TOURISM STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES BASED ON THE PLACE FOUR-COMPONENT MODEL

By

Lynn Jonas

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree Master of Education in the Faculty of Education at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

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Supervisor: Prof. M.M. Botha
Co-supervisor: Mr. H.H. Bartis
DECLARATION

I, Lynn Jonas student number 211167312, hereby declare that the dissertation submitted for the degree Master of Education is my own work and that it has not been previously submitted for the assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another University or for another qualification.

__________________________________________
Lynn Jonas
December 2014
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to determine tourism students’ perceptions of their Experiential Learning (EL) experiences based on the Predicting Learner Advancement through Cooperative Education (PLACE) four-component model. The research objectives were to ascertain Experiential Learning’s impact on the four components namely Personal Development, Career Development, Work-skills Development and Academic Development.

This study fits within the pragmatic paradigm and utilised an explanatory mixed methods research design which requires quantitative data to be collected first with follow-up qualitative data. The data collection instrument for the quantitative data was the PLACE model, which was in the form of a survey questionnaire and the data generating strategy for the qualitative data was individual interviews.

The findings of the data were heavily skewed toward the positive end of the spectrum with students viewing the impact of EL on the four components as favourable. Interviews were conducted with participants whose results showed deviations from the norm and had particularly negative experiences. Academic Development had extremely low Cronbach Alphas, which points to poor reliability. This phenomenon was also further explored during the interviews with participants making suggestions for factors to be considered. Recommendations were made to the three stakeholders of EL namely students, employers and academic coordinators in order to ensure improved Experiential Learning programmes and maximised student benefit.

Key words: Experiential Learning, Cooperative Education, Work-integrated Learning, Personal Development, Career Development, Work-skills Development, Academic Development
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CHE    Council on Higher Education
CRS    Central Reservations System
EL     Experiential Learning
ELT    Experiential Learning Theory
FRTI   Faculty Research Technology Innovation
TVET   Technical and Vocational Education and Training
GDP    Gross Domestic Product
GDS    Global Distribution System
HEI    Higher Education Institution
LSI    Learning Styles Inventory
MMR    Mixed Methods Research
PLACE  Predicting Learner Advancement through Cooperative Education
REC-H  Research Ethics Committee – Human
WBL    Work-Based Learning
WIL    Work-Integrated Learning
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This research study focuses on Experiential Learning (EL) experiences of tourism students at a chosen Higher Education Institution (HEI) based on a pre-existing model. This chapter will provide a broad overview and introduction to the study including the scope and delimitations. The research question, aim and objectives will further be presented.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

HEIs are continuously being challenged and pressured by industry operators to produce graduates that are workplace ready and that will be able to cope with these demanding environments (Clements & Cord, 2013:114). The response has often been to introduce EL and Cooperative Education programmes into curricula in order to meet this demand and Yan and Cheung (2012:21) argue that EL is now seen as a vital element in tourism and hospitality education. Moon (2004:103) explains EL to be a process of learning from experiences whereby students are placed in workplaces and are required to practice and implement skills taught and acquired in the classroom. The National Diploma in Tourism Management at the chosen institution has a six-month EL module as part of the curriculum. EL is done in the first semester of the third year of study whereby students are expected to complete this period of working at a tourism establishment. Monthly reports are submitted by students as well as monthly evaluations by employers.

This qualification is currently part of the new generic programme – implemented in 2012 – that is offered for five National Diploma courses namely Management, Logistics, Marketing, Economics and Tourism. A need was identified for these diplomas’ curricula to be changed, and initial changes have been made to the EL
component of the tourism diploma. Hill (2007:33) argues that there is a need for continuous curriculum assessment and improvement and this study will therefore generate insights towards revising the EL module by considering inputs provided by one of the stakeholder groups, namely the students, to determine how they perceive this module. These insights may be able to assist with the further development or enhancement of the EL module.

Vaughan (2008:1) notes that in recent years there has been increased emphasis on knowledge building, but argues that the process of learning and more specifically workplace learning is becoming more and more important. The inclusion of the EL module in this tourism programme indicates the significance of workplace learning in addition to theoretical knowledge building. According to Illeris (2003:173) each student is responsible for his/her own learning, whether this learning is conscious or unconscious. This study will look at students’ perceptions of their learning processes and how the EL module has impacted their experience of learning whether it is conscious learning or not.

Parks, Fenster and Onwuegbuzie (2008) developed a four-component model for Predicting Learner Advancement through Cooperative Education (PLACE). This model is used to measure students’ perceptions of their EL experiences and is based on four distinct components namely Personal Development, Career Development, Work-skills Development and Academic Development.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

No studies have been done by the Tourism Department of the chosen institution in order to assess students’ perceptions of the EL experience in order to determine whether they view it as significant or worthwhile. There may potentially be gaps that could be addressed, which could help students have a more meaningful and enriching experience. Through the use of the pre-existing PLACE four-component
model, students will be able to identify the areas they feel EL have improved or were otherwise influenced through their participation in EL.

This study aims to determine how students view their actual learning and progress through the engagement with industry during their EL module. Illeris (2003:167) indicates that there has been a shift in focus from education and teaching more to learning and the development of competencies in students. The four components of the PLACE model – Personal Development, Career Development, Work-skills Development and Academic Development – will be the focus of students’ perceptions of learning, growth and development.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION AND SUB-QUESTIONS

The following section will address the research question and sub-questions of this study.

1.4.1 Research Question

What are tourism students’ perceptions of their experiential learning experiences, based on the PLACE four-component model?

1.4.2 Sub-questions

i. What are tourism students’ perceptions regarding experiential learning’s impact on their Personal Development?

ii. How do tourism students view the impact experiential learning has on their Career Development?

iii. What type of work-skills did the experiential learning experience develop in tourism students?

iv. What are tourism students’ perceptions of the relation between experiential learning and their Academic Development?
1.5 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The following section will present the research aims and objectives of the study.

1.5.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to determine tourism students’ perceptions of their experiential learning experiences based on the PLACE four-component model.

1.5.2 Research Objectives

i. To interpret tourism students’ perceptions regarding experiential learning’s impact on their Personal Development.

ii. To determine tourism students’ views of the impact experiential learning had on their Career Development.

iii. To ascertain the type of work-skills the experiential learning experience had developed in tourism students.

iv. To determine tourism student’s perceptions of the relation between experiential learning experience and their Academic Development.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There are three main stakeholders to EL programmes that are often referred to as the Cooperative Education triangle (Coll & Chapman, 2000:1) as all three are imperative to the ultimate success of EL programmes and activities. These three stakeholders include the students, the educational institution and the workplaces. This study focuses on the perceptions of one of these important stakeholders, namely the students. However, the results and findings may be of importance to all three parties concerned.
Industry role-players are significant in that they provide the environment for students to participate in EL programmes. Cushen (2005:2) notes that industry role-players and academics benefit from EL programmes through improved relationships. Through continued interaction employers are able to better understand challenges academic coordinators face and academics could also be made aware of how to better support employers. This study would benefit employers in that programmes could be more structured in order to support them and ensure maximum student benefit.

Determining students’ perceptions of their EL experiences will also be advantageous to academic coordinators as potential gaps that exist in the current EL programme could be addressed. The findings of this study could also indicate where industry falls short and how academic coordinators could assist and possibly resolve these impediments. Furthermore, this study would benefit students in that their experiences could be enhanced through improved EL programmes whereby their needs are appropriately catered to.

1.7 DELIMITATIONS AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study was limited to tourism students at the chosen institution. Other Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges as well as private colleges were not included in the study. Students from the chosen institution participate in a six-month continuous EL module whereas students form other institutions in the vicinity visit the industry sporadically throughout their qualification duration for two weeks to three months at a time. The inclusion of these students could potentially have skewed data.

Only students who have completed their EL during the period 2013 were included. Students who have completed any time before that would be difficult to contact as there is little to no record of their whereabouts. Approximately 20 students who completed their EL in 2013 returned to the institution to do their Bachelor of
Technology in Tourism Management degree and were therefore easily accessible for data collection.

The study focuses on students’ perceptions of their experiences related to the four components of the PLACE model. Their perceptions on the EL module in its entirety including assessments, timing of the module and other related aspects do not form part of the current study. The workplace supervisors and academic coordinators’ perceptions are also excluded as the focus of this study is on students’ perceptions of their experiences.

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section will outline the various concepts and theoretical aspects related to the study that will be discussed in Chapter two.

1.8.1 Conceptual Clarification

The terminology and concepts related to experiential learning are numerous (Wessels, 2005; Moon, 2004; Ravenscroft, Buckless & Hassall, 1999). The Tourism Department of the chosen institution currently uses the term “Work-integrated Learning”; however Experiential Learning was used until 2013. The respondents of this study will be familiar with the term EL and this will therefore be the preferred term of the study.

The literature review of this study will provide an in-depth discussion of the different types of concepts related to EL, which are contradictory at times. The Canada Ontario Ministry of Education (2000) classifies Cooperative Education as a form of EL whereas other authors such as Wessels (2005:21) classify EL as a component of Cooperative Education. The Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2011:72) indicates that Cooperative Education and Experiential Learning are very often used interchangeably.
The four main concepts that will be elaborated on in Chapter Two include Experiential Learning, Cooperative Education, Work-integrated Learning and Work-based Learning.

1.8.2 Experiential Learning in Higher Education

Bates (2008:305) reported on the relevance of work-integrated curricula in university programmes. This study highlighted the increasing pressure that higher education is experiencing to include workplace experiences in their curricula. The present study will evaluate this study conducted by Bates (2008) and contradictory studies such as Branton, Van Gyn, Cutt, Loken, Ney and Ricks (1990) which questions the place of EL in higher education and training.

1.8.3 Experiential Learning in Tourism Education

The increasing global economic pressure highlights the importance of EL in tourism studies (Hawkins & Weiss, 2008:2). In recent years, most tourism and hospitality studies include some form of experiential learning over varying periods. Yan and Cheung (2012:21) argue that often these programmes lack integration and cohesion between curricular design and what the industry requires. The literature of the proposed study will therefore explore the relevance of including EL programmes in tourism education.

1.8.4 Experiential Learning Challenges

Experiential Learning is not without difficulties and obstacles and Ahern (2007:517) found that one of the biggest challenges for academic coordinators is how to assess these programmes. The study further found a general lack of understanding of how to structure these programmes in a meaningful manner. This aspect will further be explored in the literature review.
1.8.5 Theoretical Background of the PLACE Four-component Model

The current PLACE four-component model was developed from previous studies which aimed to evaluate student development during their Cooperative Education experiences. The literature review will discuss the studies that were forerunners for this model and the model itself.

The first was *The impact of field education on student development* (Williams, 1980), followed by *Student Outcomes* (Fletcher, 1989). Fletcher (1991) built on both the works of Williams (1980) as well as Fletcher (1989) and produced *Field experience and Cooperative Education*. The first PLACE model as developed by Parks, Onwuegbuzie and Cash (2001) built on the abovementioned studies and was termed *Development of a measure for Predicting Learner Advancement through Cooperative Education*. The final PLACE four-component model was revised by Parks, Fenster and Onwuegbuzie (2008) and the model developed by Parks *et al.* (2001) consisted of three factors whereas the fourth factor was added by Parks *et al.* (2008).

1.8.6 Four Factors of the PLACE Model

The importance of the four factors of Parks *et al.* (2008) PLACE model to student development and growth will be discussed. As identified above, these components are Personal Development, Career Development, Work-skills Development and Academic Development. Work done by Calway and Murphy (2000) reporting on career progression of Cooperative Education graduates will be explored. DeLorenzo (2000) examined how exposure to Cooperative Education programmes help students with decision making, self-efficacy and career locus of control. The four elements of the four-component model will be individually explored in the literature review of this study.
1.8.7 Experiential Learning Theory

The Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) by Kolb (1984) and the six learning propositions of EL by Kolb and Kolb (2005) form the theoretical framework of this study. Kolb’s (1984) ELT has been developed from previous research conducted by Dewey, Lewin and Piaget and these will further be explored as elaborated on by Kolb (1984).

1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study collected both numeric and narrative data and therefore fit within the pragmatist paradigm. This mixed methods approach is a third methodological movement that has emerged as an alternative to the purist quantitative and qualitative approaches (Feilzer, 2010:6; Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009:4; Creswell & Clark, 2007; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The model that is utilised in this study developed by Parks, et al. (2008) is a quantitative research instrument and qualitative data will further be collected.

An explanatory sequential design was followed and this design allows for quantitative data to be collected with follow up qualitative data (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The use of quantitative methods to measure perceptions of respondents has been widely used (Cronje & Coll, 2008; Ahern, 2007; Lee, 2006). Furthermore, Coll, Pinyonatthagarn and Pramoolsook (2002) utilised a mixed methods approach in order to determine students’ views of their Cooperative Education experience. There is also a move from scholars to recognise the value of both quantitative and qualitative research approaches in tourism (Walle, 1997:524).

The target group for the study were tourism students who have completed their EL during 2013. Approximately 70 students were registered during 2013 and 38 participated in the study, which constitutes at least 50% of this group. The sampling technique for the quantitative data to be collected will be the non-probability sampling
technique named convenience sampling. The researcher is an educator in the Tourism Department and will have easy access to these students. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:113) refer to convenience sampling as accidental or opportunity sampling as the individuals nearest to the study or researcher are chosen to serve as respondents.

The sampling technique for the qualitative data is extreme or deviant case sampling. The qualitative data focuses on anomalies or extreme cases from the quantitative data collected. Punch (2009:163) explains this type of sampling as a technique that allows the researcher to learn from highly unusual manifestations of the phenomenon being studied.

For the quantitative data, the data collection technique was a survey with a questionnaire as research instrument. The questionnaire is based on the PLACE four-component model (Parks et al., 2008). Certain elements of the model were adapted to suit the current study and target population. A pilot study was conducted in order to test the instrument in the current setup and changes were made accordingly. For the qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were held with participants whose quantitative data showed deviation or anomalies. An interview guide was developed from the quantitative data.

The data analysis approach for the quantitative data collected was descriptive data analysis with follow-up inferential statistics. For the qualitative data, interviews were recorded electronically and subsequently transcribed and transcriptions analysed. Coding was the first step in the analysis of the qualitative data with initial descriptive codes developed. A second level of coding was pattern codes which are used to add more meaningful units to the data.

1.10 RELIABILITY OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

Reliability is also referred to as consistency and is divided into consistency over time
and internal consistency (Punch, 2009:244). Creswell (2005:162) indicates that researchers can use any one or more of five possible procedures in order to measure the reliability of an instrument. For the purpose of this study, the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was used to test for reliability. The study conducted by Parks et al. (2008) with the PLACE four-component model similarly utilised this test.

1.11 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which audiences can be persuaded or convinced that the findings of a study are worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba in Teddlie & Tashakorri, 2009:296). There are a variety of techniques that a researcher can use to enhance the credibility of data such as prolonged engagement, member checks and persistent observation, among others (Teddle & Tashakorri, 2009:296). For the purpose of this study the researcher engaged in prolonged engagement, which refers to the researcher spending adequate amount of time in the field. Member checking was also used as transcribed interviews were sent to participants for verification.

1.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical clearance was obtained from the chosen institution’s Faculty Research Technology Innovation (FRTI) Committee and Research Ethics Committee – Human (REC-H) Committee in order to conduct research with students at the chosen institution. Students were requested to provide their student numbers on the questionnaire in order to enable further contact for the interviews. Information gathered was treated with confidentiality and students’ names are not attached to phrases or comments reported in this final document. Collected questionnaires and recorded interviews were kept secured at all times in a locked unit. The participants of the study were not obligated to take part in the study and only did so out of free will.
1.13 CHAPTER DIVISION

Chapter one focuses on the General Introduction, Background and Rationale of the study.

Chapter two provides a broad overview and in-depth discussions of the literature related to this study.

Chapter three discusses the Research Design and Methodology and explicates in detail how the study was conducted.

Chapter four presents the data through diagrammatical illustrations and narratives with analysis and interpretation of these findings.

Chapter five provides a synopsis of each chapter, the limitations of the study as well as recommendations to various stakeholders and the conclusion to the study.

1.14 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a general introduction and background to the study including the delimitations and scope of the study which was restricted to tourism students who have already completed their EL programmes. The aim of this study was to determine tourism students’ perceptions of their EL experiences based on the PLACE four-component model. The chapter also provided a broad overview of the entire study and how it will be presented.

The following chapter will provide in-depth discussions of the existing literature and theoretical aspects related to this study.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided an introduction to the various aspects and elements related this study. The purpose of this study was to determine tourism students' perceptions of their Experiential Learning (EL) module based on the PLACE (Parks et al., 2008) four-component model. The four components of this model are Personal Development, Career Development, Work-skills Development and Academic Development. The objectives of this study were:

i. To interpret tourism students’ perceptions regarding experiential learning’s impact on their personal development.

ii. To determine tourism students' views of the impact experiential learning had on their career development.

iii. To ascertain the type of work-skills the experiential learning experience had developed in tourism students.

iv. To determine tourism student’s perceptions of the relation between experiential learning experience and their academic development.

This chapter will provide in-depth discussions of the theoretical framework and literature searches related to EL. Numerous variations of the EL concept, namely Cooperative Education, Work-Integrated Learning and Work-based Learning will be assessed. This chapter will further evaluate the importance of EL in university qualifications and the relevance of the inclusion of EL in tourism programmes in higher educational institutions. Challenges experienced by the different stakeholders will also be evaluated. A theoretical framework of the PLACE four-component model (Parks et al., 2008) as well as discussions related to the significance of each of the four components of the model will be included. The Experiential Learning theories by Dewey, Lewin and Piaget as discussed by Kolb (1984), will be briefly introduced. The
Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) developed by Kolb (1984), which was based on the abovementioned theories, and the six propositions of learning form the theoretical basis of this study. Kolb’s Learning Styles Inventory (LSI) will also be explored.

2.2 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

As previously indicated, the terminology and concepts related to EL are numerous (Wessels, 2005; Moon, 2004; Ravenscroft et al., 1999). The different types of concepts related to EL are complementary and contradictory at times. Cooperative Education can be classified as a form of EL (Canada Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000; Wright, 2000:116) whereas authors such as Wessels (2005:21) classify EL as a component of Cooperative Education. The Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2011:72) indicates that Cooperative Education and EL are very often used interchangeably with minute differences between them. The concepts related to EL will be used interchangeably in subsequent literature discussions.

2.2.1 Experiential Learning (EL)

According to Kolb and Kolb (2005:193), EL is often misinterpreted to be a set of tools or techniques used in order to provide students with experiences from which they are supposed to learn. They further note that EL is also not merely a mindless recording of experiences. These experiences must be significant and meaningful to those participating in it and EL should be seen instead as a philosophy of education.

EL is often also referred to as “learning from experience” (Moon, 2004:103). This explanation indicates that the actual experience or activities participated in for the individual engaging in EL, is important. This experience that individuals need to gain must however be conducted with the relevant learning institution involved. This is supported by Wessels (2005:11) stating that EL can also be seen as an extension of the formal educational component through which learning in the workplace is facilitated by the educational institution. Valkanos and Fragoulis (2007) state that EL
should be seen as learning by doing and that learning should be achieved through the use of appropriate and relevant experiences.

One of the main objectives of EL programmes is to help students gain experience in the workplace and the Canada Ontario Ministry of Education (2000) points out that all forms of EL are valuable and should complement students’ academic experiences and help prepare them for the future. Clements and Cord (2013:114) note that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are continuously challenged to provide a new type of graduate who is better prepared for the work environment. One way in which graduates can be prepared to enter the workplace well-rounded can be through the experience gained from actually being in the workplace through EL programmes.

It is argued by Wright (2000:116) that EL can be viewed as an effective tool for helping students connect the subject matter at a much deeper level than what they have learned in their classrooms and textbooks. They are able to experience concepts and issues only read about in its real life practical set-up. Lee (2006:2) indicates that the more students increase their involvement in a particular activity, the deeper their level of learning will be. The longer students spend in workplace, the more engaged and involved they become and the assumption is that they will increase their levels of learning.

### 2.2.2 Cooperative Education

Ravenscroft *et al.* (1999:163) argue that there are potentially as many definitions of Cooperative Education as there are authors and researchers who study the subject. The definitions and discussions often overlap, disagree and converge on different intensities. Wessels (2005:5) indicates that Cooperative Education is one system of vocational education that forms part of the general field of higher education and training. Cooperative Education is seen as the umbrella of vocational education and different types include Experiential Learning. According to CHE (2011:72),
Cooperative Education is a term used to describe the placement of students in relevant workplaces in order to gain experience in their chosen fields or disciplines.

According to Cates and Jones (1999) the purpose of Cooperative Education is learning for each individual student. Students should be aware of and be able to indicate what they have learned through the process, which is often done with the use of reflective journals or monthly reports. Cooperative Education is a comprehensive technique whereby students can learn the theoretical aspects of their profession as well as the practice of the workplace. As per the Canada Ontario Ministry of Education (2000), Cooperative Education programmes should be based on courses in a curriculum and students should be able to earn credits from the completion of these programmes. This emphasises the fact that it is not simply about sending students out into the workplace, but there should be structure and organisation with predetermined outcomes for students.

In defining Cooperative Education, Jones (2007:263) signifies it to be a structured educational strategy whereby the programme will be a combination and alternation between periods of work and students returning for periods of study. Jones (2007) further explains it to be a systematic and integrated curriculum, incorporating the workplace as well as the classroom. He emphasises the return of students to the classroom before graduation, which gives students a better opportunity for reflection on what they have learnt, which is the current practice with the participants of this study. It has been argued by Nasr, Pennington and Andres (2001) that Cooperative Education is the only form of education that adequately and concretely prepares present-day technical graduates to be workplace ready.

2.2.3 Work-integrated Learning (WIL) and Work-based Learning (WBL)

According to Smith (2012:247) Work-integrated Learning (WIL) is a curriculum design whereby students are expected to spend time in a professional, work or similar practice settings related to their degrees of study. The placement of students in the
area of their interest or industry of study is equally important as they need to gain relevant and appropriate workplace experiences. The CHE (2011:78) agrees with the notion that academic curricula should be aligned with workplace practices and not simply random placement of students in any workplace. WIL programmes should therefore have a fundamental objective of preparing undergraduates for their entry into the workplace (Jackson, 2014:1). These programmes should be created in such a way that they address the necessary skills, knowledge and abilities required from graduates in their prospective industry.

It is stated by Burke, Marks-Maran, Ooms, Webb and Cooper (2009:15) that Work-based Learning (WBL) is a potentially radical approach to connecting work with learning. WBL allows students to apply appropriate skills and knowledge which they have learned during their coursework. WBL can also be described as the process whereby students are in full-time employment with their programme of study being embedded in the workplace. The work experience must be designed to meet the learning needs of the students as well as the aims of the organisation (Sobiechowska & Maisch, 2007). Any organisation wants to employ human resources that will be able to significantly add to the goals of the business, students therefore need the necessary skills to be able to contribute in a meaningful manner. Concurrently, students need to learn certain skills and capabilities; either identified by their WBL curriculum or their personal goals during workplace experiences.

There is a lack of clarity and agreement within the field of WBL as to whether it needs to be credit-based, employer-negotiated learning, vocational training and development or individually-negotiated placements (Gibbs & Armsby, 2010:187). Questions are raised as to whether the industry requirements should carry more weight than university credits or if students’ goals and needs should be the basis for WBL programmes. There is also a question regarding the accreditation and incorporation of prior experience in a work environment. Gibbs and Armsby (2010) question whether students should be able to claim that they have adequate work experience and do not necessarily need WBL experiences. Clashes continually arise
regarding the structure of these programmes and the quality of each arrangement. Continued calls for uniformity, consistency and standardisation concerning WBL programmes are increasing.

2.2.4 Experiential Learning Concepts Summarised

In an attempt to answer questions regarding definitions and the correct terminology such as Experiential Learning, Cooperative Education, Work-integrated Learning and Work-based Learning, both workplace supervisors and academics have many unanswered questions and concerns (Wessels & Jacobsz, 2008). The different types of vocational programmes for students all have the crux of students gaining experience in the workplace. Students need to be able to experience real-life situations, which will best prepare them to be successful graduates.

EL programmes may be structured and embedded into university curricula counting towards qualification credits or on a less formal basis it may be done for the benefit of students. The programmes often also differ in length, ranging from two weeks to one year. The place of EL programmes within the qualification also differs with some students completing all qualification modules before they go out into the workplace, or EL has to be completed in between semesters with students returning to the classroom. The practice of returning students often has the advantage of students being able to reflect on their experiences, which could influence their performances when back in the classroom.

Fundamental to the success of EL programmes has to be the interaction and cooperation between the students, workplace supervisors and academic coordinators in order to ensure the success of the EL programme. Academics are able to learn from industry experts what they expect from students going out to do EL programmes. Workplace supervisors are able to interact with academics in order to better understand the importance and relevance of theoretical knowledge to students.
Experiential Learning, Cooperative Education, Work-based Learning and Work-integrated Learning will be used interchangeably in discussions.

