnel management and mercantile law as optional subjects. Students have to choose two subjects from these options. According to the DUT OMT document the office administrator in today's electronic office has to cope with the integration of a wide variety of software programs in order to produce high quality, professional documents.

2.4.2 Quality assurance in University curricula

Quality assurance in universities involves monitoring of discipline curricula to ensure delivery of quality education. According to MUT Quality Assurance Policy document (2014: 4), the Quality Management Directorate (QMD) promotes a quality assurance system that provides support for the promotion of quality in teaching, learning and other functions of the university; that creates a policy development and implementation environment which promotes quality practices; that ensures that sound internal review processes are used to assure, support and enhance quality at all levels; and that prepares the university for programme (re) accreditation, national programme reviews and institutional audits. The Quality Management Directorate (QMD) is therefore required to facilitate quality assurance, development, support and monitoring of curricula. QMD also advises departments on curriculum renewal processes In addition, each academic department is required to hold advisory committee meetings every year. These committees advise the Department on matters including employer expectations of graduates, course content, new technology, and WIL. Some of the issues discussed in advisory committee meetings are implemented but some are beyond departmental control – a key aspect being difficulties experienced by Departments in updating technology due to budget constraints. This may prevent students from gaining the full range of desirable IT practice. However, it is also understood that some skills can be more effectively learned during workplace learning.

The researcher studied for the OMT diploma twelve years ago, (at that time this qualification was called Commercial Administration). In 2003, the qualification name was changed to Office Management and Technology. However the OMT curriculum is still substantially the same as it was twelve years ago while the researcher was a student. Specific complaints reported by OMT students who have undergone WIL include the shortage of computer software programs and while others are covered in class, these may not be at a sufficiently advanced level. Concerns have also been raised by industry partners that the Department should consider introducing new courses such as pastel accounting and project management to the current OMT syllabus. Other employers suggested that due to globalisation in business, office administrators should have an understanding of other countries' currencies.

Du Pré (2009: 7) makes a more far-reaching suggestion - that UoTs should become specialists in 'just-in-time' education – experts in providing a continuous upgrading of knowledge and skills. This would see the relationship between industries and universities not being limited to placement of students for WIL, but also direct industry involvement in the development and design of curricula to ensure that discipline curriculum are aligned with industry needs. The Council on Higher Education (2013:36) supports the 'Graduates for the 21st Century' movement in seeing that the rapid and sometimes fundamental change occurring locally and globally makes it essential for higher education curricula to keep adjusting to contemporary national, regional and world conditions.

2.4.3 Curriculum alignment in Higher Education

Mphumela (2017: 59) also recognises an increasing demand globally for Higher Education (HE) curricula in the 21st century to be more responsive and relevant. He explains "curriculum responsiveness" as "the ability of teaching and learning in higher education institutions to meet the changing need of industry in terms of the type of graduates being prepared". The global nature of business and technological changes require that higher education ensure very high levels of generic knowledge. Utoware and Amiaya (2014: 41) state that "the quality of the training given to an individual passing through a course should be such that can give adequate skills and information needed in the real world sense. If business education is to serve this purpose of providing for the needs of the learners and society, there should be a continuous review in its curriculum in order to ensure that the quality of education provided is in

line with societal demands". This review of the curriculum will be designed to integrate new technologies that can help in passing the desired and required skills on to the learner to make him/her employable and as well relevant in the ever-changing business environment. Ferns and Comfort (2014: 269) also state that Higher Education institutions have an obligation to prepare students with lifelong learning skills and the global economy. Earlier research by Kilcoyne and Redmann (2006: 71) already recognised that curriculum planners and educators need the latest information on employment trends and workplace skills to assist them with validating, updating, changing, expanding, or revising the courses in the office occupations programs to reflect the most important skills needed. However, Nenzhelele (2014: 3-4) raises a concern about the ability of the university sector to provide graduates with all the skills employers need.

Both learners and industries generally prefer that learning challenges be based on the exigencies of work to reflect real work circumstances that overtly add to business outcomes. (Cooper, Orrell and Bowden, 2010; Hager and Holland, 2006 cited in Ferns, Smith and Russell 2014: 2) find that stakeholders, including government, industry and students are all demanding that the university curriculum includes authentic experiences that ultimately facilitate the work readiness of a student upon graduation. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009 cited in Ainsworth 2010: 5) explain that "we must broaden our view of what we want our curricula to be and do". He sees the function of a rigorous curriculum as involving raising the level of teaching so that students are prepared with skills that "drive knowledge economics: innovation, creativity, teamwork, problem solving, flexibility, adaptability, and a commitment to continuous learning". Ferns and Moore (2012: 208) also stress that the challenge for universities to move from traditional curriculum design paradigms to a more innovative approach that aligns the theoretical components of curriculum with the practical elements of professional workplaces.

King (2010: 51) discusses accountability issues in higher education in educating the workforce. Billet (2011a cited in Jackson 2014: 3) emphasises the need for strong pedagogic practices, while Muller (2009 cited in Bohloko 2012: 275) argues that strengthening the disciplinary foundations of professions cannot be pedagogically driven, but should rather be curricula-driven. However, it could be argued that strengthening disciplinary foundations starts with disciplinary curriculum and moves to pedagogical practices and assessment strategies. Pedagogical practices could be

strong but if the disciplinary curriculum does not meet the needs of the industry, universities may not produce workers with the skills required in the 21st century world. Rasiah (2009: 6) believes that it is therefore imperative that institutions of higher learning continuously review and revamp the learning objectives, teaching strategies and assessment methods. This view is supported by Adegbehingbe and Eyono Obono (2012: 2) who explain that strategic curriculum development should reflect the changing nature of society and it should consider the needs of students, industry, faculty and government. It is therefore important for curricula to be evaluated at least once a year and to be reviewed every four years. Curtin University (2013 cited in Bosco and Ferns 2014: 281) believe that all courses must undergo comprehensive course review (CCR) at least once every five years.

Primrose and Alexander (2013) agree that the higher education curriculum has to be directed towards meeting societal needs and aspirations in every case. Arum and Roksa and Colby *et al*. (2011 cited in Alstete 2013: 200) think that the undergraduate program should have a more distinctive character to be effective in preparing students as future citizens and successful employees. Fleming *et al.* some years ago (2009: 190) recognised the importance of determining the attributes valued most by employers, and what competencies higher education should be concentrating on so that both the learning experience for the student in the workplace, and the likelihood of employment as a graduate, can be maximized. More generally, the Department of Higher Education and Training (2013, cited in MUT Quality Assurance Policy document 2014: 2) states that all universities in South Africa have an obligation to offer high-quality undergraduate education.

2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Branch (1995 cited in Dube 2001: 38) defines theory as an idea, or set of ideas, based on facts and observations in order to explain a phenomenon, or opinions and suppositions about phenomena which have yet to be disproved. Learning theories are therefore used to understand how students learn. This study looks at how students learn in classroom learning at the university and in work integrated learning programme in industry. According to the University of Illinois (2009) learning is the interaction between what students know, the new information they encounter, and the activities they engage in as they learn.

This case study combines quantitative and qualitative elements in the research design. It therefore takes a constructivist theoretical stand point which seeks to understand how students learn. According to the Educational Broadcasting Corporation (2004) “constructivism is a theory, based on observation and scientific study, about how people learn. It says that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences”.

Work integrated learning is based on the theory of active and experiential learning, where learners transition from visualising and listening to actually attempting to ‘do’ what they are being taught (Kolb, 1984; Bonwell and Eison 1991 cited in Jackson 2014:3). It is believed that human beings learn better by doing. Therefore work integrated learning provides students with an opportunity to be actively involved in the real work environment and experience what they are being taught. It is in this regard that universities strive to engage in work integrated learning.

2.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented an overview of literature pertaining to administrative professionals and a review of the skills and competencies employers are seeking in the 21st century world of work. The chapter also provides an overview of relevant literature on work integrated learning and curriculum alignment in higher education.

The following chapter provides the research methodology that was employed in this research project.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discusses the literature pertaining to the topic. In this chapter, the research methodology used in the study is described. Silverman (2008 cited in Mhlongo 2014: 36) defines research methodology as choices made by researchers apropos cases being studied in terms of planning and conducting the actual study. The research design, target population and sampling method chosen are discussed. The data gathering instruments and techniques and the procedures used for the collection of data, data analysis procedures used and ethical issues are also described. The chapter also describes the area where the study was conducted and explains the study's limitations.

3.2 RESEARCH SITE

The research was done at two different sites: the university and the workplace. At the workplace, data was collected from supervisors in different private and public companies around KwaZulu-Natal where MUT and DUT Office Management and Technology students underwent Work Integrated Learning in 2015. All supervisors who took OMT students from MUT and DUT were included in the survey. It should be noted that students at these two universities come from all nine provinces of the country. Although it is the primary responsibility of the university to place students for WIL, universities are often unable to place all students due to the large numbers involved. Students are therefore also encouraged to find placements on their own in the areas where they come from. In this case 98% of the target population were placed in companies around KwaZulu Natal by the University.

Although this is a case study that involves two institutions of higher education, the principal aspect of the study took place at MUT as only students from this university took part in the survey. I chose MUT students because I am a lecturer at this campus and in this field. I therefore selected those students as the appropriate ones for my study as they are available and known to me and it was convenient to access the whole group at once in a class. All third year OMT students at MUT who underwent

work integrated learning in 2015 were included in the survey. However, to expand the number of supervisors and the number of the workplace sites, as well as to add a further dimension to the findings, supervisors from a similar institution (DUT) were also included in addition to MUT workplace supervisors.

These two universities are located in Durban KwaZulu-Natal. As they are both former Technikons, these universities shared a common syllabus which was centrally administered and the syllabus remains similar as does the system of work integrated practice.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is 'the specification of methods and procedures for acquiring the information needed for the research project (Green *et al*. cited in Chawla and Sondhi 2011). This definition is supported by Gray (2014: 128) who describes the research design as the overarching plan for the collection, measurement and analysis of data. Research design is needed because it guides the planning and execution of the research project and helps the researcher to obtain answers to the research questions guiding the study. This research adopted a case study design which used a quantitative method approach.

3.3.1 Case study design. Thomas (2013: 150) states that a case study involves in-depth research into one case or a small set of cases. A case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (May 2011: 223). Case studies always have a boundary around a particular group which allows the researcher to look at the issue in-depth and from different angles. Therefore, I chose a case study because it allowed me to look at the phenomenon of this study, which was one with which I am closely associated, from many different angles in different ways to get a clear picture.

This case study is slightly unusual because it is not of one university only. It was extended by having the insights of supervisors from another similar university. A case study always has a limited perspective. It allowed the researcher to get same idea from different people in different ways which is also known as 'triangulation'. In this study, data was collected from two different groups which were industry supervisors

and OMT students. Industry supervisors were commenting from the perspective of the employer and students were commenting from the perspective of the student on the same topic. Document analysis was also employed in this study to explore how OMT curriculum is structured in the other Universities of Technology in South Africa. The researcher used institutional websites to obtain documents explaining how the OMT curriculum is structured in each university. The case study method was used to evaluate the experiential training programme offered to OMT students and also to evaluate the OMT curriculum.

3.3.2. Quantitative Method. Hanes (2015: 4) defines quantitative research as a study involving the use and analyses of numerical data using statistical techniques. Fox (2010: 7) explains that quantitative research deals with items which can be counted. One advantage of quantitative data is its relative precision and lack of ambiguity (Gilbert, 2008: 35). This statement is supported by Gray (2014: 192) who explains that quantitative studies generate data in the form of numbers, often depicted positively as reliable and rigorous. Hanes (2015: 4) further states that quantitative research is especially useful when carrying out a large scale needs assessment or baseline survey. The researcher used the quantitative method because it allowed her to capture information from a lot more people than she could not have contacted individually, due to time and financial constraints.

The principal research instrument employed was a survey method. The rationale for using the survey method was that the study involved a large number of people who were in a wide area (i.e. supervisors in different companies and in different places). However, a survey in the case of students was also appropriate because of the relatively large numbers involved and the speed and convenience of capturing their opinions in the course of a lecture. Gall and Borg (2003 cited in Samadi 2013: 63) state that “the purpose of a survey is to use questionnaires or interviews to collect data from a sample that has been selected to represent a population to which the findings of the data analysis can be generalised”.

In this study, two sets of questionnaires were used to gather data from two different groups. This allowed the researcher to get a clear picture when analysing both questionnaires. Supervisors may want to impress the university, they may not like to admit their own shortcomings as supervisors, and may not want to be too critical about the university as they were aware that the researcher is from the university in the same

field. Therefore, involving students in a survey allowed the researcher to compare the two questionnaires and have a richer picture.

Both questionnaires included closed-ended and open-ended questions. The use of open-ended questions was important because it allowed the researcher to obtain individual different opinions on the same topic which may not have been captured in the closed questions. These were very helpful in making recommendations using supervisors' opinions of students' performance in the work place and the implications which they saw, and which the researcher could gather, for the development of the curriculum and WIL programme.

3.4 TARGET POPULATION

Fox and Bayat (2010: 52) define a population as any group, or collection of individuals, events or objects that share common characteristics and represent the whole or sum total of cases involved in a study. Jackson (2011: 117) adds that the population consists of all of the people about whom a study is meant to generalise. In this study, one target population consisted of all employers in private and public companies who take in third year OMT students for Work Integrated Learning. A second target population involved all third-year students who take this course.

3.5 SAMPLING METHOD

Jackson (2011: 117) states that in almost all cases it is not feasible to survey the entire population. Plowright (2011: 37) also explains that the main reason for selecting a sample from a population is that the population may be too large to include all cases or participants in the research. Including a full population would also be resource-heavy, in terms of time and finances. Therefore, a sample has to be selected using different sampling techniques.

According to Neuman (2014: 246) sampling involves selecting some cases to examine in detail, and then using what we learn from them to understand a much larger set of cases. Maree *et al.* (2007: 172) explain that there are two major classes to which sampling methods belong. They are probability methods and non-probability methods. Fox and Bayat (2007: 58) state that in non-probability sampling, units of analysis in the population do not each have an equal chance, and sometimes have no chance, of

being included in the sample. In this study, non-probability purposive sampling was used. Maxwell (1997, cited in Gray, 2014: 217) states that purposive samples are used when particular people, events or settings are chosen because they are known to provide important information that could not be gained from other sampling designs. I targeted all supervisors as the most convenient and appropriate representatives of the companies taking MUT and DUT students for their WIL experience. This therefore represented a purposive sample from all employers who took OMT students from MUT and DUT for experiential training, I selected supervisors because they are the ones who work closely with students. I targeted all 80 supervisors and achieved a 72% response rate. This response rate is considered appropriate for supporting valid findings. Robson (2011: 275) states that the principle of selection in purposive sampling is the researcher's judgement as to typicality or interest. Du Plooy-Colliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014: 143) explain that the advantage of this method of sampling is that we can ensure that each element of our sample will assist with our research, because each element fits with the population parameters of the study. Hence the researcher used a purposive technique.

Of the students, I took all third year OMT students from one university. Sampling in this case involved a purposive selection of third year OMT students at MUT as these had experience of both the training given by the university and the experiential training experienced during WIL and they were easily accessible, being students that I teach.

3.5.1 Sample size

For this study, this sample was only from MUT. It was identified that the Office Technology Department at MUT, registered 115 third year students in the 2015 academic year. Of these there were 106 OMT students from MUT who underwent WIL.

The second sample used in this study, was those employers who take in MUT and DUT students for work integrated learning. There were 80 supervisors from different companies who took OMT students from both universities in the 2015 academic year. The response rate of 58 (72%) was good and, because some supervisors supervise up to five students, their opinions in effect covered the performance of a much larger number of students.

Jackson (2011: 117) states that the sample represents the subset of people from the population who actually participated in the study. From the total of 106 students who did WIL in 2015, 98 students were willing to participate in the survey, the other students being absent on that day.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION

The evidence collected during the various stages of the research process constitutes data (Plloy-Colliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014: 125). Data collection is the process of obtaining information/data from the sample of respondents that will provide insight into the nature of the problem under study. Du Plloy-Colliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014: 147) explain further that researchers need to take great care when they collect data, because if it is collected incorrectly, it will lead to invalid results and findings.

Lapan and Quartaroli (2009: 284) explain that researchers should ensure that the method(s) they employ are fit for the purpose, respond to the needs of the project, and are suited to the time-frame allocated for completing it. The use of questionnaires was helpful because it allowed the researcher to gather data necessary for this research project within a short period of time and without spending too much money. Students' questionnaires were distributed to them in class and collected the same day. Supervisors' questionnaire were distributed to them and collected through email. Although supervisors' questionnaire came directly to the researcher's email address, the respondents were happy to do that because the confidentiality had been assured to them and no names were associated with the responses.

In this study, the questionnaires were the primary tool that was used to collect data[2]. Gray (2009:139) explains that data may be analysed using a variety of statistical methods. The data collected through questionnaires from both students and supervisors was analysed with SPSS version 24.0.

[2] Note that no reference is made to interviews in this dissertation although interviews with supervisors were planned in the initial research design and were in fact held. All the evidence was lost in a car hijacking. The recollections of the researcher confirm however that no very new or different aspects emerged in the interviews beyond those obtained from the open-ended questions in the questionnaires.

After all the questionnaires had been collected, the results were tabulated in an Excel spreadsheet table and converted to a data sheet to be analysed by an expert statistician. The results present the descriptive statistics in the form of graphs, cross tabulations and other figures for the quantitative data that was collected. Inferential techniques included the use of correlations and chi square test values which are interpreted using the p-values. Thomas (2013:262) states that, the main advantage SPSS has over Excel is that you can vary it easily as to what kind of data you are collecting, and then compute appropriate statistics.

3.6.1 Questionnaire design

Gray (2014: 352) describes questionnaires as research tools through which people are asked to respond to the same set of questions in a pre-determined order. Gilbert (2008: 185) states that one of the advantage of using questionnaires is that it is possible for respondents to complete them at a time convenient to them.

Questionnaires for this study were structured in a simple format. Instruction guidelines on how to respond to the questionnaires were written on the questionnaires. A set of two questionnaires were used to collect the data in both quantitative and qualitative component of the research project. The first set of questionnaires was designed for OMT students to gather information on what extent the programme seemed to prepare them adequately for the workplace. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Section A covered respondents' biographical information, section B covered the learning opportunities offered to OMT students during Work Integrated Learning, and Section C was about the Office Management and Technology curriculum. (See appendix E)

A second set of questionnaires was designed for supervisors to get their opinions about students' performance in the workplace, their knowledge levels and the expectations they had of the students. All the data will potentially feed back into the OMT curriculum. Supervisors were also requested to give their recommendation concerning the OMT curriculum and to clarify the learning opportunities they offer to OMT students during WIL. This questionnaire was also divided into three sections. Section A covered respondents' biographical information, Section B covered the skills and abilities needed in the administrative profession and Section C was about the learning opportunities offered to OMT students during WIL. (See appendix F)

Both questionnaires consisted of 80% closed ended questions and 20% open ended questions. Closed-ended questions allowed the respondents to choose from options which were provided by the researcher. Open-ended questions were used to give the respondents the opportunity to provide more details and to clarify his/her choices or else to add additional insights and opinions from their personal experiences.

3.6.2 Pre-testing the questionnaire

Before the researcher distributed the questionnaire to participants, she tested it on a small sample. The purpose of testing the instrument is to identify weaknesses and flaws and to evaluate the adequacy of the data obtained for the research questions. Pre-testing the instrument also assists in developing and testing the sufficiency of the research tool and determining if the method is appropriate. Plowright (2011: 88) explains that the pilot can focus on the clarity of the questions, the design and style of the way you have presented the questions electronically or on paper, and anything else that you might be unsure about. Gray (2014: 372) explains that piloting will reduce the incidence of non-response to the questionnaire. It enables the researcher to see if there are any questions that are unclear to the respondents. Questions should be clear and to the point.

The researcher pre-tested the questionnaires on fourteen people (six supervisors and six students from targeted population, and two academic professionals including the academic supervisor). Academic professionals consisted of one lecturer from OMT department and my research supervisor. The aim of including academic professionals in piloting the questionnaire, was to get their opinion so as to enhance and improve kind of questions asked. A covering letter and the questionnaire were sent by email to these participants and they were asked to email them back. The importance of the research project was explained to them and they were willing to participate. No discrepancies nor ambiguities were found and therefore no changes were required in the research instruments. They were found to be valid.

3.6.3 Administration of the questionnaire and procedure

Punch (2005: 100) states that it is necessary to ensure that respondents have been approached professionally and fully informed about the purpose and context of the research, about confidentiality and anonymity, and about what use will be made, and by whom, of the information they provide. This was ensured by contacting all supervisors telephonically prior to the distribution of questionnaires, informing them about the study and requesting them to participate in the study. Academic WIL coordinators in both universities provided the researcher with a list of companies (private and public) that employ the third year OMT students from DUT and MUT for experiential component of their courses in 2015. The list had names and contact details of supervisors. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a covering letter, explaining the purpose and context of the research project, voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity. The telephone number and email address of the researcher were also provided on the covering letter for further enquiries. Questionnaires were distributed to all supervisors by email. They were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it back by email. They were given three weeks to complete the questionnaire. Follow up on progress was made from time-to-time by the researcher with the use of email and telephone calls.

Collecting data from students took the researcher one day as the researcher is a lecturer in OMT department therefore it was easy to collect data. At MUT, OMT students undertake WIL in October after final examinations and have to come back to campus in January the following year to do presentations about their experiences in the workplace. Students' questionnaires were distributed to them personally in class by the researcher when they came back for presentations after work integrated learning. They were collected the same day in class.

The use of questionnaires also suited the time frame because it was possible to do the study within the time available. As for supervisors, it took one month to get all responses. The researcher telephoned all supervisors prior to the distribution of the questionnaire which made it possible the get the questionnaires back fairly quickly. The use of survey method also made it quick to collect data.

3.7 STUDY LIMITATIONS

The study was confined to companies around KwaZulu Natal where third year Office Management and Technology students from two universities of technology underwent work integrated learning in 2015. The study did not include companies situated in other provinces in South Africa due to time and financial constraints. Although this study was a case study of two universities only, the findings may be of interest to all the other universities of technology because their syllabi are similar. To some extent it should be of interest to other institutions who send students out on work experience.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Gilbert (2008: 146) states that when designing a research project, you need to consider ethical principles such as informed consent, respect for privacy, safeguarding the confidentiality of data, harm to subjects and researchers, and deceit and lying. Ethical standards were maintained throughout the study. Necessary information explaining the purpose of the study was given to respondents (company supervisors) telephonically by the researcher prior to the distribution of the questionnaire. Students were also informed in class about the study and its purpose and the procedure that would be used to collect the data prior to the commencement of WIL, as the researcher is a lecturer in OMT department. Plowright (2011: 155) states that it is essential that you have some means to check that your potential participants do actually understand your explanation about what the research will entail. Respondents were informed of their right to voluntarily participate or decline to participate in the study, and that they could withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. Therefore no one was forced to participate in this study but the respondents were appropriately asked for their permission. Respondents were also assured that their responses would be confidential and that would remain anonymous.

Written permission to conduct the study was obtained from the research committee at MUT and the procedure to obtain ethical clearance at DUT was followed. (See appendix D). An ethical clearance letter with research ethics clearance number (See appendix A) and a letter of consent (See appendix B) were attached to the questionnaire, which was signed by the respondents as proof of voluntary participation in the study. Plowright (2011: 155) states that the informed consent involves explaining the nature of the research to the participants so that they are in a position

to make a decision about whether or not to take part. The letter of consent provided a brief introduction of the study, the purpose and the objectives of the study, risks or discomforts to the participants, confidentiality and the anonymous nature of the work, and contact numbers and persons to contact in event of any problems or queries. Participants were also assured that their information was for research purposes only and there was no remuneration for participating. The confidentiality and anonymity was maintained because no names were disclosed on the questionnaire.

Participants (students) signed the consent form and put it in a box which was provided to them by the researcher. They were also asked to place completed questionnaires in a separate box because the questionnaire was distributed to them personally in class.

The supervisors' questionnaire was emailed to them together with the consent form and they were asked to fill the consent form before completing the questionnaire. The respondents consent was obtained prior to the completion of questionnaire. Furseth and Everett (2013: 10) explain that it is important to obtain the consent of participants before data collection.

3.9 RESEARCH BIAS

To reduce the risk of bias in this study (since the researcher is a lecturer in the same Department of Office Technology) she explained to the student participants that the purpose of the research project was to improve their curriculum and the WIL programme. They were to be honest when responding. It was also not likely that students would be biased because questions were not directly about themselves or the lecturer and the study could be seen to be of benefit to students in future.

In case of industry supervisors, the issue of bias could be possible because they had to comment about the learning opportunities they offer to students. They might have wanted to impress the university because they knew that the researcher was from the university and could say good things about them. To overcome bias from supervisors the researcher also involved students in order to have a clearer picture. Therefore possible bias in this case was countered by the fact that the researcher had both supervisors' and students' opinions.

3.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the research design, research method and sampling method used in conducting this research project. It also discussed data collection and procedures, the research site, study limitations and ethical considerations. Once the data had been gathered, it was sent to the statistician for analysis. The next two chapters cover the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings for this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS FROM INDUSTRY SUPERVISORS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The methodology used in collecting the data was discussed in the previous chapter. After gathering data, data analysis is necessary because collected data have no meaning in themselves. Boeije (2010, cited in Mhlongo, 2014:41) states that data analysis is the process of working with data, organising them in a meaningful manner, and synthesising them so as to discover what is important to share with others in the form of findings. This chapter present the findings, based on the analysis and interpretation of data obtained from industry supervisors in order to better understand the phenomenon being investigated.

The Research Instrument

The research instrument consisted of 22 items, with a level of measurement at a nominal or an ordinal level. The questionnaire was divided into 3 sections which measured various themes as illustrated below:

A Biographical data

B Skills And Abilities In Administrative Profession

C Learning Opportunities Offered to OMT Students during WIL

Reliability Statistics

B1

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.906	24

C1-C8

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.803	8

The reliability scores for two of the questions exceed the recommended Cronbach's alpha value of 0.600. This indicates a degree of acceptable, consistent scoring for these sections of the research.

Factor Analysis

KMO and Bartlett's Test

B1

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.546
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	824.255
	df	276
	Sig.	0.000

C1-C8

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.777
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	115.866
	df	28
	Sig.	0.000

All of the conditions are therefore satisfied for factor analysis.

4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS FOR INDUSTRY SUPERVISOR QUESTIONNAIRES

The researcher targeted all 80 supervisors and 58 responded, giving a 72% response rate. Participants were requested to provide their personal information on the questionnaire for research purposes only. The biographical information includes gender, age category, qualification, occupation and length of service.

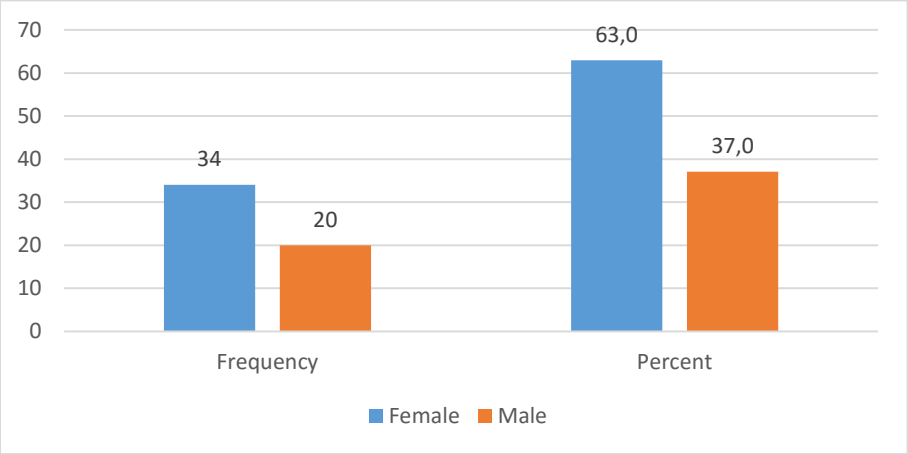


Figure 4.1 Gender of the Respondents

The sample of this study compromised more female respondents at 34 (63.0 percent) than male respondents.

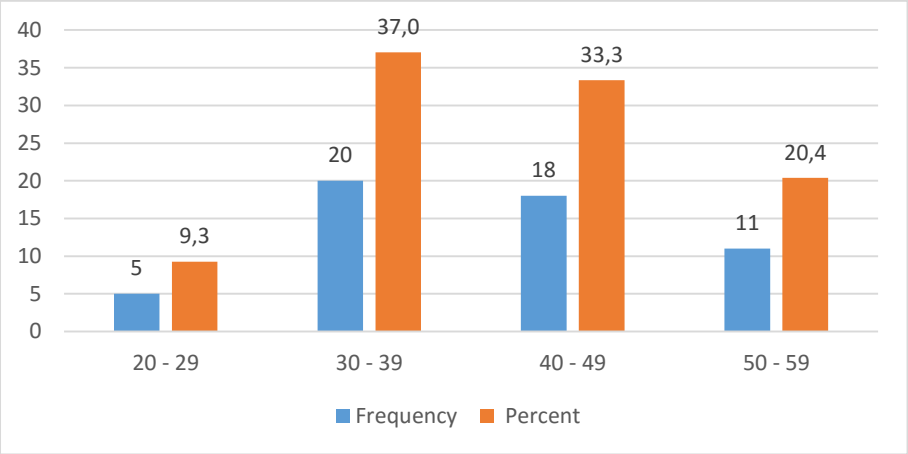


Figure 4.2 Age of the Respondents

The results show that 5 (9.3 percent) of respondents were within age category of 20 – 29 years, 18 (33.3 percent) within age category 40 – 49 years and 11 (20.4 percent) within age category 50 -59 years. This shows that the majority of the respondents were experienced people and so likely to have worthwhile insights concerning WIL.

