

**RECONGITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) IMPLEMENTATION IN LIBRARY AND  
INFORMATION SCIENCE (LIS) SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

By

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF LITERATURE AND PHILISOPHY

in the subject

INFORMATION SCIENCE

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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December 2014

## SUMMARY

Owing to past injustices, the South African higher education sector is characterised by inequalities of resource allocation and of learning opportunities. Through the National Qualification Framework (NQF), recognition of prior learning (RPL) was established to address the previous inequalities in higher education and training.

RPL can be used as a mechanism to offer non-traditional learners such as workers, adult learners, and community workers access to learning programmes in Library and Information Science (LIS) schools. It can also be used for up-skilling within LIS sector, to enable staff to migrate from paraprofessional to professional roles. LIS schools could possibly use this approach to offer experienced but unqualified library workers opportunities for progressive professional development and career growth. Despite it being a national policy and its obvious benefits, very little is known about RPL implementation in LIS schools in South Africa. This study was conducted to investigate the nature of RPL implementation in LIS schools in South Africa and make recommendations for effective and efficient RPL practice in these schools.

The study used the questionnaire as the main data collection tool. In addition, document analysis was used to validate the collected data.

The results of the study indicated that there were islands of good RPL practice in LIS schools in South Africa specifically with regard to the aspect of RPL assessment process. However, certain weaknesses were identified in other aspects of RPL implementation in LIS schools including the policy environment, training of personnel conducting RPL assessment and the quality management systems.

Among other things, the study recommends that RPL quality management system (QMS) should ideally be driven by the head/chair of the school/department. Furthermore, an integrated student management system should be used to monitor the progression of RPL candidates through the formal academic system post RPL.

**Key words:** Recognition of prior learning (RPL), RPL policy environment, Quality management system (QMS), RPL assessment process, Library and information science (LIS) schools, South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) RPL policy, RPL personnel

training, RPL admission procedures, assessment methods, and non-matriculation learners.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to first and foremost thank God, the Almighty, because it is through Him that I managed to overcome all the trials and tribulations I have encountered during this study.

However, it is fitting to give special acknowledgement to those individuals without whom completion would have been impossible. I am indebted to my promoter Dr Luyanda Dube and co-promoter Prof. Patrick 'the Warthog' Ngulube for their guidance, inspiration and wisdom. Your support, valuable feedback, constructive criticism and patience when I fell short of your expectations, really helped me to see the wood obscured by the trees. Your contributions are hereby immensely appreciated.

I want to also thank my family, relatives and all of my friends for their support and encouragement during my studies. One can never lose sight of the magnitude of patiently bearing with my absences. This is heartily appreciated.

I dedicate this work to my grandmother, Fanesa Anna Velaphi Hlongwane, for her relentless support and encouragement during all of my studies. May her memory be eternally honoured.

I would also like to thank Ms Suwisa Muchengetwa for her insightful guidance and assistance with statistical analysis. Our interactions were a new learning curve to me.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my colleagues on the Information Search Librarians team and the recognition and prior learning (RPL) directorate for their support and encouragement throughout my study; Library management and the Professional and Administrative Research Committee (PARC) for the approval of my study leave and the Research department for their financial support. I doubt whether this research project could have been a success without your support.

Finally, my deepest appreciation goes to the heads and chairs of the South African LIS schools, staff and their institutions for assisting me with data collection. I will forever be indebted to you for your valuable contributions.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to adult learners, library workers, community workers who have acquired many years of experience at their work places but were denied access to learning programme in higher education and training due to restrictive admission policies. This thesis is therefore an attempt to promote awareness of RPL services as well as its potential benefits in higher education and training institutions, particularly the Library and Information Science (LIS) schools, which are experiencing low student enrolments and shortage of qualified staff.

Student number: 852 400 9

## DECLARATION

I declare that **RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) IMPLEMENTATION IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE SCHOOLS (LIS) IN SOUTH AFRICA** is my own work, and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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SIGNATURE  
(MR I K HLONGWANE)

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DATE

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>DEDICATION</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>DECLARATION</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	<b>XII</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>XIII</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>XV</b>
<b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b>	<b>XIX</b>
APPENDIX A: Covering letter for the questionnaire	xix
APPENDIX B: Questionnaire	xix
APPENDIX C: Principles of good assessment	xix
APPENDIX D: Ten quality assurance standards for RPL	xix
<b>CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background to the study	4
1.2.1 Conceptual setting	4
1.2.2 Contextual setting	8
1.3 Statement of the problem	10
1.4 Purpose of the study	11
1.5 Objectives of the study	11
1.6 Scope/delimitation of the study	13
1.7 Contribution and significance of the study	13
1.8 Originality of the study	15
1.9 Chapter summary	15
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>18</b>
2.1 Introduction	18
2.2 Literature review map	18
2.3 Theoretical Foundation of the Study	21
2.3.1 Introduction	21
2.3.2 Experiential learning theory	21
2.3.3 The development of experiential learning theory	21
2.3.3.1 Kolb (1984)	21
2.3.3.3 Boud and Walker (1991)	24
2.3.3.4 Mezirow (1991)	25
2.3.3.5 Saddington (1998)	25
2.3.4 The limitations of experiential learning theory in the context of RPL	28
2.3.5 The value of experiential learning theory as the foundation of the study	29
2.3.6 Other theories on RPL	31
2.4 The trends and practices of RPL in the international context	32
2.4.1 Introduction	32
2.4.2 Summary of trends and practices of RPL in the international context	32
2.4.3 Analysis of trends and practices of RPL in the international context	41

Below is an analysis issues relating to trends practices of RPL in the international context as presented in Table 2.2 above.	41
2.4.3.1 Historical development of RPL	41
2.4.3.2 Definition	41
2.4.3.3 Purpose	43
2.4.3.4 Target group	43
2.4.3.5 Legislative regulatory framework	43
2.4.3.6 Assessment methods and procedures	44
2.4.3.7 Quality assurance	44
2.5 Trends and practices of RPL in African countries	45
2.5.1 Introduction	45
2.5.2 Mauritius	45
2.5.3 Namibia	46
2.5.4 Seychelles	47
2.5.5 South Africa	48
2.5.5.1 Historical background	48
2.5.5.2 Definition	49
2.5.5.3 Purpose	50
2.5.5.4 Target group	51
2.5.5.5 Legislative regulatory framework	52
2.5.5.6 Assessment methods and procedures	56
2.5.5.7 Quality assurance	59
2.5.5.8 Conclusion	61
2.6 Institutional RPL policies in South African Higher Education and Training	62
2.6.1 Introduction	62
2.6.2 Generic template of SAQA RPL policy	62
2.6.2.1 Objective	62
2.6.2.2 Scope	62
2.6.2.3 Legislative context	63
2.6.2.4 Principles of assessment	63
2.6.2.5 Criteria and registration of assessors	64
2.6.2.6 Support structures for learners and assessors	64
2.6.2.7 Assessment methods and procedures	65
2.6.2.8 Moderation and quality assurance	65
2.6.2.9 Procedures for appeal	65
2.6.2.10 Certification of learners	65
2.6.2.11 Articulation of learning	66
2.6.2.12 Record-keeping	66
2.6.3 Core criteria for successful RPL implementation	66
2.6.4.1. Institutional policy environment	66
2.6.4.2. Training and registration of assessors and key personnel	67
2.6.4.3. Methods and processes of assessment	67
2.6.4.4. Quality management systems (QMS)	67
2.7 Conclusion	68
2.8 Summary of the chapter	68
<b>CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN</b>	<b>69</b>
3.1 Introduction	69
3.2 Research approach	69
3.2.1 Quantitative approach	70
3.2.2 Justification for using the quantitative approach	71
3.2.3 Triangulation approach	71
3.2.3.1 Justification for using the methodological triangulation approach	72
3.3 Research design	74
3.3.1 Survey research design	74

3.3.2 Survey data collection methods	75
3.3.3 Advantages and disadvantages of survey research designs	77
3.3.3.1 Advantages	77
3.3.3.2 Disadvantages	77
3.3.4 Justification for using a survey research design	78
3.6 Research population	79
3.7 Data collection methods	79
3.7.1 Primary data sources	80
3.7.1.1 The questionnaire	80
3.7.1.1.1 Questionnaire format	80
3.7.1.1.2 Pre-testing the questionnaire	81
3.7.1.1.3 Administering the questionnaire	81
3.7.2 Secondary data sources	82
3.7.2.1 Document analysis	83
3.8 Data analysis	83
3.8.1 Questionnaire data analysis	83
3.8.2 Document data analysis	83
3.9 Validity and reliability of the research findings	84
3.10 Ethical considerations	85
3.11 Evaluation of the research methodology	86
3.11.1 Choosing an appropriate research approach.	87
3.11.2 Choosing the research design	87
3.11.3 Pretesting the survey questionnaire	88
3.11.4 Data collection	88
3.12 Chapter summary	90
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS</b>	<b>91</b>
4.1 Introduction	91
4.2 Results of the institutional RPL policy analysis	91
4.2.1 The rate of RPL policy approval in the LIS schools	92
4.2.3 Results	92
4.2.3.1 Policy environment	92
4.2.3.2 Training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments	94
4.2.3.3 RPL assessment process	95
4.2.3.4 Quality management systems (QMS)	98
4.3 Questionnaire results	101
4.3.1 Response rate and characteristics of the sample	102
4.3.3 Results	103
4.3.3.1 Policy environment	103
4.3.3.2 Training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments	105
4.3.3.3 RPL assessment process	107
4.3.3.4 Quality management systems (QMS)	109
4.4 Comparative analysis of the results of the institutional RPL policies and questionnaire survey	111
4.4.1 Results	111
4.4.1.1 RPL policy environment	111
4.4.2 Training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments	113
4.4.2.3 RPL assessment process	115
4.4.2.4 Quality management systems (QMS)	125
4.5 Summary of the results	138
4.5.1 Institutional RPL policy analysis	138
4.5.1.1 RPL policy environment	138
4.5.1.2 Training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments	139
4.5.1.3 RPL assessment process	141
4.5.1.4 Quality management systems (QMS)	141

4.5.2 Questionnaire survey results	142
4.5.2.1 RPL policy environment	142
4.5.2.2 Training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments	143
4.5.2.3 RPL assessment process	143
4.5.2.4 Quality management systems (QMS)	144
4.5.3 Comparative analysis of institutional RPL policies and questionnaire survey results	144
4.6 Summary of the chapter	145
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS</b>	<b>147</b>
5.1 Introduction	147
5.2 Analysis of the results	147
5.2.1 Policy environment for RPL practice	147
5.2.1.2 Policy framework for RPL	149
5.2.1.3 Commitment to the principles of equity/redress	149
5.2.1.4 Admission procedures for RPL candidates	150
5.2.1.5 Equal access opportunities for RPL support	151
5.2.1.6 Support for RPL personnel	152
5.2.1.7 Availability of information about RPL services	152
5.2.1.8 Formal agreements within LIS sector	153
5.2.2 Training of RPL personnel	154
5.2.2.1 Registration of RPL assessors	154
5.2.2.2 Performance of the functions of evidence facilitators	155
5.2.2.3 RPL policy review mechanisms	155
5.2.2.4 Training plans for RPL personnel	156
5.2.3 RPL assessment process	156
5.2.3.1. The purpose of RPL assessment	158
5.2.3.2 Support for RPL candidates	159
5.2.3.3 The involvement of RPL candidate in the assessment process	160
5.2.3.4 The choice of RPL assessment methods	160
5.2.3.5 The appeals process	162
5.2.3.6 The development of assessment instruments	163
5.2.3.7 The procedure for completing RPL assessment reports	163
5.2.3.8 Moderation of assessment activities	164
5.2.4 Quality management systems (QMS)	165
5.2.4.1. Quality management systems for RPL assessments	166
5.2.4.2 Refining RPL assessment procedures	166
5.2.4.3 Input from key stakeholders	167
5.2.4.4 Meeting RPL developmental targets	168
5.2.4.5 Monitoring activities in the quality management system	168
5.2.4.6 RPL assessment monitoring activities within LIS sector	169
5.2.4.7 Maintenance of assessment documentation	170
5.2.4.8 The recording of RPL outcomes/results	170
5.2.4.9 Monitoring the progress of RPL candidates post-RPL	172
5.2.4.10 The analyses of RPL services	174
5.3 Summary of the chapter	175
6.1 Introduction	176
6.2 Summary of research findings	176
6.2.1 Policy environment for RPL practice	176
6.2.2 Training of RPL personnel	177
6.2.3 RPL assessment process	177
6.2.4 Quality management systems (QMS)	178
6.3 Conclusions about research objectives	178
6.3.1 Policy environment for RPL practice	178
6.3.2 Training of RPL personnel	179
6.3.3 RPL assessment process	180

6.3.4 Quality management systems (QMS)	181
6.4 Recommendations	182
6.4.1 Policy environment for RPL practice	182
6.4.1.1 Admission procedures for RPL candidates	182
6.4.1.2 Equal access opportunities for RPL support	182
6.4.1.3 Support for RPL personnel	183
6.4.1.4 Availability of information about RPL services	183
6.4.1.5 Formal agreements within LIS sector	183
6.4.2 Training of RPL personnel	184
6.4.2.1 Training plans for RPL personnel	184
6.4.4 Quality management systems for assessment (QMS)	184
6.4.4.1 Refining RPL assessment procedures	184
6.4.4.2 Input from key stakeholders	184
6.4.4.3 Meeting RPL developmental targets	185
6.4.4.4 Monitoring activities in the quality management system (QMS)	186
6.4.4.5 RPL assessment monitoring activities within LIS sector	186
6.4.4.6 Maintenance of assessment documentation	186
6.4.4.7 The recording of RPL outcomes/results	186
6.4.4.8 Monitoring the progress of candidates post-RPL	186
6.4.4.9 The analyses of RPL services	187
6.5 Implications for policy, theory and practice	187
6.6 Final conclusion	188
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>210</b>
APPENDIX A: Covering letter for the questionnaire	210
APPENDIX B: Questionnaire	211
APPENDIX C: Principles of good assessment (SAQA, 2001: 15-19)	216
APPENDIX D: Ten quality assurance standards for RPL (Whitaker, 1989: 9-10)	218

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table1.1: Objectives of the study</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Table 2.1: Experiential learning dimensions</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Table 2.2 Trends and practices of RPL in the international context</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Table 3.1 Features of survey data collection methods</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Table 3.2 Reliability tests for the sections</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Table 4.1: Position (n=10)</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Table 4.2: RPL policy environment</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>Table 4.3: Training of RPL personnel</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Table 4.4: RPL assessment process</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Table 4.5: Quality management systems (QMS)</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Table 4.6: Position (n=68)</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Table 4.7: Years in same position (n=68)</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Table 4.8: RPL policy environment (n=68)</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>Table 4.9: Training of RPL personnel (n=68)</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>Table 4.10: RPL assessment process</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Table 4.11: Quality management systems (QMS)</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>Table 4.12: Comparative analysis of the results of the institutional policy and questionnaire survey</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Table 4.13: Comparative analysis of institutional policy and questionnaire responses on training of RPL personnel</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>Table 4.14: Comparative analysis using the Wilcoxon signed rank test between policy documentation and questionnaire responses on RPL assessment process</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>Table 4.15: Comparative analysis using the Wilcoxon signed rank test between policy documentation and questionnaire responses on quality management systems (QMS)</b>	<b>124</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Literature review map	18
Figure 2.2: Kolb's model of experiential learning	22
Figure 4.1: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test on the aspect the purpose of RPL assessment	116
Figure 4.2: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test on the aspect support for RPL candidates	117
Figure 4.3: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test on the aspect the involvement of RPL candidate in the assessment process	118
Figure 4.4: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test on the aspect assessment plans indicated a variety of appropriate assessment methods/instruments	119
Figure 4.5: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect the choice of assessment methods	120
Figure 4.6: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect development of assessment instruments	121
Figure 4.7: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect the procedure for completing RPL assessment reports	122
Figure 4.8: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect moderation assessment activities	123
Figure 4.9: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect implementation of quality management	126
Figure 4.10: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect refining RPL assessment procedures	127
Figure 4.11 One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect input from key stakeholders	128
Figure 4.12: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect meeting RPL developmental targets	129
Figure 4.13: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect monitoring activities in the quality management system (QMS)	130
Figure 4.14: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect maintenance of assessment documentation	131

**Figure 4.15: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect the recording of RPL outcomes/results** 132

**Figure 4.16: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect recording of RPL outcomes/results on SAQA'S NLRD (National Learners' Records Database)** 133

**Figure 4.17: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect monitoring the progress of candidates post-RPL** 134

**Figure 4.18: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect the analyses of RPL services** 135

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	American Council on Education
ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
AQFAB	Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board
AQTF	Australian Qualifications Training Framework
APEL	Assessment of Prior Experience and Learning
AVETRA	Australian VET Research Association
CAEL	Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
CCEA	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
CHE	Council for Higher Education
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DAC	Department of Arts and Culture
DEET	Department of Employment Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
DoL	Department of Labour
DUT	Durban University of Technology
ECSA	Engineering Council of South Africa
EE	Equal Education

ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance Body
FET	Further Education and Training
HSRC	Human Science Research Council
IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LET	Learning from Experience Trust
LIASA	Library and Information Association of South Africa
LIS	Library and Information Science
MQA	Mauritius Qualification Authority
NAEC	National Accreditation and Equivalence Council
NAMCOL	Namibian College for Open Learning
NBEET	National Board of Employment, Education and Training
NCHE	National Council for Higher Education
NCLIS	National Council for Library and Information Services
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
NLRD	National Learners' Records Database
NQA	Namibia Qualifications Authority
NQF	National Qualification Framework
NRF	National Research Foundation
NSB	National Standards Body
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority

	National Union of Mine Workers
ODL	Open Distance Learning
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLA	Prior Learning Assessment
PLAR	Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QMS	Quality management systems QS
RCC	Recognition of Current Competency
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RTOs	Registered Training organisations
SA	South Africa
SAICE	South African Institution of Civil Engineering
SAIDE	South African Institute for Distance Education
SAIME	South African Institution of Mechanical Engineering
SANC	South African Nursing Council
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authorities
SGB	Standards Generating Bodies
SQA	Seychelles Qualifications Authority
SU	Stellenbosch University
UCT	University of Cape Town
UFH	University of Fort Hare

UJ	University of Johannesburg
UK	United Kingdom
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UL	University of Limpopo
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNISA	University of South Africa
UP	University of Pretoria
US	United States
UREC	Unisa Research and Ethics Committee
UWC	University of Western Cape
UZ	University of Zululand
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WSU	Walter Sisulu University

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A: Covering letter for the questionnaire**

**APPENDIX B: Questionnaire**

**APPENDIX C: Principles of good assessment**

**APPENDIX D: Ten quality assurance standards for RPL**

# **CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter introduces the study and gives a detailed discussion of the background (the conceptual and contextual settings), the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, its objectives, scope/delimitation, contribution and significance, originality, ethical considerations, thesis structure, and key concepts and terms. The chapter also briefly discusses the research methodology.

Owing to past injustices, the South African higher education sector is characterised by inequalities of resource allocation and of learning opportunities. Through the National Qualification Framework (NQF), recognition of prior learning (RPL) was established to address the previous inequalities in higher education and training.

Like similar frameworks elsewhere in the world, NQF creates a comprehensive qualifications structure and an integrated approach to education and training in South Africa (National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), 1996). According to South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2002), the major principle of the NQF was the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), which had to be pursued across all sectors. RPL was therefore conceived to address past inequalities in higher education and training, mainly through NQF objectives of access, equity and redress (SAQA, 2002). However, although RPL is a national policy imperative in higher education and training, the 'conceptualization does not imply that such intentions are actually realised at the level of practice" in higher education and training' (Motaung, 2009).

The Library and Information Science (LIS) schools in South Africa face immense challenges in attracting students into the Library and Information profession (Ocholla and Bothma, 2007). Structured and planned RPL offers LIS schools the best way to give students access to learning programmes at any entry level, be it undergraduate or postgraduate. Non-traditional learners such as workers, adult learners, and community workers can also be granted access as a result of RPL.

RPL is defined as assessing and accrediting learning from life and work experience as the basis for creating new routes into higher education, training opportunities and employment (Weil and McGill, 1989, in Peters 2005). SAQA defines RPL as the comparison of the learner's previous learning and experience, howsoever obtained, against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements (SAQA, 1997:6). In South Africa, RPL process assumes that people acquire important knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes in formal, informal or non-formal contexts and that these skills and knowledge are worthy to be assessed for purposes of redress, equity, access and redistribution (The National Union of Mine Workers (), 1997:6).

RPL can also be used for up-skilling within a sector, to enable staff to migrate from paraprofessional to professional roles. LIS schools could possibly use this approach to offer experienced but unqualified library workers opportunities for progressive professional development and career growth. It must be emphasised at this point that one fundamental role of LIS schools is to empower those in the Library and Information profession to develop so they can promote and deliver quality library and information services.

Although there is little or no information on RPL practice within the LIS sector, RPL has been described as a sound academic practice that could benefit library practitioners who are either under qualified or unqualified but who have acquired a great deal of work experience and many skills over the years (Davids, 2006). Positive outcomes for learners involved in RPL include increased motivation to learn and greater confidence in their own abilities. Institutions offering RPL benefit from increased student enrolments, effective placement and increased efficiency, which often result in reducing the time spent in learning programmes (Harris, 1997; Blom *et al.*, 2004; Hargreaves, 2006).

RPL implementation in the LIS schools should be investigated because of its potential impact on South African LIS education and training in higher education. Currently, the profession is experiencing a shortage of qualified library professionals; certain positions are filled by under qualified or unqualified library practitioners; and there is a skills shortage as a result of declining student enrolments and impending

retirements (Davids, 2006; Ocholla and Bothma, 2007; Stilwell, 2009; Department of Arts and Culture (DAC), 2010).

According to the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) 2010 report, it is more and more evident that libraries cannot fill available vacancies with qualified library staff. This problem has a severe impact on quality service provision. The report paints a depressing picture of a 16% shortage of qualified library staff, suggesting that effective RPL systems are critical if LIS schools are to help replenish skills shortages in the sector. It is apparent from the DAC report (2010) and several studies that there is a considerable need for qualified Library and Information workers in the profession, not only in South Africa but also around the world, to fill the anticipated vacancies as more libraries are built and many librarians reach retirement age. According to the Department of Basic Education, "78% of schools in South Africa do not have libraries, but the 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 a functional library with books.

Libraries fulfil a very important function in any society. They contribute to personal empowerment and improve people's lives, and at a societal level they contribute to a culture of learning and skills development and the achievement of other national objectives. In South Africa libraries face critical challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, inconsistent levels of service, lack of staff and, in disadvantaged areas, a lack of services.

In the 2010 DAC report, the quantitative projections of both demand and supply of professional librarians showed that there are not enough new entrants to the profession to fill vacant positions. The main reason is the severe drop in the number of new graduates over the last decade. The report also shows that in order to lift the LIS sector out of its current predicament, some drastic growth in the output of the higher education institutions – at least 30% or 40% over the next four to five years – will be required to lift the supply of new entrants to the required level.

The study by Gulbraar (2005) found that academic library personnel form an ageing population, with a larger portion of the work force in the oldest age groups and relatively few in the two youngest. In Norway the ratio is as much as 57% to only 19%; Canada has a somewhat better ratio of 46% to 22.8%.

According to the DAC report, 'a third of all LIS employees in South Africa were between the ages of 31 and 40 while a further quarter (25.3%) was between 41 and 50. A total of 19.8% of employees were between 51 and 60 and 3.7% were older than 60' (2010:64). This means that the greatest challenge for LIS schools in higher education institutions, in South Africa and across the world, is to find new strategies for regenerating the LIS profession by increasing student enrolments. Effective recruitment strategies will help to fill the anticipated vacancies with qualified staff; manage the succession problem resulting from large numbers of retirements; and develop innovative and quality services for the future.

If RPL reduces the time taken to complete a qualification, skills shortages could be reduced and resources could be redirected to offer additional LIS training opportunities. In addition, LIS schools facing possible closure could be revitalised and sustained by wider access to and participation in LIS programmes in higher institutions. The study's aim is to objectively determine the nature of RPL implementation in LIS schools in South Africa since the promulgation of RPL policy in South African higher education and training in 2002 (SAQA, 2002).

## **1.2 Background to the study**

This part of the chapter captures the origins of the concept of RPL in South African higher education and training and the context in which the research question was studied.

### **1.2.1 Conceptual setting**

The concept of RPL emerged in higher education in the United States (US) in the late 1960s and early 1970s shortly after World War II. Returning American soldiers entering learning programmes requested that the skills they learned during military service be taken into account in order to avoid duplication of learning (Andersson, Fejes and Ahn, 2004; Kizito, 2006). This first type of RPL was a way to enhance social justice and social inclusion in higher education for adults with wide experience.

In the 1980s, RPL was introduced in the United Kingdom (UK) with a focus on admission to higher education and social justice. As in the United States, its focus later shifted to the labour market (Andersson, Fejes and Ahn, 2004). Since then other countries like Australia, New Zealand and Canada have also implemented the RPL system (Attwood and Castle, 2001; Andersson, Fejes and Ahn, 2004).

In South Africa, RPL was introduced to achieve equitable educational opportunities for adult learners. In the context of a history of educational backlog and disadvantaged learners, increased access had become the cornerstone of government policy for the higher education sector (Higher Education Act, 1997). RPL was conceived by the South African government as a key strategy for achieving the objectives of NQF: access, equity and redress (SAQA, 2002).

RPL in the higher education sector is intended to increase the pool of adult recruits, to ensure equitable opportunities to education and training, and to promote the notion of lifelong learning. Subsequently, the Employment Act of 1998 moved away from the notion that only formal education and training should be recognised. At the higher education level, the main task of the national department of education was to provide access for all South Africans to all institutions of higher education (National Plan for Higher Education, 2001). Various Acts were promulgated to address difficulties in integrating the complex process of access, quality control and accreditation in higher education and training on the one hand, with the demands for skills and training in the labour market.

The first was SAQA Act of 1995, the key driver of RPL in South Africa, which is a statutory obligation promulgated by this Act. The Act is meant to target people who were denied access to quality education, higher education and specialised qualifications because of apartheid. The Act therefore makes provision to give these individuals opportunities to learn at any stage of their lives. Such individuals are increasingly gaining access to higher education and higher qualifications because of the formal acknowledgement of their skills, knowledge and capabilities gained from formal, informal or non-formal learning (Du Pré, 2004).

SAQA's policy document on RPL had the main objective of providing direction and support for an evolving system of RPL, which could set the required standards to meet the challenges of social, economic, and human development (National Policy, 2002). After further consultation with higher education and training institutions, labour market institutions and other stakeholders to develop a national standard, SAQA released another policy document in 2004 which deals with "The Criteria and Guidelines for the implementation of RPL". This document is open-ended and non-prescriptive; it supports the development of the systems and processes that will provide guidelines to institutions on how to develop their own RPL implementation plans.

Secondly, the Employment Equity Act was promulgated in 1999. The Act recognises that past injustices and other discriminatory laws and practices have created disparities in employment, occupation and income in the labour market. As a result, people from historically disadvantaged groups have such severe disadvantages that they cannot be redressed simply by repealing discriminatory laws. The aims of the Act are to promote the constitutional right to equality; eliminate unfair discrimination in employment; and ensure the implementation of employment equity to redress the effects of discrimination.

Lastly, to provide an effective framework in the accreditation, quality control and delivery of education and training at higher education institutions coupled with labour market institutions, the Skills Development Act of 1998 was promulgated. According to the Act, skills development is about enabling and empowering individuals through the acquisition of competencies that are in demand.

SAQA has made RPL a fundamental component of the skills development strategy. The notion of lifelong learning is one of the key principles underpinning RPL provision in higher education and training (SAQA, 2002). Arguably, many workers in South Africa have never had an opportunity to enter higher education, but the demands of their jobs require advanced training. To improve their quality of life and take advantage of new job opportunities, these workers need to upgrade their skills continually. As a result, a vast majority of the working population need upgrading or training to acquire a formal qualification (i.e. a certificate, diploma or degree).

RPL is based on the premise that people learn both inside and outside formal learning structures (including from work and life experience). It is used extensively by those seeking admission to a course; advanced standing for a course; or credits towards a qualification (The New Academic Policy, 2001). RPL is a mechanism for adult learners to gain confidence, and for the formal learning system to recognise the knowledge and skills they have acquired through life and work experience (Cameron and Miller, 2004). However, the researcher observed while working as an RPL specialist at the University of South Africa (UNISA) that current RPL practice is largely restricted by its primary focus on admissions and certification. By and large, universities still determine admissions using school-based qualifications. As a result, access to higher education is still being denied to many potential candidates, who have been excluded because of admission principles applied in the past by higher education institutions.