2.3 FINDINGS FROM PREVIOUS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING RESEARCH

The amount of previous research conducted on the subject of EL is immense and extremely vast. Four volumes of bibliographic research have been compiled over varying periods in order to determine the extent of experiential education research (Experience Based Learning Systems, 2014). Volume 1, 1971-2005 found 2363 entries; Volume 2, 2006-2011 found 686 entries; Volume 3, 2011-2012 found 538 entries and Volume 4, 2013-2014 203 entries (Experience Based Learning Systems, 2014). The following section will provide a broad overview of some of the previous research conducted in the field of EL as important elements of higher education, its inclusion in tourism qualifications and the challenges these programmes bring.

2.3.1 Experiential Learning Programmes in Higher Education Qualifications

There is increasing pressure from industry for higher education to include workplace experiences in their curricula (Bates, 2008; Tynjälä, Välimaa & Sarja, 2003). Tynjälä et al. (2003:159) note that the inclusion of EL programmes strengthens ties with workplaces in addition to building society. As argued by Kolb and Kolb (2005:210), the inclusion of EL programmes in higher education promotes and encourages the concept of learning in HEIs. Despite these perceived benefits and this increased pressure, there are still HEIs that overlook EL as part of skills to be developed in students (Groves, Leflay, Smith, Bowd & Barber, 2013).

Academics often see this practice as not being relevant to the domain of higher education, which is more theoretical in nature. According to Arcodia and Dickson (2009:37), universities are generally places where specialised knowledge is transferred to participants with particular emphasis on theoretical frameworks and backgrounds. This is not necessarily done with practical application in mind, which
accentuates the importance of EL programmes in higher education qualifications. Wright (2000:118) indicates that EL can help students with the transition between undergraduate studies and the workplace as well as for those students continuing on to do post-graduate degrees. Students are afforded the opportunity through EL to put into practice the specialised skills and knowledge acquired during their lectures.

Wessels and Jacobsz (2008) found that workplace supervisors and academics in the Gauteng Province, South Africa, involved in EL programmes and partnerships undoubtedly agreed with the benefits of the inclusion in higher education qualifications. It is not only graduates that benefit but often the educational institution as well as workplaces (Hawkins & Weiss, 2008:4). Networking opportunities arise from the interaction of higher education and industry, as well as transfers of skills and knowledge between these two important stakeholders of EL. Academics are able to gain knowledge of industry expectations and workplace supervisors are able to better understand the role universities play in equipping graduates. Mutual appreciation and respect for each stakeholder’s role is thus fostered through EL programmes.

There has been an expansion in the last few decades of universities' involvement in the development of the graduates through tailored programmes for and with employers (Lester & Costley, 2010). HEIs are recognising more and more their role and importance in the development of graduates to suit the needs of industry. Yi and Luxi (2012:165) mention that students finding certain qualifications to be difficult or boring can be stimulated through engagement in EL programmes. Universities will therefore benefit from students who are interested and possibly motivated to not only complete their qualifications, but to also to do well.

In determining the added value of EL to higher education, Weisz (2001) found that Cooperative Education programmes significantly influences the achievement of university goals including improvement in academic progression rates as well as retention rates. The study also found that EL programmes increased graduate employability which is ultimately a reflection of the university’s success. A further
study by Reisberg, Raelin, Bailey, Whitman, Hamann and Pendleton (2012) evaluated the effect of Cooperative Education on students’ self-efficacy. The study found students’ self-efficacy to have improved and increased substantially post Cooperative Education. Students indicated personal growth and maturity as well as improved academic and career progression post-EL experiences. Both studies reinforce the notion that students as well as HEIs benefit from the utilisation and inclusion of EL programmes.

One of the biggest drawbacks of EL programmes is that it is time consuming for students, workplace supervisors as well as academics involved (Hawkins & Weiss, 2008). Students often have to submit assignments and reports during their EL programme – as is the case with the respondents at the chosen university – academic coordinators need to conduct site visits with follow up reports and workplace supervisors need to conduct monthly evaluations of students. This may potentially be one of the reasons why certain workplaces opt out of hosting students for EL programmes as they see it as added workload to their already tied-up schedules. Students may resent having to still do academic writing activities with the increased workload and pressure of being in the workplace.

An additional criticism by Branton et al. (1990) point out that Cooperative Education programmes are not necessarily academically legitimate, with no coordination or inclusion of theoretical concepts. These programmes are often applied and training based programmes. This questions the inclusion of EL in higher education as theoretical concepts and notions are the basis of higher educational qualifications. It is questioned by Branton et al. (1990) whether students who complete university qualifications should be expected to have such basic practical and hands-on experience that is learnt through the EL programme. The emphasis is inevitably shifted from the theoretical core of higher education to more training and application practices.
Further challenges for EL programmes include the perception that workplace environments are very rarely developed and structured with *learning* in mind (Clouder, 2009:390). She continues to argue that the social, economic and political climates of recent times will inevitably exacerbate and aggravate this situation. Economic gains are high priority for workplaces and additional political considerations make the concept and importance of *learning* secondary and often tertiary priorities. Students who are sent out to workplaces are not necessarily afforded the opportunity to learn and apply their theoretical knowledge as reaching economic targets enjoy priority.

Despite these challenges and negative connotations of EL, Chavan (2011) conducted a study to determine higher education students’ attitudes towards EL. The results indicated that overwhelmingly students were of the opinion that EL helped them learn and they enjoyed participating in the activities and the programme. They appreciated the hands-on approach of EL that made their lectures more relevant and real. In addition, Calpito (2012:2) notes that instead of learning through stressful academic workloads and traditional lectures, students can benefit more from curricula that is integrated with EL programmes.

### 2.3.2 Experiential Learning Programmes in Tourism Education

The tourism industry is complex and particularly interdisciplinary with interdependent elements (George, 2007:4; Tribe, 2005:16; Keyser, 2002:347). The industry is often also referred to as the tourism and hospitality industry or the travel and tourism industry. The main sub-sectors of the tourism industry include hospitality, transportation, attractions, tourism distribution and ancillary services necessary to enhance the performance of the industry as a whole (George, 2007:193). If one part of these sub-sectors fails, the “system” of tourism fails (Page, 2011:13).

The tourism and hospitality industry has seen tremendous growth both in size and complexity (Scotland, 2006; Leslie & Richardson, 2000). Tourism currently
contributes US$2.2 trillion to the world Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as stated by World Travel and Tourism Council (2013) including the generation of 101 million jobs. The estimated contribution of tourism to the South African GDP is said to be 9% with more than 1,2 million jobs created in the sector (South African Tourism, 2014) which is more than the mining, communication services, automotive manufacturing and chemicals manufacturing sectors.

With increased importance placed on the tourism industry, HEIs have also had to adapt to provide skilled and knowledgeable human resources for the industry. Kiser and Partlow (1999:70) state that EL has long been an important component of tourism and hospitality education, but the challenge is to balance theory and practice in curricula. The industry is a very practical one that requires hands-on skills, but theoretically rich that needs in-depth exploration and explanations. Students who enter the highly competitive world of travel distribution need to be familiar with at least one of the many Global Distribution Systems (GDS) such as Amadeus, Galileo or Fidelio. These are specialised technical skills that students need and the travel industry requires this as minimum entrance for students including theoretical knowledge of tourism geography. The tourism department of the chosen university in conjunction with Galileo currently runs an annual two-week training programme for students interested in doing this short course should they be interested in entering the travel distribution sector of the tourism industry.

In recent years, many tourism and hospitality studies have included some form of EL over varying periods (Arcodia & Dickson, 2009; Okumus & Yagci, 2005; Leslie & Richardson, 2000; Waryszak, 1999). Yan and Cheung (2012) however argue that these programmes often lack integration and cohesion between curricular design and what the industry requires. Academics include elements that are more theoretically important whilst industry requires more practically oriented elements to be included. Students who enter the dynamic and uncertain world of tourism need to be better prepared and equipped to deal with the fragile industry (Sheldon, Fesenmaier,
Woeber, Cooper & Antonioli, 2008:63). Hence, the significance of cohesion between industry and higher education in order to ensure adequately prepared students.

Tourism educational programmes need to be redesigned fundamentally in order to be able to provide well-rounded graduates. Sheldon et al. (2008:65) indicate that in order to be sustainable and relevant, tourism educational programmes will have to adapt their structures, curriculum designs as well as interactions between higher education, students and industry. The inclusion of EL modules in these programmes offers a valuable opportunity to help prepare tourism students for the industry. A considerable gap seems to exist between what educational institutions offer in terms of management-level tourism education and what the tourism industry express to require and need (Zehrer & Mössenlechner, 2009:267). The challenge would be for higher education to include industry demands and requirements in their tourism programmes in order to be considered successful and relevant.

One of the drawbacks of EL in tourism education as indicated by Okumus and Yagci (2005:102) is the fact that some tourism organisations view students as cheap labour and expect these students to work very long hours. Workplace supervisors are disillusioned by the fact that students are not willing to work extended hours often free of charge or for very limited remuneration. Students often do not complete their EL programme at one tourism business in search of another where they may receive remuneration for the long hours worked. Okumus and Yagci (2005:103) further argue that due to resource and time limitations, academic coordinators are unable to do site visits where challenges and problem areas could be identified timeously. Students often end their EL experiences not having their expectations met with negative perceptions of the industry and workplaces are left feeling higher education does not adequately prepare students for the workplace.

Furthermore, the results of Kiser and Partlow’s (1999) study signify that HEIs may provide EL programmes that adequately fulfil their mission and goals for students, but should allow adequate room for students’ personal career goals and aspirations to be
fulfilled and at the same time maintaining relevance to the industry. This is a very
delicate and difficult balancing act that often leaves one of the stakeholders
disappointed and disillusioned. Waryszak (1999) questioned students’ perceptions
and expectations of EL programmes in the hospitality industry. Certain expectations
as indicated by students included peer cohesion, levels of work pressure and levels of
autonomy in their work will either be higher or lower than at university. The study
found several students wanted more pressure at work and others less, some students
expected low social climatic conditions in the workplace and others expected the
interaction and networking in the hospitality workplace to be a lot more. With varying
degrees of expectations and perceptions of what the workplace will be and should be,
maintaining the balance between EL programmes that satisfies students’ goals,
higher educational goals and aims with industry goals and objectives, appears a
daunting task.

Zehrer and Mössenlechner (2009:267) commented on the diversity of skills and
competencies required to enhance graduate employability in the tourism industry.
Evaluations of what is taught in tourism education and what is needed by the industry,
indicate that these two are vastly dissimilar. They further noted that similar
discussions often result in considerable controversial debates, which often lead to
questioning the relevance of these skills in university education and whether these
skills training should be of concern to HEIs. In comparison to other tertiary education
disciplines, tourism education is still relatively young (Keyser, 2002:12). Page
(2011:7) notes that even though engagement in touristic activities is a very old
practice, the study of tourism as a discipline is still relatively new. Earlier forms of
tourism education were highly vocational and included specific skills training and
competencies (Mayburry & Swanger, 2011). The first organised programme for the
hospitality industry was a hotel management curriculum in 1922 (Mayburry &
Swanger, 2011). The inclusion of EL programmes can therefore be seen as an
attempt to maintain this skill and competency based form of education.
Millar, Mao and Moreo (2010:33) comment that despite the growth of the tourism industry and the increase in the number of hospitality and tourism educational programmes, the most common question still remains as to whether tourism and hospitality graduates possess the necessarily skills, knowledge and competencies that the industry requires. Ironically, Millar et al. (2010) note that hospitality and tourism educational programmes at HEIs were derived from the needs of the industry for competent professionals. It is argued by Mayburry and Swanger (2011:34) that should the perceptions of industry professionals be that tourism graduates are inadequately prepared for the industry, the credibility of tourism and hospitality education should be questioned. Industry professionals also often argue that what is taught in classrooms is out-dated and often quite irrelevant. In an attempt to curb this concern of students' competencies, EL programmes can be introduced as they benefit the students in a tangible manner and has the potential to produce students with a much higher propensity for obtaining soft skills and employability skills required (Nasr et al., 2001:13).

2.3.3 Experiential Learning Challenges

EL programmes are not without problems and obstacles faced by students, industry operators and academic coordinators alike. One of the main challenges that Ahern (2007) found was that lecturers were unsure of how to assess and score EL modules. Most lecturers felt reluctant to score students on soft skills acquired. This was also a concern with Maclaran and Marshall (1998:334) who found that predetermined criteria to grade EL programmes proved to be ineffective in practice. Furthermore, Clements and Cord (2013:115) note that one of the main challenges for higher education is to create assessment and learning outcomes that will foster development and growth in the workplace. Success or failure of EL programmes often depend on these assessment criteria and learning outcomes developed.

General disagreements and often conflict occur between academic coordinators and employers regarding roles and responsibilities. An academic participant in Cushen's
(2005:53) study noted that industry role-players often forget that university is about teaching and industry experience is about training. This participant noted that it is an unrealistic expectation of industry to expect universities to produce readily trained technicians as this training needs to occur at the workplace. This blurring of roles were also found in Lee’s (2006:3) study whereby EL coordinators in universities resent the fact that they feel like administrators and not educators. These administrative duties are often seen as add-ons to their already burdened schedules. On a suggestion by a colleague to create a database of employers a participant in Cushen (2005:60) commented “Let’s not create unnecessary work for ourselves”.

The placement of students in workplaces often becomes a great obstacle to their completion of qualifications. This burden is frequently placed on EL coordinators at the academic institution and Lee (2006:29) note that there are often “hospitality business deprived areas” that makes placement of students more difficult. Through the researcher’s personal experiences it has been observed that students often complete all other modules and are still unable to find a workplace to complete their EL module. Cushen (2005:27) found that most students are often willing to take any job to fulfil EL requirements but there are frequently students who prefer a specific type of establishment. Those students looking for particular type of workplace experiences generally take longer to find a job and consequently take longer to complete their EL programmes.

2.4 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND – PLACE FOUR-COMPONENT MODEL

The current Predicting Learner Advancement through Cooperative Education (PLACE) four-component model was developed from previous studies which categorised and evaluated students’ development during their EL experiences. The following section will briefly introduce the studies that were forerunners for this model and the model itself.
2.4.1 The Impact of Field Education on Student Development

Williams (1980) conducted a study to determine the impact of field education on student development. The findings divided student development outcomes into four clusters, namely Personal Development, Affective Development, Career Development and Academic Development. This study did not only include EL programmes at higher education levels, but also middle school practical work experiences, college work experiences, peer advising, tutoring and Peace Corps involvement among others.

Williams’ study (1980) found that field education had very positive impacts on students’ Personal Development however; no conclusive results could be drawn for Career Development impacts post field education. The Affective Development’s results did not have sufficient evidence to support improvements in moral and attitudinal behaviour. No positive impacts on Academic Development was expected, the researchers simply wanted students to not be negatively affected academically by their experience. These clusters were evaluated pre- and post-graduation.

2.4.2 Student Outcomes

Fletcher (1989) wrote a review paper on research related to student benefits of workplace experiences in order to summarise the outcomes in an attempt to identify those which may be empirically studied. Student outcomes in Cooperative Education programmes were subsequently categorised into Career Development, Career Progress and Personal Growth. These categories were loosely similar to that developed by Williams (1980).

2.4.3 Field Experience and Cooperative Education

Fletcher (1991) further elaborated on the work of Fletcher (1989) in order to identify areas of convergence and divergence. The categories identified were Personal
Development, Career Development and Academic Achievement. This study by Fletcher (1991) took a more varied group of Cooperative Education participants with different programme characteristics and experiential settings into account.

Fletcher (1991) argues that previous studies did not take differences between programmes, work sites and individual students into account. Fletcher (1991) further notes that the benefits and impacts of EL on students had been proven, but the EL practitioners have the challenge and mandate to enhance these programmes so that students can achieve maximum benefits from their experiences.

### 2.4.4 Development of a Measure for Predicting Learner Advancement through Cooperative Education (PLACE)

Parks *et al.* (2001) first attempted to develop an instrument that measures students’ perceptions of their Cooperative Education experiences. This instrument built on the works of Williams (1980) and Fletcher (1989, 1991) and the categories of student development as per Parks *et al.* (2001) are Works-skills Development, Career Development, Academic Function and/or Achievements and Personal Growth and/or Development. The revised instrument was later named Predicting Learner Advancement through Cooperative Education (PLACE).

The focus of this study was to develop an instrument that can test students’ perceptions and outcomes pre-graduation. Parks *et al.* (2001) also determined the importance of another element that had not been included in either Williams (1980) or Fletcher’s (1989, 1991) research, namely Work-skills Development. Parks *et al.* (2001) drew a comparison between the works completed by Fletcher (1989, 1991) as illustrated in Figure 2.1 below. The element of Work-skills Development was also included here.
2.4.5 A Four-component Model of Cooperative Education

Parks et al. (2008) built on the first PLACE model and wanted to expand and refine the model developed by Parks et al. (2001). The factors of the final PLACE four-component model are Personal Development, Career Development, Work-skills Development, and Academic Development. Previous research regarding the importance and relevance of each of these factors will follow.

2.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FACTORS OF THE FOUR-COMPONENT MODEL

The importance of the four components of Parks’ et al. (2008) PLACE model to student development and growth will be discussed. As identified above, these components are Personal Development, Career Development, Work-skills Development and Academic Development.

Several authors found positive influences of these four factors post-EL experiences (Reisberg et al., 2012; Lee, 2008; Simons & Cleary, 2006; Nasr et al., 2001). The study conducted by Lee (2008:37) found numerous benefits of EL including,
increased understanding of how hospitality organisations function, students’ increased ability to view career expectations realistically, an increased network of professional contacts, increased ability to take initiative, increased ability to adapt to change, increased leadership skills, and increased financial management skills. These are some of the aspects explored regarding the four components. Conversely, there are authors who found that the workplace experiences did not significantly impact on for example student grades or students’ attitudes and growth (Jackson, 2014; Wingfield & Black, 2005; Williams, 1980).

2.5.1 Personal Development

Deliberate and conscious personal developmental work is about changing your life for the better (Irving & Williams, 2001:225). Students participating in EL experiences may not necessarily set out deliberately to develop personally however, students’ experiences in industry, regardless of whether the experience itself was positive or negative, will have an impact on their personal growth and development. Simons and Cleary (2006:307) determined how students’ personal developmental process is influenced by workplace experiences. Students’ awareness of politics and diversity had improved and through community engagements in the workplace students were able to have a better appreciation for community projects.

During EL programmes, students are placed in situations where they are forced to work with other people and this helps with their interpersonal relations. They form bonds with colleagues as well as regular customers that patronage an establishment. The PLACE model (Parks et al., 2008) questions students on how they perceive their communication interpersonally to have been influenced by their EL experiences. The element of being able to effectively communicate and interact with colleagues and customers is vital.

Sleap and Reed (2006:50) highlight personal developmental skills to be self-confidence, self-discipline, self-reliance, independence and problem solving. Learning
these valuable skills will give graduates competitive advantage over those students who did not complete any EL programmes (Clements & Cord, 2013:114). Students learn to improve their self-confidence through continued interaction with clients, they become very self-disciplined as they learn the importance of for example being punctual and also learn to work independently. They are able to grow in maturity and on their return to the classroom this improved personal state of mind will help them to be better students.

2.5.2 Career Development

Parks et al. (2001) draws a distinction between Career Development and Career Progression. Career Development is said to be students’ certainty about their chosen careers and the development of a realistic career identity and their strengths and weaknesses. Career Progression on the other hand includes post-graduation benefits that graduates experience such as higher starting salaries and faster advancement up the corporate ladder. Graduates are often looking for work opportunities that will afford them higher income. In determining the effects of EL on engineering students, Blair, Millea and Hammer (2004) found that those who participated in the programme earned higher salaries than those who did not. These students enjoyed higher career progression prospects than non-participating students.

Reporting on career progression of Cooperative Education graduates, Calway and Murphy (2000) found that students viewed these experiences as highly beneficial in the short term, long term as well as for professional experiences. Students felt that the EL programme afforded them the opportunity to have greater experiences over students who did not complete an EL programme and increased their chances of permanent employment post-graduation. Lee (2008:39) indicates that participation in EL programmes often affords students the opportunity to be directly placed into a professional position with their EL employer after graduation. Through the researcher’s personal observations, this has occurred numerous times at the chosen university where students are offered permanent positions even prior to their
completion of the actual qualification. This practice however has resulted in students choosing the permanent position and taking much longer to complete their qualification with some students not returning to complete their qualification.

Furthermore, exposure to Cooperative Education programmes helps students with decision making, self-efficacy and career locus of control (DeLorenzo, 2000). Comparing students who have completed some form of work-based learning with non-cooperative education students, it was found that students who were exposed to EL programmes scored much higher on decision-making and being in control of their careers. Lee and Dickson (2010:28) argue that EL programmes and experiences help students have a more realistic expectation of their career which allows them to make better decisions about their careers. After having spent time in the workplace, students now have first-hand experience of the day-to-day operations as well as the long-term prospects for them in their particular industry. Zegwaard and Coll (2011:282) claim that EL programmes could be a lot more effective than any counselling sessions particularly for indecisive and uncertain students.

Students and graduates aspire to build, shape and develop their careers and Delorenzo (2000:15) indicates that Cooperative Education is a means for students to test their career aspirations through workplace experiences. Students are able to ascertain early in their careers whether they have made the right decisions that fit with their interests and career goals after having spent time at a workplace. Graduates indicated that their Cooperative Education experiences assisted them in being able to successfully move between various aspects of the industry (Calway & Murphy, 2000), which in turn advances their career growth aspirations. Dressler and Keeling (2011) note that EL students have the advantage of learning about different types of occupations in their chosen industry, as well as interactions with other industries. EL programmes assist in particular those students who are uncertain of the exact career they wish to follow and affords them the opportunity to explore real options.
2.5.3 Work-skills Development

Newly recruited graduates are under increased pressure to perform and they are expected to contribute meaningfully to the workforce within six months of recruitment (Wilton, 2012:604). They should either have learnt skills needed prior to recruitment or should be extremely fast learners in order for them to be successful in the workplace. Jackson (2014:2) indicates that in order to function effectively in the modern workplace, employability skills and the development of these skills in graduates are considered fundamental to their success.

It is noted by Trung and Swierczek (2009:568) that the work skills required by employers vary among industries but problem-solving, interpersonal and communication skills are generally desired by most employers. The type of skills employers required as identified by Little (2000:124) include personal and social skills, communication skills, problem solving skills as well as organisational skills. Little (2000) further elaborates that communication skills include oral, written, presentation and report writing skills. The PLACE model (Parks et al., 2008) also questions students on communication skills and specifically to the tourism industry for students to have knowledge of how organisations within the industry function.

Haigh and Kilmartin (1999:195) argue that independent learning and problem solving skills should be acquired through EL programmes. Problem solving skills include the ability to identify and analyse issues that may arise in the workplace as well as the ability to suggest practical solutions to problems (Little, 2000:124). Graduates and students should therefore empower themselves through independent learning if they want to be able to be better problem solvers in the workplace. Work skills, referred to as “business skills” by Sleap and Reed (2006:50) include time management, ability to prioritise tasks, interpersonal skills and the ability to work in a team. Little (2000:124) mentions organisational skills which include the ability of graduates to plan their own work schedules and often other employee’s work schedules as well as the ability to set priorities for themselves.
In Jackson’s (2014) study on employability skills and how they are developed, students noted that workplace skills cannot be learnt in the classroom. Post EL experiences, students realise that the textbook and lectures can only go so far; certain workplace skills can only be learnt through experiences at work. Wilton (2012:607) argues that the foundation for employability skills may have been already laid for students and this will lead students who have undertaken EL to view the workplace as more beneficial to the development of skills. This indicates that the theoretical components of skills development in the classroom are equally important as they are the basis on which students can build to learn practical work skills in the office.

Conversely, some students in Jackson’s (2014) study felt that their classroom experiences did not prepare them for the workplace at all. Criticisms by these students were related to their inability to communicate effectively with clients as well as co-workers. Respondents of Jackson’s (2014) study indicated that the theoretical elements covered in the classroom were irrelevant, out-dated or not sufficient for them to be workplace-ready. However, Weisz and Smith (2005:606) explore and indicate the importance of generic skills. These are skills that have the potential to be learned in one context and transferred to, or applied in others and they are not necessarily discipline or industry specific. Generic skills include interpersonal skills, communication skills and problem solving skills. Returning students and graduates should be encouraged to learn these generic skills in order for them to be more competitive in the workplace. Weisz and Smith (2005:606) further note that generic skills are often expected as standard when students enter the workplace. Students are also encouraged to be proactive in skill development for themselves.

It is further argued by Sisson and Adams (2013:138) in as much as academic staff wants to emphasise the importance of academic performance and academic development in students, the industry places more emphasis on frontline skills. Academics may highlight critical thinking, managerial skills and strategy development in students, but industry professionals are pushing for supervisory and interpersonal
skills. In an attempt to equip students with both academic and industry skills, HEIs can include EL programmes as part of their curricula in order to help better equip students for the industry and its demands.

2.5.4 Academic Development

Blair *et al.* (2004) found that once graduated, participants performed better academically on their return to the classroom and students who participated in extended programmes, performed even better. Students often become more mature during their time spent at work and they return to their classrooms effectively as more stable, developed students. The workplace teaches them the value and importance of deadlines and also adhering to these deadlines which often does not have extensions as is frequently the case at university level. Returning students were found to also be far less reliant on additional support from lecturers, student assistants and even family members (Reisberg *et al*., 2012). Post-EL students also felt that they did not need continued assistance from career and academic advisors. Students therefore return more matured and independent, which allows them to perform better academically.