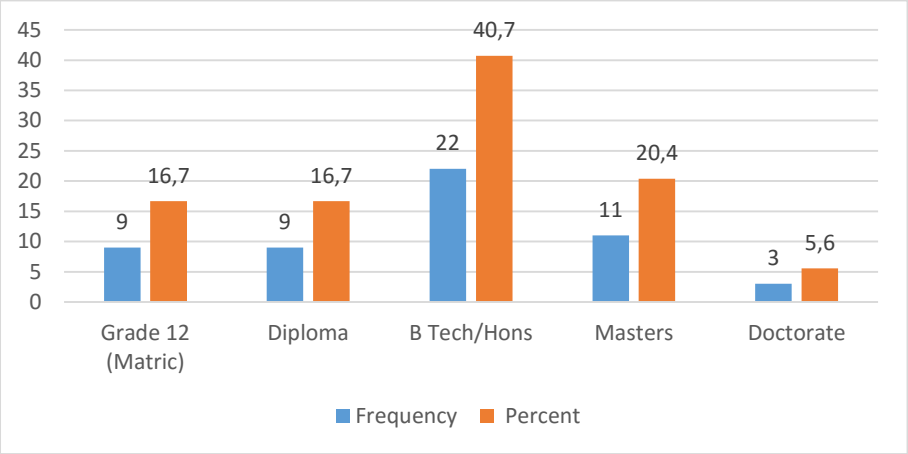


Figure 4.3 Qualification of the Respondents

Figure 4.3 shows that 9 (16.7 percent) of supervisors had Matric as their highest qualifications, 9 (16.7 percent) had Diplomas, 20 (40.7 percent) had Bachelor Degrees, 11 (20.4 percent) had Master's degrees and 3 (5.6 percent) had doctorates. Therefore they are very well qualified.

Table 4.1 Occupation and Rank of the Respondents

Occupation/Rank	Frequencies	Percentages
Academic Administrator	1	1.8
Admin Assistant	1	1.8
Admin Clerk	3	5.5
Administration A/C	1	1.8
Administrative Officer	1	1.8
Executive Deans Secretary	1	1.8
Faculty Office Admin	1	1.8
Head of Department	1	1.8
Human Resource Administrator	1	1.8
Human resource Manager	1	1.8
Junior Administrator	1	1.8
Junior Lecturer	1	1.8
Lecturer	4	7.3
Office Administrator	4	7.3
Office Manager	2	3.6
Office Supervisor	1	1.8
Personal Assistant/Director	1	1.8
Police Official-Sergeant	1	1.8
Project Manager/Secretary	1	1.8
Provincial Administrator	4	7.3
Secretary	3	5.5
Senior Admin Officer	1	1.8
Senior Administrator	1	1.8
Senior Lecturer	2	3.6
Senior Lecturer/HOD	2	3.6
Senior Personal Assistant	1	1.8
Senior Secretary	2	3.6
Senior Supervisor	1	1.8
Social Worker/Manager	1	1.8
Transport Manager	1	1.8

Table 4.1 shows that most respondents hold positions in middle management. This may be the reason why they were given the task of supervising WIL students.

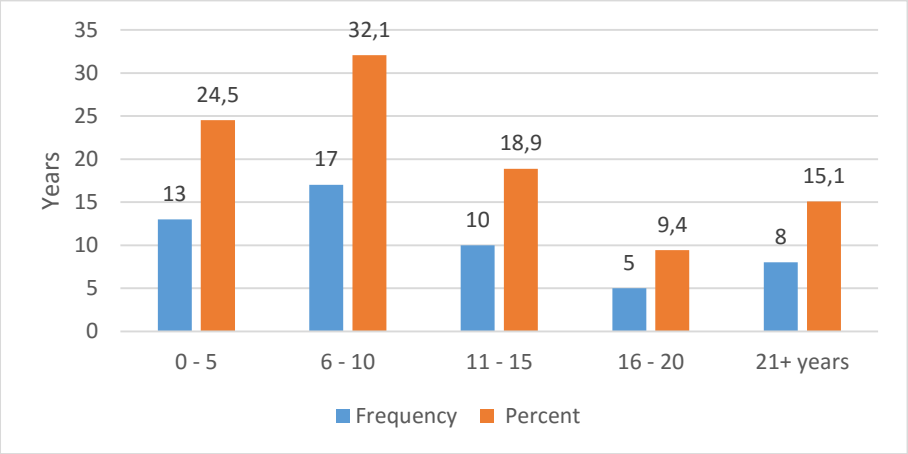


Figure 4.4 Length of Service

Figure 4.4 shows that the largest number of respondents had 6 – 10 years' service. However, it should be noted that the second highest response rate of 13 (24.5 percent) was from those with fewer than six years length of service. The results indicate however that the majority of supervisors had more than five years of service. This means that students were assigned to be supervised by mentors with experience and knowledge of work.

4.3 PERCEPTION OF INDUSTRY SUPERVISORS BASED ON SKILLS AND ABILITIES IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSION AS COVERED IN THE CURRENT OMT CURRICULUM

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of the following skills and abilities with regards to their expectations from the OMT students as very important, important, moderately important or of little importance.

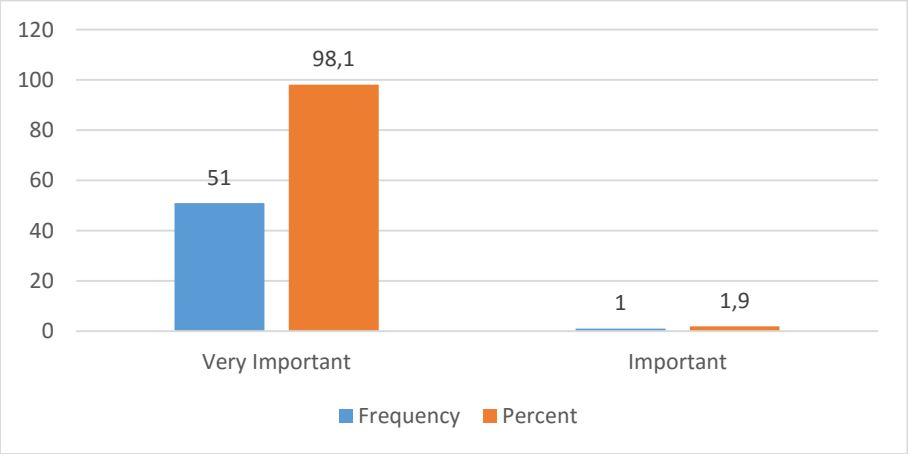


Figure 4.5 Communication Skills

Figure 4.5 shows that a large majority of respondents 51 (98.1 percent) rated communication skills as very important in administrative profession, while only one rated it as just important. There were no respondents who rated these skills as of little importance.

The analysis above indicates that an administrative assistant's work nowadays involves interacting with many people every day, often including national and international clients by email, telephone and in person due to the globalisation in business. However, the majority of supervisors indicated that students lack adequate communication skills and that communication and interpersonal skills need to be improved in OMT curriculum.

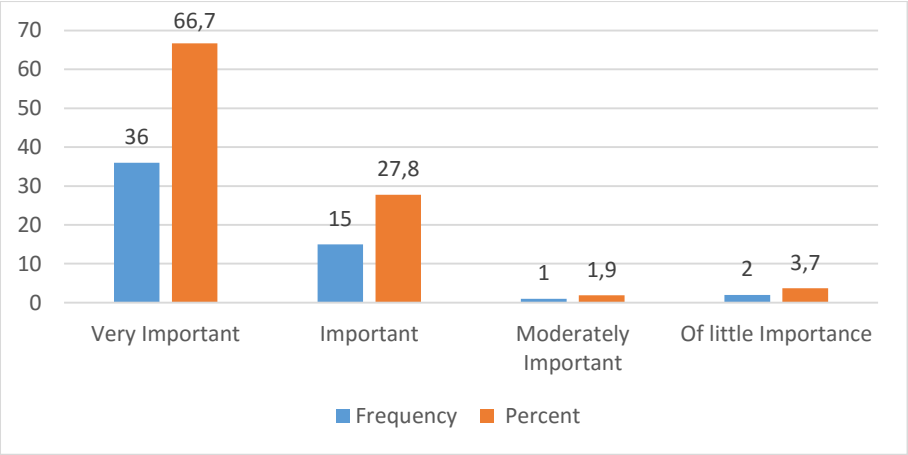


Figure 4.6 Report Writing Skills

Figure 4.6 shows that 36 (66.7 percent) of respondents rated report writing skills as very important, 15 (27.8 percent) rated as important, and one as moderately important and only two as of little importance.

Report writing skills were mentioned by the majority of the supervisors and most of the students as a skill that needs to be improved in the OMT curriculum, which implies that students discovered during workplace learning that report writing is important in their profession.

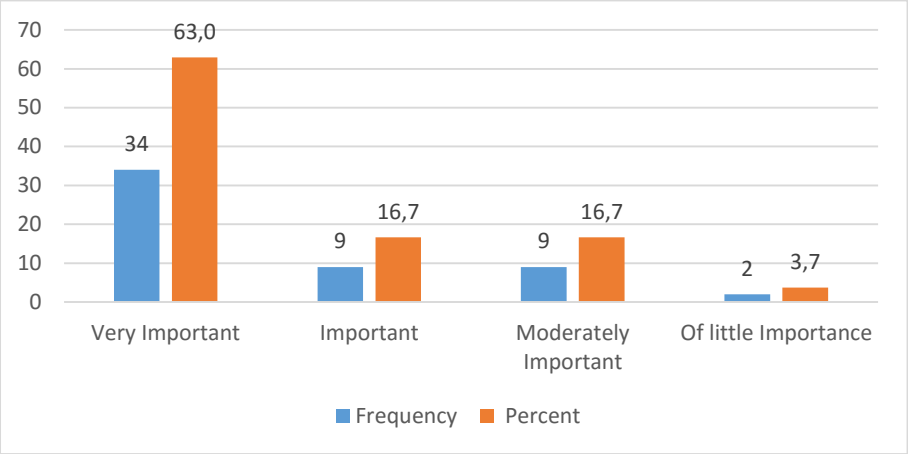


Figure 4.7 Presentation Skills

Figure 4.7 shows that 34 (63.0 percent) of respondents rated presentation skills as very important, while 9 (16.7 percent) rated this as important and 9 also rated it as only moderately important.

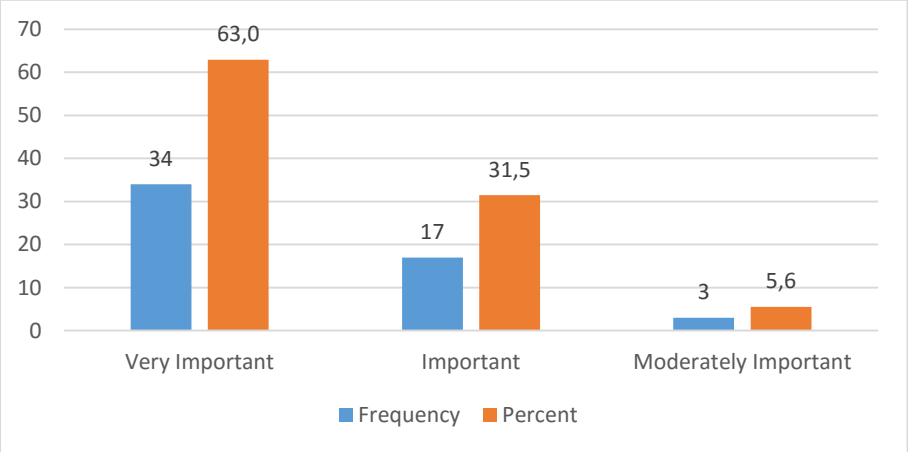


Figure 4.8 Organisational Skills

Figure 4.8 shows that 34 (63.0 percent) of respondents rated organisational skills as very important, while 17 (31.5 percent) rated it important and 3 (5.6 percent) rated moderately important. There were no respondents who rated organisational skill as of little importance.

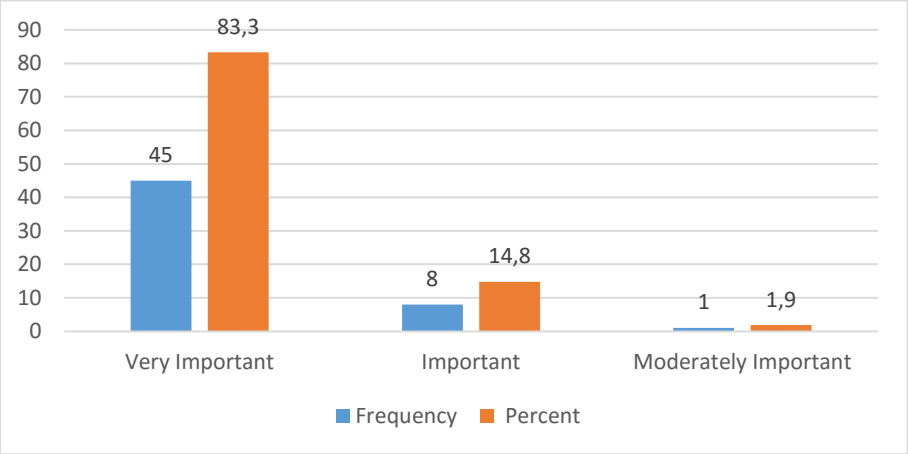


Figure 4.9 Time Management Skills

Figure 4.9 shows that a large majority of respondents were of the view that time management skills are very important. 83.3 percent rated time management as very important, 8 (14.8 percent) rated important and only one rated as this as only moderately important.

Therefore, the majority of respondents believe that time management plays a vital role for the effective functioning of any organisation. Prioritising tasks as per their importance or urgency helps one to meet company deadlines. It is clear that without effective time management, companies cannot function well, as tasks would not be finished on time. It is therefore important to note that supervisors reported that students often lack time management skills when they were commenting about the skills that need to be improved in OMT curriculum.

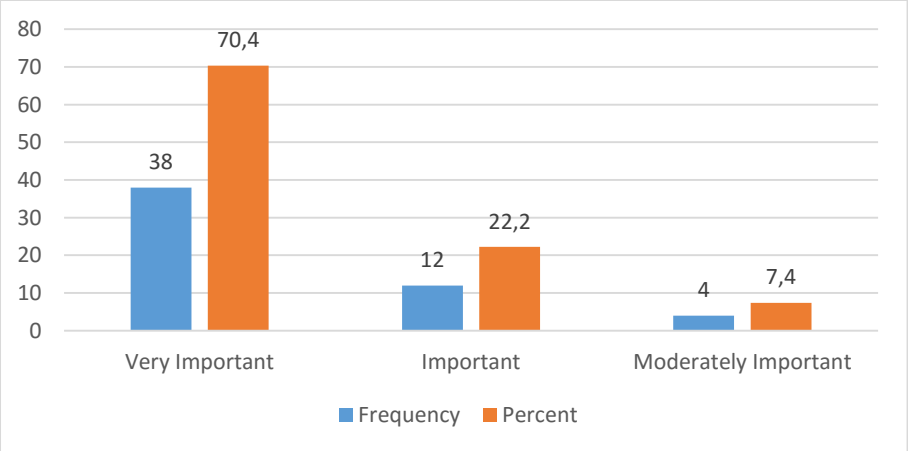


Figure 4.10 Customer Service

Figure 4.10 shows that the majority of respondents (38 or 70.4percent) feel that customer service is very important. 12 (22.2 percent) rated it as just important and four feel that it is moderately important.

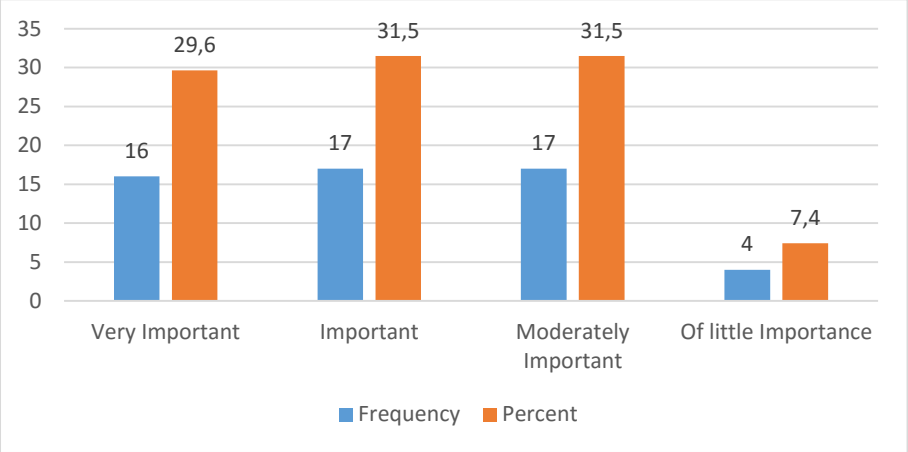


Figure 4.11 Bookkeeping

Figure 4.11 shows that only 16 (29.6 percent) respondents rated bookkeeping skills as very important, while 17 (31.5 percent) of respondents rated it as just important and another 17 (31.5 percent) of respondents rated it as moderately important. The smallest number 4 (7.4 percent) of respondents rated it of little importance.

The results above, indicate that a small majority of respondents feel that it would be useful for administrative assistants to have bookkeeping skills, but this is not essential as in most big companies, bookkeeping is done by the finance department. Bookkeeping was one of the skills and competencies which were required from traditional secretaries, however, in today's office, bookkeeping is not so frequently a requirement.

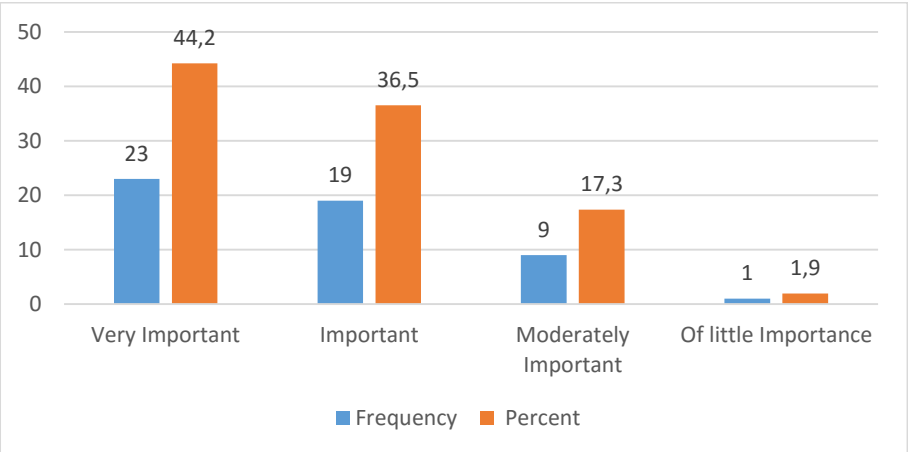


Figure 4.12 Human Resources Skills

Figure 4.12 shows that 23 (44.2 percent) of respondents feel that skills regarding human resource management are very important, while19 (36.5 percent) of the respondents feel that is just important and 9 (17.3 percent) that it is only moderately important. Only one respondent saw it as of little important. Office Team (2015) explains that, today, the roles of administrative assistants have evolved from conquering spread sheets and memos to include areas such as accounting, payroll and Human Resource applications.

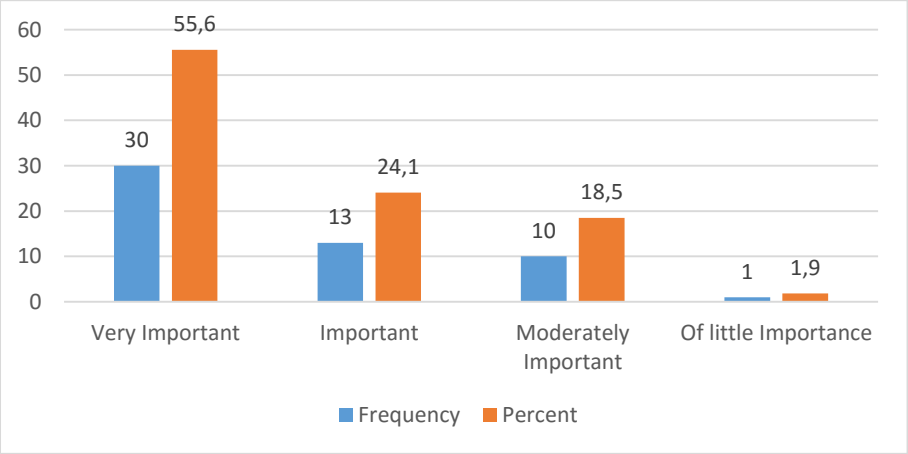


Figure 4.13 Copying and Audio Typing

Figure 4.13 shows that 55.6 percent of respondents feel that copying and audio typing skills is very important while 24.1 percent of respondents feel that is just important and 18.5 percent of respondents feel that it is moderately important. Again only one saw it as of little important. This means that copying and audio typing skills are still needed in this profession and there were no respondents who rated it as unimportant.

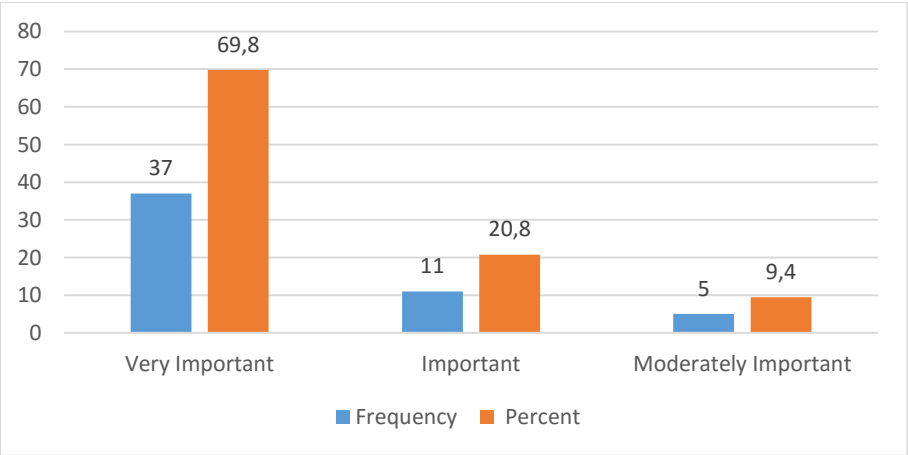


Figure 4.14 Teamwork

Figure 4.14 shows that all of the respondents rated team work skills as important or moderately important. When students were commenting on the challenges they faced in participating in WIL, they mentioned team work as one of the challenges they faced.

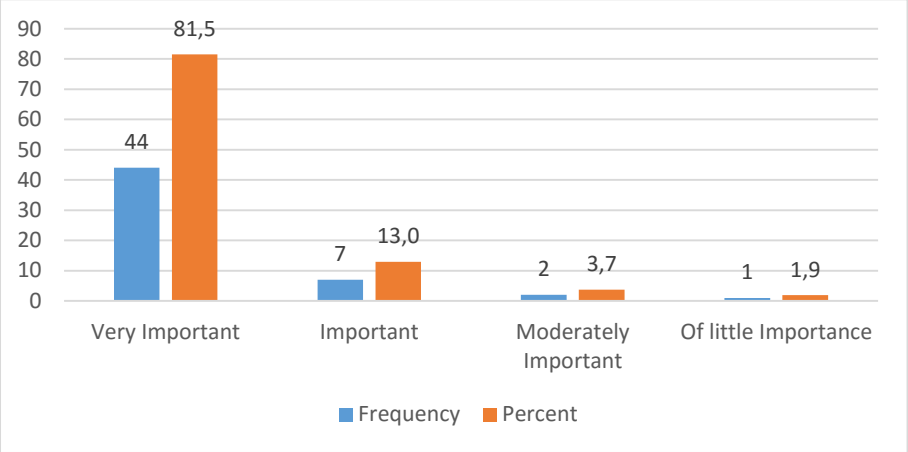


Figure 4.15 Typing Skills

Figure 4.15 shows that (as expected) a large majority of respondents (nearly 95%) rated typing skills as very important or important. Again only one rated it of little importance. (This, often recurring, single negative response could indicate that the respondent might just have answered without paying attention to the question as results indicate that this skill is very important in administrative profession). It is interesting that the majority of the supervisors mentioned advanced typing skills as a skill that students often lack and one which should be improved in the OMT syllabus. This was also mentioned by students when they were commenting on gaps in the OMT curriculum.

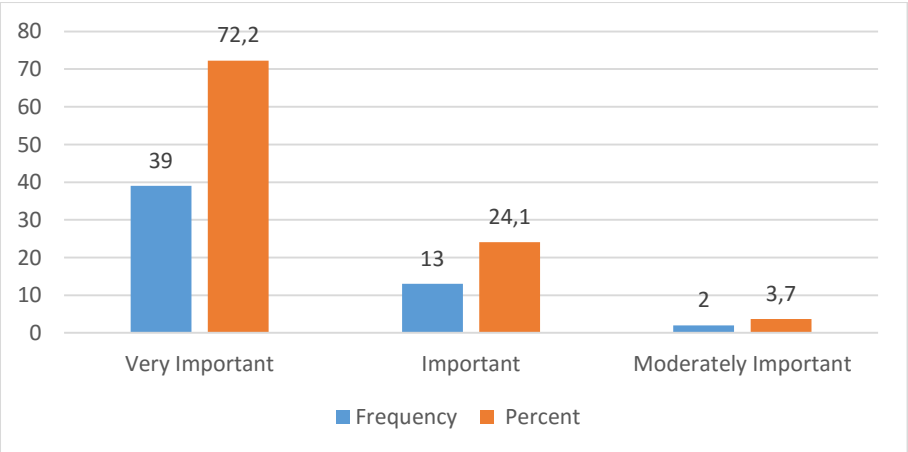


Figure 4.16 Minute Taking

Figure 4.16 indicates that the majority of respondents 39 (72.2 percent) rated minute taking skills as very important while 13 (24.1 percent) rated important and 2 (3.7 percent) rated moderately important. Both supervisors and students feel that minute taking skills should be improved in the OMT curriculum.

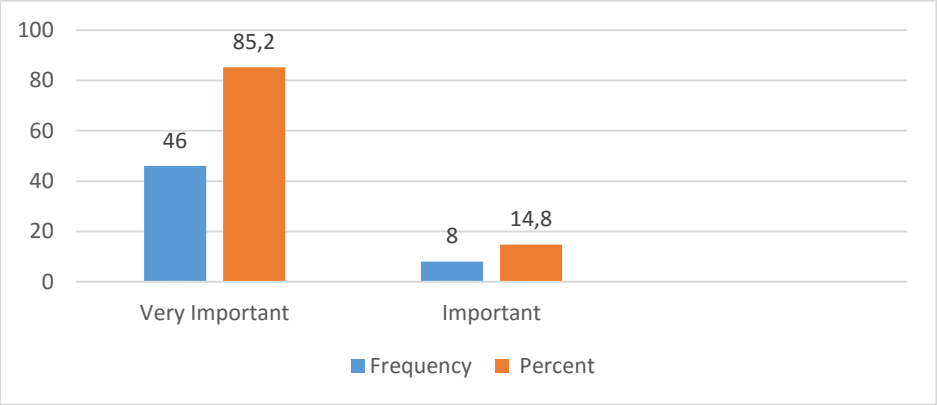


Figure 4.17 Good Work Ethic

Figure 4.17 shows that a large majority of respondents 46 (85.2 percent) rated a good work ethic as very important and only eight (14.8 percent) rated it as just important.

4.4 OPINIONS BASED ON SKILLS AND ABILITIES NOT COVERED IN THE CURRENT OMT CURRICULUM

The researcher also included in the questionnaire, skills and abilities which are not included in the current OMT curriculum. This information was necessary as several of these were identified by other researchers as skills that administrative professionals should now possess.

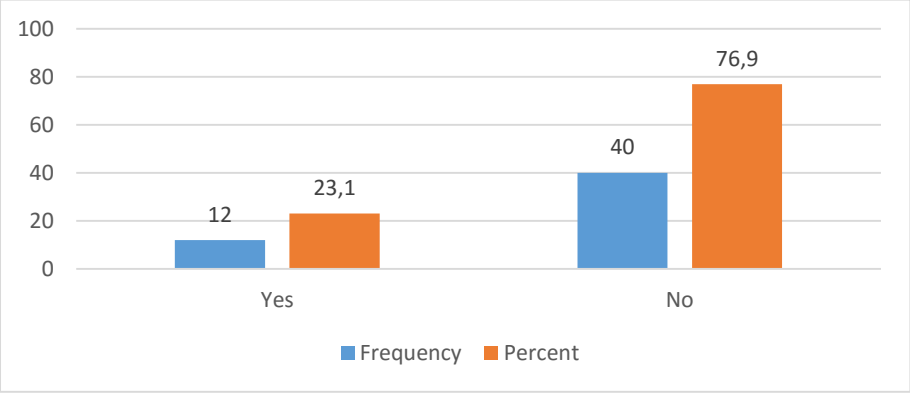


Figure 4.18 Are there any other skills that they think are important for the administrative profession which are not listed above?

Figure 4.18 reveals that 40 (76.9 percent) of the respondents did not feel that there are other important skills for the administration profession which were not in the skills listed above and only 12 (40 percent) of the respondents felt that there were other skills lacking. These results show that only a minority (23%) of industry supervisors believe that there are other skills that need to be added to the curriculum. There is however an interesting inconsistency here as the opposite number of respondents agreed that there 'are skills that students lack which need improvement' (72%) (see below figure 4.3.3). This would seem to indicate that supervisors are reluctant to criticise the curriculum directly, or else that they see that it covers the main skills required, while still being aware of students' weaknesses in these skills, and of gaps which need attention, as expressed in their answers to open-ended questions.

