International work-integrated learning programs: Insights from the in-country partners

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Work-integrated learning programs for higher education students that involve an international component require people in the recipient countries (in-country partners) agreeing to host and engage with the students. Yet research on these programs has focused almost exclusively on the participating students. Thus, the aim of this study was to focus on the in-country partners and gain further understanding about who they are, and how they perceive and experience these programs. Interviews with twelve in-country partners from the Indo-Pacific revealed that in-country partners are professionals contributing significant time and resources, their reputation, and cultural knowledge towards these programs. While they value the energy and ideas the students bring, they are concerned about inadequate cultural preparation of students, and the unilateral nature of the arrangements they have with higher education institutions. Future programs would benefit from including more of the in-country partner's 'voice' in program design and development.

Keywords: Learning abroad, student mobility, Indo-Pacific, host community

In-country partners are an essential stakeholder for higher education (HE) work-integrated learning (WIL) programs that include an international component. Without in-country partners agreeing to host students during these programs, HE students would not have the opportunity to apply their theoretical learning in an international context. However, most of the existing literature on international WIL focuses on the benefits these international programs offer to HE students (Bessette & Camden, 2017; Kosman et al., 2021; Ogden & Streitwieser, 2016; Shields et al., 2016), omitting the in-country partners who are so important for the success of the programs. Confusingly, there are different terms used, sometimes interchangeably, to describe an international study experience undertaken by HE students (Sherraden et al., 2013), such as study abroad, learning abroad, and international student mobility (Potts, 2016). For the purposes of this paper, the term international WIL is used to describe a short-term (two to four week) program where HE students travel to another country to apply their theoretical learning in a workplace context. As travel restrictions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic ease off, countries such as Australia, the United States (US), and United Kingdom (UK), have indicated plans to grow the number of HE students undertaking an international program to pre-Covid levels, or higher (Institute of International Education, 2021; International Education Association of Australia [IEAA], 2022; Universities UK International, 2021). If program numbers as well as their quality are to increase, it is essential that we gain the insights from the in-country partners who host students so that their views can be incorporated into these international WIL opportunities.

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It is difficult to obtain a detailed description of in-country partners from the existing literature on international WIL or study abroad programs. For example, when describing the perspective of the Dominican in-country partners of a study abroad partnership, the information provided about the in-country partners was in relation to their professional role (e.g., artisan, ecologist, driver) (Klak & Mullaney, 2013). Similarly, when portraying how in-country partners perceive, interpret, and give meaning to a Canadian international fieldwork placement, details provided about the six in-country partners were limited to their gender (Shields et al., 2016). It is important to advance our understanding about not only who the in-country partners are, but also why they decide to become involved in international WIL programs if the number of opportunities and student participation are to grow in this area.

Of course, detailed descriptions of in-country partners will not necessarily provide any insights about how they perceive and experience these programs. Moreover, the limited publications reporting on in-country partners' profiles and their insights appear to be mirrored by a similar lack of research looking at how they experience these programs. Despite in-country partners being essential to any international program for HE students, there is a recognized gap in the literature relating to the impact these programs have on them (Ogden & Streitwieser, 2016). Given the importance of in-country partner perspectives, their 'voice' (i.e., their opinion, view, and insight) should be included in the design and implementation of any future international WIL programs (Shields et al., 2016). This critical need is further highlighted by a study exploring the impact of US geography students on in-country partners which found that most of the academic and professional staff participating in the programs do not consider the potentially negative impact their students might have on the in-country partners (Schroeder et al., 2009). More research into these programs is required to ensure these programs do not "turn into little more than a good excuse for an interesting experience" for the students (Racine & Perron, 2012, p. 197) with little acknowledgement or understanding of how the in-country partners perceive and experience international WIL programs. Further, our knowledge of what encourages in-country partners to be a part of these programs should not be static (Hammersley, 2017), as these may shift over time.

Thus, the aim of this study is to gain extensive insights about who are the in-country partners that host HE students during international WIL programs to the Indo-Pacific, and how they perceive and experience these programs.

METHOD

Theoretical Framework

This study used an exploratory qualitative research design. It drew upon a social constructionist interpretive perspective that recognizes participants have unique experiences of international WIL, that these experiences involve social interactions (a key feature of international WIL programs), and that they construct meaning through these experiences (Lock & Strong, 2010).