Zegwaard and Coll (2011:284) note that in as much as students take theoretical knowledge into the workplace, they return to the classroom with practical experiences and knowledge which allows them to better understand theoretical concepts. This new-found understanding of theoretical concepts helps students to perform better academically. Jackson (2014:2) further supports the idea that one of the main benefits of WIL programmes for returning students is that of increased academic performances. Students return to the classroom more mature, self-disciplined with greater desire to perform better and Zegwaard and Coll (2011:282) similarly determined that EL programmes often act as motivation for students to complete their qualifications in order to graduate.
In a study of first implementation of a WIL programme at a higher educational institution, Ogilvie and Homan (2012) discussed the negative impacts of these programmes on students. The WIL programmes in the study were scheduled during academic periods which caused disruptions in academic timetables in order to better accommodate students, which caused frustration for administrators and students alike. Certain students also felt that having to go to the workplace took time away from their studies and preparing for their academic growth and development. This would suggest that the clustering of WIL programmes outside of lecture times with students solely focusing on the workplace for extended periods of time appears to be a more favourable practice.

Ballantine and McCourt Larres (2007) researched the impact of Cooperative Education programmes on students with particular emphasis and comparison between academically more able and less able students. It was found that both groups of students found Cooperative Education programmes to be very beneficial. More academically able students were not at an advantage in the workplace or on return to the classroom. Both groups of students felt that the workplace experienced enhanced their generic skills. The paper further encourages academics to include these programmes in their curricula in order to assist students to develop and grow their employability skills.

Participation of students in EL programmes is not necessarily a guarantee of improved academic performances. Wingfield and Black (2005) found that there was no visible impact on students’ grades after they have participated in experiential activities. They drew a comparison between students who participated in a passive course design versus students who participated in experiential activities. There were no significant differences between these students’ grades. However, students who participated in experiential activities had better understanding of their careers and how coursework is relevant to their future careers. Participation in EL also helped students understand the significance of learning to their future jobs.
2.6 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THEORY

The Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) as developed by Kolb (1984) as well as the Learning Styles Inventory (LSI) forms the theoretical framework of this study. This theory was developed based on previous work done by Dewey, Lewin and Piaget as indicated by Kolb (1984:20). The following section will briefly explain the previous works of these authors and provide a more comprehensive discussion of Kolb’s (1984) ELT.

2.6.1 Dewey’s Model of Learning

Ord (2012:55) refers to Dewey as the architect of experiential learning and argues that in order to better understand Kolb’s ELT (1984), there needs to be a return to the original works of Dewey. Dewey (as cited in Ord, 2012:60) explains experience to be a transaction between an individual and their environment and that there has to be interaction and exchange that occur between these two parties. Dewey (1916:70) also explains how experience is embedded in the perception of relationships or connections which leads up to the particular experience. He further notes that this experience must amount to something noteworthy and it should have meaning to the individual who is involved.

Kolb (1984) identifies the elements of Dewey’s Model of Learning to be the following:

i. Observation of surrounding conditions
ii. Knowledge of what has happened in similar situations in the past
iii. Judgement

An individual will receive impulses that will allow them to make observations of their surroundings which they will be able to compare with current knowledge they have of what has occurred in the past. This knowledge can either be from personal past experiences or that which has been transferred from others who are more
experienced. The individual is then able to formulate a judgement based on the observations made and what is recalled about past situations and judgement can be made as to what this experience signifies (Kolb, 1984:23). Students who are placed in an EL programme will observe in the workplace new and unfamiliar situations such as a customer shouting at them for a mistake made. They are able to consider what they have learnt before on how to handle such customers or anecdotes that were related to them by their colleagues. They are able to formulate their own judgements as to how to handle the situation, what this experience signifies to them and whether or not it is a meaningful opportunity to learn something valuable.

Dewey also held the belief that traditional schooling is needlessly long and unnecessarily restrictive (Dewey as cited in Neill, 2005). He further argued that students should be allowed to be actively involved in real-life tasks and challenges. The concept of experiential learning and sending students out to workplaces to have first-hand experiences of the challenges and tasks they may need to face post-graduation therefore supports this idea of moving away from restrictive and restraining classroom setups. In the above cited example, the student will know how to handle an angry customer better having experienced it, versus a list of ideas on how to handle angry customers detailed in a textbook.

2.6.2 Lewinian Model of Action Research and Laboratory Training

Kolb (1984:22) explains the two interrelated concepts of Lewin’s theory to be experience and feedback. Experiences are those observed and shared by individuals and the feedback related to these experiences will lead to action. The aim is to integrate these two into an effective, goal-oriented learning process. Ineffectiveness of both individuals and organisations can be attributed to inadequate feedback which results in either no action or too little action being taken. Kolb (1984:22) refers to it as inadequate balance between concrete observations and action.
When an individual is able to reflect on a particular experience, they are able to evaluate their own reactions and behaviour during the event. They are able to resolve to react differently in future or they may decide that they reacted in the most appropriate manner and choose to do so again in a future similar situation. Kolb (1984:21) states that the data collected through the feedback process allows the individual to modify their behaviour and their choices of new experiences. Lewin (as cited in Kolb, 1984:21) notes that immediate, personal experience can be seen as the focal point for learning.

Lewin indicates that learning can be perceived as a four-stage cycle and Ord (2012:56) notes that this four-stage model is often incorrectly cited as Kolb’s model. Nevertheless as cited in Kolb (1984:21), the four stages of Lewin’s model include:

i. Concrete experiences
ii. Observations and reflections
iii. Formation of abstract concepts and generalisations
iv. Testing implications of concepts in new situations

The concrete immediate experiences that an individual has will form the basis for their observations and reflections. These observations then form the basis from which new inferences and suggestions can be made for action. Through this process an individual is able to create new experiences (Kolb, 1984:21).

2.6.3 Piaget’s Model of Learning and Cognitive Development

This model is largely similar to those developed by Lewin and Dewey particularly in its reference to the interaction between the individual and their environment. It claims that dimensions of experience and concept, reflection and action form the basic ranges and scales for development of adult thought (Piaget in Kolb, 1984:23). Piaget further explains that the key to learning is related to the interaction of the realisation and acceptance of concepts of experience and the process of integration of
experiences into existing concepts and schemas. There needs to be continued interaction between assimilation of concepts and accommodation of these concepts.

Piaget (as cited in Kolb, 1984:23) defines learning as intelligent adaptation that is a direct result from a balanced tension between the accommodation of concepts and the assimilation of these related concepts. When there is an imbalance between these two and one dominates then individuals will either imitate or simply act with no regard for their environmental realities. Piaget also argues that in order to reach a higher level of cognitive functioning from the concrete to the abstract and from the active to the reflective; the balance must be maintained between the assimilation and accommodation of concepts.

2.6.4 Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory (ELT) is one of the best known educational theories in higher education (Chavan, 2011:127; Miettinen, 2000:55). This ELT was developed following EL research, models and theories from Dewey – developed in 1938, Lewin – developed in 1951 and Piaget – developed in 1970. There are two main reasons why the term “Experiential” is used. Firstly, the term is used to differentiate ELT both from cognitive learning theories as well as behavioural learning theories (Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 1999:2). The former tends to emphasise understanding and reasoning over affect, and the latter often denies any role for subjective experience in the learning process. The second reason is related to its intellectual origins in Lewin, Dewey and Piaget (Kolb et al., 1999).

ELT is used as the basis for examining learning as a method of teaching students (Kolb, 1984). Yan and Chueng (2012:22) explain that EL starts in the classroom and then allows the students to achieve their learning objectives through real-life scenarios. They also describe Kolb’s model as four interdependent constructs related to learning preferences of students namely feeling, doing, thinking and watching.
Kolb (1984:26) argues that learning is a process and ideas are not indisputable and absolute elements of thoughts, but they are shaped and developed through experiences. He notes that knowledge is tested and verified through the experiences that students have, particularly in the workplace when engaging in EL programmes. Kolb (1984) further indicates that ELT provides an integrative holistic perspective on learning that combine experience, perception, cognition and behaviour. This ELT defines learning as a knowledge-creating process through the transformation of experience (Kolb et al., 1999). Through the grasping and transforming of experiences, individuals are able to create knowledge.

The model relates to two modes of grasping experiences and two modes of transforming experiences (Kolb et al., 1999:2). The two modes of grasping experiences are Concrete Experience and Abstract Conceptualisation while the two modes of transforming experiences are Reflective Observation and Active Experimentation. These modes are often depicted as a four-stage cyclical process whereby the concrete experiences are seen as the basis for reflections and observations. Kolb and Kolb (2005:194) refer to it as an idealised learning cycle whereby the student is expected to touch base with all four elements. The reflections that the individual goes through are assimilated into abstract concepts from which new inferences for action can be drawn. These newly drawn inferences can be used as a guide for creating new experiences and can be actively tested.

Kolb’s ELT was built on the works of scholars such as Dewey, Lewin, Piaget, Jung, James and others. The theory is built on six propositions that are shared by these authors (Kolb & Kolb, 2005:194). A brief discussion of these concepts as explained by Kolb (1984) will follow.

i. Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes.

ii. All learning is relearning.

iii. Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world.
iv. Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world.

v. Learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment.

vi. Learning is the process of creating knowledge.

Viewing learning as a process is one of the distinguishing characteristics of EL (Kolb, 1984:26). Kolb’s ELT is based on the notion that thoughts are continually formed and re-formed through experiences. Experiences engaged in helps the individual to modify their behaviour and actions in future events. Learning can be seen as a historical record and not necessarily knowledge of future events or behaviour. In any given experience, an individual recalls or refers to their historical record of experience in order to help them act or react. According to Illeris (2004:431), learning can be seen as a continuous process that builds on previous experiences and that helps to give direction to future action or perspectives. Hager (2004:352) also explains learning to be a process and argues that the processes of learning include teaching and experience. Learning can be seen as attempting or trying to master a particular activity or concept and that in itself is a process.

All learning is relearning as every student enters a classroom with some idea about the topic at hand (Kolb, 1984:28). This knowledge about the topic may not necessarily be accurate or exhaustive, but they do not enter the classroom as a blank slate where anything can be written on. Regardless of whether previous knowledge is inaccurate, there has to be cognisance of the fact that people used this knowledge to determine their behaviour until the point where relearning can occur. Kolb and Kolb (2005:2) comment that learning is best achieved through a process that includes students’ ideas and beliefs about a specific topic in order to examine, test and integrate these ideas into new, more refined ideas and beliefs.

The previous models of Dewey, Lewin and Piaget all describe the conflicts of dialectically opposing modes of adaptation (Kolb, 1984:28). In order for learning to occur, there has to be a resolution between these conflicts. The Lewinian model
discusses the concrete experiences versus the abstract concepts and observation and action. Dewey explains the major conflict to be between the impulse that gives ideas their driving force and reason that gives desire its direction. Piaget discusses the processes of accommodation and assimilation of concepts towards cognitive growth. In order for learning to occur, there has to be some type of resolution between these seemingly opposing concepts. Kolb and Kolb (2005:194) state that conflict, disagreements and differences are all part of the learning process and these elements form the driving force of learning. They further comment that during the learning process, the individual will move back and forth between these opposing ideas of reflection and action.

Learning in individuals should occur holistically and not simply in certain areas of functioning such as cognition and perceptions (Kolb, 1984:29). In an attempt to address the nature of specialised human functions, ELT is also concerned with how these functions are integrated into a holistic adaptive attitude toward the world. Matthews (1999:23) argue that workplace learning activities should be able to address the person as a whole, which should incorporate a whole lot more than simply the development of technical and functional skills. This holistic approach should also be flexible enough that it can satisfy individual learning and growth needs of the individuals. Ideas, thoughts, feelings, perceptions and behaviour of individuals should therefore also form part of their learning processes (Kolb & Kolb, 2005:194).

Learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment (Kolb, 1984:26). There has to be constant and continuous interaction that takes place between these two components in order for learning to occur. Illeris (2004:432) argues that mere acknowledgement of these two components are not adequate for learning to occur. The interface and collaboration between the individual and the learning environment is what causes learning to ensue. The concept of interaction between the person and their environment in learning is further supported by Hager (2004:355) who indicates that learning changes the individual and their
related environment. He states that the expected outcome of learning is the desire and willingness to change the environment or the world in one way or another.

Learning is the process of creating knowledge and Kolb’s ELT defines learning to be a process of knowledge creation through the transformation of experiences (Kolb, 1984:41). There has to be a combination of the grasping and the transformation of experiences in order for knowledge to be created. Kolb (1984:36) explains that knowledge is the result of the interaction between social knowledge, which is a collection of previous human cultural experiences, and the individualised, personal experiences of each individual. There has to be interaction and accommodation between these two concepts in order for knowledge to be created.

2.6.4.1 Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory (LSI)

The Learning Style Inventory (LIS) was developed by Kolb in 1971 in order to better understand students’ learning patterns (Kolb et al., 1999:4). The concept of the LSI refers to different styles and types of learning based on students’ preferences for utilising different phases of the learning cycle. There are a variety of elements that will influence what students’ most preferred method of learning is and these include personality types, educational specialisation, career choices and the current job roles and tasks that individuals hold (Kolb & Kolb, 2005:195).

Yamazaki (2003) argues that the importance of cultural influences cannot be underestimated and should be considered and included as a factor that leads to students making their choice of learning style. Learning styles can also be seen to represent different preferences of students for adaptive modes (Coffield, Moseley, Hall & Ecclestone, 2004:62). These modes of adaption do not necessarily exclude other modes and it usually varies from time to time and often from situation to situation. In both grasping and transforming experiences, individuals use different methods of the four-stage model, which means that learning occurs differently for most students (Kolb et al., 1999:4).
The four main types of learning styles include Diverging, Assimilating, Converging and Accommodating (Kolb et al., 1999:4). Diverging style individuals often prefer to work in groups, usually listen with an open mind when receiving personalised feedback and their dominant learning abilities are Concrete Experience and Reflective Observation (Kolb et al., 1999:5). Coffield et al. (2004:61) classified diverging style individuals as those who are generally more imaginative and are more aware of meanings and values. They view concrete situations from many perspectives and usually observe rather than act. Diverging style learners are also more likely to be feeling-oriented.

Kolb et al. (1999:5) explains the assimilating learning styles to be people who prefer readings, lectures, analytical models and who generally want more time to think things through. Their dominant learning abilities are Abstract Conceptualisation and Reflective Observation. These individuals prefer inductive reasoning and creating theoretical models (Coffield et al., 2004:91). They are largely more concerned with ideas and abstract concepts than they have interest in other people. Their ideas are often more logically sound than practical.

The converging style type learner has a dominant learning ability of Abstract Conceptualisation and Active Experimentation (Kolb et al., 1999:6). They are often more apt at finding practical uses for theoretical ideas and theories and solving problems. There is a preference for dealing with technical skills rather than focusing on social or interpersonal issues. Coffield et al. (2004:61) explains the converging style learners to be good problem solvers and decision makers. These people are often very controlled in their emotional expressions.

The final learning style is the accommodating style and their dominant learning abilities are Concrete Experience and Active Experimentation (Kolb et al., 1999:6). People who prefer this type of learning style would normally be more able to learn from hands-on experiences. According to Coffield et al. (2004:61), the accommodating learning style individual enjoys doing something and getting involved
in new and different experiences. They are very good at adapting to different and changing circumstances and environments. They can often be seen to be impatient but they are generally intuitive and have good interpersonal skills.

2.6.4.2 Criticisms of Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory and Learning Styles Inventory

Even though Kolb’s ELT is noted to be one of the best known EL theories (Chavan, 2011:127; Miettinen, 2000:55), it has not been without criticism (Bergsteiner & Avery, 2014; Bergsteiner, Avery & Neumann, 2010; Freedman & Stumpf, 1978).

In exploring the concept of EL, Miettinen (2000:56) argues that Kolb’s book on his ELT has ill-defined concepts with inadequate references to background literature. He further comments that these poorly defined concepts remain unclear at times and is left open to many interpretations. The idea that Kolb’s theory is not clearly defined is also argued by Bergsteiner et al. (2010:32). They claim that the concepts of concrete and abstract learning are poorly defined and conceptualised. This lack of proper conceptualisation is said to have contributed to the lack of cohesion and integration in the field of experiential learning.

Freedman and Stumpf (1978:279) evaluated the reliability and consistency of Kolb’s LSI and found the model to be relatively volatile and only moderately consistent. They argue that the low reliability of the model limits the ability of the LSI model to accurately and precisely explain learning styles. Kolb (1984) contends that the critique of LSI was made without awareness of the literature on EL. He notes that their concerns regarding the reliability of LSI is a result of a lack of understanding from Freedman and Stumpf (1978) of the role of variability and situational adaptation in the EL process.
2.6.4.3 Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory related to this study

The semi-structured interviews of this study utilised certain elements of Kolb’s ELT. Due to the constructivist nature of this model and theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2005:194), developing the research instrument for the qualitative data is therefore more appropriate. Kolb’s ELT is built on six propositions of learning and they were incorporated into the interview schedule and subsequent discussions in Chapter four. The inclusion of Kolb’s ELT and its application to this study is explicated in greater detail during the research design and methodology chapter of this study.

2.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the literature related to this study. The different variations and concepts related to EL were discussed. Experiential Learning, Cooperative Education, Work-integrated Learning and Work-based Learning were among the discussed concepts and these were used interchangeably in the above text. Even though these concepts differ tremendously, they all have the crux of students being placed in workplaces to have relevant workplace experiences in order to become more well-rounded graduates.

Previous research findings related to the topics of EL both in its importance in higher education as well as the inclusion of EL programmes in tourism education was also explored. The tourism industry has seen tremendous growth and with this expansion increased need for more knowledgeable and employable human resources. The challenges experienced particularly by academic coordinators were also briefly discussed. The development of the PLACE model with reference to the previous studies on which the model built was elaborated on. The relevance of each of the four components namely Personal Development, Career Development, Work-skills Development and Academic Development and how EL influences these in students were deliberated on.
The following chapter will present the research design and methodology in conducting the study. The philosophical underpinnings of the study which includes the research paradigms, approaches and designs will be discussed. The chapter will also discuss the data collection instrument in detail as well as reliability and trustworthiness and the ethical considerations of the study.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a broad overview of the literature and theoretical framework of this study. The purpose of the study was to determine tourism students’ perceptions of their Experiential Learning (EL) experiences based on the Predicting Learning Advancement through Cooperative Education (PLACE) four component model (Parks et al., 2008). The objectives of the study were as follows:

i. To interpret tourism students’ perceptions regarding EL’s impact on their personal development.
ii. To determine tourism students’ views of the impact EL had on their career development.
iii. To ascertain the type of work-skills the EL experience had developed in tourism students.
iv. To determine tourism students’ perceptions of the relation between the EL experience and their academic development.

This chapter will present the research methodology that were utilised for this study. This was a pragmatic paradigm study, which used a mixed method approach with both quantitative and qualitative research utilised. An explanatory sequential research design was followed, whereby quantitative data is collected first with follow-up qualitative data collected. The research instrument for the quantitative data was a questionnaire which was based on the PLACE model and the qualitative instrument was a semi-structured interview based on Kolb’s ELT. These issues and related topics will be further explained and explored in this chapter.
3.2 PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE STUDY

The following section will discuss the philosophical research foundations of this study, relevant to the research paradigm, the research approach and the research design.

3.2.1 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm can be explained as a system of thinking or a world view and ways in which the world can be observed, measured and understood (Thomas, 2009:72; Neuman, 2003:70). Plowright (2011:177) signifies a paradigm to be theoretical principles of a system of ideas that regulate, maintain and strengthen a way of thinking about a topic or a particular issue. The research paradigm will therefore determine all methods, designs and approaches the researcher should follow in conducting the study. It is thus imperative that a researcher from the onset of a research project determine what his/her worldview is and through which lens they would like to look at the problem or issue to be researched.

3.2.1.1 Philosophical Assumptions

Research paradigms and their philosophical means of looking at the social world is underpinned by two notions namely ontology and epistemology (Basit, 2010:6). It is argued that authors often use ontology and epistemology to differentiate between qualitative and quantitative research (Bergman, 2011:100). Collis and Hussey (2003:48) note that ontological assumptions are based on whether the researcher believes that the world is objective and external to the researcher or that the world is only understood and socially constructed by examining human performers and their perceptions. Basit (2010:6) relates the term ontology to the state of “being”. Ontological assumptions can therefore be seen to be concerned with the belief in what exists and what is real and more specifically the researcher’s view of what social reality is. Quantitative research views reality as objective, singular and apart from the
researcher whereas qualitative research views reality as subjective, independent and multiple (Collis & Hussey 2003:49).

Springer (2010:4) notes epistemology to be a philosophical assumption about how knowledge is acquired, the nature of knowledge and what constitutes valid sources of knowledge. Epistemological assumptions can be seen as a “knowing” (Basit, 2010:6) and what can be accepted as valid knowledge and how it is conveyed to others. This notion of knowledge acquisition and acceptance is supported by Collis and Hussey (2003:48) and further elaborated to be concerned with the examination of the relationship between the researcher and that which is being researched. Thomas (2009:87) indicates that epistemology is the study of our knowledge of the world. Researchers are often trying to determine through research studies conducted what human beings know, perceive or understand about certain phenomena. Epistemologically the quantitative researcher perceives the researcher and the research topic to be independent and the qualitative researcher perceives the knower and the known to be inseparable and interdependent (Neuman, 2003:86).

An additional philosophical assumption, axiology, relates to the issue of values and what role values play in the research process. The researcher’s principles, history and beliefs will lead them to make decisions and judgements about the subject they are studying (Basit, 2010:7). She also argues that it is impossible for any research study to be completely free of human bias as ultimately a person has to interpret and present findings and their personal views and opinions will influence this presentation and interpretation. It is therefore vital that researchers understand their own axiology and determine how to carry out research in an ethical manner.

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005:376) note that in determining the specific data collection and analytical methods that should be used by the researcher, it is not necessarily dictated by the epistemology. Both the ontology and epistemology affect the researcher’s stance and perspective and these will in turn determine the chosen methodology and methods in order to conduct the research project (Basit, 2010:7). In
consideration of the research paradigms in relation to the ontology and epistemology it is argued by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:85) that interpretivists believe that there are multiple, constructed realities whereas positivists are of the belief that there is a single reality. Positivist quantitative researchers believe that the knower and the known are independent (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009:85; Collis & Hussey, 2003:49) and according to the interpretivist, the knower and the known are inseparable and the researcher interacts with that being researched (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009:85; Collis & Hussey, 2003:49).

Positivists are of the notion that research is value-free and completely un-biased and phenomenologists consider research to be value-laden and totally biased (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009:85; Collis & Hussey, 2003:49). Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:85) note that positivists believe the objects they are studying were present before they became interested in them and phenomenologists consider researchers to have values which help them to determine what they view as facts and interpretations which are drawn from these facts. According to Basit (2010:6) should the knowledge be regarded as personal or subjective, more interaction should be sought through interviews in order to better explain social phenomena.

Epistemologically, the pragmatic researcher depends on both subjective and objective points of view; axiologically they believe that values are important in the interpretation of results; ontologically they believe that there are diverse viewpoints regarding social realities (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009:88). Once a researcher has determined what their philosophical assumptions are, the paradigm that best fits the study can be selected.

3.2.1.2 Research Paradigms

There are numerous classifications and categorisation of paradigms (Springer, 2010; Thomas, 2009; Punch, 2009:290; Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008; Cohen et al., 2007; Neuman, 2003; Collis & Hussey, 2003). It is argued by Symonds and Gorard
(2010:124) that it is virtually impossible to find universally agreed upon definitions of the different types of paradigms and it can only be operated on the assumptions of what the paradigm involves. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:88) refer to five different paradigms namely, positivism, postpositivism, pragmatism, transformative and constructivism. A different categorisation has been identified by Thomas (2009) and for the purposes of this argument the interpretation of positivist and interpretivist paradigms will first be discussed as per Thomas (2009). These two paradigms have dominated the research arena historically and each has a unique and different approach. The more recent pragmatic paradigm will also be evaluated as this is the paradigm this study fits into.

According to Thomas (2009:74) positivists believe that knowledge about the social world can be collected and obtained objectively and that elements of the social world can be measured and studied scientifically. These researchers prefer accurate and detailed quantitative data and often use experiments, statistics and surveys carefully analysing numbers from measures (Neuman, 2003:70). Positivists’ focus would predominantly be on numbers, statistics and quantifiable data. Quantitative research tends to reflect positivism which is the assumption that reality consist of facts that are independent of observers and thus can be revealed through scientific observation (Springer, 2010:19).

Historically, the positivist paradigm is also referred to as the normative paradigm and shares similarities with the hard and natural sciences (Basit, 2010:14). Collis and Hussey (2003:53) support the notion of positivists studying their subjects in the same manner as the natural sciences. The truth as seen by the researcher can only be discovered by observing, interrogating or experimentations of large numbers of subjects. These findings will be statistically analysed and is subject to generalisation. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:5) note that originally, quantitative researchers followed the principles of positivism which argues that social research should adopt scientific methods.
One of the main criticisms of positivism is that it reduces human beings and their associated behaviour to numbers and statistics (Neuman, 2003:71). The focus of positivism is on statistics, numbers and generalisations which are not necessarily true for the entire population of the study. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:5) a new paradigm has emerged as a response to the criticisms of positivism, namely postpositivism. They note that positivists generally argue that research is conducted objectively in a value-free environment. However, postpositivism acknowledges that any researcher’s value system will play an important role in how they conduct, measure and interpret research.