Qualitative responses:

Those respondents who had indicated that there are other important skills for the administrative profession which were not listed, gave the following skills and abilities:

- Ability to contemplate at situations, proactive and troubleshoot.
- Discreet (confidentiality).
- Kitchen etiquette,
- Effective data analysis and self-motivation.
- Taking down messages and telephone etiquette.
- Technical oversight
- Work independently and decisively.

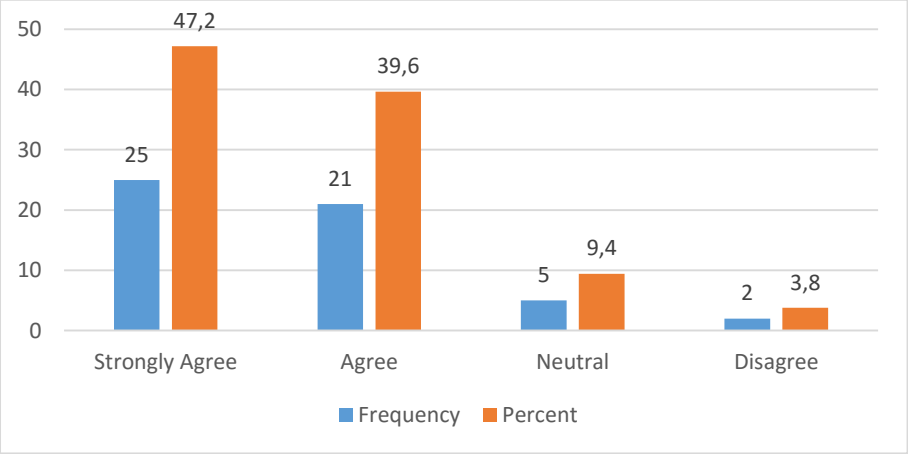


Figure 4.19 The OMT course as currently taught at the University is relevant to the needs of industry and commerce

Figure 4.19 shows that 25 (47.2 percent) of the respondents strongly agree that the OMT course is relevant to the needs of industry and commerce. It should be noted that a quite large number 21 (39.6 percent) of the respondents just agree. Again this, and the two following graphs, could mean that although they agree that it is relevant to the needs of industry and commerce, they feel that there is also room for improvement or that universities could do better. 5 (9.4 percent) of the respondents remained neutral and only two (3.8 percent) disagreed.

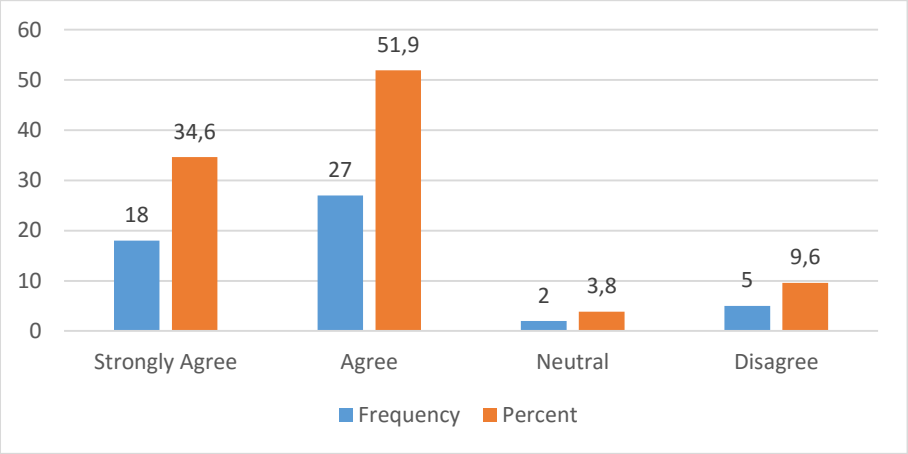


Figure 4.20 OMT curriculum offered at the University provides students with the necessary skills for efficient office management

Figure 4.20 shows that only 18 (34.6 percent) of the respondents strongly agree that the OMT curriculum offered provides students with the necessary skills for efficient office management. The largest number 27 (51.9 percent) of the respondents simply agreed. This seems to reinforce the suggestion that although universities are seen to provide students with most of the necessary skills for efficient office management, supervisors feel that there are areas that need to be improved. 5 (9.6 percent) of the respondents disagreed and 2 (3.8 percent) of the respondents remained neutral.

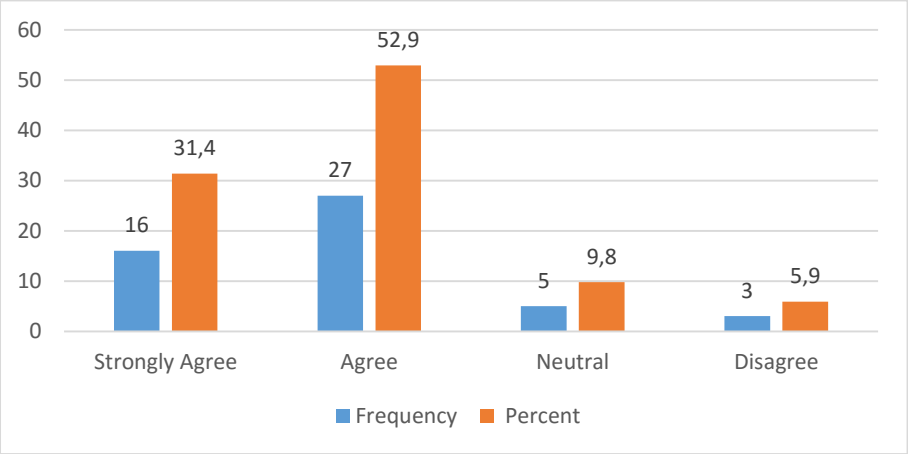


Figure 4.21 The University adequately prepares the students for this career

Figure 4.21 shows that 16 (31.4 percent) of the respondents strongly agree that the University prepares students adequately for this career while again the largest number 27 (52.9 percent) of respondents just agree. This, again, tells us that universities still need to improve in preparing students for this career in some respects.

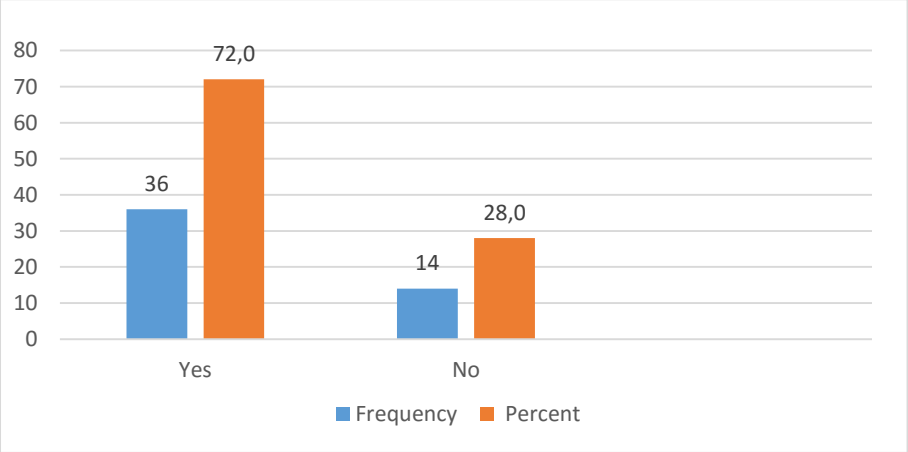


Figure 4.22 are there any skills that the students lack which you see as requiring improvement?

Figure 4.22 reveals that 36 (72.0 percent) of the respondents felt that there are skills that students lack which require to be improved and only 14 (28.0 percent) of the respondents felt that there were no skills that need to be improvement. These results, as mentioned above, show that the great majority of industry supervisors believe that the department needs to do more in improving certain skills in the OMT diploma, despite their overall approval of the curriculum indicated in their responses so far. The apparent contradiction in these responses is however to be noted - as the majority in the previous table agreed that the university adequately prepares the students for this career.

Qualitative responses:

Those respondents who indicated that there are skills that students lack were required to indicate which skills they are referring to. (Please note that these have been grouped by the researcher within specific categories of response).

Table 4.2

COMPUTER SKILLS	PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES AND OTHER SKILLS
• Improve typing skills • Improve Microsoft programmes • Expose more computer programmes including pastel • Improve typing speed • Introduce full package of Microsoft programmes	• Ability to conduct oneself professionally with confidence • Time management skills • Lack of enthusiasm to learn and be creative • Professional skills to interact with groups • Punctuality and innovation • Interpersonal skills • Operating office equipment • Communication skills verbal and written • Compiling reports • Minute taking skills • Listening skills • Accounting skills • Pivot tables

The results, as reflected in table 4.2, reveal that industry supervisors feel that computer skills need to be given more attention in the curriculum. It was also suggested that the full package of Microsoft Office should be taught, and that pastel accounting and accounting skills be included in the curriculum. Also typing speed needs attention in their view. According to the current Office Management and Technology syllabus at first year level, students are expected to type 35 words per

minute, 45 words at second year level and 60 words per minute at third year level. It is noted that operating office equipment, minute taking skills, report writing skills and communication skills were each of great concern to both workplace supervisors and students. These skills were also mentioned by students commenting on the skills that need improvement in the OMT curriculum and again, when reflecting on the challenges they faced in participating in WIL.

4.5 Respondents were asked for suggestions as to how the OMT Curriculum could be improved.

Their responses are given below. (Please note that these have been grouped by the researcher within specific categories of response).

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of the following skills and abilities as regards their expectations as very important, important, moderately important or of little importance.

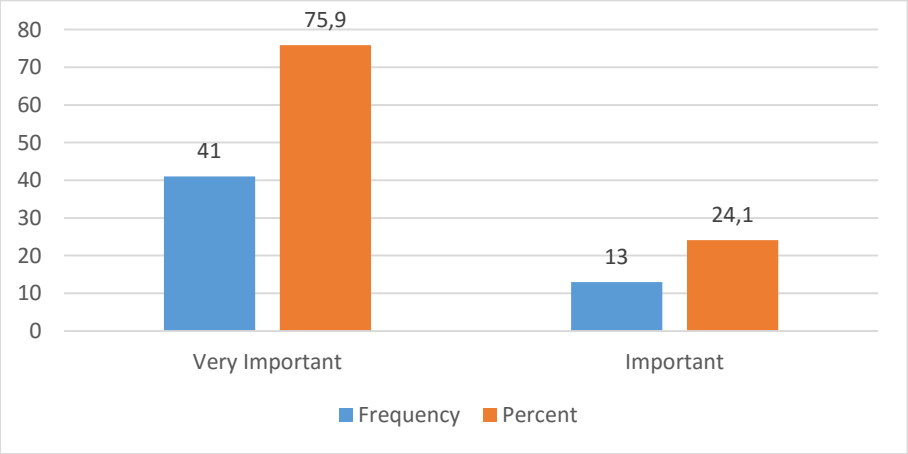


Figure 4.23 Interpersonal Skills

Figure 4.23 shows that all of the respondents feel that interpersonal skills are important. There were no respondents who rated this as of little importance. However, the study done by Abdullah (2013: 65) indicates that current graduates are generally not fully equipped with the necessary soft skills, including interpersonal skills. Supervisors also mentioned interpersonal skills as one of the skills that OMT students lack and that need to be improved.

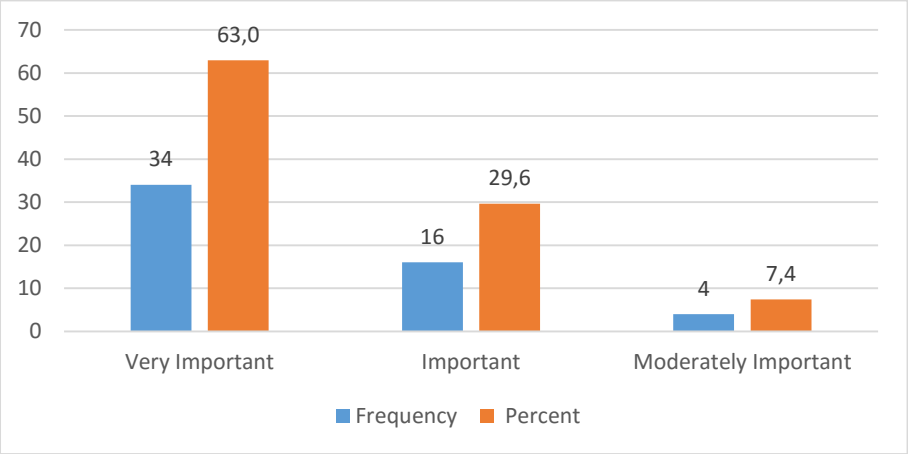


Figure 4.24 Business Writing Skills

Figure 4.24 shows that 34 (63.0 percent) of respondents rated business writing skills as very important skill in administrative profession, while 16 (29.6 percent) rated important and 4 (7.4 percent) rated moderately important. There were no respondents who rated business writing skills as of little importance.

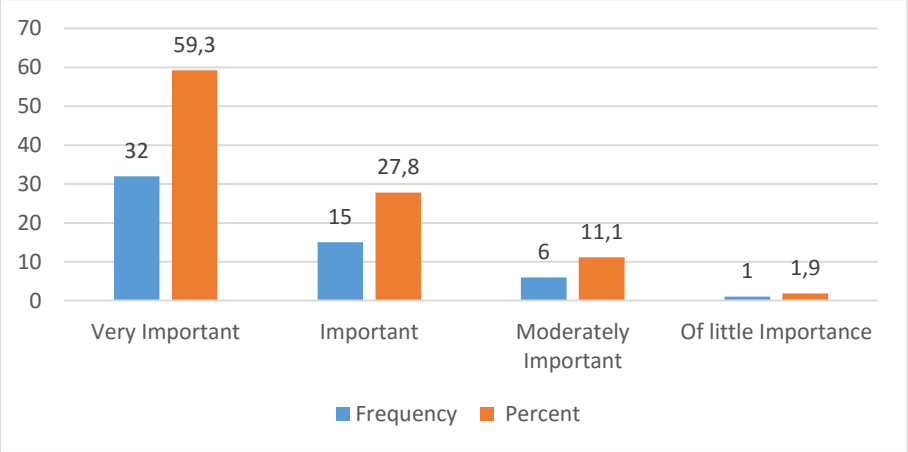


Figure 4.25 Problem Solving Skills

Figure 4.25 shows that problem solving skills are rated by the majority of respondents 32 (59.3 percent) as very important, 15 (27.8 percent) rated these as important, 6 (11.1 percent) rated them as moderately important and only one considered this as of little importance. This shows that todays' administrative jobs require individuals who can take responsibility as they often work hand in hand with management personnel. They should therefore be able to solve basic problems unaided. Abdullah (2013: 65) also mentioned problem solving skills as one of the soft skills that graduates frequently lack.

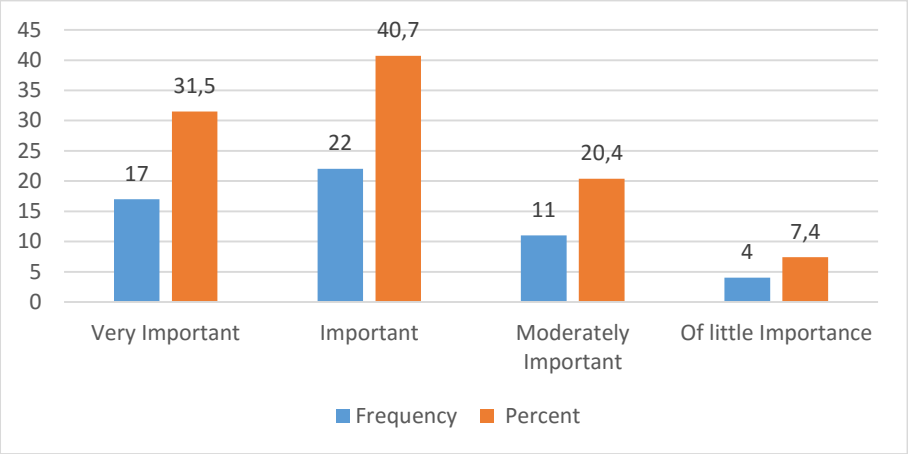


Figure 4.26 Managerial Skills

Figure 4.26 shows that 17 (31.5 percent) of respondents feel that managerial skills are very important in the administrative profession while a large number 22 (40.7 percent) feel that it is important. There were also a few respondents 11 (20.4 percent) who felt that managerial skills are only moderately important and a few, 4 (7.4 percent) who feel that it is of little importance. According to the benchmarking survey by the International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP) (2013), administrative professionals are a significant point of contact for customers, co-workers, managers, executives and shareholders. Today's administrative professionals are therefore often called upon to perform certain managerial duties, hence they are also called 'office managers'.

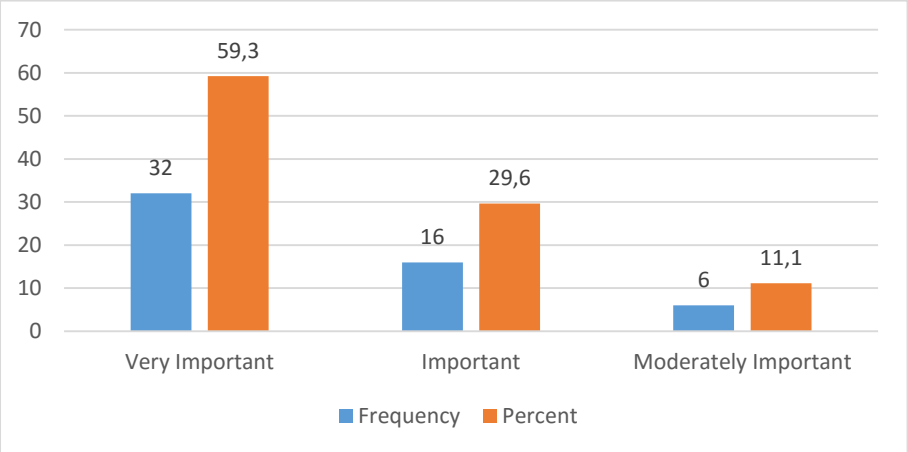


Figure 4.27 Planning

Figure 4.27 shows that 59.3 percent of respondents feel that planning ability very important while all others feel that it is either important or moderately important.

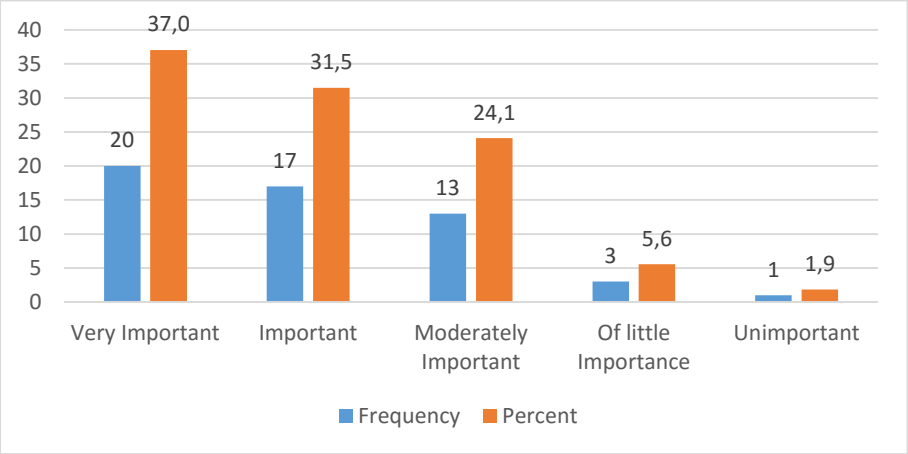


Figure 4.28 Project Management

Figure 4.28 shows that 37.0 percent of respondents feel that project management skills are very important while 31.5 percent feel that is just important and 24.1 percent of respondents feel that it is moderately important. A few respondents 3 (5.6 percent) feel that it is of little important and only one rated it as unimportant.

The report by the American Society of Administrative Professionals (2014) claims that office administrators are now members of the executive team, who can therefore be required to take on the role of project managers. Industry supervisors also mentioned that project management should be included in OMT curriculum.

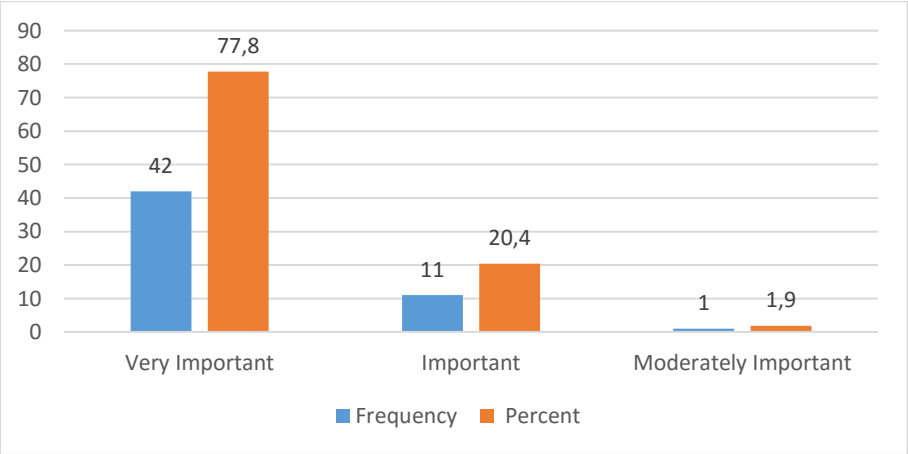


Figure 4.29 Multi-Tasking Skills

Figure 4.29 shows that nearly all respondents rated multi-tasking skills as either very important or as important. Today's businesses have become high technology workplaces with increased responsibilities for administrative assistants. When students commented about the challenges they faced in participating in WIL, they often mentioned working under pressure as one of the challenges.

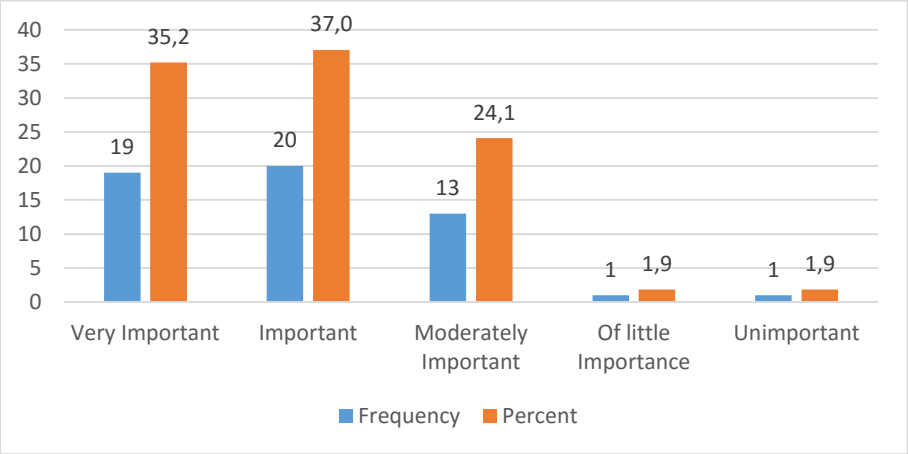


Figure 4.30 Research Skills

Figure 4.30 shows that 19 (35.2 percent) of respondents rated research skills as very important while the largest number 20 (37.0 percent) of respondents rated it as simply important. Few respondents 13 (24.1 percent) rated it as moderately important and only two respondents rated it as of little importance or unimportant. A few students, when they were commenting about the preparation given to them by the university before WIL, mentioned that they were asked to complete a research assignment in the workplace but they had not been taught research skills.

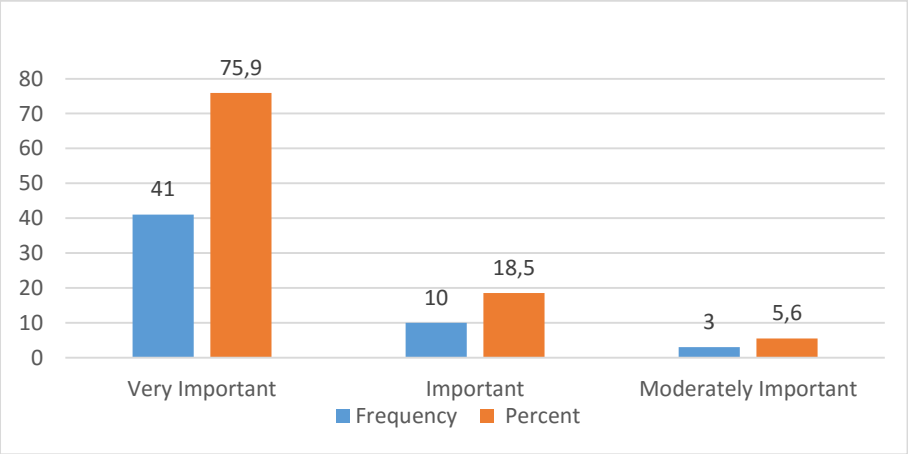


Figure 4.31 Attention to Detail

Figure 4.31 indicates that the majority of respondents 41 (75.9 percent) rated attention to detail skill as very important, 10 (18.5 percent) rated important and 3 (5.6 percent) rated moderately important. Supervisors, when commenting about the skills that need improvement, said that students lack listening skills. Attention to detail is the ability to concentrate fully on a task, which can be linked to good listening skills.

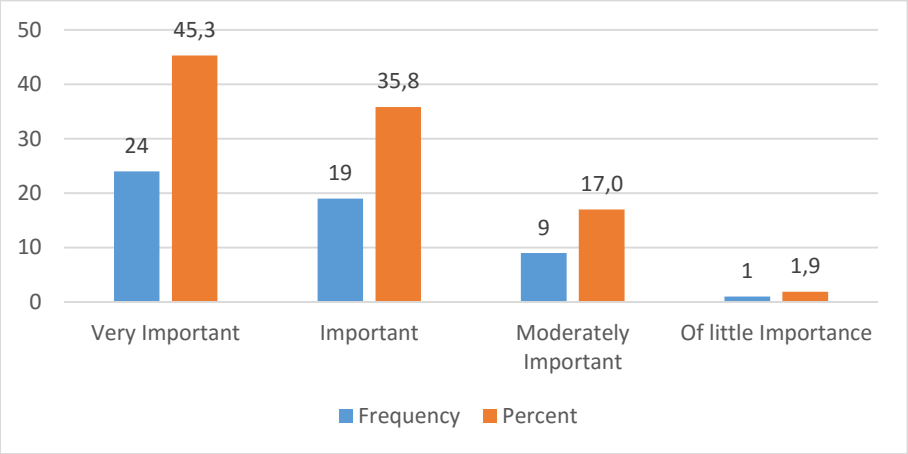


Figure 4.32 Financial Budgeting

Figure 4.32 shows that 24 (45.3 percent) of respondents rated financial and budgeting skills as very important while 19 (35.8 percent) of respondents rated it as important. Few respondents 9 (17.0 percent) feel that it is moderately important and only 1 (1.9 percent) of respondents rated it as of little importance. In today's world of work, administrative assistants are often expected to manage a departmental budget. Supervisors also suggested that students should be taught to create budgets. Both supervisors and students suggested that financial accounting should be included in OMT curriculum. When they were participating in WIL some students mentioned that they were unable to perform tasks that required a financial background.

Table 4.3

OMT CURRICULUM SUGGESTIONS

- Include financial accounting module
- Communication should be taught up to third year level
- Content should be relevant to the industry needs
- Students should be exposed to office equipment and sending emails in classroom learning before they undergo work integrated learning
- Include module in group behaviour
- OMT curriculum should be innovative
- More time is needed in practical classes and special attention should be given in typing speed
- Students should be taught to create budget
- Technical skills to advanced hardware.
- Introduce pastel accounting
- Introduce project management

WIL PROGRAMME SUGGESTIONS

- Extend work integrated learning period to six months
- Students to be visited at least twice in workplace learning by the university supervisor
- University to strengthen partnership with industry
- Introduce students to work environment early.
- Use students feedback from work integrated learning and mentors suggestions to improve curriculum and WIL programme.

The responses in table 4.3 indicate that there are skills that need to be incorporated in the OMT curriculum which universities do not cover. Some of the skills that were suggested by almost all respondents were pastel accounting and project management. It is also clear that universities need to do more in terms of communication skills as this was suggested by most of the respondents and it was also highlighted in the previous table (4.2) as one of the skills students' lack.