RPL should be of particular importance to encourage LIS schools to conduct cost-effective RPL mechanisms, which will speed up recognition and certification of existing skills and knowledge to address the skills shortage in LIS sector (Department of Education and Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), 1999; Stilwell, 2009; Ocholla and Bothma, 2007). According to the recent DAC (2010) report, there is a 16% shortage of qualified librarians. As a result, relatively unqualified and inexperienced people are placed in responsible posts for which they are not equipped. The irony is that there are a large number of equally experienced and capable library workers without formal qualifications (Lor, 2001) who could benefit from RPL and thus alleviate the skills shortage in the sector.

It is inconceivable that despite the obvious benefits of RPL, LIS schools are not capitalising on these benefits and are faced with closure and declining student enrolments (Ocholla and Bothma, 2007). This study therefore sought to investigate the nature of RPL implementation in LIS schools in South Africa since the promulgation of RPL policy in South African higher education and training in 2002 (SAQA, 2002).

### **1.2.2 Contextual setting**

Post-1994, the LIS profession has been dramatically affected by the restructuring of South African higher education due to changes to national policy regarding school and higher education (Ocholla and Bothma, 2007; DAC, 2010). In particular, the precipitous drop in student numbers has resulted in a reduction in the number of institutions offering programmes in LIS from 18 LIS schools in 2000 to the current 10 (Ocholla and Bothma, 2007; DAC, 2010). The University of Johannesburg (UJ) and Stellenbosch University (SU) changed their qualifications to include only information and knowledge management and exclude any reference to librarianship; these two institutions do not see their training as part of the LIS field.

There are currently 10 LIS schools in South Africa:

- Durban University of Technology (DUT)
- University of Cape Town (UCT)
- University of Fort Hare (UFH)
- University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)
- University of Limpopo (UL)
- University of Pretoria (UP)
- University of South Africa (UNISA)
- University of Zululand (UZ)
- Walter Sisulu University (WSU)
- University of Western Cape (UWC)

Some of the current changes to LIS schools include name changes, curricula and qualifications. According to Ocholla and Bothma (2007), these qualifications may be viewed in five ways:

- the nature and type of qualification programmes offered (e.g. Bachelor's or Master's degrees);
- the duration and credit requirements for a qualification (e.g. three or four years);
- the academic level of the qualifications (e.g. undergraduate or postgraduate);
- the mode of instruction (contact or distance); and

- the orientation of the LIS school (e.g. vocational or general education)

The most common route to a professional career in the LIS sector is through a three-year or four-year vocational qualification or a postgraduate diploma in LIS (Ocholla and Bothma, 2007; Nassimbeni and Underwood, 2007). However, different institutions offer different entry routes to the LIS profession. The main one is the undergraduate route offered by UNISA and UFH, UP, UWC and UZ. However, some institutions such as UCT and UKZN offer a postgraduate diploma. Other institutions such as UZ, UL, UNISA, UWC and WSU offer both an undergraduate degree and a postgraduate diploma. UWC also offers a variation of the postgraduate diploma a two-year Bachelor of Library and Information Science (Alt), for students with any other bachelor's degree at the university (DAC, 2010).

As noted by Ocholla and Bothma (2007), in their struggle for survival South African LIS schools are making changes to their courses and positioning themselves within various schools, departments and faculties. According to the above authors, most LIS programmes were traditionally located under Arts and Humanities; however, recently, it is not uncommon to find that LIS programmes subsumed under different faculties, schools and departments, for example Accounting and Informatics; Engineering, Built Environment and IT; and Education.

One answer to the declining numbers of people choosing librarianship as a career and the resultant shortage of qualified librarians, the difficulty of recruiting and retaining qualified staff and the need to develop school libraries (DAC, 2010; Stilwell, 2009; Ocholla and Bothma, 2007) is RPL. Using RPL, LIS schools can tap into this large pool of a large number of library practitioners who are either unqualified or under-qualified (Davids, 2006). When these people achieve recognised status (at a level of 'assistant', 'paraprofessional' or 'professional' (Underwood, 2003), the survival and viability of LIS schools in South African higher education and training will be much more likely.

According to Harris and Saddington (1995), RPL can:

- contribute to redress equity by opening up more ways for people to attain qualified status;

- enable more people to reach higher levels of qualification and expertise by beginning with an acknowledgement of existing skills and knowledge;
- contribute to enhancing international economic competitiveness by building on often invisible and unacknowledged workforce skills; and
- offer the first step in attaining the goal of developing a multi-skilled and flexible workforce by acting as an auditing tool to quantify existing competence.

Although RPL is a national higher education and training policy imperative (Osman, 2004) with social, economic and political benefits (Harris and Saddington, 1995), there is no known research about how LIS schools undertake RPL practices for adult learners with prior experiential learning.

Research in LIS seems to 'focus on core areas of LIS education such as management, information retrieval, services and dissemination, and the application of ICTs' (Ocholla and Ocholla, 2007). So it absolutely critical to undertake an audit of the current RPL practices in order to determine the nature of RPL implementation in LIS schools in South Africa. This will enable the researcher to recommend measures for effective and efficient RPL practice in the LIS schools.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

High-quality, accessible RPL services are widely available, but they have not reached many for whom they are intended, particularly those who did not enter higher education and occupational training but who have acquired a great deal of knowledge and experience through years of non-formal or formal training, work experience and/or other life experience (Harris and Saddington, 1995; Department of Education, 1997; Grunning, Van Kleef and Werquin (2008). According to Gawe (1999:23), many institutions of higher learning all over the world (such as in the US, Canada, Northern Ireland, the UK and Australia) have been using RPL for many years to widen access to and participation of adult learners into higher education and training.

In South Africa, various institutions have undertaken RPL practice in the vocational and higher education and training sectors. Although there is evidence of good RPL practice elsewhere in the sectors, there is generally no widespread use of RPL practice (Grunning, Van Kleef and Werquin, 2008). In addition, there is little

information available and/or research conducted on RPL practice in South African LIS schools, it has great potential to reverse the trends of threatened closure of LIS schools (Ocholla and Bothma, 2007) and lack of qualified library practitioners and/or professionals in the country (Department of Education and HSRC, 1999; Stilwell, 2009; DAC, 2010). Despite it being a national policy and its obvious benefits, very little is known about RPL implementation in LIS schools in South Africa, which raises two questions: 'what is the nature of recognition of prior learning (RPL) implementation in Library and Information Science (LIS) schools in South Africa?' and 'what measures could be suggested if current practices were inadequate?'

#### **1.4 Purpose of the study**

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the nature of RPL implementation in LIS schools in South Africa and make recommendations for effective and efficient RPL practice in these schools.

#### **1.5 Objectives of the study**

The objectives of this study (see Table 1) were to:

1.5.1 Investigate whether the LIS schools were committed to providing an enabling policy environment for RPL practice.

1.5.2 Establish whether credible assessment processes were being followed in the LIS schools to ensure the integrity of the RPL system.

1.5.3 Determine whether personnel involved in assessment were trained to ensure the quality of RPL assessments.

1.5.4 Determine whether quality management systems (QMS) were in place to ensure the continuous improvement of RPL system in LIS schools.

1.5.5 Make recommendations for effective and efficient RPL practice in the LIS schools in South Africa.

**Table1.1: Objectives of the study**

<b>Sn</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Research question</b>	<b>Data collection instruments</b>
1	To investigate whether the LIS schools were committed to providing an enabling environment for RPL practice	Are the LIS schools committed to providing an enabling environment for RPL practice?	Literature review, questionnaire and document analysis
2	To establish whether credible assessment processes were being followed in the LIS schools to ensure the integrity of the RPL system	Are credible assessment processes being followed in the LIS schools to ensure the integrity of the RPL system?	Literature review, questionnaire and document analysis
3	To determine whether personnel involved in assessment were trained to ensure the quality of RPL assessments	Are assessors and/or other personnel involved in assessment trained to ensure the quality of RPL assessments?	Literature review, questionnaire and document analysis
4	To determine whether QMS were in place to ensure the continuous improvement of RPL system in LIS schools	Are QMS in place to ensure the continuous improvement of RPL system in LIS schools?	Literature review, questionnaire and document analysis
5	To suggest appropriate measures for efficient and effective RPL implementation in SA LIS schools	What measures can be put in place for an efficient and effective RPL implementation in SA LIS schools?	Literature review, document analysis, data analysis and interpretation

### **1.6 Scope/delimitation of the study**

This study was not concerned with vocational or workplace RPL or the nature of RPL implementation in higher education and training in South Africa in general. The aim of this study was to investigate the nature of RPL implementation in South LIS schools. Thus, the study focused on the ten LIS schools in South African higher education and training.

### **1.7 Contribution and significance of the study**

This research is of significance to the domain of LIS, as it extended the existing knowledge base with regards to RPL practice in the LIS field. The concept of RPL is relatively new to the majority of information practitioners in higher educational institutions in South Africa, and the handful of higher education institutions in South Africa that have embraced the concept and implemented the practice have welcomed the educational and administrative benefits it offers. The research provided information for those who do not yet know the potential applications and benefits of RPL within their educational setting.

To illustrate the potential of an effective and efficient RPL practice, RPL practitioners can:

- give value to what has been undervalued;
- break down (often discriminatory) barriers to access and routes to progress;
- advantage the disadvantaged and the excluded;
- challenge the exclusive practices of formal institutions;
- save adults having to relearn what they already know;
- enable employers to audit their staff and to plan for more effective human resource development;
- allow adults to acquire qualified status and to market themselves more effectively in the employment world;
- make visible learning that may have hitherto been invisible;
- contribute to a positive national morale; and
- give substance to the concept of lifelong learning (Harris, 1997).

Theories of learning such as experiential learning, of which RPL forms a part, have become increasingly prominent in adult education theory and practice. This study not only extended knowledge and understanding of RPL practice within the LIS and higher education sectors, but also provides educators, policy-makers and stakeholders with useful insights for aligning RPL with LIS curriculum, instruction and articulation possibilities. Furthermore, the study encourages educators to critically question their very purpose, the ethics of their presumption to insert themselves into adults' experience, and the interests served by their approach to using RPL assessment methods for teaching and learning in the LIS field.

In terms of methodology, 11 studies have been completed on RPL in disciplines other than the LIS field, according to the National Research Foundation (NRF) database. All the studies used qualitative methods such as participant observation and historical research, and hybrid methods like focus groups, content analysis, and evaluation research. This study used the quantitative method combined with document analysis to guarantee a higher level of objectivity and enhance the validity and reliability of the findings.

The study suggested appropriate measures for creating an effective and efficient RPL system in LIS schools. This will not only improve the quality of RPL outcomes but will also contribute significantly to increased access and participation for adult learners in higher education and training. This is bound to have a domino effect in the LIS sector; effective RPL practice can alleviate current challenges such as library closures and declining student enrolments, as well as the shortage of qualified LIS practitioners – particularly in public libraries and schools.

In South Africa RPL has a social and political agenda: to support the development and transformation of an equitable education and training system (SAQA, 2002). Through RPL, people with work experience who achieve a qualification are empowered by public recognition of their achievements (Evans, 1987). It is hoped that this study will contribute to effective and efficient RPL systems in the LIS schools so that the large number of library practitioners who are either unqualified or under qualified, but who have the requisite knowledge, skills and practical experience acquired through years of service in the LIS sector (David, 2006) can have their prior learning recognised. Therefore, effective and efficient RPL practices in LIS schools will promote the NQF principles of access, articulation and redress. A high RPL uptake in the LIS schools is important to address shortage of LIS professionals in South Africa. This is so because the shortage of LIS professionals is a national problem (DAC, 2010) that adversely affects the provision of library and information services in school libraries or media centres, community and or public libraries, special libraries, medical libraries and academic libraries.

### **1.8 Originality of the study**

There are a number of ways to create original research, including:

- setting down a major piece of new information in writing for the first time;
- continuing an existing original piece of work;
- carrying out original work designed by the supervisor;
- providing a single original technique/observation or result in an otherwise unoriginal but competent piece of research;

- having original ideas, methods and interpretations performed by others under the direction of the postgraduate; and
- showing originality in testing somebody else's idea (Francis, 1976, in Phillips and Pugh, 2005:61–62)).

According to Phillips and Pugh (2005:63), originality includes:

- carrying out empirical work that hasn't been done before;
- making a synthesis that hasn't been done before;
- using known material but with a new interpretation;
- trying out something locally that has previously only been done abroad;
- taking a particular technique and applying it in a new area;
- bringing new evidence to bear on an old issue;
- being cross-disciplinary and using different methodologies;
- looking at areas that people in the discipline haven't looked at before; and
- adding to knowledge in a way that hasn't been done before.

For Walker (1997), there are several ways to demonstrate the originality of research, including developing new methodologies, tools and or techniques, new areas of research, new interpretations of existing material, new applications of existing theories to new areas, or new blends of ideas.

A search for the term 'RPL' on the NRF database of current and completed research projects revealed a total of 11 qualitative RPL research projects: four current and seven completed. These are: two current MEd projects and one completed MEd project; two completed MTech projects; two current DEd projects and one completed DEd project; and three completed DPhil projects in education, economics and fashion.

Given the above analysis, this research on the implementation of RPL in LIS schools in South Africa is therefore original because it:

- sets down a major piece of new information in writing for the first time;
- carries out empirical work that hasn't been done before;
- makes a synthesis that hasn't been made before;

- uses known material but with a new interpretation (e.g. RPL concept and LIS education and training);
- tries out something in South Africa that has previously only been done abroad;
- brings new evidence to bear on an old issue;
- is cross-disciplinary and uses different methodologies (e.g. quantitative method); and looks at areas that people in the discipline haven't looked at before.

### **1.9 Chapter summary**

This chapter discussed the background of the study (the conceptual and contextual settings), the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, its objectives, scope/delimitation, contribution and significance, originality, ethical considerations, thesis structure, and key concepts.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Fink (1998) describes a literature review as something that identifies, evaluates and interprets the work of researchers, scholars and practitioners in a chosen field. Hart (1998:13) describes conducting a literature review as 'the selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed'.

The first part of this chapter explores the theory underlying this study of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). It starts by looking at several different learning theories to find the best one for this study. These theories are human capital theory, liberal humanism, critical theory and experiential learning theory. The second part of the chapter is a review of the literature that has been written about implementing RPL in the international and local (African) context as it relates to the objectives of this study. The generic template of SAQA's RPL policy was and the core criteria of RPL implementation in South African higher education and training were also discussed.

### **2.2 Literature review map**

Figure 2.1 is a map or diagram of the literature relating to RPL). At the top is the title of the broad main research topic, followed by the sub-sections or subject headings. The arrows show how the subject headings are linked to one another (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008; Creswell, 2007).

Literature maps are used when planning research. They act as 'guideposts giving direction of where information will be obtained thereby assisting in refining the research topic' (Machi and McEvoy, 2008:50; University of Sheffield Department of Information Studies, 2007; Creswell, 2003; Ngulube, 2003). Maps are also 'excellent tools for developing the composition outline of the literature review document'

(Heinrich, 2001; Machi and McEvoy, 2008; Alias and Suradi, 2008). Kamler and Thomson (2006:49) stress that 'mapping strategies can be used at various points of candidature, recursively, as doctoral researchers progress and revise their understanding'.

A student's literature map gives 'tangible evidence' of how he or she understands and interprets the research area, and makes it easy to share this understanding with both peers and supervisors (Kamler and Thomson, 2006). According to Hart (1998:162), 'mapping the ideas, arguments and concepts from a body of literature is an important part of the review of literature'. Mapping illustrates the research field in different ways. For example, it is called a 'graphic blueprint' (Heinrich, 2001), a 'diagrammatic representation' (Hart, 1998) and a 'geographical metaphor' (Kamler and Thomson, 2006).

Machi and McEvoy (2008) present two mapping approaches. The first uses core ideas or 'descriptors' that have been developed from keywords in research topics. Hart (1998) calls this a 'subject tree map'. The second approach is mapping by author. This approach identifies key experts in the field and may include quotations and references to the work of others. Figure 2.1 uses the subject tree map format, and shows how RPL is divided into sub-themes related to South African LIS schools.

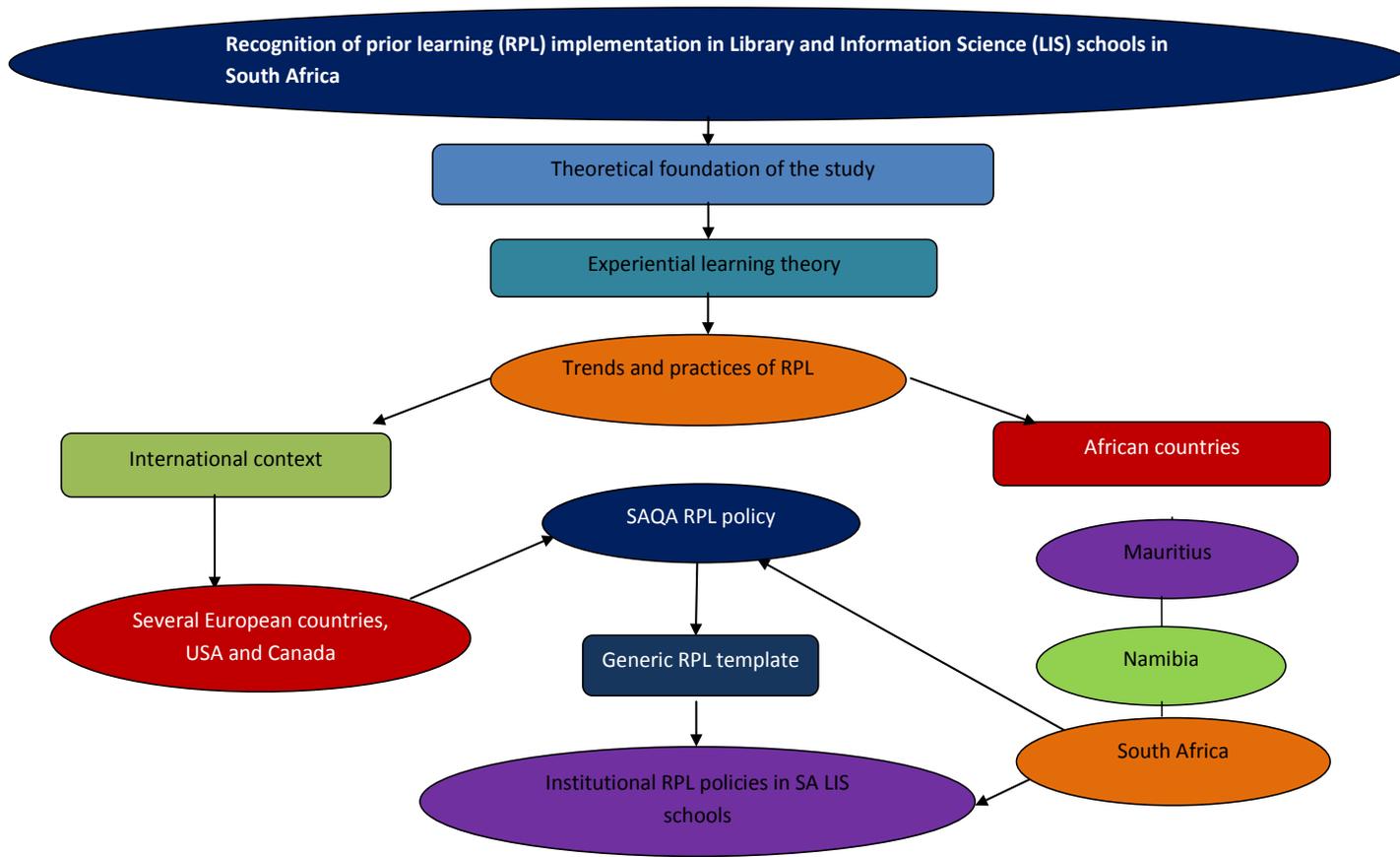


Figure 2.1: Literature review map

## **2.3 Theoretical Foundation of the Study**

### **2.3.1 Introduction**

The theoretical foundation that is the basis of this study, namely experiential learning theory, is explored in depth in this section. The experiential learning theory has been chosen because it is more appropriate for the purposes of this study than human capital theory, liberal humanism or critical theory.

### **2.3.2 Experiential learning theory**

This study focuses on RPL, which is a method of recognising the expertise, skills, experiences and competencies that a person has acquired in their working life and not necessarily through formal education.

In adult education, experiential learning theory asks the student to reflect on concrete real-life experiences. Adults can learn in different ways, such as formal learning and informal learning, and other non-formal learning and experiences sites such as everyday workplace tasks and relationships, home and family activity and community involvement. Many experiential learning theorists believe that the best way to learn skills and concepts is by 'doing' (Michelson, 1996). This is certainly true when a person constructs or builds 'practical' knowledge, which is the knowledge he or she uses in daily activities and work.

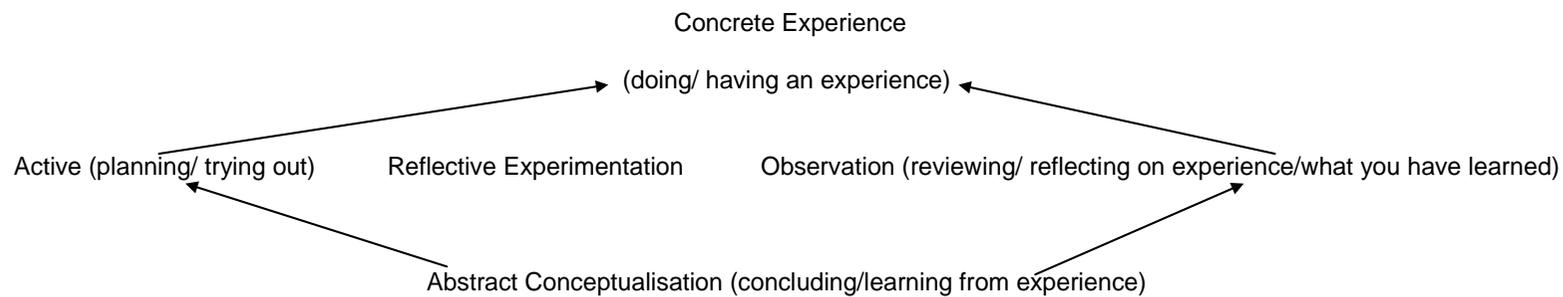
According to Beard and Wilson (2006), experiential learning happens when we consciously think about our own experiences or the experiences of other people, and use these to build upon the knowledge we already have. With RPL the work experience of candidates, however it was obtained, is taken into consideration for access to higher education institutions. This work experience is also used to award credits towards diploma and degree certificates (SAQA RPL Policy, 2002). The experiential learning theory has been selected for this research because of its emphasis on experience.

### **2.3.3 The development of experiential learning theory**

Various educational theorists have written about the importance of learning experience and their work is discussed in chronological order.

#### **2.3.3.1 Kolb (1984)**

According to Kolb (1984), the process of experiential learning involves four stages within a learning cycle, namely concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Figure 2 is a diagram of Kolb's theory.



**Figure 2.2: Kolb's model of experiential learning**

Source: Fenwick (2000)

In the first stage, the learner 'lives through' some kind of **concrete experience**. This could be a simulated experience that has been created especially for a learning situation, such as a case study or role-play. On the other hand, this concrete experience could be a real-life or workplace experience that the learner has had. It could also be an exercise where the learner actively experiments with the skills he or she has learned.

In the second stage, the learner takes some time for **reflective observation**. The learner thinks about the experience and asks: What did I observe? What was I aware of? What does this experience mean to me? How could this experience have been different?

In the third stage, the learner uses the ideas and understanding that he or she has gained through reflective observation to create an **abstract conceptualisation**, or a way of explaining the learning. This is where the learner asks: What principle seems to be operating here? What general 'rule-of-thumb' have I learned here? What new understanding have I gained about how I, people, or particular situations work?

Finally, the learner applies the new learning through **active experimentation**. The learner asks: What will I do next time? How will I use this principle in other situations? The learner tests the new 'principle' in similar situations, and then in different situations, and continues to revise and reshape the learning based on what happens when he or she experiments with it. The learner may not actually test out the new skill in real life, but may simply think about how he or she would use it (Fenwick, 2000).

Kolb (1984) agrees that people learn from their experiences and that the results of learning can be reliably assessed and certified for college or university credit.

### **Limitations of the Kolb model**

However, Kolb (1984) and Brookfield (1998) warn that, although all adults are exposed to many life experiences, not everyone will learn from those experiences. Experience alone does not teach. Brookfield argues that adult experience can be distorted, self-fulfilling, unexamined and limiting. It is clear therefore that learning only happens when the learner uses reflective thought and 'processes' the experience internally, in a way that actively makes sense of the experience, links the experience to previous learning and transforms the learner's previous understandings in some way (Kolb, 1984; Fenwick, 2000).

It is useful to refer to Dewey (1939:25) here, who contended in 1939 that 'all genuine education comes about through experience [but] ... not all experiences are genuinely or equally educative'. As Kolb (1984), Dewey (1939) and Butterworth (1992) point out that RPL does not recognise or value the person's actual experience, but rather the skills and understanding that the person has gained from it. Current thinking suggests that learning is only likely to be recognised and applied if the learner actively reflects upon the experience. This point is

stressed by Freire (1994), who sees action and reflection (doing and thinking) as the two essential aspects of any truly useful educational experience.

#### 2.3.3.2 *Weil and McGill (1989)*

How does experiential learning happen in adult education? Weil and McGill (1989) distinguish four different forms of educational practice, which they call 'villages' or areas of focus:

- First village (1) – learning gained from experience is accredited so the learner can enter the educational system or find employment. This is called APEL (Assessment of Prior Experience and Learning), PLA (Prior Learning Assessment) or RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning). For educators who function in this 'village', reflection is about recording and assessing experience. The first model was the United States GI Bill of 1946, which dealt with returning World War II soldiers who wanted credit for their military experience in order to enter university. This experience was assessed using traditional university course materials.
- Second village (2) – experiential learning is used to challenge higher and continuing education, schools and curriculum. This approach derives from the progressive tradition of Dewey wherein educators help learners recognise their hidden knowledge through reflecting on their life experience.
- Third village (3) – focus is on social change. In this radical tradition, educators help learners to look beyond their private world and become aware of the broader socio-cultural dynamics and history that shape their life experience and how they reflect on it.
- Fourth village (4) – the focus is on individual development. Educators in this 'village' have a humanistic perspective and encourage learners to reflect on their personal growth and take responsibility for their own learning.

#### **Limitations of the Weil and McGill model**

The villages above are organised in terms of the educator's purpose or intention and the learner outcomes that the educator is looking for. The villages do not separate different ways of actually conceptualising experience and the process of cognition or 'learning' that takes place within it.

#### 2.3.3.3 *Boud and Walker (1991)*

Boud and Walker's experiential learning model is similar to Kolb's but it has two main enrichments: they acknowledge that specific contexts can affect an individual's experience in different ways, and they are interested in how differences among individuals – particularly their

past histories, learning strategies and emotions – influence the sort of learning that a person gains when reflecting on his or her experience.

Boud and Walker (1991) found that when individuals recall and re-evaluate their experiences they use four processes, namely:

- association, which is relating new information to familiar concepts
- integration, which is looking for connections between new and old knowledge
- appropriation, which is relating the new knowledge to the individual so that he or she can own it, and
- validation, which is working out how genuine the new ideas and the feelings about the experience.

Boud and Walker (1991) also show the importance of 'preparation', or how ready the learner is to learn from the experience, and the significance of the learner's particular context. Preparation is a significant aspect of the RPL assessment process (SAQA, 2002).

#### *2.3.3.4 Mezirow (1991)*

In his 'transformative learning theory' Mezirow (1991:14) argues that 'when individuals cognitively reflect on their own fundamental understandings (formed through their biographies of experience), they transform these basic knowledge structures or 'meaning perspectives' to become more inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically reflective, and integrative of experience'.

#### *2.3.3.5 Saddington (1998)*

Saddington (1998) builds upon Weil and McGill's four educational-purpose 'villages' to show how different experiential learning dimensions come together in adult education practice. Saddington (1998) uses three basic types of educational practice to examine different experiential learning dimensions, namely:

- Progressive, which focuses on the individual's responsibility towards his or her society, and sees education as a problem-solving tool for social and political reform;
- Humanist, which focuses on the learner, who is at the centre of a process of discovery and self-actualisation, driving towards personal enrichment, integration and psychological development;

- Radical, which focuses on how society and the individual can achieve freedom; first by questioning and re-interpreting the cultural assumptions lying behind their experience, and then by starting to take action that brings about change.