The second paradigm that emerged is interpretivism, which Thomas (2009:75) explains to be research that is interested in people, their behaviour, their interactions with the world around them including what they think and how their ideas about their world are formulated. This paradigm is usually associated with qualitative research techniques and is often also referred to as phenomenology (Altinay & Pareskevas, 2008:70; Collis & Hussey, 2003:53; Shank & Brown, 2007) as well as constructivism (Springer, 2010:20; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009:86; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:14). Research that fits within this paradigm is concerned with smaller numbers and in-depth analyses of human behaviour with no interests in generalisation of findings (Basit, 2010:14). It is further noted by Basit (2010:14) that interpretivism construes social reality the same way it is viewed by the participants of the study conducted. The interpretivist paradigm came about as a result of further criticism of the positivism paradigm which focuses on numbers, statistics and generalisations (Collis & Hussey, 2003:53). This alternative paradigm aims to focus on people, their behaviour and their perceptions from a humanistic point of view rather than a statistical one.

The pragmatic paradigm has recently emerged and this paradigm has in part developed due to the debate between the importance of quantitative research versus qualitative research (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005:375). This is a third methodological movement that has emerged as an alternative to the purist quantitative and qualitative
approaches (Feilzer, 2010:6; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009: 4; Creswell & Clark, 2007; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The pragmatic researcher values both quantitative and qualitative data and includes both in their research studies. Mertens (2012:256) argues that it is impossible to say that only one specific research method is appropriate and encourages the use of both quantitative and qualitative data to be utilised. This notion of combining quantitative and qualitative data is supported by Punch (2009:290) who contends that the type of research method used should be guided and determined by the research question that is being asked. Should the research question be partially answered by qualitative research, quantitative research should be considered in order to answer the question as best possible.

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005:377) note that there is an incorrect and improper separation that exists between quantitative and qualitative research approaches and indicate that quantitative methods are not necessarily positivist, nor are qualitative techniques necessarily hermeneutic. It is argued that the focus should be shifted from purist quantitative and qualitative to answering the research question at hand. As indicated by Creswell (2003:11) that the research question and research problem should become the focal point of the research and the researcher should use any and all possible approaches available to answer the question. Creswell (2003:4) also argues that the research situation must move away from a stance of quantitative versus qualitative to rather questioning which approach is the best or most appropriate to use in a particular study.

This research study which focused on tourism students’ perceptions of their Experiential Learning (EL) experiences utilised a quantitative research instrument initially and incorporated semi-structured group interviews with these students in order to obtain richer and more meaningful information regarding their perceptions. Determining perceptions of the subjects of a study was done through qualitative data collection methods in various studies (Meintjes & Niemann-Struwe, 2011; Paranhos & Mendes, 2010). Conversely, determining perceptions of subjects was done through quantitative data collection methods in other studies (Richardson, 2010; Ahern, 2007;
Lee, 2006). This study focused on both numeric and narrative data and thus fits within the pragmatic paradigm. The following section will evaluate the concept of reasoning and the acquisition of knowledge.

3.2.1.3 Reasoning

In discussing reasoning in research and how knowledge is acquired, Thomas (2009:88) indicates that the two main ways of reasoning which leads us to knowledge is inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning. A third dimension of reasoning is introduced namely inductive-deductive reasoning (Cooper & Schindler, 2008:73; Cohen et al., 2007:6).

Deductive reasoning moves from acquiring general knowledge to determining more specific knowledge (Collis & Hussey, 2003:15). A practical example illustrated by Collis and Hussey (2003:15) refers to a researcher discovering a particular theory and wanting to implement or evaluate this theory in their place of work environment. This type of reasoning looks at the broader, proverbial bigger picture first then attempts to apply this general idea to a more specific situation. Punch (2009:358) explains it to be moving downward in terms of the levels of abstraction from the concepts being more general and very abstract to them being more specific and concrete. Deductive reasoning follows a sequence of logical steps which starts at the very general to the particular or specific and a conclusion is deduced from this premise (Cohen et al., 2007:6).

The principles of inductive reasoning can be seen as opposite to that of deductive reasoning which move from the specific and concrete to the more abstract and general (Collis & Hussey, 2003:15). It is argued that inductive research proceeds from the basis of various observations from particular experiences which leads the researcher to derive a general principle about a phenomenon (Thomas, 2009:88). The more observations the researcher experiences, the surer they can be that the derived general principle is true. It should however be noted that observations that
always come to the same conclusions does not make the observation always true or will not always continue to be true.

This study utilised a pre-existing model which can relate to the general principles of knowledge and in an attempt to apply the model to the tourism students at the chosen institution, the research is consequently based on deductive reasoning as per Collis and Hussey's (2003:15) example above.

3.2.2 Research Approach

In having established the research paradigm within which the study fits, it is then appropriate to determine the research approach that will suit the study. This study utilised a mixed methods research (MMR) approach. Combinations of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies are increasingly being favoured by educational researchers (Basit, 2010:17) as opposed to purist quantitative and the dominating qualitative approaches.

According to Punch (2009:290) the fundamental rationale that supports MMR is about combining the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. This method and approach does not contend that the one is better than the other, but rather adopts a more complementary stance. This perception is supported by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) who indicate that both quantitative and qualitative research is important and extremely useful. MMR is not about replacing one of these approaches but instead to draw on the strengths of both and to minimise and eliminate the weaknesses of both in one single research project. Creswell (2005:510) notes that the choice of MMR provides a better understanding and answer to the research problem than either of quantitative or qualitative research would have been able to answer. The power and muscle of the method rests on its ability to incorporate the strength of both types of research approaches and building on them while compensating for their weaknesses.
Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010:29) indicate that one of the general purposes of MMR is that the combination of both quantitative and qualitative research enables the exploration of various aspects of a particular phenomenon. The numeric and statistical characteristics associated with quantitative data may be elaborated and explained in more detail through the narratives that were collected through the qualitative data. The research question becomes the guiding force in the choice of research approach (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009:7; Creswell, 2003:12) and Creswell (2003) further argues that MMR gives researchers a freedom of choice and the ability to choose the techniques, methods and designs that will best answer the research question.

Lund (2012) discussed the various advantages related to the use of MMR. It is argued that firstly, MMR provides better answers to complex research questions that quantitative and qualitative research may not be able to answer adequately in isolation. The combination of these approaches therefore provides for better interpretation and inferences to be drawn from the data. Another advantage of MMR can be the fact that the results of MMR can lead to further research which adds to theoretical insights and the general pool of knowledge. Conducting MMR therefore provides the researcher with rich, meaningful and useful findings and interpretations about the studied phenomenon.

In a criticism of MMR, Symonds and Gorard (2010:124) note that researchers and authors are unable to agree upon definitions of quantitative and qualitative research approaches and the addition of a third approach will continue to be ill-defined. If none of the existing approaches and paradigms is well-defined and classified, combining these two approaches will cause increased confusion and lack of coherence in research studies. As indicated by Morse in Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010:262) MMR does not have a singular language that is clear and cohesive. This fragmented and disjointed perception could result in further confusion and the interpretation that MMR is difficult and should be avoided.
3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The typologies of MMR designs are vast (Morgan, 2007; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Green & Caracelli, 1997), in addition, Tashakorri and Teddlie (2010) identify almost 40 different types of designs in literature. For the purpose of this discussion, the designs as discussed by Creswell (2005) will be explored. He identifies three different designs available to the pragmatic researcher namely, triangulation mixed methods design, explanatory mixed methods design and exploratory mixed methods design (Creswell, 2005:514).

Triangulation mixed methods design refers to the simultaneous collection of qualitative and quantitative data. Punch (2009:296) explains that the purpose of triangulation mixed methods design is to collect complementary qualitative and quantitative data on the same topic in an attempt to utilise the strength of both methods. The data is collected concurrently and presented in a merged format. Through the simultaneous collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, the researcher is able to determine whether the findings from the one set of data support or contradict the other (Creswell, 2005:514). Emphasis is not necessarily placed on either of the two approaches as the aim is more to determine contrasts and similarities between the findings.

Secondly, exploratory mixed methods first collect qualitative data with follow-up quantitative data and emphasis is commonly placed more on the qualitative data (Creswell, 2005:516). He explains that the qualitative data is first collected in order to explore or study a phenomenon and the subsequent quantitative data will be collected in order to explain relationships that became apparent from the qualitative data. Punch (2009:297) argues that the exploratory qualitative data provides a foundation from which the quantitative data can be better understood. The narrative style of qualitative data is analysed and further explored and supported through the numeric and statistical quantitative data collected.
The third type of mixed methods design is explanatory design and this can be seen as the opposite or reverse of the exploratory mixed methods design which first collects qualitative data. Explanatory mixed methods design first collects the quantitative data which guides the selection of samples for the qualitative data collection (Punch, 2009:296). The numeric and statistical comes first and is further investigated through the narrative qualitative data. As indicated by Creswell (2005:515), the researcher places emphasis and priority on the quantitative data and the qualitative data is used to refine the former. The quantitative methods may be used to test theories or concepts after which a qualitative method may explore in detail a few cases or individuals (Punch, 2009:297; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009:153-154).

Furthermore, Creswell and Clark (2007) refer to explanatory sequential design and note that sequential procedures are those in which the researcher aims to elaborate on the findings of one method with another. A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was followed for this study. Initial quantitative data was collected with subsequent qualitative data to elaborate on the findings of the former. Anomalies and extreme cases of certain individuals in the study were further explored through qualitative methods. The research instrument utilised in this study developed by Parks, et al. (2008) is a quantitative research instrument. The PLACE model utilised allows for limited open-ended questions which could give respondents an opportunity to freely express themselves. The follow-up qualitative data collection provided the study with richer data and more insight into students' experiential learning experiences through interviews conducted. This idea of using interviews to gather more data with a few participants from the initial phase is supported by Bulsara (2007). It is mentioned that the findings from the qualitative phase is able to explain and inform in greater detail and depth the results of data collected during the quantitative phase.

Coll et al. (2002) utilised a mixed methods approach in order to determine students' views and perceptions of their Cooperative Education experience. There is also a
move from scholars to recognise the value of both quantitative and qualitative research methods in tourism (Walle, 1997:524). These and similar studies as well as the research question have impacted and influenced the researcher’s decision to utilise mixed methods in this study.

3.3.1 Target Group

A research study generally involves people or a collection of items under consideration (Collis & Hussey, 2003:155) who form part of a particular group, often referred to as the target group and this group is usually large. This large group of people is referred to as the population of the study (Punch, 2009:359). One of the first vital steps in a research process is to determine who the population is as this will guide the researcher to the appropriate subjects to be selected for the study (Springer, 2010:100).

A research study will in most instances not be able to encompass the entire population of the phenomenon to be studied, hence the selection of certain sub-sets or samples to be included (Shank & Brown, 2007:46; Cohen et al., 2007:100). This selected sample will then be a representation of the population and should thus be selected with great caution. Populations can often times be relatively small and also extremely large. In considering very large populations, Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:170) refer to the accessible population which refers to a total number of subjects or elements from which it is possible for a researcher to collect relevant data from.

The population of this study included all students who have completed and participated in EL programmes. The sample that was selected for the purposes of this study was the tourism students who have completed their experiential learning during 2013 at the chosen institution. Approximately 70 students were registered during 2013 and 38 students of this group was used as the sample.
3.3.2 Sampling Strategy

Sampling is the process whereby researchers evaluate a total population and draw a part or a subset that can be studied in order to be able to answer research questions or draw conclusions regarding the entire population (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008:89). It is noted by Neuman (2003:211) that sampling is most commonly focused on by quantitative researchers as their aim is to use a small representative of a larger group in order to produce generalisations. Punch (2009:162) argues that sampling is equally important to quantitative and qualitative researchers as nobody can study everyone doing everything everywhere. Sampling in quantitative research is therefore about the selection of a certain group of people or subjects to represent the entire population of the phenomenon being studied.

The types of sampling techniques available to quantitative data differ from the sampling techniques in qualitative data. Quantitative research is more commonly associated with probability or random sampling techniques and qualitative research is more likely to use non-probability sampling or purposive sampling (Punch, 2009:162). There are numerous types of sampling techniques available to both research approaches (Plowright, 2011; Punch, 2009; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008; Neuman, 2003) and often quantitative researchers use both probability and non-probability sampling techniques and the researcher will be guided by the research question and the problem of the study.

For the purposes of this study, the sampling technique for the quantitative data collected was the non-probability sampling technique named convenience sampling. The researcher is an educator at the chosen institution and had easy access to these students. Cohen et al. (2007:113) refers to convenience sampling as accidental or opportunity sampling as the individuals nearest to the study or researcher are chosen to serve as respondents. Plowright (2011:43) notes that many researchers often use schools or contacts to gain access to research sites as they are convenient.
The respondents and participants of this study were information-rich students who have successfully completed a six-month period in the tourism industry. For some of these students their EL experiences were their first interaction with the tourism industry and their perceptions of their experiences were invaluable both to the study as well as the tourism department. Other students had previous work experience both in the tourism industry and elsewhere, and their perceptions of a structured, academically aligned workplace experience were diverse. This was a factor considered in the inclusion of qualitative data collection in order to better obtain this elaborate detail from participants.

The non-probability sampling technique for the qualitative data collected was extreme or deviant case sampling. The qualitative data collected focused on anomalies or extreme cases from the quantitative data collected. Punch (2009:163) explains this type of sampling as a technique that allows the researcher to learn from highly unusual manifestations of the phenomenon being studied. Neuman (2003:211) refers to this type of non-probability sampling technique as deviant case sampling and explains that the researcher uses cases that differ substantially from the dominating pattern to study them further. After the analyses of the quantitative data, the researcher evaluated the data and identified these extreme cases and interviews were conducted with four of these respondents.

A good sample for quantitative research must be valid and must be a representation of the population that it claims to represent (Cooper & Schindler, 2008:376). In determining the validity of a sample, attention must be paid to the accuracy and the precision of the sample. Accuracy refers to the degree to which bias is absent from the sample. Sampling is however often associated with selection bias and refers to the bias arising as a distortion of evidence and this is a result of the way in which the data was collected (Thomas, 2009:102). Sampling bias might have existed in this study as those students who volunteered to participate in the study may not necessarily be a representative sample of tourism students who have completed their EL module at the chosen institution.
Participants for the interviews were selected based on the quantitative data that was analysed and a few anomalies emerged. There were a few respondents whose responses deviated from the normal positive experiences and comments. Subsequently, two respondents who had particularly negative experiences were chosen to have follow-up interviews with. Furthermore, one respondent who had very positive experiences, scoring predominantly 6 and 7 in both Sections 1 and 2 of the questionnaire was also interviewed. A fourth interview was conducted with a respondent whose responses included both very positive and very negative answers.

### 3.3.3 Data Collection Techniques

There are numerous data collection techniques available to the mixed methods researcher. Symonds and Gorard (2010:126) list closed-ended/structured questionnaires or interviews, systematic observations, document analyses and official statistics among the options available to the quantitative researcher. In terms of the qualitative researcher there may be open-ended/semi-structured questionnaires or interviews, observations, document and image analysis as well as video recording (Symonds & Gorard, 2010:126).

For the quantitative data, the data collection technique for this study was a research survey and Neuman (2003:264) notes that a survey is the most widely used data-gathering technique not only in social sciences but in many other fields of study. In a survey, respondents may be answering questions on a questionnaire or in an interview or the completion of a diary (Thomas, 2009:135). The investigator would be interested in determining attitudes, behaviour, characteristics and perceptions of the population through the answering of questions (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008:81; Creswell, 2005:354). Creswell (2005:355) argues that even though there are many variations of surveys, there are fundamentally only two main types of surveys namely, cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys. He notes that cross-sectional surveys are concerned more with current attitudes, behaviour and opinions of the population whereas longitudinal surveys focus on the individuals' attitudes over a period of time.
This study therefore utilised a cross-sectional survey as it aimed to determine students’ perceptions of their experiences post EL.

For the qualitative data, four individual interviews were held with participants whose quantitative data showed deviations or anomalies. Punch (2009:144) notes that the interview is the most common data collection method in qualitative research studies. It gives the researcher great access to people’s opinions, perceptions and ideas about reality. An interview schedule was developed after the quantitative data was collected in order to explore anomalies and extreme variations. These interviews were semi-structured and the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed.

3.3.4 Data Collection Instruments

The following section will discuss the development and construction of the research instruments namely the questionnaire and the interview schedule.

3.3.4.1 Survey Questionnaire

There are a variety of forms of research surveys available to researchers however; the most basic forms are questionnaires and interviews (Creswell, 2005:360). The data collection instrument for the quantitative data was a questionnaire and the questionnaire utilised was based on the Predicting Learner Advancement through Cooperative Education (PLACE) four-component model (Parks et al., 2008).

The model was originally created with three factors (Parks, et al., 2001) and the three-factor model was tested and subsequently revised to form the current four-component PLACE model (Parks et al., 2008). The initial instrument used during the development of the PLACE model (Parks et al., 2001), included 34 7-point Likert scale questions. The subsequent re-development of the PLACE model (Parks et al., 2008) included 29 7-point Likert rating scale questions with additional open-ended questions included in the questionnaire.
Questionnaires are among the most popular quantitative data collection methods (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008:122) to such an extent that most adults will have had some encounter with a questionnaire in their lifetime. Creswell (2005:360) defines a questionnaire as a form utilised in a survey that respondents have to complete and subsequently return to the researcher. There are numerous types of questionnaires available to researchers including mailed, electronic, one-on-one interviews, telephone interviews (Plowright, 2011:78; Creswell, 2005:360). Plowright (2011:78) refers to the term “paper” or written questionnaires, which refers to administered or self-administered questionnaires that need to be completed. This study utilised a written, self-administered questionnaire. Some questionnaires were emailed to students as they are working in various towns and cities.

The type of questions that can be asked in a questionnaire are vast (Plowright, 2011:82; Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008:122; Neuman, 2003:268) and will depend on the type of study being conducted, the research question to be answered as well as the depth of information needed from respondents. Punch (2009:62) explains that data collection questions are asked in such a manner that they are able to help answer the central research question of the study. Open-ended and closed-ended questions often dominate survey questionnaires and it is often debated as to which ones are best. Neuman (2003:278) argues that the question of open and closed questions should not be about which one is best but rather which is more appropriate for the study. The bulk of the questions used in this questionnaire were closed-ended questions with one out of four sections being open-ended. The need for open-ended questions was diminished with the inclusion of the interview in the study.

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:234) note that an associated format of closed-ended questions is Likert scale questions. The Likert Scale is most commonly used to measure respondents' attitudes and perceptions (Thomas, 2009:178; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009:234). Respondents are expected to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with statements provided relating to a particular belief or attitude about the studied topic. Neuman (2003:197) notes that the most common
form of Likert scale responses are for respondents to either agree or disagree with a statement.

The questionnaire of this study was based on the PLACE model (Parks et al, 2008) with a variety of modifications and amendments effected to complement this study. The instrument was divided into four separate sections. The first section evaluated the level of change respondents experienced over the course of their EL programme. The 7-point Likert scale response options were 7 = increased significantly, 6 = increased moderately, 5 = increased slightly, 4 = no change, 3 = decreased slightly, 2 = decreased moderately, 1 = decreased significantly. Respondents were asked to rate their perceived level of change for each of the four components namely, Personal Development, Career Development, Work-skills Development and Academic Development.

Section two of the questionnaire focused on respondents' perceptions of the level of importance of each of the four factors of the four-component model. This section expected respondents to ignore their level or perception of their personal change, but to focus on the importance of the factors. The 7-point Likert scale response options were 7 = extremely important, 6 = very important, 5 = moderately important, 4 = neutral, 3 = slightly important, 2 = low importance, 1 = not at all important. Section 3 included three open-ended questions and section 4 focused on the demographics of the respondents. Students were asked to include their student numbers in order for the researcher to be able to contact students for the qualitative phase of interviews.

A pilot study was conducted with four respondents in order to test the questionnaire. The respondents included two tourism students who were not part of the research study as well as a peer review by two fellow researchers. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:203) refer to the importance of conducting pilot studies as a “test drive” for your research instrument. This allows for any mistakes or discrepancies that might have occurred during the instrument construction to be identified and corrected.
The first amendment was made to the instruction of Section one. One respondent in the pilot study felt that “Rate your level of change with regard to these factors over the course of your EL programme” was slightly confusing and the sentence was changed to “Rate the level of change you experienced with regard to these factors over the course of your EL programme.” Another respondent indicated that they wasted a lot of time in referring back to the top of the page to determine what each number represents. Smaller blocks indicating what each number represents were created and added to each of the four components.

Slight modifications in terms used were also suggested such as “growth in maturity” versus only “maturity”. Also, “Understanding how organisations in the tourism industry function” versus “Knowledge of how organisations in the tourism industry function”. The pilot questionnaire is attached as Addendum A and the revised questionnaire that was the final research instrument for this study is attached as Addendum B. Thirty-eight questionnaires were collected for this study.

3.3.4.2 Interview schedule

The data collection instrument for the qualitative data was an interview schedule. Four individual interviews were conducted with participants whose results showed deviations from the norm and related anomalies which emerged from the quantitative data analysis. Cohen et al. (2007:271) indicate that topics and issues to be covered in the interview may be specified and outlined in advance to direct the researcher and does not have to be followed in the exact sequence. The interviews were semi-structured which allowed the interviewer to deviate and ask follow up questions on students’ responses. Sharp (2012:74) note that the most important aspects of interviews is that it provides flexibility to the interviewer and the added advantage of being able to observe the participants of the study.

The theoretical framework of this study was based on the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) by Kolb (1984). The interview schedule focused on the six propositions
of Kolb’s (1984) ELT. The questions were therefore clustered into these six elements. The first proposition looks at the process of learning and how participants experienced the differences in their own behaviour. Questions to participants focused on their relative changes experienced.

The second proposition focuses on relearning. Students entering the workplace have already learnt from their higher education experiences as well as pre-university experiences. Certain elements learnt in the workplace will be relearning and others will be new information. Questions to participants focused on what they perceived to have been relearnt and what they perceived to have been new learning at the workplace during EL.

The third proposition argues that there must be a resolution of conflicts between opposing modes of adaptation. This segment of the interview focused on how students believe their ideas, perspectives and perceptions have been challenged and how it has changed their way of doing things. The next proposition notes that learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world. On entering the workplace for EL experiences, students arrive as individuals with their own personalities, ideas and goals. The workplace will either add to their own personalities or change some of their ideas and perceptions. Questions to students focused on how they perceive EL has impacted them beyond the acquisition of generic and employability skills.

Learning also results from the interaction between the individual and the environment. The work environment generally has a different atmosphere and character than the classroom set-up in HEIs. How students acted and behaved in their university environment may have been different from how they behaved in the workplace. Questions to participants focused on how they perceive their interactions at the workplace to have been different or similar to those in the classroom. Finally, learning is seen to be a process of creating knowledge. Participants were questioned on whether or not they perceive to have greater knowledge about the industry they operate in as well as their own personalities.
The elements of the four-component model were also taken into consideration during the interviews. The interview schedule is attached as Addendum C.

### 3.3.5 Data Analysis Approach

Producing raw data is irrelevant as people prefer information (Cooper & Schindler, 2008:93) and therefore researchers must generate information through the analysis of data collected. Sharp (2012:103) argue that any data that has been collected must be analysed otherwise the point of the data collection is lost. This phase in the research process is therefore vital as the information generated from the analysis process will ultimately be used by other researchers, educators and managers. Cohen et al. (2007:86) refer to data analysis as the process of organising, explaining and making sense of the data in relation to respondents and participants’ responses and opinions. It is indicated by Collis and Hussey (2003:170) that this phase of analysis and interpretation forms the major part of the research project.

The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data varies and the particular method of analysis selected must suit the research questions and the objectives of the study. This study utilised a mixed methods research approach which applied both quantitative and qualitative data. The analysis of both approaches will therefore be evaluated. The quantitative data was analysed using the software programmes Statistica Version 11 and SPSS Version 21. The data analysis approach for the quantitative data collected was descriptive data analysis. This is a type of analysis approach that focuses on summarising data and intends to discover trends and patterns and summarises results for ease of communication (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009:275). According to Collis and Hussey (2003:198) descriptive data analysis is useful in summarising and presenting data in diagrammatical formats in order to identify patterns and relationships.

The descriptive data collected guided the researcher in the utilisation of inferential statistics. In using inferential statistics, the researcher wants to make inferences
about the population from the sample selected (Punch, 2009:208). This guides the researcher in determining the likelihood that the results of the sample are also true for the entire population. Both the descriptive data and inferential statistical results were used to prepare an interview schedule for the semi-structured individual interviews held.

Sharp (2012:104) explains quantitative data to be generally associated with numbers and researchers need to analyse these numbers by utilising statistical procedures. The research instrument for the quantitative data was a questionnaire and Creswell (2005:175) notes that a system of scoring the data needs to be applied when such an instrument is utilised. Both sections one and two of the instrument made use of 7-point Likert scale response options. The scores for both Sections one and two were the corresponding numbers “1” to “7”.

