

Enhancing Service Delivery via Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) at uMzimkhulu Local Municipality, South Africa

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Abstract: Municipalities in South Africa face numerous challenges that hinder efficient service delivery. One of these challenges is the lack of implementation of required services, leading to citizen dissatisfaction and protest actions. This study aims to investigate methods for improving service delivery in public institutions in South Africa through the implementation of work-integrated learning (WIL) programmes. Data for this study was collected from the uMzimkhulu local municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, specifically from the Harry Gwala District. A total of 56 participants took part in the study, including 28 WIL students and 28 mentors. This ensured representation from all departments within the municipality. Two separate sets of questionnaires were used to collect data from these two groups. Data analysis was performed using the Statistics Packaging for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. The study identified several challenges that currently hinder the effective implementation of WIL programmes within the municipality. As a result, it is recommended that the municipality provide training for WIL students and establish efficient monitoring and evaluation processes for the WIL programmes. Additionally, the municipality should involve students in WIL programmes in matters related to progressive initiatives and provide further support to enhance their ability to handle client services. It is also

advised that the municipality prioritise the development of facilities and resources for WIL students to fully engage them in their work.

Keywords: Public institutions, public administration, service delivery, work-integrated learning, local municipality.

1. Introduction

As more citizens experience unsatisfactory quality in services delivered by public institutions, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programmes can be used as an effective tool to improve service delivery. Johnson et al. (2016) also believe that public institutions should have a solid understanding of WIL platforms to ensure successful implementation. However, there has been limited investigation into how WIL programmes can enhance service delivery in South African public institutions, particularly in uMzimkhulu local municipality. Therefore, this study aims to examine the potential influence of WIL programmes on the development of public service delivery. In recent years, dissatisfied citizens across South African municipalities have engaged in violent protests due to the failure of public institutions to meet their needs. Bhorat et al. (2018) argue that efficient public services require an adequate number of personnel. Unfortunately, the current situation suggests a shortage of personnel, which negatively impacts service provision and leads to citizen dissatisfaction and protests. According to Statistics South Africa (2023), the most common complaints relate to the lack of suitable health facilities, education services, housing, water and sanitation, and crime prevention.

It can be argued that further assistance is needed to improve service delivery. Jackson (2017) suggests that students from educational institutions are energetic and innovative, and they often seek new

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information by asking questions. Therefore, students are willing to participate in WIL programmes to contribute to the responsibilities of public institutions. Atkinson (2016) emphasises the importance of mentor involvement in WIL processes to ensure that students are guided according to the institution's needs. Experienced mentors are essential to achieving the strategic goals of public institutions. This study also examines the professional relationships between mentors and WIL students to identify opportunities for further development in service delivery. According to Fleming and Pretti (2019), WIL is a programme that is initiated by institutions involving tertiary institutions, the actual workplace, and students in order to function effectively. In this programme, students integrate theoretical knowledge into practice in a formal workplace environment. These programmes also equip students with real-life experiences, including learning independence, composing curriculum vitae, and preparing them for the challenges of the labour market, leading to employment and significant improvement. Mallozzi and Drewery (2019) advocate for WIL programmes that provide students with a sense of protection and acceptance, enabling them to be productive in a work environment. Public institutions assign mentors for guidance on work-related matters and personal development plans to enhance fundamental development opportunities, improve student skills, and promote efficient learning and performance in the work environment. Fleischmann (2015: 34) also asserts that students in WIL should have constant interaction with clients to gain an understanding of client-oriented service and meet client expectations.