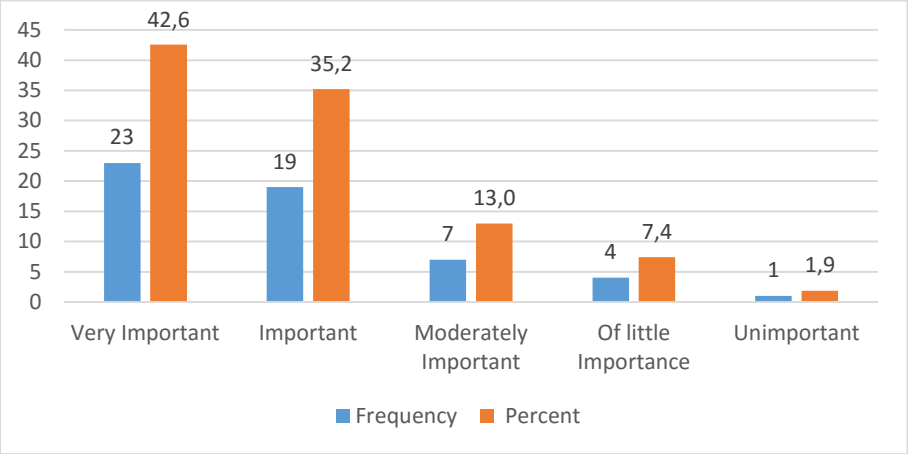


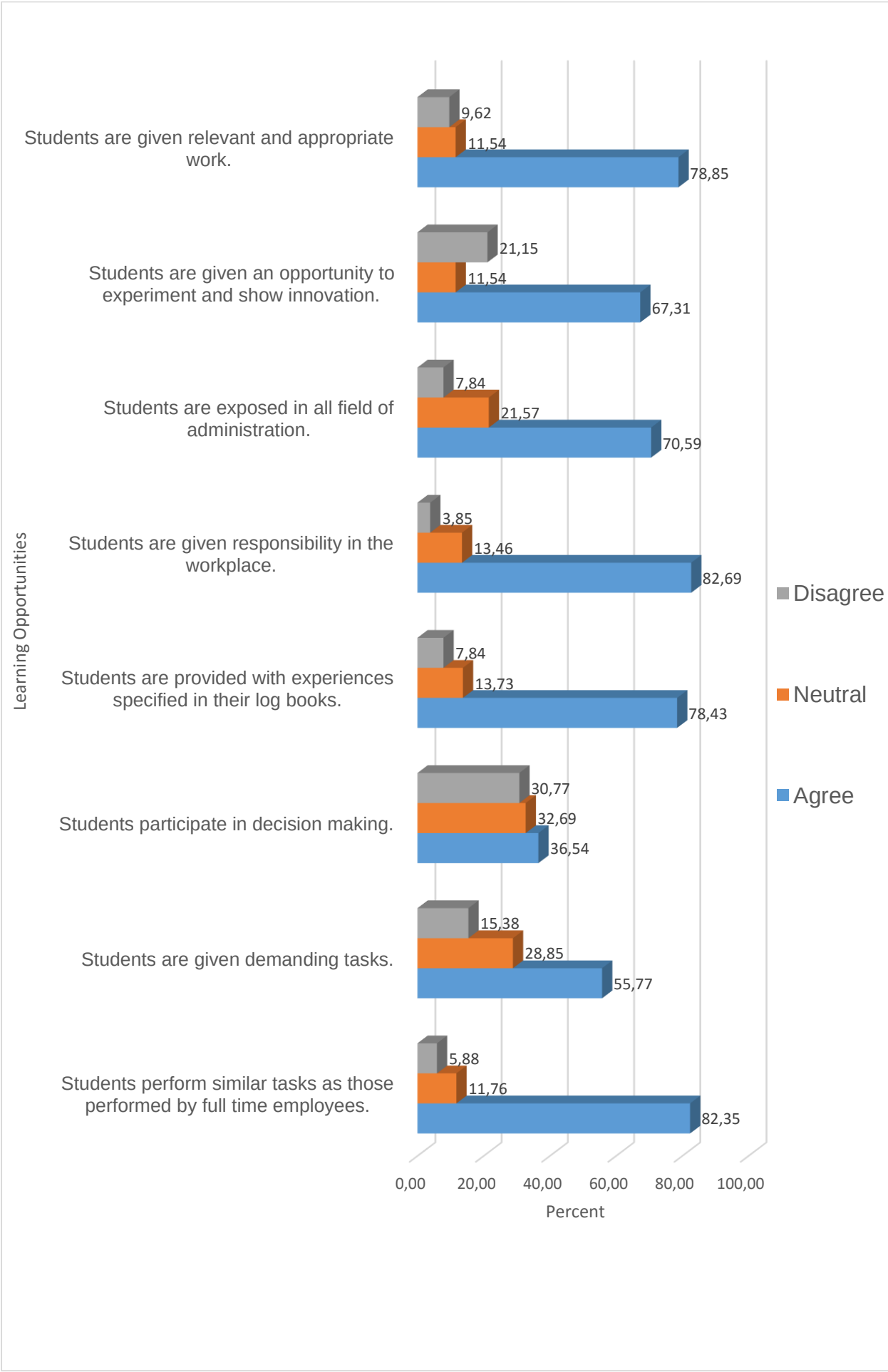
Figure 4.33 Website/Social Media Management

Figure 4.33 shows that 23 (42.6 percent) of the respondents rated website/social media management skill as very important while19 (35.2 percent) saw it as important. Only 5 respondents rated it as of little or no importance.

4.6 LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO OMT STUDENTS DURING WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING

This section examines the learning opportunities offered to OMT students during workplace learning. This information was necessary in assessing the WIL programme.

Figure 4.34 represents participants' responses on the statements that were given on the questionnaire based on learning opportunities offered to students.


Learning Opportunities
Students are given relevant and appropriate work.
9,62
11,54
78,85
Students are given an opportunity to experiment and show innovation.
21,15
11,54
67,31
Students are exposed in all field of administration.
7,84
21,57
70,59
Students are given responsibility in the workplace.
3,85
13,46
82,69
Students are provided with experiences specified in their log books.
7,84
13,73
78,43
Students participate in decision making.
30,77
32,69
36,54
Students are given demanding tasks.
15,38
28,85
55,77
Students perform similar tasks as those performed by full time employees.
5,88
11,76
82,35
0,00
20,00
40,00
60,00
80,00
100,00
Percent
Disagree
Neutral
Agree

Responses overall show high levels of agreement with most statements. However, the findings also indicated lower levels on two statements both of which were below 56%. These were that students participate in decision making, and that students are given demanding tasks. It is therefore also clear that, in some companies, tasks performed by students during workplace learning are not similar to those performed by full time employees. This may be because some tasks are confidential or involve critical issues that need to be handled by someone who is more experienced than a student who is still learning.

These results show that most supervisors agreed that students are offered relevant workplace learning opportunities that will make them work ready and employable in today's world of work. However, there were also respondents who disagreed. For instance, only 21.15% feel that students are given an opportunity to experiment and show innovation.

This may be explained because respondents (industry supervisors) were from different companies and the learning opportunities offered to students during WIL differ from company to company differ. Therefore it is clear that the experiences gained by students during WIL are not uniform although students come out with the same qualification.

4.7 Respondents were asked what additional learning opportunities students gained during WIL apart from the duties listed in their log books

Their responses are given below:

- Become more motivated and able to manage their time better.
- Communication, self-confidence, interpersonal and time management skills.
- Competency
- Exposure to interact with colleagues from other branches.
- Gain experience and exposure in work environment.
- Gain skills in using integrated tertiary software.
- Improve computer skills
- Learn to be responsible and accountable.
- Organisation culture

- Take instruction from superiors and understanding work.
- Taking initiative without being supervised.
- Team work and listening skills.

The responses above indicate that there are many skills and knowledge areas which students acquire during work integrated learning some of which cannot be covered in classroom learning. This shows the importance of the work integrated learning programme to our students.

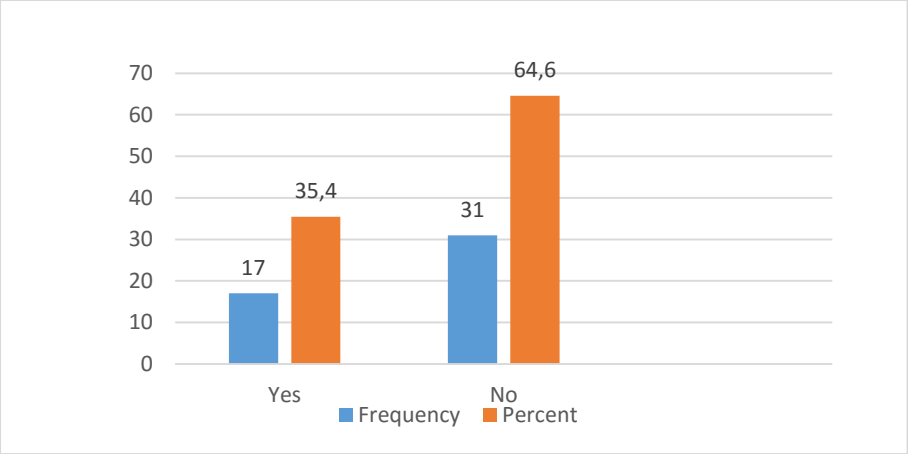


Figure 4.35 Do you regard 12 weeks of WIL period appropriate to expose students to the working environment?

Figure 4.35 reveals that 31 (64.6 percent) of the respondents felt that 12 weeks of WIL period is not adequate to expose students to the working environment and only 17 (35.4 percent) of the respondents felt that 12 weeks of WIL period is enough.

Respondents were asked to respond to this question and provide explanations of their answers. Their responses are given below:

Qualitative Responses:

The majority of respondents felt that a 12-week period is not enough to cover everything performed in an office and to expose students to different aspects of the administration sector. When industry supervisors were commenting about the WIL period in qualitative questions, most of the respondents felt that six months would be ideal for students to adapt to the work environment and to get experience as most

companies require candidates with experience. Some respondents also pointed out that most companies do not pay students if their WIL period is less than six months.

The issue of WIL incentives is a great concern to both supervisors and students. It was reported by supervisors when they were making suggestions to improve the WIL programme that students sometimes fail to come at work because it is difficult for them of find the transport fare. In this regards, it should be noted that the Public Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA) provides support to provincial governments assisting them with the Integrated Provincial Support Programme (IPSP) with the aim of improving service delivery and extending good governance. Part of the strategy is to improve service delivery involves shared knowledge and learning opportunities. PSETA therefore pays a stipend of R2500 to students who are doing workplace learning from all universities in South Africa who do workplace learning over a period of six months and more. Students who do WIL in a period that is less than six months are therefore debarred from this benefit.

4.8 Respondents were asked what suggestions they could make to improve the current WIL programme.

Their responses are given below:

- Extend WIL period to six months.
- Improve placement and visitation of students.
- University should give students challenging tasks to prepare them for the workplace.
- Placement should be closer to their home to avoid poor attendance and improve punctuality.
- Students should be exposed to more than one company.
- WIL to be done from first year level to third year level.

It was also suggested by the majority of students that WIL should be done from first year up to third year level. The fifth point about exposing students to more than one company was also raised by many supervisors. This could help students to become more work ready and employable as this study has revealed that the experience received by students during workplace learning is not consistent and that it differs from company to company.

4.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a full presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data gathered from industry supervisors. The findings showed that there are certain skills that need to be improved in the current OMT curriculum. Suggestions for improving the current OMT curriculum and the current WIL programme were made.

The next chapter presents analysis and interpretation of the data gathered from third year OMT students who underwent work integrated learning in 2015.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS FROM THE STUDENTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented data analysis and interpretation of findings gathered from industry supervisors. This chapter presents an analysis of data gathered from OMT third year students at Mangosuthu (MUT). These students had experience of both the training given by the university and the experiential training experienced during work integrated learning. The purpose was to gather information as to how adequately both the university and the WIL programme prepared them for the world of work. There were 106 students who did WIL in 2015, all 106 students were targeted and 98 responded, giving a response rate of 92%.

The Research Instrument

The research instrument consisted of 22 items, with a level of measurement at a nominal or an ordinal level. The questionnaire was divided into 3 sections which measured various themes as illustrated below:

1 Biographical data

2 Learning Opportunities Offered During Wil

3 OMT Curriculum

Reliability Statistics

The two most important aspects of precision are **reliability** and **validity**. Reliability is computed by taking several measurements on the same subjects. A reliability coefficient of 0.60 or higher is considered as “acceptable” for a newly developed construct.

The table below reflects the Cronbach’s alpha score for all the items that constituted the questionnaire.

		Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
B1 - B8	Learning Opportunities	8 of 8	0.540
B9	Extent of the WIL programme preparedness for duties	17 of 17	0.901
C1	Extent of the University preparedness for duties	18 of 18	0.914

The reliability scores for two of the questions exceed the recommended Cronbach's alpha value of 0.600. This indicates a degree of acceptable, consistent scoring for these sections of the research. The first section has a value slightly less than the acceptable value. This may be due to the varied interpretations of the statements

Factor Analysis

Factor analysis is a statistical technique whose main goal is data reduction. A typical use of factor analysis is in survey research, where a researcher wishes to represent a number of questions with a small number of hypothetical factors.

The matrix tables are preceded by a summarised table that reflects the results of KMO and Bartlett's Test. The requirement is that Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy should be greater than 0.50 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity less than 0.05. In all instances, the conditions are satisfied which allows for the factor analysis procedure. Factor analysis is done only for the Likert scale items.

KMO and Bartlett's Test

		Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		
			Approx. Chi-Square	df	Sig.
B1 - B8	Learning Opportunities	0.603	56.757	28	0.001
B9	Extent of the WIL programme preparedness for duties	0.713	423.190	120	0.000
C1	Extent of the University preparedness for duties	0.776	687.882	153	0.000

All of the conditions are satisfied for factor analysis.

5.2 BIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF OMT STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

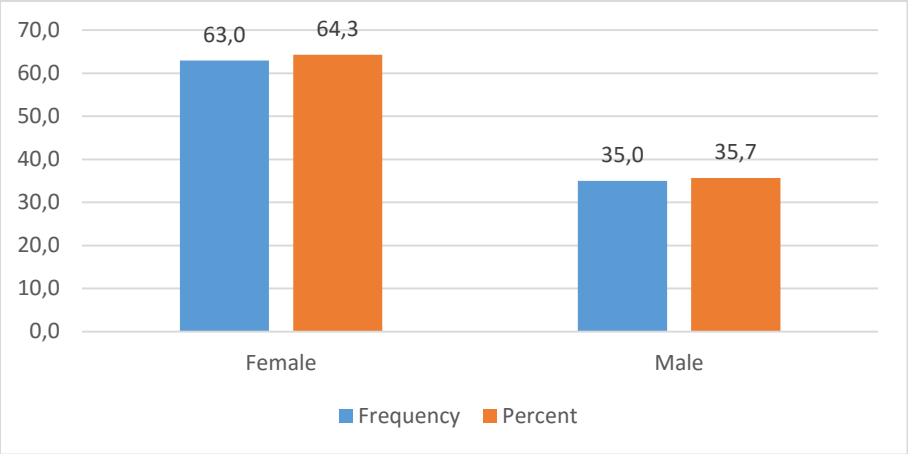


Figure 5.1 Gender of the Respondents

The sample of this study included more female respondents at 63.0 (64.3 percent) than male respondents, at 35.0 (35.7 percent). In past years, administrative courses were generally done by female students only. Although there are still more woman than man, these figures show that an administrative job is no longer perceived as one done by females only, as the number of male students who do this course increases every year. Probably the change in the role and nature of the administrative profession now attracts more males.

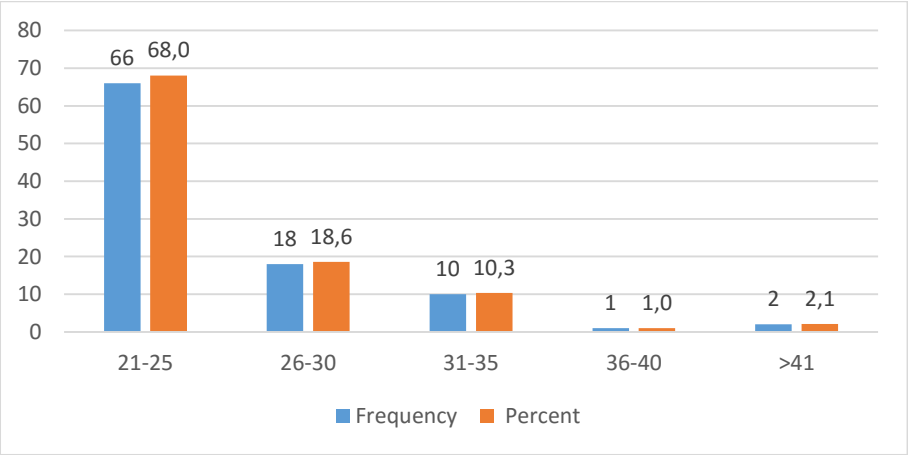


Figure 5.2 Age of the Respondents

The figures show that the majority of the respondents were between the age of 21 -25 years, which is the age category that is expected of a university student. However, it should be noted that there is also a fairly large number of respondents between the ages of 31-35 years. Some of these respondents are probably employees who were

employed with matric certificates many years ago as receptionists or clerks. This is an indication that people see the need for up skilling to meet the demands of todays' administrative work.

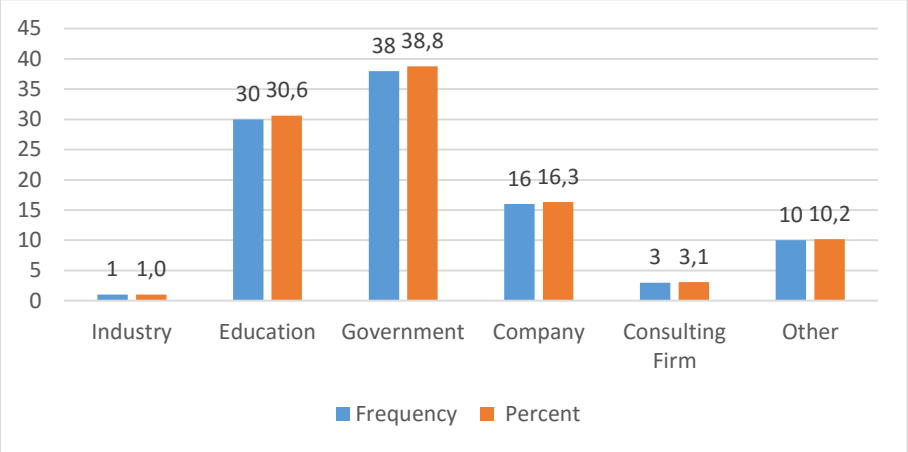


Figure 5.3 WIL location

Figure 5.3 indicates that the largest number of respondents, 38 (38.8 percent) did work integrated learning in the government sector, followed by education at 30 (30.6 percent) and that more of the respondents did work integrated learning in the public sector than in the private sector. There were very few respondents who did WIL in the industry sector and other sectors. This appears to indicate that the spread of work experience offered to MUT students is skewed away from industry and service or retail organisations.

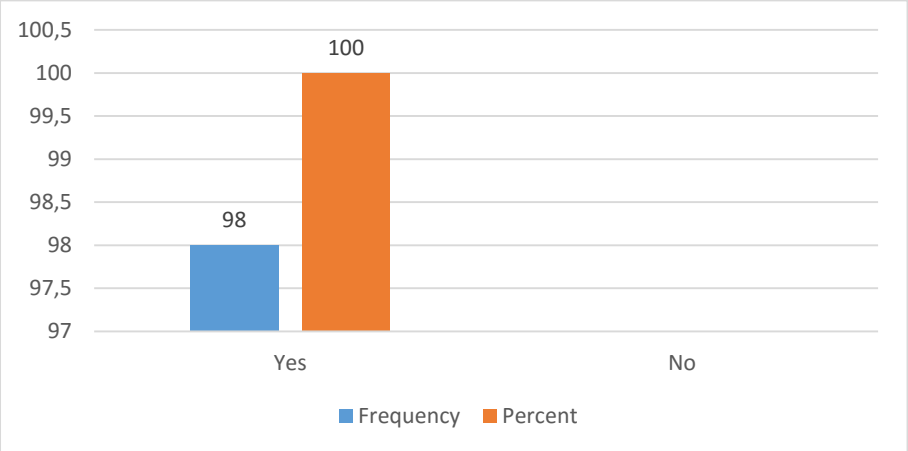


Figure 5.4 Did you have a mentor/supervisor in the workplace?

Figure 5.4 shows that all respondents had mentors who supervised them during workplace learning.

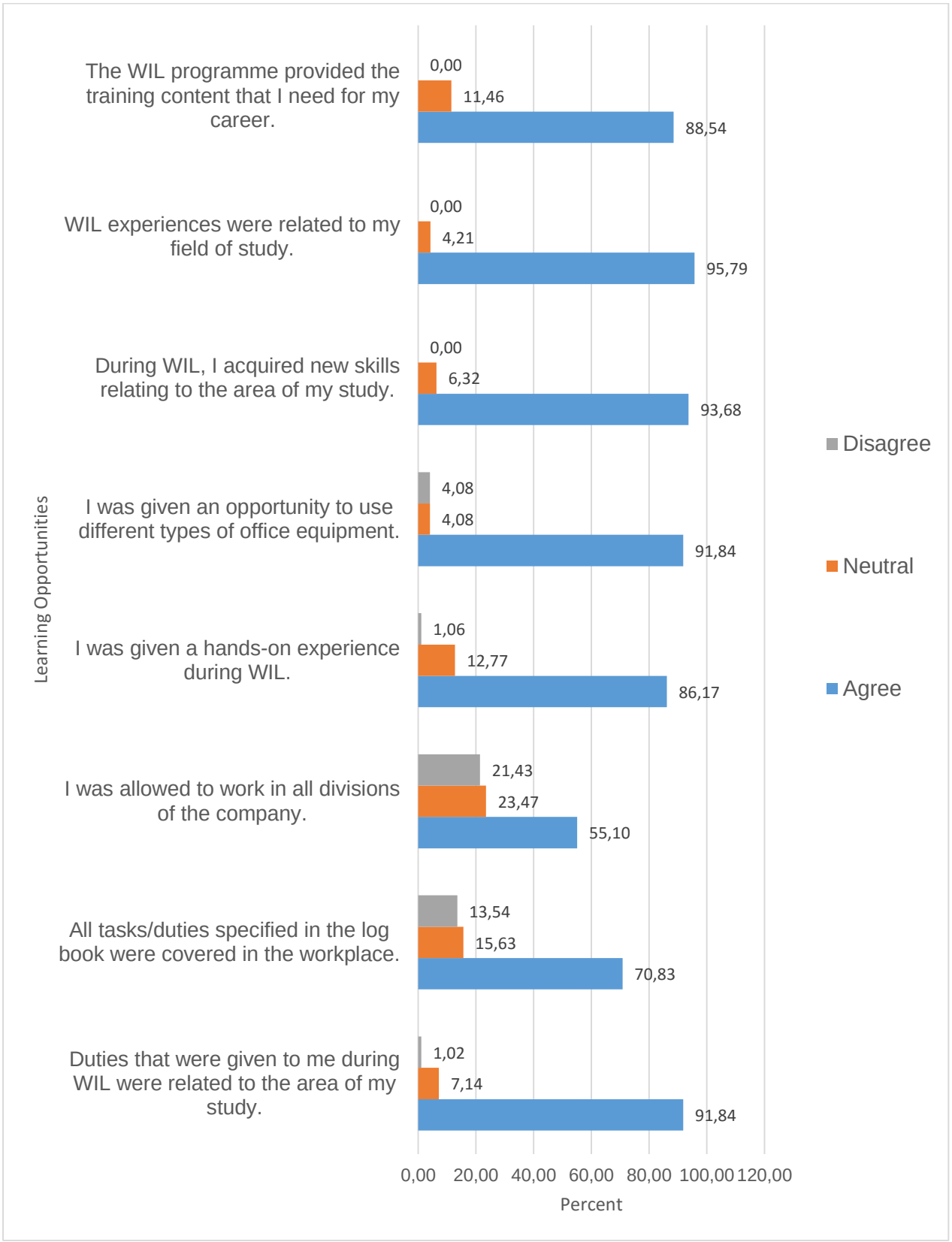
5.3 STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING PROGRAMME

This section examines the learning opportunities offered to OMT students during workplace learning as they experienced them.

5.3.1 LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO OMT STUDENTS DURING WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING

Figure 5.5. Participants were asked to respond whether they 'strongly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree or strongly disagree' with the statements in the questionnaire, based on learning opportunities offered during WIL.

The graph below represents a summary of the responses:



Responses overall show high levels of agreement with most statements indicating a positive experience. Agreement levels were above 80% in most statements. However, the findings also indicate only a moderate level of agreement about rotating students to all divisions of the company. Only 55.1% of the respondents agree that

they were allowed to work in all divisions of the company. 21.43% disagreed totally with this statement and 23.47% of respondents remained neutral. As compared with other statements, there is also a slightly less positive response to the statement concerning whether all the tasks specified in their log books were covered. This ties up with students' responses when they were commenting about their preparation for workplace learning. Some students indicated that there are duties written in their logbook in which they did not get hands-on experience which they were participating in WIL.

5.3.2 STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF WORKPLACE LEARNING BASED ON THE DUTIES/TASKS AS LAID DOWN IN THEIR LOGBOOK

Respondents were asked to respond either 'poor, below average, average, above average, excellent or not applicable' to questions concerning their experience of WIL tasks as stipulated in their log books

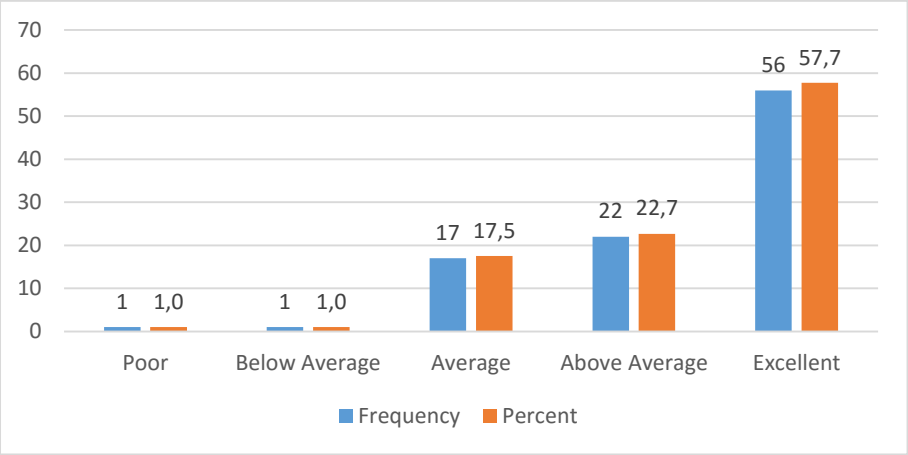


Figure 5.6 Handling incoming and outgoing calls

The results show that students feel that handling incoming and outgoing calls is learned well in the workplace, although it should be noted that there were respondents who felt that they were given little access to telephone experience when they were commenting about the challenges they faced in participating in WIL.

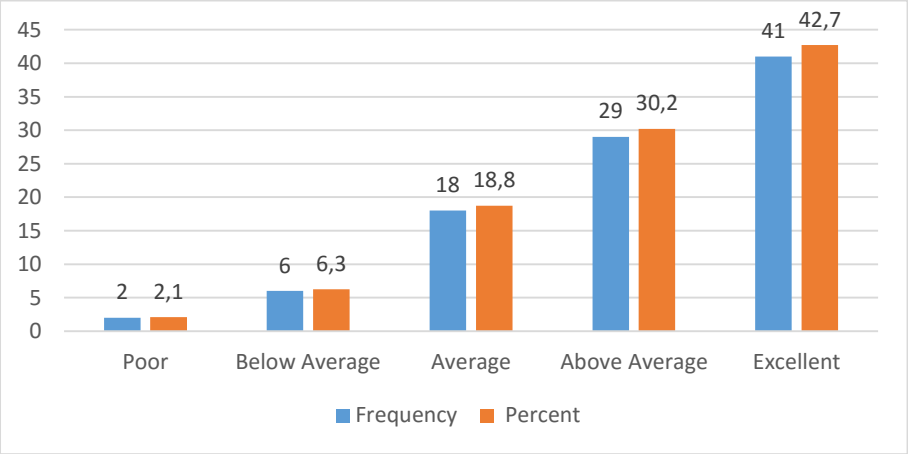


Figure 5.7 Handling incoming and outgoing mail (fax, email etc.)

Figure 5.7 shows that the largest group of respondents, 41 (42.7 percent) indicated that the extent to which the WIL programme prepared them in terms of handling incoming and outgoing mail (fax, email, etc.) was excellent, and 29 (30.2 percent) of the respondents indicate that the level was above average. It is clear therefore that students get hands-on opportunities in this in the workplace. However, supervisors felt that this skill needed to be improved. They also felt that students were often unskilled in the use of fax and email.

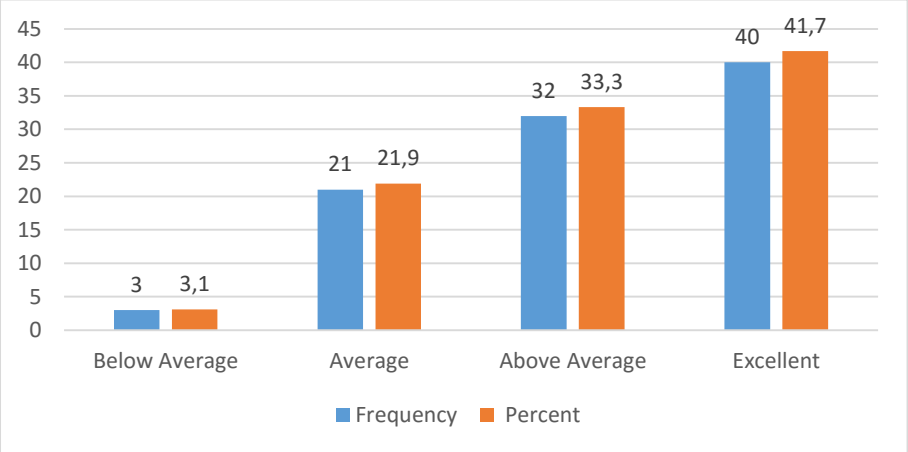


Figure 5.8 Record messages correctly

The majority of respondents (75%) rated the extent to which WIL programme prepares them for recording messages correctly as either excellent or above average. No respondents indicated that it was poor. On the other hand, it should also be noted that some students mentioned recording messages as one of the challenges they experienced in workplace learning.

