

Advancements in work-integrated learning research: Editorial insights

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Over the past two decades, scholarship into work-integrated learning (WIL) has significantly expanded, highlighting the importance of its contribution to higher education. The *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning* (IJWIL) has been an important part of the promotion of research and scholarship of WIL, and the dissemination of new knowledge. This current IJWIL Issue includes three articles that provide a bibliometric analysis of what is now a significant body of WIL literature. These analyses reveal trends in themes such as equity and access, professional identity development, stakeholder engagement, risks, and highlight the high level of collaboration among WIL researchers. This editorial emphasizes the advances of WIL scholarship by further identifying key developments and topical challenges and linking these to recent published WIL literature to inspire further research to enhance the understanding of WIL as a transformative pedagogy.

Keywords: Scholarship, literature, history, developments, trends, topical challenges

Over the past two decades, research into various aspects of work-integrated learning (WIL) has expanded significantly (Zegwaard & Rowe, 2019). As institutional, national, and international bodies around the globe respond to the multiple benefits of WIL for graduate outcomes (Jackson, 2013; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017), its visibility and demonstrable impact have made WIL a compelling area of investigation. Since 2000, the *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning* has been a key platform for generating, disseminating, and ideating WIL research (Sovilla & Varty, 2023), with published articles reflecting global trends and insights, offering detailed analyses of emerging areas in WIL research.

This current Issue of the *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning* includes three successive articles (Ademuyiwa et al., 2024; Areskoug Josefsson et al., 2024; Rafiq et al., 2024) that provide a bibliometric analysis of the WIL literature. Bibliometric analysis tools, such as VOSviewer, are new tools that allow for detailed quantitative analysis of the literature (Waltman et al., 2010). While there has been critical commentary on WIL literature in the past (e.g., Bartkus, 2007; Bartkus & Higgs, 2011; Bartkus & Stull, 1997; Coll & Kalnins, 2009; Zegwaard, 2015; Zegwaard & Coll, 2011), there has been no analysis of this literature to the detail that a bibliometric analysis tool can provide. Given the recent

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rapid advancement of WIL research, such detailed analysis is timely. As this is the first time such detailed analysis has been undertaken, and IJWIL is fortunate to have three articles of such nature in this Issue, it is useful to provide an editorial background of the development of the WIL literature.

BACKGROUND

As WIL continues to expand across the globe (Zegwaard & Pretti, 2023a), a significant body of scholarly literature has developed. Building on earlier cooperative education literature (Sovilla & Varty, 2023), that primarily focused on improving the practicalities of delivery (Bartkus & Stull, 1997) and tended to be quantitative in nature (Coll & Kalnins, 2009), WIL research has become advanced and diverse in approach and phenomena. Research approaches have become more theoretically informed and have embraced multiple methodologies and mixed methods (Fleming & Zegwaard 2018), providing deeper insights into student learning and quality practice (Bartkus & Higgs, 2011; Zegwaard, 2015).

Early WIL research focuses largely on work placement models of WIL, reflecting the cooperative education practice backgrounds of many researchers (Zegwaard et al., 2023). Although there were some investigations of non-placement forms of WIL emerging (e.g., Kay et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2020), early research into WIL reflects practice where work placement types of WIL were the most common model (Peters et al., 2014; Universities Australia, 2019). Non-placement models of WIL were largely overlooked by scholars (Jackson & Greenwood, 2015; Rowe et al., 2022; Zegwaard & Rowe, 2019) until the advent of COVID-19, disrupting placements and sparking growth in innovative, online, and alternative non-placement models of WIL (Dean & Campbell, 2020; Dean et al., 2020; Kay et al., 2022; Rook & Dean, 2023; Rowe et al., 2022; Zegwaard et al., 2020).

With the diversifying of WIL models, typologies (e.g., Fincher et al., 2004; Kaider et al., 2017; Rowe et al., 2012) and frameworks (e.g., Groenewald et al., 2011; McRae & Johnston, 2016) were developed to organize terms. Concurrently, much focus was given to developing detailed research-informed guidelines for good practice (e.g., de Silva et al., 2016; Lowe & Hay, 2016; Martin & Hughes, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Orrell, 2011; Sachs et al., 2017; Stirling et al., 2016; Walker-Martin et al., 2022; Winberg et al., 2011; Winchester-Seeto et al., 2015). The focus on good practice cumulated to the development of research-informed quality frameworks (e.g., Campbell & Pretti, 2023; Campbell et al., 2019; McRae et al., 2021; Rowe et al., 2023; Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2022; WACE, 2024; WILNZ, 2020; Winchester-Seeto, 2019). These quality frameworks supported discussions for the development of endorsement and accreditation standards for WIL programs (Ferns & Arsenault, 2023; Ferns, Dawson, & Howitt, 2022) such as the accreditation of cooperative education programs in Canada (CEWIL, 2018).