The government mainly focuses on internships, apprenticeships, community service, and in-service training as forms of training for all students on WIL programmes in their institutions. Roeloffze and Kleynhans (2018) state that challenges faced include development strategies that are not associated with WIL programmes and practitioners lacking vast knowledge of WIL matters. Dlamini (2018:94) contends that underdeveloped institutions tend to deprive proper learning experience opportunities with respect to WIL due to the inadequacy of mechanisms to be utilised for effective learning exposure in these programmes. Municipalities are deprived when it comes to WIL student intake, as they have limited office space and a limited budget allocation for stipend payments. Tseane-Gumbi (2019) and Urban and Gaffurini (2017) encapsulate that to have a positive social impact within societies, the government should initiate mechanisms that will combat service delivery challenges in South African communities. Such mechanisms can include the utilisation of WIL students to improve service delivery. Among the WIL students in uMzimkhulu local municipality, there are those who have completed their qualifications from universities and require on-the-job training, often referred to as graduate interns. Additionally, there are students who require practical experience within the municipality, often from Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, but have not completed their qualifications within their respective fields of expertise. The WIL students in the second cohort are often referred to as in-service trainees or student interns. All units within the municipality are represented by WIL students who have either completed a relevant qualification to complement the functions of the respective unit or are working towards obtaining a relevant qualification. These qualifications include financial management, supply chain management, auditing and management accounting, public relations & communication, public management, fleet management, human resources management, information technology, and electrical engineering.

It is the contention of this study that WIL students can contribute to the efficiency of institutions' service delivery provided they receive the right mentorship and training. Hence, this study hopes to investigate how WIL students can be incorporated into the municipality affairs in a way that will allow them to contribute to the efficiency of service delivery.

2. Methodology

This quantitative study adopted a descriptive research design approach to investigate the potential of WIL programmes on service delivery within public institutions. As Kumar (2018) notes, a quantitative study design is steadier, has more reliable results, and can be categorised in simple

forms. Thus, this study employed questionnaires as a tool for data collection, as this form of measuring instrument was deemed economical and could capture adequate data within a reasonable period. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was utilised in this study to gain detailed information from the participants. The content of these questionnaires was sufficient to assist in the collection of the required information. The gathered data for this study were transcribed numerically through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 and interpreted. In doing so, the researcher was able to collect the views of the municipal officials (mentors) and WIL students (mentees) regarding their experiences at the municipality and how the WIL programme can be deployed to achieve improved service delivery. The study employed purposive sampling to gather relevant participants, which relied on the researcher's selection of a sample based on certain characteristics. In this study, the characteristics considered are that the first set of participants should be permanent staff members who are also mentors on WIL programmes. The second set of participants are students on WIL programmes at the municipality.

Purposive sampling was considered ideal for this study as it allowed the researchers to select specific participants who were directly involved in the WIL programmes within the municipality. The study analysed and interpreted the data to produce descriptions in the form of percentages, followed by a detailed description of the participants' perceptions regarding the WIL programme. The study was conducted at the uMzimkhulu local municipality office located in the Harry Gwala District in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The researcher chose this public institution because it has better-structured units, which means it has a broader representation of the target population as opposed to provincial departmental offices located in the same area. The target population for this study is 30 permanent uMzimkhulu local municipality officials who are also responsible for mentoring WIL students, as well as 30 students on WIL programmes in the municipality. A total of 28 participants were selected among the permanent staff members to participate in the study, while another 28 were also selected from the student cohorts on WIL programmes. Importantly, all departments within uMzimkhulu local municipality are represented in this target population. The names and identities of the participants were not sought in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The participants gave their consent in writing and were made to feel at ease that the information they shared was for research purposes only and would be treated with utmost confidentiality. Furthermore, permission to conduct research was sought from the municipality management, and the study also received full ethical approval from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee at the Durban University of Technology.

3. Presentation of Results

This section presents the statistical results obtained from the perceptions of WIL students and mentors regarding how WIL programmes can enhance service delivery in public institutions. This information is presented in the form of a table, which displays the participants' responses through frequencies and percentages for each statement. Below, we provide two tables: Table 1 displays the responses of WIL students, and Table 2 displays the responses of the mentors.

Table 1: *Perceptions of WIL Students at uMzimkhulu Municipality regarding their experience and involvement in the improvement of service delivery*

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
My duties are in line with my qualifications.	-	-	1 (3.6%)	11 (39.3%)	16 (57.1%)
My duties are aligned with the objectives of the institution.	-	-	2 (7.1%)	14 (50%)	12 (42.9%)
WIL students contribute efficiently to service delivery.	-	-	5 (17.9%)	16 (57.1%)	7 (25%)