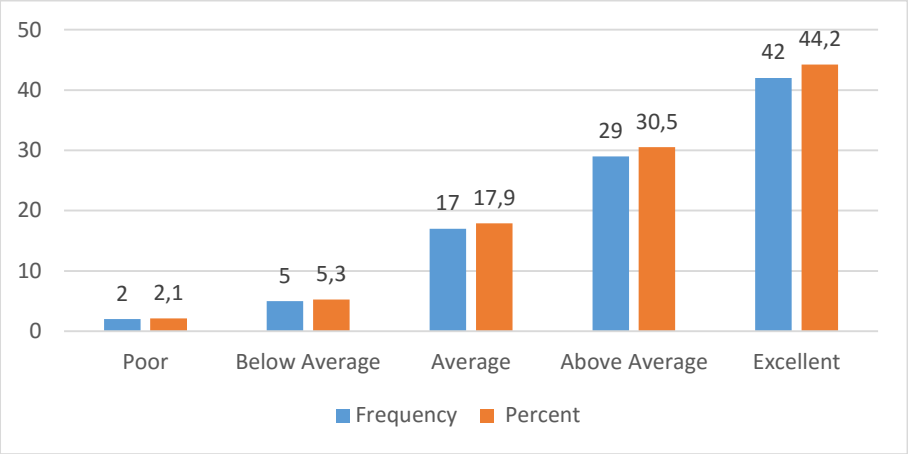


Figure 5.9 Welcoming visitors

The majority (75%) of the respondents were happy with the way they were prepared during WIL for welcoming visitors.

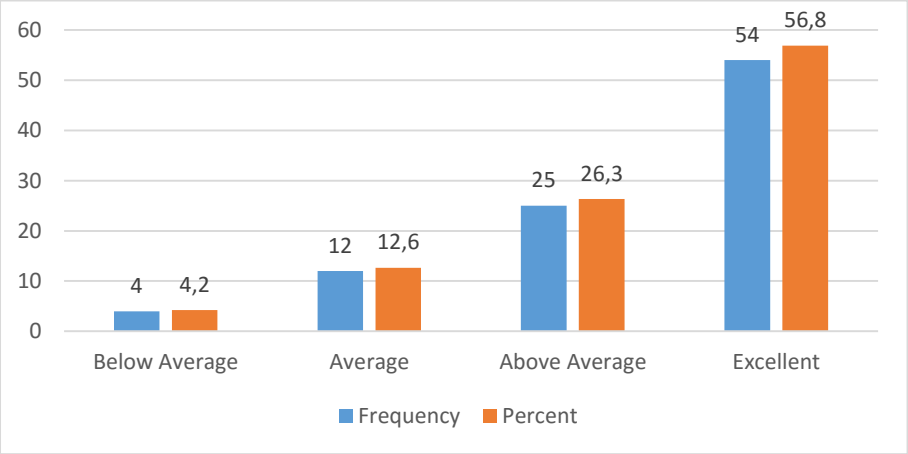


Figure 5.10 Providing customer service

It could be expected that students will learn customer service better in the workplace than in the classroom as they do it practically. This is confirmed by 54 (56.8 percent) of the respondents who rated the preparation level as excellent and 25 (26.3 percent) of the respondents as above average. That customer service is an important skill in administrative profession and is valued by almost all companies is confirmed by the International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP) (2013) who point out that administrative professionals are a significant point-of-contact for customers, co-workers, managers, executives and shareholders. Students have stated that they learn a lot about customer service while on WIL.

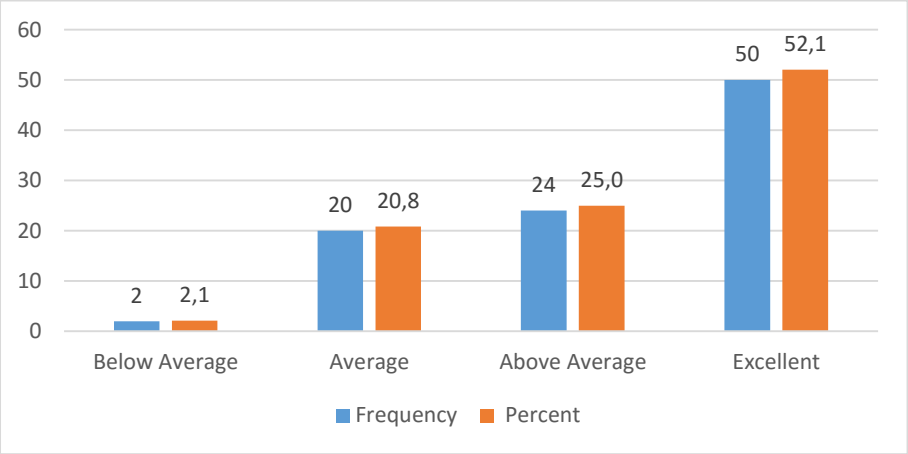


Figure 5.11 General office communication

Figure 5.11 indicates that students believed they were prepared well in terms of general office communication during workplace learning. However, when commenting about the skills that need to be improved in the OMT curriculum it should be noted that industry supervisors often felt that students lack communication skills and they suggested that it should be included in the curriculum up to third year level.

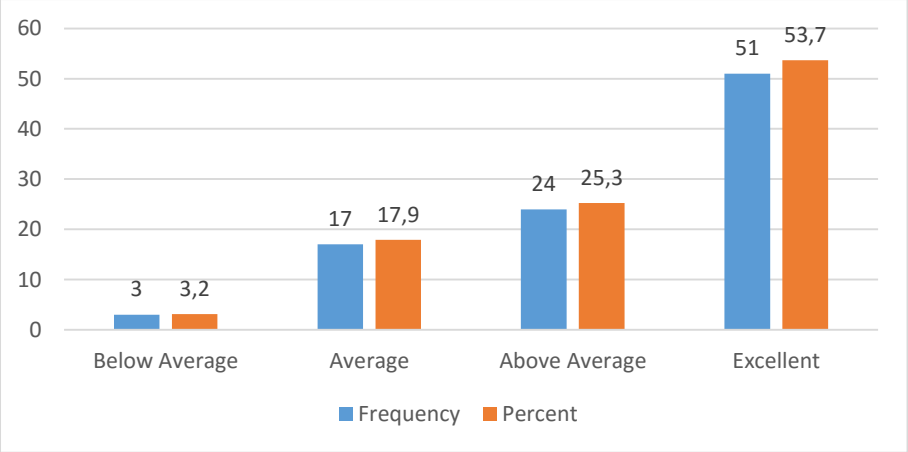


Figure 5.12 Filing

As shown in figure 5.12 the majority of the respondents at 51 (53.7 percent) indicated the preparation they received in the workplace in terms of filing was excellent There were no respondents who rated it as poor. These findings also suggest that skill in filing is still required in today's administration.

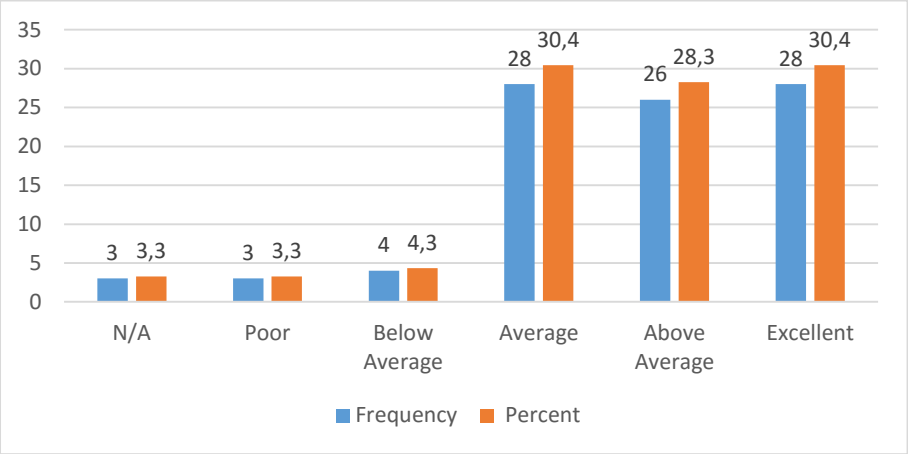


Figure 5.13 Dicta-phone typing/transcribing

These results show that skill in dicta-phone typing/transcribing is also still needed and used in companies and that students are undertaking these tasks in WIL

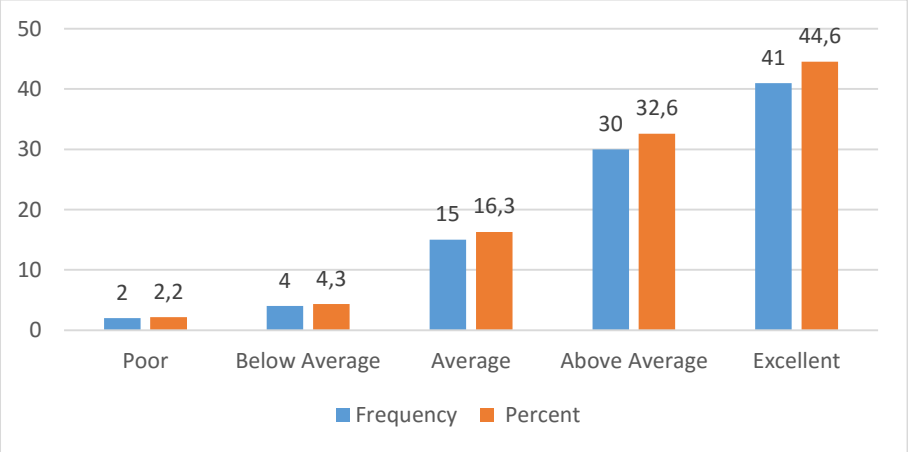


Figure 5.14 Using Ms Office Suite

Figure 5.14 shows that the majority of the respondents are happy with the manner in which workplace learning prepares them for using Ms Office suite. Many explained that there are programmes they learned in the workplace which they did not learn in class. This shows the importance of WIL. As discussed above, it is not possible for universities to have all software programmes because each company uses different programmes suitable for its purpose. However, it should be noted that industry supervisors felt that students often lack adequate computer skills. They mentioned that even knowledge of Microsoft programmes needs to be improved and that the university should introduce the full package of Microsoft Office. It should also be noted

that some students felt that they had no access in computers during workplace learning.

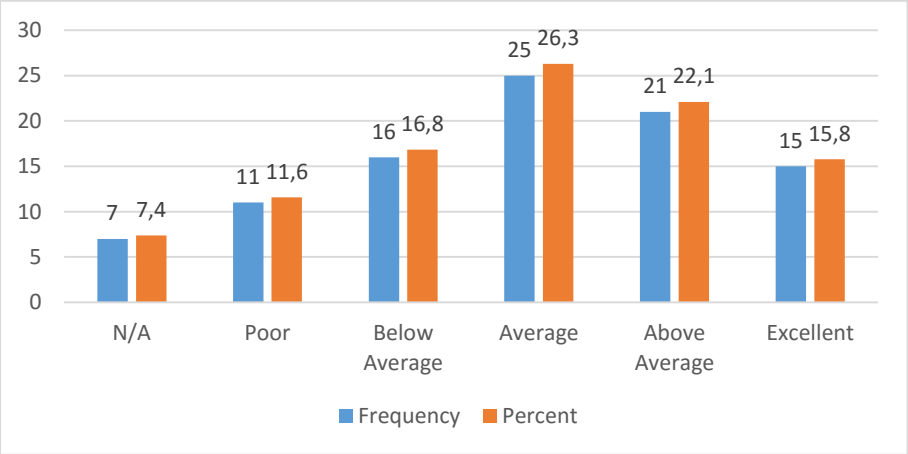


Figure 5.15 Organising meetings

It is interesting to note that the response here were less favourable than in most other cases. There were more respondents who indicated that they were not particularly happy about the manner in which they were prepared for this skill in the workplace. Companies may be reluctant to allow students to perform this duty.

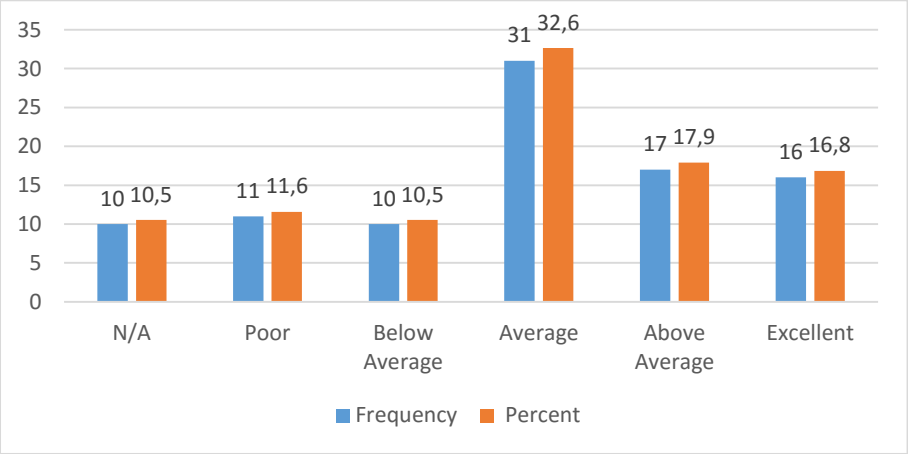


Figure 5.16 Minute taking

Figure 5.16 also shows that companies do not do much in preparing students for minute taking, although taking minutes is one of the important duties students should be trained for as listed in students' log books. Possibly supervisors fear that they might not do it properly, or it could be that some things in a meeting are confidential. While there were some very good experienced supervisors who do comply with this

requirement, minute taking is one of the skills mentioned by both supervisors and students as something that needs to be improved. It was also indicated by students that one of the challenges they faced in WIL was that they were not given an opportunity to attend meetings. The findings show that this should be improved in both classroom learning and in workplace learning.

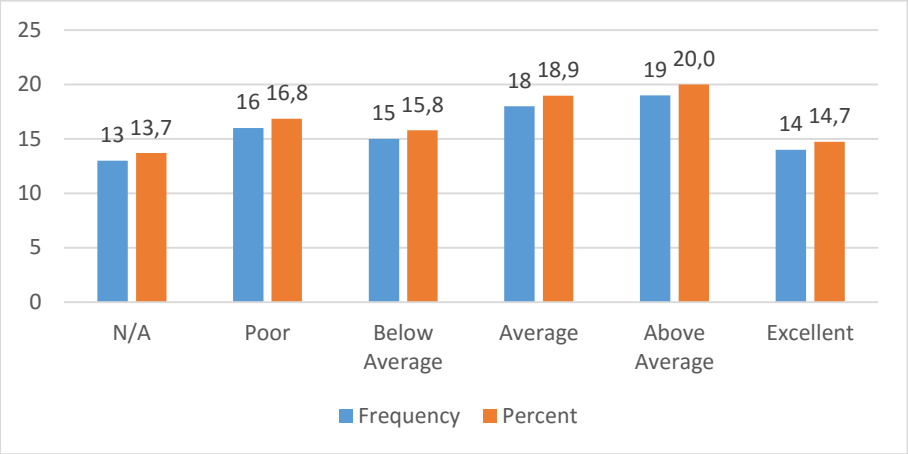


Figure 5.17 Making Travel arrangements

These results show that a large number of the respondents indicated that their preparation for making travel arrangements during WIL was below average. Possibly many companies do not allow such tasks to be performed by someone who does not have much experience.

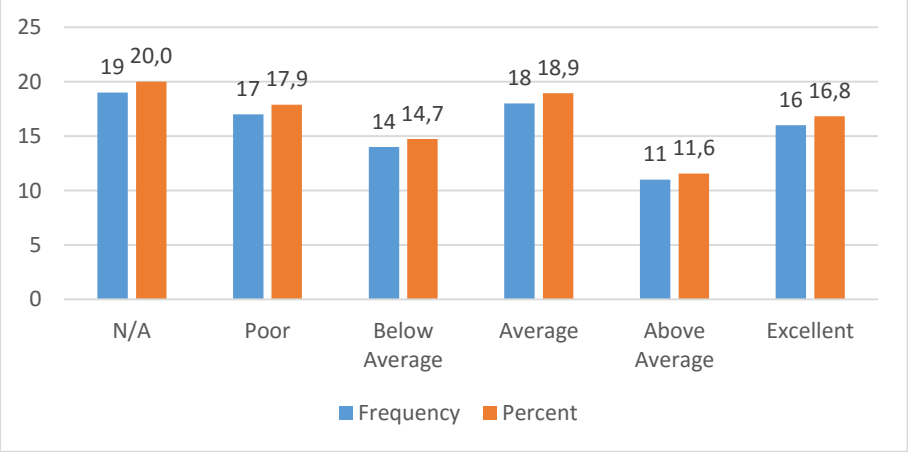


Figure 5.18 Organising business events

The findings in figure 5.18 also show that a large proportion (37.9%) of the respondents indicated that they did not get adequate preparation for organising

business events as they rated this either poor or not applicable. However, there were also those respondents (28.4%) who indicated the level of preparation as either above average or excellent. These results also tell us that learning opportunities students receive during workplace learning differ markedly from company to company. Possibly companies did not have events to organise in the period while the student was doing workplace learning. It should also be noted that some students mentioned organising business events as one of the new skills they learned in workplace learning which was not covered in classroom learning.

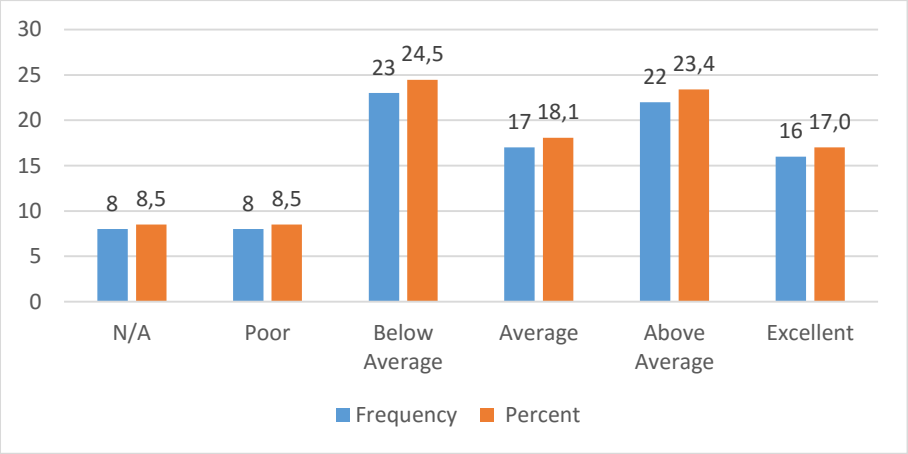


Figure 5.19 Report writing

The results in figure 5.19 also show that a large number 23 (24.5 percent) of respondents indicated that their preparation of report writing was below average indicating that students feel that they are not getting enough hands-on experience in report writing. It should also be noted that when students were commenting about the new skills they learned in the workplace, report writing skills was one of the skills some mentioned.

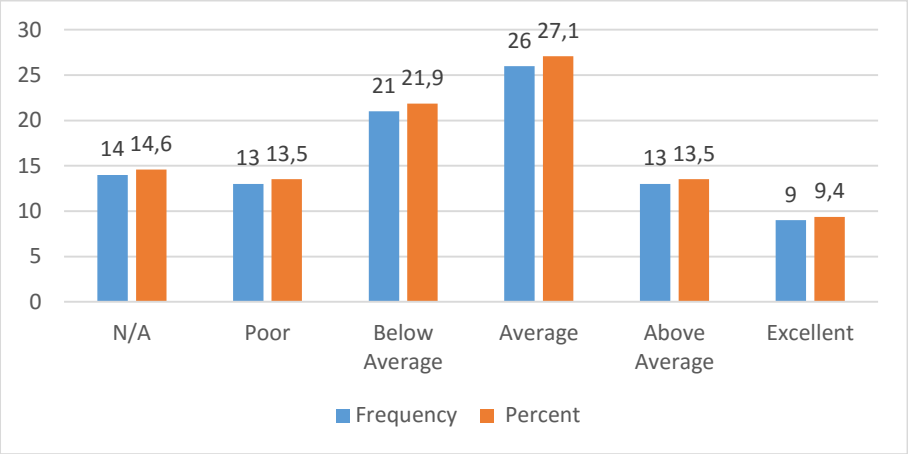


Figure 5.20 Legal matters

The results in figure 5.20 show that the largest number (35%) of the respondents indicated that the preparation level of legal matters was either below average or poor. 14 (14.6 percent) of the respondents indicated that the preparation of legal matters was not applicable. The findings indicate that students do not appear to be learning much more in the workplace in terms of legal matters. Legal practice is one of the subjects covered at level 1 and level 2 in OMT curriculum. In classroom learning students do legal practice theoretically. The findings indicate that students do not get much opportunity to deal practically with legal matters during workplace learning.

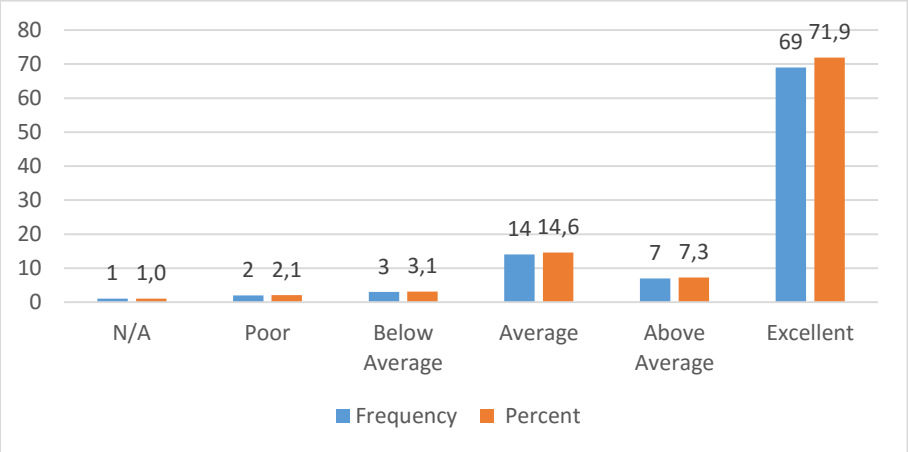


Figure 5.21 Using office equipment (fax, scanner, photocopier, etc.)

Figure 5.21 shows that companies do well in preparing students to use office equipment. This is in contrast to the responses of students regarding the preparation they get at university. Previous OMT students raised the need to be exposed to different office equipment before they undergo WIL. However, Donkor, Nsoh and

Mitchual (2009:01) argue that technologies keep on changing almost on a daily basis making it difficult for educational institutions to acquire all the necessary machines and equipment required for the training of their students. This shows that there are some skills that cannot be learned in classroom learning which can more effectively be learned in workplace learning.

5.3.3 QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESPONSES

This section covers both quantitative (closed ended) and qualitative (open ended) responses within the questionnaire based on the WIL programme. Respondents were given the following question and asked to respond either yes/no and to give an explanation for their answers:

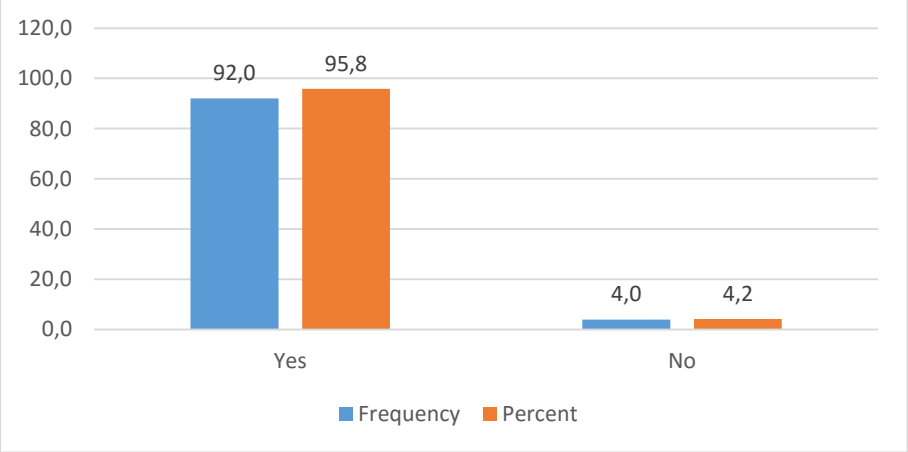


Figure 5.22 Were you provided with the experiences specified in your course curriculum during WIL?

Figure 5.22 shows that 95.8% of the respondents indicated that they were provided with the experiences specified in their curriculum in workplace learning, while only 4.2% of the respondents indicated that it was not the case where they were placed.

Qualitative responses:

Those respondents who had indicated that they were not provided with the experiences specified in the course curriculum during WIL were asked to explain why they were not provided with the relevant experiences. Their responses are given below.

- Not enough equipment at hospital
- Tasks are performed differently documentary wise

The results above, indicate that some students do not get relevant experiences during workplace learning, particularly those who are placed in a government hospital. It was also revealed that students did not have access to computers, as some of the government hospitals still use cards to store patients' information.

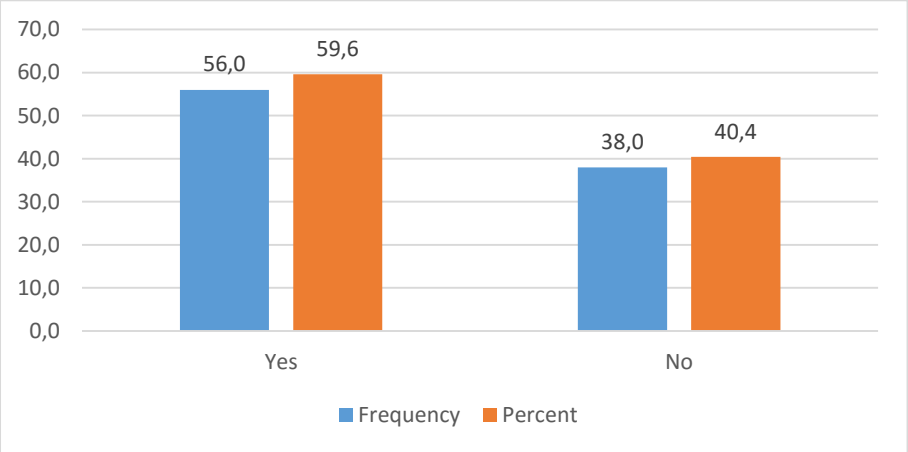


Figure 5.23. Are there any new skills which you learned from the WIL programme that you had not learned in class?

Figure 5.23 shows that most 56 (59.6 percent) of the respondents indicated that there are new skills they learned during workplace learning which they did not learn in classroom learning. On the other hand, 38.0 (40.4 percent) of the respondents indicated that this was not the case where they were placed.

Qualitative responses:

Those respondents who had indicated that there are new skills learned from WIL programme which they did not learn in class were asked to explain what those skills are. Their responses are given below. (Please note that these have been grouped by the researcher within specific categories of response).

Table 5.1

GENERAL OFFICE DUTIES

- Operating switchboard
- Faxing, scanning, printing and filing
- Sorting and grouping files
- Sorting forms
- Organise the office

COMPUTER SKILLS

- Being exposed to different programmes
- Data capturing
- Coreldraw
- Using ITS
- Designing posters
- Pastel
- Invoicing
- Java applications
- Microsoft project
- Using e-Filing
- Using the mainframe program (pers ap/persal)
- Processing SAP solutions

OTHER SKILLS

- Booking venues on LMS
- Organising events and online bookings
- Communication and team work
- Writing reports
- Checking reports
- Meditech
- Marking assessments guide
- Requisition
- Attending trainings and workshops
- Management skills, skills development

The results show that there are some of the skills that can be learned in the workplace which cannot be learned in classroom learning and also those that can be learned in both classroom and workplace.

5.3.3 Respondents were asked what challenges they faced in participating in WIL

Their responses are given below. (Please note that these have been grouped by the researcher within specific categories of response).

Table 5.2

WIL RELATED CHALLENGES

- Finding placement
- Absence of mentor
- Not starting Wil on time
- Lecturer was absent during Wil

WORK RELATED CHALLENGES

- Attending to students queries
- Communication
- Filing
- Handling finance
- Taking down messages correctly
- Keeping records up to date
- Liability to use copier machine
- Managing time
- Handwriting
- Taking minutes
- No knowledge of using office equipment
- Teamwork
- Working under pressure
- No financial background
- Working with different machines

INTERPERSONAL TENSIONS

- Rude patients
- Competition with other interns
- Fear in the first few weeks
- Dealing with rude students and parents
- Office politics
- Rude clients and supervisors
- Sometimes taken for granted
- Running errands for staff, buying lunch
- Was a volunteer, no employee number
- Different personalities
- Environment not healthy
- Dealing with different people

RACIAL CHALLENGES

- Race discrimination
- Work with different race group
- Working with different cultures

TELEPHONE USAGE CHALLENGES

- Could not use telephone due to coding
- Liability to make outgoing calls
- Answering phone not familiar
- Managing different calls from different departments

COMPUTER USAGE CHALLENGES

- Learning Integrated Tertiary Software
- No access to computer
- New software
- Typing experience
- Not using software correctly
- Using new advanced programmes
- Processing SAP solution report
- Speed and typing extremely large documents

OTHER CHALLENGES

- Being exposed to different environment and tasks
- Heavy workload
- Incomplete duties list
- Meeting deadlines
- Network errors while using machines
- Drought and Transport
- No work to do at times
- Not given a chance to attend meetings
- Relevant things should be lectured
- Working overtime

The findings in table 5.2 indicate that some of the challenges are caused by inadequate preparation before they undergo WIL. A large number of respondents mentioned that they were unable to use office equipment, had challenges with filing, taking minutes, taking messages down correctly, or were also unable to type fast enough. It should be noted that some of the duties that respondents found challenging in the workplace are in fact covered in class. Some of the challenges were caused by the workplace itself as in certain companies students were not allowed to use the telephone, use the computers, nor to attend meetings. It is clear that learning opportunities given to students in workplace learning vary considerably from company to company. Some respondents mentioned that at times there was no work to do and some respondents complained about a heavy workload. Based on the results in table 5.2, it can be inferred that a real effort is required to improve aspects of the WIL programme and classroom learning.

5.3.4 Respondents were asked what suggestions they would make for the improvement of the current WIL programme

Their responses are given below.