Work was also undertaken on defining WIL (e.g., Patrick et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2014; Winchester-Seeto et al., 2016) and WIL pedagogy (Ferns et al., 2024), with the *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning* adopting the definition of:

An educational approach involving three parties – the student, educational institution, and an external stakeholder – consisting of authentic work-focused experiences as an intentional component of the curriculum. Students learn through active engagement in purposeful work tasks, which enable the integration of theory with meaningful practice that is relevant to the students' discipline of study and/or professional development. (Zegwaard et al., 2023, p. 38)

In addition, WIL scholars are increasingly concentrating on significantly challenging topics in WIL, and for higher education in general, that require scholarly attention (Table 1). Areas of growth for research topics include improving access and inclusion of WIL for all groups of learners and particularly for

those from equity backgrounds, enhancing curriculum and assessment quality, exploring alignment to global issues such as sustainability, and broadening approaches across disciplines, methodologies, and theories.

TABLE 1: Challenging topics in WIL and examples of recent published literature.

Topic	Examples of literature
Equity, access, and inclusion	Ajjawi et al. (2023), Garant-Jones et al. (2023), Goldman et al. (2023), Grant-Smith et al. (2024), Hay and Fleming (2024), Jackson (2017) Mackaway and Chalkley (2022), Mackaway et al. (2024), Mallozzi and Drewery (2019)
Indigenous perspectives	Arney (2022), Eady et al. (2022), Keen and Eady (2022), Nielsen et al. (2022), Valencia-Forrester (2023)
Authenticity	Bosco and Ferns (2014), Gajendran et al. (2022), Garnett (2012), Nevison et al. (2017), Smith (2012)
Multidisciplinarity	Adams-Hutcheson et al. (2023), Brewer et al. (2020), Ferns, Lewis, et al. (2022)
Professional identity development	Campbell and Zegwaard (2015), Goldman and Stirling (2020), Jackson (2016a, 2016b), Nystrom (2009), Trede (2012), Trede et al. (2011), Zegwaard et al. (2017)
Leadership	Clark (2017), Dean et al. (2022), Ferns and Lilly (2015), Patrick et al. (2014), Patrick et al. (2008)
Governance	Cameron and Orrell (2022), Henderson and Trede (2017), Kay et al. (2023)
Practitioner workload and professional development needs	Bilgin et al. (2017), Choy and Sappa (2021), Clark et al. (2014), Dean et al. (2023), Emslie (2011), Jovanovic et al. (2018), Kosman et al. (2023), Wheeldon et al. (2023), Zegwaard et al. (2019)
Managing risk	Cameron (2019), Cameron et al. (2018, 2023), Cameron and Orrell (2022), Fleming and Hay (2021), Hay and Fleming (2021)
Resilience and wellbeing	Drewery et al. (2016, 2019), Drysdale et al. (2022), Gillett-Swan and Grant-Smith (2018), Grant-Smith and Feldman (2023), Hay and Fleming (in press), Konstantinou et al. (2023), Zegwaard and Adams-Hutcheson (in press)
Assessment and curricular design	Adams and Jones (2022), Ajjawi et al. (2022), Brentnall et al. (2023), Dean and Campbell (2020), Ferns (2014), Ferns and Zegwaard (2014), Lucas et al. (2014), Rowe and Winchester-Seeto (2022)
Policy design	Campbell et al. (2022), Hewitt et al. (2018), Murray and Fleming (2023), York and Vidovich (2014)
UN SDG* and VUCA* world	Gardner and Perry (2023), Lyons et al. (2022), McRae et al. (2023), McRae and Woodside (2023), Pretti and McRae (2021)
Theorizing	Carpendale and Mitchell (2023), Eames and Cates (2011), Twomey and Pretti (2023)
Research approaches	Bilous et al. (2018), Brink (2018), Cameron (2018), Chopra et al. (2018), Fleming (2018), Fleming and Zegwaard (2018), Lucas et al. (2018), Rowe et al. (2018), Zegwaard and Hoskyn (2015)
Defining WIL practice and pedagogy	Ferns et al. (2024), Zegwaard et al. (2023)

Note: UN SDG = United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. VUCA = volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