I receive adequate feedback from my mentor.	-	-	1 (3.6%)	17 (60.7%)	10 (35.7%)
The municipality allows me to make decisions based on service delivery.	1 (3.6%)	1 (3.6%)	13 (46.4%)	9 (32.1%)	4 (14.3%)
I attend capacity development training for better ideas on the improvement of service delivery.	-	1 (3.6%)	4 (14.3%)	14 (50%)	9 (32.1%)
My workload is manageable.	-	-	3 (10.7%)	9 (32.1%)	16 (57.1%)
My mentor is skilled in mentoring and coaching.	-	-	4 (14.3%)	9 (32.1%)	15 (53.6%)
My mentor shows interest in solving my problems.	-	-	4 (14.3%)	11 (39.3%)	13 (46.4%)
My mentor equips me with the resources necessary for effective performance in service delivery.	-	1 (3.6%)	3 (10.7%)	12 (42.9%)	12 (42.9%)
As a WIL student, I contribute effectively to this institution's service delivery.	-	-	1 (3.6%)	16 (57.1%)	11 (39.3%)
There is a high level of dissatisfaction displayed by uMzimkhulu citizens due to poor service delivery.	4 (14.3%)	5 (17.9%)	9 (32.1%)	7 (25%)	3 (10.7%)
Dissatisfaction is normally displayed through protest actions.	2 (7.1%)	8 (28.6%)	3 (10.7%)	12 (42.9%)	3 (10.7%)
My concerns regarding WIL programmes are attended to by my mentor.	1 (3.6%)	4 (14.3%)	3 (10.7%)	15 (53.6%)	5 (17.9%)
I am able to articulate feedback from my mentor and work on improving my performance.	-	-	2 (7.1%)	11 (39.3%)	15 (53.6%)
I would participate in WIL programmes in this municipality, given another chance.	-	-	3 (10.7%)	8 (28.6%)	17 (60.7%)

Table 2: Perceptions of municipal staff at the uMzimkhulu Municipality regarding their experience and involvement of WIL students for the purpose of improving service delivery

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have attended training for effective mentoring on WIL programmes.	7 (25%)	11 (39.3%)	1 (3.6%)	7 (25%)	2 (7.1%)

I contribute to the successful implementation of WIL programmes.	12 (42.9%)	14 (50%)	1 (3.6%)	1 (3.6%)	- -
The purpose of the institution is well understood by WIL students.	9 (32.1%)	11 (39.3%)	7 (25%)	- -	1 (3.6%)
WIL programmes are beneficial to this municipality.	- -	1 (3.6%)	3 (10.7%)	16 (57.1%)	8 (28.6%)
I motivate WIL students to explore their knowledge and achieve their goals.	14 (50%)	14 (50%)	- -	- -	- -
My institution has mechanisms in place to improve WIL programmes.	4 (14.3%)	16 (57.1%)	6 (21.4%)	2 (7.1%)	- -
I am able to integrate WIL students into institutional strategic planning decisions.	5 (17.9%)	15 (53.6%)	4 (14.3%)	2 (7.1%)	2 (7.1%)
Monitoring of WIL students is effectively implemented in this municipality.	9 (32.1%)	12 (42.9%)	4 (14.3%)	1 (3.6%)	2 (7.1%)
WIL programmes are in line with institutional service delivery programmes.	11 (39.3%)	14 (50%)	2 (7.1%)	1 (3.6%)	- -
Facilities in the municipality allow WIL students to excel in service delivery.	8 (28.6%)	8 (28.6%)	6 (21.4%)	4 (14.3%)	2 (7.1%)
Standardised and simple service delivery procedures are available for WIL students.	6 (21.4%)	14 (50%)	8 (28.6%)	- -	- -
WIL students are important role players in institutional development.	- -	- -	4 (14.3%)	12 (42.9%)	12 (42.9%)
There are challenges in the municipality that prevent the successful implementation of WIL programmes.	2 (7.1%)	8 (28.6%)	8 (28.6%)	- -	10 (35.7%)
The municipality's service delivery performance needs improvement.	- -	2 (7.1%)	2 (7.1%)	13 (46.4%)	11 (39.3%)
WIL students have an opportunity to interact with citizens for better quality services.	- -	- -	3 (10.7%)	16 (57.1%)	9 (32.1%)
I am available to provide guidance and monitoring to WIL students.	- -	- -	1 (3.6%)	12 (42.9%)	15 (53.6%)
Municipality's poor service delivery triggers the most protest actions by its citizens.	2 (7.1%)	2 (7.1%)	8 (28.6%)	9 (32.1%)	7 (25%)