- Accommodate students who want to learn and gain experience
- More software programmes to be taught
- Add accounting
- Assist students with work placement
- Communication with companies for incentives
- Extend WIL period
- Provide support
- WIL should start at the beginning of the year
- Good communication between students and supervisors
- More practical classes than theory
- Expose students to office equipment before WIL
- Lecturers to put more effort in assisting students during WIL
- Making sure tasks are performed and understood well
- Meet due dates through emails
- Office environment needs to be taught in school
- Provide business centre for students to practice
- WIL should be done within the academic year

- Training must be done before June
- Lecturers to visit every student during WIL
- WIL should start from first year of the course
- Students should look for companies early
- To spend more time familiarising with office equipment

Based on the above responses, it is clear that improvement is required in the current WIL programme. It is noted that the respondents suggested that more software programmes must be taught including in accounting, and that more time should be dedicated for practical classes than theory classes. It was also suggested that universities should have a business centre with office equipment so that students can learn to use them before they undergo WIL. Therefore, the responses indicate that the WIL programme needs to be improved not only in the workplace but also in the Office Management and Technology Practice (OMTP) class where they are being prepared for the workplace before they undergo workplace learning. It should be noted that the length of the WIL training period is a great concern for both supervisors and students. Many believe that the period of three months is too short and suggestions were made that it should be extended to at least six months. Some of the respondents suggested that WIL should start in the first year of study and many requested closer ties with lecturers during the WIL period.

5.4 RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS BASED ON THE CURRENT OMT CURRICULUM

This section deals with the current OMT curriculum. Responses to statements relating to the OMT curriculum were necessary to identify any skills gaps in the current OMT curriculum and any areas requiring development.

5.4.1 STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF CLASSROOM LEARNING BASED ON THE DUTIES/TASKS AS LAID DOWN IN THEIR LOGBOOK

This section aims at ascertaining to what extent students believe that the University prepares them for the duties/tasks listed in their WIL logbook. Respondents were asked to respond either poor, below average, average, above average, excellent or not applicable.

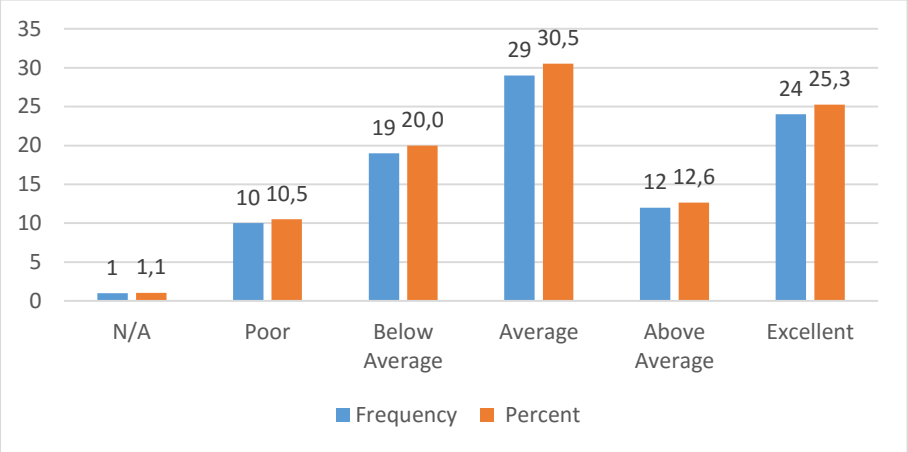


Figure 5.24 Handling incoming & outgoing calls.

Comparing the ratings for developing telephone handling skills in both workplace learning and classroom learning, the results show that 80.4% of the respondents indicated that the preparation they received in WIL was above average and there were only 38% of the respondents who rated classroom preparation as above average. This indicates that workplace learning prepares students better for handling incoming and outgoing calls than classroom learning.

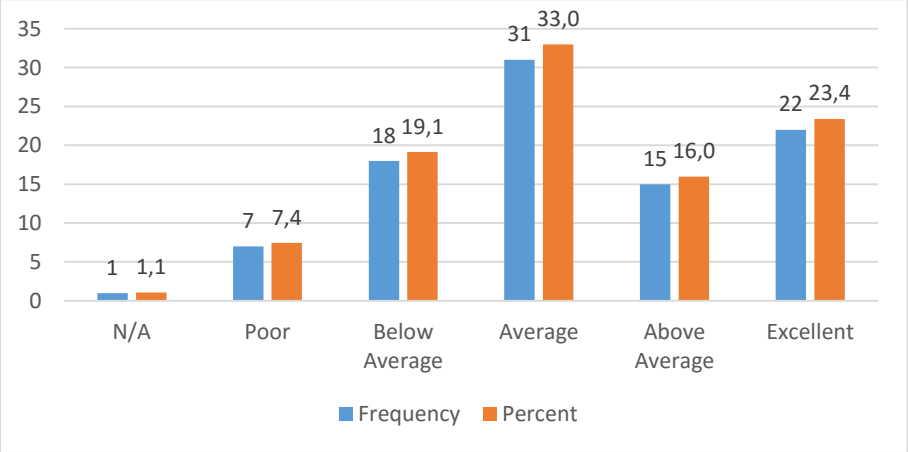


Figure 5.25 Handling incoming & outgoing mail (fax, e-mail, etc.)

The results in figure 5.25 indicate that 31 (33.0 percent) of the respondents rated the extent to which university prepares them for handling incoming and outgoing calls as just average. There were also those respondents who were not happy about the preparation they received as 18 (19.1 percent) rated the level as below average, 7 (7.4 percent) of the respondents rated as poor. There were only 39.4% respondents who rated the classroom preparation as above average. It was reported by students that the university did not prepare them for using office equipment before they undergo

WIL and this could include fax machines, scanning and practice with e-mailing. They suggested that the university should expose them to office equipment before they undergo WIL.

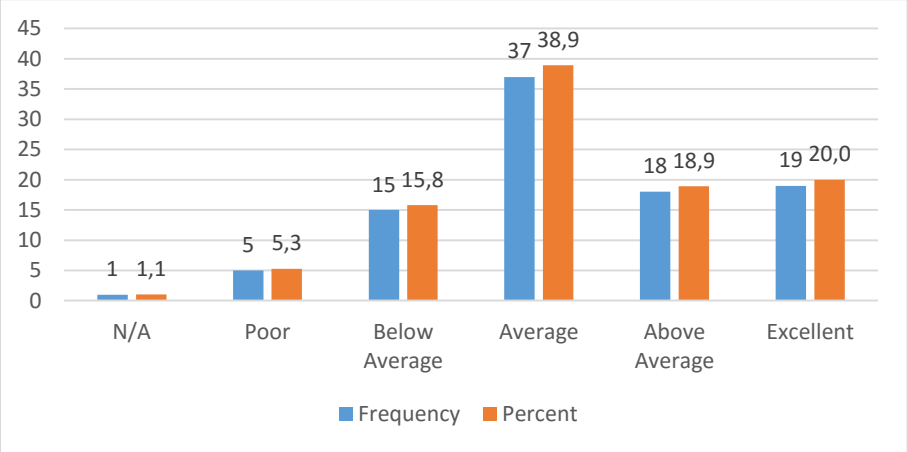


Figure 5.26 Record messages correctly

The findings in figure 5.26 show that the largest number 37 (38.9 percent) of respondents indicated that the preparation they received at university for recording messages correctly was just average. This contrasts with the findings for workplace learning where 75% respondents indicated 'above average'. This means that this task is also taught better in the workplace than in the classroom.

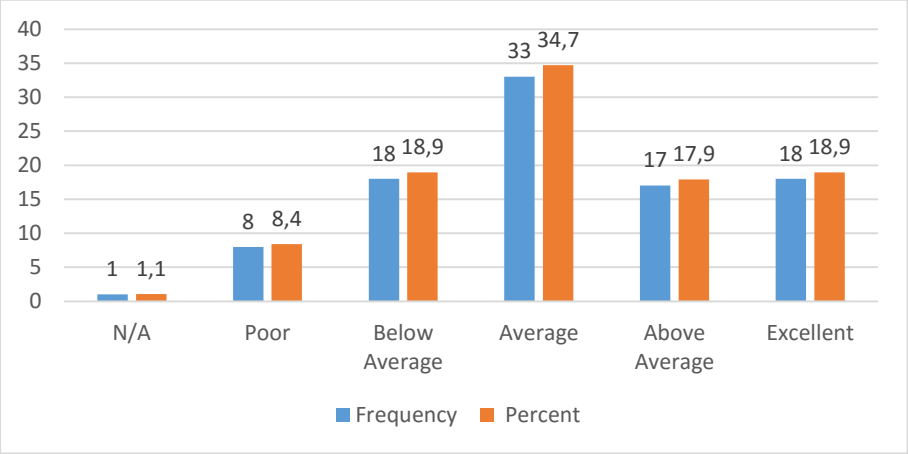


Figure 5.27 Welcoming visitors

Figure 5.27 shows that the largest number (34.7%) of respondents indicate that the preparation in classroom learning for welcoming visitors was just average. 18.9 % of the respondents indicated that the preparation was excellent, followed closely by

17.9% of the respondents who rated the preparation as above average. It should be noted that there were also those who showed that they were not happy at all but they were very few. These findings indicate that welcoming visitors is, as could be expected, one of the skills which are more difficult to prepare students for in classroom learning. In the workplace they get the opportunity to do it practically.

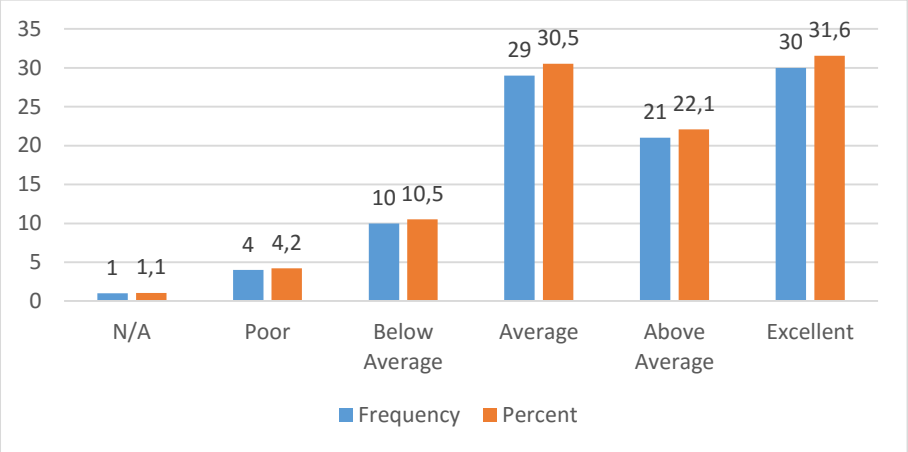


Figure 5.28 Providing customer service

Once again the findings for customer service preparation show that this task is better learned in the workplace as there were 83% respondents who rated the preparation they received in the workplace as above average, and only 54% of the respondents rated the classroom preparation as above average.

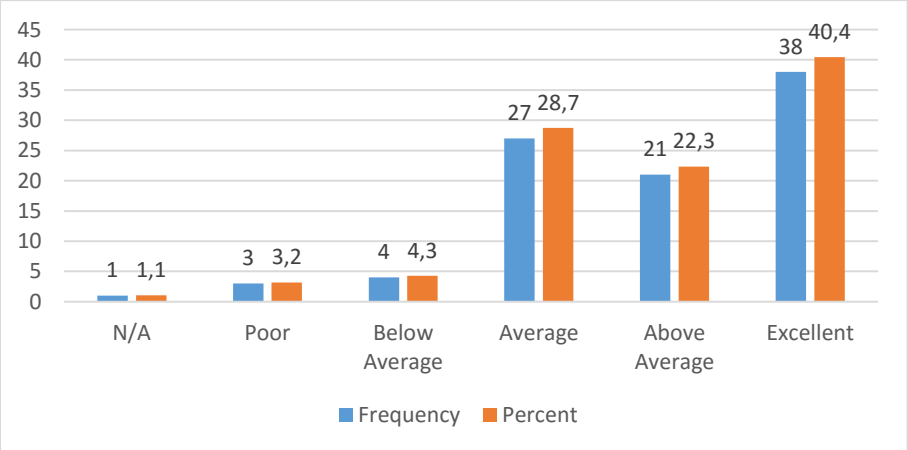


Figure 5.29 General office communication

Figure 5.29 shows that 63% of the respondents indicate that the extent to which the university prepares them for general office communication was either above average

or excellent followed by 28.7% of the respondents who rated the preparation as just average.

The overall findings for both workplace and classroom show that there were 77.1% of the respondents who indicated that workplace preparation was above average and while 63% of the respondents indicated that the classroom preparation was above average. This indicates that office communication is also better learned in the real work environment.

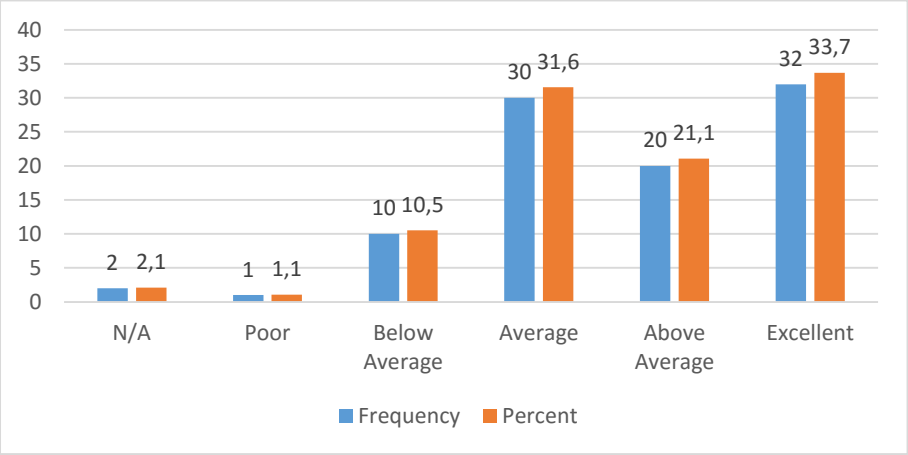


Figure 5.30 Filing

Figure 5.30 shows that a large number of the respondents were happy with the manner in which the university prepares them for filing. A majority of the respondents indicated that the preparation was either above average or excellent. However this is contrary to what they said when they were commenting on the challenges they faced in participating in WIL. Here they mentioned filing as one of the challenges they faced and a skill that needs to be improved in OMT curriculum. They also suggested that the university should include electronic filing in the syllabus.

The results for the preparation of students for filing show that 79% respondents indicated workplace preparation was above average and only 55.1% respondents indicated that the classroom preparation was above average. These results also indicate that filing is learned better in the workplace.

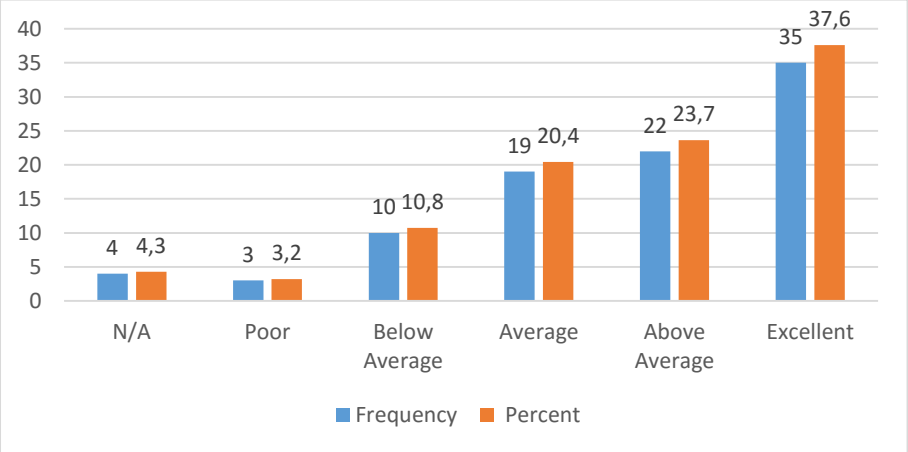


Figure 5.31 Dicta-phone typing/transcribing

Generally students are satisfied with the manner in which the university prepares them for Dictaphone typing/transcribing. 59% of respondents indicated that workplace preparation was above average and 61.3% respondents indicated that the classroom preparation was above average. There is therefore almost no difference in these results.

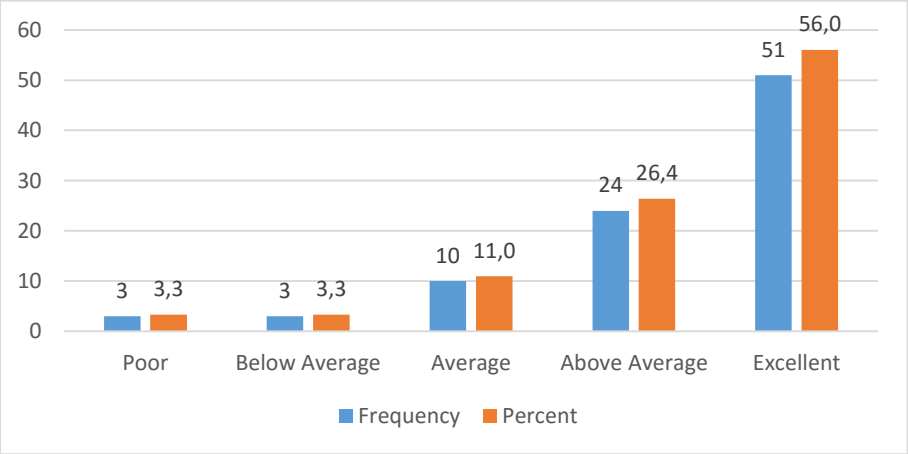


Figure 5.32 Using Ms Office Suite

The findings in figure 5.32 show that most of the respondents were satisfied with the way the university prepares them for using Ms Office suite. It should be noted however that when the researcher compared the level of satisfaction for the preparation of both workplace and classroom learning that there were more (82.4%) of respondents who rated classroom preparation as above average than workplace preparation at 77.2%. Alhough the difference is not much, the results show that in the opinion of the students both workplace and classroom are doing well in preparing them to use Ms Office Suite. This is, however, contrary to what supervisors said when they were commenting about

the skills that need to be improved in the curriculum. They mentioned that students lack computer skills, and suggested that universities should expose students to all Microsoft office programmes. Students likewise suggested a number of additional software programmes that they feel that should be included in the syllabus.

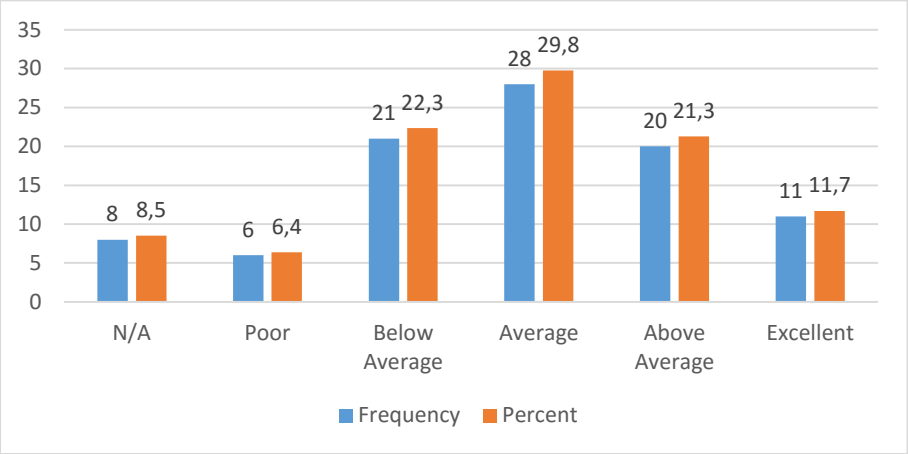


Figure 5.33 Organising meetings

These findings indicate that only 33% of the respondents rated preparation for meetings as above average, and 23.7% rated the preparation as either below average or poor. It is therefore evident from the responses that the university needs to do more in preparing students for organising meetings. While it is difficult to teach this skill in the classroom, it is also true that only 37% respondents indicated that workplace preparation was above average in this regard, and only 33% of respondents indicated that the classroom preparation was above average. These results show low percentages for both.

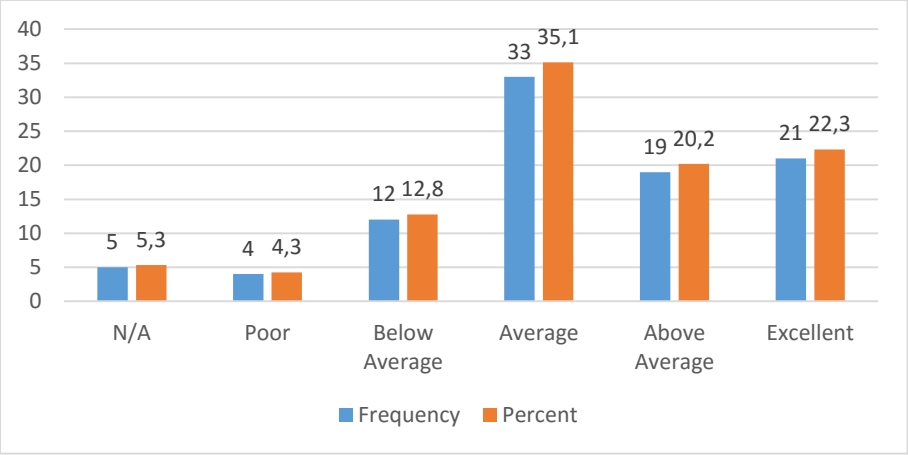


Figure 5.34 Minute taking

The results in figure 5.34 show that 43% of the respondents rated the preparation they received at university for minute taking skills as either above average or excellent followed by 35.1% of the respondents who rated the preparation as just average. These ratings show that improvement by the university is needed in preparing students for minute taking skills as the largest number of the respondents rated the preparation as just average. It was also reported by supervisors that students lack minute taking skills. When students commented about the skills that need improvement in the curriculum, they also mentioned minute taking. They felt that the preparation they receive at the university is not adequate. Only 35% of respondents indicated that workplace preparation in this regard was above average and 42.5% respondents indicated that the classroom preparation was above average. This indicates that both industry and university needs to improve their development of minute-taking skills.

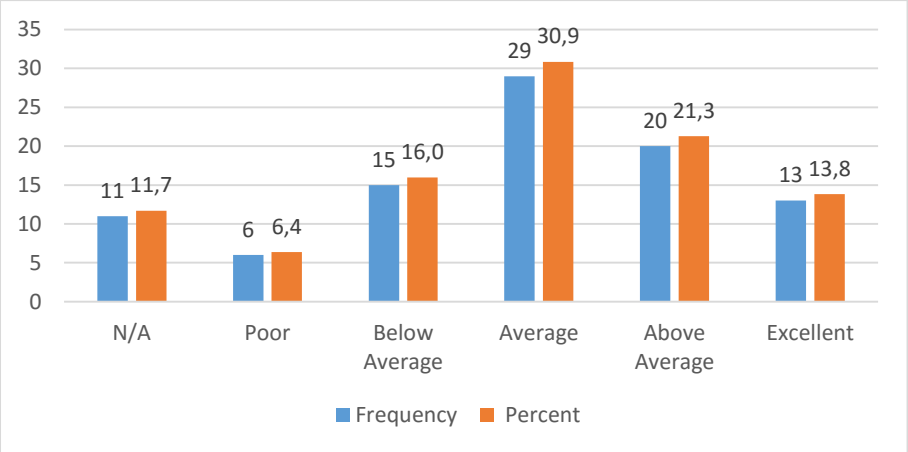


Figure 5.35 Making Travel arrangements

Figure 5.35 shows that only 35.1% of the respondents indicated that they were happy with the preparation they receive at University for making travel arrangements. 22.4% of the respondents indicated that they are not happy. It should be noted that there were also some respondents who rated the level as 'not applicable', perhaps indicating that they never had an opportunity to practice this skill. Students also mentioned making travel arrangements as one of the weaknesses in the OMT curriculum. They feel that they learn very little in class in this regard. It would appear that both industry and university need to improve in this regard.

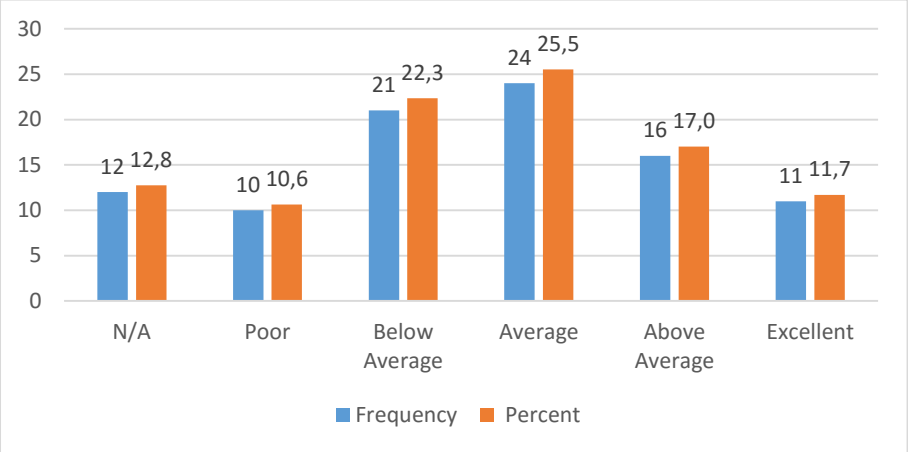


Figure 5.36 Organising business events

Findings from figure 5.36 are in line with the results in figure 4.53. These results indicate that students do not get enough preparation for organising business events in either the classroom or in the workplace. Students commented on the need to learn more about organising business event in the curriculum. 28.4% of the respondents rated workplace preparation as above average and 29% of the respondents rated classroom preparation as above average. These very similar results indicate that both industry and university need to do more in preparing students for organising business events.

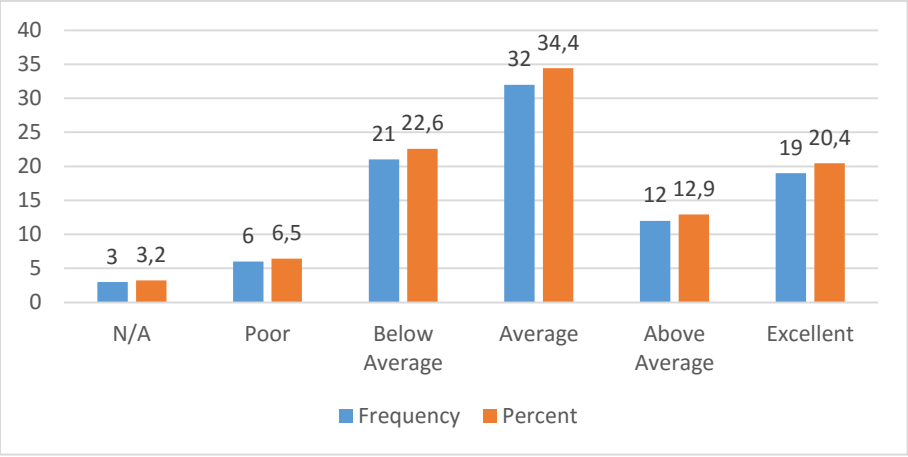


Figure 5.37 Report writing

The results in figure 5.37 show that a large number 32 (34.4 percent) of the respondents indicated that the level in which university prepares them for report writing is only average, followed by 21 (22.6 percent) who rated it as below average. These results indicate that the preparation of students for report writing is not good at

university, supporting those students who specifically mentioned report writing skills as an area that needs to be improved in the OMT curriculum.

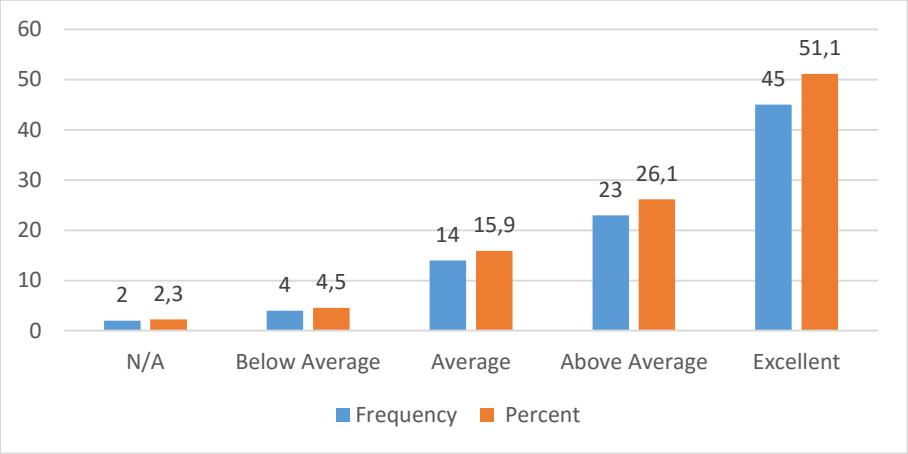


Figure 5.38 Typing skills

Figure 5.38 shows that students are happy with the extent to which university prepares them for typing skills as the majority (77.2%) rated the level as either above average or excellent. These findings show that *in the opinion of students* the university adequately prepares students for typing skills. However, this is contrary to supervisors' responses where typing skills was one of the skills that the majority of the supervisors mentioned as needing improvement.