Ethics Approvals

The study was approved and conducted under the ethics approval processes of three different organizations, namely the Committee for Ethics in Human Research at the University of Canberra (project number 2916), the Tongan Ministry of Health National Health Ethics and Research Committee (ref: 20191122), and the Fiji National University College Human Health Research Ethics Committee (ref: 304.20). Reporting was informed by the consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research

(COREQ) checklist (Tong et al., 2007) as this is considered the most comprehensive reporting guideline for qualitative research and applies to research where data collection is conducted via interview (Walsh et al., 2020).

Participant Selection

Convenience sampling was used to recruit 12 participants who had hosted HE students during international WIL programs. Academics who had previously organized international WIL programs were asked to seek permission from their in-country partners to forward their details to the lead researcher for recruitment purposes. After receiving permission from their in-country partners for their contact details to be forwarded to the lead researcher, the contact details of 19 people and one organization were collated. All 20 potential participants were contacted with a request to participate in a semi-structured interview, 19 by email and one in person, of which twelve consented to participate in the study. The email invitation included a participant information sheet and a consent form. The in-person request included verbal details of the purpose and structure of the study.

Setting and Data Collection

An interview guide was developed following an extensive review of the literature in accordance with current guidelines on how to effectively collect data from semi-structured interviews (Liamputtong, 2013; Mack et al., 2005), together with input from the entire research team to ensure questions and language were relevant to the aims of the study (Table 1). The lead researcher and a member of the research team who has direct experience leading international WIL programs, reviewed the questions for their cultural sensitivity and appropriateness (Howitt & Stevens, 2005).

TABLE 1: Guide for semi-structured interviews with participants who host higher education students on an international work-integrated learning program.

Participant Characteristics
1. Gender (Prompts: male/female/other).
2. Age (Prompts: < 30, 30-50, >50 years).
3. How many years have you lived in this community?
4. Have you travelled overseas? If so, to where and when?
5. What is your role?
Interactions between In-Country Partners and International Work-Integrated Learning Students
6. What has your involvement been with students from universities?
7. How regularly do you encounter students when they are visiting?
8. Why do you think the students visit your community/organization?
9. Please describe a typical day when the students are visiting.
In-Country Partner Experience with International Work-Integrated Learning Programs
10. What is important to you about these student visits?
11. Is there anything that was unexpected or surprised you about the students?
12. Is there anything in particular the university can do to improve the student visits?
13. What have you learned from the students?
14. What do you think they have learned from you?
15. What are some of the positive outcomes from the student visits? [Prompts: short-term (less than 12 months); long-term (12 months or more)].
16. What are some of the less positive outcomes?
17. As you think back over the student visits, what do you think has been the effects of the visits on the local community/your organization?

Twelve participants from five different countries in the Indo-Pacific region completed the semi-structured interview with the lead researcher. All but one of the participants were unknown to lead researcher. Prior to commencing each interview, participants were provided with an opportunity to ask questions regarding the interview process and/or the purpose of the study. All participants provided their written consent (one verbally) prior to the commencement of the interviews. One interview was completed in-person in 2019, with the remaining eleven interviews conducted online between July 2021 and January 2022. Detailed notes were taken during the in-person interview and discussed the same day with one of the research team. The online interviews were recorded using video conferencing software (Microsoft Teams, ©Microsoft, or Zoom, ©2022 Zoom Video Communications) transcribed verbatim. All ensuing transcripts were checked for accuracy by the lead researcher. The mean duration of the interviews (±SD) was 45min 17s (±19min 3s).

Participant Demographics

All participants in this study had travelled outside the country in which they had hosted students on an international WIL program, with 75% travelling abroad for leisure, 50% for study, 42% for business, and 33% for career opportunities. Many participants were in senior roles within their organizations (Table 2).

TABLE 2: In-country partner participant characteristics.

