Recognition of prior learning (RPL) as a tool for reskilling LIS professionals

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Outline

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Introduction

• Emergence of recognition of prior learning (RPL) - late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States of America (USA)

• RPL is also known as prior learning assessment (PLA) in the USA

• Purpose was to broaden access to higher education
• There is a great diversity in the application of RPL across the system in USA
• In the 1980s, RPL was introduced in the United Kingdom (UK)
• Focus on admission to higher education and social justice
• RPL is also known as APEL (Assessment of Prior and Experiential Learning)
• Other OECD countries like Australia, New Zealand and Canada have also implemented RPL.

• In Canada, RPL is referred to as Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR).
• Local RPL policy initiatives and implementation
• RPL in African countries - South Africa, Mauritius, Namibia and Seychelles
• RPL in South Africa is more than in other African countries (Shamash and Sims 2009)
• Most of these RPL-related practice and research were located in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

• Focus is on standardised examinations, challenge exams, portfolio assessment and the validation of prior certified learning (credit exchange), and increased access (Higher Education Act, 1997)
• SAQA RPL revised policy (2015) define RPL as: the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed, for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development - reskilling
• This is where RPL can be of great benefit to the LIS sector in reskilling the LIS professionals

• However, there are ‘islands of good practice’ of RPL implementation in South Africa across all sectors (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2009)
Problem statement

• There are a large number of equally experienced and capable library workers without formal qualifications (Lor, 2001) in the LIS sector

• Skills shortage in LIS sector (DAC, 2010; Stilwell, 2009; Ocholla and Bothma, 2007; Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), 1999)
• ‘Islands of good practice’ of RPL implementation in South Africa *across all sectors* (OECD, 2009)

• Analysis of RPL implementation in LIS schools in South Africa to determine its efficacy as a tool for reskilling LIS professionals
• **Study objectives**

• to investigate whether the LIS schools were committed to providing an enabling policy environment for RPL practice

• to establish whether credible assessment methods and processes were being followed in the LIS schools to ensure the integrity of the RPL system
• to determine whether personnel involved in assessment were trained to ensure the quality of RPL assessment outcomes
• to determine whether quality management systems (QMS) were in place to ensure the continuous improvement of RPL system in LIS schools
• Literature review

✓ Theoretical foundations of RPL

• Experiential learning theory (ELT) by Kolb (1984) provided the basis for early RPL initiatives (Osman 2003)

• ELT defines learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984)
✓ Kolb's experiential learning cycle

✓ concrete experience – basis for observations and reflections

✓ reflective observation - are assimilated and distilled into abstract concepts

✓ abstract conceptualization - implications for action can be drawn

✓ and active experimentation - can be tested and serve as guides in creating new experiences - rational for RPL system
• Experiential learning is learning which takes place outside the formal classroom (Van Rooy, 2002)

• Other theorise on RPL include human capital theory for economic/employment opportunities, liberal humanism theory for personal development and critical theory for social justice
Role of RPL in LIS sector

• There is a large pool of library practitioners who are either unqualified or under-qualified (Davids, 2006) with many years of experience in the LIS sector

• Libraries cannot fill available vacancies with qualified library staff (Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) 2010 report)
• About 16% shortage of qualified library staff

• Around 78% of schools in South Africa do not have libraries

• Civil society group Equal Education (EE) believes the actual shortage to be as high as 92% (Gomes, 2010)
This means that only about 8% of schools have functional libraries and yet Information technology (IT) is widely adopted in the field of library and information services (Law, Leung, & Buhalis, 2009)
• Information professionals are now expected to be aware and capable of using and demonstrating emerging information and communications technologies (ICTs) (Chandrashekarara, 2012)
• There was a low level of ICT knowledge and skill amongst subject librarians and a general lack of formal training for ICTs amongst the subject librarian (Hoskins, 2005)
• Librarians need to be more alert to ICT changes and their effect on the Library and Information Science (LIS) sector (Ajeemsha and Madhusudhan, 2012).
• Corcoran and McGuinness (2014) who emphasised the importance of regular and planned upgrading of the skills set
• Call for rigorous continuing education for re-skilling the librarians in terms of ICT knowledge and skills (Enakrire & Ocholla, 2017)

• Institutions must acknowledge the significance of continuous updating of the professional knowledge and skills of librarians (Moonasar and Underwood, 2018)
• Underwood, (2002) identified RPL as an opportunity for the LIASA to enhance professional recognition and the development of its members, whether it be at the level of "assistant", "paraprofessional" or "professional") would, in essence be RPL candidates’

• Using RPL system will help explore different options in skilling and upskilling to bridge the knowledge and skill gaps
World Economic Forum (WEF) report (2018)

• In assessing reskilling pathways and job transition opportunities for:
  ✓ individuals
  ✓ companies
  ✓ and policy makers
For individual workers

• As the types of skills needed in the labour market change rapidly, individual workers will have to engage in life-long learning if they are to remain not just employable but are to achieve fulfilling and rewarding careers that allow them to maximize their employment opportunities.
For companies

- reskilling and upskilling strategies will be critical if they are to find the talent they need and to contribute to socially responsible approaches to the future of work’
For policy-makers

- reskilling and retraining the existing workforce are essential levers to fuel future economic growth, enhance societal resilience in the face of technological change and pave the way for future-ready education systems for the next generation of workers
In addition,

- the WEF report states that ‘fostering continuous reskilling and lifelong learning across the economy will be critical in order to maintain a labour force with the tools needed to fuel inclusive economic growth and to ensure that companies can find workers with the skills needed to help them succeed and contribute their full potential to the economy and society.’
✓ Benefits of RPL as a tool for reskilling

• RPL provides both educational benefits and self-confidence (Sandberg & Kubaik, 2011; Stevens, 2010)

In South Africa, RPL play a valuable and crucial role in raising the skill level of workers and not just fulfilling capitalist goals (Cooper, 1998)
RPL offers various benefits to employers and employees (McIntyre, 2016):

**Employers**

- fast tracking workers
- a reduction in training costs
- reduction in down-time
- efficient identification of 'skills gaps' for more focussed training
- avoids duplication of learning
- promotes a positive learning culture
Employees

• - identification of gaps in knowledge

• credit for non-formal learning towards a qualification

• - saves time in achieving this qualification

• - improves employment opportunities – promotion

• - increases self-confidence and morale
✓ Key aspects of an effective RPL system

• an enabling policy environment

• credible assessment methods and processes

• training of personnel involved in RPL assessments

• quality assurance of RPL system

• funding
Methodology

- The study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods
- Survey questionnaires and content analysis
- Population involved the 10 LIS schools in the South Africa
- Analysis of key aspects of RPL
## Results

N = 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Level of acknowledgement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy environment</td>
<td>56.04% (68)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment methods and processes</td>
<td>80.5% (68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training of RPL personnel</td>
<td>54.4% (68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality management systems</td>
<td>41.0% (68)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
✓ Conclusion and recommendations

• Given its benefits, RPL can be used as a tool for reskilling LIS professionals
• There are still ‘islands of good practice’ in RPL implementation in LIS sector
• Need for continuous monitoring and evaluation of RPL implementation
• LIASA + RPL = reskilling - Jobs (4IR)