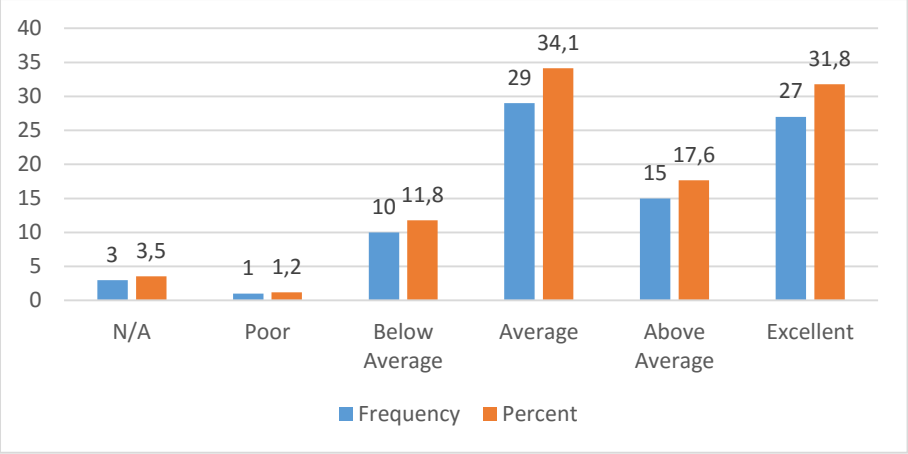


Figure 5.39 Human Resources Duties

The results in figure 5.39 show that the largest number (34.1%) of the respondents rated the level of preparation they receive from the University for Human Resource Skills as just average, followed closely by 31.8% of the respondents who indicated

that the level of preparation was excellent. There were very few respondents who rated the level as below average, poor or as not applicable.

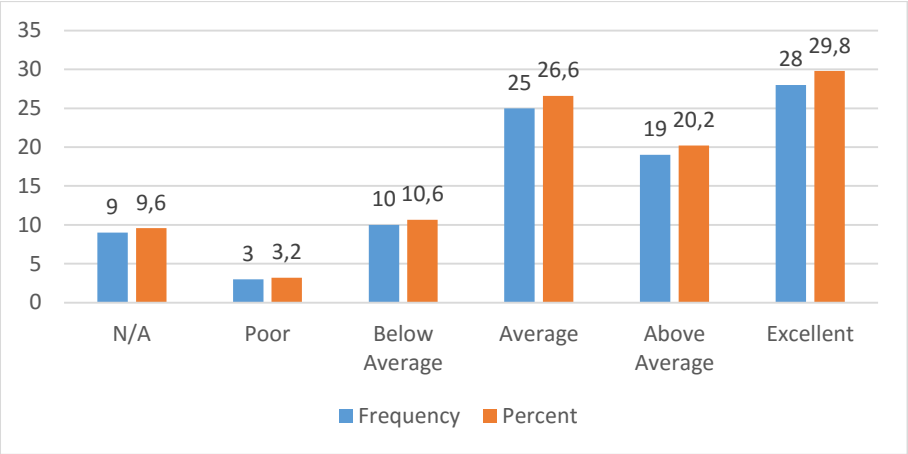


Figure 5.40 Legal matters

Overall findings indicate that there were only 23% respondents who rated workplace preparation for legal matters as above average while this graph indicates that there were 50% of the respondents who rated classroom preparation for legal matters as above average. From these findings, it is clear that there were very few respondents who were satisfied about the preparation they received in the workplace for legal matters compared to classroom learning.

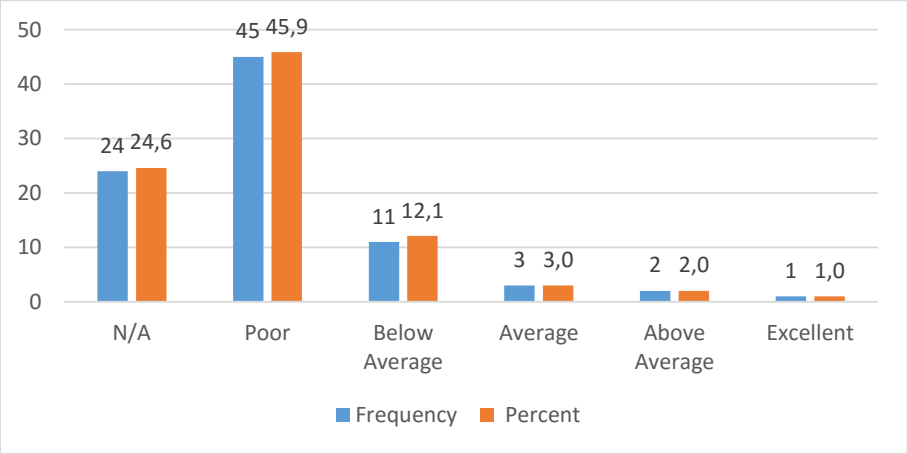


Figure 5.41 Using office equipment (fax, scanner, photocopier, etc.)

Figure 5.41 illustrates that the majority (71%) of the respondents indicated that the extent to which university prepares them for using office equipment was either poor or not applicable at all. These results are in line with the concern which was raised by previous OMT students when they were reporting back at the university about their

experiences in workplace learning in Office Management and Technology Practice (OMTP) class that they need to be exposed to office equipment by the university before they undergo WIL. It is clear that, in the opinion of the students, universities do not prepare students adequately for using office equipment.

The results show that there were 79.2% who rated the preparation they received in the workplace for using office equipment as above average and there were only 30% respondents who rated classroom preparation as above average. This can be ascribed to the university not having the range of equipment used in an average office. This mirrors a study done by Jackson (2014: 9) which shows that students complained that they were not adequately prepared for WIL, particularly in their ability to use technology. This could be due to budget constraints. Technology keeps on changing which makes it difficult for universities to have all equipment used in an office available for students to practice on.

5.4.2 QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESPONSES

This section covers both quantitative (closed ended) and qualitative (open ended) responses within the questionnaire based on the current OMT curriculum. Respondents were given a question and asked to respond either yes/no and to give an explanation to their answers.

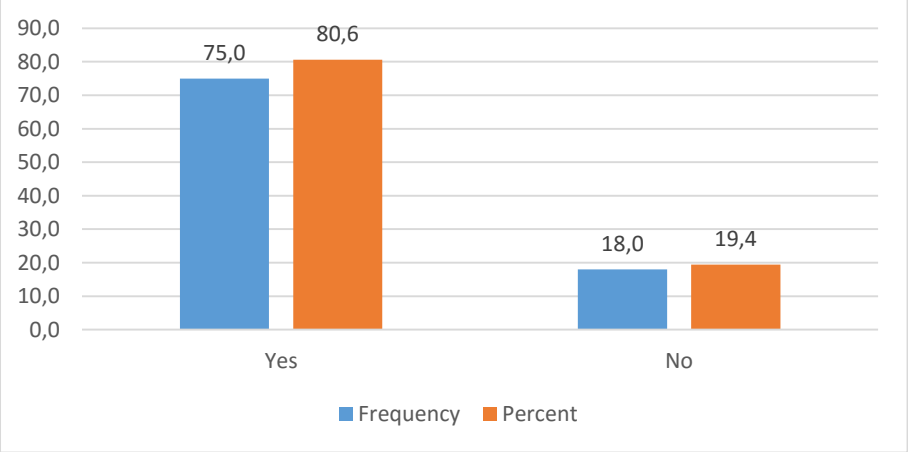


Figure 5.42 Was the preparation given to you by the University before WIL appropriate and adequate?

Figure 5.42 reveals that there were considerably more (75, or 80.6 percent) respondents who indicated that they were satisfied about the preparation given to

them before they underwent workplace learning than were not satisfied. There were only 18 (19.4 percent) respondents felt that the preparation was not adequate.

Qualitative response:

The open-ended responses are given below. (Please note that these have been grouped by the researcher according to Yes or No responses).

Table 5.3

YES RESPONSES	NO RESPONSES
• Adapt easily with the environment • All tasks performed in class was put into action • Theory learnt in class was relevant to what happens in the workplace • Applied all information learnt • Basics learnt in theory are very helpful • Computer usage was done in school prep talk given regarding business • Familiar with excel and word • Gives you an advantage to learn and express what you have experienced	• Insufficient time, did not know how to operate some equipment • Lacks in some sections • Mastered most of work through mentors • More practical are needed • No knowledge on how to use office equipment • Not enough OMTP classes held • Not enough time to prepare and conduct • Not enough time, had to learn to use office equipment without any help • Not familiar with office environment • Was given research assignment to complete • Was not confident enough to face the world of work • Was theoretical but not practical • Was told to do WIL but had no knowledge of what it was

The results in table 5.3 indicate that the largest number (80.6%) of the respondents believe that the preparation was adequate. Moreover, they mentioned that the theory they learnt in class was relevant to what happens in the workplace. It was easy for them to apply the information they learnt in class to the real work environment. On the other hand, a smaller but still significant number (19.4%) felt that the preparation was not appropriate and/ or adequate.

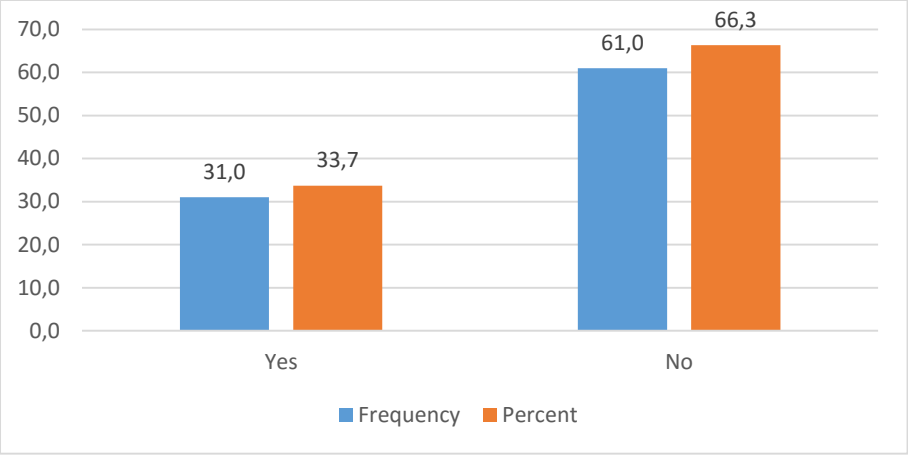


Figure 5.43. Are there any other skills that you believe are important for the administrative career which are not covered in OMT curriculum?

The findings in figure 5.43 show that around one third (31.0 or 33.7 percent) of the respondents indicated that there are important skills for the administrative profession which are not covered in the OMT curriculum and which they feel that they should be taught in class. On the other hand 61.0 (66.3 percent) indicated that the skills covered in OMT curriculum are sufficient.

Qualitative responses:

Those respondents who indicated that there are other important skills not covered in the curriculum were asked to explain. Their responses are given below.

- General office duties (faxing, scanning, photocopying, sending emails)
- Pastel accounting
- Financial accounting
- Organising business events
- Report writing

- Taking minutes
- Telephone etiquette
- Databases

Some of the skills mentioned above are included in OMT curriculum but students appear to feel that they are not given enough exposure to them. It particularly it appears that universities do not prepare students adequately for using office equipment. When students were giving answers to open-ended questions as to which improvements were needed in the current WIL programme, five students suggested that universities should have a simulated office with office automation to show students how to use them before they undergo WIL. It is also clear that there is a felt need for incorporating financial accounting and pastel accounting in the OMT curriculum as these skills were mentioned by both supervisors and students as important for an administrative career.

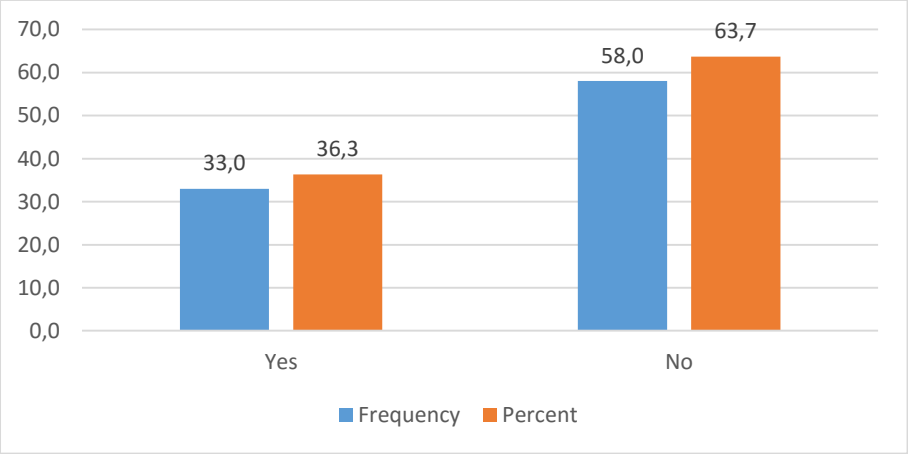


Figure 5.44 Are there any other software programmes that you believe are important for the administrative career which are not covered in class

The results in figure 5.44 show again that 33.0 (36.3 percent) of the respondents indicated that there are software programmes that are not covered in class which they found to be important.

Qualitative response:

The responses are given below as to which software programmes should be covered:

- Database

- Microsoft outlook
- Pastel accounting
- Electronic filing
- Java programmes
- Persal
- Locating documents online
- Using internet
- VIP programme
- ITS iEnabler
- ICDL
- Update windows

Some of the software programs mentioned above, such as database and Microsoft Outlook, are covered in class, but probably they are not taught to the level that is expected in the workplace. It is noted that the issue of using of equipment was mentioned by almost 90% of the respondents as one of the challenges they faced during WIL. While it is clear that universities need to keep up with the changing technology, it should also be noted, as mentioned above, that each company uses different software programs suitable for its purposes, and that therefore it is not possible for universities to have all of the software programs students may be asking for.

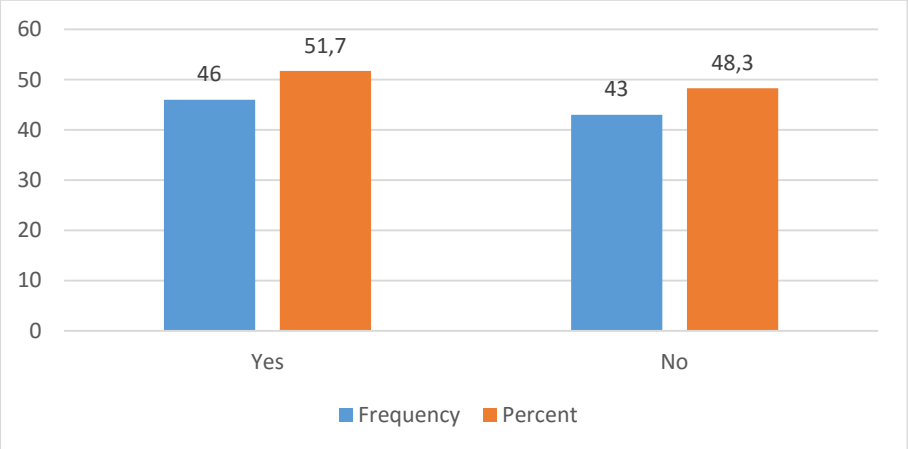


Figure 5.45 Are there any skills that need to be improved in OMT curriculum?

The results in figure 5.45 show that nearly half (43 or 48.3 percent) of the respondents believe that there are skills that need to be improved in the OMT curriculum. These

explained their answers as follows: (Please note that these have been grouped by the researcher within specific categories of response).

Table 5.4

GENERAL OFFICE DUTIES

- Telephone skills
- Using office equipment (fax, scanner, photocopier)
- Filing
- Typing skills

WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING

- Extend WIL period to six months
- Find placement for students
- Closer relationship with companies
- More hand on in duties/tasks
- Better supervision and better organisation

OTHER SKILLS

- Communication
- Organising business events
- Travel arrangement
- Report writing
- Minute taking
- Computer skills (Excel, PowerPoint, Ms Word)
- Financial accounting
- Time management
- Human relations
- Improve practical

The responses in table 5.4 reveal that there are a number of skills that need to be improved in OMT curriculum. The length of the WIL period was also of concern for both supervisors and students. A suggestion for extending WIL training to six months was also made by both supervisors and students. The findings of this study also reveal that there are certain tasks that students are not given to perform during workplace learning.

5.5 CONCLUSION

In Chapters Four and Five the findings gathered from both supervisors and students' data were presented, analysed and categorised according to sections used in the questionnaires. The data was analysed by a statistician using SPSS version 24.0 and presented in the form of graphs and tables.

The findings for both supervisors and students indicate that the current OMT curriculum is fairly well in line with industry needs. However, a skills gap in the curriculum was also identified which can result in students failing to perform as effectively as they might during WIL. Suggestions were made by both supervisors and students for the improvement of the current OMT curriculum and for the current WIL programme. On the positive side the findings also indicate that the WIL programme plays a vital role as there are several skills that are learned better in the workplace than in the classroom. Students also indicated that they acquired new skills and knowledge during workplace learning.

The overall response rate was good from both supervisors and students, and, as a result, the research questions were answered and research objectives were achieved.

The next and final chapter presents conclusions, suggestions and recommendations for this research study.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous two chapters discuss the findings of this study in detail. Data obtained through questionnaires were analysed and interpreted. The focal point of this study was to examine the current OMT curriculum to discover whether it meets the demands of the workplace with the aim of making recommendations to improve the quality of this curriculum at Universities of Technology as it pertains to WIL.

This chapter discusses the conclusions and recommendations based on the analysis of the data collected.

The objectives of the research project were:

- To ascertain what skills, abilities and attributes employers are typically seeking in the administrative profession today.
- To investigate the learning opportunities offered to OMT students during WIL.
- To identify any skills gaps in the Office Management and Technology curriculum and any areas requiring development.
- To assess the quality of students' preparation in both classroom learning and workplace learning.

6.2 ACHIEVEMENT OF THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This section explains how the objectives of this study were achieved.

The First Objective

The first objective was to ascertain what skills, abilities and attributes employers are typically seeking in the administrative profession today. The relevant information regarding the first objective was gathered both from the literature consulted

(secondary data) and from supervisors and OMT students (primary data). The findings from the primary data are reflected in Chapter Four and in Chapter Five.

Both industry supervisors and students suggested the following skills and abilities should be added to the work schedules/ curriculum:

- **Financial accounting and pastel accounting**

Most respondents felt that it would be useful to include financial accounting in the office management and technology curriculum. Industry supervisors also mentioned accounting skills when they were discussing skills that OMT students lack. There were seven industry supervisors and six students who suggested that financial accounting should be included in the OMT curriculum. The statistics that have come from both the students and supervisors and from the literature, appear to show that it is essential that administrative assistants have a basic understanding of accounting. This is because in large organisations with many departments, secretaries are often expected to manage departmental budgets. Two industry supervisors suggested that students should be taught to create budgets. When industry supervisors were rating the importance of financial budgeting skills, 45.3 percent rated this as very important and 35.8 said it is important. Furthermore, other Universities of Technology in South Africa include financial account as an optional subject in their OMT curriculum. Therefore it is recommended that all UoT's consider including Financial Accounting in the OMT curriculum.

It was also suggested by two industry supervisors and four students that the pastel accounting software package be included. It is clear from the statistics and literature that basic accounting knowledge is still a requirement in the administrative profession. Half (2015) explains that today, the roles of administrative assistants have evolved from conquering spread sheets and memos to include areas such as accounting, payroll and human resource applications.

- **Project management**

The statistics showed that nearly 70% (68.5%) of industry supervisors saw project management as important for today's office managers. Project management was also rated as an important skill by most industry supervisors both within closed and pen-ended questions. Several years ago, project management was not generally a requirement for administrative assistants, but in today's world of work, administrative assistants are expected to possess additional management skills. Christopher Whibley (2014) sees the need for office administrators to become part of an executive team which can be called upon to 'assume the role of project manager and chief of staff'. Based on the findings and the literature, it should therefore be recommended that students gain a basic understanding of project management at diploma level. (Note that this subject is already covered at Advanced Diploma level).

- **Research skills**

The findings showed that 37% of the industry supervisors saw research skills as very important and a further 32.5% agreed that it can be important. Some supervisors did not see research as an important skill because some companies may not expect administrative assistants to undertake research. Two students mentioned that they were given research tasks in the workplace and it was a challenge for them because they did not have a research skills background. It therefore seems that research skills should be introduced at diploma level in order for students to have at least a basic understanding of research especially since the pillars of the university are understood to be teaching, learning and research. It is therefore recommended that students be introduced to research at diploma level. In that way students will not encounter difficulties when studying for the Advanced Diploma because where they are expected to do research.

- **Ability to multi-task**

The findings also reveal that multi-tasking skills are very important in the administrative profession. Companies expect administrative assistants to be able to multi-task. 77.8% of the respondents rated multi-tasking skills as very important. The modern

technological office environment demands office administrators to handle many different tasks at once. When students were commenting in open-ended questions about challenges they faced while participating in the WIL programme, six respondents mentioned that working under pressure was a challenge to them. Universities could therefore play a greater role in preparing students to have multi-tasking skills for instance through role play. Companies could give students more diverse work to do during workplace learning and give them deadlines, so that they will learn to multi-task and to manage time as well. On the other hand, some students indicated that where they were placed they were not given sufficient work to do at times.

- **Website/Social Media Management**

Quantitative statistics showed that 42.6% of the industry supervisors felt that website/social media management is very important in the modern office and 35.2% more saw it as important. Office Team (2015) believes that administrative professionals should now have a working knowledge of social media (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, Instagram and Pinterest) to help companies build their online reputations.

- **Ability to be reflective, to be proactive and to troubleshoot**

When industry supervisors were commenting about important skills and abilities required in today's administrative profession, one respondent indicated that administrative assistants should now be able to reflect critically about situations they encounter – that they should possess critical thinking skills. The same respondent also suggested that they should also be taught to be proactive and be able to trouble shoot. This means that students should be trained in such a way that they 'think out of the box', analyse and solve problems at work and think carefully about a situation before taking decisions. Schoeman (2017: 44) adds that "this new world poses new challenges in the field of teaching and learning, requiring a greater emphasis on collaboration, digital literacy, critical thinking and problem-solving".

- **Effective data analysis**

One of the responses from industry supervisors indicated that effective data analysis is important in administration and should be included in the curriculum. Parker (2016) agrees that it would be useful to prepare students in such a way that they are able to analyse data effectively.

- **Discretion (respecting confidentiality)**

The qualitative statistics showed that one respondent suggested that a module in discretion should be included in OMT curriculum. Discretion was one of the soft skills identified by several authors (Half 2015; Gallagher and Creedon 2014; Wilton 2011 cited in Nenzhelele 2014; Hencock *et al*. 2009 cited in Leong and Kavanagh 2013; Calkins 2011; Wagner 2008 cited in Ainsworth 2010) as survival skills students need to master in order to succeed in the current world of work.

- **Working independently and decisively**

One respondent recommended that the university should prepare students in such a way that they are able to work independently and be able to make effective decisions at work. According to Cooperman (2009:4), today's administrative assistants are required to make decisions.

The Second Objective

The second objective was to investigate the learning opportunities offered to OMT students during WIL. The findings of this study indicate that learning opportunities offered to students differ from company to company as students are placed in different companies. Some students gain much experience and some gain less. Despite the fact that learning opportunities vary from company to company many respondents felt that the WIL programme provides them with an opportunity to learn skills specified in their logbooks and that it also provides them with an opportunity to learn new skills which are not covered in their syllabus.

The statistics from the students, indicate that 70.83% of the respondents agree that all tasks specified in the log book were covered in the workplace. The statistics from industry supervisors showed that 78.43% agreed that students were provided with experiences specified in the log book. The study found that over 80% of students indicated that they were happy with the manner in which the workplace prepares them for the following tasks which are specified in the log book: handling incoming and outgoing calls, customer service, general office communication, filing and using office equipment. These tasks were given excellent ratings by the majority of students.

However, the findings also show that over 35% of the respondents gave ratings of only average or below average in the following tasks which are specified in the log book: organising meetings, minute taking, travel arrangements, organising business events, report writing and legal matters. The result shows low level responses on these tasks. Excellent ratings were below 17% on these tasks. It can be inferred that companies may be reluctant to allow the student with no experience to do such critical tasks. This was confirmed by the statistics from industry supervisors that showed a less positive response to the statements as to whether students were given demanding tasks and were involved in decision-making during WIL. Both supervisors' and students' comments confirmed that students lack these skills and recommended that they should receive attention. This could be achieved by universities working in more close collaboration with industry. Universities should therefore urgently discuss with industry players the possibility of allowing students to do these tasks under the supervision of a mentor in order for them to get hands-on experience of these tasks in real settings.

The statistics also showed that the great majority (93.68%) of students agree that in workplace learning they acquired new skills, some of which cannot as easily be learnt in a classroom setting. Table 5.1 indicates the number of skills students learned in the workplace which were not covered (or not covered effectively) in class, including general office duties such as operating the switchboard, using different office machines, filing skills, and how to organise an office. As noted above, universities do not have all the office machines students will encounter when out in the workplace. Students also indicated that they learned computer software programs which are not covered in class such as java applications, integrated tertiary software (ITS), pastel

accounting software, mainframe programs, invoicing software, CorelDraw graphic suite and E-filing software.

In some placements students were given an opportunity to attend training sessions and workshops. They also learned to do bookings and organise events online, gained management skills, made requisitions, checked reports and experienced team work. These findings show the value of WIL programme in the university curriculum.

The qualitative statistics from supervisors confirmed that the WIL programme also provides students with an opportunity to learn new skills which are not covered in classroom learning. Skills and abilities mentioned by supervisors include learning the organisation's culture, and learning to be responsible and accountable. Supervisors also mentioned that the WIL programme helps to increase students' self-confidence and that students become more motivated and able to take initiative without being supervised as they gain experience and exposure in the work environment. They also learn to interact with colleagues. Again opportunities open up to learn the different software programs used by the organisation for its specific purposes; they learn to take instructions from supervisors and gain a fuller understanding of their work, along with time management, listening and teamwork skills.

The findings showed that the majority of students were quite positive about the workplace experiences. The statistics indicate that 91.84% of the respondents agreed that the duties/tasks given to them during workplace learning were related to the area of their study.

It can be concluded therefore that the study was able to assess the learning opportunities offered to students in the workplace.

The Third Objective

The third objective was to identify any skills gaps in the Office Management and Technology curriculum and any areas requiring development. Many respondents felt that there *was* a shortage of skills in the OMT curriculum and that there are areas that require improvement. 72% supervisors and only 51.7% of students agreed that there

are skills that need improvement. This may be because industry supervisors are the ones who understand better what is expected in the workplace and so are in a stronger position to recognise shortcomings and probably the ones to listen to because they are looking from the industry perspective. However, WIL students' opinion should also be taken into consideration since they have experienced both the university syllabus and the WIL experience. The findings of the study revealed the skills gaps, or areas that needed improvement in OMT curriculum discussed below.

The findings showed that there is a perception amongst industry supervisors that students lack verbal and written communication skills, and also interpersonal and teamwork skills. This could be partially explained because English is a second language for most students and some students come from previously disadvantaged areas and have poor schooling backgrounds. It was therefore suggested by both supervisors and students that improving communication skills should be an important focus within the OMT syllabus. Lee (2006: 25) points out that "work integrated learning programmes are able to enhance key skills demanded by employers such as critical thinking, communication, team-work and problem solving skills". This study therefore recommends that communication skills should be taught up to third year level. It was also suggested that more emphasis should be put on written English. These related skills could be achieved by putting more emphasis on developing, for instance, report writing and minute taking skills (as these were identified by both supervisors and students as lacking sufficient emphasis in the syllabus at present). This could be done both within the classroom and in the workplace, involving the development of necessary English writing abilities within realistic, or simulated, office settings.

Both university and industry should therefore work in collaboration to adequately prepare students for the benefit of the students as a whole. The university needs to consider teaching methods that will involve both theoretical and practical aspects when preparing students for language-related skills. Students could be involved in role play – for instance they can hold a meeting and discuss issues on the agenda, and others could take minutes which the lecturer might correct on an overhead with students participating. Staff members can also hold a meeting (perhaps on a topic which would involve the students) and allow students to take minutes after which the lecturer concerned could again correct the minutes during a lecture period with

students participating. Students could also be given a scenario and asked to write a report possibly working in pairs. In workplace learning, the student should be allowed to attend a meeting in which non-controversial issues will be discussed and take minutes while the mentor is also taking minutes. After the meeting the mentor could correct the student's work. Similarly students on WIL practice could be allowed to write a report, or sections of a report, which the mentor is also writing and which could then be corrected.

Industry supervisors' responses indicated that students lack various computer skills along with adequate typing speeds. Both supervisors and students felt that more time should be dedicated in the syllabus for practical classes and that special attention be given in typing speed. Supervisors recommended that the full package of Microsoft Office should be covered in the classroom. As noted above, qualitative responses from students showed that 36.3% of the respondents believe that there are software programs which are important for the administrative profession which are not covered in class including pastel accounting, database, Microsoft outlook, java programs, ITS and VIP programs. Students also suggested that electronic filing, locating documents on line, and using internet skills should be covered in classroom learning. As also noted, it will not be possible to cover in class some of the specific computer software packages which a particular organisation may need. However, those unusual ones which are peculiar to that organisation or industry, could be learned through the WIL programme.

The responses received showed that students felt that the experiences of making travel arrangements and organising business events should also be improved in the OMT curriculum. The results indicate that students did not get adequate preparation for these in either classroom learning or in workplace learning. While role play could also be considered here, these two skills could be learned best in a real work situation. Industry players could allow students hands-on experience on these skills under the supervision of a mentor.

As discussed above, the findings were also quite negative about classroom preparation in terms of using different office machines. The responses received showed that the majority (82, 6%) of the students were worried that the university did

not prepare them to use office equipment prior to workplace learning, while supervisors indicated that students were often unable to use even Microsoft outlook. Both supervisors and students suggested that the university should expose students to office machines and sending emails before they undergo WIL. One student suggested that office environment should be taught in classroom learning. The study therefore recommends that the university should have some kind of an office with office equipment that will be used to teach students to operate office machines. As Donkor, Nsoh and Mitchual (2009:01) state that technologies keep on changing almost on a daily basis making it difficult for educational institutions to acquire all the necessary machines and equipment required for the full training of their students. However, this might be partially achieved by the university requesting sponsorship from big companies. The companies that specialise in office equipment might be the ideal ones to target as this could be the way of advertising their products to potential customers who will be using these machines.