I provide WIL students with the resources necessary to contribute to performing effectively in service delivery.	1 (3.6%)	-	6 (21.4%)	15 (53.6%)	6 (21.4%)
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3.1 Discussion of findings

Table 1 reveals that WIL students contribute efficiently to service delivery. Encouraging WIL students to partake in service delivery matters by working with citizens and within internal municipal affairs equips them with vast organisational work ethics and knowledge. Winborg and Hägg (2023) concur that students involved in external initiatives exercise the networking skills they have developed through contacts and networking with both external and internal role players. This affirms that there is mutual understanding through effective communication channels, and opportunities for growth are shared among all parties involved in agreement to the benefits. Effeney (2020) argues that despite positive relationships between stakeholders, there are potential risks involved that hinder the vigorous success of the WIL programmes. These include discrimination against WIL students, the anxiety they experience, potential injuries on duty, exhaustion, not fitting into the programme, and limited vacation leave. As such, various models must be collectively considered to combat potential risks involved in the WIL programmes. The reactive dedication shown by WIL students proves that they are keen on achieving the best outcomes in their WIL programme. Lim et al. (2020) indicate that WIL is seen to be beneficial in terms of increasing students' confidence in their talents and achievements in a work environment. Furthermore, Lim et al. believe that education is the application of resilience to increase students' academic attainment and ultimately show improved performance. With their vast knowledge of efficient technology use, WIL students can contribute positively to service delivery. Nel and Marais (2020) and McReynolds et al. (2020) add that WIL students can interact using online learning platforms with ease while maintaining productive relationships. These platforms include WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom, Facebook, and Twitter. As such, WIL students and mentors were compelled to acquire digital skills during the COVID-19 pandemic era, which have remained useful to date.

It has been noted that most WIL students at uMzimkhulu Municipality would participate in a WIL programme within the municipality again if given another chance. One can surmise that the WIL students most probably felt valued and that their experience with the municipality was fruitful, professional, and maintained a high-quality image. Martin and Rees (2019) concur that many WIL students have witnessed great moments and expressed delight regarding the experience and self-assurance. Moreover, WIL students felt appreciated by their academic and professional mentors and were reaffirmed of their expected future occupation route. As such, it is imperative that WIL students attain various forms of training and workshops to support both their tertiary-level education and workplace education so that both spheres can be incorporated together for effective performance. It is within this context that Khampirat, Pop, and Bandaranaike (2019) suggest that higher education institutions should have suitable training, coaching, mentoring, and consultation structures as essential tactics to enhance students' professional capacities. This can be achieved in both the industry and at the tertiary level in order for WIL students to be effective and increase their ability to undertake challenging work responsibilities.

WIL students stated that their concerns with respect to WIL programmes are attended to by their mentors, and they also receive support and encouragement from them. In this vein, Gazaway et al. (2019) indicate that WIL students feel that receiving emotional support from their mentors allows them to feel welcomed within the work environment and aids in better handling their negative sentiments of dissatisfaction and insecurity. When mentors offer emotional support, mentees are more likely to be vulnerable, express their concerns, and pose necessary questions. This vulnerability would not occur if a mentor does not provide emotional support and allows the mentee to become

progressively frustrated and detached from the profession. The results suggest that most participants felt that dissatisfaction towards the municipality is normally displayed through protest actions by community members. De Juan and Wegner (2019) mention that some community members feel the municipality is inconsistent with the provision of services as they feel they have unsatisfactory access to the benefits and rights. Moreover, citizens residing closer to town and around the municipal offices do not suffer from the lack of services as opposed to those residing further from town, as their demands are not expedited. Ngcamu (2019) stipulates that it has been shown that there are instances where protests are caused by the inadequate delivery of critical services to communities and a lack of coordination between municipalities and communities.