Section three of the questionnaire had two open-ended questions and one close-ended question. The close-ended question was scored “1” to “4” with 1 = Personal Development, 2 = Career Development, 3 = Work-skills Development, 4 = Academic Development. In the analysis of the two open-ended questions in section three, codes were assigned. Section four of the questionnaire focused on the demographics of students and included three questions. The first question which is the student number was assigned scores arbitrarily starting at one until the last respondent. The ages of students were left as an open-ended question and were subsequently coded and scored. The third question which focused on the students’ gender was scored “1” for Male and “2” for Females.

Data analysis of qualitative data is often time-consuming, labour-intensive and a difficult process to follow (Springer, 2010:383). In order to manage this difficult process the analysis of qualitative data needs to be broken down into smaller parts or stages. The idea of breaking this difficult process into smaller more manageable parts is supported by Cohen et al. (2000:148) who portray the qualitative data analysis process as a series of seven steps. The first step is to establish units of analysis of
the data which includes categories, classifications and clusters which can be done through the development of codes. They indicate that the most common qualitative data analysis methods include coding of field notes, content analysis of field notes, cognitive mapping, and seeking patterning of responses, causal pathways and connections. The forms of data analysis must be appropriate for the kinds of data gathered and the overall approach of the research project (Thomas, 2013:235).

Cohen et al. (2007:478) identifies codes as categories that pull material together into some form of order and structure. Codes keep words as words and they maintain the specificity of context and at the very early stages of analysis they are descriptive codes. In order to stay true to the data collected and participants’ responses, codes should be created when the analysis process starts and should not be predetermined. Field notes and transcripts will be evaluated in an attempt to look for words, phrases or patterns that appear regularly and that seem important to the researcher (Creswell, 2005:238). The researcher's interests, personal reflections and the research question should guide and influence the categories and codes selected.

The second step refers to the creation of a domain analysis which involves the grouping of units into domains, clusters, groups, patterns or themes. Cohen et al. (2007:479) mention that it might be useful at this stage to recode the domain or to simply review them to evaluate how they fit within the clusters. Putting similar categories together will assist the researcher with further analysis of the data and initial categories may be changed, merged or even omitted during this phase (Drew, Hardman & Hosp, 2008:344). The following step in the data analysis step according to Cohen et al. (2000:149) requires the researcher to establish relationships and linkages between domains determined in the previous step. This step helps to ensure the context of the data as well as ensuring that the richness is maintained and retained. These linkages can be developed through connections and data subsets.

The fourth step involves making speculative inferences. This step in the research process moves from description of the data collected to inferences being drawn. The
researcher is required to posit some explanations for the situation at hand, referring to certain key elements and possibly their causes (Creswell, 2005:181). At this stage the researcher will have organised and arranged data in such a manner that an initial summary can be put together. This step of summarisation will focus the researcher’s attention on areas that needs further attention and analysis.

Step six of this data analysis process involves the identification of negative and discrepant cases in the data (Cohen et al., 2000:149). This step requires an evaluation of the data which both confirm theories as well as those that disprove or disagree with theories being tested. These discrepancies are not necessarily exceptions to the rule but instead they should be viewed as variants of the rule. Ary et al. (2002:4690) refer to this as negative case analysis or discrepant data analysis. This refers to the identification of negative cases that contradict the main pattern or category identified. This activity helps the researcher to identify a different perspective and helps to counter-balance the possibility of a researcher holding onto preconceived ideas about the results of the study. The final step includes the theory that will emerge from the data collected.

The interviews conducted in this study were recorded electronically and subsequently transcribed and transcriptions analysed. Coding was the first step in the analysis of the qualitative data. Punch (2009:175) notes that coding is the starting point in qualitative data analysis and it should be seen as the foundation for what should follow. Descriptive codes were initially used in the analysis of the qualitative data. A second level of coding was pattern codes which were used to more meaningful units of the data (Punch, 2009:176). Qualitative data from questionnaires was divided into themes and subsequent categories. The six propositions of learning formed the themes of the qualitative data from interviews with Academic Development as additional theme.
3.4 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

In measuring the quality of a research instrument in quantitative data collection, there are two fundamental criteria namely reliability and validity (Springer, 2010:153). As indicated by Cohen et al. (2007:133), there are many different types of reliability and validity and therefore there are a variety of ways in which they can be addressed. The following section will briefly explain these two concepts.

3.4.1. Validity

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:209) defines validity as the evaluation of whether the data represents the constructs they were assumed to measure. In other words, did the instrument truly measure and record what the research study set out to measure or determine. It is also explained to be the extent to which the findings of the research accurately represent what is happening in the situation being studied (Collis & Hussey, 2003:58). Springer (2010:153) identifies three types of validity namely content validity, criterion-related validity and construct validity.

Content validity refers to the extent to which the test administered measures the content that it intended to measure (Springer, 2010:153). In order to test for this type of validity, the items listed on the test must be relevant to the content area being studied. Creswell (2005:164) explains content validity to be the extent to which the questions that are asked are representative of all the possible questions that could be asked in studying the phenomenon. He further notes that this form of validity is useful if the possibilities of questions are both well-known and easily identifiable. It is also stated by Cohen et al. (2007:137) that it is impossible to cover all aspects in their entirety due to time constraints. However, the researcher must aim to reasonably cover all the relevant elements of the issue being studied.

According to Cohen et al. (2007:140), criterion-related validity aims to relate the results of one particular instrument with the results of another. This type of validity is
explained by Creswell (2005:165) as a useful tool for determining whether scores from an instrument can predict an outcome. Criterion-related validity can also be further divided into concurrent validity and predictive validity (Springer, 2010:155; Cohen et al., 2007:141). Predictive validity is explained to be the extent to which scores in a particular test are related to a particular variable that will be studied in the future (Springer, 2010:155). An example cited by Cohen et al. (2007:140) refers to students taking an examination at age 16 and their results correlate with the same test being taken at age 18. This examination or test can then be said to have strong predictive validity. Concurrent validity on the other hand refers to two different types of instruments or techniques being used to study one phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2007:140). The results of both techniques must be relatively similar in order for it to be valid. The major difference between these two types of validity is the time difference as predictive validity is carried out over a period of time and concurrent validity can be carried out concomitantly.

The third type of validity is construct validity which is argued to be the most complicated type of validity by Creswell (2005:165). He argues that construct validity needs to be assessed using both statistics and practical procedures and this adds complications. Punch (2009:247) explains construct validity to be the extent to which the measure conforms to theoretical expectations.

There is also a further division of validity between internal and external validity. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:24) explain external validity to be the generalisability of quantitative results. The generalisability of findings refers to the extent to which the results may be applied to other similar conditions. Punch (2009:314) warns that the researcher needs to be aware of the possible threats that exist in generalisations and need to ensure that these threats are taken into consideration. Internal validity refers to the internal logic and consistency of the research (Punch, 2009:315). As discussed by Basit (2010:65), this type of validity explains the way in which specific perceptions have been described and can be upheld by the data collected.
3.4.2 Reliability

Thomas (2009:105) explains reliability to be the extent to which the same research instrument will give the same results on a different occasion. If the research was carried out under similar conditions with a similar group of respondents, the results should also be relatively comparable. Cohen et al. (2007:146) refer to three types of reliability namely reliability as stability, reliability as equivalence and internal consistency. In explaining reliability as stability, Cohen et al. (2007:146) refers to the test re-test of an instrument. The same test would be administered to the same group of respondents over a time period. They note that it is important to not have the re-test too soon after the first one as respondents may remember their previous answers or not too long after as their circumstances might have changed. Stability is referred to by Punch (2009:244) as consistency over time and he argues that if the re-test scores are similar to the first test scores, the instrument can be said to be reliable.

Reliability as equivalence is explained to be instances where researchers use multiple indicators to answer the same research questions (Neuman, 2003:100). A reliable measure would give the same results even if a variety of indicators are used to measure the same constructs. According to Basit (2010:69), equivalence involves the use of equivalent or alternative forms of a test and should they generate similar results, the instrument can be said to be reliable. Cohen et al. (2007:147) notes that reliability as equivalence can be achieved through what is known as inter-rater reliability. This type of reliability is common when more than one researcher is taking part in the research study. Observers are required to record their scores of the behaviour being studied and scores are then compared in order to determine if their scores are similar or different (Creswell, 2005:164). Should scores be similar, the instrument is said to be reliable.

The third type of reliability is internal consistency which indicates that an instrument is reliable and accurate if respondents’ answers are consistent throughout (Creswell, 2005:164). A respondent starting a questionnaire by indicating positive feelings
towards the questions or topic being studied should remain positive through all their answers. Creswell (2005:164) further indicates that there are mainly three types of tests available in order to determine internal consistency namely, Kuder-Richardson split half test, Spearman-Brown formula and the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient. The formerly mentioned types of reliability require the instrument to be administered twice and in contrast, in order to test for internal consistency, the test can be administered once (Springer, 2010:161). This instrument was only administered once and for the purpose of this study, the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was used to test for score reliability. The study conducted by Parks et al., (2008) with the PLACE four-component model similarly utilised this test.

3.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which audiences can be persuaded or convinced that the findings of a study are worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba in Teddlie & Tashakorri, 2009:296). According to Basit (2010:70) qualitative research is unique and generally particular to a specific setting and cannot therefore be duplicated or claim to have reliability or validity. Reliability and validity are often rejected as concepts in qualitative research and Lincoln and Guba (cited in Cohen & Crabtree, 2006) substitute these terms with credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Sinkovics, Penz and Ghauri (2008:691) note that by establishing these aforementioned concepts, trustworthiness can be accomplished in qualitative research.

Shenton (2004:64) notes that transferability is a term used in qualitative research in preference of external validity in quantitative research. He further argues that due to the small numbers and specific environments and individuals qualitative research represents, to generalise is an impossibility. Transferability can further be explained to be the extent to which significant conditions of the phenomenon being studied overlap or match (Sinkovics et al., 2008:699). It is also argued by Shenton (2004:64)
that the researcher first needs to ensure the extent of their confidence in transferring the results and conclusions to other situations.

Lincoln and Guba (cited in Cohen & Crabtree, 2006) explain dependability to be the extent to which the findings of a research study are consistent and could be repeated. Dependability is further associated with reliability in quantitative data as well as the stability of results over time (Sinkovics et al., 2008:699). They also refer to dependability as repeatability and to what extent the study can be repeated over time. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:296) refer to dependability as the ability of the human instrument to produce results that are consistent.

The next principle that contributes to the trustworthiness of a study is confirmability and it is compared to objectivity in quantitative research (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009:296). In order to attain confirmability, the researcher has to demonstrate that the interpretations drawn from the data collected are rooted in circumstances and situations outside of the researcher’s own imagination (Sinkovics et al., 2008:699). The interpretations should be coherent and logically assembled. Teddlie and Tashakorri (2009:213) encourage the use of a reflexive journal, which is similar to a diary that can be used on a daily basis during data collection.

Credibility as the final principle concerns the truthfulness and accuracy of findings as well as the confidence that can be put in the observations, interpretations and conclusions of the researcher (Drew et al., 2008:233). The researcher has the responsibility of accurately presenting the realities of the participants. As indicated by Sinkovics et al. (2008:699) the focus of credibility is on the establishment of a match between the respondents’ constructed realities and those represented by the researcher. Credibility in qualitative research is often also compared with validity in quantitative research (Drew et al., 2008:233). There are a variety of techniques that a researcher can use to enhance the credibility of data such as prolonged engagement, member checks and persistent observation among others (Teddlie & Tashakorri, 2009:296). For the purpose of this study the researcher engaged in prolonged
engagement, which refers to the researcher spending adequate amount of time in the field as well as member checks whereby participants validated transcribed interviews.

3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Plowright (2011:150), ethics is concerned with both general and specific moral principles that would be associated with a particular activity or a specific profession. Any research that needs to be conducted must take these moral principles into account. Punch (2009:49) notes that due to the fact that educational research involves collecting data from people, ethical issues will always play a role. It is further argued that the issue of ethics permeates through every phase of the research process from the chosen topic to who ultimately benefits from the research. This idea is supported by Cohen et al. (2007:51) who comment that every stage of the research process may potentially be sources of ethical problems and concerns from the data collection methods to how data will be presented or published. The onus of ensuring that the research process is carried out ethically ultimately rests with the researcher (Basit, 2010:56; Punch, 2009:49).

The researcher has an obligation of ethical responsibility to both the research subjects as well as to their profession (Creswell, 2005:12). There are a few fundamental ethical principles of research towards the respondents and participants of a study, as indicated by Plowright (2011:155). Firstly, the subjects of the study should be allowed to withdraw at any stage or refuse to participate without any fear of a penalty or punishment. The next principle refers to confidentiality and anonymity and Neuman (2003:126) argues that when a researcher studies people’s beliefs, backgrounds and behaviour, it is an invasion of privacy and this privacy needs to be protected through ensuring the anonymity of subjects. He further notes that it is often times not possible to ensure anonymity, but the confidentiality of the information collected should be maintained.
It is stated by Plowright (2011:156) that deception is another important principle in research and may be intentional or unintentional. Unintentional deception is when the researcher divulges little information to the participants of the study due to either time constraints or not wanting to bore them with unnecessary details about the research process. Intentional deception is when the researcher deliberately gives incorrect information or withholds certain details from the subjects in order to study their reactions in certain situations. The next principle of informed consent is explained by Cohen et al. (2000:51) to also imply informed refusal as the participants have the right to refuse to participate in the study or to withdraw at any stage. Informed consent also refers to volunteering and taking responsibility on the part of the participants.

As stated by Neuman (2003:124), the issue of volunteering is vital as no subject may ever be coerced into participating. By informing the subjects of the relevant information relating to the study, they are able to take responsibility in the event of something going wrong. The Belmont Report (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research, 1979:22) found that most survey research does not require a written consent from respondents, and the recommendation was made that written consent should be obtained from the subjects of these studies. This signed, written consent of participants can also serve as protection for the researcher.

The final element of the ethical principles includes security and safety of participants in order to prevent any emotional or physical harm (Plowright, 2011:155). As a result of numerous unethical research being conducted on people, the ethical principle of exerting no physical harm on the subjects of a study, has become paramount. According to Thomas (2013:42) damage to participants includes both physical and psychological harm and these could have lasting negative effects on people. There can also be legal harm and even harm to a person’s career or income that needs to be taken into consideration by the researcher (Neuman, 2003:120). The researcher needs to be cognisant of all the different possible harmful activities that can occur during a research process and harm in any shape or form should be avoided.
Ethical clearance was applied for from the chosen institution’s Faculty Research Technology Innovation (FRTI) Committee and the Research Ethics Committee – Human (REC-H) in order to conduct research with the respondents and participants of this study. Respondents were requested to provide their student numbers on the questionnaire in order to assist future contact for the interviews. Information gathered was treated with confidentiality and students’ names were not attached to phrases or comments reported to in the final document. Collected questionnaires and recorded interviews were kept secured at all times. The participants of the study were not be compelled to take part in the study and only did so out of free will. Students were asked to complete an “Informed Consent” form in which they acknowledged that they are participating in the study voluntarily and was not coerced to do so in any way. A copy of the informed consent form is attached as Addendum D. A fieldworker was utilised to assist with both questionnaire completion and interviews conducted. Interviews were recorded and students were aware of the recording of these interviews.

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided detailed discussions of the research design and methods available including their relation to this study. The purpose of this study was to determine tourism students’ perceptions of their EL module based on the PLACE four-component model. This was a pragmatic paradigm study, which uses a mixed method approach that includes both the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. An explanatory sequential research design was followed, whereby quantitative data was collected first with follow-up qualitative data collected.

This chapter also discussed the philosophical foundations of quantitative and qualitative research namely ontology, epistemology and axiology. This study focused on deductive reasoning, which works from a general theory, model or framework to the more specific application or testing of the model. For the quantitative data, survey research was conducted with in-depth semi-structured interviews held for the
qualitative data. The research instrument for the quantitative data was a questionnaire which was based on the PLACE model with 29 7-point Likert scale questions and open-ended and closed-ended questions. An interview schedule was developed for the qualitative data based on the findings of the quantitative data and the six propositions of learning. These questions were based on the anomalies and discrepancies identified in the quantitative data results.

The following chapter will present the findings of this study for both the quantitative data as well as the qualitative data. Graphs, tables, charts and related diagrammatical formats and narratives will be utilised to illustrate the findings of the collected data.
CHAPTER 4
DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to determine tourism students’ perceptions of their Experiential Learning (EL) experiences based on the PLACE (Predicting Learning Advancement through Cooperative Education) four-component model (Parks et al., 2008). This study utilised a mixed methods approach which applies both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

This chapter will present the findings of the data collected by making use of graphs, tables, charts, related diagrammatical formats and narratives. Statistica Version 11 and SPSS Version 21 were applied to analyse the data. Furthermore, the findings of this study will be compared to existing literature. This study utilised an explanatory mixed methods design whereby the quantitative data was first collected followed by the qualitative data. Therefore, the quantitative data will first be presented which will be followed by the qualitative data.

4.2 QUANTITATIVE DATA

The quantitative data was collected by means of a survey with a questionnaire as research instrument. The target group of this study was tourism students who have completed their EL programme at the chosen institution during the period 2013. There were approximately 70 students registered during this period and 38 respondents completed the questionnaire. The response rate for this study with 38 respondents was 54%. Creswell (2005:367) indicate that a response rate of 50% should be seen as satisfactory. However, both Creswell (2005:367) as well as Drew et al. (2008:169) argue that required response rate figures are guidelines and not necessarily set in stone. The quantitative data will be presented according to the demographic information, perceived level of change and perceived importance of each factor.
4.2.1 Demographic Information

A brief demographic section was included in this study, looking at the age and gender of respondents.

4.2.1.1 Age

Figure 4.1 represents the ages of respondents. Respondents all fell within the 21 – 28 year old age group with twelve of the 38 respondents being 22.

![Figure 4.1 Respondents’ ages](image)

Further cross-references were made between the different age groups means of 21-22, 23-25 and 26-28 as illustrated in Figure 4.2. The age group 26 – 28 scored the lowest mean of 4.76 for their perceived level of change in Personal Development whereas the 21-22 year olds scored 5.70. The age group 21 – 22 scored a mean of 6.37 for Academic Development and 26-28 scored 6.22.
Figure 4.2 Age group means of perceived level of change

Illustrated in Figure 4.3 below is the age group means for respondents’ perceived level of importance of the four factors. The age group 23 – 25 scored the highest mean of 6.51 for Academic Development. The lowest mean was by the age group 26 – 28 at 4.95.

Figure 4.3 Age group means of perceived level of importance
Josiam, Devine, Baum, Crutsinger and Reynolds (2010:44) note the importance of age in terms of attitude towards a job and the workplace. In this study conducted by Josiam et al. (2010) it was found that there is a significant relation between ages of students and their attitudes towards work. A significant relation could be drawn between increasing age and maturity and respondents' ability to connect education and work.

The age 26-28 of this current study however consistently scored the lowest scores both in perceived level of change and perceptions of the importance of these factors. They potentially lacked the ability to make the connection between their education received and the work they had done. Conversely, the younger respondents consistently scored the highest means in all areas except for their perceived level of importance of academic performance. The small 26-28 age group could possibly be the reason for the lower scores of this group.

4.2.1.2 Gender

Figure 4.4 below illustrates the gender of respondents with 71% being female and 29% male.

![Gender Chart](image)

**Figure 4.4 Gender**
Gender in the workplace can be viewed as significant particularly in the tourism industry as women are underrepresented in top management and are being inequitably recruited and promoted (Zhong, Couch & Blum, 2011:5). The majority of the respondents in this study were females and this is often the case in the tourism and hospitality workplace where women dominate, but only at low level positions (Nickson, 2013:117). Josiam et al. (2010:49) note that in regions where women are treated equally, there are often little differences between the perceptions of males and females regarding their work experiences.

Table 4.1 below illustrates the differences between male and female means for both perceived level of change as well as perceived level of importance of factors. The lowest mean for female respondents was 5.44 for their perceptions of their Personal Development post-EL. The male respondents scored their lowest mean for Career Development – which was a 0.01 lower than their perceptions of Personal Development. Both genders scored the highest means for Academic Development in Section 2 indicating that they perceive Academic Development to be very important to them. Reiterating the sentiment held by Josiam et al. (2010:49), the differences between the male and female means are minute all ranging between 5.44 and 6.70.

Table 4.1: Gender – mean comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER – MEAN COMPARISONS</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Development – Section 1</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>5.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Development – Section 2</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>6.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Development – Section 1</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>5.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Development – Section 2</td>
<td>5.98</td>
<td>6.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-skills Development – Section 1</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>6.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-skills Development – Section 2</td>
<td>5.96</td>
<td>6.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Development – Section 1</td>
<td>6.16</td>
<td>6.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Development – Section 2</td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td>6.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the initial construction of the PLACE model by Parks et al. (2001:29), significant differences were found between the sexes. Females scored much higher than males particularly in the areas of Work-skills Development as well as Academic Development. The assumption was made that female participants of EL find the experience more beneficial.

4.2.2 Respondents’ Perceived Level of Change

The first section of the questionnaire asked respondents to rate their perceived level of change with regard to the four factors namely Personal Development, Career Development, Work-skills Development and Academic Development post-EL on a 7-point Likert scale of 1 = “Decreased significantly”, 2 = “Decreased moderately”, 3 = “Decreased slightly”, 4 = “No change”, 5 = “Increased slightly”, 6 = “Increased moderately”, 7 = “Increased significantly”. These ratings are presented in relation to the measures of central tendency, standard deviations and Cronbach Alphas.

4.2.2.1 Measures of Central Tendency

In terms of respondents’ perceived level of change in each factor, the mean ranged between 5.58 and 6.25, representing “Increased slightly” and “Increased moderately” for all factors. The median was consistent between 5.68 and 6.33, representing “Increased slightly” and “Increased moderately” respectively for all four factors. The mode for Personal Development and Career Development ranged between 5 and 6 whereas Work-skills Development and Academic Development were 7 which indicate that respondents most frequently indicated their level of change “Increased significantly” post-EL for these two factors. Figure 4.5 below illustrates these.
Figure 4.5 Measures of central tendency for perceived level of change

The high mode of 7 for Work-skills Development and Academic Development is noteworthy, as Sisson and Adams (2013:138) argue that the industry places more emphasis on frontline skills regardless of the fact that academic staff emphasises academic performance and development with critical thinking and strategy development. The respondents of this study have managed to develop and improve on both these important elements.

Lee (2008) similarly questioned students on their perceptions of their learning experiences in the classroom versus the workplace. On an identical 7-point Likert scale where 1 represents *Decreased significantly* and 7 represents *Increased significantly*, all reported means fell between 5 and 6. The results of this study therefore concur with the mentioned study whereby students’ perceptions of the EL experiences are leaning predominantly towards the positive.

4.2.2.2 Standard deviation

Table 4.2 below indicates the standard deviation for Section 1 factors. The standard deviations for all factors are narrowly centred around the mean. Academic
Development is the only factor that has a deviation lower than 0.80. Responses for all factors were closely spread around the mean. This reiterates the fact that students experienced improved changes during their participation in EL.

Table 4.2 Standard deviations of perceived level of change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONDENTS’ PERCEIVED LEVEL OF CHANGE</th>
<th>STANDARD DEVIATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Development</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Development</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-skills Development</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Development</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2.3 Cronbach Alphas

Table 4.3 below indicates the Cronbach Alphas for the perceived level of change factors, which measures the internal consistency of items. The first three factors have high Alpha scores which indicate that these factors are reliable and internally consistent. Academic Development has a very low Alpha score of 0.10; this indicates a lack of internal consistency and reliability and this was further explored during the interviews conducted. The first two elements “Motivation to learn in the lecture room” and “Motivation to graduate” are more closely related than the third element of “Desire to pursue lifelong learning”, which potentially contributed to the low Alpha score of Academic Development.

Table 4.3 Cronbach Alphas of perceived level of change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Cronbach Alpha</th>
<th>Average Inter-item correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Development</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Development</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work skills Development</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Development</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The development of the PLACE model (Parks et al., 2008:49) found the Cronbach Alphas for Work-skills Development to be 0.66 and for Academic Development 0.67. The Alpha for Work-skills Development can be said to be more consistent with that of Parks et al. (2008) with a slight 0.03 difference. On the other hand, the difference between the Academic Development of this study and that of Parks et al. (2008) is a much more significant anomaly. Therefore this concept was further explored during the interviews conducted.

4.2.3 Respondents’ Perceived Level of Importance of Each Factor

Respondents were asked to rate their perception of the importance of each factor, regardless of their level of change, on a 7-point Likert scale of 1 = “Not at all important”, 2 = “Low importance”, 3 = “Slightly important”, 4 = “Neutral”, 5 = “Moderately important”, 6 = “Very important”, 7 = “Extremely important”.

4.2.3.1 Measures of Central Tendency

In terms of respondents’ perceptions of the importance of the factors, the mean indicates an average of between 6.1 and 6.4, representing “Very important”, for all factors. The median ranged between 6.1 and 6.7, also representing “Very important”, for all four factors as indicated in Figure 4.2 below. The mode was 7 consistent across all four factors, which indicate that respondents most frequently indicated that these factors are “Extremely important”.
Parks et al. (2008:43) found that more than 50% of respondents indicated 6 or 7 as their answers for 16 out of the 29 items. The measures of central tendency of this study also indicate that students perceived these factors to be of high importance.