The students also suggested that telephone etiquette should be included in the curriculum. When students were commenting about the challenges they faced in participating in WIL programme, one student mentioned that using telephone was a challenge because the student was not familiar with operating company telephones.

One supervisor found that students lack professional skills to interact effectively within groups. This was confirmed by one student who indicated that working in a team was a challenge. Another supervisor recommended that a module in group behaviour should be included in the curriculum and this could be considered.

It was also indicated by supervisors that students often lack time management skills, listening skills, an ability to conduct oneself professionally with confidence, to be punctual, and to be sensitive to industry needs. Other skills they would have liked to see in students included innovative thinking and more enthusiasm to learn. These are quite different from the skills required as seen by the students.

It should be noted that third year OMT students at MUT are required to present in class about their experiences in workplace learning after the completion of WIL programme. In the experience of the researcher, these previous cohorts of OMT students reported

that there is a skills gap in the OMT curriculum, hence the researcher decided to embark on this study. Therefore, the findings of this study confirm that what was indicated by previous students in class after WIL was indeed true.

The Fourth Objective

The fourth objective was to assess the students' preparation in both classroom learning and workplace learning. The relevant information was gathered from OMT third year students. The results showed that 95.5% of the students agreed that WIL programme provided them with the experiences specified in their course curriculum. It was found that the WIL programme plays a vital role in preparing students in most of the tasks/duties specified in their logbooks as it allows them hands-on experiences. However, it was also found that there are tasks that need to be improved in both workplace learning and in classroom learning as identified above under the third objective. The majority of the respondents rated the preparation as below average in those tasks. The results based on preparation in classroom learning show low level responses in most of the tasks/duties specified in logbook as explained above in the third objective. It is important to understand that there are skills that can be learned better in the workplace than in classroom. It should be noted that, when students were rating the overall preparation in classroom learning, 80.6% agreed that the preparation given to them by the university before they underwent WIL was appropriate and adequate indicating that there were still 20% who were not sure that this was the case.

The critical research questions of the study were:

- Is the OMT course content and curriculum in line with industry needs?
- Are the students given sufficiently demanding tasks during WIL?

Responses to questions about whether the OMT course content and curriculum is in line with industry needs, show that 87% of the respondents felt that what is covered in class is still important and in line with industry needs. However, they also identify areas that need to be improved and suggested new skills that should be incorporated in OMT curriculum. Responses to question about whether students are given demanding tasks during workplace learning indicate that students are not given an opportunity to

perform demanding tasks. It was found that some companies do not allow students to perform crucial tasks.

Based on the findings of the study, it can be inferred that research objectives were achieved and critical research questions of this study were answered.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents recommendations for improvement at the university and in the industry. They are based on the findings presented and discussed in chapter four and chapter five and also on the literature review.

6.3.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UNIVERSITY

It is recommended that the university curriculum should keep up with the latest knowledge and technology in order to produce graduates who are competent, professional and versatile and fully employable in the current industry context. It is suggested, for instance, that the university should consider requesting big companies to sponsor office equipment and the building of a suitable office environment venue that will assist in teaching students to operate them. It is also recommended that the universities should discuss with industry the possibility for allowing students to do these tasks under the supervision of the mentor in order for them to get real life experience.

6.3.1.1 Recommendations based on the OMT Department

Both students and supervisors pointed out areas in the OMT syllabus that need improvement.

It was seen that students often lack soft skills, with emphasis being placed on communication skills both verbal and written, and on teamwork skills as well as interpersonal skills and critical thinking. This was already recognised as an issue in a study conducted by Abdullah (2013:65) in Malaysia which shows that graduates are not fully equipped with the necessary soft skills including critical thinkin. The recent

study conducted by Lekoa, Ngubane, and Makhathini (2017: 46) shows that the lack of essential skills such as academic writing, communication skills and interpersonal skills among exit-level university students remains a challenge for higher education institutions, disciplinary specialists and industry alike. It was therefore recommended that the department should do more in preparing students for these skills as recommendations for change noted above in third objective. It is also suggested that students should be involved more in group work and in role play. This will help to develop teamwork, communication skills and interpersonal skills amongst students. It is recommended that lecturers should give students scenarios or provide provocative ideas, and let students use their minds to find solutions in order to develop their critical thinking skills.

As it was also seen that students lack computer skills, more emphasis should be placed on Microsoft Excel, Microsoft PowerPoint, Microsoft word and typing speed. It was recommended that the department should prepare students to use these programs up to advanced level. It was suggested that the department should give special attention to students' typing speed. It is therefore recommended that the Department should allocate more time to practical classes related to software usage and typing.

As discussed above the Department should also do more in improving students' minute taking skills, report writing skills, in making travel arrangements, and organising meetings and business events. It was recommended that some of these skills be done in class practically. It was also suggested that the Department should prepare students in sending emails prior to WIL programme.

A significant recommendation was made that the Department of OMT in universities should, wherever possible, have fully equipped business centres so that students will have an understanding of the office environment and be exposed to office equipment before they undergo WIL. This would help to enable the university to give students more challenging tasks to prepare them for the workplace.

The department should also be more fully aware of what is happening in the workplace during workplace learning and also be aware of how students feel about the

preparation they receive in the workplace. Lecturers from the Department should visit the WIL companies regularly during workplace learning to become better acquainted with what the students and supervisors experience, which will make their preparation of students in both classroom and workplace learning better informed in the future.

6.3.1.2 Recommendations based on the OMT curriculum

The findings of the study reveal that indeed there is a skills gap in the OMT curriculum. This means that universities should consider revising it to align it with the current needs of industry and the workplace. Drawing from the literature on curriculum alignment in higher education, it can be seen that this is widely recognised. For instance, Nenzhelele (2014: 3-4) explains that there is a gap between skills requirements for entry-level graduate employment and those offered by high education institutions. The findings of this study revealed new skills and abilities that employers are seeking in the administrative profession in today's world of work. These are explained above under the First Objective. The study therefore recommends that the university incorporate these skills and abilities within the OMT curriculum.

It was also recommended that universities should strengthen their partnership with industry. This will allow the university to have access to new developments in industry so that the curriculum can be developed according to these needs. It was highlighted that the university curriculum must be innovative and relevant. It was also recommended that universities should use students' feedback from work integrated learning and mentors' suggestions to improve the curriculum and the WIL programme. Kheswa and Du Preez (2017: 50) emphasise that WIL is a structured, assessed learning experience that incorporates feedback to develop the curriculum. This will ensure that education given to students is aligned and relevant to the needs of the industry.

6.3.1.3 Recommendations based on the OMT WIL programme

It is recommended that universities should take care in finding appropriate placements for students and that lecturers should assist students during workplace learning and visit them at least twice. According to the HEQSF in the CHE (2013) document, universities have to accept full responsibility for the placement of students. However, although universities generally do their best to find good placements for students, and to visit them regularly in the workplace, this is not always possible due to the large number of students involved and the heavy lecturing commitments of most lecturers. However, this might be overcome by universities assigning one or two people who would be fully dedicated to WIL visits only and freed from taking classes, perhaps on a roster basis. This would allow all lecturers to be aware of what is happening in the workplace as well as having dedicated time to focus on this responsibility. It might require some sharing of their lecturing tasks amongst colleagues during the WIL period. In this way all lectures will have a better understanding of what is required and be able to implement more appropriate WIL preparation in class.

The majority (64.6%) of supervisors felt that three months of WIL is not sufficient to expose students fully to a work environment involving all the different aspects of administration and covering everything performed in an office. Supervisors also felt that more time is needed for students to develop interpersonal skills and to adapt to new tasks and to the organisational culture. One supervisor also pointed out that several jobs require at least six months' experience to master them. The results indicated that about a quarter (26.8%) of the students were also of the opinion that the WIL period should be extended to six months. It should also be noted that some of the tasks or projects are likely to come up only occasionally, therefore the short period of WIL programme will deprive students of the opportunity to be involved in these, for example organising business events since such events do not happen often. Supervisors would also be reluctant to involve a student in a long-term project if he/she is only there for a short period. The study findings therefore indicate that the majority of industry supervisors, and a smaller number of students, are of the view that WIL period be increased to six months. This study therefore recommends that the WIL period for OMT third year students which is currently three months, be increased to at least six months. It is believed that the recommended period will be adequate to

expose students to the work environment and to make them work ready. Extending the WIL period to six months will also enable students to apply for Public Sector for Education and Training Authority (PSETA) incentives as explained in Chapter Five. PSETAs give a stipend of R2500.00 to students if their WIL period is six months or more.

It was also indicated by industry supervisors that some students fail to report on time due to the long distance to the workplace, and sometimes they do not come at work because they do not have transport money. It is therefore recommended that students should be placed closer to their homes wherever possible to avoid absenteeism and coming late to work. It was also recommended that the university should negotiate with companies for incentives to assist students with transport money. As mentioned above, if the WIL period is extended to six months or more the PSETAs could also be of great support to those students who cannot find placements closer to their homes.

It was suggested by one industry supervisor that students should be exposed to more than one company. It was also reported by a few student respondents that they were not provided with experiences specified in their course curriculum because there was not enough equipment where they were placed. As the findings of this study show that student experiences during workplace learning differ considerably from company to company, exposing students to more than one company could help ensure that no student has a poor experience overall. However, this would undermine the benefits seen to exist in the longer period in one company. Some flexibility could be exercised here.

It was also recommended that students be rotated to all departments within the organisation during workplace learning. This will enable students to get more exposure within different departments. However, as highlighted above, this is not easy to do within a three month period of WIL. Hence six months WIL period is again recommended.

The OMT WIL programme in five universities in South Africa is done at third year level of study. Only one university sends students for WIL training at second year and at third year. Individual respondents, in an open-ended question about improving the

WIL programme, believed that WIL should be done at first year level of study and another said it should start at first year and continue up to third. It was also recommended by others that universities should introduce students to the work environment early. This could be beneficial as they will get more workplace experience. However, this would also have to be balanced against the time needed to finish the course syllabus. Some students raised concerns about the current timing of the WIL programme, suggesting that it should be done within the academic year at the beginning of the year. This is because in some universities WIL period starts in June during the holidays. Probably students want to be at home with their families during holidays. However, including holidays could be an advantage for enabling the longer period particularly if students are able to be placed closer to their homes.

6.3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE COMPANIES

Since companies are often the same institutions that employ students after completing their studies, they should be prepared to play a significant role in better preparing students to meet the requirements of the workplace. It is therefore recommended that companies be involved in designing and developing a curriculum that will involve what they understand to be the necessary skills and knowledge needed by employers. By so doing, the course content and curriculum can be developed accordingly on an ongoing basis and students can be trained according to the needs of employers in today's world of work.

The findings of this study revealed that in some companies students were not allowed to work in all divisions of the company. It was suggested that companies rotate students in order to expose them in all administrative aspects. This could be achieved by universities stipulating in the log books that students should be rotated during workplace learning.

It was also found that some companies do not give students sufficiently demanding tasks. As discussed above, students do not get much hands-on experience in organising meetings, taking minutes, making travel arrangement, organising business events, and report writing skills in the workplace. As suggested above, this could be

achieved, where appropriate, by allowing the student to work hand in hand with the supervisor in performing these critical tasks to avoid mistakes.

It was suggested that supervisors should make sure that tasks are performed and understood well and also provide support to students at all times. It was also highlighted that better communication between supervisors and students should be maintained at all times.

6.3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE STUDENTS

Although it is the final responsibility of the university to find placement for students, it was suggested that students should also try to find placements on their own as it is very difficult for the university to place all the many students involved. Students were also encouraged to look for placements early and to take workplace learning seriously. Students are encouraged to conduct themselves professionally, show confidence and to ‘think out of the box’.

6.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The world of work is ever changing, requiring continuous development in the Higher Education curriculum. Sibuqashe (2017: 39) states that for the HE system to produce quality graduates, curriculum development, teaching and assessment practices have to be of a high quality. Future research could investigate whether the recommendations, wherever they have been implemented, have been successful, how successful were they and how they could be improved.

6.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was limited to two Universities of Technology in KwaZulu-Natal, namely Mangosuthu University of Technology and Durban University of Technology. The focus of this study was on industry supervisors who take in OMT students from MUT and DUT for WIL training, as well as OMT students from MUT only. Although this study was a case study that involved only two universities, the findings should be relevant to Universities of Technology in other provinces as they follow very much the same

processes and procedures in conducting WIL for OMT students. Furthermore, UoTs in South Africa operate similarly in their main focus on teaching and learning, applied research and community engagement.

6.6 CONCLUSION

Institutions of higher education are faced with the major challenge of being relevant in the fast moving 21st century. Scott Dockweiler (quoted by Makua 2016: 1) says that "the world of work and the world in general is changing. People are living longer, new technologies are emerging, and we have never been more globally connected. That means the skills we use now in the workplace are not necessarily the skills we will need in the future". Given the realities of globalisation and ever changing technology which makes it difficult for universities to educate future employees, perhaps universities need to look at preparing students to be able to think on their own and encourage them consistently to use their common sense. Both university and industry should prepare students to 'think out of the box'. It is therefore recommended that students should be taught to be independent, self-motivated individuals. By so doing, students will be able to take initiative to undertake tasks or do what needs to be done in the future without supervision. They will be able to do their best in the workplace.

Martin (2013, cited in Martin 2015: 5) emphasises that learning opportunities should also focus on personal development of a range of soft skills. This means that students should be trained to develop their own critical thinking so that they can meet any unknown challenge that they might face in the future. Improving their problem solving, decision making and critical thinking skills could be assisted by giving students scenarios or brainstorming ideas and letting them decide which the best solution might be - and awarding marks for their input. This was a conclusion in a study done by Griesel and Parker (2009: 20) "the role of higher education cannot be treated in isolation and must take its rightful place in producing thinking, responsive and intellectually well-grounded individuals who are flexible and can readily adapt to new demands and challenges".

Fuyane (2017: 40) states that "various scholars, policy makers and employers unanimously agree on the 4Cs (critical thinking and problem-solving, collaboration,

communication and creativity and innovation) and digital citizenship as the core skills needed in the 21st century". It is therefore imperative that institutions of higher education provide students with quality education, up-to-date skills and knowledge, and adequately prepare them prior to their WIL training in order to bridge the gap between the skills learned in class and those required in the workplace and also to be able to meet future challenges. The study conducted by Griesel and Parker (2009: 20) also suggested the importance of developing a common understanding, in the first instance, of the nature of perceived gaps; and secondly, of ways in which the gaps can most effectively and creatively be addressed on both sides of the interface between higher education and the world of work.

The aim of this research project was to examine the current status of the OMT curriculum to discover whether it meets the demands of today's world of work and to determine the skills, abilities and attributes employers are typically seeking in the administrative profession today. The study also investigated the learning opportunities offered to OMT students during their WIL training.

Overall it is concluded that the Office Management and Technology curriculum should be reviewed regularly in order to provide students with the highly developed skills, knowledge, attributes and competencies that will enable them to meet the demands of the modern workforce. Industry on the other hand should play their role in making sure that students are given quality training during work integrated learning. Both universities and industries should play a vital role in better preparing students for the world of work.

The findings of this study suggest that the Office Management and Technology curriculum should change as the technology changes. This will ensure that education given to students is aligned and relevant to the needs of industry. Students could then make a better transition from what they learn in class to the workplace without any difficulty.

It is therefore concluded that the results of this study could be of benefit to all stakeholders in the WIL programmes offered by Universities of Technology.

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Appendix A – Ethical Clearance Letter

Institutional Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Health Sciences
Room MS 49, Mansfield School Site
Gate 8, Ritson Campus
Durban University of Technology

P O Box 1334, Durban, South Africa, 4001

Tel: 031 373 2900
Fax: 031 373 2407
Email: lavishad@dut.ac.za
http://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional_research_ethics

www.dut.ac.za

18 March 2016

IREC Reference Number: **REC 16/15**

Ms T O Mkhize
4 Villa Peri
13 Mathura Road
Isipingo Rail
4133

Dear Ms Mkhize

Learning opportunities offered to Office Management and Technology students during Work-Integrated Learning and the implications for the curriculum

The Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your notification regarding the piloting of your data collection tool.

Please note that Full Approval is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Kindly ensure that participants used for the pilot study are not part of the main study.

Yours Sincerely

[redacted]

Professor J K Adam
Chairperson: IREC

DUT DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
2016 -03- 18
INSITUTUTIONAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
P O BOX 1334 DURBAN 4000 SOUTH AFRICA

Appendix B – IREC letter of information and consent form

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study: Learning opportunities offered to Office Management and Technology students during Work-Integrated Learning and the implications for the curriculum

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: T.O. Mkhize (Master of Management Sciences in Administration and Information Management)

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: Dr. Jane Skinner (PhD) and Dr. Paul Green (PhD)

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:

This study examines the current status of Office Management and Technology curriculum to discover whether it meets the demands of the workplace. The study also investigates learning opportunities offered to Office Management & Technology (OMT) students during Work-integrated Learning (WIL) and the implications for the curriculum, with the aim of contributing to the achievement of the goal of the Department.

The research objectives of the study are to:

1. To ascertain skills, abilities and attributes employer are seeking in administrative profession today.
2. To investigate learning opportunities offered to OMT students during WIL.
3. To identify any skills gap in Office Management and Technology curriculum and weaker areas requiring developments.
4. To assess the students experience of the WIL.

Outline of the Procedures:

For the purpose of this study, the researcher will use Quantitative Method to collect data. The researcher will send a letter of consent to all respondents which will request them to partake in the study. This study will make use of questionnaires and interviews in order to examine the current status of OMT curriculum with particular reference to the learning opportunities offered to OMT students during WIL. Questionnaires will be divided into two. The first Questionnaire will be distributed to respondents (supervisors) in companies around KZN at the end of January 2016 by email and the researcher will follow up by phoning all respondents to ensure that all emails are received. This is because OMT students at MUT and DUT undergo WIL in October until end of January. 15 – 20 minutes face to face interviews will also be conducted in March 2016 with supervisors in companies around Durban only because of costs and time constraints. Semi-structured questions will be used for the interview and the interview will be recorded by audio tape. A second questionnaire will be designed for third year OMT students to ascertain their perception towards OMT curriculum and WIL experiences and will be distributed to them after they have completed WIL at the end of January 2016. The questionnaire will be appropriate for this study because the researcher will use both open-ended and closed-ended questions in supervisors and in students questionnaires so that respondents will be able to give his/her different personal opinion. In order for the survey to be reliable and valid, the researcher will take great care to ensure that the questions are constructed properly. Respondents

will be given 5 days to complete and return questionnaires, after which time a reminder will be sent by email and telephonically.
The researcher will emphasize to the respondents that all comments will be treated as confidentially, all respondents will remain anonymous.
Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: There are no foreseeable risks from participating in this research.

Benefits: It is hoped that OMT students, employers and institutions of higher education will benefit from the study as any skills gap in OMT Curriculum and work-integrated learning will be addressed. Therefore students may be trained more closely to the needs of the employers. The findings of this study will be made available through publications in accredited peer-reviewed journals; presentations at local and international conferences and also seminars and workshops given at the institutions.

Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study:

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

Remuneration: No remuneration will be paid to the participants.

Costs of the Study: The participants are not expected to cover any cost incurred.

Confidentiality: The data will remain under the ownership of DUT. Electronic data will be protected by passwords.

Research-related Injury: Not applicable.

Persons to Contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:

Please contact the researcher (0734999861), my supervisor 031 373 5000 / 033 845 8804 or the Institutional Research Ethics administrator on 031 373 2900. Complaints can be reported to Dr. Jane Skinner on 031 373 5000 and Dr. Paul Green on 0338458804.

General:

Potential participants must be assured that participation is voluntary and the approximate number of participants to be included should be disclosed. A copy of the information letter should be issued to participants. The information letter and consent form must be translated and provided in the primary spoken language of the research population e.g. isiZulu.

CONSENT

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, _____ (name of researcher), about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number: _____,
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

_____ _____ _____ _____

Full Name of Participant **Date** **Time** **Signature / Right Thumbprint**

I, _____ (name of researcher) herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

_____ _____ _____

Full Name of Researcher **Date** **Signature**

_____ _____ _____

Full Name of Witness (If applicable) **Date** **Signature**

_____ _____ _____

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable) **Date** **Signature**

Appendix C – Letter requesting permission to conduct study at MUT

Mangosuthu University of Technology

MEMORANDUM

TO : **MUT Research and Ethics Committee**

FROM : **Ms T O Mkhize**

Lecturer: Office Technology (Staff No. 91512)

DATE : **12 January 2015**

SUBJECT : **REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE DEPARTMENT OF OFFICE TECHNOLOGY**

I am a Masters student at the Durban University of Technology. The research I wish to conduct for my Master's dissertation is in the Department of Office Technology. The title for my study is "Learning opportunities offered to Office Management and Technology students during Work-integrated Learning and the implications for the curriculum". This project will be conducted under the supervision of Dr Paul Green, Head of Department for Finance and Information Management at the Durban University of Technology, and the Co- supervisor is Dr Jane Skinner also employed in the same University as a Senior Researcher.

I am hereby seeking the letter of permission to conduct the study in the Department of Office Technology as it is requested by the University - Faculty Research Ethical Committee by the 20 of January 2015 for them to approve the proposal that will be submitted to your office before collection of data.

The approved proposal will be submitted to your office as soon as possible so the requested letter is one of the requirements for the University to approve the proposal. Approval letter from the committee will also be submitted to your office.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on **0734999861/031 9077138** and Octavia@mut.ac.za

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

……

Ms Thobekile O Mkhize

Appendix D – Permission Letter to conduct study at MUT

Mangosuthu
University of Technology

10 July, 2015

Ms. T.O. Mkhize

Office Management and Technology

Ms T.O. Mkhize

It is my pleasure to inform you that permission to conduct survey titled: "*Learning opportunities offered to Office Management and Technology students during Work-Integrated Learning and the implications for the curriculum*" amongst MUT staff members was granted.

Permission to conduct the survey is granted on the condition that any changes to the project must be brought to the attention of the MUT Research Ethics Committee as soon as possible.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Dr. Anette Mienie

Director: Research

031 9077354/7450

anette@mut.ac.za

Appendix E – Office Management and Technology students' questionnaire

DUT DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

QUESTIONNAIRE: OFFICE MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

This questionnaire is to be completed by Office management and technology students who are doing Work-integrated learning (WIL). All information obtained in this questionnaire will be kept confidential and only be used for research purposes. Please do not write your name. Please be assured that your responses will be confidential and entirely anonymous.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Thank you for taking time to respond to the research questionnaire.
- The questionnaire is for a Masters study titled: **Learning opportunities offered to Office Management and Technology students during Work-Integrated Learning and the implications for the curriculum.** It will not take you longer than 15 – 20 minutes to complete.
- Mark the relevant box with a cross (X), and furnish brief responses where applicable.

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

1. What is your gender?

Female	
Male	

2. What is your age category/group?

16-20 years	
21-25 years	
26-30years	
31-35 years	
36-40 years	
>41 years or older	

3. Please specify the location of your WIL

Industry	
Education	
Government	
Company	
Consulting Firm	
Other specify	

4. Did you have a Mentor/Supervisor in the workplace?

YES ☐ NO ☐

SECTION B: LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED DURING WIL

Please **mark with a cross (X)** on the statement which best suits your choice (opinion) about the learning opportunities that were offered to you at the workplace. PLEASE NOTE THIS IS YOUR OPINION. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS.

SA = Strongly Agree A = Agree N= Neutral/Neither agree or disagree D = Disagree

SD= Strongly Disagree

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. Duties that were given to me during WIL were related to the area of my study.					
2. All tasks/duties specified in the log book were covered in the workplace.					
3. I was allowed to work in all divisions of the company.					
4. I was given a hands-on experience during WIL.					
5. I was given an opportunity to use different types of office equipment.					
6. During WIL, I acquired new skills relating to the area of my study.					
7. WIL experiences were related to my field of study.					
8. The WIL programme provided the training content that I need for my career.					

9. To what extent does the WIL programme prepare you for each of the following duties/tasks as listed in your log book?

Duties/tasks	Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent	N/A
Handling incoming & outgoing calls.						
Handling incoming & outgoing mail (fax, e-mail, etc.)						
Record messages correctly						
Welcoming visitors						
Providing customer service						
General office communication						
Filing						
Dicta-phone typing/transcribing						
Using Ms Office Suite						
Organising meetings						
Minute taking						
Making Travel arrangements						
Organising business events						

Report writing						
Human Resources duties						
Legal matters						
Using office equipment (fax, scanner, photocopier, etc.)						

10. Were you provided with the experiences specified in your course curriculum during WIL?

YES ☐ NO ☐

If the answer is no, please explain briefly:

.....

.....

.....

11. Are there any new skills which you learned from WIL programme that you haven't learned in class?

YES ☐ NO ☐

If the answer is yes, please explain briefly:

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.....

.....

12. What challenges did you face in participating in WIL?

.....

.....

.....

13. What possible suggestions would you make for the improvement of the current WIL programme?

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.....

.....

SECTION C: OMT CURRICULUM

1. To what extent does the University prepare you in each of the following duties/tasks as listed in your log book?

Duties/tasks	Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent	N/A
Handling incoming & outgoing calls.						
Handling incoming & outgoing mail (fax, e-mail, etc.)						
Record messages correctly						
Welcoming visitors						

Providing customer service						
General office communication						
Filing						
Dicta-phone typing/transcribing						
Using Ms Office Suite						
Organising meetings						
Minute taking						
Making Travel arrangements						
Organising business events						
Report writing						
Human Resources duties						
Legal matters						
Using office equipment (fax, scanner, photocopier, etc.)						

2. Was the preparation given to you by the University before WIL appropriate and adequate?

YES ☐ NO ☐

Please explain your answer:

.....

.....

3. Are there any other skills that you believe are important for the administrative career which are not covered in OMT curriculum?

YES ☐ NO ☐

If the answer is yes, what are those skills?

.....

.....

4. Are there any other software programmes that you believe are important for the administrative career which are not covered in class?

YES ☐ NO ☐

Please explain your answer:

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.....

5. Are there any skills that need to be improved in OMT curriculum?

YES NO

Please explain your answer:

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Thank you for your time

Appendix F – Industry supervisors questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE: OFFICE MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY (OMT)

This questionnaire is to be completed by supervisors for students who are doing Work-integrated learning (WIL). All information obtained in this questionnaire will be kept confidential and only be used for research purposes. Please do not write your name. Please be assured that your responses will be confidential and entirely anonymous.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Thank you for taking time to respond to the research questionnaire.
- The questionnaire is for a Masters study titled: **Learning opportunities offered to Office Management and Technology students during Work-Integrated Learning and the implications for the curriculum.** It will not take you longer than 15 – 20 minutes to complete.
- Mark the relevant box with a cross (X), and furnish brief responses where applicable.

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

1. What is your gender?

Female	
Male	

2. What is your age category/group?

20-29 years	
30-39 years	
40-49 years	
50-59 years	
60-65 years	
> 66 years	

3. What is your highest qualification?

Doctorate	
Masters	
B Tech/Hons	
Diploma	
Grade 12 (Matric)	
Other (please specify)	

4. Occupation and Rank .....
.....

5. How long have you been employed at your current organisation?

3. The OMT course as currently taught at the University is relevant to the needs of industry and commerce.

Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐

4. The OMT curriculum offered at the University provide students with the necessary skills for efficient office management.

Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐

5. The University adequately prepares the students for this career.

Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐

6. According to your own observation based on the students' performance, are there any skills that the students lack which require to be improved?

YES ☐ NO ☐

If the answer is yes, please explain briefly:

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.....

7. What possible suggestions could you make to improve the current OMT curriculum?

.....

.....

SECTION C: LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO OMT STUDENTS DURING WIL

Please **mark with a cross (X)** on the statement which best suit your choice (opinion) about the learning opportunity that you offered to OMT students during WIL. PLEASE NOTE THIS IS YOUR OPINION. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS.

SA = Strongly Agree A = Agree N= Neutral/Neither agree or disagree D = Disagree SD= Strongly Disagree

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES	SA	A	N	D	SD
9. Students perform similar tasks as those performed by full time employees.					
10. Students are given demanding tasks.					
11. Students participate in decision making.					
12. Students are provided with experiences specified in their log books.					
13. Students are given responsibility in the workplace.					
14. Students are exposed in all field of administration.					
15. Students are given an opportunity to experiment and show innovation.					
16. Students are given relevant and appropriate work.					

0-5 years	
6-10 years	
11-15 years	
16-20 years	
21 and above	

SECTION B: SKILLS AND ABILITIES IN ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSION

Listed below are skills that may be general and/or relevant to administrative profession.

1. Please rate the importance of the following skills and abilities with regards to your expectations from the OMT student.

Task description	Very Important	Important	Moderately Important	Of little Importance	Unimportant
Communication skills (verbal and written)					
Interpersonal skills					
Report writing skills					
Business writing skills					
Presentation skills					
Problem solving skills					
Organisational skills					
Time management skills					
Managerial skills					
Customer service					
Planning					
Bookkeeping					
Project management					
Human resources skills					
Copying and audio typing					
Teamwork					
Multi-tasking skills					
Research skills					
Attention to detail					
Financial and Budgeting					
Typing skills					
Website/social media management					
Minutes taking					
Good work ethics					

2. Are there any other skills that you think are important for the administrative profession which are not listed in the above table?

YES ☐ NO ☐

If the answer is yes, please explain briefly:

.....

.....

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.....

9. Apart from the duties/tasks listed in the students' log book, what additional learning opportunities do you feel that students gain during WIL?

.....

.....

.....

10. Do you regard 9 - 12 weeks of WIL period appropriate to expose students to the working environment?

YES ☐ NO ☐

Please explain your answer:

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.....

.....

11. What possible suggestions could you make to improve the current WIL programme?

.....

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Thank you for your time