Lack of service delivery that influences protests includes unemployment, poverty, shortage of housing, corruption, and nepotism. However, Khambule et al., (2019) signify that the destruction of the government's facilities should be considered as the destruction of a pathway leading to improved services and, consequently, a better quality of life. The continuous damage to the government's facilities affects not only government operations but also accessibility to such facilities or services for the underprivileged. In essence, the relevance of government facilities to societies as a tool of communal growth and development should be underlined. Among the further comments made by the respondents, it was observed that WIL students lacked the proper resources to excel and be effective in their daily responsibilities within the municipality, especially to cater for the shortcomings in service delivery. These poor resources include a lack of transport, a lack of proper facilities, and a lack of personal protective equipment. In this regard, Nielsena et al. (2017) state that there needs to be a proper resource allocation to employees in all workplace categories to ensure that their well-being is managed and that they can provide effective work performance. Furthermore, WIL students were also concerned about the disposition of angry community members when their expected services are not met, citing that it is difficult to deal with aggrieved citizens, especially if there is no proper guidance on how to handle such situations. As Gruber (2011) argues, complaining clients expect frontline personnel to demonstrate genuine empathy for their difficulties, treat them as citizens, and not provide an unnoticed impression of honouring their requirements. WIL students stated that another challenge is transitioning from being a student to being in a work environment. WIL students find this challenging as the cultures in these two environments are different, which means they need to quickly adapt to the new environment. In this regard, Chang et al. (2022) observe that system modifications and organisational cultural shifts are required to boost mentoring engagements and ensure mentors, as well as mentees, are encouraged in their WIL adventure.

Bowen (2020) attests to the findings of this study, which discovered that WIL students at the uMzimkhulu local municipality often guard offices during mentor meetings so that they can deal with any queries directed to their units in the absence of their mentors. Brabazon et al. (2019) also concur with the study's findings that WIL students are involved with community members by sharing information on services the community is entitled to, making them client-oriented. However, WIL students sometimes deal with hefty complaints from some clients, as they have limited experience or training to handle these situations. Mozelius et al. (2022) support the research findings by establishing that since WIL students are familiar with technology, they can assist the municipality in innovative ways to integrate technology into their systems and ensure fast-paced service delivery, as well as engage in profound learning initiatives. Consequently, WIL students can help the municipality increase personnel utilisation, ensuring that responsibilities are executed in a timely manner due to adequate human capacity. According to Jackson and Dean (2023), WIL students can also gain experience that can assist them in attaining a permanent position within the workplace. Simultaneously, public institutions are able to attend to their objectives more efficiently with the enhancement of WIL programmes. The opportunity given to WIL students is commendable since they get to experience several forms of career growth. Mackaway and Winchester-Seeto (2018) note that HR professionals may be in an exceptional position to make WIL placements more equitable.

Their professional and often interpersonal understanding of diversity and inclusion issues brings a degree of awareness and compassion to the obstacles that students face.

Having established the role of WIL students in relation to the potential improvement of service delivery in the municipality, results from Table 2 indicate that most mentors generally strive to do their best with their mentoring responsibilities, even though they have not received formal training in mentoring and coaching for WIL programmes. Martin et al. (2019) argue that effective organisational mentoring requires mentors to possess or enhance their own mentoring, leadership, and managerial skills. Furthermore, the primary motivation for mentors in assisting WIL students is consideration, as well as the potential for graduate recruitment. The study highlights the need for mentors to receive proper training to enhance their mentoring and coaching skills. Andersen and West (2020), as well as Stelter, Kupersmidt, and Stump (2021), emphasise the importance of training mentors and equipping them with the necessary resources to implement effective mentoring practices, enabling students to improve academic outcomes in higher education and achieve their full potential in the workplace. Jackson et al. (2022) note that some WIL students struggle to adapt to the fast-paced work environment, requiring more time to complete simple tasks. Additionally, some WIL students lack confidence, discipline, and the ability to network within and outside the organisation. Jackson et al. (2022) also discovered that mentors face challenges that hinder their ability to fulfil their mentoring responsibilities, including exhaustion from their own work, resulting in limited or no time to mentor WIL students. However, the current study suggests that there is inadequate feedback from mentors regarding monitoring, which may imply that the progress of WIL students is not being effectively measured and improved. Spencer et al. (2020) propose that reducing responsibilities, implementing consistent monitoring, and establishing less stringent support schedules would likely provide WIL students with greater flexibility and opportunities.