4.2.3.2 Standard Deviation

Table 4.4 below indicates the standard deviation for perceived level of importance. Contradictory to Section one’s standard deviations, Personal Development is the only factor that is below 0.60 with Academic Development being slightly over 0.60. All four factors have a standard deviation of less than 1, which indicates that the responses were closely centred around the mean.

Table 4.4 Standard deviations of perceived level of importance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCEIVED LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE</th>
<th>STANDARD DEVIATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Development</td>
<td>0,57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Development</td>
<td>0,96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Skills Development</td>
<td>0,82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Development</td>
<td>0,63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.6 Measures of central tendency for perceived level of importance
4.2.3.3 Cronbach Alphas

Illustrated below in Table 4.5 are the Cronbach Alphas for Section 2 factors which questioned respondents on their perceptions of the importance of each of the factors. All Alpha scores were very high, which indicate a high level of reliability and internal consistency of the factors studied. The perceived level of change Cronbach Alpha in Section 1 was 0.01 for Academic Development whereas it has a 0.64 Alpha for level of importance. Respondents may have perceived their personal level of change to not have been significant but they nevertheless view these elements as important.

Table 4.5 Cronbach Alphas of perceived level of importance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Cronbach Alpha</th>
<th>Average Inter-item correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Development</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Development</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work skills Development</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Development</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.4 Most Important Factor

Respondents were asked to rank the four factors in order of importance. Personal Development was identified 19 times as the most important factor, followed by Academic Development listed 14 times as most important. Career Development and Work-skills Development both were identified 11 times as the most important factor. Figure 4.7 represents these rankings.
According to Clements and Cord (2013:114), if students are able to improve themselves and increase in personal developmental capacity, they will give themselves competitive advantage over those students who did not complete any EL programme. However, the results of Delorenzo (2000:19) found that there was no direct effect of participation in EL programmes and self-efficacy, career decision-making and internal locus of control of respondents. Contradictory to Delorenzo’s (2000) results, the respondents of the current study not only see these factors as important as in Figure 4.7 above but as indicated in Figure 4.5, have experienced moderate to significant changes in all four these factors.

### 4.2.5 Perceived Level of Change and Perceived Level of Importance comparison

Table 4.6 below draws a comparison of the data discussed above. The measures of central tendency were relatively consistent, particularly the modes with 7 indicated 6 out of 8 times. Respondents experienced high levels of change and perceive these factors to be of high importance. The means and medians ranged between 5.58 and
6.67 in both sections, which is also steady and indicate that respondents felt that their personal level of change increased either slightly or moderately. They perceived all factors to be moderately important to very important. The data is therefore heavily skewed towards the positive end of the spectrum.

There are significant differences between the standard deviation for Personal Development and that for Academic Development. They are the only two factors with standard deviations below 0.60. Personal Development in Section 1 however had a standard deviation of 0.87. Academic Development’s standard deviations in both sections were low in comparison to all other factors. The Cronbach Alpha of Section one’s Academic Development was significantly lower than all other Alpha scores.

**Table 4.6 Comparative table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLACE Factors</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Cronbach Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Dev - Section1</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Dev - Section2</td>
<td>6.17</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Dev - Section1</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Dev - Section2</td>
<td>6.15</td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-skills Dev Section1</td>
<td>5.74</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-skills Dev Section2</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Dev Section1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>6.33</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Dev Section2</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses for both Sections 1 and 2 were generally skewed towards the positive. The measures of central tendency including means, modes and medians reported were all above 5 and the standard deviation for all factors were very low, which indicates that scores were predominantly centred around the mean. Cronbach Alpha scores were high, which indicates internal consistency of the factors. The Alpha score
for Academic Development in the first section was low at 0.10 and this was explored further during the follow-up interviews.

4.3 QUALITATIVE DATA FROM QUESTIONNAIRES

The questionnaire contained two open-ended questions related to respondents’ work experiences which will be presented in narrative format.

4.3.1 Previous Work Experience

Four themes emerged from this data namely No experience, Volunteer work, Experience – tourism related, Experience – not tourism related. There were a few respondents who answered this question related to their Experiential Learning Experiences. These responses were removed from this section and included in the correct section.

Theme 1: No experience

For several respondents, experiential learning was their first work experience:

“I haven’t worked before, so everything I’ve learnt so far is new to me.”
“No experience whatsoever before I worked/doing experiential learning. I was not working before.”
“Experiential learning module was my first job.”

Theme 2: Volunteer work

There were respondents who indicated that their prior work experience was not for remuneration, but was on a voluntary basis.

“I only volunteered in places that were not related to tourism.”
“This voluntary work at Iron Man has increased skills of “thinking on my feet”.”
Theme 3: Experience – tourism related

In this theme one respondent indicated “I have had the opportunity of working in the tourism industry, such as retail.” No other respondents had prior work experience in the tourism industry.

Theme 4: Experience – not tourism related

The largest theme of this question included those respondents who had work experiences prior to their EL but they were not tourism related work experiences. This theme was further divided into 4 categories namely Positive experiences, Negative experiences, Money-motivated experiences, General experiences.

The positive comments in the category of non-tourism related work experience included respondents indicating that even though their experiences were not tourism related, they still had meaningful experiences:

“Well prior to that I worked at two different places where I was fortunate to have been surrounded by amazing colleagues, I was hardworking and was really good at what I did. I enjoyed every moment of it regardless of a few challenging experiences.”

“Each environment is different, however before my experiential learning programme, my prior experience was pleasant and useful.”

Those respondents, who fell in the negative experiences category, had slightly negative experiences prior to their experiential learning indicating the following:

“Low income, not related to tourism.”

“Had no meaning, before I was not interested at all in one work I did. It became something I had to do and not something I looked forward to doing.”
Several respondents indicated that their work experiences prior to EL were only done in order to generate an income and not necessarily career building or working towards gaining experience or knowledge about the tourism industry:

“Prior work experiences were merely just to get by and make sure I have enough money to get to university and back. So that was never career driven but rather a way of survival.”

“I was not learning anything from especially tourism related things as I was there just to make money.”

“I would describe past work experiences as very informal, wasn’t seen as important. Just a way of generating a quick buck.”

There were further general comments from respondents regarding their prior work experiences that were not related to tourism with one respondent also referring to the importance of the academic element of the EL programme:

“They were holiday jobs there were no importance placed on them, whereas experiential learning had to do about obtaining marks and goal orientated.”

“I did not have any tourism related experience, used to work for as a brand ambassador for a promotions company.”

4.3.2 Experiential Learning Experience

Six themes emerged from this data namely Personal Development, Career Development, Academic Development, Industry knowledge, Positive experiences and Negative experiences.

Theme 1: Personal Development

In the first theme namely Personal Development, respondents noted that they developed and grew as individuals as a result of their EL experience. Three further categories were identified for this theme namely Making friends, Interactions with colleague and Interactions with guests.
Some respondents felt that they made very good friends during their EL programme, which indicate an improvement in interpersonal skills.

“I miss the last four months of it because I adapted well, made friends, mastered my duties and loved the company.”

“Made a lot of long-time friends.”

“I made couple of friends as well.”

In the category of interactions with colleagues, respondents realised the importance of team work and good employee relations and also to adapt to the working environment in order to be successful.

“It helped me a lot because as an individual I can’t grow on my own. I have to work with others as a team so that I can know that I can help here and there with my suggestions.”

“I had to I have learned a lot of different and interesting facts how to work together as a team”

“I learn to adapt to a changing environment around me on a daily basis”

The third category of interactions with guests found respondents commenting on how they learnt to work with international tourists and clients in general. These are vital skills in the tourism industry and respondents realised how this helped them grow.

“meeting international tourists and learning new tasks to do every day.”

“interacting with tourists from different countries”

“I learnt how to handle stressful situations, deal with different people and communicate effectively with clients.”

**Theme 2: Career Development**

The second theme that was identified was Career Development. Respondents felt that working in the industry has helped shape their career goals and made them realise which sector of the industry they are most interested in. Two categories emerged from this theme namely, Shaping of career goals and Entrepreneurial goals.
Respondents felt that the EL experience helped shape their career goals and aspirations. They also felt that EL helped direct their career decisions.

“I learnt a lot about job opportunities or career paths that I could possibly pursue.”

“I am more interested in the development angle of tourism, creation of tourism attractions and the strategies and planning placed within the industry.”

“It helped a lot it was a catalyst to my career development.”

“They helped shape my career goals. Give me an indication of where I want to be in the future.”

The second category of entrepreneurial goals emerged as respondents mentioned that their EL experience nurtured a desire to start and run their own business. Respondents also felt that the EL experience built on their ability to run a tourism business successfully.

“I am working at a company that started up two years ago, so it is still in its growth phase. This resulted in me being involved in all sections of the company daily. I am not only learning about tourism related work, but also how to start up and run a business and what it entails.”

“I actually think I can run my own business.”

“I even developed a business idea.”

**Theme 3: Academic Development**

*Academic Development* emerged as a theme as respondents discussed the realisation that the theoretical elements discussed in the classroom is relevant and can be applied to the workplace. The EL experience also made them realise the significance of theoretical content.

“It was motivating to realise that most of the work covered in class is relevant to the workplace.”

“My experiential learning experience was exciting because now I could see the theory that was mentioned in my classes.
“I learnt to interpret and relate all the work that I learn from my modules to the reality of tourism field.”

Further discussions that emerged from the theme of Academic Development included the following:

“It help us come/realise that I can’t stop at a diploma!”

“Something that kept me motivated while completing my diploma.”

“I have also managed to realise the importance of the academic development.”

Theme 4: Industry knowledge

The theme Industry knowledge was dominated by respondents who felt that their knowledge of the industry was increased and improved and they acknowledge that they had limited knowledge about the industry prior to their EL experience.

“It was very beneficial for me as I got first-hand experience on how the tourism industry works.”

“The experience opened my eyes and gave me the broad knowledge as at first I didn’t know what the tourism field is all about.”

“It enlightened me to the working world, before I did not know how the hospitality industry worked until I experienced it.”

There was however one respondent in the theme of Industry knowledge who felt that having worked in the industry, they now realise that they do not want to have a career in the hospitality industry.

“As a result of the programme, it gave me the realisation that I do not want to work within the hotel industry regarding tourism.”

Theme 5: Positive experiences

Positive experiences of respondents were further divided into four categories. The first category was related to general positive comments that respondents made
regarding their experiential learning. These included the informative, educational as well as enjoyment aspects of the experience.

“Insightful”
“It was educational”
“Awesome!!”
“Fun, nerve-wrecking, educational and interesting”
“Wonderful. Truly life-changing experience”

The second category of the positive experiences related to respondents’ interactions with other staff members that added to their positive experiences during their experiential learning:

“It was the best experience for me because I was working in central reservations office. I have learned a lot from my supervisor as he was so kind and allowing me the opportunity to learn everything possible that they do in the office.”

“Working with people who were friendly, had patience to take their time and teach me on how to operate a business and lastly were like a family to me.”

“I learnt a lot from my experiential learning experience. I worked in a healthy and positive environment and I was excited to go to work each and every morning. I felt like I belong there and was happy all the time till my six month period ended.”

The third category indicates how respondents had positive experiences and enjoyed the meeting of new people during their EL experiences.

“It was a good learning experience, learning interesting and new facts and people.”

“I loved and enjoyed my experiential learning and I met a lot of people.”

“My experiential learning was exciting, Had the opportunity of meeting many people.”
The fourth category refers to those respondents who recognised the academic element of the EL experience.

“Having this experiential learning in our course is helping us a lot. Thank you.”

“The money we as “interns” get are nothing compared to how real this is from lectures and lecture venues/student life. The experience we get is unmatched and really put things in perspective.”

Theme 6: Negative experiences

The theme Negative experiences were sub-divided into three categories. The first category related to “Entire experience was negative”. Respondents in this category felt that their entire experience during the EL programme was extremely negative and not worthwhile:

“Not so great because the managers for other departments were selfish and I felt they were intimidated by us (meaning the students) and they always took credit for the work we did.”

“Not the best experience I thought it would be and I didn’t learn much from it because some students were allowed in the meetings with the general staff and weren’t included (favouritism in the workplace).”

“My experience was not pleasant or beneficial in any form. I was de-motivated to work in this industry, the staff had no passion or drive for what they are doing.”

“Terrible experience”

The second category related to experiences that “Started negative but ended well”. Respondents experienced difficulty during their first few months and took some time to adapt to the work environment and when they managed to adapt, their experience was worthwhile.

“The experience for me at first was horrible. I was not working at an organisation which I was interested in and it was very lonely at work. Once I
started doing things on my own and was given an opportunity to make important decisions by myself I started to enjoy work.”

“At first it was a disappointment and led to a mini-depression because I don’t study three years to be a receptionist but later it was an eye-opener for me to succeed.”

“Very challenging at first, found it difficult to adapt to the job itself and new province. Tasks were hard and felt like I was being picked on working schedule was terrible but at the end of it all I miss the last four months.”

The third category included those respondents who experienced only “Certain parts of the experience were negative”. They acknowledged that the experience was good but admitted that they experienced difficult and challenging times as well.

“… however there were hard times caused by too much work.”

“…however the environment was not always pleasant as there were many staff politics.”

“Colleagues were very cruel and mean at times there will use me as their doormat.”

4.4 QUALITATIVE DATA FROM INTERVIEWS

The quantitative data was analysed and a few anomalies emerged. There were four respondents whose responses deviated from the normal positive experiences and comments. Subsequently, two respondents who had particularly negative experiences were chosen to have follow-up interviews with. Furthermore, one respondent who had very positive experiences, scoring predominantly 6 and 7 in both Section 1 and 2 of the questionnaire was also interviewed. A fourth interview was conducted with a respondent whose responses included both very negative and very positive responses. Participants will be referred to as Participant 1 to 4. The qualitative data will be presented as themes based on the six propositions as identified by Kolb and Kolb (2005:194), which was the basis of the qualitative data
collected. Academic Development was added as an additional theme as the Cronbach Alpha of this factor was extremely low in comparison to the other factors.

Parks et al. (2001:30) note that administrators of Cooperative Education and EL programmes should never assume that simply because students were placed in the workplace that learning is taking place. There should be continued monitoring and evaluation of these programmes and the workplaces in order to ensure that learning takes place. The following discussions will look at how students have experienced learning in different facets and areas of their EL experiences.

4.4.1 Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes

Kolb and Kolb’s first proposition (2005:194) look at the process of learning and how participants experienced the differences in their own behaviour. This proposition highlights the fact that the end results are not necessarily as important as the actual experience and process that students go through when they learn. As indicated by some of the discussions below, this is not necessarily the case with students as for them EL has a potential specific outcome.

Participant 1 explained how the outcome of learning something may not always be the way one plans it. This in itself presents a learning opportunity as the student may be able to better handle the situation in future.

“What you read and what you take in and then you create a scenario in your head and then when it actually comes to real act you just, sometimes you just stutter and then you just get nervous.”

Participant 2 discussed at length how they experienced the process of learning during the first few months of EL. This participant had difficulty adapting at first, started getting used to the way things were being done and only when left alone by the manager, did it become apparent that learning had taken place.
“So I was there alone. I had to make all the decisions on my own, so then I think I became comfortable and it started being fine.”

The issue brought up by Participant 3 was the fact that students do not know what they are supposed to learn or what management expect them to learn in order to have a successful EL experience and potentially be employed post-EL. For students this is often the desired outcome and it is not necessarily about the learning experience.

“… you can be there for the sake of training and the manager might as well pretend that you’re doing a great job ever since in fact some of us don’t even get paid. So in your mind for the fact that you’re there for the entire month you realise that I have impressed them and only to find out ag you didn’t meet their requirements.”

The issue of students wanting to find employment at the place where they completed their EL experience was also touched on by Participant 1.

“You get to a place, you do experiential learning, and you know, you are, you’ve proven yourself so much that they want you to stay, to carry on working there.”

Discussing the issue of being employed at the workplace where you completed the EL, Participant 1 had the following to say, which points to an extremely negative experience:

“And there [where I worked] it was… even if they offered, I will turn it down.”

4.4.2 All learning is relearning

This proposition looks at students entering the workplace having already learnt from their higher education experiences as well as pre-university experiences. Certain elements learnt in the workplace will be relearning and others will be new information.
Three of the four participants indicated that they could clearly recognise concepts that they have learnt in the classroom that they were exposed to again in the workplace.

“For marketing yes. I created a new slogan for the website. That basically came from [participant mentions lecturer’s name]’s work, some marketing work as well. Some things I relearnt like this programme thingy we had worked on but I knew what was going on in Excel, so I taught her on Excel and things.”

“I would say it’s client service, what is relevant from what I taught in class was basically client service, how to interact with clients.”

“… the manager kept on stressing, no we need to know what country they are from for marketing reasons and it dawned on me, that oh yah, we had done this in class that as an organisation you need to know your clientele. Like, what is your target market and [mentions lecturer’s name] had explained this to me.”

Participant 2 recognised that as much as some of the learning was relearning, there were elements that were new and she had to learn from scratch.

“They created a programme for her to capture the guests and bookings and all of that. There I knew some things, but I learnt new things.”

In stark contrast, Participant 1 felt that the EL experience did not bring any opportunities to relearn anything that was taught in the classroom.

“Because what we, the work we were exposed to is nothing related to a textbook, it’s nothing that you can practice from what you have studied.”

4.4.3 Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world

The third proposition argues that in order for learning to occur there has to be resolution between opposing modes of adaptation to the world. This often includes how people’s beliefs and perceptions about their world may change as a result of a learning experience. Participants were questioned on how their personal beliefs and ideas were challenged or changed as a result of their EL experience.
Participants 1 and 2 managed to turn their negative experience of the EL into a motivational tool.

“My experiential learning was, I don’t wanna say bad. I felt as if there was more that I could’ve been exposed to. I also felt we were undermined; we weren’t given a platform, a chance to prove ourselves. For me, I took it as motivation. Because after that I actually figured out what I wanted and what to work on to get it. I knew that if I wanted to be in higher more positions than those there, obviously I know I’ll start at the bottom level…”

“Because if you’re not in a place that didn’t meet your expectations therefore at some point, for instance there was no motivation behind the entire in-service training. So at some point to me it didn’t help, but at the very same time I didn’t for instance drop my marks at school because I had to believe that as much as in-service training didn’t meet my expectations, all is not lost. I can still graduate and maybe go to a place that I will develop mentally, physically.”

It was recognised by Participant 2 that people do not always disrespect or undermine a younger individual as they had expected the employees to do.

“The thing is basically sometimes in the industry you see someone that’s been there for years, someone very young comes in with a bigger position or whatever than you and they treat you like crappy. Sometimes that does happen. They were very respectful, I respected them, they respected me. And I mean they were people that was way older than what I am.”

Participant 4 was also inspired and motivated by the EL experience.

“It really changed my perception on you know like job employability, looking at my fellow-classmates, it kinda did make me a bit competitive, especially with that 3rd year seeing how I sort of benchmarked against other people in terms of employability.”
4.4.4 Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world

This proposition focuses on how learning does not only affect one area of a person during an experience but is often all encompassing and changes them. On entering the workplace for EL experiences, students arrive as individuals with their own personalities, ideas and goals. The workplace will either add to their personalities or change some of their personality traits. This section particularly looked at how students changed in terms of their personal growth and advancement.

Participants were questioned on how they think the EL experience has changed them and how they feel they have grown or matured as individuals.

“Changed me personally? Yes, I think in the sense that I was exposed. It actually made me think that OK, I am not so, not so unfortunate in some other areas. It actually gave me perspective.”

“It changed me in the sense of making decisions on my own. I was a person who was very afraid to take initiative and just think for myself. It gave me like time to grow, I basically learnt to do things on my own. So I mean, yah, that helped me in making my own decisions and being happy with the decisions I make.”

“It really was a catalyst for a lot of change in my life. If we’re looking at in terms of working with people. I’m somebody who prefers to work on my own. I am a bit introverted although I am sociable, so that was a big challenge for me because I lived with some of my other fellow co-workers. In terms of communicating and being assertive, like it definitely helped me with my assertiveness. It also helped me in terms of my concentration. I am somebody who tends to be a little bit absent-minded in that respect and at [mentions establishment’s name] you literally had to make sure you knew all of the details.”
Participant 3 felt that EL had not changed them.

“Not really because it didn’t meet my expectations at all, but I was there simply because I was scared to look for other places because we were bound by time you know.”

4.4.5 Learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment

The fifth proposition of Kolb and Kolb (2005:194) evaluates how learning results from interactions between the person and their chosen environment. The work environment generally has a different atmosphere and character than the lecture setup in a higher educational institution. How students acted and behaved in their university environment may have been different from how they behaved in the workplace.

For the first category of this theme, participants were questioned on how their interactions were with their colleagues and how this influenced them. Participants had both positive and negative experiences and often interactions with management differed from interactions with other colleagues.

“With my managerial interactions it was just orders, you just follow orders and procedure. With the rest of the other staff, it was more, how do you say, more in a proper manner. We got to know each other on different levels. It was more also personal type of.”

“Yah, I can say that I had a problem with the management. But due to the fact that the office was not fully equipped so I was not happy about that and I didn’t even like shy to tell him that I’m not happy about that. But other than that we were cool.”

“I would say good. Everyone was very respectable. We all became friends in the end.”
“It was really wonderful, it was really amazing. They were kind of like my family. There were instances where there were some issues and they were people with personalities that I just had to work with.

Participant 4 also told of an incident where they had to confront a colleague in order to make sure that the working environment was pleasant.

“I try not to be a confrontational person and I was gonna let it go but I realised I will be seeing this person in the office every day. And I just went up to her and I closed the office door and I was like what have you been saying about me? And I confronted her and we got it all out in the open.”

Participant 3 felt that their work environment was not adequately prepared to handle tourists and it made their job as employees very difficult.

“But you know there were moments where we couldn’t like offer what they want due to the lack of facilities and equipment. For instance if a guest is looking for something and we have to call our manager since we don’t have a landline or internet to do research.”

In a further attempt to understand how participants interacted with their environment, in the second category they were asked to discuss their interactions with guests of the establishments.

“They were very strict. No interactions with guests at all. Just do your job.”

“There was one incident that was really bad, but most of them was good. They would send cards and stuff back to me saying they enjoyed their stay and thank you for helping them, and all of that, leaving presents at the door when they leave. So the interaction was good. And it was mostly international guests.”

“Tourists? Yah, they were great. Due to the fact that we didn’t have equipment, some of them were like irritated and others will just say OK, we will come back while we’re looking for their answers and then they never come back… So it was some sort of embarrassment.”
“Amazing, I absolutely, that’s actually one of the best things about my in-service. I think there was like maybe like two or three guests that I didn’t maybe that I didn’t like. But it wasn’t, generally like 99.9% it was like good experiences.”

4.4.6 Learning is the process of creating knowledge

Kolb (1984:41) indicates that in order for knowledge to be created, there has to be transformation of experiences and the collection of previous experiences and current experiences. Through the EL experiences, and previous classroom experiences, participants were able to recognise when knowledge was created for them and when they were learning.

“So I did everything, everything that she did. She even went on holiday. That’s when I started feeling comfortable, when she went away. She went on holiday twice while I was there. So, I was there alone. I had to make all the decisions on my own, so then I think I became comfortable and it started being fine.”

“Most of the things that you do at the workplace, you don’t do at varsity. Or things you do here, you don’t go do at the workplace.”

“There were certain things that I wasn’t aware of because clients will come and then ask and I will take that question, if I don’t know how to answer it to my manager. By doing that I discovered something new.”

“I gained practical information. Yes, I know how to deal with foreigners, yes I understand how to market now having dealt with these people. Yes, now I know how to work with people and what not, co-workers, managers and all of that.”

“There was no direct link between them [previous experiences] and the qualification that I have. Whereas now, I’ve actually worked in the industry. So yah, experiential learning definitely helped me.”
Participants were also questioned on their knowledge of the industry and whether or not EL improved this knowledge. Participant 3 felt that the establishment was ill-prepared for the industry and tourists.

“The office was not fully equipped in terms of resources. If they [tourists] see something that need to be researched or whatsoever, there’s no internet. And the worst part is that our landline, I started from December, I think February or March it was not working. We have to send a CallBack to our boss and while the client is waiting.”

Participants also had negative impressions of the industry being created through their EL experiences as well as perceptions of ignorance on the part of tourists.

“It has not [improved my knowledge of the tourism industry]”

“Not really because that was, ok, yes a bit with international tourists and things. Some people they don’t take note of your websites and stuff and they don’t really read to understand or ask questions about it. So you have to treat a guest, I think what I’ve learnt is you have to treat a guest like they’ve never seen your website. One guest asked where can they swim with dolphins, I mean really.”

4.4.7 Academic Development

In an attempt to address the low Cronbach Alpha score of Academic Development in Section 1 at 0.10 and an average inter-item correlation of 0.02, participants were questioned on what they perceive to be important for Academic Development and what additional elements could be important in this factor. The following were their suggestions.