Characteristic	Category	n=
Age	< 30 years	3
	30 – 50 years	6
	> 50 years	3
Gender	Male	6
	Female	6
Role	Business Owner	2
	Chief Executive Officer / Executive Director	2
	Head of School/Institute	2
	Health Professional	2
	Higher Education Professional Staff	2
	Higher Education Student	1
	Project Manager	1
Sector	Business	3
	Community	1
	Health	2
	Higher Education	5
	Sport	1
Country of international work-integrated learning program	Fiji	2
	Malaysia	3
	Samoa	2
	Thailand	2
	Tonga	3
Country of birth	Country where they hosted international work-integrated learning students	4
	Elsewhere	8

Data Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis was used to scrutinize the data collected from the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This inductive approach puts the researchers at the heart of knowledge production and provides a step-by-step method for capturing patterns of shared meaning from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). These steps include becoming familiar with the data, then generating codes from the data, constructing themes, and lastly revising and defining these themes (Braun et al., 2019). The researchers independently reviewed each individual transcript to identify similarities within and across all participant responses. The entire research team was involved with each stage of data analysis, including generating codes and constructing themes. Trustworthiness of the analysis process was established through the use of the step-by-step approach of reflexive thematic analysis (Mackieson et al., 2019). Including all researchers in the generation of themes assists in increasing the robustness (credibility) and dependability of the research findings (Noble & Heale, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017).

RESULTS

Overall Findings

The participant demographic information and the findings from the interviews reveal that in-country partners of these programs have travelled extensively both domestically and internationally, they are professionals in their sector of employment, and are proactively participating with HE institutions to facilitate successful, effective, and safe international WIL experiences for students. They are willing to continue their involvement in these programs as they enjoy the benefits these programs provide, such as extended professional networks. However, they would welcome improved student pre-departure preparation, a more bilateral arrangement with the sending institution, and enhanced awareness of the social, cultural, and economic realities of living and working in their countries.

Interactions Between In-Country Partners and International WIL Students

Participants expressed they were involved in international WIL programs as it provided them and their organization with access to novel ideas and new ways of thinking. They described how hosting students, who were generally younger than themselves, gave them and their organizations exposure to different perspectives on how to approach existing and future professional challenges. In some cases, the programs and the students pushed the participants out of their comfort zone and inspired them to extend their business processes and practices.

> So, I think it's very good for us, me myself, my team and the students have also learned a lot through the whole process from the students that is coming. But also, from the whole process of coordinating this thing [international WIL program]. We also learn because we then need to get out of our comfort zone and find different industry partners. [Participant 6]

Participants described that they were proud to host students and hoped that the students would talk not only favorably about their experience when they returned home, but also talk favorably about the country (in general) as well as what the country had to offer, and that "they will have a memorable, memorable experience here and hopefully they will come back to visit us again in the future" [Participant 9].

Participants described they were aware that the students were coming from a more resource rich nation and they had access to facilities and opportunities that were not always available locally. While

acknowledging this difference, participants described being motivated to participate in international WIL programs to showcase and celebrate their culture, ways of doing, and their country to the students, maybe by taking the students to "my house and host them with normal, simple…family meals...and take them to show our islands and you know and I'm very happy to do that" [Participant 2].

In-Country Partner Experience with International WIL Programs

International WIL programs are beneficial for the in-country partners that host them. All participants declared that they were supportive of facilitating these programs and were willing to continue to be involved, as they believed in how these programs benefit not only the students, but also themselves.

> I think what the real impact comes in is those, that kind of opportunity to discuss amongst, across cultures and to learn to encounter whatever the other might be appropriately and how that can then change you for the better. [Participant 5]

Participants reported that hosting students offered them access to a professional network that "they never normally would have any sort of contact with" and that this "was really helpful' [Participant 7], especially when hosting students from a diverse range of discipline areas.

The potential creation of a network of friends and advocates for the participants' country was mentioned as a possible benefit by participants, as the students "get the experience of being in the office, the wonders of this wonderful country, but then new friends from another country as well" [Participant 11].

Participants recognized that the students were from a country that had a different culture than their country. They described that for students to have a positive learning and cultural experience, it was necessary that the sending institutions "better prepare the students about the the, I don't know, I can't find better word, business landscape in [country]" [Participant 6], particularly to understand what is considered routine and commonplace in the countries and communities they travel to.

> I do remember one thing. The assumptions that they came in with. And, you know, when they find something, not to go, wow, when it's not really a wow. It's just that you've come in with your pre…you've already come in with some assumptions. You're not coming in with a blank notebook…It's just that I recall somethings. So yeah, I was like wow, but you're thinking what's so wow about, it's quite normal. [Participant 12].

The participants indicated there "should be heavy involvement in such a program from [country name] who are living in Australia, to plan the program in in consultation closely with, with, with the health workers who are going to come" [Participant 4]. This was to provide students with a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the sociocultural aspects of their community, aspects that they indicated only local community members can provide.