Mezirow's theory of 'transformative learning' is based on a three-level concept of how people reflect critically on their experiences. A 'disorienting dilemma' is a problem which a person can't instantly solve using their existing experience and knowledge. Mezirow suggests that when an adult has to deal with a disorienting dilemma, he or she often uses reflection. At first, people often reflect on the content of 'what happened' in the experience, which may or may not lead to learning something.

If individuals do find and test a solution to the problem but see that the solution does not have a good result, they then often reflect upon the process of the experience or 'how it happened'. This type of learning, when learners **analyse** and **learn from** bad choices, is called procedural learning. When the learner **asks questions** about the very premises (deep-seated beliefs and assumptions guiding action) that are the basis of the problem-solving process, this leads to critical reflection.

Other people can have views that are different to ours, causing us to re-examine our own ideas and helping us 'unfreeze' our 'meaning perspectives' (Mezirow, 1991) and assumptions. In this third level of reflection the learner challenges things he or she normally takes for granted – 'what's wrong with how I see what happened and how it happened?'. This questioning leads to a dramatic change, or **transformation**, in the way the learner views the world. Mezirow (1991:29) describes this transformative learning process as 'bringing of one's assumptions, premises, criteria, and schemata into consciousness and vigorously critiquing them.'

The learning dimensions described by Mezirow and the four 'villages' described by Saddington have the same basic concept of experiential learning. In this concept, an independent learner is helped by the educator to reflect on concrete experience and mentally construct new understandings of a social goal of progress or improvement (Fenwick, 2000).

There are important dimensions of learning, such as the type and role of experience in a learner's life. Table 2.1 illustrates how these learning dimensions are understood in different ways by different approaches to learning.

**Table 2.1: Experiential learning dimensions**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Progressive</b>	<b>Humanist</b>	<b>Radical</b>
Most seriously regarded social problem	Social change	Personal meaningfulness	Oppression
Underlying theory of social development	Reform	Self-actualisation	Social transformation
Best metaphor for educational practice	Problem-solving	Personal growth	Empowerment
Key value	Democracy	Acceptance	Freedom
What counts as "knowledge"?	Judgment and the ability to act	Wholeness	Praxis (reflective thought and action)
The educator's task	Guiding	Support	Conscientisation
How to describe an educated person	Responsible	Integrated	Liberated
Role of the learner's life experience	A source of learning and inseparable from knowledge	The source of knowledge and the content of the curriculum	Basic to understanding the societal contexts and source of knowledge
Types of experience mainly used	Structured	Personal focus	Self in society
Villages at work	1 & 2	1 & 4	3

Source: Saddington (1998:134)

### **2.3.4 The limitations of experiential learning theory in the context of RPL**

There are some limitations to the RPL process. For example, it is difficult to assess the experiential learning of some people. This is because not all learners can express or demonstrate what they understand, especially as RPL often depends on writing ability. Another limitation is that institutions expect learners to organise and describe their life experiences to match the particular module, course or unit learning outcomes they want credit for. This can mean that many adult learners' rich experiences are left out because they don't 'fit' (Michelson, 1996). The result is that the institutional RPL process can ignore some aspects of a learner's experience. This is because the institutions decide how knowledge is organised and defined, and how the learners' experience must be 'regulated' to fit into particular experience categories that the institution thinks are worth recognising (Harris, 1999).

Despite these limitations, there are various ways to assess many different types of prior learning experience. Right from the beginning the learning outcomes that the learner has to achieve must be explained clearly to him or her, and learners and academics can negotiate which assessment method(s) to use (Harris, 2000b; SAQA, 2002).

To summarise, there are different ways of expressing the nature of experiential learning. They include Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning; Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning describing critical reflection on experience; and Freire's (1994) theory of 'conscientisation' and 'praxis' learning through action combined with critical reflection. Boud and Walker (1991) are also important; they believe, as other theorists do, that learners must be (consciously) involved in the situation for learning to occur at any level. All these theorists assume that learning by constructing experience is done intentionally: learners always actively pursue knowledge and find opportunities for educative learning in a variety of situations, whether formal, informal or non-formal.

Therefore the experiential learning theory focuses on learning gained through experience. For adult education, this confirms that adults who gain experience in a variety of contexts, such as work or personal circumstances, often learn to understand puzzling new situations and develop new skills and knowledge. This understanding, skill and knowledge are valid and can be given a value for credits or entry into higher education and training institutions.

In South Africa, RPL is intended to promote the social justice issues of access to education and correcting past unfairness. As stated above, RPL believes that the learning that adults have

gained from life and work contexts can be used as part of access to learning programmes in the higher education system. RPL assessment can address some of the challenges currently faced by LIS schools in South African higher education and training. These challenges include low student enrolment and a shortage of qualified library practitioners. There is a risk that some LIS schools may close, but this can be prevented and libraries can be staffed by suitably qualified personnel.

As stated earlier, experiential learning theory has been chosen as the foundation of this study because it emphasises experience as a foundation for learning and knowledge production. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)'s objectives are to achieve the access, equity and redress which are embedded in RPL. In order for this to happen, experiential learning theory emphasises that experiential learning must be recognised and validated so that social justice can be achieved. This applies mainly to previously disadvantaged individuals (learners), who have historically been unfairly deprived of free and full access to educational opportunities in higher education institutions and who have had restricted employment opportunities.

In a sense, RPL matches the many characteristics of the experiential learning theory discussed above. It is hoped, therefore, that the NQF principles of access, equity and redress will be achieved if RPL in LIS schools and other sectors is successfully implemented.

### ***2.3.5 The value of experiential learning theory as the foundation of the study***

South Africa is currently facing the threat of dwindling student numbers in LIS schools and a resulting shortage of qualified and skilled library practitioners. Skills development and job creation are high on the government's agenda.

Nineteen years after the first democratic elections, South Africa still faces the challenge of becoming a more fair and just society. The NQF's objectives are to access to educational opportunities and redress for educational opportunities denied for historically disadvantaged people, but these objectives have not yet been achieved. Educational institutions, most notably LIS schools, are critical to achieving these objectives by implementing RPL. In addition, LIS schools as public institutions in South African higher education and training are seen as a way to move towards social justice by offering access and redress to people who were marginalised by apartheid. As Davids (2006) comments, 'we have a large number of library practitioners who are either unqualified or under-qualified ... however, most of these practitioners are, at times,

highly competent individuals who acquired their knowledge and skills regarding librarianship, through years of practical experience and in-service training’.

The experiential learning theorists discussed above agree that one of the most sound and valuable means of gaining knowledge and skills is experience. According to SAQA (2002), the RPL process can systematically assess this experience or ‘practical knowledge’ as the learning theorists call it, as a way to achieve access, equity and redress in LIS schools.

As in South Africa, countries such as the US, the UK, Canada, New Zealand and Australia have agreed upon national university guidelines. In their definition, ‘learning from experience’ includes learning acquired from non-credited courses, workplace learning and life experience (Cohen *et al.*, 1994). For this reason, many post-secondary institutions and adult education programmes use RPL processes. Learners use these processes to apply for academic course credits for their life experiences, which do not easily match the requirements of a formal education programme.

RPL has the potential to increase student enrolments, which will eventually boost staff capacity not only in LIS schools themselves but in school libraries, public libraries and other similar entities in the sector. Many mature historically disadvantaged learners do not have the formal qualifications they need to enter study programmes, or they need recognition within the work environment. Through RPL these learners can show that they meet these entry requirements because their experiences qualify them for access to higher education and training. Credit towards a qualification means a learner needs less time to complete a formal qualification and can save large sums of money in study fees.

RPL can also be a helpful to learners every time they think about and assess their experiences. It focuses on competency and understanding rather than grades, and is often described as a useful career planner. It helps learners to recognise what they actually know and can achieve. This has the advantage of building the learner’s confidence and pride.

### **2.3.6 Other theories on RPL**

- Human capital theory

Human capital theory emphasises the relationship between education and training and the needs of industry (Olaniyan and Okemakinde, 2008). Human capital theory prioritises knowledge, skills and values that will be of benefit to the economy. It sees students as 'consumers' or 'clients' whose passage through higher and, most often, further education must be facilitated by using study modules and credit frameworks (Breier, 2005). Technical and professional training and generic skills instruction are highly emphasised in this theory. Although it does have economic benefits, RPL in South Africa is geared mainly towards redress for those educationally disadvantaged by the apartheid system.

- Critical theory

Critical theory is associated with social movements such as trade unions or feminist groups and those who view education as a means of transforming the individual and society. It emphasises the nature of knowledge, power and the dominance of particular groups, and the need for social justice to challenge and transform these things (Osman, 2003; Harris, 2000a; Michelson, 1996; Luckett, 1999). According to the critical theorists, learning from work and life experience creates forms of knowledge which are quite different from those of formal education; unfortunately, official educational processes ignore this learning (Breier, 2005). In its extreme form, learning from informal experience is seen as the basis for group consciousness-raising, community action and social change (Weil and McGill, 1989). RPL is therefore seen as a way to achieve social redress so that disadvantaged individuals can gain access to higher education and training and challenge the foundations of academic power.

- Liberal humanism theory

The liberal humanism theory focuses on human potential development and how it is valuable in serving economic needs (Kellner and Lewis, 2007). This theory emphasises that the prior experience of learners, particularly adult learners, should be valued and used as a resource for further learning. It also says that learning should be active, meaningful and relevant to real-life agendas (Weil and McGill, 1989). Although adults' experience is recognised as the 'richest source of learning' in an adult education setting (Knowles, 1990), liberal humanism also acknowledges that not all adults have the same capacity to learn from experience (Brookfield, 1998).

The liberal humanism theory has influenced portfolio development practices in RPL, in particular, encouraging applicants to reflect on their life histories for self-developmental as well as academic purposes (Breier, 2005).

## **2.4 The trends and practices of RPL in the international context**

This section contains an in-depth literature study of international RPL trends and practices that will inform local practice.

### **2.4.1 Introduction**

To keep abreast of developments in the field of RPL abroad, the researcher examined current international RPL trends and practices in the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

### **2.4.2 Summary of trends and practices of RPL in the international context**

Table 2.2 examines trends and practices of RPL in the US, the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Table 2.2 indicates the criteria that were used, including the historical development of RPL, its definitions, purposes, target group, regulatory framework, assessment methods and quality assurance standards and procedures. These criteria are similar to the core criteria of RPL implementation in South African higher education and training that are specified in SAQA (2002).

**Table 2.2 Trends and practices of RPL in the international context**

Criteria	US	UNITED KINGDOM	AUSTRALIA	CANADA	NEW ZEALAND
Historical background	<p>The United States (US) probably has the most experience regarding RPL. The US first introduced RPL in the early 1970s. The American Council on Education (ACE) and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) are two important organisations working in the field of RPL. (Michelson, 1996; Andersson and Fejes, 2005)</p>	<p>The United Kingdom (UK)'s interest in RPL began in the early 1980s. In 1987, the Learning from Experience Trust was set up to encourage developments in the then current system of "assessment of prior and experiential learning" (APEL). (Learning from Experience Trust, 2000; Evans, 2006; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2007)</p>	<p>Australia's RPL implementation was driven by developments in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector in the late 1980s and early 1990s. There was some resistance to RPL in academic institutions, where some faculties had plenty of successful applicants even though they resisted using RPL. However, increased competition for students and government funding incentives intended to broaden education access has led to a change of attitude. (Evans, 2000; Wheelahan, 2002; Australian National Training Authority</p>	<p>Canada's Ontario College system and Manitoba's Red River College are RPL leaders in Canada, following early pilot projects at Mohawk College, Hamilton in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, RPL is still not readily available at universities. (Wihak, 2006; Van Kleef, 2007; Council of Ministers of Education (Blower, 2000); Van Kleef, 2006; OECD, 2007)</p>	<p>In New Zealand, the underlying principles of RPL date back to the 1980s. The strength of the outcomes-based aspect of qualifications and the qualifications systems makes New Zealand arguably the most mature international example of RPL. (Young, 2001; New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), 2003; OECD, 2007)</p>

Criteria	US	UNITED KINGDOM	AUSTRALIA	CANADA	NEW ZEALAND
			(ANTA), 2003; Bateman, 2003; OECD, 2007)		
Definition	Known as PLA (prior learning accreditation): it refers to any knowledge building or skills attainment gained before or outside enrolment at a post-secondary institution which have been assessed for awarding college credit purposes.  (The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) 2003)	Known as APEL (accreditation of prior experiential learning): it refers to credit awarded for learning based on prior experience, i.e. work, community or volunteer experience that was not previously assessed and/or awarded credit.  (Mullholland and Leith, 1998; Learning from Experience Trust, 2000)	RPL means recognition of competencies currently held, regardless of how, when or where learning occurred. Under the Australian Quality Training Framework, competencies can be attained in a number of ways. These include any combination of formal or informal training and education, work experience or general life experience (ANTA, 2001).  Defined as a systematic process to accredit learning gained outside formal educational institutions, by assessing relevant learning against the	Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is defined as a process of identifying and measuring learning gained outside known public educational institutions for recognition through academic credit.  (Wheelahan, <i>et al.</i> , 2003).	RPL is defined simply as learning occurring outside a formal learning programme and at some period before the assessment. In tertiary education, RPL became officially known as Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL). In the industry it has mostly become Recognition of Current Competency (RCC). Due to the integrated nature of the RPL concept, there is no official definition of APL or RCC in New Zealand.  (NZQA, 2003)

Criteria	US	UNITED KINGDOM	AUSTRALIA	CANADA	NEW ZEALAND
			standards required by a university subject or course. (ANTA, 2001)		
Purpose	Access/entry to higher education and credit towards completing a degree or required college credits for occupational purposes and for gaining entry into higher education. (Michelson, 2000; ACE, 2003)	Lifelong learning, social inclusion, wider participation and employability. (OECD, 2007).	Lifelong learning, credit and access to education and training for disadvantaged learners. (Davis and Brown, 1990; Wheelahan, 2002; OECD, 2007)	Credit and admission to a formal programme of study placement or advancement in the workplace. (Wihak, 2006; OECD, 2007)	Equity and access to higher education. (Reid <i>et al.</i> , 1996; Hornblow, 2002)
Target group	Mainly adult learners go back to school for various reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• early school dropouts who now wish to earn a degree</li> <li>• those who wish to make a career change requiring different qualifications</li> <li>• foreign students requiring credit for qualifications earned in another country.</li> </ul>	Various groups of learners falling into one of the following categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unemployed people seeking recognition of past work or other achievements, either for entry to higher education programmes or advanced standing with credit towards an award;</li> <li>• people with certificated or non-certificated work-based learning seeking</li> </ul>	RPL is meant for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• people wanting to re-skill – provides job opportunities;</li> <li>• older workers requiring recognition of their skills for employment purposes;</li> <li>• women returning to study who require the skills they developed informally to be formally</li> </ul>	RPL is targeted at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• individuals who require advancing in their education and training;</li> <li>• individuals who require enhancement ability in applying for work and advancing their careers;</li> <li>• Aboriginal people who did not follow a traditional educational path. (OECD, 2007)</li> </ul>	RPL targets anyone with skills, knowledge, attitudes and values achieved that can be validated disregarding length, place or method of learning, for example disenfranchised or minority ethnic groups of Maori. (NZQA, 1993; Hornblow, 2002)

Criteria	US	UNITED KINGDOM	AUSTRALIA	CANADA	NEW ZEALAND
		<p>credit for that learning towards a higher education award;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• people seeking to “top up” an existing qualification (diploma plus employment and other learning experiences equals a degree.)</li> </ul> <p>(Learning from Experience Trust, 2000)</p>	<p>recognised;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• people in the workforce who developed skills through learning on the job;</li> <li>• people from disadvantaged groups with little access to traditional methods of education and training.</li> </ul> <p>(Kenyon, R.S.; Saunders, J. &amp; Gibb, J.1996; OECD, 2007)</p>		
Legal regulatory framework	<p>RPL implementation is not done systematically. No national RPL policy, but widespread interest and activity in RPL in higher and further education sectors exists.</p> <p>(International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2005)</p>	<p>There is no single legal or regulatory system for RPL in the UK. The strategy is regional: for example, Scotland and Wales have clear RPL policies whereas England has one under development.</p> <p>(Learning from Experience Trust, 2000; Evans, 2006)</p>	<p>The Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) introduced the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) in 1995 to replace earlier frameworks. (National</p>	<p>There is no national education system or framework, therefore RPL implementation rests with the provinces and territories (OECD, 2007).</p>	<p>NZQF has ten levels ranging from national certificate for senior secondary school students to national diplomas. Each level has three domain sets that guide the development process for unit standards and</p>

Criteria	US	UNITED KINGDOM	AUSTRALIA	CANADA	NEW ZEALAND
			Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET), 1996; AQF Advisory Board, 2002; OECD, 2007)		qualifications. These domains are also helpful in articulation arrangements. (NZQF, 2003)
Assessment methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standardised national examinations</li> <li>Institutionally-developed challenge examinations</li> <li>National course examinations for recommendations regarding non-formal NGO/company-based training</li> <li>Individual assessment through a portfolio of evidence or oral interview (CAEL, 1998; Scholten &amp; Teuwsen, 2001)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portfolios of evidence</li> <li>Assigned subject-related essays</li> <li>Challenge examinations</li> <li>Interviews/oral examinations</li> <li>Testimonials from supervisors</li> <li>Projects (Learning from Experience Trust, 2000; Evans, 2006; OECD, 2007)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work-experience “translated” into educational outcomes</li> <li>Validation of industry-based and in-house training programmes through evaluation of such programmes</li> <li>Challenge tests</li> <li>Portfolios (Ryan &amp; Watson, 2001; AQF Advisory Board, 2002)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portfolio assessments</li> <li>Demonstrations</li> <li>Challenge examinations</li> <li>Workplace training programme evaluation (OECD, 2007; Conrad, 2008)</li> </ul>	Most common assessment method used is the portfolio of evidence. Evidence can be collected from a variety of sources and comprises learners’ knowledge, understanding and achievement. (NZQA, 2001)
Quality assurance	Institutions appear to favour quantitatively based methods, requiring minimal institutional effort, and present academic-based demonstrations of	Many entities are responsible for quality assurance, depending on the sector. For example, England has the Qualifications and Curriculum	Quality assurance guidelines are established by the Australian Quality Training Framework	Quality responsibility lies with the institutions. Only three provinces, namely Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, have	Assessment standards and quality assurance are the responsibility of NZQA, which must ensure that evidence

Criteria	US	UNITED KINGDOM	AUSTRALIA	CANADA	NEW ZEALAND
	<p>students. It appears that CAEL's 10 standards for good practice are widely accepted by institutions practising RPL. According to these standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Credit should be awarded only for learning, not for experience.</li> <li>• College credit should be awarded only for college-level learning.</li> <li>• Credit should be awarded only for learning appropriate to the subject which has a balance between theory and practical application.</li> <li>• Determination of competence levels and credit awards must be made by appropriate subject-matter and academic experts.</li> <li>• Credit should be appropriate to the academic context in which</li> </ul>	<p>Authority (QCA), while there is the Department of Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills in Wales, and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland. In Scotland, however, quality assurance is the responsibility of RPL providers. (Learning from Experience Trust, 2000; OECD, 2007).</p> <p>In Britain, in addition to the CAEL standards, "malpractices" in terms of RPL were identified. Ten APL [RPL] malpractices to be avoided are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Granting credits for "time served" or just for experience.</li> <li>• Basing assessment fees (portfolio etc.) on the number of credits awarded.</li> <li>• Failing to focus on specific credits and programmes.</li> </ul>	<p>(AQTF) for the registered training organisations (RTOs), the states and territories. The AQTF is a set of standards ensuring quality of training and assessment in Australia. These standards state that all assessments must be judged upon the rules of evidence. The rules are as follows:</p> <p><b>Sufficient</b> evidence must be gathered to show consistency in the applicant's ability to apply relevant skill or knowledge across a range of situations or contexts.</p> <p><b>Valid</b> evidence that shows a direct and clear relationship between evidence and</p>	<p>quality assurance standards (OECD, 2007). Concerns about RPL [PLAR] in Canada have been addressed in several ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards for assessment, policies and procedures are developed at most practising institutions.</li> <li>• Educators and trainers have begun to prepare course descriptions using learning outcomes which are clear statements about the individual knowledge and ability required to be successful in a course.</li> <li>• Institutional faculty and staff are trained in PLAR, providing adequate support</li> </ul>	<p>provided is current, relevant, authentic, verifiable, equitable and sufficient. Quality assurance in New Zealand is based on the following principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Framework credits are awarded when achievements meet national standards, regardless of where those achievements were attained.</li> <li>• Skilled and knowledgeable candidates can be assessed immediately by presenting evidence of prior performance and completing assessment tasks.</li> <li>• Workers can be assessed by completing regular</li> </ul>

Criteria	US	UNITED KINGDOM	AUSTRALIA	CANADA	NEW ZEALAND
	<p>it is accepted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Credit awards and transcript entries should be monitored to avoid duplicate credit for the same learning.</li> <li>• Policies and procedures applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available.</li> <li>• Fees charged for assessment should be based on services performed in the process and not determined by the credit amount awarded.</li> <li>• All personnel involved in learning assessment should receive adequate relevant training, and there must be provision for continued professional development.</li> <li>• Assessment programmes should be regularly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failing to separate the role of the APL advisor from that of the assessor.</li> <li>• Promising an APL service without the regard for resources, staff development and expertise in the area.</li> <li>• Having no method of checking inconsistencies and APL malpractice: offering an uncoordinated and inauthentic service.</li> <li>• Failing to publicly declare in advance the rules, regulations and criteria used for APL assessment.</li> <li>• Failing to provide a justified transcription of APL outcomes, including sufficiency of evidence, as part of quality assurance.</li> <li>• Failing to give feedback to intending students.</li> <li>• Promising credits and/or admission to programmes</li> </ul>	<p>competency must be gathered.</p> <p><b>Authentic</b> evidence and verification of a person's own work must be used, not work that is copied or taken from the work of others.</p> <p><b>Current</b> evidence, that is up-to-date and current for the relevant qualification or competency, is required. (ANTA, 2001; AQF Advisory Board, 2002; Wheelahan, 2002).</p>	<p>services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutions enable faculty assessors to use a range of appropriate methods and tools in their work.</li> <li>• PLAR candidates are provided with orientation, enabling them to make informed decisions regarding assessment undertaking.</li> <li>• Community outreach activities are undertaken to disseminate accurate information on PLAR and promote services to non-traditional markets.</li> <li>• National organisations are funding the development of standards for PLAR practices, quality</li> </ul>	<p>on-the-job tasks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accredited providers and registered workplace assessors assess prior learning against the same standards and within the same moderation systems used for other education and training programmes.</li> <li>• Prior learning assessment provides qualifications credits where no previous credits exist. RPL is not normally used to describe qualifications exemptions or credit transfers or to translate whole qualifications to framework qualifications.</li> </ul>

Criteria	US	UNITED KINGDOM	AUSTRALIA	CANADA	NEW ZEALAND
	monitored, reviewed, evaluated and revised to reflect changes in the needs being served and in the assessment state. (CAEL, 2003; Whitaker, 1989:9–10)	before assessment takes place (not checking the authenticity of the claim). (Nyatanga <i>et al.</i> , 1998:9)		audits and conferences promoting best practices. (Van Kleef, 1999:7)	(Simosko & Cook, 1996; NZQA, 2003)

### **2.4.3 Analysis of trends and practices of RPL in the international context**

Below is an analysis issues relating to trends practices of RPL in the international context as presented in Table 2.2 above.

#### *2.4.3.1 Historical development of RPL*

According to the literature, the US has the longest history of using RPL. This dates back to the end of World War II, when returning American soldiers wanted access to higher education and credit for the skills that they had learned while in the military. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) was formed in the US to develop the philosophical basis for RPL, and is extremely influential and internationally respected in RPL circles. In other countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the UK, RPL is newer than in the US. Even so, these countries have been providing RPL in institutions for decades, supported by their governments. This is similar to the situation in the US.

#### *2.4.3.2 Definition*

RPL is defined in a number of ways, some broader than others. Different countries use various terms to describe RPL, for example PLA (prior learning accreditation) in the US and APEL (accreditation of prior experiential learning) in the UK. In New Zealand RPL is officially known as Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) in tertiary education, while in industry it is mostly called Recognition of Current Competency (RCC). "Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition" (PLAR) is the most commonly used term to describe RPL in Canada.

Therefore different concepts, terms and acronyms are used to refer to RPL in different countries. These differences influence the way in which RPL has been implemented. However, all the definitions include the key notion that RPL involves assessing a person's previous access to higher education and granting credit towards qualifications, in order to enhance personal development and/or opportunities in the labour market.

The different concepts of RPL clearly show that each of these countries faces enormous economic, social and political problems and that successfully implementing RPL is complex and difficult.

#### *2.4.3.3 Purpose*

Countries at the forefront of RPL agree on the purpose of RPL: that is, to enable people who have gained significant knowledge and skills outside formal education to have these skills recognised for credit towards a diploma or degree, and for access to formal training opportunities in higher education and training. However, different countries have quite tight definitions of RPL. These range from defining RPL as a tool to gain access to higher education and training or towards qualification credits, to seeing it as a mechanism to validate and recognise work or life skills and knowledge.

In Australia, RPL is also seen as a way to increase the number of skilled and qualified tradespeople. In Canada it is also used to identify and recognise the knowledge, skills and attitudes of immigrants who are unemployed or underemployed in Canada's labour force. Equity is one of the main reasons for RPL in New Zealand, as it is in South Africa. The initial purpose of RPL internationally was to provide access to higher education and training and to recognise knowledge and skills for academic credits; however, other purposes of RPL are emerging internationally. These are not limited to a narrow academic focus but, as in South Africa, they reflect the use of RPL to address social, political and economic imperatives.

#### *2.4.3.4 Target group*

Various groups or categories of people are targeted for social, political and economic reasons. But in general, the international concept of RPL targeted and/or encouraged disadvantaged individuals or learners, in or out of the workforce, whether they were already engaged with studying and training or not, to participate in formal learning pathways for competitive advantage.

#### *2.4.3.5 Legislative regulatory framework*

Internationally there is no legislative regulatory framework for the implementation of RPL, including in the US, the UK and Canada. Only New Zealand and Australia have national legislative regulatory RPL frameworks. Because there are many RPL

initiatives in different countries, we need a common set of rules and regulations for RPL so that outcomes achieved at each qualification level are the same in all countries. It is clear that where there are legislative regulatory RPL frameworks, they play a central role in establishing common benchmarks and quality systems, so that qualifications recognised through RPL and formal course assessments are equivalent.

#### *2.4.3.6 Assessment methods and procedures*

Internationally, various assessment methods are used in RPL assessment. The most common method in the US is through standardised examinations and a PLA portfolio. The UK uses a learning portfolio, observation in the workplace and questionnaires. In Australia, a variety of assessment methods are used, depending on the assessment/awarding bodies, institution or RPL provider and the purpose of assessment. In New Zealand, the approach is that learners request the assessment when they are ready to do so, and they can keep trying until they have achieved the outcome. In Canada, assessment methods are determined by individual staff or at the department level.

The most common RPL assessment methods used internationally are challenge exams and a portfolio of evidence. It is important, though, that the assessment method used is appropriate to the learning outcomes expected. It is therefore clear that credible assessment methods and procedures must be used, so that RPL is recognised as a valid tool to assess the appropriate level of learning the learner has gained through experience.

#### *2.4.3.7 Quality assurance*

In the US, CAEL has established standards and policies and developed resources and guidelines to help institutions to provide a credible RPL process. CAEL uses the Whitaker (1989) standards for Quality Assurance in Assessing Learning for Credit. These include both academic and administrative standards. The UK, Australia and New Zealand have also established standards for the same purpose. However, CAEL's Whitaker standards seem to be generally adopted as an international benchmark, so institutions can make RPL judgements that are credible and also

respected and trusted by other countries. Canada also refers to CAEL standards for RPL quality assurance purposes. It is clear that, internationally, different bodies, quality assurance bodies, institutions and RPL providers use well-established standards and guidelines to ensure that the quality of RPL assessments is acceptable.

## **2.5 Trends and practices of RPL in African countries**

This section deals with RPL trends and practices in African countries in order to enrich our understanding of current RPL practice and policy initiatives and to draw parallels with the South African experience.

### **2.5.1 Introduction**

In Africa, very few countries have extensive experience of RPL and relatively little attention has been paid to how RPL can be used in African countries (Gillis and Moore, 2002; Sims, 2010). In his report on the benefits and pitfalls of RPL in developing countries, Sims (2010) states that some African countries, including Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles and South Africa, have recently begun introducing RPL policies, but as yet there is no extensive evaluation.