The WIL literature has expanded significantly through multiple outlets. The *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning* has developed into an advanced scholarly journal that is currently ranked by Scopus at the 70th percentile (a top end Q2 journal). The *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning* is the most cited journal for WIL, with many WIL articles also being cited from the journals of *Studies in Higher Education*, *Higher Education Research and Development*, *Education and Training*, and *Higher Education* (Rafiq et al., 2024). In addition, several books expanding conceptions, approaches, and practices of WIL have recently been published, such as *Educators' Work-Integrated Learning Experiences* (Chahine & Reddy, 2024), *The Routledge International Handbook of Work-Integrated Learning* (Zegwaard & Pretti, 2023b), *Advances in Research, Theory and Practice in Work-Integrated Learning* (Ferns, Rowe, & Zegwaard, 2022), *Application of Work-Integrated Learning Among Gen Z and Y Students* (Gerhardt & Annon, 2021), and *Work-Integrated Learning in the 21st Century: Global Perspectives on the Future* (Bowen & Drysdale, 2017).

BIBLIOMETRICS ANALYSIS AS AN INVESTIGATIVE TOOL

With virtually all scholarly literature being published in digitized form, technology has developed to quantitatively measure and track the reach and impact of published articles, individual researchers, and journals through bibliometric analyses (Donthu et al., 2021; Ellegaard, 2015; Wilsdon et al., 2015). Such measures, however, can be met with mixed views because, for example, measuring the impact of scholarly outputs can be difficult to determine depending on the interpretation of impact (e.g., academic, economic, knowledge, cultural, citation rate, citation location) (Bretas & Alon, 2021; Wilsdon et al., 2015). However, such measures can have real impacts on policymakers' strategic decision making, academic appointments, career progression, and institutional prestige. Furthermore, for individual authors, research performance measures can be complicated by confusion with same-named researchers and researchers changing their name partway through a publishing career (e.g., birth name vs married name). It is, therefore, important for researchers to manage their profile by using unique identifiers codes (ORCID IDs is widely used) and actively managing their online profiles, such as Google Scholar accounts, to remove incorrectly ascribed publications.

Various metrics have been developed for measuring journal performance that primarily focus on citation trends, such as journal impact factors (JIF), h-indices, i10-indices, total citation rates, citation rates per article, and external vs internal citation rates. Each of these measures has its benefits and criticisms (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Wilsdon et al., 2015). In addition, various bibliometric analysis tools have been developed such as Bibliometrix, CiteSpace, HistCite, and VOSviewer, and searchable databases of scholarly publications are now readily accessible through platforms such as Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, DOAJ, and Web of Science. The ability to search databases can generate insightful details of performance of published articles and journals, however, are dependent on what is discoverable within these databases. For example, Scopus only includes submitted documents that match set criteria, however, Google Scholar is more inclusive of a wide range of outputs such as uncatalogued journals, websites, and uploaded reports. Despite these limitations and considering these tools are still being further developed (Block & Fisch, 2020), bibliometric analysis tools present a powerful way of analyzing the literature in a way that can provide valuable insights of developments and trends within a research field.

BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF THE WIL LITERATURE

With the recent advances and growth of WIL research and the development of bibliometric tools, it is now possible for the published WIL literature to become the research focus. In this current *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning* Issue, there are three successive articles published that have conducted bibliometric analysis of the WIL literature, offering valuable insights of trends, reach, and performance of journals and authors. Each of these articles have approached the bibliometric analysis in different ways, outlining the details of their approach and limitations within.

Ademuyiwa et al. (2024) conduct a bibliometric analysis of articles only published in the *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning* from 2018 to 2023 (222 articles). These authors primarily use a thematic approach to analyzing topical trends and provide overviews of methodological approaches. They observed eight trending themes, including equity and access, learning, professional identity, stakeholder engagement, virtual/online WIL, risks, employability, and practitioners' professional development needs. They also analyzed trends in collaborations between authors and institutions, and research output rates by country. The authors provide useful guidance on how the WIL research community could further develop research activities and collaborations, for example, increasing methodological diversity and increasing collaboration between institutions, including partnering with researchers from countries that are underrepresented in the WIL literature.

Areskoug Josefsson et al. (2024) and Rafiq et al. (2024) both conduct bibliometric analyses using VOSviewer. This approach allows for detailed quantitative analysis of many aspects of the WIL literature, however, is limited to only what is discoverable within the Scopus database. Both sets of authors offer significant granular insights, including mapping research linkages and collaboration between different authors, and citation rates of individual authors and journals. Although both sets of authors approach bibliometric analysis using the same tool, they use different search parameters that resulted in some differences in their findings. For example, the work by Areskoug Josefsson et al. uses more inclusive search parameters, such as any language, any publication date (up to 2023), and multiple search terms (work-integrated learning, work-integrated education, and work-based learning) resulting in a large data set (5,323 articles). Whilst Rafiq et al. restricts his work only to the search term 'work-integrated learning' and articles published in English between 2002-2023 (resulting 1,392 articles).