Future Directions for International WIL Programs

While being motivated to continue their involvement in international WIL programs, in part due to the benefits these programs provide, participants also offered a number of suggestions for future programs. There was a general acceptance by the participants that being involved with an international WIL program involved assuming professional responsibility for the student experience as well as "at the same times making sure that they were safe and they were being culturally sensitive" [Participant 12]. This often involved working outside normal work hours in addition to taking on duties outside of their

professional role. This was in part because the participants perceived that many students were not adequately prepared to understand the potential health and safety risks they may be exposed to by being in an unfamiliar environment. Participants described they took a proactive approach to ensuring the students were protected and learnt important cultural etiquette that would facilitate a smooth, safe, and positive experience for both students and the in-country partners but would welcome more assistance from the sending institution in preparing the students better prior to their arrival in country.

> One key area that that if the universities or that the person who is in charge of the program can, you know, control the students a bit more. Or even just remind them I, I think that would make the students realize that they are not here for a holiday. [Participant 10]

There was concern amongst the participants that staff from the sending institutions were not entirely aware of the challenges faced by the in-country partners when hosting HE students. The reality of the social, cultural, and economic pressures in which the in-country partners operated, and the ability to access resources and facilities prior to or during an international WIL program visit, was of concern to participants. Some expressed concern about needing to use their own money in preparation for hosting students. This was largely because the sending institution reimbursed expenses after the program was completed rather than provided funding upfront.

> The host institution is not in a position, you know, to reserve those things for the incoming students, so it really falls back on the actual people who are going to be accommodating the students while they're here to be making those arrangements. [Participant 3]

> You know, data was really expensive there. So, people just sending files that are huge and it's like I can't, I can't open that 'cause I'll actually use a week of their data just opening this file. I'm like I can't, you know. So, just little thing like, you know. [Participant 7]

The in-country partners who participated in this study stated a preference for a broader and more inclusive arrangement with the sending institutions, possibly by starting communications earlier and therefore integrating in-country partners more fully into the planning phases of the programs, and/or by changing the arrangement (or honoring an existing arrangement) to a more bilateral arrangement. In some instances, a two-way exchange of students had been agreed with the institution where the students originated, although to date only a one-way flow of students to the in-country partners had eventuated.

> We have always been, uh, kind of the receiving end of programs...So my, my suggestion is that if you want this to be a real partnership then both, both parties should be at the table when initial discussions and throughout the planning phase. [Participant 4]

> At that time, you know, we, we were thinking it's going to be a bilateral arrangement in the sense where, you know, the [institution name] students are going to come and staff are going to come and maybe our staff and students will be able to um go to [institution name] and, you know, have that experience as well…it has not happened until now, but we are positive that it will happen in the future. [Participant 3]

DISCUSSION

This study provides a rare insight into the in-country partners who host HE students during short (two to four week) international WIL programs in the Indo-Pacific, their perspective of their involvement,

and the impact these programs have on them. By better understanding how in-country partners perceive and experience international WIL programs, their views can be incorporated into program design and development which should lead to improved experiences for both students and partners. Using social constructionism to guide the study acknowledged that each stakeholder involved in international WIL programs construct knowledge about these programs from their own historical and cultural contexts (Lock & Strong, 2010). That is, while meaning is constructed through these socio-cultural interactions, there is no single 'correct' perspective about these programs, but rather multiple perspectives (Bøe, 2021). This study reveals that the in-country partners who host HE students are professionals, often in very senior roles, who work in a diverse range of industries and sectors across different countries. They express great pride in their country and culture, and welcome the opportunity to receive new ideas and ways of doing, from both students and accompanying academics who visit their communities, and any potential extended network of professional colleagues. They are aware of their responsibility for facilitating successful international WIL programs which includes student health and safety. In addition, suggested improvements consisted of enhanced cultural preparation of the students, better bilateral arrangements, and an increased awareness by the sending institutions of the social, cultural, and economic realities of living and working in the Indo-Pacific.