### **2.5.2 Mauritius**

The Mauritius Qualification Authority (MQA) (2009: 2) defines RPL as 'a process that takes into consideration a learner's prior learning and experience as well as the learner's existing knowledge and skills'. In order to develop a national approach to RPL and to validate and recognise experiential learning, the MQA worked in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning, the Institute for Lifelong Learning of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and L'Académie de la Réunion to develop a national policy that provides a framework for validating prior experiential learning (Allgoo, 2007; MQA, 2007).

The RPL process, which requires facilitators, advisors and assessors, follows a series of steps such as pre-screening, facilitation and assessment. According to Ehlers (2007:2), relevant sources of evidence for the RPL procedure include:

- formal statements of results
- samples of work produced

- performance appraisal reports
- references from current or previous employers
- job descriptions
- details of formal training
- relevant seminars, conferences and workshops attended
- certificates of participation/achievements/awards/letters of recommendation
- video tapes, tape recordings and/or photographs of work activities
- specific details of work and/or participation in projects
- written testimonials from managers or colleagues

To ensure quality assessments, the RPL process is overseen by the MQA and the National Accreditation and Equivalence Council (MQA, 2007; MQA, 2009). The applicant's existing knowledge and skills are evaluated against a set of specific unit standards for a formal qualification, as set out in the NQF. Thus, the RPL assessment takes into account the learner's context, and his or her learning is acknowledged regardless of how, when and where it was acquired.

RPL in Mauritius is linked to helping workers in the sugar industry who have been made redundant to find work in the country's fast-expanding tourism industry (Singh, 2008). As in South Africa and many other countries around the world, the main purposes of RPL in Mauritius are social inclusion and an attempt to close the gap, and to re-integrate unemployed people into the labour force (MQA 2009; Allgoo, 2007; Singh, 2008; Afunde, 2010; Ehlers, 2007).

### **2.5.3 Namibia**

In Namibia, before there was an official RPL policy, the renowned Namibian College for Open Learning (NAMCOL) conducted extensive RPL pilot projects. These were intended to facilitate access to its distance education certificate courses, and also access to alternative courses in primary and secondary education (Afunde, 2010). In 2007, the Namibian Qualifications Authority (NQA) together with NAMCOL, a parastatal educational institute, developed an RPL policy framework which was introduced in 2008. The policy provides guidelines for RPL so that learners can gain entry into learning programmes offered by the College, or exemption from some

programme requirements. It also ensures that consistent practices and standards are applied (Afunde, 2010).

RPL in Namibia is a mechanism to widen entry by adult learners into formal learning programmes. According to the NAMCOL policy (2007), a candidate seeking RPL for access to NAMCOL programmes must be at least 23 years of age and have at least five years' relevant working experience. The RPL process involves pre-screening, pre-assessment, portfolio development and assessment by the assessment panel (NAMCOL, 2007).

#### **2.5.4 Seychelles**

Although RPL is a relatively new concept in the higher education and training system of the Seychelles, there have been several RPL projects in the vocational and occupational trades, for example in Environmental Health and Health Information to upgrade qualifications in the health sector. After several decades and many successful RPL projects, the Seychelles Qualifications Authority (SQA) was officially established in 2006 to revise all qualifications within the Seychelles education and training system. This was part of the government's strategy to create a knowledge-based society and promote lifelong learning (SQA, 2008). The draft policy guidelines on the recognition of prior learning were released by SQA in 2008.

Some of the key objectives of SQA are:

- developing and implementing an NQF;
- promoting the quality and standard of education and training through a system of accreditation, validation and quality assurance;
- establishing criteria for the process of recognition of competencies acquired outside of formal education and training, and for monitoring this process;
- maintaining a database on all providers within education and training; and
- promoting international recognition of local qualifications (SQA, 2008).

The entire RPL process is overseen by SQA. In this process the initiator pre-screens the potential RPL candidate and the specialist coordinator in the field of the relevant qualification pre-assesses the candidate's application. The assessment methods include interviews, workplace visits and portfolio development. According to the RPL

policy, relevant sources of evidence of the candidate's knowledge and skills or competence include:

- certificates attained, including exam results;
- transcripts, course outline or content, duration of the course;
- licences acquired;
- records from clients for service rendered;
- evidence of years of service;
- samples of work done;
- signed records from the workplace showing different activities performed; and
- references and testimonials (SQA, 2008).

RPL in the Seychelles aims to make education accessible to individuals who were previously disadvantaged for socio-economic reasons, for example lack of access and lack of finances.

### **2.5.5 South Africa**

Compared to Mauritius, Namibia and the Seychelles, South Africa has a more developed RPL system in higher education and training, similar to other countries in the developing world such as Australia. As the South Africa RPL system is the focus of this study, the same criteria used internationally for trends and practices of RPL have been used here for a more in-depth discussion of the topic.

#### *2.5.5.1 Historical background*

The South African education and training system has been through radical changes since the democratic elections in 1994. These changes were necessary to transform education and training to make it more learner-inclusive and to include adult learners (Harris, 1997). Under apartheid, the South African education and training system was designed along racial lines. As a result many people were denied access to education.

In order to redress the past injustices caused by apartheid, several higher education Acts and policies were introduced. These new education and training policies were reinforced by the NQF, which was set up in 1995. The key objectives of the NQF are

to speed up redress of past discrimination in education, training and development opportunities and to make access to education and training easier (Mayet, 2006). RPL is one of the key principles of the NQF (SAQA, 2002); it was introduced as a key element of policy reforms in order to build a more inclusive education and training system. It is also seen by the trade union movement and the new dispensation as a workforce development strategy, as well as a tool to redress past social injustices.

#### *2.5.5.2 Definition*

In South Africa, there are various definitions of RPL. One of the major definitions is found in the National Standards Bodies Regulations, a document published in 1998. These regulations state that all qualifications can be achieved, partly or completely, through RPL. They define RPL as “the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements”. The regulations also state that prior learning includes learning achieved through formal, informal and non-formal learning and work experience, but other types of learning can be included as well.

The Human Science Research Council (HSRC)’s way of seeing the NQF provided one of the first official definitions of RPL. The HSRC (1995:3) document saw RPL in terms of the unit standards, and defined it as: “granting credit for a unit on the basis of an assessment of formal and non-formal learning experience, to establish whether the learner possesses the capabilities specified in the outcome statement.” A person can also gain recognition for prior learning in respect of an entire qualification, as long as he or she can demonstrate full competence in the requirements of that qualification.

The policy document published by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (2000:6) defined RPL as a process of recognising the skills and knowledge people already have, but for which they have not been given credit. It argues that in order to be promoted or get a better job with higher wages, a person needs some form of qualification or certificate.

The SAQA (1995) document defined RPL as comparing the learner's previous learning and experience; however it was obtained, against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification and the acceptance for the purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements.

The SAQA (2002:7) policy document extended this definition in terms of a number of principles in the development and execution of RPL, namely that:

- learning occurs in all kinds of situations – formal, informal and non-formal;
- learning is measured against the specific learning outcomes required for a specific qualification; and
- credits are awarded for such learning if it meets the requirements of the qualification.

#### *2.5.5.3 Purpose*

SAQA's policy (2002) advocated a holistic approach to RPL development and implementation in higher education and training institutions. This approach takes into account the different purposes of RPL, and candidates should be involved in deciding why they are undertaking RPL. Different candidates may need RPL for:

- personal development, and/or certification of current skills without progression into learning programme, if the candidate chooses;
- progression in a learning programme, fast-tracked by using RPL;
- promotion; or
- career or job change.

RPL in South Africa, unlike similar initiatives in other countries, has a very specific agenda. SAQA RPL policy (2002:34-49) states:

RPL intends to support education and training systems transformation of this country. This calls for an approach to the development of RPL policy and practices, which explicitly address the visible and invisible barriers to learning and assessment. Such an approach must generate all role players' commitment to removing these barriers and to building a visible system, usable and widely recognised as an effective and creative vehicle for lifelong learning. Very importantly, it has to generate consensus around the criteria

and support systems within which all assessments' integrity and quality will be protected, while at the same time extending RPL opportunities and benefits to all learners and stakeholders. It is also imperative to build a viable, sustainable and credible system. It is recognised that transforming education and training is not the responsibility of RPL alone, in the context of this policy, transformation encapsulates:

- a holistic approach to the process and execution of assessment;
- a developmental and incremental approach to the implementation of RPL, particularly in terms of sustainability;
- an acknowledgement of the differing contexts within which RPL will be implemented;
- opening up of access to education and training;
- redress of past injustices;
- an acknowledgement of the dynamic nature of the construction of knowledge, which will come into play as the system matures.

It can be said that the RPL principle was fundamental to the development of new education and training in South Africa. The principle has its origin in a number of projects and policy-making initiated by the trade union movement and the African National Congress in the late 1980s. The RPL principle, which is set out in the National Standards Bodies Regulations of 1998, is defined as 'the giving of credit to what learners already know and can do, regardless of whether this learning was achieved formally, informally or non-formally' (SAQA, 2002).

#### *2.5.5.4 Target group*

RPL in South Africa is a key strategy for reforming policy that is relevant to the education and training system and to workforce development strategies and policies. The SAQA RPL policy (2002) identified the following target groups which had a particular need for redress and access:

- People who are seeking access to continuing education courses and professional qualifications. This target group may include under-qualified adult learners who want to up-skill and improve their qualifications. It may also

include candidates without a matric, which is the minimum requirement for entry into higher education.

- People who have worked for many years and have gained experience in specific areas, but do not have recognition for that experience. Such people will probably have very low levels of formal education.

Learners entering higher education through non-traditional routes can greatly increase student enrolments in LIS schools. RPL would also assist an overwhelming majority of under-qualified library staff, who have extensive work experience, to up-skill and improve their qualifications, particularly in terms of time and energy costs.

#### *2.5.5.5 Legislative regulatory framework*

South Africa's new democracy has seen a number of new Acts promulgated concerning RPL practice. These Acts are intended to achieve new and transformed objectives for higher education and training. These objectives include:

- developing a system that is more responsive to the needs of the economy, individuals and society at large; and
- eradicating past unjust educational policies, particularly policies that prevented people from accessing education and training

RPL is an important tool for opening up access to people who were denied the privilege of quality education (Harris, 1997). Several new Acts relating to education, labour and related fields indicate the importance of RPL in South African higher education and training. They are:

- The South African Qualifications Authority Act (Act 58 of 1995);
- The Employment Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998);
- The Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998);
- The White Paper on Education and Training (1995);
- The National Qualifications Framework (NQF);
- The South African Qualification (SAQA) Act of 1995;
- The Higher Education Act of 1997;
- White Paper 3 of 1997: a programme for the transformation of higher education;
- The Skills Development Bill of 1997;

- The Skills Development Act of 1998; and
- The National Plan for Higher Education (2001).

**The South African Qualifications Authority Act (Act 58 of 1995)** was promulgated in 1995. It is based on the principles and values that are the basis for transforming higher education and training systems in South Africa. These principles reflect the need to recognise the contribution, knowledge and skills of those who struggled for this country's liberation. At the same time, the Act is intended to open new pathways for access to education and training opportunities which people were denied in the past. The SAQA Act established SAQA and specified its major task, which was to develop and implement the NQF and include the RPL principle.

According to Harris (1997), the NQF is essentially a matrix where national qualifications and outcome-based unit standards can be registered. This registration is designed to achieve the key integration system objectives of the NQF. These are: education and training; relevance; credibility; coherence and flexibility; legitimacy; access; articulation; progression; portability; the recognition of prior learning; and guidance of learners. The Act further states that the primary functions of SAQA are:

- to oversee the development and implementation of the NQF;
- to formulate and publish policies and criteria to establish and accredit bodies that can facilitate the development of standards and qualifications, that is National Standards Bodies (NSBs) and Standards Generating Bodies;
- to accredit bodies responsible for monitoring and auditing the quality of learning and teaching, provision for the achievement of registered standards and qualifications, that is Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs); and
- to ensure international comparability of registered standards and qualifications.

The RPL principle is fundamental to the development of new education and training systems in South Africa. The SAQA Act (1995) outlines the objectives of the NQF:

- to create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
- to facilitate access, mobility and progression to and within education, training and career paths;

- to enhance the quality of education and training;
- to accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and
- to contribute to the full personal development of each learner in social and economic paths, thereby developing the nation at large.

As a result, the NQF's emphasis is on what is learned, not how it was learned.

**The Skills Development Act of 1998** provides 'an institutional framework to develop and improve the skills of the South African workforce' (1998:2). This Act is explicit about the need to improve the employment prospects of people who were previously disadvantaged by unfair discrimination and to redress those disadvantages through training and education (1998:4).

Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) were established under this Act. Their responsibilities include facilitating the development and implementation of RPL processes for the workforce in their particular sector and quality-assuring the processes. SETAs are accountable to the Ministry of Labour. SETAs also function as ETQAs and, as such, require accreditation from SAQA. All SETAs were supposed to develop and submit RPL policies to SAQA during their accreditation process, but in spite of this, fully-fledged implementation plans and projects were only developed in a few sectors.

**The Employment Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998)** states that employers have a duty to eliminate unfair discrimination. The Act also provides a framework in which the employer can attract, develop, advance and retain his or her human resource talent. The Employment Equity (EE) Act recognises that:

- as a result of apartheid and other discriminatory laws and practices, there are disparities in employment, occupation and income within the national labour market; and
- these disparities create pronounced disadvantages for certain categories of people, and these disadvantages cannot be redressed simply by repealing discriminatory laws.

The purpose of the EE Act is to achieve equity in the workplace by:

- promoting the constitutional right of equality, and the exercise of true democracy;
- eliminating unfair discrimination in employment;
- ensuring that employment equity is implemented to redress the effects of discrimination;
- achieving a diverse workforce that is broadly representative of South African population;
- promoting economic development and efficiency in the workforce; and
- meeting the Republic of South Africa's obligations as a member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO)

The Employment Equity Act encourages and promotes RPL practice in higher education and training. It moves away from recognising only formal qualifications. It introduces the idea of a range of qualifications for employing or promoting a person, including formal qualifications, prior learning, relevant experience and the capacity to do the job.

**The Department of Education White Paper (1997)** set out a comprehensive and ambitious transformation agenda. The intention was to overcome social inequities through higher education, contribute to reconstruction and development and enable South Africa to effectively engage in globalisation (Kistan, 2002).

A system was constructed in which higher education could provide greater access to learning opportunities at various levels, across a range of programmes and entry points. In a way this forms the basis of social justice and economic revitalisation (Council for Higher Education (CHE) Report, 2000:9). According to this White Paper, RPL aims to create opportunities for a person whose academic or career paths have been needlessly blocked because their prior knowledge was not assessed and certified.

To realise the above objectives, the higher education system had to transform so it could redress past inequalities, serve a new social order, meet pressing national needs and respond to new realities and opportunities. The Ministry of Education has the vision of a transformed, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist system of higher

education. This new system promotes access, equity and fair chances to everyone who wants to realise their potential through higher education. At the same time, the system must remove all forms of unfair discrimination and make it easier to redress past inequalities (Department of Education White Paper, 1997:5).

The **Further Education and Training Act of 1998** refers to RPL as a way to gain access to the Further Education and Training (FET) band of qualifications. In the principles underpinning the new approach to FET, the issues of redress and access are explicitly referred to. Despite this, the development of RPL policies and systems has been the slowest in the public FET sector. To date no formal policy governing RPL at FET institutions has been drafted.

In South Africa, the development of RPL has a statutory or public policy base. Nevertheless, the OECD (2009)'s report on South Africa found that RPL is only practised on a limited scale in the Higher Education and Training, Further Education and Training and General Education and Training Bands and in Adult Basic Education and Training. RPL is not used in all formal institutions of learning, at workplace-based education and training centres and by small private single-purpose providers.

#### *2.5.5.6 Assessment methods and procedures*

SAQA RPL policy (2002), states that assessment methods and processes must be systematic flexible, collaborative and transparent. They must involve the learner and assessor, and must be done within a specific context and site, such as the workplace or institution of education and training. RPL practitioners have a range of valid assessment forms to determine whether a person has the required skills, understanding and knowledge to pass a course. The suggested assessment methods are, in general, as relevant to assessment as they are to RPL.

Although portfolio-assisted assessment is the preferred method in New Zealand, Canada, Australia and the UK, there are many assessment tools that RPL assessors can use. According to Harris and Saddington (1994) and Cohen *et al.*, (1994), RPL assessors may include one or more of the following methods:

- interviews, (structured or unstructured) to clarify the documentary evidence presented and/or to review the scope and depth of learning. Interviews can be particularly useful in areas where judgement and values are important.
- debate, to confirm that the applicant can sustain a considered argument and demonstrate adequate knowledge of the subject
- presentations, to check that the applicant can present information in a way appropriate to subject and audience
- performance testing, to test that the applicant can apply theory correctly/safely in a structured context
- examinations, to test that the applicant understands concepts, basic skills and applications by giving practical examples
- oral examination, to check that the applicant understands deep complex issues and can explain them in simple terms
- essays, to check the standard of the applicant's academic writing and use of references. Essays also demonstrate whether the applicant can develop a coherent argument, understands and can transfer knowledge and can critically evaluate ideas.
- examples of work done, performed or designed, to check the quality of the work, how relevant it is to the credit sought and that is the applicant's own work
- portfolios, to validate the applicant's learning by providing a collection of materials that reflect the applicant's prior learning and achievements. This includes the applicant's own work, reflections on his or her own practice, and indirect evidence from other people who are qualified to comment. The portfolio should identify the connection between the learning and the credit that the applicant wishes to have.
- book reviews, to ensure that the applicant has up-to-date knowledge of the appropriate literature and can analyse it satisfactorily
- annotated literature reviews, to illustrate the range of reading done by the applicant and ensure that this reading covers the subject requirements
- special projects, to bring knowledge and skills up to date and extend the scope of prior learning

- reports, critiques, articles, to indicate the level of the applicant's knowledge of relevant issues and assess his or her analytical and writing skills

As stated in the SAQA policy (2002), the above are useful guidelines for developing assessment methods for RPL. The policy also states that assessments should be fit-for-purpose, and that the most efficient and practical methods should be used.

In South Africa, RPL recognises that learning occurs in all kinds of situations: formally, informally and non-formally. To protect the integrity of the RPL process, learning is measured against the learning outcomes required for a specific qualification. In principle, the applicant could be awarded credits for such learning if the requirements of the qualification are met (SAQA policy, 2002). As in New Zealand, the RPL process has the following steps:

- identify what the candidate knows and can do;
- match the candidate's skills, knowledge and experience to the standards and the associated assessment criteria of a qualification;
- assess the candidate against those standards; and
- credit the candidate for skills, knowledge and experience built up through formal, informal and non-formal learning that occurred in the past.

According to SAQA's (2002) guidelines on the management of assessment, assessors and moderators should meet specific requirements.

**Assessors** should:

- have a recognised qualification in the unit standard(s) to be assessed;
- be subject-matter experts on the unit standard(s) to be assessed, demonstrated through work experience, and
- have at least a recognised qualification in planning and conducting assessment, and preferably a qualification in assessment design and development.

**Moderators** should:

- possess a recognised qualification in the discipline to be assessed;
- have subject matter expertise on the unit standard(s) to be moderated, demonstrated through work experience; and
- have a recognised qualification in assessment planning and moderation (SAQA, 2002).

#### *2.5.5.7 Quality assurance*

RPL quality assurance is not the same as assessment. According to Singh (2000:55), a useful description of quality assurance in higher education is 'balancing value for money, fitness for purpose, a transformation at individual, social and systemic levels and all this within the encompassing goal of fitness for purpose (in terms of the responsiveness of provision in relation to broad national priorities)'. Quality assurance is also based on a firm commitment to partnerships and cooperative agreements with professional councils and SETAs. SAQA correctly warns that the relationship between RPL, integrated assessment and credible certification is a very real issue in South Africa, because the traditional assessment models used internationally are not appropriate in the South African context (Oberholzer, 2000).

The following key conditions, specified by Isaacs (2000:5) for a successful quality assurance system, are:

- rigorous standards;
- robust assessment systems;
- pressure in terms of accountability; and
- equity of opportunity.

There are a number of professional bodies in the country. Some of them have legal powers and others have experience in quality assurance within the system (Isaacs, 2000:3). Ideally, all of these bodies should be involved in RPL, because they can give their industry's perspective on training and expected outcomes and this is very important. Examples of such bodies are the Engineering Council of South Africa

(ECSA); the South African Institution of Civil Engineering (SAICE); the South African Institution of Mechanical Engineering (SAIME); and the South African Nursing Council (SANC).

According to SAQA (2002), the RPL policy and procedures should spell out the way quality assurance is done. The policy document also states that the quality assurance system must not be an add-on or only specific to RPL. It should be properly integrated into credible quality management systems that the institution is already using. For this reason, ways of assuring the quality of assessment, including RPL, must be moderated, evaluated and quality-assured in the same way as other assessments are.

According to SAQA (2002), RPL assessment processes and outcomes should also be quality-assured. This is meant to increase confidence in RPL assessments done by other institutions and to show that RPL students meet the same assessment outcomes as students who have completed the formal course and assessment. RPL quality assurance must fit into existing structures and systems for assessment, learner support and advice and delivery of learning programmes. It should also comply with RPL quality assurance standards. These include:

- credit should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience;
- credit should only be awarded for the relevant NQF level standard or qualification;
- credit should be awarded only for learning balanced between fundamental, practical, and reflective competence that is appropriate to the learning area/subject;
- only registered assessors, with the appropriate subject-matter expertise, can assess competence levels and credit awards;
- policies and procedures applied in assessment, including the provision for appeal, should form part of the RPL process; and
- all personnel involved in assessment should receive adequate training and there should be provision for their continued professional development.

The following are the CAEL-endorsed standards for quality assurance in assessing learning for credit according to Whitaker (1989):

Policies, procedures and criteria applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process. All personnel involved in learning assessment should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform. Assessment programmes should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated and revised as needed to reflect served needs changes, purposes being met, and the state of the assessment arts. Credit, or its equivalent, should be awarded only for learning and not for experience. Assessment should be based on standards and criteria for the acceptable learning level agreed upon and made public. Assessment should be treated as an integral part of learning, not separate from it, and should be based on an understanding of learning processes. The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be developed by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts. Credit, or other credentialing, should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted. If awards are for credit, transcript entries should clearly describe what learning is being recognised.

#### *2.5.5.8 Conclusion*

The introduction of RPL in South Africa was a deliberate attempt to redress past injustices. The key objectives of the NQF in South Africa, unlike similar frameworks in the UK, US, New Zealand and Australia, strongly embody social change, access, redress and equity on the one hand and national economic development on the other. These goals relate more to radical and developmental approaches to RPL. The credit exchange approach to RPL, unlike in other countries, seem to be the dominant approach in higher education institutions in South Africa. South African higher education institutions should therefore be cautious of simply adopting and adapting assessment approaches to RPL without paying attention to existing social conditions.

Because of the inequalities created by South Africa's past unjust regime, the profile of the RPL candidate in South Africa will be different to that of candidates in other countries. RPL in South Africa has the main NQF objective of access to higher education and training opportunities. For this reason RPL approaches in South Africa must recognise various forms of experiential learning by combining the educational

guidance, access and intense support that may be required for success in academic education.

## **2.6 Institutional RPL policies in South African Higher Education and Training**

In this section, the generic template of SAQA's RPL policy is discussed followed by a discussion of the core criteria of RPL implementation in South African higher education and training.

### **2.6.1 Introduction**

The institutional RPL policies of 12 existing LIS schools were analysed according to SAQA (2002)'s generic RPL policy for individual institutions to determine the status of RPL implementation in these LIS schools.

### **2.6.2 Generic template of SAQA RPL policy**

The following example of a 'generic' template for an RPL policy is a combination of a number of ETQA RPL policies. According to SAQA (2002), such a policy could contain the following headings:

#### *2.6.2.1 Objective*

The SAQA (2002) policy guidelines cover the process of gathering evidence and making judgements about a learner's performance in relation to standards and qualifications, and assessing and crediting this performance.

#### *2.6.2.2 Scope*

RPL is a service available to all learners who have appropriate learning and skills relevant to qualifications for which this institution is accredited, regardless of where and how the learning was obtained (SAQA, 2002). RPL practice in SA higher education and training thus supports the socially inclusive purposes of the NQF by facilitating entry to programmes and giving credit to or exemptions from a programme of study or access to a full award. In this way, RPL can address the needs of disadvantaged groups, part-time students and mature students, and can have a positive impact on the recruitment and retention of students in the LIS schools. In addition, RPL gives LIS schools the opportunity to fulfil one of their primary mandates – up-skilling individuals and meeting workforce needs for libraries, and so contributing to the social and economic development of the country.

### *2.6.2.3 Legislative context*

A range of acts, regulations and policy frameworks underpins the SAQA RPL policy (2002). These include the SAQA Act, Regulations, Policies and Guidelines, the Skills Development Act, the Employment Equity Act and Higher Education Acts and Policies. Institutional RPL policies must be formed and implemented in terms of these education acts, national policies and regulations.

### *2.6.2.4 Principles of assessment*

All assessments should follow the principles of RPL assessment (SAQA, 2002).

These principles state that assessment should be:

- **Appropriate:** the method of assessment suits the performance being assessed.
- **Fair:** the method of assessment presents no barriers to achievements not related to the evidence.
- **Manageable:** the methods used make for easily arranged, cost-effective assessments that do not interfere unduly with learning.
- **Integrated into work or learning:** evidence collection is integrated into the work or learning process where appropriate and feasible.
- **Valid:** the assessment focuses on the requirements laid down in the unit standard; i.e. the assessment is fit for purpose.
- **Direct:** the activities in the assessment mirror the conditions of actual performance as closely as possible.
- **Authentic:** the assessor is satisfied that the work assessed has been done by the person assessed.
- **Sufficient:** the evidence collected establishes that all criteria have been met and that the applicant can consistently perform to the required standard.
- **Systematic:** planning and recording is sufficiently rigorous to ensure that assessment is fair.
- **Open:** learners can contribute to the planning and accumulation of evidence. Assessment candidates understand the assessment process and the criteria applied.

- Consistent: in similar circumstances, the same assessor would make the same judgement again. The judgement made is similar to the judgements made by other assessors.

#### *2.6.2.5 Criteria and registration of assessors*

All RPL practitioners must be trained as certified assessors and registered as constituent assessors for specified qualifications and/or standards with the appropriate ETQA (SAQA, 2002). The self-audit tool in the policy highlights the importance of this criterion:

Through training of assessors and other personnel involved in assessment, the quality of assessments and the integrity of the assessment system are ensured. Training enables evidence facilitators, assessors, moderators, advisors and administrative personnel to provide a holistic, learner-centred service that is in keeping with the objectives of the NQF and related policies. Monitoring policies ensure that assessors' and moderators' professional competencies in assessment are reviewed and updated (SAQA, 2002).

#### *2.6.2.6 Support structures for learners and assessors*

SAQA RPL policy states that RPL candidates should be given support to overcome the invisible barriers to successful assessment. Institutions offer a variety of advisory or other support services that meet the needs of RPL candidates, including support staff and academic training in RPL procedures; advice and facilitation services; choice of assessment methodologies; help with identifying equivalencies; preparation for assessment; post-assessment guidance; and dealing with the anxieties, traumas and non-technical barriers that adult learners face when applying for RPL (SAQA, 2002).

#### *2.6.2.7 Assessment methods and procedures*

There is no fundamental difference between assessing previously acquired skills and knowledge and skills and knowledge acquired through a formal learning programme (SAQA, 2002). The SAQA RPL policy states that the choice of assessment method(s) should be fit-for-purpose and ensure reliable and valid assessment outcomes. All assessments should follow a basic procedure, which includes planning the assessment with the candidate, conducting the assessment and giving feedback to the candidate, regardless of subject matter and context, as prescribed by the SAQA RPL policy.

#### *2.6.2.8 Moderation and quality assurance*

Moderating assessments guarantees the integrity and credibility of the assessment. According to SAQA RPL policy (2002), assessments should be moderated to ensure that they are consistent, fair, reliable, legitimate, appropriate, manageable, authentic and practical/feasible. Ten per cent of completed assessments must be moderated for consistency, fairness and reliability. RPL moderation and quality assurance should not happen as an add-on, but should be an integral part of the institution's quality assurance rules and regulations.

#### *2.6.2.9 Procedures for appeal*

SAQA RPL policy (2002) states that candidates who have been denied RPL or those who wish to challenge the RPL credit amount given, should be informed of their right of appeal and how to request a new assessment. The policies do not clearly define appeal procedures, but most RPL institutions seem to have them.