All three articles highlight recent developments in WIL research and the high citation rates of WIL scholarly outputs. They note the high level of collaboration between authors and present listings of WIL citation rates per author, journal, and institution. These articles also explore the expanded geographic contributions of WIL scholars, and observed that most WIL outputs are from Western countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and the USA,

CONCLUSION

It is exciting that the WIL literature has developed to the stage that detailed bibliometric analysis of the literature can be conducted. Each of the three articles provided valuable insights on trends and performance of the WIL literature. By employing different approaches to their analyses, these articles also deliver different insights, underscoring the importance of analyzing the literature using multiple approaches to obtain a fuller understanding. These three articles are only the beginning of what is possible in greater investigations into the impact and understandings of WIL literature. The *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning* editorial team sincerely hopes that the insights from the

three bibliometric-focused articles and the editorial insights in this article will inspire researchers and invite readers to consider further areas of WIL research.

This editorial article also includes many citations that link key developments and current topical challenging topics to the recent advances in the WIL literature. Although not a complete or exhaustive listing of relevant WIL literature, the editorial team hopes the compilation of references within the editorial article will serve as a useful resource for researchers and readers of the WIL literature. It was our aim to encourage the WIL community's research and scholarship activities, and to promote the continued advancements in the understanding of WIL as transformative pedagogy.

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About the Journal

The International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning (IJWIL) publishes double-blind peer-reviewed original research and topical issues related to Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). IJWIL first published in 2000 under the name of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE).

In this Journal, WIL is defined as:

An educational approach involving three parties – the student, educational institution, and an external stakeholder – consisting of authentic work-focused experiences as an intentional component of the curriculum. Students learn through active engagement in purposeful work tasks, which enable the integration of theory with meaningful practice that is relevant to the students' discipline of study and/or professional development (Zegwaard et al., 2023, p. 38).*

Examples of practice include off-campus workplace immersion activities such as work placements, internships, practicum, service learning, and cooperative education (co-op), and on-campus activities such as work-related projects/competitions, entrepreneurship, student-led enterprise, student consultancies, etc. WIL is related to, and overlaps with, the fields of experiential learning, work-based learning, and vocational education and training.

The Journal's aim is to enable specialists working in WIL to disseminate research findings and share knowledge to the benefit of institutions, students, WIL practitioners, curricular designers, and researchers. The Journal encourages quality research and explorative critical discussion that leads to the advancement of quality practices, development of further understanding of WIL, and promote further research.

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Types of Manuscripts Sought by the Journal

Types of manuscripts sought by IJWIL is primarily in two forms: 1) *research publications* describing research into aspects of work-integrated learning and, 2) *topical discussion* articles that review relevant literature and provide critical explorative discussion around a topical issue. The journal will, on occasions, consider good practice submissions.

Research publications should contain; an introduction that describes relevant literature and sets the context of the inquiry. A detailed description and justification for the methodology employed. A description of the research findings - tabulated as appropriate, a discussion of the importance of the findings including their significance to current established literature, implications for practitioners and researchers, whilst remaining mindful of the limitations of the data, and a conclusion preferably including suggestions for further research.

Topical discussion articles should contain a clear statement of the topic or issue under discussion, reference to relevant literature, critical and scholarly discussion on the importance of the issues, critical insights to how to advance the issue further, and implications for other researchers and practitioners.

Good practice and program description papers. On occasions, the Journal seeks manuscripts describing a practice of WIL as an example of good practice, however, only if it presents a particularly unique or innovative practice or it was situated in an unusual context. There must be a clear contribution of new knowledge to the established literature. Manuscripts describing what is essentially 'typical', 'common' or 'known' practices will be encouraged to rewrite the focus of the manuscript to a significant educational issue or will be encouraged to publish their work via another avenue that seeks such content.

By negotiation with the Editor-in-Chief, the Journal also accepts a small number of *Book Reviews* of relevant and recently published books.

Reference

Zegwaard, K. E., Pretti, T. J., Rowe, A. D., & Ferns, S. J. (2023). Defining work-integrated learning. In K. E. Zegwaard & T. J. Pretti (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of work-integrated learning* (3rd ed., pp. 29-48). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003156420-4>



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