

Food Technology Work-Integrated Learning: A Qualitative Study from An Educational and Food Industry Perspective

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Abstract

Aim: The aim of this study was to describe Food Technology students' experience of work-integrated learning (WIL), from an educational and food industry perspective.

Problem statement: Food Technology students often find themselves unprepared for food industry demands on their competence on entering working life, and express difficulties integrating educational theory into a practical context. As a result, qualitative and effective WIL becomes particularly important for Food Technology students to develop the competence required to handle the transition from education to working life.

Methods: Three focus-group discussions were performed and subjected to qualitative content analysis. The groups comprised the University of Johannesburg students who were about to start WIL, those who were already placed in the food industry for WIL, and those who had completed the 12 months of WIL in the food industry.

Results: The results revealed that WIL for Food Technology students includes personal mastering of several professional skills: Communication skills (listening to others and asking questions; reading and understanding work-related materials). They use Math and Science (using scientific methods to solve problems and math skills to solve problems). Managing oneself, people, time, and resources (checking how well one is learning or doing tasks; managing the time of self and others). Furthermore, WIL entails adapting to organizational requirements, including working with people, which includes being aware of others' reactions and understanding the possible causes as well as solving problems by bringing others together to discuss differences. Developing an experience-based understanding of situations and challenges contextual workplace knowledge and understanding; inspecting and evaluating products' quality.

Conclusion: The results reveal that WIL is complex, encompassing adaptation to roles and personal capabilities that increase WIL students' competence and preparation for work. In addition, WIL requires a personal commitment to one's own learning as well as organizational and social support.