#### *2.6.2.10 Certification of learners*

Successful RPL candidates can be given certificates such as Bridging and Foundational Certificates, Graduate, Postgraduate and Master's certificates (SAQA, 2002). These certificates should be credit-bearing and will allow the candidate to fit into the higher education system horizontally, vertically and diagonally.

#### *2.6.2.11 Articulation of learning*

One purpose of RPL in South Africa is to give clear guidelines on how experiential learning credits can fit into particular learning fields and qualifications. This means that people from disadvantaged groups can be better represented across institutions, qualification levels and academic programmes.

#### *2.6.2.12 Record-keeping*

Accurate record-keeping is vital for RPL assessment outcomes and for appeal purposes. Accurate, up-to-date records make it possible for an institution to monitor the strengths and weaknesses of the RPL system, write reports and make improvements to the system. Each institution must submit its RPL data to be recorded in the National Learner Records Database (NLRD) (SAQA, 2002).

### **2.6.3 Core criteria for successful RPL implementation**

The SAQA RPL policy (2002) also provides the core criteria for implementing RPL in South African higher education and training. These core criteria form the basis of the generic RPL template discussed above. According to SAQA (2002) guidelines, the implementers of RPL can use these criteria as a self-audit tool to assess the implementation process. The core criteria are discussed below.

#### *2.6.4.1. Institutional policy environment*

According to the SAQA RPL policy (2002), there must be an enabling environment that facilitates the development and implementation of RPL. The purpose of this self-audit tool is to assess whether 'there is a shared commitment on the part of ETQAs, accredited constituent providers and workplaces to provide enabling environments for learning and assessment (inclusive of close cooperation between administration, learning facilitators, evidence facilitators, advisors, assessors, moderators, professional organisations, employers, trade unions and communities, where appropriate)' (SAQA, 2002:27). The policy also warns that 'unless proper policies, structures and resources are allocated to a credible assessment process, it can easily become an area of contestation and conflict.'

#### *2.6.4.2. Training and registration of assessors and key personnel*

The SAQA RPL policy (2002:23) states clearly that staff that deal with the RPL process must be adequately trained. This self-audit tool from the SAQA RPL Policy (2002:23) highlights

through training of assessors and other personnel involved in assessment, the quality of assessments and the integrity of the assessment system are ensured. Training enables evidence facilitators, assessors, moderators, advisors and administrative personnel to provide a holistic, learner-centred service that is in keeping with the objectives of the NQF and related policies. Monitoring policies ensure that assessors' and moderators' professional competencies in assessment are reviewed and updated.

#### *2.6.4.3. Methods and processes of assessment*

This self-audit tool is used to moderate and review the methods and processes of assessment, to protect the integrity of qualifications and the system as a whole (SAQA RPL policy, 2002:53). According to this self-audit tool, "assessment is a structured process for gathering evidence and making judgements about a candidate's performance in relation to registered national standards and qualifications. As stated in the policy, "this process involves the candidate and the assessor within a particular context in a transparent and collaborative manner" (SAQA RPL policy, 2002:25). This highlights the importance of appropriate assessment processes and instruments for the RPL system.

#### *2.6.4.4. Quality management systems (QMS)*

The SAQA RPL policy gives an example of a self-audit tool for quality management systems. The purpose is to assess whether the LIS schools have quality RPL management systems in place to ensure the "continuous improvement of assessment systems. QMS ensures the critical integrity of assessments and reporting and recording processes inform strategic planning requirements at provider, sectoral and national level" (SAQA, 2002:27).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This section started with a discussion of the criteria/components of the generic template of SAQA RPL policy. These categories were then used to summarise the institutional RPL policies in tabular format. (Analysis of these institutional RPL policies was not conducted at this stage of the research). In addition, the core criteria of RPL implementation in South African higher education and training were discussed. These form the basis for the analysis of institutional RPL policies in the following chapters.

## **2.8 Summary of the chapter**

This chapter was divided into two distinct parts. The first part explored the theoretical foundations underlying this study. Several different learning theories were discussed in this chapter namely human capital theory, liberal humanism, critical theory and experiential learning theory. The experiential learning theory was chosen as the most appropriate theory for this study because it focuses on recognition of knowledge and skills individuals have acquired in formal, informal and non-formal education systems and environments with a view to facilitating access to higher education and training and awarding credits towards qualifications.

The second part of the chapter was a review of literature on RPL implementation in the international and local (African) context with reference to historical background of RPL, its definition, purpose, target group, assessment methods as well as quality assurance systems and legal regulatory framework. The generic template of SAQA's RPL policy was also discussed followed by a discussion of the core criteria of RPL implementation in South African higher education and training.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Research must strictly follow some defined system of inquiry to find new facts or to arrange old ones in a new way (Trumbull, 2000:80). This needs an appropriate research methodology. According to Mouton (2003:56), a research methodology focuses on the research process and the tools and procedures to be used; point-of-departure tasks (data collection or sampling) at hand; the individual steps in the research process; and the most "objective" (unbiased) procedures to use. Hall and Hall (1996) refer to research methodology as the philosophy or general principles or strategies behind research and methods used in eliciting the required data for the study. That means the research methodology focuses on the entire process of research, from the philosophical assumptions, through the questions, data collection, data analysis, and on to the interpretation of findings. The research methodology and design followed in this study is set out below.

### **3.2 Research approach**

The quantitative research approach, of which the scientific belief system is based on a positivist paradigm, was chosen as the dominant research approach for this study. According to Punch (1998:5), the most important assumptions of this paradigm are:

- (i) Social phenomena are real and exist through people's objective experiences.
- (ii) Social reality can be explained for the most part in terms of the personal circumstances of individuals, demographics and other background values.
- (iii) Causes of social phenomena are independent of human consciousness and occur without the person being aware of them.
- (iv) In accordance with recognised scientific principles and methods, social reality can be studied objectively, and the findings can in turn be verified by other researchers.

(v) Social phenomena are determined or caused by factors, events and other phenomena in the environment.

The nature of the research process and methodology is determined by the researcher choosing between quantitative, qualitative or a combined quantitative-qualitative (mixed methods) approach (Creswell, 2007) . According to SAQA (2002), the successful implementation of recognition of prior learning (RPL) should be based on several criteria including providing an enabling environment for RPL practice, following/using credible assessment processes to ensure the integrity of the RPL system, training personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments to ensure the quality of RPL assessments and putting in place quality management systems (QMS) to ensure the continuous improvement of RPL system.

Accordingly, the quantitative research approach was used as it is the most appropriate approach for this study. The study's aim is to objectively assess the implementation of the RPL phenomenon in South African LIS schools since the promulgation of RPL policy in South African higher education and training in 2002 (SAQA, 2002).

### **3.2.1 Quantitative approach**

A quantitative research approach "entail[s] the collection of statistical/numerical data, as exhibiting a view of a relationship between theory and research as deductive and a prediction for a natural science and as having an objectivist conception of reality" (Bryman, 2012:160). According to Creswell (2009:4), a quantitative research approach is "a numbers-based research approach which measures objective theories about customer attitudes, behaviour, and performance using statistical procedures". Bryman (2012:160) further pointed out that "utilising a series of tests and techniques, quantitative research approach is mainly preoccupied with measurement; causality; generalisation; and replication of findings." In terms of quantitative research, Creswell and Clark (2007:180) state that this research approach is "typically used within the post-positivist paradigm and it utilizes deductive reasoning to obtain the answers to research questions. The research questions are "variable-oriented research questions". Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:23) argue that quantitative research can be considered as "confirmatory research", which is typically used to test theories.

The above authors further state that the research process is used to test the hypotheses determined by the investigators. The raw data (numbers) is analysed by statistical methods, and then used to answer the research questions that were developed before the study began. The sample size is large and is randomly selected from the larger population, so that the results can be generalised to the population.

The main quantitative designs include experimental, quasi-experimental, and correlational and survey research designs. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009: 23), the goal of quantitative research is to “describe the trends or explain the relationships between the variables”. The aim of this study was to obtain information in order to investigate the nature of RPL implementation in the LIS schools in South Africa. As a result, the researcher adopted the quantitative approach as the most appropriate approach.

### ***3.2.2 Justification for using the quantitative approach***

The RPL policy was adopted in the South African higher education sector in 2002. Since that date there has never been an audit of RPL implementation in the LIS schools to find out how well it complied with the core criteria of RPL implementation laid down by the SAQA (2002) guidelines. This means that the nature of current RPL implementation in the LIS schools in South Africa is not known.

The quantitative survey questionnaire was used as the main data gathering method for this study. This was then statistically analysed to objectively determine the nature of RPL implementation in the LIS schools in South Africa. The statistical data collected through the survey questionnaire were augmented by data collected from the institutional RPL policy documents. According to Thurmond (2001), using qualitative and quantitative methods to study the same phenomenon is a form of triangulation called methodical triangulation. A detailed discussion of the triangulation approach is given below.

### ***3.2.3 Triangulation approach***

Triangulation is the “combination of two or more methodological approaches, theoretical perspectives, data sources, investigators and analysis methods to study the same phenomenon” (Thurmond, 2001:253). Creswell and Miller (2000:124) define triangulation as “a validity procedure where researchers look for convergence

among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study". Golafshani (2003) and Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue that triangulation is actually used to increase the accuracy of the study. In this case triangulation is one of the validity measures. There are mixed views on the uses of triangulation in research. Kimchi, Polivka and Stevenson (1991) argue that triangulation is used just gaining a wider and deeper understanding of the study phenomenon.

There are five types of triangulation, namely data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, data analysis triangulation and methodological triangulation (Denzin, 2006; Flick, 2002; Thurmond, 2001; Kimchi, Polivka and Stevenson, 1991). Data triangulation uses different sources of information in order to make a study more valid. In this study, various sources of data were used; they include primary data which was collected from the participants through a survey questionnaire and secondary data collected during an analysis of RPL policy documents.

Investigator triangulation uses several different investigators in the analysis process. Theory triangulation uses multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data. Unlike theory triangulation, investigator triangulation typically uses professionals outside of a particular field of study. This type of triangulation uses different locations, settings and other key factors related to the environment in which the study took place, such as the time, date or season. The key is to identify which environmental factors, if any, might have influenced the information received during the study.

Data analysis triangulation is the combination of two or more methods of analysing data. These techniques can include different families of statistical testing, or different statistical techniques which can identify similarities or validate data. Methodological triangulation uses multiple qualitative and/or quantitative methods to study the phenomenon. For this study, the researcher used two data-gathering methods, namely a questionnaire and document analysis, which worked together to make the study more valid.

#### *3.2.3.1 Justification for using the methodological triangulation approach*

For this study, the researcher used methodical triangulation which involves the use of multiple qualitative and/or quantitative methods (Denzin, 2006). According to

Bryman (2012:160), a quantitative research approach can be broadly described as “entailing the collection of numerical data, as exhibiting a view of a relationship between theory and research as deductive and a prediction for a natural science and as having an objectivist conception of reality”. By contrast, qualitative research is “a means of exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009:4).

In this study, the quantitative input helped to collect statistical information which was important in identifying or revealing RPL trends and issues in the LIS sector. At the same time, the qualitative input helped to explain the meaning of those trends by generating rich narratives of RPL practice. Various scholars (Creswell, 2002; Mactavish and Schleien, 2000) recommend using more than one method to study the same phenomenon because this increases and deepens the understanding of the research.

There are three reasons for using methodological triangulation (Risjord, Moloney and Dunbar, 2001:40–59). The first is completeness. Quantitative methods can extend findings derived from qualitative research (and vice versa). The methods complement each other, providing richness or detail that would be unavailable from one method alone. The second is called abductive inspiration. Qualitative research is often used where a phenomenon is poorly understood. Interviews with the participants can help the researcher to understand the material better. The results may suggest hypotheses that can be tested by quantitative methods. Qualitative research can also help organise quantitative data that has already been gathered, or suggest new ways of approaching the phenomenon.

The final rationale for triangulation is confirmation. At the simplest level, qualitative methods can clarify the results of quantitative research, such as apparently inconsistent findings. Triangulation was used in this study to achieve completeness, because both methods complemented each other. The statistical data obtained from the questionnaire gave the researcher a picture of the level of RPL implementation in South African LIS schools, but this data had to be backed up by hard evidence. Quantitative surveys are often narrow, superficial or misleading because they emphasise standardisation and generalisability (Babbie, 2004; Case, 2002; Aldrige

and Levine, 2001). Therefore the researcher used triangulation in order to overcome this limitation.

Accordingly, a parametric test was used to compare the results of the quantitative questionnaire survey those of the institutional RPL policy analysis to discover the facts. In this way, the results of the qualitative institutional RPL policy analyses provided hard evidence to support the statistical findings of the questionnaire survey. According to Risjord, Moloney and Dunbar (2001), this form of triangulation is called methodical triangulation.

### **3.3 Research design**

A research design is a plan of action that links the methodology, philosophical framework and fundamental assumptions of the research to the methods used for data collection and subsequent analysis (Creswell, 2007; Creswell and Clark, 2007). The research design can be thought of as the structure of research. It is the plans and strategies that have been developed to explore and to discover answers to the research problem (Trumbull, 2000: 80). In other words, the research design provides “the overall structure for the procedures the researcher follows, the data the researcher collects, and the data analyses the researcher conducts” (Leedy and Ormrod, 2013:74). A survey research design was used for this study.

#### **3.3.1 Survey research design**

A survey design involves collecting primary data from all or part of a population to find information about how often certain variables occur, how they are distributed and how they interrelate within the population (Ngulube, 2005; Tanner, 2000). Surveys are largely quantitative and have been widely used world-wide in LIS research (Kemoni, 2007; Ngulube, 2005; Tanner, 2000). According to Pinsonneault and Kraemer (1993:2), a survey is a means of “gathering information about the characteristics, actions, or opinions of a large group of people, referred to as a population”. Furthermore, it is “particularly valuable in answering research questions about what, how much and how many, and also questions about how and why”.

According to Creswell (2003:153), a survey gives a “quantitative or eric description of the trends of a population, which is obtained by generalising from the sample studied to the population”. In terms of design, Ngulube (2005) and Tanner (2000) state that

surveys can be either cross-sectional or longitudinal. A cross-sectional design collects data from a sample selected from a given population at a specific point in time. In a longitudinal design, data is collected at different points in time (Adams and Schvaneveldt, 1991). A cross-sectional approach was used in this study; data was collected at one point in time, starting with the analysis of the institutional RPL policy documents followed by a questionnaire survey.

### ***3.3.2 Survey data collection methods***

The survey research design typically uses self-administered questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews and web (electronic) surveys to collect data (Leedy and Ormrod, 2013; Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2008; Babbie and Mouton, 2006; Leedy and Ormrod, 2005). Table 3.1 gives the features of survey data collection methods.

**Table 3.1 Features of survey data collection methods**

Features	Self-administered questionnaire	Web survey	Telephone interview	Face-to-face interview
<b>Administrative issues</b>				
Cost	Cheap	Cheapest	Moderate	Expensive
Speed	Slowest	Fastest	Fast	Slow to moderate
Length	Moderate	Moderate	Short	Longest
Response rate	Lowest	Moderate	Moderate	Highest
<b>Research control</b>				
Probes possible	No	No	Yes	Yes
Specific respondent	No	No	Yes	Yes
Question sequence	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Only one respondent	No	No	Yes	Yes
Visual observation	No	No	No	Yes
<b>Success with different questions</b>				
Visual aids	Limited	Yes	None	Yes
Open-ended questions	Limited	Limited	Limited	Yes
Contingency questions	Limited	Yes	Yes	Yes
Complex questions	Limited	Yes	Limited	Yes
Sensitive questions	Some	Yes		Limited
<b>Sources of bias</b>				
Social desirability	Some	Some	Some	Most
Interviewer bias	None	None	Some	Most
Respondent's reading skill	Yes	Yes	No	No

Source: Neuman (2012:195)

For this study, a self-administered web-based questionnaire was used in conjunction with document analysis to cut down on cost and time.

### **3.3.3 Advantages and disadvantages of survey research designs**

Like other designs in social scientific research, surveys have their own weaknesses and strengths (Babbie and Mouton, 2006:262–264). The following advantages and disadvantages, described by Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2008:79), Unrau (2008:338), Maree and Pietersen (2007:157) and Babbie and Mouton (2006:262–264), were carefully considered to decide whether the survey format was appropriate for the objectives of this study.

#### **3.3.3.1 Advantages**

The following advantages were considered in the choice of the survey research design:

- Survey questionnaires are useful methods of data collection and well-suited for answering questions related to ‘what?’, ‘where?’ and ‘how many’.
- With an appropriate sample, surveys may aim at representation and provide generalised results.
- Surveys can be relatively easy to administer, and need not require any fieldwork.
- Survey may be repeated in the future or in different settings to allow comparisons to be made.
- With a good response rate, surveys can provide a lot of data relatively quickly.
- The questionnaire format also allows large amounts of information to be gathered in a short time period in a relatively inexpensive way.

#### **3.3.3.2 Disadvantages**

The researcher also carefully considered the following disadvantages when using the survey research design for this study:

- the data, in the form of tables, pie charts and statistics, become the main focus of the research report, with a loss of linkage to wider theories and issues.

- the data provide snapshots of points in time rather than a focus on the underlying processes and changes.

The researcher is often not in a position to check first-hand the understandings of the respondents to the questions asked. Issues of truthfulness and accuracy are thereby raised.

The survey relies on breadth rather than depth for its validity. This is a crucial issue for small-scale researchers.

The survey method relies on the respondent's ability to recall events or behaviour. Despite its disadvantages, the advantages of the survey research design outweigh its disadvantages. And because of the simplicity of the questionnaire, high literacy levels of the participants and the fact that RPL practice is a daily occurrence, the above weaknesses were overcome.

#### **3.3.4 Justification for using a survey research design**

Survey research may be 'designed for explanation, exploration, or description purposes' (Bless and Higson-Smith, 2000:41–42). According to Neuman (2012:17), explanatory research identifies the sources of social behaviours, beliefs, conditions, and events; it documents causes, tests theories, and provides reasons. It builds on exploratory and descriptive research and often asks the 'why?' question. Survey research aimed at explanation seeks to establish relationships between variables. However, the explanatory questions may go beyond establishing the existence of causal relationships to actually asking why such relationships exist.

In exploratory research, 'a researcher examines a new area to formulate questions that he or she can address more specifically in the future'.

Exploratory research 'frequently addresses the 'what?' question, and rarely yields definitive answers' (Babbie and Mouton, 2012:16–17). The purpose of exploratory research is to 'gain a broad understanding of a situation, phenomenon, community or person' (Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:41) and 'to find out the existing situation, events, attitudes or opinions that are occurring in a given population' (Babbie and Mouton, 2006:81; Neuman, 2012:17). Judging from the literature on RPL locally and internationally, there is no research on RPL implementation in South African LIS schools. As a result very little is known about RPL practice in South African LIS

schools. The purpose of this study was therefore to explore the RPL phenomenon in order to gain a broader understanding of the nature of RPL implementation in the LIS in South Africa. Accordingly, an exploratory descriptive survey research design was used in this study to investigate the nature of RPL implementation in the LIS schools in South Africa.

### **3.6 Research population**

The research population for this study was all the 10 LIS schools in the South African education and training system. As a result, there was no sampling necessary. The target population/respondents included the head/chair of departments/schools, senior lecturers, lecturers, junior lecturers and RPL officials in all the 10 LIS schools in South Africa. The respondents from the academic staff were recommended by the heads/chair of the schools/departments to participate in the study due to their knowledge and experience of RPL practice. A total of 76 respondents were targeted comprising of 10 RPL officials and 66 academic staff recommended by the heads/chair of the schools/departments. Five of the RPL officials did not respond together with three academic staff. As a result, there were 68 respondents who participated in the study comprising of five professors, one associate professor, 44 senior lecturers, 13 lecturers and five RPL officials.

### **3.7 Data collection methods**

The survey questionnaire was the main method of data collection, complemented by document analysis. By using different data collection methods, the researcher sought to 'corroborate one source and method with another ... [and to] enhance the quality of the data' (Mason, 2002:33). The researcher felt that complementing the survey questionnaire with document analysis would provide greater richness and depth. The document analysis method was used to counter the weaknesses of the quantitative survey, and it revealed meaningful information that might not have been discovered if only one approach or data collection technique had been used. The following is a detailed discussion of the data collection methods used in the study.

### **3.7.1 Primary data sources**

Primary data sources are defined as ‘those that appeared first in time – in particular, when or soon after the events in question occurred’ (Leedy and Ormrod, 2013:170). Swanborn (2009:64) refers to primary data as ‘elicited or new data’. According to Struwig and Stead (2001:121) and Welman and Kruger (2001:60), primary data ‘is obtained from direct observation of the phenomenon under investigation or is personally collected.’ To ensure that primary data is collected, ‘interviews, personal or telephonic, self-administered questionnaires and direct observation methods’ are used (Struwig and Stead, 2001:131). For this study, the researcher used a self-administered web-based questionnaire and document analysis to collect data in order to investigate the nature of RPL implementation in the LIS schools in South Africa.

#### *3.7.1.1 The questionnaire*

The questionnaire was the main data gathering method. The questionnaire is the most widely used technique to gain information relevant to the researcher’s subject of enquiry (Babbie, 1990:15; McMillan and Schumacher, 2001:257). According to Thomas (2009:22), a questionnaire is a ‘written form of questioning’.

Questionnaires typically have two types of question, namely open-ended and closed-ended (Thomas, 2009; Bailey, Hebbler, Olmsted, Raspa, and Bruder 2008). An open-ended question gives the respondent the choice of what to say in response. A closed-ended question asks gives the respondent a limited set of responses to choose from (Bailey, Hebbler, Olmsted, Raspa and Bruder, 2009; Thomas, 2009). Closed-ended questions are also known as multiple-choice questions. The study used closed-ended questions comprising “yes or no” answers and five-item Likert-style questions.

##### *3.7.1.1.1 Questionnaire format*

The researcher developed a list of questions based on research objectives which include the core criteria for the implementation of RPL (SAQA, 2002). The survey questionnaire had four parts, I to V. Specific instructions were given on how to answer each part.

PART I consisted of biographical information. Variables such age, gender, highest qualification, position/rank, name of institution and years of service were included. Biographical variables were included to get statistics on the differences in perceptions, opinion, experience and expectations of the various demographic groupings. The other parts of the questionnaire were as follows:

PART II consisted of questions related to RPL policy environment;

PART III consisted of questions related to training of RPL personnel;

PART IV consisted of questions related to RPL assessment process; and

PART V consisted of questions related to quality management systems (QMS).

#### *3.7.1.1.2 Pre-testing the questionnaire*

The questionnaire was pre-tested to ensure that the correct data was gathered. Pre-testing of the measuring instrument involves trying it out on a small number of people who are similar to those in the respondents' target group. The researcher then uses the results of the pre-test to improve the methodology (Burns and Grove, 2005:746). The questionnaire was pre-tested on six participants including senior lecturers, lecturers and RPL officials who did not take part in the main study. The outcome of the pre-test showed clearly that no changes were needed, and this confirmed to the researcher that the questionnaire was valid and reliable.

#### *3.7.1.1.3 Administering the questionnaire*

In this study a self-administered web-based questionnaire was administered by email. According to Schonlau, Fricker and Elliot (2002), the advantage of email surveys is that they can be cost-effective when the sample size is small and when there is a need to keep track of the distribution process. However, these authors also note some disadvantages of email surveys; for example it is difficult to obtain a large enough response rate to ensure a representative sample, and there is a time lapse between the mailing and delivery dates. Please check this is this ordinary mail or email?

For this study, an electronic mail (email) was used to distribute seventy-six (76) a web-based questionnaires and to collect responses. The contact details were obtained from the secretaries/officials in the LIS schools/departments and some from

the academic staff themselves. A web-based questionnaire was chosen because all the respondents had sufficient computer skills and internet connections. The respondents were also geographically dispersed. According to Abel, Sardone and Brock (2005), web-based questionnaire tools like surveymonkey.com can reach large numbers of respondents with a wider geographical spread, and can reduce the chance of human error in entering data. In addition, the interface is easy to use and supports different question formats such as Likert-style questions, drop-down selection, multiple response items and opportunities to provide feedback.

An introductory letter explaining the purpose of the study was sent out with each questionnaire. All the respondent had to do was to click on the hyperlink to go into the website and open the questionnaire. Reminders were sent out after two weeks to all those who had not yet responded. However, a total of sixty-eight (68) respondents participated in the survey out of a targeted seventy-six potential participants with knowledge and experience of RPL practice in the LIS schools in South Africa. As indicated above, five RPL officials and three academic staff did not reply. In spite of this, the researcher managed to obtain a higher response rate (89,5%) which was significant to the credibility of the findings of this study. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001: 261) 'a response rate of 60% is good and 70% is very good' for analysis and reporting.

### **3.7.2 Secondary data sources**

A secondary data source provides second-hand information (Welman and Kruger, 2002). Swanborn (2009:65) calls secondary data 'non-elicited or existing data'. According to Struwig and Stead (2001:62) and Welman and Kruger (2001:132), secondary data is 'information collected by individuals or organizations other than the researcher for other purposes'. Leedy and Ormrod (2013:173) refer to secondary data as the 'work of historians who have interpreted and written about primary sources'. Examples of secondary data are literature, archives, registers, personal files, government policies, photographs and letters (Swanborn, 2009:66–69). For this study, the researcher reviewed the literature and analysed the RPL policies of the 10 LIS institutions based on the survey questionnaire to obtain secondary data.

### *3.7.2.1 Document analysis*

The study used document analysis to complement the main data-gathering method, namely the questionnaire. According to Seale (2004:48), document analysis is 'a social research method and is an important research tool in its own right and is an invaluable part of most schemes of triangulation'. According to Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2008:1660), 'all, or virtually all, research projects involve, to a greater or lesser extent, the use and analysis of documents.'

Documents such as records, reports, books, pictures, letters, diaries, autobiographies, films and cartoons, are an important source of data in many areas of investigation (Thomas, 2009). According to Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2008:1660), 'all or virtually all, research projects involve, to a greater or lesser extent, the use and analysis of documents'. The institutional RPL policy documents were obtained from the institutions' web sites. In this study, the institutional RPL policy documents were collected for analysis as none of the LIS schools had own discipline-specific RPL policies. The institutional RPL policy documents were useful in developing an understanding of the nature of RPL implementation in the LIS schools in South Africa.

## **3.8 Data analysis**

After collecting the research data, the researcher used the following approaches and techniques to analyse it.

### ***3.8.1 Questionnaire data analysis***

The quantitative data collected from the participants through survey questionnaire. The data was entered in Epi-info version 7. Each questionnaire was entered twice and the information validated to ensure that data entry was properly entered. The data was exported to SPSS where it was analysed using descriptive statistics, non-parametric tests to determine whether there were differences in locations among responses and the institutional policy.

### ***3.8.2 Document data analysis***

The institutional RPL policy documents of the participating LIS schools were used to conduct document analysis. Content analysis was used as the data analysis technique to analyse data collected from the institutional RPL policy documents. The

content of the institutional policy documents were qualitatively examined and evaluated against the main data collection instrument, namely the survey questionnaire. From here the same procedure was followed as in survey questionnaire data analysis. The data was entered in Epi-info version 7. Each questionnaire was entered twice and the information validated to ensure that data entry was properly captured. The data was exported to SPSS for descriptive analysis.

### **3.9 Validity and reliability of the research findings**

Reliability and validity are essential to the effectiveness of any data-gathering procedure (Best and Kahn, 1993). Validity and reliability are regarded as 'the two fundamental elements in the evaluation of a measurement instrument' (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011:2). According to Neuman (2006) reliability deals with an indicator's (measurement's) dependability. A reliable indicator or measure gives the same result each time the same thing is measured when the entity being measured has not changed (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010). Reliability, according to Thorndike (2005:110), is defined as 'the accuracy or precision of a measurement procedure'. According to Tavakol, Mohagheghi, and Dennick, 2008: 78; Leedy and Ormrod, 2005:68), reliability is concerned with 'the ability of an instrument to measure consistently'. According to Tavakol and Dennick (2011:53), the reliability of an instrument 'is closely associated with its validity'. An instrument cannot be valid unless it is reliable. However, the reliability of an instrument does not depend on its validity (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

In this study, a pre-test of the questionnaire was done to test and correct the items and correct items on the instrument and to assess the feasibility of the study. Before pre-testing, the survey questionnaire was sent to the supervisors for scrutiny and additional input. The researcher held a briefing session with the participants to explain the purpose and objectives of the study.