The tourism department at the chosen institution facilitates the running of a Galileo course, which is a Global Distribution System (GDS) that provides computerised reservation systems in the tourism and hospitality industry. Students choose whether they want to participate in the course and have to pay for this separately from their
tourism course fees. Participant 1 had the following to say regarding the Galileo course:

“… the Galileo course. I think it should be included in our course and not that it’s external and you pay for it externally.”

Students participate in their EL module during their third year, the first semester. Participant 1 also felt that this exposure to the industry should occur more frequently from the first year of study and not only in the third year.

“I think the department can expose students more from first year. Maybe more excursions.”

Similarly, Participant 3 felt that more practical elements need to be included in the programme as the industry is very hands-on and the theoretical aspects do not necessarily cover everything.

“Because to us theory is not enough, we need to go to those places and see how they are operating so by the time we finish we can have a clear understanding of how the tourism industry runs. So to me, theory is not enough.”

When Participant 2 was questioned on the academic related elements, it was indicated that students need to be made aware of the importance of studying and learning to understand concepts and theories rather than to study for memorisation. The respondent explained the issue of tourists’ different accents and how important it was to first understand what they were saying before you can actually assist them.

“… with coming back to university and learning and so it’s read and understand for yourself and not just parrot-style studying and all of that.”

Participant 4 indicated that the academic instruction and advice do not clearly indicate to students the link between academic performance and employability. The participant noted that students fail to realise the importance of having a sound academic record and how this influences their employment opportunities.
“I heard about a girl who graduated two years ago who still has not worked. And of course this was somebody who had just barely made it, she finished her diploma in 5 years, she was just very slack about it and she did not associate her academic performance with her employability.”

The three elements included in the questionnaire for Academic Development to be evaluated by respondents included the following:

i. Motivation to learn in the lecture room

ii. Motivation to graduate

iii. Desire to pursue life-long learning

In an attempt to strengthen the internal consistency and reliability of this factor the following four elements could be added as suggested by participants:

i. Industry exposure and practical elements to be added throughout the three years

ii. Inclusion of a GDS or Central Reservation System (CSR) course in the programme

iii. Learning for understanding

iv. Link between academic performance and employability

4.5 LINKING RESEARCH OBJECTIVES TO THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine tourism students’ perceptions of their EL experiences based on the PLACE four-component model (Parks et al., 2008). Four objectives were identified. Based on the data analysis and discussions above, the four objectives will be discussed.

4.5.1 Experiential Learning’s Impact on Personal Development

Research objective 1 was to interpret tourism students’ perceptions regarding experiential learning’s impact on their Personal Development. As evidenced in Figure
4.7, Personal Development was indicated 19 times by respondents as the most important factor. They also consistently indicated that their Personal Development “Increased slightly”, “Increased moderately” or “Increased significantly” as a result of their participation in EL. With respondents’ previous work experiences it was indicated that they felt EL helped them make friends, improved interactions with colleagues and guests or tourists. Participants of the interviews discussed how the EL experience brought about fundamental changes in their personality in terms of being more assertive, making decisions on their own and being able to motivate themselves.

Chan (2012:405) explains that regardless of whether or not an EL experience was perceived to be positive or negative by participants, it will have tremendous impacts on their learning processes. This idea is supported by one of the participants who indicated that “Even if you’ve had a negative experience, you benefit in the sense that you now, you’ve had that six months and you know how the industry works and you know what you like and what you dislike”. Two of the participants who had a particularly negative EL experience were also able to see the positive side and use the experience as a motivational tool.

A participant in Chan’s study (2012) commented on the importance of being comfortable with your EL experience to fall short of your expectations. One of the participants of the current study felt that their EL did not impact them at all and they did not learn anything because the entire EL experience did not live up to their expectations. Lien and Hakim (2013:133) argue that students often find it very difficult to understand the benefits and impact of industry experiences as they do not necessarily walk away with any tangible elements. During a semester in a classroom they may have assessment marks and evaluation sheets that will give them a sense of how they have performed. This sense of knowing how your performance measures up to expectations is challenging for students as indicated by one participant: “… the manager might as well pretend that you’re doing a great job ever since in fact some of us don’t get paid… only to find out ag you didn’t meet their requirements…”. 
Being able to interact interpersonally with both colleagues and management can also be a deciding factor for Personal Development (Parks et al., 2008:48). Certain participants had negative experiences with the management of the workplace and others had great interactions with the management. A general observation is that participants of the interviews all had positive experiences with their interactions with their colleagues. These findings concur with that of Richardson (2010:190) who found that respondents – more than 70% – had very positive experiences with their colleagues but generally negative experiences with the management. Certain respondents of the current study felt that managers were intimidated by the students in the workplace, they felt undermined as employees and they saw favouritism in the workplace with some students receiving preferential treatment. These sentiments held by students are congruent with Richardson (2010) whose respondents noted that management dealt unfairly with them, they did not reward staff for doing a good job, they did not respect students and more than 60% claimed that they did not have good relations with the management.

4.5.2 Experiential Learning’s Impact on Career Development

This objective aimed to determine tourism students’ views of the impact experiential learning had on their Career Development. The means reported for Career Development were between 5 “Increased slightly” and 6 “Increased moderately”. Career Development also emerged as a theme during the open-ended questions in the questionnaire where participants indicated that EL helped shape their careers and further created entrepreneurial goals.

A difficulty identified by Lien and Hakim (2013:134) is that EL participants are less likely to value the experience if they have no intentions of pursuing the sector further. One participant noted that “For me, working at a guesthouse no, because I wanna get in transport so that’s something totally different. So that [EL] didn’t really [help build my career]”. Certain participants of the current study were reluctant to agree that EL
helps build careers. They felt that if they found EL placement at different establishments in the tourism industry that might have helped build their career.

Parks et al. (2008:48) identified the ability of students to apply theoretical knowledge as an important element for Career Development. This notion was well supported by respondents who were able to identify specific modules or subject matter where they were able to apply their theoretical knowledge such as marketing skills and target market identification as well as client services. It is argued by Lee and Dickson (2010:32) that the significantly high scores of the respondents of their study related to career goals and how this impacts Career Development is not surprising as these are the very benefits that EL is expected to produce.

4.5.3 Experiential Learning’s Impact on Work-skills Development

The third objective of this study was to ascertain the type of work-skills the experiential learning module had developed in tourism students. The mode reported for Work-skills Development was 7 representing “Increased significantly”.

One of the most important work-skills that students need to develop in order to be employable is that of communication. Wan and Kong (2012:5) indicate that there are intense face-to-face interactions in the tourism industry and businesses’ service quality is often judged based on these interactions. If employees are not able to communicate effectively with guests, it directly affects perceptions of service rendered. EL is an opportunity for students to practice their communication skills with both domestic and international tourists. However, one of the participants had indicated that they were under strict instructions to have no interactions with guests at all. A potential reason for this practice by the particular workplace could be related to the findings of Wang, Ayres and Huyton (2010) who found that there are significant differences between what the industry wants and the type of graduates universities produce. Wang et al. (2010:10) speculated that there is an apparent failure on the part of HEIs to produce job-ready graduates. Not allowing students to interact with
guests however, removes the opportunity for those students to practice this very vital skill.

A further important element in Work-skills Development is increased understanding of the tourism industry and how organisations function (Parks et al., 2008:48). Responses of participants indicated that the EL experiences helped them understand international tourists better as well as created awareness of certain elements in the industry that they were not aware of. Another participant however felt that even though the experience helped them understand the industry better, they have also come to realise that the industry is very complex and stated the following: “… tourism is very broad and in your 3 years you’re taught basically everything… there are a lot of things like airlines that I did not encounter in my experiential learning, not because the place was bad…”.

An additional finding by Wang et al. (2010:11) is that the tourism industry practitioners have a very narrow, commercial, directly relevant business practices approach whereas tourism academics have a more broad, theoretical and exploratory approach to graduate development. This is also evident in the type of work-skills that employers require of students. A respondent of the current study indicated their desire to have exposure to managerial functions in the industry: “Because I felt as if we’re going to shadow maybe a manager or someone in charge to see how they run, how they operated. Or at least take us to one meeting, at least sit quietly, take notes or something like that”. This participant was also frustrated by the type of duties they had to perform at the workplace, without rotation to other areas of the organisation: “I mean setting a table, that’s general, you do that at home. Doing laundry, do laundry at home”.

4.5.4 Experiential Learning’s Impact on Academic Development

The final objective was to determine tourism student’s perceptions of the relation between the experiential learning module and their Academic Development. The
mean, median and mode reported for this factor were all between 6 “Increased moderately” and 7 “Increased significantly”. From the qualitative data collected in the questionnaires, Academic Development emerged as a theme. Participants were able to recognise the importance of the theoretical elements and how they are associated with the practice and the workplace. The academic element also emerged as a category of the theme Positive experiences with participants understanding the role of EL in their overall qualification and the perspective that it brought.

Lee and Dickson (2010:29) argue that EL and Cooperative Education programmes should not be seen as alternatives or replacements for theoretical and academic functions, but the central focus must always remain continued student learning. As stated by one participant: “Because to us theory is not enough”. The participant commented on the importance of visiting the workplaces in order to help them better understand how the industry functions. The inclusion of EL programmes can therefore be seen as supplementary and complementary to theoretical programmes rather than replacement.

Academic Development scored the lowest Cronbach Alpha of 0.10 and an average inter-item correlation of 0.02. In an attempt to increase the reliability and internal consistency of this factor, this issue was further explored during the interviews conducted. Academic Development was added as a seventh theme and the responses of participants were wide-ranging. These included suggestions of an inclusive GDS module in the tourism qualification, increased exposure to the industry from first year and increased importance being placed on the connectedness of employability and academic performance. Mayburry and Swanger (2011:34) argue that the lack of agreed upon curricula for tourism and hospitality creates the problem in the creation of academic qualifications. One qualification may have an academic, theoretical approach and another may have a more technical skill-oriented approach. In reference to participants’ suggestions for Academic Development, there is also a desire for more technical skills and a practice-oriented approach from students. EL coordinators and programme developers should bear in mind that a synergy between
academia and the workplace is more desirable, they are more powerful functions together than on their own (Lee & Dickson, 2010:33).

When participants were further questioned on the impact of EL on their Academic Development, their responses ranged from a more mature approach to their academic performances where one participant used EL as motivation to perform better in class. Another participant also noted that as much as the EL experience was negative, they did not allow that to influence their academic performance: “… as much as in-service training didn’t meet my expectations, all is not lost”. One participant had seen both positive and negative impacts of EL on other students’ academic performances post-EL: “Some people it has influenced them very positively, I’ve seen people being very motivated afterwards, but at the same time I’ve also seen people become very demotivated because they have worked”. Due to a participant’s inability to see what they have learnt in the classroom as relevant in the workplace; they felt that EL did not impact their academic performance.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the findings of this study through the usage of diagrammatical formats and narratives. Data was analysed and interpreted through comparisons with previous research. The study utilised an explanatory mixed methods design whereby quantitative data is collected first with follow up qualitative data. The data was subsequently presented in the same manner. The measures of central tendencies, standard deviations and Cronbach Alpha scores were discussed for all factors, including both perceived level of change as well as perceived level of importance of factors.

Qualitative data collected from the questionnaires’ open-ended questions as well as qualitative data collected from interviews were analysed and divided into themes and subsequent categories. The factors of the four-component model were prominent in all qualitative data. The qualitative data collected from the interviews were presented
based on the six propositions of Kolb and Kolb (2005), with a supplementary theme added for Academic Development. The four research objectives of the study were discussed and compared to relevant literature.

The following chapter will discuss the limitations, recommendations and conclusion to the study.
CHAPTER 5
SYNOPSIS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to determine tourism students’ perceptions of their Experiential Learning (EL) experiences based on the PLACE four-component model. Four objectives were identified, namely:

i. To interpret tourism students’ perceptions regarding experiential learning’s impact on their personal development.

ii. To determine tourism students’ views of the impact experiential learning had on their career development.

iii. To ascertain the type of work-skills the experiential learning module had developed in tourism students.

iv. To determine tourism student’s perceptions of the relation between the experiential learning module and their academic development.

This final chapter will provide a synopsis of the presented chapters as well as the limitations encountered for the duration of the research project. Recommendations will be made to stakeholders of EL based on the findings of the study as well as for potential further research studies on the topic of EL.

5.2 SYNOPSIS

Chapter one was a brief introduction to the entire study and it highlighted the background and rationale of the study. The abovementioned purpose and objectives of the study were discussed with further justification for the significance of the study to stakeholders involved such as tourism industry operators, the tourism department at the chosen institution and the students themselves. The scope of the study was limited to tourism students who have completed their EL module at the chosen institution during the period 2013.
Chapter two discussed the related literature at length, including concept clarification related to Experiential Learning including Cooperative Education, Work-Based Learning and Work-Integrated Learning. These concepts were found to overlap and contradict at times with authors identifying EL as the overall umbrella of vocational training and the others are types of EL whereas other authors identify Cooperative Education as the main category with sub-categories such as EL. For the purposes of this study, EL was the preferred term as the respondents of this study were familiar with the term EL. An in-depth discussion of the PLACE four-component model, its origins and the importance of each of these four factors were also explicated. The research objectives of this study were directly linked to the four components namely Personal Development, Career Development, Work-skills Development and Academic Development. The Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) of Kolb (1984) and the six propositions of Kolb and Kolb (2005) were the theoretical frameworks for this study and were also discussed accordingly.

The research design and methodology of this study, which was a pragmatic study with a mixed methods design, was discussed in Chapter three. This study was based on an explanatory sequential design whereby quantitative data was first collected with follow-up qualitative data. The justifications for each chosen method were explicated and the philosophical underpinnings of the study were discussed. The data collection tool for the quantitative data was the PLACE four-component model and a pilot study was conducted in order to test the questionnaire in the current scenario. An interview schedule was used for the qualitative data and the six propositions of Kolb and Kolb (2005) were the basis of the qualitative data generated. Institutional ethical clearance was obtained as data was collected from students. The reliability and validity of the quantitative data as well as credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative data were further illustrated.

The presentation of findings through diagrammatical illustrations and narratives were presented in Chapter four. These findings were compared and contrasted against existing literature. The findings were further linked to the four research objectives that
were set out in Chapter one and were discussed based on the four components of the PLACE model. The measures of central tendencies all indicated that students responded favourably and positively to the impact that EL has had on their development and growth. Students’ experiences proved to have significant impact on all four components and the findings also suggested that students understand and appreciate the importance of these four components and the impact that EL can have on them.

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The following are specific limitations that were experienced during this study.

5.3.1 Small Sample Size

This study focused specifically on the cohort of tourism students who have completed their EL during the period 2013. The rationale for this decision was the fact that eighteen of these students had returned to the university to complete their Bachelor of Technology Tourism Management degree and were therefore more accessible than students who have completed their qualifications before 2013. Students who have not returned to the university were therefore more difficult to contact. This led to a small sample size that implies limited generalisations and cross-tabulations of the findings. The inclusion of tourism students from other educational institutions in the vicinity could have expanded this number. However, students from private colleges and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges do not necessarily go out to do their EL for six months continuously and their perceptions could have confounded the findings if they were included in the sample.

5.3.2 Fieldworker

Due to ethical clearance conditions, a fieldworker had to be trained to conduct
interviews with selected participants. This proved slightly cumbersome initially as the fieldworker was not able to probe participants adequately, which led to responses lacking depth at times. Multiple interviews were held with students who were not part of the qualitative data sample for the fieldworker to practice interviewing skills and the final four interviews which were conducted with the sampled participants proved to be more meaningful.

5.3.3 Ambiguous Question

Section three, question three of the questionnaire (see Addendum B) proved to be confusing for several respondents. Certain responses had to be removed from the data analysis as the question was inappropriately answered. This was not an issue that surfaced during the pilot study and was therefore not recognised as a potential difficulty. In spite of this challenge, it was found that the number of respondents who answered the question appropriately was sufficient for analysis.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section will discuss recommendations to the various stakeholders of the EL programme at the chosen institution based on the findings as presented in the previous chapter. Coll and Chapman (2000) refer to students, academic coordinators and industry supervisors as the Cooperative Education triangle as all three stakeholders are imperative to the success of EL programmes. These three stakeholders are therefore considered for recommendations made.

5.4.1 Recommendations to the Tourism Department at the Chosen Institution

One participant indicated during the interview that they were not allowed to have any contact with guests stating that “They were very strict. No interactions with guests at all. Just do your job.” The students also did not rotate among the different departments or areas of the workplace as was the expectation. This is contrary to
Clement and Cord (2013:117) who argue that graduate abilities may be learnt in the classroom but the soft skills that are sought after by industry operators can only be learnt in the workplace and this happens through interactions with colleagues and guests. Employers who participate in the EL programme therefore need to be made aware of the importance of this interaction and through setting clear guidelines and expectations to employers, the tourism department may be able to ensure that students have more meaningful experiences. Rotation among various departments at the workstation could be made compulsory if the workplace is interested in accommodating students for EL.

Assigning mentors to students could also be a requirement set in order to ensure that they have a full understanding of what happens in the workplace. One of the participants mentioned that they would have preferred to have shadowed someone at the workplace, or to simply be able to sit in on some meetings and make notes. This could potentially have given them a better understanding of the operations and exposed them to an activity that the classroom does not. This idea is supported by Cushen (2005:20) who highlights the importance of the appointment of a mentor and student support as key success factors to any EL programme.

It is noted by Clement and Cord (2013:117) that host organisations should be carefully selected and strict criteria should be created to evaluate workplaces in order to ensure that students enjoy a worthwhile and valuable experience. Workplaces that receive positive feedback from students should be the preferred workstations and workplaces that are rated as negative experiences need to be carefully monitored and evaluated as a suitable candidate for EL placement. A participant of this study had indicated that the basic facilities such as access to a telephone or internet were not available at the work station over a few months. Through rigorous monitoring and evaluation of workplaces, the department may be able to pressurise the workstation to rectify these issues, which are hindering students from having meaningful experiences.
5.4.2 Recommendations to Employers

Employers should rotate students amongst the different departments or sections of the organisation in order to ensure that the student leaves the workplace well versed with the workplace. Cushen (2005:82) discusses the importance of employers providing task variety to students in order to enhance their experiential experiences. The more departments and areas students are exposed to in the workplace, the more skills they are able to acquire, which will ultimately allow them to be more employable. Interactions with guests are vital as this will help to improve students’ communication skills. Students could have badges indicating that they are trainees or wear a different uniform from regular staff to show customers that these are students-in-training, which could generate more support from guests rather than irritation.

Mentors assigned to students could provide monthly reports on the progress of students to their supervisors or managers in order to follow the progress of students. By doing this, both students and the tourism department would be able to see whether or not students have learnt anything and how they have progressed over the six month period at the workplace. Wessels and Jacobsz (2008:18) found that academic staff is often more concerned with quality management in EL programmes than industry operators. Through mentorship, supervisors and managers are able to pay more attention to quality management and clear guidelines may be presented to students as to what are expected of them.

5.4.3 Recommendation to Students

One of the participants had emphasised the importance of self-development and how students need to take responsibility for their own growth and development. Students should therefore create personal goals for growth and skills development prior to their industry exposure. This could assist them in better choosing an establishment that could enhance their careers as some of the participants mentioned that the experience gained at the EL workplace was not necessarily in line with what their
career goals are. Students therefore need to be more proactive in their preparation prior to choosing an establishment. Gursoy, Rahman and Swanger (2012:32) note that students often have unrealistic expectations of the type of skills they will acquire and responsibilities they will have during EL. Through developing a personal plan, students will be able to be more realistic in terms of their own abilities and what the workplace can offer.

5.4.4 Recommendations for Further Research

In order to expand on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for potential further research studies.

5.4.4.1 Larger Sample Size

Due to the scope of this study, a small sample size of 38 respondents was used. A follow-up study could potentially include other cohorts of students from previous years at the chosen institution in order to obtain a larger sample size. Tourism students from other institutions could also be included with comparisons drawn between the different groups of students’ perceptions of their EL experiences. A larger sample size might be able to allow for more generalisations in findings. A similar study could also be conducted across various disciplines who participate in EL programmes in order to draw comparisons between the experiences of students at the chosen institution. This would yield a much larger sample size as well.

5.4.4.2 Other Stakeholders’ Perceptions

This study specifically highlighted the perceptions and experiences of one of the affected groups of EL. Employers are similarly important stakeholders in EL programmes and their perceptions, expectations and experiences of accommodating students at the workplace could also be assessed. A study of this nature would assist
the tourism department to better understand how to prepare students for the EL experience in order to maximise the potential benefits of workplace experiences.

As the third important stakeholder, a follow-up study could focus on the academic coordinator’ experiences and perceptions of the EL programme. There could potentially be challenges and obstacles that they face in terms of dealing with both students and demanding industry operators.

5.4.4.3 Pre- and post-EL studies

Pre- and post-EL research studies with tourism students could also be done in order to determine how different their perceptions, expectations and experiences are prior to EL and how the programme has fallen short or exceeded expectations. Pre- and post-EL studies may further contribute to the enhancement of the EL programme. This could also be expanded to include employers pre- and post-EL, particularly employers who have never accommodated students at their workplaces.

5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a synopsis of previous chapters comprised in this study. The limitations experienced during the study such as the inexperience of the fieldworker were indicated and how these limitations were dealt with. Three main recommendations were made to the tourism department at the chosen institution namely providing clear guidelines to employers, the appointment of a mentor at the workplace as well as careful selection of hosts. Further recommendations were made to the employers to rotate students and expose them to a variety of tasks in the workplace. Employers could also increase guest interactions, and have regular mentor checks to follow students’ progress.

Recommendations made to students involved them drawing up a growth and development plan for themselves prior to their EL experience and potentially prior to
them choosing a workplace in order to ensure they obtain maximum benefit from the experience. This chapter also included recommendations for further research studies including a study with a larger sample size and comparisons between various disciplines and not just tourism. The perceptions and experiences of employers and academic coordinators could also be taken into consideration in follow-up studies. A final recommendation for further research included pre- and post-EL studies.

The aim of this study was to determine how tourism students perceive their EL experiences and how they feel these experiences impacted their Personal Development, Career Development, Work-skills Development and Academic Development. Some students had very positive experiences and others extremely negative experiences and the latter made students feel that the experience was worthless. In the words of one of the participants “Even if you’ve had a negative experience, you benefit…” The value of EL experiences cannot be underestimated and continued efforts should be made to improve these experiences for students, whether it be through students taking more responsibility or through an amended structure of the programme.


Please carefully consider and answer all questions to the best of your ability. If you cannot / do not wish to answer a question, please leave it blank. All data provided will be kept confidential and used for statistical purposes only. Your participation is completely voluntary and if you decide not to participate there is no penalty.

SECTION 1: Rate your level of change with regard to these factors over the course of your experiential learning programme:

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<th>2 Decreased moderately</th>
<th>3 Decreased slightly</th>
<th>4 No change</th>
<th>5 Increased slightly</th>
<th>6 Increased moderately</th>
<th>7 Increased significantly</th>
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<td>Ability to creatively identify, formulate and solve problems</td>
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**Factor 1: Personal Development**

- Ability to set priorities
- Ability to follow through on tasks and projects
- Ability to take initiative
- Ability to communicate interpersonally
- Ability to manage time
- Self confidence
- Ability to adapt to change
- Ability to lead
- Ability to work with others to accomplish a goal
- Ability to make decisions
- Maturity
- Ability to creatively identify, formulate and solve problems
- Ability to manage money
- Awareness of social responsibility

**Factor 2: Career development**

- Practical work experience related to tourism
- Practical work experience related to my career goals
- Ability to apply knowledge
- Opportunity to learn from professionals in my field
- Professional network of contacts in my field
- Ability to view my career expectations realistically
- Clarity of career goals

**Factor 3: Work skills development**

- Ability to complete an oral presentation
- Ability to write in a business environment
- Ability to communicate with tourists (international tourists)
- Knowledge of how organisations in the tourism industry function

**Factor 4: Academic development**

- Motivation to learn in the classroom
- Motivation to graduate
- Desire to pursue life-long learning
SECTION 3: Answer the following questions

1. Prior to your experiential learning module, how would you best describe your past work experiences?
 __________________________________________
 __________________________________________
 __________________________________________
 __________________________________________

2. Overall, how would you describe your experiential learning experience?
 __________________________________________
 __________________________________________
 __________________________________________
 __________________________________________

3. Place the four factors in order of importance to you with 1 being most important and 4 least important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Development</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Skills Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Development</td>
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4. How would you change this questionnaire?
 __________________________________________
 __________________________________________
 __________________________________________
 __________________________________________

SECTION 4: Answer the following questions

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<td>Age:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex:</td>
<td>Male</td>
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</table>

THANK YOU
ADDENDUM B: FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Please carefully consider and answer all questions to the best of your ability. If you cannot / do not wish to answer a question, please leave it blank. All data provided will be kept confidential and used for statistical purposes only. Your participation is completely voluntary and if you decide not to participate there is no penalty.