Dutton et al. (2019) state that some mentors reported that mentees also hinder their growth by refusing to inquire for themselves. Additionally, most mentors encountered cultural clashes with their mentees as there are distinctions in values and beliefs, and sometimes acts of racism are witnessed. This also hinders progression in the mentoring relationship. Hinton Jr et al. (2020:4) state that many mentees may feel alone in their ongoing conflicts and difficulties, both emotionally and physically. Thus, mentors must have open communication with their mentees regarding unwritten norms in order to better comprehend their mentees in regard to where they come from and the challenges they bear. This will assist in knowing how to best support their mentees as they will be aware of the depth of their struggles, if any. Mentors are also advised to take pride in assisting their mentees, as the relationship should be beneficial to both parties. Alkhatnai (2023) contends that it is apparent that mentors frequently develop their own talents through working together with WIL students. Furthermore, mentors improve their supervisory skills through the mentorship relationship as they have an opportunity to interact with various WIL students. Mentors must also recognise that cooperation and engagement with a younger mentee may present a chance for them to learn and become more educated by means of exposure to fresh perspectives. Thus, mentors should be appropriately coached to ensure that they do not regard the programme as a form of supervision instead of delivering instructions. Mentors are required to display the responsibilities that the mentees will imitate in order for their careers to grow.

Based on the extended findings of this study, it is recommended that the municipality provides induction, workshops, and other required training to all their WIL students to build the necessary capacity that will assist them in contributing to the improvement of services delivered to citizens in the municipality. According to Ohei et al. (2019), employers benefit by attracting potentially skilled employees through providing WIL programmes to students and by offering training to these students that targets specific skills and knowledge required by the organisation and tertiary institutions. For Abery et al. (2015), when WIL students are offered the right training and support through various human development programmes to train and develop specific skills, this will

ensure improved performance in specific municipal functions and promote adaptation to the workplace culture. This will also ensure greater productivity and better performance of WIL students within the municipality. In the process, WIL students will also gain a better understanding of the purpose, vision, mission, and objectives of the municipality. Khampirat et al. (2019) indicate that WIL is one of the most effective and influential learning techniques that allow for a smooth transition from higher education institutions to the work environment. It also ensures improvement in work skills and engagement in professional practices.

The municipality should further capacitate their WIL students on how to deal with client complaints. The municipality should also provide training for all mentors on WIL programmes, as well as refresher courses on mentoring programmes. Tadesse (2019) adds that efficient leadership is optimal for improved service delivery strategies. This will ensure that all mentors are equipped with adequate skills to manage and improve the skills of students on WIL programmes and provide guidance towards achieving institutional and personal goals. The management within the municipality must also be capacitated on the WIL programmes to ensure the successful implementation of strategies to improve the programmes. It is also essential that management support stakeholders involved in the WIL programmes to ensure success and track progress. Fleming et al. (2018) denote that WIL is crucial for industries, higher educational institutions, and students, as relationships between these stakeholders are maintained and sustained. Expectations must be clear and stated at the commencement of the work placement for the workplace mentor to provide relevant mentorship to the WIL students. To successfully generate clear expectations, management at the municipality must construct a set of rules to govern the mentor and mentee relationship. This would enable an efficient monitoring and evaluation system at the municipality. Ndevu and Muller (2017) stipulate that South African citizens are receiving services of low quality due to challenges faced by public institutions such as a lack of capacity, manpower, skills, and funds for execution of government mandates.

Hence, Chatwin and Ackers (2018) observe that managers are not adequately equipped with knowledge of WIL principles, so they tend not to be able to cater for proper placement opportunities for such students. The placements of students on WIL programmes need to correspond with environmental, business, and institutional changes to accommodate the latest WIL concepts and allow students to utilise their full capabilities. It is essential that the municipality has initiatives in place to monitor and evaluate the WIL programmes. This initiative needs to be implemented mainly by the management of the municipality while being guided by the Human Resources Development Unit, which has expertise in this area. This will ensure that gaps within the programme are identified early and dealt with accordingly. Moreover, the evaluation will ensure programme improvement and introduce more impactful changes, if necessary, to strengthen the programme. The municipality must prioritise facilities and resource development for WIL students so they can utilise and stay motivated to work at their full potential. Li and Herd (2017) state that in a work environment, technology improves a digital field, enhancing performance and providing more accessibility to efficiency and development through technological changes. By integrating technology, a municipality can take on more responsibilities and compete in the ever-changing environment if it adopts digital methods. This way, they can effectively engage in the provision of services and demonstrate remarkable results. As Swartz et al. (2018) argue, we live in a technologically advanced era, and students must have access to new technologies to improve their learning abilities and access vast knowledge. A simple, understandable, standardised work procedure and service delivery performance should be established for WIL students to refer to, abide by, and incorporate into their daily responsibilities. This will help them understand the strategic service delivery procedures and ensure they deliver on them.