The questionnaire was pre-tested on senior lecturers, lecturers and RPL officials with the requisite knowledge and skills of the RPL practice at the University of South

Africa. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient test was also employed to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. The results are shown in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2 Reliability tests for the sections**

Question	Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient	Rule of thumb as proposed by George and Mallery (2003)
Question 9 (9 items) – Methods and processes of assessment	0.877	Good
Question 10 (11 items) – Quality management systems (QMS)	0.885	Good
<b>Overall reliability (20 items)</b>	<b>0.820</b>	<b>Good</b>

The Cronbach's alpha is 'the most commonly used measure of reliability (i.e. internal consistency)' (Streiner, 2003: 99). According to Streiner (2003:99-103), the internal consistency of a test is expressed as a number between 0 and 1. There are different reports about the acceptable values of alpha, ranging from 0.70 to 0.95 (DeVellis, 2003; Streiner, 2003; Bland J, Altman, 1997). A maximum alpha value of 0.90 has been recommended (Streiner, 2003: 103). In total there were 20 items were the respondents gave a rating on a five point Likert scale and the overall reliability of the measurement instruments was 0.820 which was good. Looking at the questions, question 8 and 9 have good reliabilities which were greater than 0.8. Thus, Cronbach alpha for this questionnaire indicated that it was a very reliable instrument.

### **3.10 Ethical considerations**

This study was carried out in strict accordance with the Research Ethics Policy of Unisa (2007). The researcher maintained the confidentiality and security of all data collected from or about research participants. The researcher also ensured that ethical guidelines as suggested in the proposal are implemented. The researcher had to notify the Unisa Research and Ethics Committee (UREC) in writing about the change of the title of the thesis after studying feedback received from UREC. The initial title was: The implementation of the concept of recognition of prior learning (RPL) in South African LIS schools. After much consideration, the thesis title was changed to: The recognition of prior learning (RPL) implementation in LIS schools in

South Africa. As expected, there was no report on injury or harm experienced by the participants which was attributable to their participation in the study (UREC, 2007). Participants were informed that the information gained during the project may be published, that they would not be identified and their personal details would remain confidential. All the participants signed the informed consent at the end of the questionnaire. No names of the LIS schools were used in the presentation of results. Therefore the participants were assured of anonymity.

The information disclosed was used only for the purpose for which it was collected and not in a way that directly or indirectly adversely affects the participants. Also, extreme care was taken, not only in the choice of appropriate methodology, but also to report the findings in a way that did not change or slant them to serve the researchers own or someone else' interest. Thus, bias on the part of the researcher was avoided. In addition, no attempt was made by the researcher to hide what he had found in the study, or to highlight something disproportionately to its true existence.

### **3.11 Evaluation of the research methodology**

A study should be 'evaluated after completion' by the researcher (Creswell and Clark (2007:162). Ngulube (2005:139) contended that 'research methods need to be evaluated in order to explain what information was required, how it was collected accurately and how it was analysed'. In this study the researcher took a critical appraisal of the values and decisions involved in designing and executing the study, and interpreting the findings of this study. The goal of this section therefore is, to reflect on the research approach, methods and procedures as applied in this study. According to this researcher, the value of evaluating the research methodology is not only to inform other researchers about the challenges encountered during the process of the study but also to contribute towards an improved social research practice. To this end, the researcher provided some insights which might enable other researchers from different disciplines and perspectives to reflect on the principles and practices of scientific enquiry and research methodology in relation to their studies. In this study the following challenges were encountered:

### **3.11.1 Choosing an appropriate research approach.**

As noted by Creswell (2005:21), the criterion for selecting an approach takes into account many factors that may include 'the research problem, the personal experience of the researcher, and the audiences'. In this study, choosing the appropriate research approach to achieve the research objectives of the study presented the researcher with a huge challenge. Initially, mixed method was selected as the research approach for the study. However, after relentless challenges from the supervisors regarding the suitability of this approach due to a lack of strong justification for its use in the study, the researcher was forced to rethink the approach from inception.

In the end, by using the research question and the purpose of the study as a guide, the researcher was able to identify and justify the use of quantitative approach as the most appropriate research approach for the study. The research question for the study is: 'What is the nature of recognition of prior learning (RPL) implementation in Library and Information Science (LIS) schools in South Africa?'

Due to the nature of the question and the type of data obtained which was statistical in nature, quantitative approach was chosen in this study as the most appropriate approach to describe the nature of RPL implementation in the LIS schools in South Africa. This personal experience alluded to above served as a useful reminder to the researcher that personal preferences for one approach or another does not work. Thus researcher should refrain from choosing between qualitative and quantitative approaches or mixed method until they formulate a research question and state the purpose of the study.

### **3.11.2 Choosing the research design**

Determining what kind of design can best answer the research questions posed a difficult challenge to the researcher. However, the research question served as a guide to the choice of the research design. The design came out of the study, rather than being imposed on the study.

Once the researcher has decided on the appropriate research approach, the next step was to delve deeper into the nature of the research approach itself. This involved figuring out 'from whom the data was going to be collected', 'how the data was going to be collected' and 'how the data was going to be analysed once it was

collected'. Addressing the issues raised above culminated in the choice of the appropriate research design for this study.

The research population for this study involved all the LIS schools in South Africa which were dispersed throughout the country. The survey research design utilising an online questionnaire was therefore more appropriate to cover a wider geographical area instantly and in a cost effective manner.

### ***3.11.3 Pretesting the survey questionnaire***

The study used an online questionnaire to collect data from the research respondents. This data collection instrument had to be pretested before going out spending time, money and energy to the final study. For this study, pretesting was done among a few senior lecturers and RPL officials or specialists with enormous RPL experience.

Positive feedback was received from four participants out of a potential of six participants. An attempt to secure feedback from two remaining participants proved futile. This delay forced the researcher to readjust the research schedule thus extending the study beyond the initial study timelines.

No major issues were raised during pretesting by the participants in terms of content and structure of the questionnaire. However, a few questions had to be reformulated. The value of pretesting in this study was that it enabled the researcher to refine the questions so that they were able to draw data relevant to the intended study objectives. Additionally, the pretesting was also invaluable in helping the researcher to consider some ideas from a different angle or perspective.

### ***3.11.4 Data collection***

In this study, the researcher used self-administered web-based survey questionnaire as the main method of data collection complemented by document analysis to collect data on RPL implementation in South African LIS schools. An email was used to distribute a web-based questionnaire and to collect responses. Web-based surveys and e-mail are thought to offer more advantages than mail surveys such as timeliness in getting the questionnaire to respondents and in obtaining results, higher response rates, lower costs, and ease of inputting data for analysis (Abel, Sardone, Brock, 2005). However, many scholars have cited limitations of surveys such as

failure to establish the casual relationship between variables; problems of self-reporting that increases bias, effects of sampling techniques, non-response rates, for example, (Ngulube, 2005; Tanner, 2000).

In this study the timeliness in getting the questionnaire to respondents did not translate into the timeliness it was expected in obtaining the results. All the ten (10) South African LIS schools responded to the survey despite the sometimes long and tedious correspondences the researcher had to deal with.

Completing the data collection process for this study was an arduous and anxious task for the researcher. Although the sample size was relatively small, the data collection process took longer, well over three months, to complete amid repeated and costly follow-ups. Despite the efforts made, some respondents were either too busy or not in office to respond, and/or simply forgot to respond.

Document analysis was another method used in this study to complement the survey questionnaire. Institutional RPL policies were used in the LIS schools for RPL purposes. There is no departmental or LIS schools specific RPL policy found during this study.

In the initial planning of this study the supervisors raised this logistical concern which was then addressed. This pointed to the benefit of reflecting on the scientific approach and method of collecting and generating new knowledge during the proposal writing stages.

### **3.12 Chapter summary**

Chapter 3 outlined the research approach and design used to answer the research question. The quantitative research approach was chosen as the dominant approach for this study. In line with this approach a survey research design was employed. Choosing the most appropriate research approach to achieve the research objectives of this study was challenging. Many factors had to be taken into account including the research problem, the personal experience of the researcher, and the unit of analysis for this study.

With regard to data collection methods, a combination of methods were used to collect and analyse data. The survey questionnaire, was the main data collection method, complemented by document analysis method in the form of an analysis of institutional RPL documents. This process is known as methodical triangulation. The collected data was analysed using statistical software, namely SPSS software. Both the set of data collected during the study from the respondents using the survey questionnaire and institutional RPL documents through content analysis techniques were entered in Epi-info version 7 for analysis.

To ensure validity and reliability of the research findings, the questionnaire was pretested against a few senior lecturers and RPL officials or specialists with enormous RPL experience at UNISA before finally being used for purposes of collecting data.

Ethical issues were also considered as the study was carried out in strict accordance with the Research Ethics Policy of UNISA of 2007.

And finally, the research methodology was also evaluated by reflecting on the research approach, methods and procedures as applied in this study, not only to improved social research practice but also to provide some insights which might enable other researchers from different disciplines and perspectives to reflect on the principles and practices of scientific enquiry and research methodology in relation to their studies.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The aim of the study was to investigate the nature of recognition of prior learning (RPL) implementation in Library and Information Science (LIS) schools in South Africa. This chapter presents the findings of the study.

The objectives of this study were four-fold. Firstly, it was to investigate whether the LIS schools were committed to providing an enabling policy environment for RPL practice. Secondly, to determine whether assessors and other personnel involved in assessment were trained to ensure the quality of RPL assessments. Thirdly, to establish whether credible assessment processes were being followed in the LIS schools to ensure the integrity of the RPL system and lastly to determine whether quality management systems (QMS) were in place to ensure the continuous improvement of RPL system in LIS schools.

In order to answer these objectives the questionnaire survey was used as the main data collection method complimented by the document analysis. Section 4.1 gives the introduction to the chapter. The results of the institutional RPL policy analysis are given in 4.2. Section 4.3 presents questionnaire results while section 4.4 provides comparative analysis of the results of the institutional RPL policies and questionnaire survey. Section 4.5 presents the summary of the results. Lastly, section 4.6 presents the summary of the chapter.

### **4.2 Results of the institutional RPL policy analysis**

A total of 10 LIS schools in South Africa participated in the survey. In all the ten universities 9 of them had the institutional RPL policy as a standalone document while one LIS school's policy is integrated in the admission and registration policy of the institution. The content of the institutional policy documents were qualitatively examined and scored against the questionnaire survey. The resultant data was then entered into Epi-info version 7 and computed into quantitative data.

#### **4.2.1 The rate of RPL policy approval in the LIS schools**

This section gives the rate of RPL policy approval in higher institutions in South Africa. Table 4.1 shows years in which the institutional RPL policies were approved:

**Table 4.1: Position (n=10)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Rank</b>
1999 - 2002	3	30%	2
2003 – 2006	6	60%	1
2007 – 2009	1	10%	3
	<b>10</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	

The majority of the policies were approved from 2003 – 2006. One university had the policy approved as earlier as 1999 whilst the latest had the policy approved in 2009. In spite of the date of approval of the RPL policies, actual date of implementation might still differ in the LIS schools.

#### **4.2.3 Results**

This section presents the results of the institutional RPL policy analysis according to research objectives:

##### **4.2.3.1 Policy environment**

The institutional RPL policy documents were analysed to determine which aspects of policy environment were documented. There were eight items under this objective as indicated in table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: RPL policy environment**

Statement	Level of acknowledgement		Sample size
	Yes	No	
Institutional 'will' to open up access to learners	100.0% (10)	- -	10
The RPL policy was based on the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) policy	100.0% (10)	- -	10
Commitment to the principles of equity/redress	100.0% (10)	- -	10
Equal access for support for all candidates seeking assessment	100.0% (10)	- -	10
Admission procedures were inclusive of non-matriculation learners	70.0% (7)	30.0% (3)	10
Support for RPL personnel conducting assessments	70.0% (7)	30.0% (3)	10
Information about RPL assessment was widely available to candidates	50.0% (5)	50.0% (5)	10
Formal agreements to ensure recognition of assessment results in the LIS sector	- -	100.0% (10)	10

The aspects in the institutional policy that were documented to be in place with acknowledgement level of 100% were:

- there was an institutional 'will' to open up access to learners coming from diverse backgrounds, displaying diverse needs/ capabilities;

- the RPL policy was based on the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) policy of 2002;
- the assessment policy expressed an explicit commitment to the principles of equity/redress; and equal access existed to opportunities for support for all candidates seeking assessment.

The following aspects were documented with an acknowledgement level of less than 70%:

- admission procedures were inclusive of non-matriculation learners;
- organizational structures ensured that RPL personnel were given sufficient support for their services; and
- information about RPL assessment was widely available to potential candidates.

However all the respondents indicated that no formal agreements were encouraged in the LIS schools to ensure recognition of assessment results in the LIS sector.

#### 4.2.3.2 Training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments

The institutional policies were analysed to determine which aspects on training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments were documented. There were five issues as indicated in table 4.3.

**Table 4.3: Training of RPL personnel**

Statement	Level of acknowledgement		Sample Size
	Yes	No	
RPL training plans encouraged mentoring relationships between personnel conducting RPL assessments	90.0% (9)	10.0% (1)	10
Performance of the functions of evidence facilitators	80.0% (8)	20.0% (2)	10

RPL policy review mechanisms were in place	30.0% (3)	70.0% (7)	10
Implementation of quality assurance systems to ensure that they meet the development objectives as agreed with the ETQA	20.0% (2)	80.0% (8)	10
Registration of assessors/moderators made explicit provision for the requisite certification in the relevant unit standard	-	100.0% (10)	10

In terms of whether the criteria for the registration of assessors/moderators made explicit provision for the requisite certification in the relevant unit standards designed for that purpose, 90% of the LIS schools indicated that this was not documented in the policy. All aspects had levels of acknowledgements of less than 50% except the aspect: RPL training plans encourage mentoring relationships between personnel conducting RPL assessments with level of acknowledgement of 80.0%. One can conclude that, in terms of training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments, most of the aspects were not documented in the policy.

#### 4.2.3.3 RPL assessment process

Document analysis was done to determine RPL assessment process outlined in the institutional policy. The rating was done on a 5-point Likert scale. The categories "to a reasonable extent and to a greater extent" were grouped together to give the ranking and also as an indication that the aspect was documented in the policy document. The information is shown in table 4.4.

**Table 4.4: RPL assessment process**

Aspect	Level of extent				
	To a great extent	To a reasonable extent	To some extent	To a very little extent	Not at all
The purpose of assessment was clarified to the candidate upfront	70.0% (7)	20.0% (2)	10.0% (1)	-	-
The quality of support to be provided to the candidate in preparing for the assessment was established	70.0% (7)	20.0% (2)	10.0% (1)	-	-
An appeals process was made known to the candidate	40.0% (4)	30.0% (3)	10.0% (1)	10.0% (1)	10.0% (1)
Assessment instruments were developed in compliance with the ETQA requirements	30.0% (3)	20.0% (2)	10.0% (1)	40.0% (4)	-
The choice of assessment methods was fit for purpose to ensure credible assessment outcomes	20.0% (2)	20.0% (2)	20.0% (2)	40.0% (4)	-
Moderation mechanisms were in place, including policies for evaluating assessment systems	30.0% (3)	10.0% (1)	10.0% (1)	50.0% (5)	-
Assessment plans indicated a variety of appropriate assessment methods/instruments to validate diverse types of learning	30.0% (3)	-	10.0% (1)	40.0% (4)	20.0% (2)
Assessment reports indicated the recommendations for further action to address identified gaps	10.0% (1)	20.0% (2)	10.0% (1)	30.0% (3)	30.0% (3)
The candidate was actively involved	20.0%	-	10.0%	40.0%	30.0%

in all aspects of the assessment process	(2)		(1)	(4)	(3)
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The highly scoring aspects on RPL assessment process where the level of extent was equal or greater than 70% were:

- the purpose of assessment and the expectations of the candidates were clarified upfront (90.0%);
- the quality of support to be provided to the candidate in preparing for the assessment was established (90.0%); and
- an appeals process was in place and made known to the candidate (70.0%).

However the following aspects had levels of extent of below 40%, indicating that there were not well documented in most universities:

- the choice of assessment methods was fit for purpose to ensure credible assessment outcomes (40.0%);
- moderation mechanisms were in place, including policies for evaluating assessment systems (40.0%);
- assessment plans indicated a variety of appropriate assessment methods/instruments to validate diverse types of learning (30.0%);
- assessment reports indicated recommendations for further action to address identified gaps (30.0%); and
- the candidate was actively involved in all aspects of the assessment process (20.0%).

#### *4.2.3.4 Quality management systems (QMS)*

In terms of quality management and systems, there were eleven items. In all aspects the levels of extent that they agreed were below 50% except for two as indicated in table 4.5.

**Table 4.5: Quality management systems (QMS)**

Aspect	Level of extent				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Quality management systems ensured the refining of assessment procedures at all levels	20.0% (2)	60.0% (6)	10.0% (1)	10.0% (1)	-
Information on RPL outcomes was maintained	10.0% (1)	70.0% (7)	10.0% (1)	-	10.0% (1)
Quality management systems for assessment were implemented in accordance with agreed criteria.	30.0% (3)	40.0% (4)	10.0% (1)	10.0% (1)	10.0% (1)
Quality management systems provides for support in meetings developmental targets	-	10.0% (4)	20.0% (1)	- (2)	80.0% (1)
Assessment documentation was maintained in accordance with agreed criteria	-	50.0% (5)	10.0% (1)	30.0% (3)	10.0% (1)
Quality management systems provide for input from all key stakeholders, including representatives from the candidate community	20.0% (2)	20.0% (2)	10.0% (1)	-	50.0% (5)
RPL assessment monitoring activities ensured consistency within the sector	-	30.0% (3)	10.0% (1)	20.0% (2)	40.0% (4)
Monitoring activities were clearly spelt out in the QMS documentation, including diagnostic, formative and summative activities	-	20.0% (2)	10.0% (1)	10.0% (1)	60.0% (6)
The quality management system provides for analyses of RPL services	-	20.0% (2)	20.0% (2)	10.0% (1)	50.0% (5)
RPL results were recorded in accordance with the requirements of the SAQA's NLRD (National	-	10.0%	10.0%	-	80.0%

Learners' Records Database)		(1)	(1)		(8)
The quality management system provides for the system to monitor the progress of candidates who enter learning programmes post-RPL	-	-	20.0% (2)	-	80.0% (8)

The quality management systems aspects that were document in at least 70% of the universities were:

- quality management systems ensured the refining of assessment procedures at all levels (80.0%);
- information on RPL outcomes was maintained (80%); and
- quality management systems for assessment were implemented in accordance with agreed criteria (70%).

The following aspects were not documented by the majority of the universities in their institutional RPL policies:

- assessment documentation was maintained in accordance with agreed criteria (50%);
- quality management systems provide for input from all key stakeholders, including representatives from the candidate community (40%);
- RPL assessment monitoring activities ensured consistency within the sector (30%);
- monitoring activities were clearly spelt out in the quality management system (QMS) (20%);
- the quality management system provides for analyses of RPL services (20%);
- RPL results were recorded in accordance with the requirements of the SAQA'S NLRD (National Learners' Records Database) (10%); and
- the quality management system provides for the system to monitor the progress of candidates who enter learning programmes post-RPL (0%).

One can conclude that quality management systems were not well documented in the institutional policies.

### **4.3 Questionnaire results**

This section presents the results of the questionnaire survey starting with the response rate and characteristics of the sample. This is followed by the presentation of the results of the questionnaire survey according to research objectives.

### 4.3.1 Response rate and characteristics of the sample

A total of 10 LIS schools in South Africa participated in the survey. As stated earlier in Chapter 3, a total of 76 respondents were targeted comprising of ten RPL officials, heads/chairs of LIS schools/departments. Of the 76 respondents, 10 respondents were RPL officials, 10 heads/chairs of LIS schools/departments and 56 respondents were academic staff recommended by the heads/chair of the schools/departments. Five RPL officials and three academic staff failed to respond. In total, there were 68 respondents who participated in the study comprising of five professors, one associate professor, 44 senior lecturers, 13 lecturers and five RPL officials.

Table 4.6 gives the frequency of the positions of the respondents of the questionnaire survey and the ranking denoting the position with the highest and least number of respondents while table 4.7 gives the frequency of years in the same position as well as the ranking indicating the years in the same position with the highest and least number of respondents.

**Table 4.6: Position (n=68)**

Position	Frequency	%
Professor	5	7.4
Associate Professors	1	1.5
Senior Lecturer	44	64.7
Lecturer	13	19.1
RPL official	5	7.4
	<b>68</b>	<b>100</b>

In terms of position in the LIS schools the majority of the respondents were senior lecturers as indicated in Table 4.6. Approximately 77.9% had a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree whilst 22.1% (15) had a Master's degree.

**Table 4.7: Years in same position (n=68)**

Years	Frequency	%	Rank
Less than 10 years	8	11.8	4
11 – 20 years	15	22.1	2
21 – 30 years	30	44.1	1
More than 30 years	15	22.1	2
	<b>68</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	

The number of years the respondents were in the same position was given in Table 4.7. The majority had more than 20 years' experience.

In terms of gender, 48.5% (33) were males whilst 51.5% (35) were females. The ratio of males to females was almost one was to one. All the respondents indicated their age. The information is shown in table 4.8.

### **4.3.3 Results**

This section presents the results of the questionnaire survey according to research objectives:

#### *4.3.3.1 Policy environment*

The respondents were asked to describe the policy environment in the school/department. There were eight items as indicated in table 4.9.

**Table 4.8: RPL policy environment (n=68)**

Statement	Level of acknowledgement	
	Yes	No
The RPL policy was based on the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) policy	94.1% (64)	5.9% (4)
Institutional 'will' to open up access to learners	88.1% (59)	11.9% (8)
Commitment to the principles of equity/redress	70.6% (48)	29.4% (20)
Information about RPL assessment was widely available to candidates	60.3% (41)	39.7% (27)
Admission procedures were inclusive of non-matriculation learners	55.9% (38)	44.1% (30)
Equal access for support for all candidates seeking assessment	38.2% (26)	61.8% (42)
Support for RPL personnel conducting assessments	27.9% (19)	72.1% (49)
Formal agreements to ensure recognition of assessment results in the LIS sector	13.2% (9)	86.8% (59)

The aspects which had more than 70% of the respondents acknowledging were:

- the RPL policy was based on the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) policy of 2002 (94.1%);
- there was an institutional 'will' to open up access to learners coming from diverse backgrounds, displaying diverse needs/capabilities (88.1%); and

- the assessment policy expressed an explicit commitment to the principles of equity/redress (70.6%).

The respondents had levels of acknowledgements of less than 30% on the following aspects:

- organisational structures ensured that RPL personnel were given sufficient support for their services (27.9%); and
- formal agreements among the LIS schools were encouraged to ensure recognition of assessment results in the LIS sector (13.2%).

Looking at the responses one can conclude that issues dealing with institutional policies have high levels of acknowledgement but issues dealing with implementation like resources and support and agreement with the schools seem to have levels of agreement below 30%.

#### 4.3.3.2 Training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments

The respondents were asked to describe the state of RPL training in the LIS school /department. There were 5 issues as indicated in table 4.10.

**Table 4.9: Training of RPL personnel (n=68)**

Statement	Level of acknowledgement	
	Yes	No
Registration of assessors made explicit provision for the requisite certification in the relevant unit standards	75.0% (51)	25.0% (17)
Performance of the functions of evidence facilitators	69.1% (47)	30.9% (21)
RPL policy review mechanisms were in place	61.8% (42)	38.2% (26)
RPL training plans encourage mentoring relationships between personnel conducting RPL assessments	39.7% (27)	60.3% (41)

Implementation of quality assurance systems to ensure that they met the development objectives as agreed with ETQA	26.5% (18)	73.5% (50)
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About 75% of the respondents indicated that the criteria for the registration of assessors/moderators made explicit provision for the requisite certification in the relevant unit standard designed for that purpose. However, only 40% indicated that RPL training plans encouraged mentoring relationships between personnel conducting RPL assessments and close to 30% indicated that quality assurance systems were implemented in the LIS schools to ensure that they increasingly meet the development objectives as agreed with the ETQA.

#### *4.3.3.3 RPL assessment process*

The respondents were asked to rate aspects on RPL assessment process on a 5 point Likert scale. The categories to a reasonable extent and to a greater extent were grouped together to give the ranking and also as an indication that the respondents agreed to the aspect. Close to 90% indicated that the choice of assessment methods was fit for purpose to ensure credible assessment outcomes. The information is shown in table 4.11.

**Table 4.10: RPL assessment process**

Aspect	Level of extent					Total
	To a great extent	To a reasonable extent	To some extent	To a very little extent	Not at all	
The choice of assessment methods was fit for purpose to ensure credible assessment outcomes	38.2% (26)	48.5% (33)	4.4% (3)	7.4% (5)	1.5% (1)	100% (68)
Assessment plans indicated a variety of appropriate assessment methods/instruments to validate diverse types of learning	39.7% (27)	45.6% (31)	2.9% (2)	10.3% (7)	1.5% (1)	100% (68)
Moderation mechanisms were in place, including policies for evaluating assessment systems	35.3% (24)	50.0% (34)	1.5% (1)	11.8% (8)	1.5% (1)	100% (68)
An appeals process was made known to the candidate	38.2% (26)	44.1% (30)	1.5% (1)	14.7% (10)	1.5% (1)	100% (68)
The candidate was actively involved in all aspects of the assessment process	22.1% (15)	57.4% (39)	1.5% (1)	19.1% (13)		100% (68)
The purpose of assessment was clarified to the candidates upfront	17.6% (12)	60.3% (41)	1.5% (1)	19.1% (13)	1.5% (1)	100% (68)
The quality of support to be provided to the candidate in preparing for the assessment was established	20.6% (14)	54.4% (37)	2.9% (2)	17.6% (12)	4.4% (3)	100% (68)
Assessment instruments were developed in compliance with the ETQA requirements	23.5% (16)	51.5% (35)	2.9% (2)	19.1% (13)	2.9% (2)	100% (68)
Assessment reports indicated recommendations for further action to address identified gaps	25.0% (17)	50.0% (34)	2.9% (2)	20.6% (14)	1.5% (1)	100% (68)

The highly scoring aspects on RPL assessment process where the level of extent was greater than 80% were:

- the choice of assessment methods was fit for purpose to ensure credible assessment outcomes (86.6%);
- assessment indicated a variety of appropriate assessment methods/instruments to validate diverse types of learning (85.3%);
- moderation mechanisms were in place, including policies for evaluating assessment systems (85.3%); and
- an appeals process was made known to the candidate (82.4%).

All the other aspects were at least greater than 70%.

#### *4.3.3.4 Quality management systems (QMS)*

In terms of quality management and systems, there were eleven items. In all aspects the levels of extent that they agreed were below 50% except for two as indicated in table 4.12.

**Table 4.11: Quality management systems (QMS)**

Aspect	Level of extent					Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Quality management systems for assessment were implemented in accordance with agreed criteria.	1.5% (1)	57.4% (39)	1.5% (1)	26.5% (18)	13.2% (9)	100% (68)
Quality management systems ensured the refining of assessment procedures at all levels	1.5% (1)	50.0% (34)	1.5% (1)	26.5% (18)	20.6% (14)	100% (68)
Information on RPL outcomes was maintained	2.9% (2)	45.6% (31)	1.5% (1)	23.5% (16)	26.5% (18)	100% (68)
Quality management systems provided for input from all key stakeholders, including representatives from the candidate community	2.9% (2)	35.3% (24)	1.5% (1)	36.8% (25)	23.5% (16)	100% (68)
Assessment documentation was maintained in accordance with agreed criteria	2.9% (2)	23.5% (16)	1.5% (1)	57.4% (39)	14.7% (10)	100% (68)
Quality management systems provides for support in meetings developmental targets, including evaluation and monitoring activities	1.5% (1)	19.1% (13)	2.9% (2)	54.4% (37)	22.1% (15)	100% (68))
Evaluation and monitoring activities were clearly spelt out in the QMS documentation, including diagnostic, formative and summative activities	2.9% (2)	16.2% (11)	4.4% (3)	60.3% (41)	16.2% (11)	100% (68)
The quality management system provides for the system to monitor the progress of candidates who enter learning programmes post-RPL	-	17.6% (12)	2.9% (2)	51.5% (35)	27.9% (19)	100% (68)
Evaluation and monitoring activities ensured consistency	2.9%	11.8%	2.9%	64.7%	17.6%	100%

within the sector	(2)	(8)	(2)	(44)	(12)	(68)
The quality management system provides for analyses of RPL services.	2.9% (2)	11.8% (8)	5.9% (4)	50.0% (34)	29.4% (20)	100% (68)
RPL results were recorded in accordance with the requirements of the SAQA'S NLRD (National Learners' Records Database)	-	8.8% (6)	2.9% (2)	63.2% (43)	25.0% (17)	100% (68)

It seems as if there were no quality managements in most of the universities. The only aspects with level of agreements of more 50% were:

quality management systems for assessment were implemented in accordance with agreed criteria (58.8%); and

quality management systems ensured the refining of assessment procedures at all levels (51.5%).