SECTION 1: Rate the level of change you experienced with regard to these factors over the course of your experiential learning programme:

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<td>Understanding how organisations in the tourism industry function</td>
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### Factor 4: Academic development

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<tr>
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<th>2 Low importance</th>
<th>3 Slightly important</th>
<th>4 Neutral</th>
<th>5 Moderately important</th>
<th>6 Very important</th>
<th>7 Extremely important</th>
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<td>Motivation to learn in the classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivation to graduate</td>
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<td>Desire to pursue life-long learning</td>
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Please turn over
SECTION 3: Answer the following questions

1. Prior to your experiential learning module, how would you best describe your past work experiences?
   
   ____________________________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________________

2. Overall, how would you describe your experiential learning experience?
   
   ____________________________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________________

3. Place the four factors in order of importance to you with 1 being most important and 4 least important.

   | Personal Development |   |
   | Career Development   |   |
   | Work Skills Development |   |
   | Academic Development  |   |

SECTION 4: Answer the following questions

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THANK YOU
ADDENDUM C  INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Tell me about your experiential learning experience.

2. How do you think experiential learning has changed you?

3. How have your beliefs, ideas and perceptions changed as a result of your experiential learning experience? (ex. about people in general, the workplace, the classroom)

4. How do you think experiential learning influences employability of graduates?

5. How do you think EL is able to help build your career?

6. How did you find your interactions with colleagues in the workplace?

7. How did you find interactions with guests/customers/tourists in the workplace?

8. Was there anything that you relearnt in the workplace that you were already taught in the classroom?

9. How has experiential learning improved your knowledge of the tourism industry?

10. How do you think experiential learning influences academic performance?

11. What other element that you think is important for academic development?
ADDENDUM D:  INFORMED CONSENT

NELSON MANDELA METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY
INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM

<table>
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DECLARATION BY PARTICIPANT

I, ___________________________________________ the participant and undersigned, hereby confirm as follows:

- that I was invited to participate in this research project,
- undertaken by the researcher, Lynn Jonas of the Tourism Department at NMMU,
- the aim and procedures of this study has been explained to me,
- I understand that these questionnaires may lead to follow-up interviews, which will be recorded,
- my identity will not be revealed in any discussions,
- I was given opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered satisfactorily,
- my participation is voluntary,
- I may withdraw from this study at any stage without penalisation.

Sign:______________________________________________________

Signed/confirmed at __________________________ on __________ 20

Signature of witness:

Full name of witness:
ADDENDUM E: INTERVIEWS TRANSCRIBED

Interview 1
Start of interview 1.

Tell me about your experiential learning experience.
My experience at the establishment?

Yes, please tell me about your experiential learning experience.

My experiential learning experience, um was, I don’t wanna say bad. I felt as if there was more that I could’ve been exposed to. For example we were given, we were shifted around from kitchen, reception, the bar, the laundry. At first I thought we’re gonna move on to offices and learn more about the behind-the-scenes and not just the front section. I also felt we were undermined; we weren’t given a platform, a chance to prove ourselves. Yah, overall I didn’t enjoy it, it actually turned me off into hotels or B&Bs or such accommodation sector, I do not want to get into that, I mean if that is how it is going to be. Um, yah, yah, I think yah. Because I felt as if we’re going to shadow maybe a manager or someone in charge to see how they run, how they operated, but yah, we were just regular staff, doing what the rest of staff did.

So you would’ve like to have been more of the behind-the-scenes and not just the front of house section?

Yes. Or at least, take us to one meeting, at least sit quietly, take notes or something like that.

Just so that you can get the experience.

Yes.

Do you think that your experiential learning changed you?

It changed my perspective on the accommodation sector, yes it did. Changed me personally? Yes, I think in a sense that I was exposed. I was exposed to the staff a lot, not the managerial staff, general staff, I mean the staff below. We get to interact with them, like we find out how they live, their lives and their challenges and stuff like that and it actually made me think that OK, I am not so, not so unfortunate in some other areas. I’m not as bad-off so it yah actually gave me perspective.

So, if you consider people in general, the workplace and the classroom how have your ideas, beliefs and perceptions changed as a result of your experiential learning?

*Inaudible*… Can you give me an example?

Like say for example, you take people in general, you had a perception about them or you had an idea about how to deal with tourists. Did it change that?

Yah, it did, because what you read in the books is actually different from real life. What you read and what you take in and then you create a scenario in your head and then when it actually
comes to real act you just, sometimes you just stutter and then you just get nervous and then yah, yah, I think.

But how did it change your beliefs, ideas and perceptions as a result of experiential learning? So now you've had interactions with these tourists or in the workplace environment. How did it change you as well as in the classroom? Like how you were before your experiential learning and now after you did it. Is there any differences?

I think the only difference would be in the classroom. It's more confined there's less people, and there's more interaction, but not in-depth. In the workplace, we didn't really get to interact much with the guests, we just helped them and serviced them, we didn't get to talk or to find out more. I don't think it has changed.

So, how do you think experiential learning influences employability of graduates?

Um... just when I think I got it. Um... could you repeat that?

How do you think experiential learning influenced employability of graduates?

Influenced?

For example, you get degrees where you don't do in-service training, so they don't have that background when they graduate. But then you have other degrees where you do in-service training before you graduate. So how do you think experiential learning influences employability of graduates?

Um, for, for where I worked I feel as though whether I did experiential learning or I didn't, as part of my course or whether I didn't maybe I did another course and I applied work there, it wouldn't make much difference. Because what we, the work we were exposed to is nothing related to a textbook, it's nothing that you can practice from what you have studied. I mean, setting a table, that's general, you do that at home. I mean, yah um... what else, doing laundry, do laundry at home, I mean, it's really, I don't know, it didn't influence much.

So, you don't think experiential learning influences employability?

No.

Ok.

How do you think experiential learning is able to help build your career?

I would say, if I was placed or I got placement somewhere else, possibly I could've made contacts I could've have mingled with people, I could've, if I was given the chance, proven myself, I mean I think from there on. I mean others they get, I don't even know how to explain this. You get to a place, you do experiential learning, and you know, you are, you've proven yourself so much that they want you to stay, to carry on working there. And yah, that's what I think. And there it was... even if they offered, I will turn it down.

Ok.
So how do you find, how did you find the interactions with your colleagues in the workplace?
With my managerial interactions it was just orders, you just follow orders and procedure. With the rest of the other staff, it was more um… how do you say, more in a proper manner. We, we got to know each other on different levels. It was more also personal type of…

And your interactions with guests/customers/tourists at the workplace?
They were very strict. No interactions with guests at all. Just do your job.

So, none whatsoever?
Nope.

Was there anything that you re-learnt in the workplace that you were already taught in the classroom?
No [laughs] sorry

How has experiential learning improved your knowledge of the tourism industry?
It has not.

It didn't add any knowledge about the industry?
No.

Ok.

How do you think experiential learning influences academic performance?
For me, I took it as a motivation. Because after that I actually figured out what I wanted and what to work on to get it. I knew that if I wanted to be in higher more positions than those there, obviously I know I'll start at the bottom level but at least if they get to see my academic record, not that it was bad but um… how can I put this?

So, it basically motivated you?
Yes.

Ok.

Last question. Is there any other element that you think would be important for academic development?
Oh, yes I think with tourism, with regard to that I think the department can expose students more from first year. Maybe more excursions, rather than wait for BTech to go on excursions. We're only going on an excursion now. And as well as the Galileo course. I think it should be included in our course and not that it's external and you pay for it externally.

Thank you, that's the end of interview 1.
**Interview 2**
**Beginning of interview 2**

**Please tell me about your experiential learning experience.**

At first it was bad. I wouldn't say that bad, but yes, it was lonely because it was the owner, it was me, there was a maintenance guy and there was a maid. I worked in a guesthouse. [Participant mentions establishments’ name]. I did everything that she did basically. I went from helping the maintenance guy, I did phone calls, enquiries, making up beds, cleaning rooms, to making breakfast, everything. So I did everything, everything that she did. She even went on holiday. That’s when I started feeling comfortable, when she went away. She went on holiday twice while I was there. So, I was there alone. I had to make all the decisions on my own, so then I think I became comfortable and it started being fine. Then after a while I didn’t want to leave and I had to. But it was too far for me to travel there every day because it was like yah, far so I had to leave. But it was in the end I was very happy so yes.

**So how do you think experiential learning has changed you?**

It has changed me in a sense of making decisions on my own. I was a person who was very afraid to take initiative and just think for myself. I would always just want to get back to my friend and just ask them what do you think about this or whatever. When I was there, it gave me like time to grow, I basically learnt to do things on my own, make decisions on my own, I mean a guesthouse, someone else’s place, making decisions on your own. So, mean yah, that helped me in making my own decisions and being happy with the decisions I make.

**Ok.**

**So, when considering people in general, the workplace and the classroom; how have your beliefs, ideas and perceptions changed as a result of your experiential learning?**

I wouldn't say very much, because I think or I would like to think that I’m a very open-minded person. So, yah not much.

**So, how do you think experiential learning influences the employability of graduates?**

I do think it helps because I mean when they see like on your CV or whatever you do have experience I mean that’s the thing they look for so yah they will probably employ you because you have experience and you’re not just straight out of varsity or whatever.

**And with no experience.**

Yah.

**How do you think experiential learning is able to help build your career?**

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For me, working at the guesthouse no, because I wanna get in transport so that’s something totally different. So that didn’t really.

**But how do you think experiential learning is able to help build your career, for example you already had experience in the industry, something like that?**

Yes, maybe with management skills and all of that yes, managing things.

**So, how did you find your interactions with the colleagues at the workplace?**

I would say good. Everyone was very respectable. The thing is basically sometimes in the industry you seem someone that’s been there for years, someone very young comes in with a bigger position or whatever than you and they treat you like crappy. Sometimes that does happen. They were all very respectful, I respected them, they respected me. We all became friends in the end. And I mean they were people that was way older than what I am.

**And your interactions with the guests or the tourists?**

There were some… ok, there was one incident that was really bad, but most of them was good. They would send cards and stuff back to me saying they enjoyed their stay and thank you for helping them, and all of that, leaving presents at the door when they leave. So the interaction was good. And it was mostly international guests.

**That’s good.**

**Was there anything that you relearnt in the workplace that you already learnt in the classroom?**

Sorry?

**Was there anything that you relearnt in the workplace that you already learnt in the school?**

The classroom?

**Yes. For university, sorry.**

For marketing, yes. There was this, she had to re-do her website, so we basically, I basically had to help her. She had a mentor from TEP, Tourism Enterprises, so they gave us a couple of tasks to do. We had to like write down things that we wanna change on the website or whatever. I created a new slogan, yes, I created a new slogan for the website. That basically came from [participant mentions lecturer’s name], some marketing work as well. And then, on the, where she had to… she was a very pen and paper person, not very good with computers. So I basically taught her how to do things on the computer, Excel and all of that. They also created a programme for her to capture the guests and bookings and all of that. Because she had it on this whole big sheet. There I knew some things, but I learnt new things. So, some things I relearnt like um… this programme thingy we had worked on but I knew what was going on in Excel, so I taught her on Excel and things.
So, how has experiential learning improved your knowledge of the tourism industry?
Not really because that was... ok, yes a bit. With international tourists and things. Some people being very, I don't want to say this word, but some people are small-minded they like, ... [mentions name of establishment] there was one guests who came there, he was late, he got lost. We were talking to him on the phone directing him, he kept on going the wrong way, then we had to go drive to him to go and fetch him and all of this. When he got there, he put his bags in the room, then came back and asked us where can he go swim with the dolphins? So that was a bit, I mean knowledge in the tourism industry. Some people they don't take note of your websites and stuff, they don't really read to understand or ask questions about it. So you have to treat a guest, I think what I've learnt is you have to treat a guest like they've never seen your website. You have to keep on telling them this is what we do, this is what we offer and all of that, so yah.

Ok.

How do you think experiential learning influenced your academic performance?
Right now, not at all [laughs]. I don't think it helped really because most of the things that you do at the workplace, you don't do at varsity. Or the things you do here, you don't go do at the workplace. It's very limited. So no I don't think it had any effect or something.

Ok, is there any other element that you think is important for academic development?
I don't think so.

So there's nothing that you can think about that is important for academic development?
Maybe if you, I mean at first I was a parrot-learner, but now I read to understand and interpret in my own way. So I think basically what came from there like experiential learning, is the way people would speak to you, coz you know they have the accents and stuff, you have to listen properly. So I think it came from there that you have to um... you have to understand something for yourself before talking back to that person or whatever, so I think um... with coming back to university and learning and so it's read and understand for yourself and not just parrot-style studying and all of that.

Thank you and that's the end of interview 2.
Interview 3
Start of interview 3.

Please tell me about your experiential learning experience.
Um... at some point it was boring I have to be honest, sometimes it was boring because I was working at the tourist information centre and the office was not fully equipped in terms of resources. So we were basically dealing with people that come and then ask and then we tell them. But if they see something that need to be researched or whatsoever, there's no internet. And the worst part is that our landline, I started from during December, I think February or March it was not working. So if we don't have airtime, we have to send a CallBack to our boss and while the client is waiting. So it was some sort of embarrassment. Comes, comes January, or maybe February yah February, it was quiet ever since we're dealing with tourists they come to our office so it was very quiet. Sometimes it was boring.

Ok, do you think that your experiential learning changed you?
Not really because it didn't met my expectations at all, but I was there simply because I was scared to look for other places because we were bound by time you know. Come six months and I'm not done then I won't be able to graduate. So I thought ag no let me rather sit there.

So you don't think that experiential learning changed you?
No.

Um... when we consider people in general, the workplace and the classroom. how have your beliefs, ideas and perceptions about people changed as a result of your experiential learning?
They changed in such a way that you know when you in class you're always told about how to handle clients so basically the theory. But while I was there I experienced, what can I say, the actual experience whereby I deal with clients, they come and I explain, they explain everything you know because we have time where we interact with clients other than the fact that we're just there to help them. They came with their problems and then share with us and then we interact. So at some point the *inaudible* that go around with tourists is that they, some of them have a negative attitude towards other people. But where I was working they were very nice. They were willing to talk other than the fact that they're just there to get information.

Um... do you think that experiential learning influences employability of graduates?
I would say it depends. Because there are people who go to experiential learning right and finish it and when they apply the very same business where they were doing experience would take them. So at some point it depends. It depends on on... you can be there for the sake of training and the manager might as well pretend that you're doing a great job ever since in fact
some of us don’t even get paid. So in your mind for the fact that you’re there for the entire month you realise that I have impressed them and only to find out ag you didn’t meet their requirements so at some point as I said it depends on what the management is looking for out of you.

So, do you think experiential learning is able to help you build your career?
Yah, I might say, if I was at maybe a different place maybe I would say so, but based on what I’ve experienced on that particular, I don’t want to generalise. So that’s why I’m saying if I was maybe at a different place I would have experienced something different, but based on the place that I was in, it’s a no.

Ok.

How did you find your interactions with your colleagues at the workplace?
Colleagues other than the management or just?
All of them.
All of them?
All of your colleagues.
Yah, I can say that I had a problem with the management. But um… due to the fact that the office was not fully equipped so I was not happy about that. And I didn’t even like shy to tell him that I’m not happy about that. But other than that we were cool.

So you got along with your colleagues at the workplace?
Yah.

How did you find your interactions with guest/customers/tourists?
Tourists? Yah, they were great. But you know there were moments where we couldn’t like offer what they want due to the lack of facilities and equipment. For instance if the guest is looking for something and we have to call our manager since we don’t have a landline or internet to do research. So, some of them were like irritated and others will just say OK, we will come back while we’re looking for their answers and then they never come back.

So, do you think there is anything that you releart in the workplace that you were already taught in the classroom?
I would say it’s client service, yah, client service. Because as much as I wasn’t happy it doesn’t mean that I was not happy with clients, but I was not happy with the conditions at the workplace so, what is relevant from what I taught in class was basically client service, how to interact with clients.

So you learnt that in the class and then you practiced that in the workplace?
Yah,
How has experiential learning improved your knowledge of the tourism industry?
Um... yah there were certain things that I wasn't aware of because clients will come and then ask and I will take that question, if I don't know how to answer it to my manager. By doing that I discovered something new. So at some point it did help yah.

Do you think that experiential learning influences academic performance?
Then I will rather say that it depends. Because if you're not in a place that didn't meet your expectations therefore at some point, for instance there was no motivation behind the entire in-service training. So at some point to me it didn't help, but at the very same time I didn't for instance drop my marks at school because I had that believe that as much as in-service training didn't meet my expectations, all is not lost. I can still graduate, and maybe go to a place that I will develop mentally, physically, so...

So, you just spoke about motivation to learn in the classroom and graduating, motivation to graduate. Do you think there is any other element that is important for academic development?
Other element, I would say now ever since you are now at university, theory is dominating. So, to me I feel it will be more important that there can be some sort of a combination of practical and also theory and especially in tourism industry. Because to us theory is not enough, we need to go to those places and see how they are operating so by the time we finish we can have a clear understanding of how the tourism industry runs. So to me, theory is not enough.

Ok, thank you very much, that's the end of interview 3.
Interview 4
Start of interview 4.

Please tell me about your experiential learning experience.
It was absolutely wonderful, it really was like one of the best experiences of my life. I worked at [mentions the name of the establishment] and I pretty much did everything, but my main tasks were day-to-day operations and just dealing with guest complaints and making sure they were taken care of.

So you had a good experience?
It was absolutely wonderful and it really was a catalyst for a lot of change in my life. It was fantastic.

So, how would you say it changed you?
It changed me like so much. If we're looking at in terms of working with people. I'm somebody who prefers to work on my own. I am a bit introverted although I am sociable, so that was a big challenge for me because I lived with some of my other fellow co-workers. Like, in terms of communicating and being assertive, like it definitely helped me with my assertiveness because we worked in a really somewhat stressful situation where you had to be able to tell people if they were giving you nonsense; that listen I'm not gonna accept this. It also helped me in terms of my concentration. I am somebody who tends to be a little bit absent-minded in that respect and at [mentions name of establishment], you literally had to make sure you knew all of the details.

If we consider people in general, the workplace and the classroom, how have your ideas, beliefs and perceptions changed as a result of your experiential learning?
How my ideas have changed?
And the perceptions you might have had about the people, about the workplace and the classroom. How did experiential learning influence…
Yah, um…well, it encouraged me in one sense. I realised that really a lot of the people that I did study with and before we did our experiential learning, we were not as motivated and we gained a lot of theory. But after practically applying it, it really changed my perception on you know like job employability, looking at my fellow-classmates, it kinda did make me a bit competitive, especially with that 3rd year, seeing how I sort of benchmarked against other people in terms of employability.

So do you think experiential learning increases or influences employability of graduates?
Definitely, definitely 100%, definitely. Even if you've had a negative experience, you benefit in the sense that you now, you've had that six months and you know how the industry works and you know what you like and what you dislike. Even if, let's say even if I worked in hospitality and I want to move over to a let's see a car rental agency. I've had experience working with employers, I've had to wake up and do things, so it definitely increases your employability because you have a reference that says you have actually worked and I think that's one of the greatest benefits.

**So, do you think that experiential learning helps you build your career?**

Yes, yes, definitely. I do have quite a long resume or CV where I have done other things, but in relation to what I have studied, it has definitely helped my career. Because if you look at some of the other things I did like working at restaurants or camps, they're not – as wonderful as they are – there is no direct link between them and the qualification that I have. Whereas now, I've actually worked in the industry. So yah, experiential learning definitely helped me.

**Um, how did you find your interactions with your colleagues in the workplace?**

It was really wonderful, it really was amazing. They were kind of like my family. There were instances where there um, were some issues and they were people with personalities that I just had to work with. Two people in particular that I really struggled with. The one girl, I remember she was spreading rumours about me and I try not to be a confrontational person and I was gonna let it go but I realised I will be seeing this person in the office every day. And I just went up to her and I closed the office door and I was like “what have you been saying about me?” and I confronted her and we got it all out in the open. The other guy, we were like, it was kinda like, we were sorta like siblings. He was one of the managers and it was sometimes kinda difficult for me to respect him you know because like he would swear at people and he would like fart and he would laugh and he would just up in front of you and scare you, like he is a lot of fun. He has a very boisterous attitude and personality but there were some times where I found it difficult to respect him just as a manager. I felt I saw him as just a co-worker. But yah, in general it was wonderful working with all of my co-workers.

**And your interactions with the guests or the tourists?**

Amazing, I absolutely, that's actually one of the best things about my in-service. I love meeting new people. And I remember we would have like guests every single day. Yah and it was really nice meeting a lot of different people and they were are all from different parts of the world and yah, I had a couple of fun experiences. I have some of the guests on Facebook. They really really were wonderful. Like, there was this family, I wish, like I want them to adopt me like [laughing]. They are the nicest people I've ever met. Like all of them, the guests were really
amazing. They were really, really, yah, I think there was like maybe like 2 or 3 guests that I didn’t maybe that I didn’t like. But it wasn’t, generally like 99.9% it was like good experiences. So that’s good, having good relations or interactions with both the colleagues and the guests.

Yah

Um, was there anything that you relearnt in the workplace that you were already taught in the classroom?

Yes, definitely. Um, one thing that we did that they really focused on was when the guest filled in their information, they had to list which country they were from. And in the beginning that didn’t register to me and [mentions manager’s name], the manager kept on stressing, no we need to know what country they are from for marketing reasons. And it dawned on me, that oh yah, we had done this in class that as an organisation you need to know your clientele. Like, what is your target market and [mentions manager’s name] had explained this to me and as she was explaining this to me I was like, I know what you’re talking about yeah, I know this.

Ok, so how have your experiential learning improved your knowledge of the tourism industry?

Has it improved my knowledge of the tourism industry? Um, yes and no. Yes, because I gained practical information and I mean that is immeasurable, you can’t, only when you’ve dug your heels into the dirt can you say, I know what I’m talking about. Yes, I know how to deal with foreigners, yes I understand how to market now having dealt with these people. Um, Yes, now I know how to work with people and what not, co-workers, managers and all of that. Um, No, in the sense that tourism is very broad and in your 3 years you’re taught basically everything and there are elements of tourism that are very specific to let’s say car rental, there are a lot of [mentions lecturer’s name] things, like there are a lot of things like airlines that I did not encounter in my experiential learning. Not because you know the place was bad where I worked or the subject was bad it’s just that that subject was very specific to airlines and I was in hospitality and we didn’t necessarily deal with that.

Do you think experiential learning influences academic performance?

Yes it does. Um, I will say this: the onus rests on the individual. Some people it has influenced them very positively, I’ve seen people being very motivated afterwards, but at the same time I’ve also seen people become very demotivated because they have worked. Look, there are some people who when they told me their experiences, I was like wow, you guys did not work because like in my experience we put in a lot of hours, other people was a little bit more relaxed, so when they had to come back and they had to study again it was a little more difficult, so I think it really rests on the individual.
Um, ok, is there any other element that you think is important for academic development?

Any other element that's important for academic development? I think the way our course is conducted is really really wonderful, however um, I think it's important to focus on self-development. I think individual self-development. Where I don't know if there can be a workshop or something that really encourages the student to ask you know like probing questions like “what do I want out of this?” or “how am I gonna benefit?” um, “is where I’m applying to in line with my career objectives?” “what are my career objectives?”. In the three year course we never really looked at self-development and things like working on confidence and working on people skills, working on being able to articulate yourself. I think if you don’t naturally have those and you are let’s say a bit more introverted and you lack confidence and you’re thrust into the hospitality industry, it can eat you up. So you need, by the time you graduate here, you really need to have all your stuff together.

And your academic development?

Ok, academic development? Is there anything?

Any other element? For example motivations, is there different motivations?

Motivations for academic development? I think for when the student, even if the student should do this on their own, going back to self-development, but I think if a clear distinction or a clear line can be drawn between your academic performance and your employability. There are a lot of tourism students, like I heard about this girl who graduated 2 years ago who still has not worked. And um, the lecturer was saying it was heart-breaking to hear that. And I asked the question, well how did she perform academically? Was it somebody who finished in the 3 years or did it take her 8 years to finish her diploma? And did she graduate with 70s and 60s or 80s or did she just barely make it? And of course this was somebody who had just barely made it, she finished her diploma in 5 years, she was just very slack about it and she did not associate her academic performance with her employability. A lot of students believe that as soon as I get the diploma that will be enough. Failing to realise that they’re gonna look at how well you performed. And you will be set up with a couple of other candidates who graduated Cum Laude, who did extra-curricular activities and you were never taught at school or university or a clear line haven’t been drawn between your academic performance and your employability. But then again, it really rests on the individual, like we’re all big boys and girls, we need to know this.

Ok, thank you very much.

Awesome.

That is the end of interview 4.
23 May 2014

Prof MM Botha
Faculty of Education
06-01-G08
South Campus

Dear Prof Botha

NMMU TOURISM STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING BASED ON THE PLACE 4-COMPONENT MODEL

PRP: Prof MM Botha
PI: Ms L Jonas

Your above-entitled application for ethics approval served at Research Ethics Committee (Human).

We take pleasure in informing you that the application was approved by the Committee.

The ethics clearance reference number is H14-EDU-ERE-004 and is valid for three years. Please inform the REC-H, via your faculty representative, if any changes (particularly in the methodology) occur during this time. An annual affirmation to the effect that the protocols in use are still those for which approval was granted, will be required from you. You will be reminded timeously of this responsibility, and will receive the necessary documentation well in advance of any deadline.

We wish you well with the project. Please inform your co-investigators of the outcome, and convey our best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Prof CB Cilliers
Chairperson: Research Ethics Committee (Human)

cc: Department of Research Capacity Development
Faculty Officer: Education