The municipality could also consider bringing on more WIL students to have more personnel assisting in achieving its goals. WIL students play a significant role in fulfilling their responsibilities

and performing various clerical duties. Due to staff shortages at the municipality, WIL students play a crucial role in assisting with the delivery of day-to-day services. Undoubtedly, WIL students provide valuable support to the institution. According to Kemp et al. (2021), student placements are valuable to organisations, with students offering a significant boost in workforce capacity, creating connections with stakeholders, and advocating for the organisation's mission. WIL students also share knowledge with community members, participate in teamwork, and solve problems for community projects. They also learn to communicate effectively with colleagues within the municipality and other relevant stakeholders. Bheekie et al. (2011) mention that in community services, students have the opportunity to connect with citizens. However, due to organisational restrictions, they are limited in spending a minimum amount of time with each person requesting aid, which prevents significant involvement in examining concerns in-depth. With the necessary resources and guidance provided to WIL students, the municipality's service delivery will improve. A comprehensive analysis of mentors' and mentees' perspectives, as well as required interventions, should be utilised to identify issues and gaps in the programme structure.

Service delivery will be improved, especially because most WIL students are based locally and can, therefore, relate comfortably with the members of their society. WIL students can also strive to prove to their peers, mentors, managers, and the community that they are ready to take on new responsibilities. WIL programmes are most effective if the required resources are procured for utilisation at the most appropriate times. In nurturing the collaborative relationships involved in WIL, Bheekie et al. (2011) argue that to cement the triangular relationship between the school, services, and the community, collaboration with local community organisations is required to determine essential needs and analyse the demands on resources. Budrin et al. (2020) also mention that the incorporation of WIL into the process of learning and training improves the development of WIL students' professional skills and competencies, boosting their rate of employment as young professionals in their chosen field of study. Furthermore, the accumulation of components such as academic instruction, specialised training, practical skills, and autonomous work distinguishes integrated educational initiatives.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to investigate how service delivery can be improved through the effective implementation of work-integrated learning (WIL) programmes. The investigation was conducted in the local municipality of uMzimkhulu as a representation of public institutions. The general findings of the study revealed that WIL programmes can indeed be used as a tool to improve service delivery within public institutions. Furthermore, it was revealed that mentors and management in the WIL programme, not fully equipped with mentoring, coaching, monitoring, and evaluation responsibilities, highlighted challenges that hinder the successful implementation of WIL programmes in public institution systems. Moreover, the study discovered that most WIL students are passionate about achieving institutional objectives and are willing to face significant challenges in ensuring that service delivery is achieved. For the successful implementation of WIL programmes, the study recommends that the municipality's management construct standard operating guidelines to govern the mentor and mentee relationship. This would enable an efficient monitoring and evaluation system at the municipality. Additionally, as a shortage of finances has been observed to be an issue, the municipality's management should employ efficient budget principles to allocate funds for training and developing both mentors and WIL students in their efforts to improve WIL programmes. There are also other areas that extend beyond the scope of this study. For instance, a more in-depth approach to this topic with similar variables could be conducted, which could examine the integration of tertiary institution mentors into the study and how they can best support WIL students. Research should also be conducted with a larger sample size.

7. Declarations

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation (S.C.N., L.M. & K.O.); Literature review (S.C.N., L.M. & K.O.); methodology (S.C.N., L.M. & K.O.); software (N/A); validation (K.O.); formal analysis (S.C.N. & L.M.); investigation (S.C.N. & L.M.); data curation (S.C.N. & L.M.); drafting and preparation (S.C.N., L.M. & K.O.); review and editing (K.O.); supervision (K.O.); project administration (L.M.); funding acquisition (N/A). All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

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