

Abstract

Business education often lacks structured experiential practice, particularly in the context of institution–community partnerships (Narong, 2026). Grounded in experiential learning and critical thinking theories (Facione, 2015; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2010; Kolb, 1984), the research scaffolds critical thinking from introductory to capstone levels, transitioning students from theory to real-world application. Business cases enhance applied outcomes and analytical reasoning (Esguerra, 2025). This research proposes a Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) model that embeds co-created industry cases and Indigenous community-based research projects into core business courses. It evaluates sustainability and Indigenization in partnerships between Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and corporate/social enterprises (Malik, 2024; Morgan, Litts, Tehee, et al., 2025; Toombs, Skov, & Campbell, 2025), addressing decolonization while aligning with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Sachs et al., 2025; United Nations, 2025; Vizina, 2022). Guided by the question—How does WIL, via co-created case writing, reflection journals, and community projects, cultivate critical thinking for analyzing and applying sustainability and Indigenization?—the model proposes a conceptual framework for standardizing IP–corporate partnership evaluations. It emphasizes Indigenous governance/sovereignty, Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (Dimayuga, 2023; McGregor, 2020), environmental sustainability (Abdellatif et al., 2025), equitable benefit-sharing, social/cultural inclusion, and ongoing monitoring/accountability, using a “Two-Eyed Seeing” approach (Bartlett, 2012; Denny & Fanning, 2016; Marshall & Marshall, 2012; Smith & Abdellatif, 2024). These pillars are operationalized through guiding questions, best practices, and rubric-based criteria, fostering problem formulation, ethical reasoning, and reflective judgment. Students apply real cases (e.g., Kichwa of Ecuador, Haida Gwaii, Sámi People, T’Sou-ke Nation, Mikisew Cree First Nation), shifting from passive learners to active knowledge co-creators. A mixed-methods design analyzes student cases, reflections, community feedback, and rubric data via triangulation. Preliminary findings show transferable critical thinking, indigenous-informed decision-making, equitable partnerships and provide insights for educators to embed sustainability and Indigenization as core outcomes, promoting accountable, rights-respecting Indigenous partnerships in business education.

Keywords: Indigenization, Sustainability, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), Experiential learning, Critical thinking, Community Partnerships.