When the literature considers in-country partners in the context of the many international programs undertaken by HE students, this is done with a growing concern about the possibility for harm (Law et al., 2013; Schroeder et al., 2009), or unintended, potentially negative, consequences (Crabtree, 2013) these programs might have on the in-country partners and/or their communities. The perceived power imbalance between the sending institution and the in-country partners is seen as potentially resulting in students benefitting at the expense of the in-country partners (Powell et al., 2010), and in-country partners having less influence over the international WIL program than the sending institution (Le et al., 2013). However, in raising these concerns only two of the studies (Powell et al., 2010; Schroeder et al., 2009) did so by interviewing the in-country partners. Further, in one of these studies (Schroeder et al., 2009) it was not possible to determine the number of in-country partners interviewed. In contrast to the concerns outlined by other authors, all in-country partners in our study were willing participants in international WIL programs, were receptive to the energy and ideas students brought, and were unanimously supportive of their continuing involvement in future programs. Admittedly, participants in studies such as ours may give overly positive responses due to their fear of losing the program (Broom, 2016). We cite the offering of suggestions for improvements to future programs, such as a preference for a more bilateral arrangement with the sending institution, as evidence of the confidence in-country partners have in their influence over international WIL programs, and the depth and strength of the relationship they have with the sending institutions.

While the in-country partners wished to continue their participation in international WIL programs, the programs can still be improved. While previous studies on WIL programs have found that they are more time consuming and resource intensive than traditional classroom-based learning activities (Bilgin et al., 2017; Clark et al., 2016), the research focused mainly on academic workload, not the workload of in-country partners. Further, creating international WIL opportunities for students is considered not only time consuming but also expensive for the sending institutions (Gulick et al., 2006). We now understand the in-country partners are busy professionals with many responsibilities, in addition to those involved with hosting HE students on international WIL programs. It is, therefore, not surprising the programs also have financial and workload implications for the partners. Participants in our study reported considerable benefits to being involved in international WIL programs, such as extended professional networks. However, it was acknowledged that collaborating

in such programs created significant workload for the in-country partners that was often under appreciated by the sending institution.

Despite the significant workload, the in-country partners in our study expressed a desire to be more involved with the design and planning of international WIL programs. They did so predominantly to facilitate the depth of the students' knowledge and understanding of the host country and culture. Although adding to their already high workload, this recommendation was made to address what was perceived by the in-country partners as a lack of knowledge by the students about what is normal or everyday practice in their country. The recommendation by the in-country partners for an improvement to the student pre-departure preparation is aligned with other research stating that students are not appropriately prepared for their international learning experiences. For example, in their exploration of the pre-departure training required by Canadian physiotherapy students, Bessette and Camden (2017) found that improvements in such training could enhance not only learning experiences but assist the students to appropriately engage with cultures other than their own. Improving pre-departure preparation may also counter concerns that there is potential for these international programs to normalize colonial or paternalistic relations (Crabtree, 2013). What is significant from our study is the suggestion that sending institutions need to consider using local in-country partners, or members of the community's diaspora, to ensure greater cultural preparation and awareness. Doing so would respect the unique cultural knowledge and perspective that only the in-country partners can provide, while minimizing the possibility of normalizing colonial undertones. It further acknowledges that the opinions and perspectives of the in-country partners can be used to improve international WIL programs which should lead to improved experiences for both students and in-country partners.

The call for the involvement of in-country partners in the planning and preparation phases of international WIL programs, marks a shift in the type of relationship HE institutions will have with in-country partners and acknowledges the partners have a unique and valuable contribution to make that can enhance these programs. Previous studies have suggested for the in-country partners to be a co-learner to equalize power relationships (Frank & Sieh, 2016), and to be more of a collaborator to better meet in-country partner objectives (Hammersley, 2017). There have also been suggestions for the relationship between in-country partners and sending institutions to be mutually beneficial (Hartman et al., 2018) and reciprocal (Hall et al., 2018; Hammersley et al., 2018). We would add that HE institutions should consider improving the balance that exists in their arrangements with in-country partners, possibly by establishing a more bilateral arrangement. Such arrangements would counter concerns that international WIL programs are potentially a form of colonialism (Powell et al., 2010), while recognizing and respecting the professionalism of the in-country partners, in addition to acknowledging that their contributions could improve the safety and effectiveness of the programs. We recognize that a more bilateral arrangement may require additional funding, and that it is not clear whether or if this funding would be available. However, this potential restriction should not hinder the involvement of in-country partners more inclusively in the design and development of these programs.