#### **4.4 Comparative analysis of the results of the institutional RPL policies and questionnaire survey**

In this section, the institutional RPL policies and the questionnaire survey were compared to determine whether what was written in the RPL policy documents was happening in practice.

##### **4.4.1 Results**

The results of the institutional RPL policies and the questionnaire survey were analysed on the basis of the ratings/percentage scores obtained for each aspect of the research objectives.

##### *4.4.1.1 RPL policy environment*

There were eight items describing the policy environment in the LIS schools/departments. The responses of "yes" where used to compare questionnaire responses and institutional policies. The information is shown in table 4.13.

**Table 4.12: Comparative analysis of the results of the institutional policy and questionnaire survey**

Statement	Level of acknowledgement	
	Questionnaire	Institutional
Institutional 'will' to open up access to learners	88.1%	100.0%
The RPL policy was based on the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) policy	94.1%	100.0%
Commitment to the principles of equity/ redress	70.6%	100.0%
Information about RPL assessment was widely available to candidates	60.3%	50.0%
Admission procedures were inclusive of non-matriculation learners	55.9%	70.0%
Equal access for support for all candidates seeking assessment	38.2%	100.0%
Support for RPL personnel conducting assessments	27.9%	70.0%
Formal agreements to ensure recognition of assessment results in the LIS sector	13.2%	0.0%

The aspect: equal access existed to opportunities for support for all candidates seeking assessment the institutional policies of all schools (100%) indicating that they best describe policy environment. However, a comparison with the questionnaire response showed that the agreement levels were 38.2% respectively. One can conclude that there were documented but in practice it was not happening. This also applies to the aspect: organisational structures ensured that RPL personnel were given sufficient support for their services where the level of acknowledgement was 27.9% and 70.0% for questionnaire and institutional respectively.

In terms of the aspect: formal agreements among the LIS schools were encouraged to ensure recognition of assessment results in the LIS sector both the institutional and the questionnaire responses indicated that it's not documented and not happening respectively.

Correlation analysis was used to determine whether there was an association between the documentation on the policy and the responses from the questionnaires. A spearman rank correlation was used. The hypothesis to be tested was:

There was an association between the documentation on the policy and the responses from the questionnaires ( $H_0: \rho = 0$ )

OR

There was no association between the documentation on the policy and the responses from the questionnaires ( $H_1: \rho \neq 0$ )

The spearman rank resulted in an  $r_s = 0.664$  and a  $p$ -value = 0.073. Since  $p$ -value = 0.073 was greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis of no correlation was not rejected at the 5%. One can conclude that there was no relationship between institutional policy and response to questionnaires at the 5% level of significance. Thus, the responses were not associated with what the school policy was saying in terms of the institutional policy environment. What this means is that, in practice, there was no enabling institutional policy environment as required by SAQA RPL policy (2002). However it can be noted that at the 10% level of significance there is a positive relationship, meaning that the document analysis and respondents were in agreement on the policy environment.

#### *4.4.2.2 Training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments*

There were five items describing the state of RPL training in the LIS school/department in terms of training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments. The information is indicated in table 4.14.

**Table 4.13: Comparative analysis of institutional policy and questionnaire responses on training of RPL personnel**

Statement	Level of acknowledgement	
	Questionnaire	Institutional
Registration of assessors made explicit provision for the requisite certification in the relevant unit standards	75.0%	-
RPL policy review mechanisms were in place	61.8%	30.0%
Performance of the functions of evidence facilitators	69.1%	80.0%
RPL training plans encouraged mentoring relationships between personnel conducting RPL assessments	39.7%	100.0%
Implementation of quality assurance systems to ensure that they met the development objectives as agreed with ETQA	26.5%	20.0%

The aspect: quality assurance systems were implemented in the LIS schools to ensure that they increasingly meet the development objectives as agreed with the ETQA; resulted in both the institutional policy and the questionnaire giving acknowledgement levels of 20.0% and 26.5% respectively. Thus this was not happening in most schools and was not documented as a key aspect on training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments.

The aspect: RPL training plans encourage mentoring relationships between personnel conducting RPL assessments; was indicated by 100% of the schools in their policy document but only 39.7% of the respondents acknowledged that it was describing their RPL training.

In terms of RPL policy review mechanisms were in place 61.8% of the respondents acknowledged that RPL policies were in place whilst only 30.3% of the schools have this documented in their policy.

The aspect: the criteria for the registration of assessors/moderators made explicit provision for the requisite certification in the relevant unit standard designed for that purpose; had 75% of the respondents acknowledging that it was taking place whilst it was not documented in the institutional policy documents.

The spearman rank correlation was used to determine whether there was a correlation between documentation in the policy and the responses. The hypothesis to be tested was:

$$H_0: \rho = 0$$

$$H_1: \rho \neq 0$$

The spearman rank resulted in an  $r_s = -0.300$  and a  $p\text{-value} = 0.624$ . Since  $p\text{-value} = 0.624$  was greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis of no correlation was not rejected. One can conclude that there was no relationship between institutional policy and response to questionnaire RPL training plans encourage mentoring relationships between personnel conducting RPL assessments. It can also be observed that the insignificant correlation is negative.

#### *4.4.2.3 RPL assessment process*

The respondents were asked to rate aspects on RPL assessment process on a 5 point likert scale where 1 = to a great extent, 2 = to a reasonable extent, 3 = to some extent, 4 = to a very little extent and 5= no opinion. The rating obtained from the document analysis hypothesised against the survey responses to obtain a median score. Wilcoxon signed rank test was used to determine whether the level of extent depicted by policy was the same as depicted by the respondents. The information is shown in table 4.15.

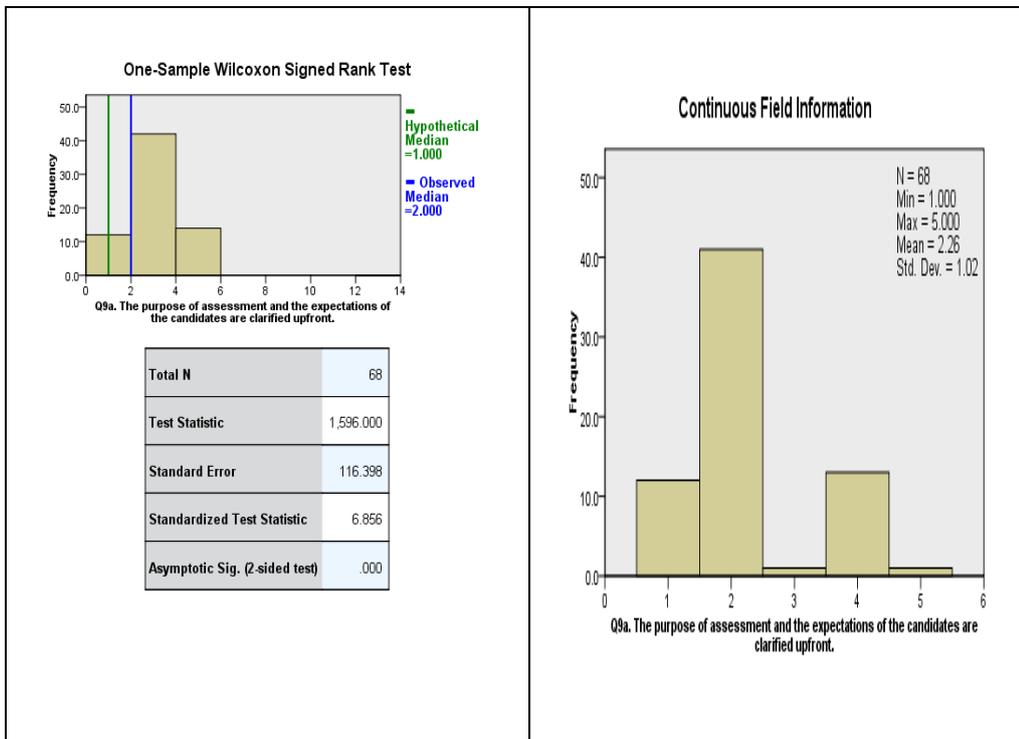
**Table 4.14: Comparative analysis using the Wilcoxon signed rank test between policy documentation and questionnaire responses on RPL assessment process**

Aspect	Hypothesised median from policy document	p-value	Decision
The purpose of assessment was clarified to the candidate upfront	1	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians
The quality of support to be provided to the candidate in preparing for the assessment was established	1	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians
The candidate was actively involved in all aspects of the assessment process	4	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians
Assessment plans indicated a variety of appropriate assessment methods/instruments to validate diverse types of learning	4	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians
The choice of assessment methods was fit for purpose to ensure credible assessment outcomes	3	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians
An appeals process was made known to the candidate	2	0.921	Do not reject the null hypothesis of equal medians
Assessment instruments were developed in compliance with the ETQA	2	0.041	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians

requirements			
Assessment reports indicated the recommendations for further action to address identified gaps	4	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians
Moderation mechanisms were in place, including policies for evaluating assessment systems	3	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians

Only the aspect: an appeals process is made known to the candidate showed that there was no difference between documentation in the policy and the responses. The hypothetical median was 2, indicating that making an appeal process known to the candidate occurred to a reasonable extent. The policy and the response were in agreement.

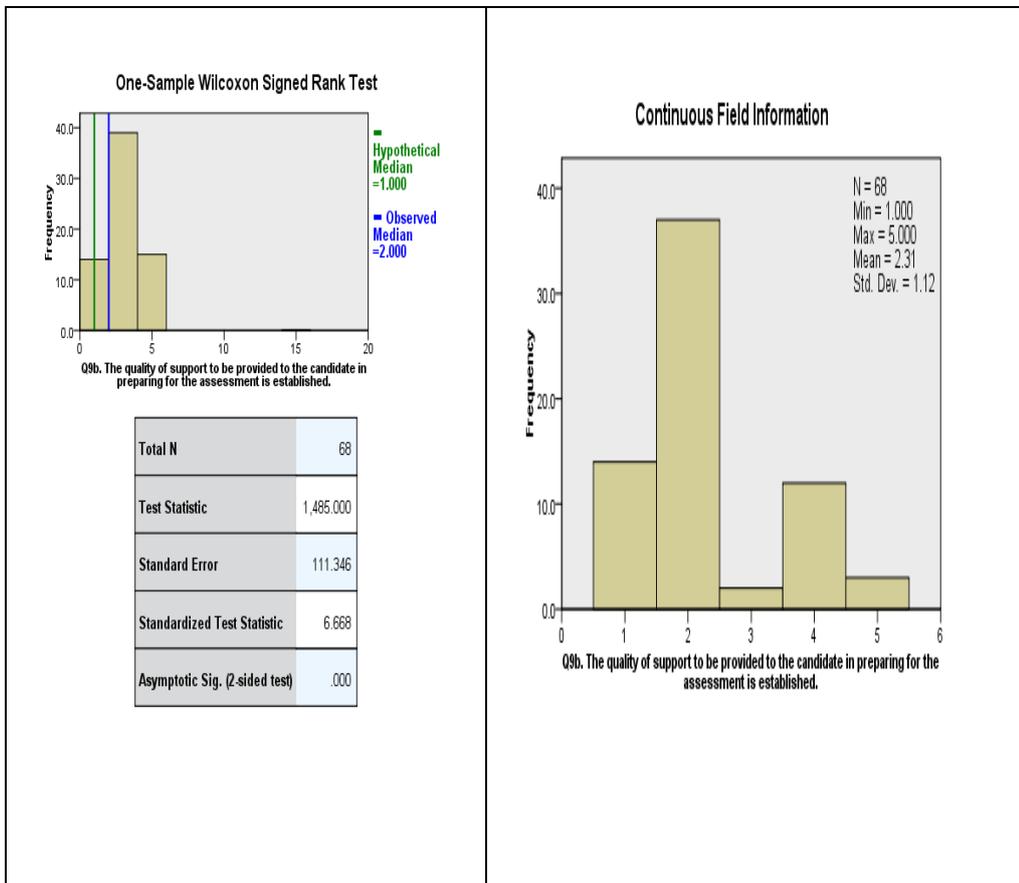
In terms of the aspect: the purpose of assessment was clarified to the candidate upfront; the hypothesised median was 1, that is, the policy indicated that it occurred to a great extent. However, the response showed that the median was 2.00 indicating that it was to a reasonable extent. The information is shown in figure 4.1:



**Figure 4.1: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test on the aspect the purpose of RPL assessment**

The One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test gave a z-value = 6.856 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 1 (to a great extent). One can conclude that the respondents do not think that it's happening to a large extent rather to a reasonable extent. Looking at the histogram one can conclude that the respondents were mainly concentrated on 2 (to a reasonable extent).

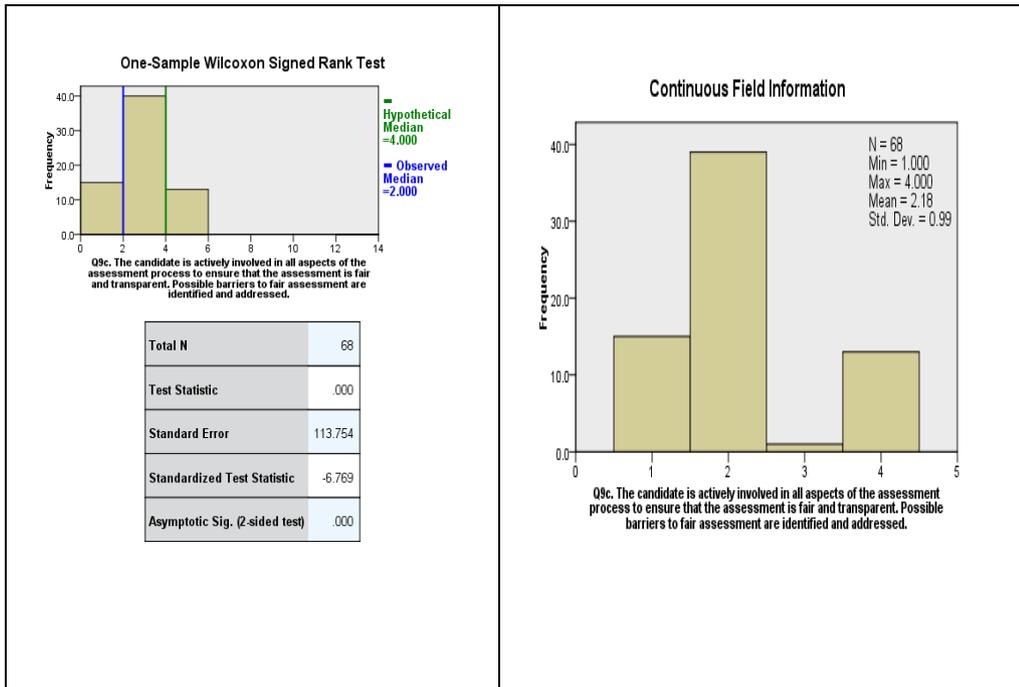
The aspect: the quality of support to be provided to the candidate in preparing for the assessment was established; had a hypothesised median of 1 (to a great extent) whilst the responses gave a median of 2 (to a reasonable extent). The test gave a z-value = 6.668 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 1 (to a great extent). The information is shown in figure 4.2.



**Figure 4.2: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test on the aspect support for RPL candidates**

One can conclude that the respondents were of the opinion that quality of support provided to a candidate in preparing for the assessment was established to a reasonable extent. Looking at the histogram one can conclude that the respondents were mainly concentrated on 2 (to a reasonable extent).

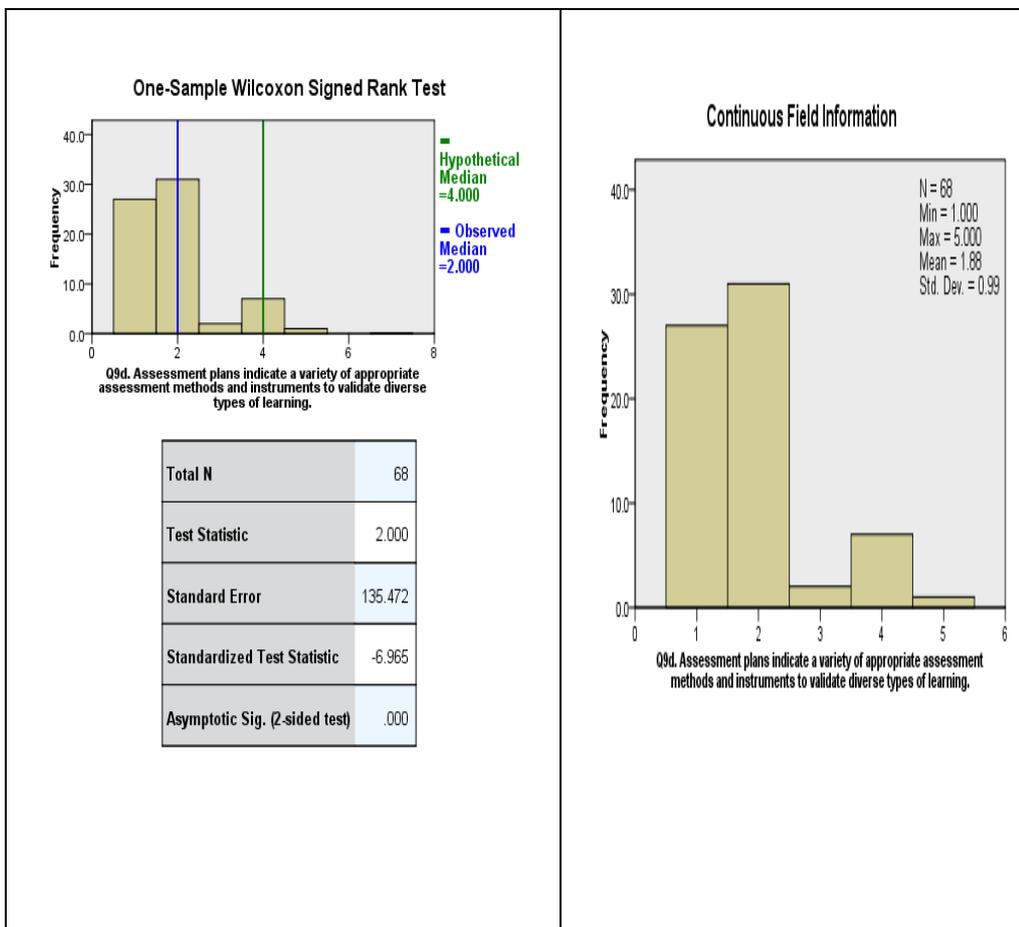
The aspect: the candidate is actively involved in all aspects of the assessment process; had a hypothesized value of 4 (to a very little extent) and the median of the responses were 2 (to a reasonable extent) as shown in figure 4.3 below:



**Figure 4.3: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test on the aspect the involvement of RPL candidate in the assessment process**

The One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test gave a z-value = -6.769 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 4 (to a very little extent). It can be noted that the policy does not indicated the active involvement of the candidate in all aspects of the assessment process whilst practically it is happening.

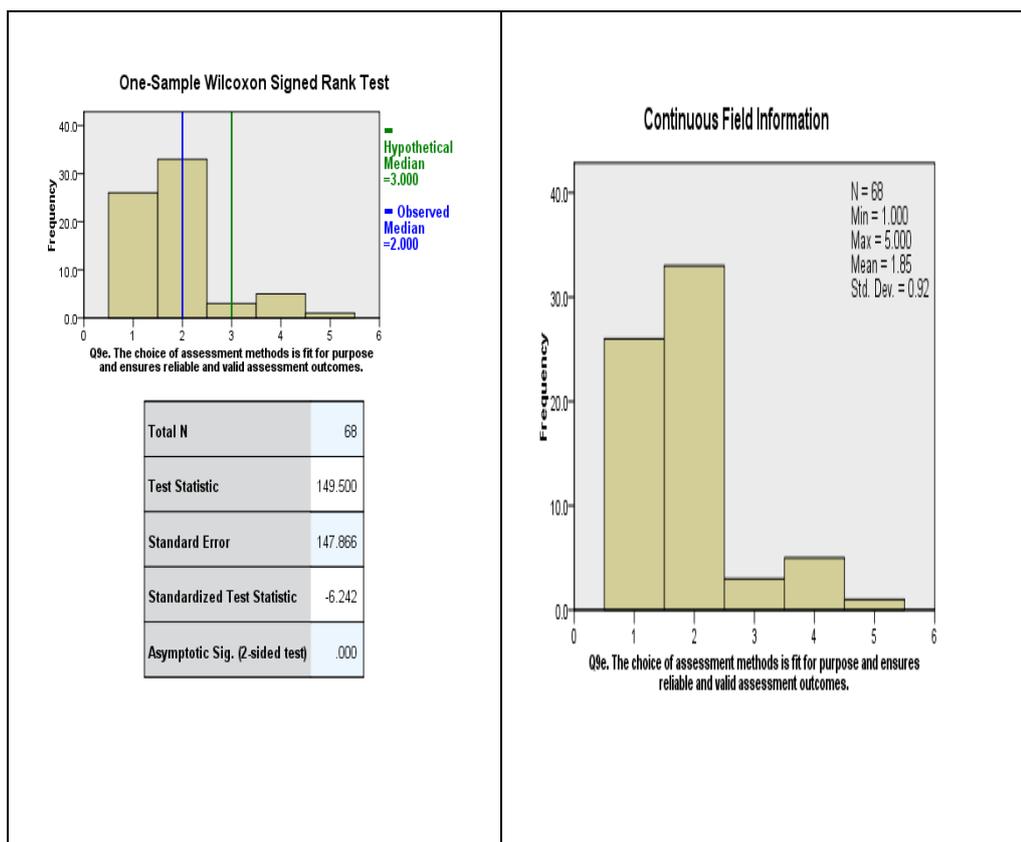
In terms of the aspect: assessment plans indicated a variety of appropriate assessment methods/instruments to validate diverse types of learning; the hypothesised median was 4 (to a very little extent). However, the responses showed a median of 2.00 indicating that it was to a reasonable extent. The information is shown in figure 4.4.



**Figure 4.4: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test on the aspect assessment plans indicated a variety of appropriate assessment methods/instruments**

The One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test gave a z-value = -6.965 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 4 (to a very little extent). One can conclude that the respondents think that it's happening to a reasonable extent whilst the policy does not document such activity in most of the schools. Looking at the histogram one can conclude that the respondents were mainly concentrated on the responses 1 (to a great extent) and 2 (to a reasonable extent).

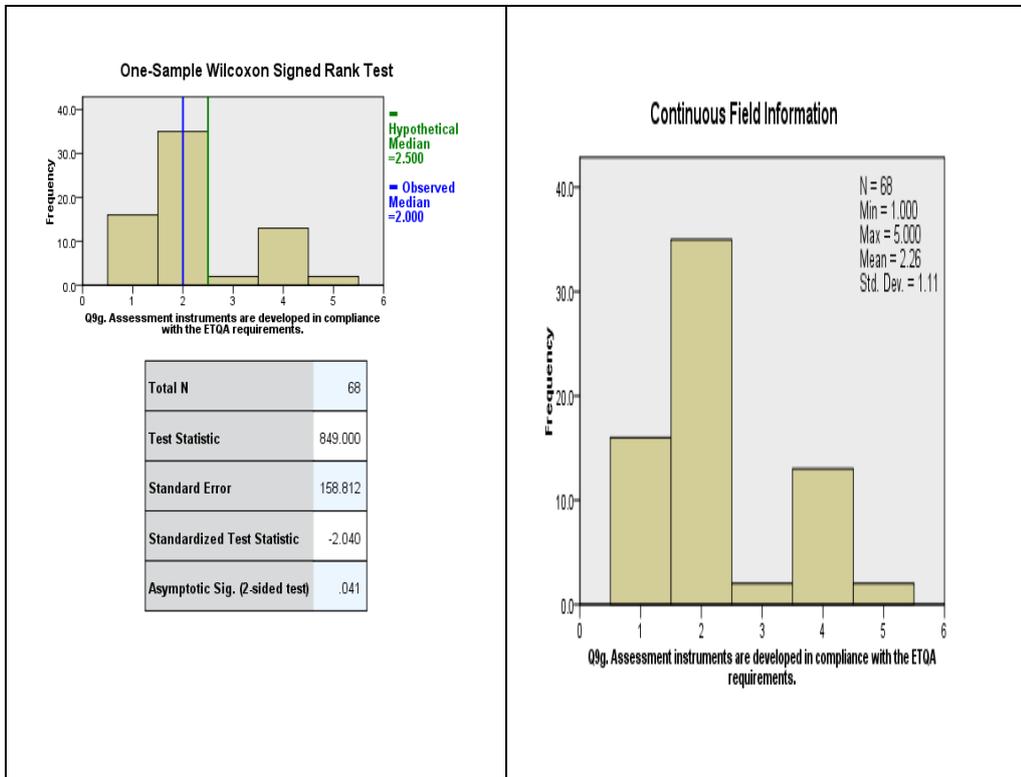
The One sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test gave a z-value = -6.242 with a p-value = 0.000, on the aspect: the choice of assessment methods is fit for purpose to ensure credible assessment outcomes. The hypothesised median from the documentation was 3 (to some extent). The observed median was 2 (to a reasonable extent). Since the p-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis of the median being equal to 3 was rejected. The majority of the respondents either indicated a 1 or 2 as shown in figure 4.5.



**Figure 4.5: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect the choice of assessment methods**

One can conclude that the respondents think of that choice of assessment methods was fit for purpose to ensure credible assessment outcomes. In most schools/department, the assessment was not documented.

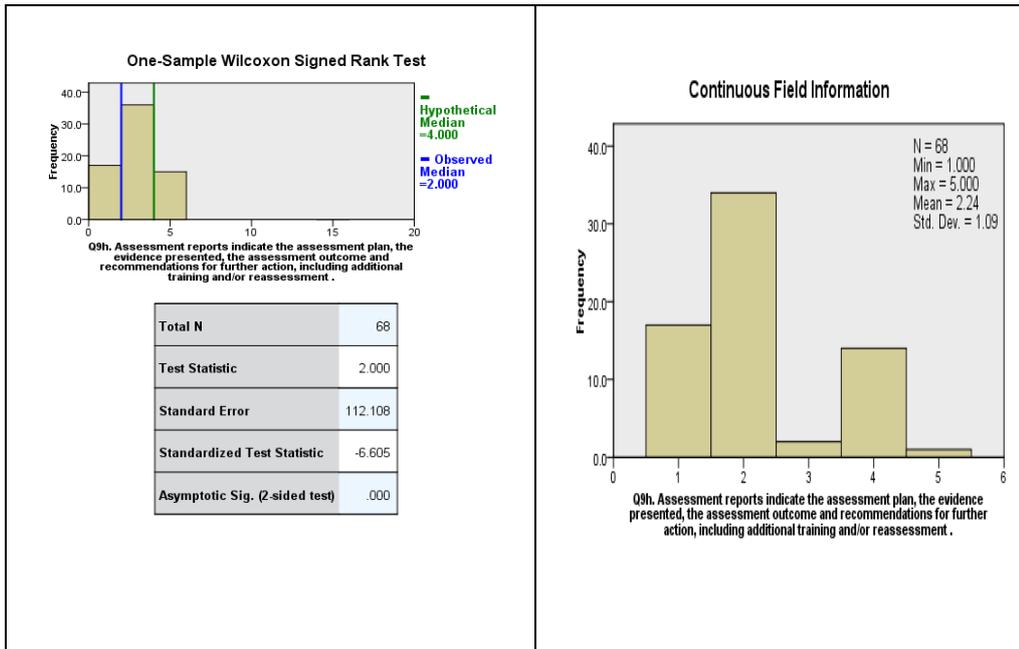
The histogram of the aspect: assessment instruments were developed in compliance with the ETQA requirements; had the highest peak at 2 (to a reasonable extent) as shown in figure 4.6.



**Figure 4.6: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect development of assessment instruments**

The One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test gave a z-value = -2.040 with a p-value = 0.041, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 2.5 (to some extent). One can conclude that the respondents were agreeing to a reasonable extent that developments of assessment plans were in compliance with ETQA requirements whilst in most schools there seem not to be clear documentation on activities that support the aspect.

