

THE ROLE OF WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING (WIL) IN BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY NEEDS

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In Sri Lanka, as in many countries, there exists a significant gap between the theoretical knowledge provided by universities and the practical skills demanded by industries. As a result, graduates often encounter difficulties in securing employment due to limited practical experience, insufficient technological awareness, and lack of soft skills. Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) has emerged as a key strategy to address this issue. WIL combines academic knowledge with real-world experience through internships, apprenticeships, teaching practice, fieldwork, and project-based learning. This study explores the role of WIL in bridging the gap between higher education and the labor market in Sri Lanka, using a mixed-methods approach to collect insights from students, academic staff, and industry representatives. Findings suggest that WIL improves employability, confidence, and adaptability among graduates, while strengthening university-industry collaboration. Strengthening WIL is therefore essential to enhance graduate employability and ensure the relevance of university curricula to labor market needs.

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