Of course, while increasing the involvement of in-country partners in program design and development will help address what they perceive as deficiencies in the current preparation of students, it will also result in additional workload for both them and the academic staff. It is important, if not essential, that HE institutions recognize and compensate both academic staff and in-country partners for the additional workload that is involved in effectively preparing their students for international WIL programs. It is also important for HE institutions to recognize the social, cultural,

and economic realities from the perspective of the in-country partners. HE institutions will then be facilitating the long-term relationship and sustainability of these programs, both of which are crucial for the longevity of successful international programs (Ryan-Krause, 2016), while countering concerns about international WIL programs potentially having negative impacts on in-country partners.

Implications for Future International WIL Programs

Future international WIL programs could benefit from improved clarity regarding the socio-cultural, historical, economic, and political realities in which in-country partners operate. All of the in-country partners in this study lived in countries with fewer resources than the countries which were organizing the programs and sending the students. Higher education institutions who organize these programs need to recognize that in-country partners operate within a vastly different cultural and financial environment than they do. Not all in-country partners have access to resources or prioritize international WIL programs in the same way as the sending institution, and that in fact, involvement in these programs potentially puts some in-country partners into financial distress. Further, improvements to the pre-departure preparation of students by involving local in-country partners, or the community's diaspora, as preferred by the in-country partners involved in this study, would provide a step towards a more bilateral relationship between the sending institution and the in-country partners, and would acknowledge and respect the unique cultural knowledge and perspective that only the in-country partners can provide.

We have used the term 'in-country partner' throughout this paper to refer to the people who host HE students on international WIL programs, in preference to the more preferred term, 'host community'(Larsen, 2016; Reisch, 2011; Shields et al., 2016; Tran & Bui, 2021). We do so for two reasons. Firstly, the term 'host' implies that there is an element of entertaining or socializing that the community undertakes, that is, the students are guests. While the students are certainly guests in the country, and some entertaining of students may be undertaken, we believe using the term 'host' undermines both the professionalism of the people involved and their vital contribution to successful, effective, and safe international WIL programs. Secondly, using the term 'host' portrays the people who engage with, and assume responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of the students, as passive actors in international WIL programs. The term 'host community' does not represent the diversity of views, experience, or professionalism revealed by the people interviewed for our study. By changing the term used, future studies would counter the risk that the language used to describe the in-country partners may normalize colonial relationships (Crabtree, 2013; Ravishankar, 2020) and undermine their vital contribution to future international WIL programs.

Limitations

While this research project prides itself on the depth and breadth of qualitative data collected, the experiences described by participants occurred at least two years prior to the interviews being undertaken. This was due to the fact that from January 2020 to December 2022, international programs were temporarily suspended as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. While the interviews were semi-structured and allowed for a broad range of questions to be asked there is always the potential that participants do not provide complete responses, especially if the response may be negative (O'Sullivan & Smaller, 2016). However, a non-judgmental approach was taken with an emphasis on truthful expression (Edge, 2015) which is particularly important if study findings are to guide future international WIL program development.

CONCLUSION

International WIL programs would not be viable without the involvement of in-country partners in recipient countries agreeing to host HE students. However, details about who these in-country partners are, and how they perceive and experience these programs is the key focus of this study, as this has not been well characterized in the literature to date. This study reports that rather than being passive recipients of students who may potentially be harmed by engaging with students, the in-country partners who engage with HE students are professionals with extensive skills, knowledge, and experience, and who are proactively deciding to be involved in international WIL programs. They are also keen to continue to be involved in these programs as they welcome the energy and ideas students bring, and the potential networks they provide.

The in-country partners perceive the pre-departure preparation students routinely undertake is insufficient and could be enhanced by students learning about the culture of the community they were to travel to, directly from members of their community, and preferably prior to undertaking any travel. In doing so, the students could commence respectful acknowledgement of the unique, deep, and rich understanding the in-country partners have of their culture and appreciate how beneficial it is to learn directly from these people about that culture. Higher education institutions may wish to review their assumptions when planning international WIL programs and consider the sociocultural and economic realities and constraints of the in-country partners who will host their students to facilitate a more balanced interaction. Sending institutions should also consider a more bilateral arrangement between the HE institution and the in-country partners to counter any perception of exploitation of in-country partners. Future research would benefit from an evaluation of the impact on the students' learning experience and their ability to engage with cultures different to their own following direct in-country partner involvement in the pre-departure preparation activities.

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