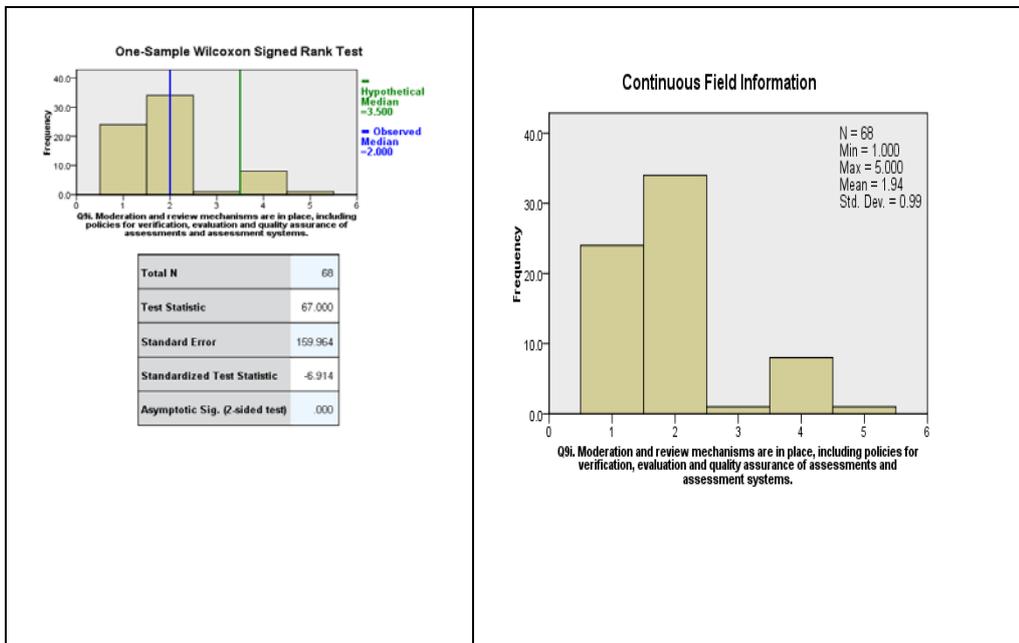
In terms of the aspect: assessment reports indicated recommendations for further action to address identified gaps; the hypothesised median was 4 (to a very little extent). However, the observed median was 2 (to a reasonable extent) as shown in figure 4.7.



**Figure 4.7: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect the procedure for completing RPL assessment reports**

The One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test gave a z-value = -6.605 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 4 (to a very little extent). Thus the respondents felt that it was occurring to a reasonable extent. Looking at the histogram one can conclude that the respondents were mainly concentrated on 2 (to a reasonable extent).

The aspect: moderation mechanisms were in place, including policies for evaluating assessment systems; had a hypothesised median of 3 (to a very little extent) and the observed median was 2 (to a reasonable extent) as shown in figure 4.8:



**Figure 4.8: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect moderation assessment activities**

The One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test gave a z-value = -6.914 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 3 (to a very little extent). Respondents felt that moderation and review mechanism were in place to a reasonable extent. However the document analysis showed that the indicators of the aspect being present were not documented in the policy by most schools.

#### 4.4.2.4 Quality management systems (QMS)

The respondents were asked to rate aspects on RPL assessment process on a 5 point likert scale where 1 = to a great extent, 2 = to a reasonable extent, 3 = to some extent, 4 = to a very little extent and 5= no opinion. The rating obtained from the document analysis hypothesised against the survey responses to obtain a median score. Wilcoxon signed rank test was used to determine whether the level of extent depicted by policy was the same as depicted by the respondents.

In terms of quality management systems, there were eleven items. All aspects had the hypothesised mean being rejected as shown in table 4.16.

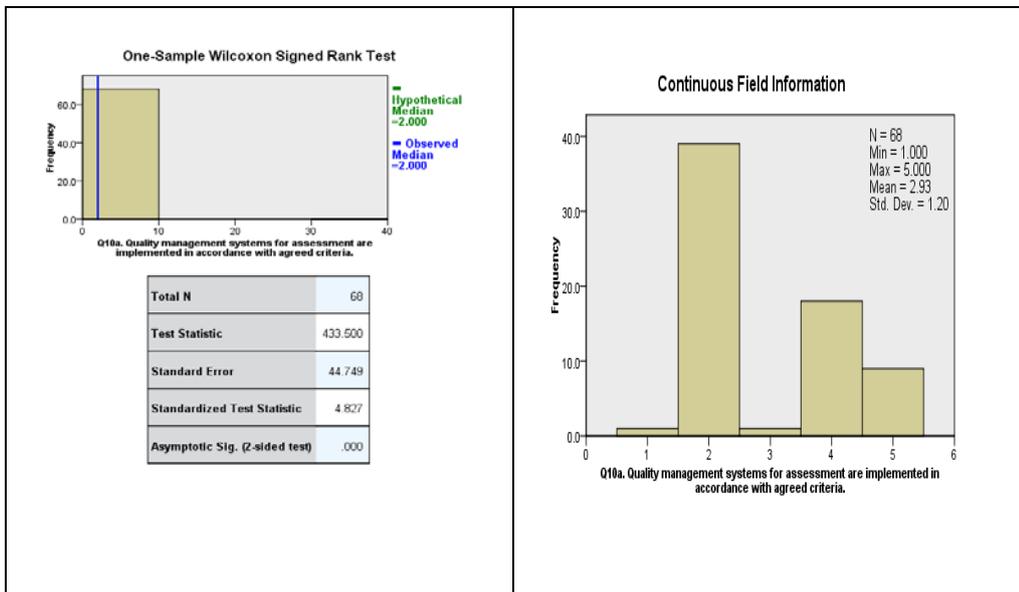
**Table 4.15: Comparative analysis using the Wilcoxon signed rank test between policy documentation and questionnaire responses on quality management systems (QMS)**

Aspect	Hypothesized median from policy document	p-value	Decision
Quality management systems for assessment were implemented in accordance with agreed criteria	2	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians
Quality management systems ensured the refining of assessment procedures at all levels	2	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians
Quality management systems provided for input from all key stakeholders, including representatives from the candidate community	4	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians
Quality management systems provided for support in meetings developmental targets	2	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians
Monitoring activities were clearly spelt out in the quality management systems (QMS)	4	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians
RPL assessment monitoring activities ensured consistency within the sector	4	0.078	Do not reject the null hypothesis of equal medians
Assessment documentation was maintained in accordance with agreed criteria	2	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians
RPL results were recorded in accordance with the requirements of the SAQA'S NLRD (National Learners' Records Database)	4	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians
Information on RPL outcomes is maintained	2	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians

The quality management system provided for the system to monitor the progress of candidates who enter learning programmes post-RPL	4	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians
The quality management system provided for analyses of RPL services.	4	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis of equal medians

The aspect: RPL assessment monitoring ensured consistency within the sector; led to the null hypothesis of equal medians not being rejected. The medians were 4 (to a very little extent) indicating that it was not documented and also that the respondents indicated that they felt that RPL assessment monitoring activities did not ensure consistency within the sector.

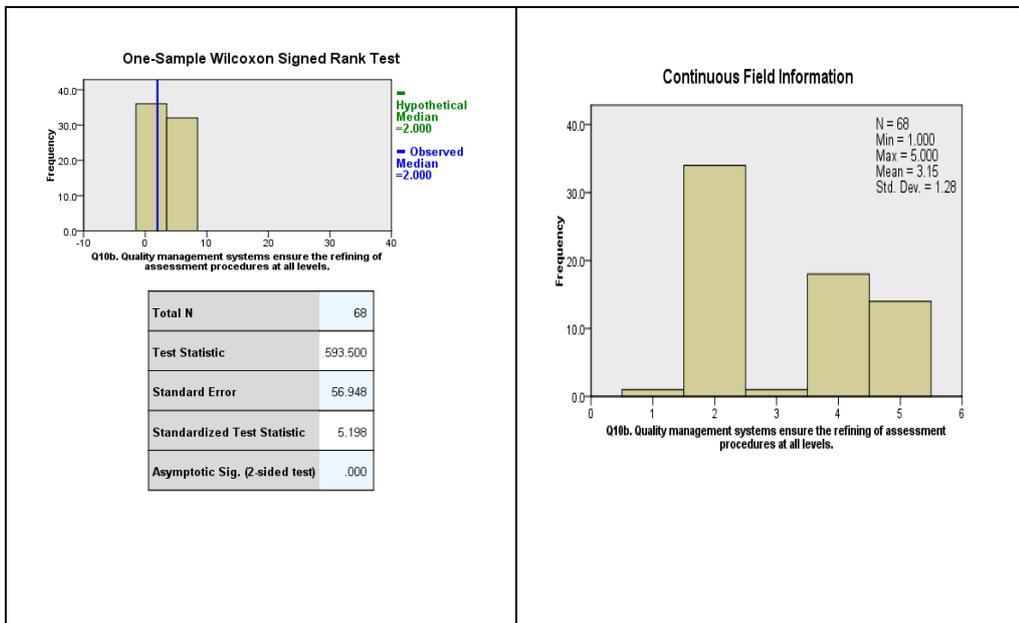
In terms of the aspect: quality management systems for assessment were implemented in accordance with agreed criteria; the hypothesised median was 2, that is, the policy was in agreement and the observed median was also 2.00. The information is shown in figure 4.9.



**Figure 4.9: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect implementation of quality management system**

Although the medians were the same, looking at the histogram it can be observed that close to 40% gave a 4. These caused the one-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test giving a z-value = 4.827 with a p-value = 0.000. This resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 2 (agree). One can conclude that close to 40% of the respondents did not agree that it's happening.

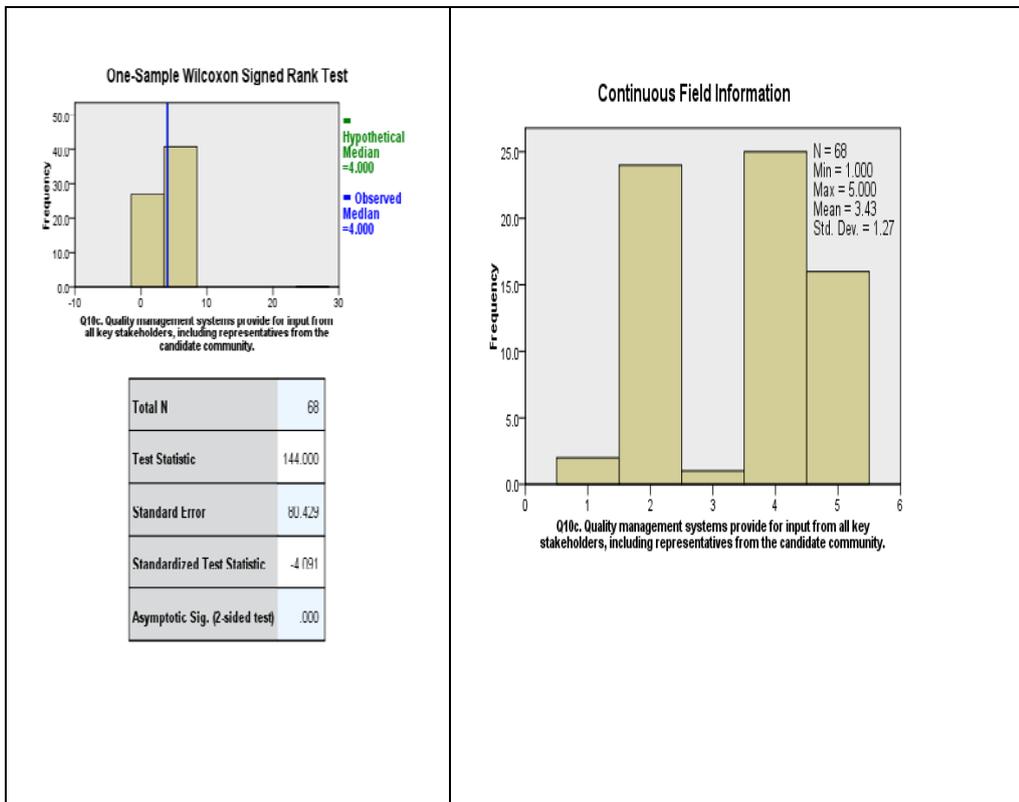
The aspect: quality management systems ensured the refining of assessment procedures at all levels; had the hypothesised median was 2, that is, the policy was in agreement and it was also the observed median. Looking at the histogram close to 50% (47.1%) indicated a 4 as shown in figure 4.10:



**Figure 4.10: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect refining RPL assessment procedures**

Due to close to 50% indicating a 4, the One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test gave a z-value = 5.198 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 2 (agree). One can conclude that the respondents thought that quality management systems ensured the refining of assessment procedures at all levels.

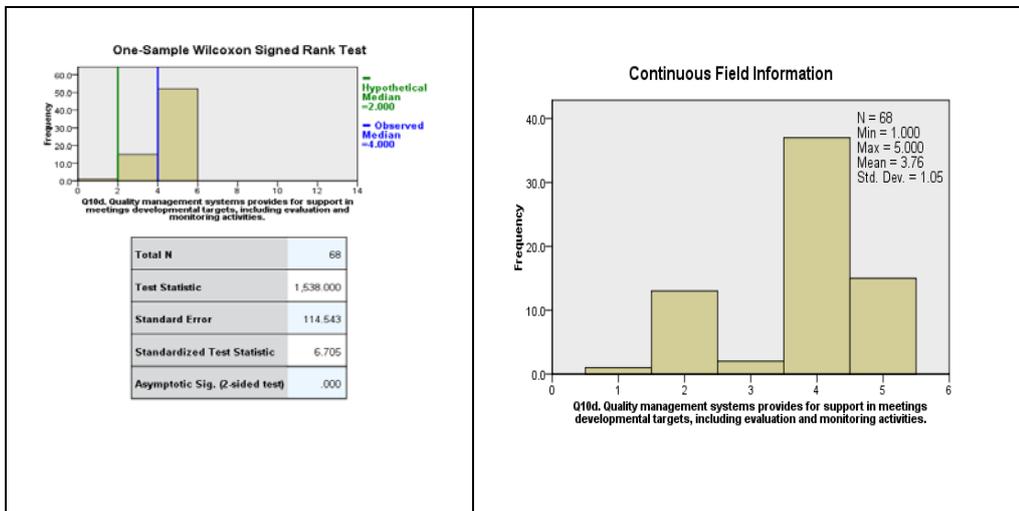
The aspect: quality management systems provided for input from all key stakeholders, including representatives from the candidate community; the hypothesised median was 4, that is, the policy was in disagreement. However, the response showed the median was 4.00 indicating that they disagreed. The information is shown in Figure 4.11.



**Figure 4.11 One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect input from key stakeholders**

The histogram shows that it was two peaked. One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test gave a z-value = -4.097 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 4 (disagree). One can conclude that the respondents think that in practice the key stakeholders did not provide input about quality management systems and it was also not documented in the institutional policies of most schools.

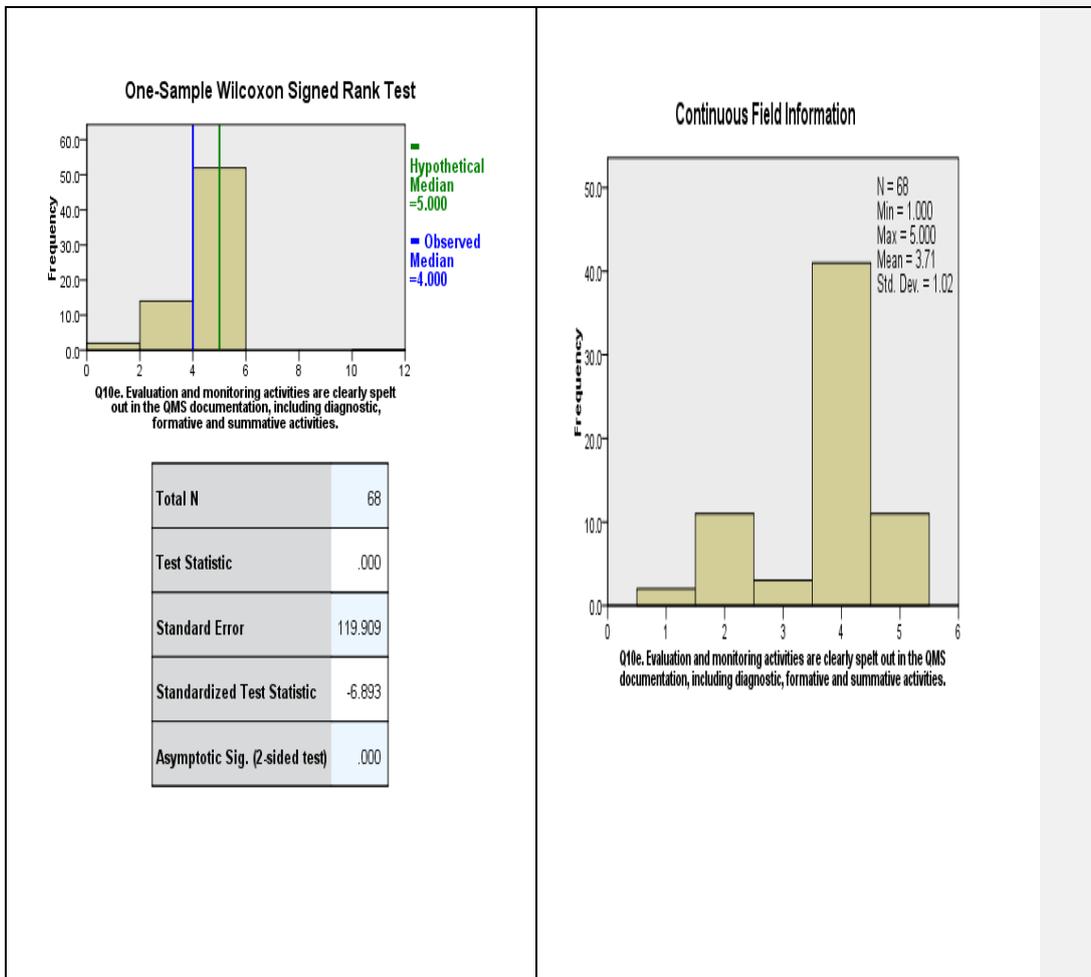
The aspect: quality management systems provided for support in meetings developmental targets; had a hypothesised median of 2, that is, the policy agreement. However, the response showed the median was 4.00 indicating that there were in disagreement. The information is shown in figure 4.12:



**Figure 4.12: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect meeting RPL developmental targets**

The One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test gave a z-value = 6.705 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 2 (agree). One can conclude that the respondents did not think that quality management systems provides for support in meeting developmental targets, however, its documented in the institutional policy.

In terms of the aspect: monitoring activities were clearly spelt out in the quality management system; the hypothesised median was 5, and the observed median was 4.00 indicating that the respondents were not in agreement. The information is shown in figure 4.13.

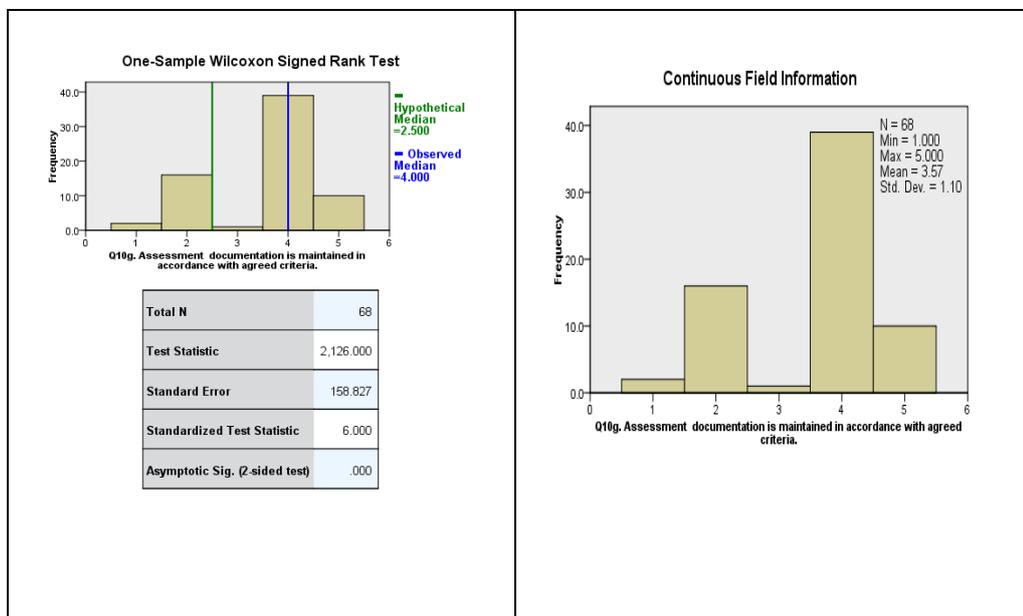


**Figure 4.13: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect monitoring activities in the quality management system (QMS)**

The One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test gave a z-value = -6.893 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 5 (strongly disagree). One can conclude that the respondents did not think that monitoring activities were clearly spelt out in the quality management system, whilst it's not documented in the institutional policy.

In terms of the aspect: assessment documentation was maintained in accordance with agreed criteria; the hypothesised median was 2.5, that is, most of the policies

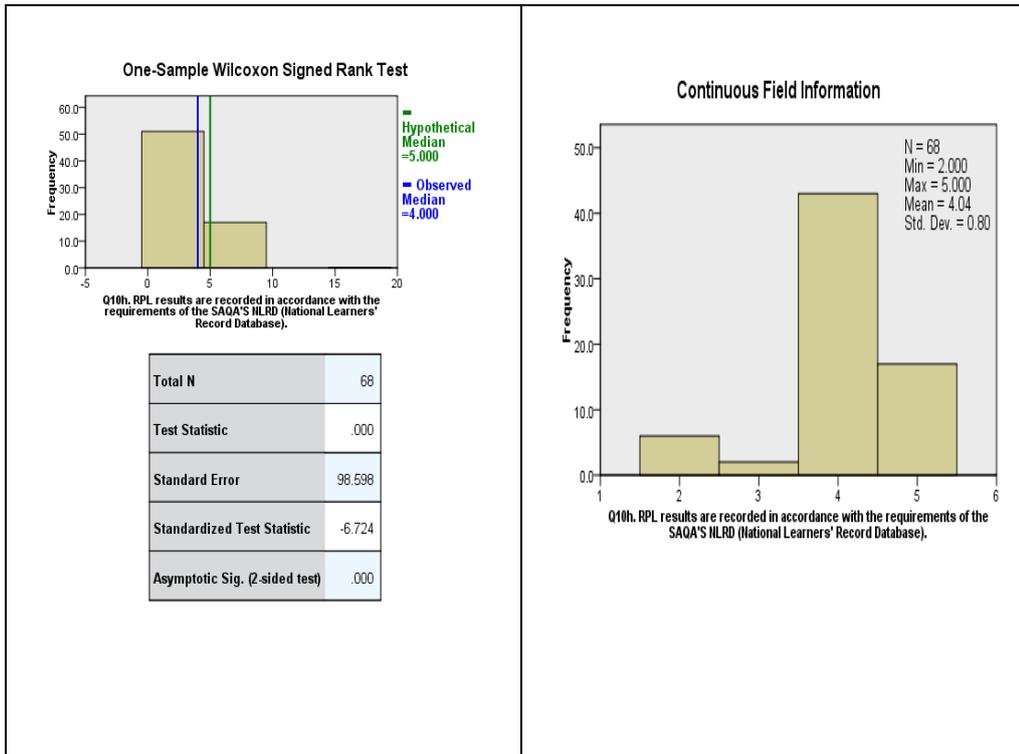
were not clear. The observed median was 4.00 indicating that the respondents were not in agreement. The information is shown in figure 4.14.



**Figure 4.14: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect maintenance of assessment documentation**

The One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test gave a z-value = 6.000 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 2.5 (neutral). Thus respondents felt that assessment documentation was not being maintained in accordance with agreed criteria. Looking at the histogram one can conclude that the respondents were mainly concentrated on response 4 or 5 (in disagreement).

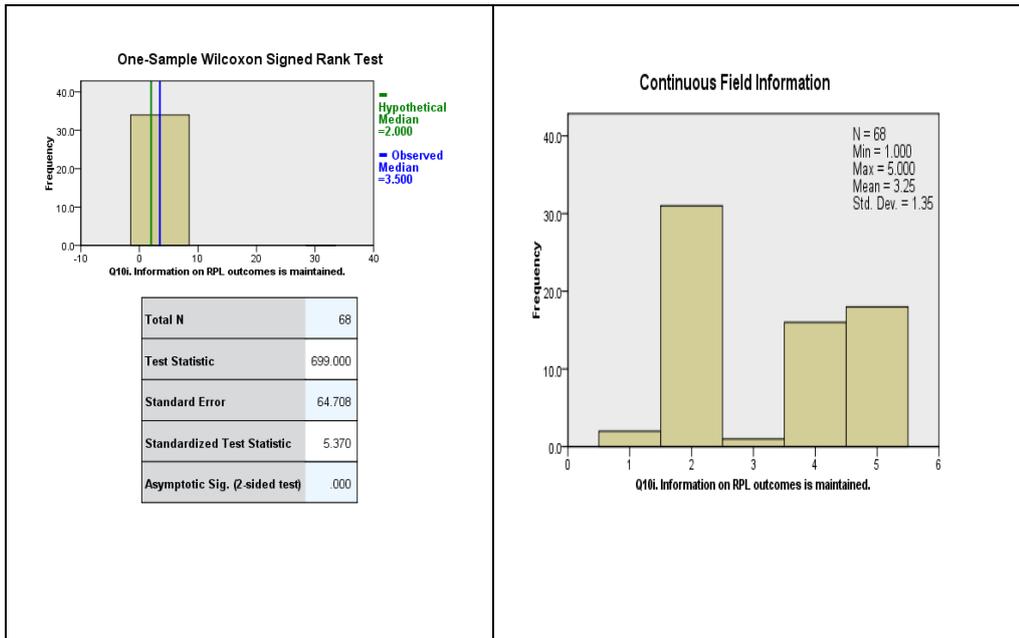
When it comes to the aspect: RPL results were recorded in accordance with the requirements of the SAQA'S NLRD (National Learners' Records Database); the hypothesised median was 5 (strongly disagree) and the observed median was 4.00 indicating that the respondents were in disagreement. The information is shown in figure 4.15:



**Figure 4.15 One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect the recording of RPL outcomes/results**

The One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test gave a z-value = -6.724 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 5 (disagreement). The respondents did not agree that RPL results were recorded in accordance with the requirements of the SAQA'S NLRD (National Learners' Records Database). This is also depicted on the histogram where the majority of the respondents gave a value of 4 or 5. The institutional policies were not reflecting that.

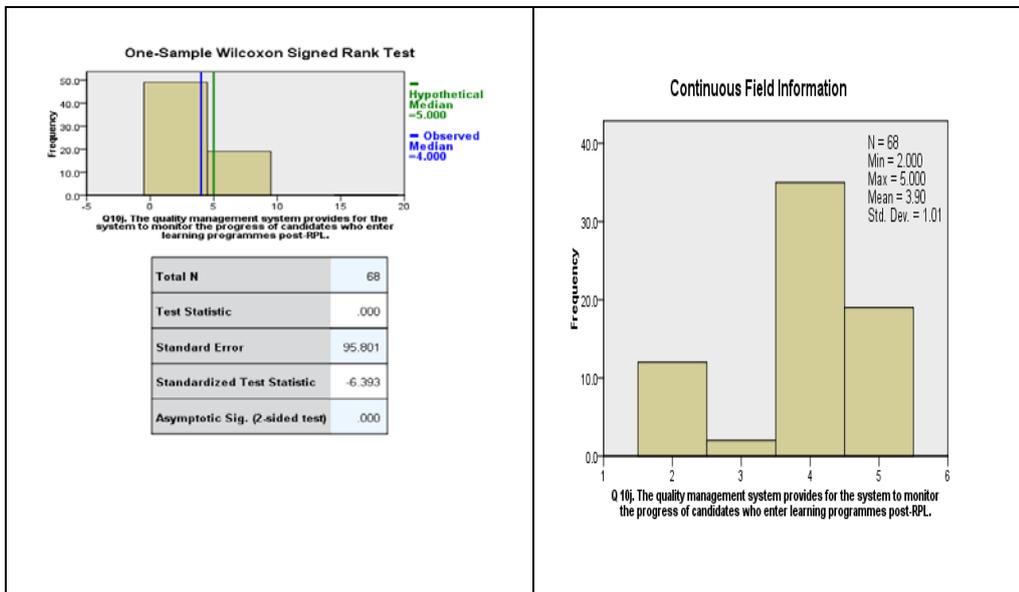
The aspect: information on RPL outcomes is maintained; had the hypothesised median of 2 (agree) and the observed median was 3.5 indicating that the respondents were in disagreement. The information is shown in figure 4.16:



**Figure 4.16: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect recording of RPL outcomes/results on SAQA'S NLRD (National Learners' Records Database)**

The One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test gave a z-value = 5.370 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 2 (agree). It can be concluded that the respondents did not agree that information on RPL outcomes was maintained however in the policies it's documented in most schools.

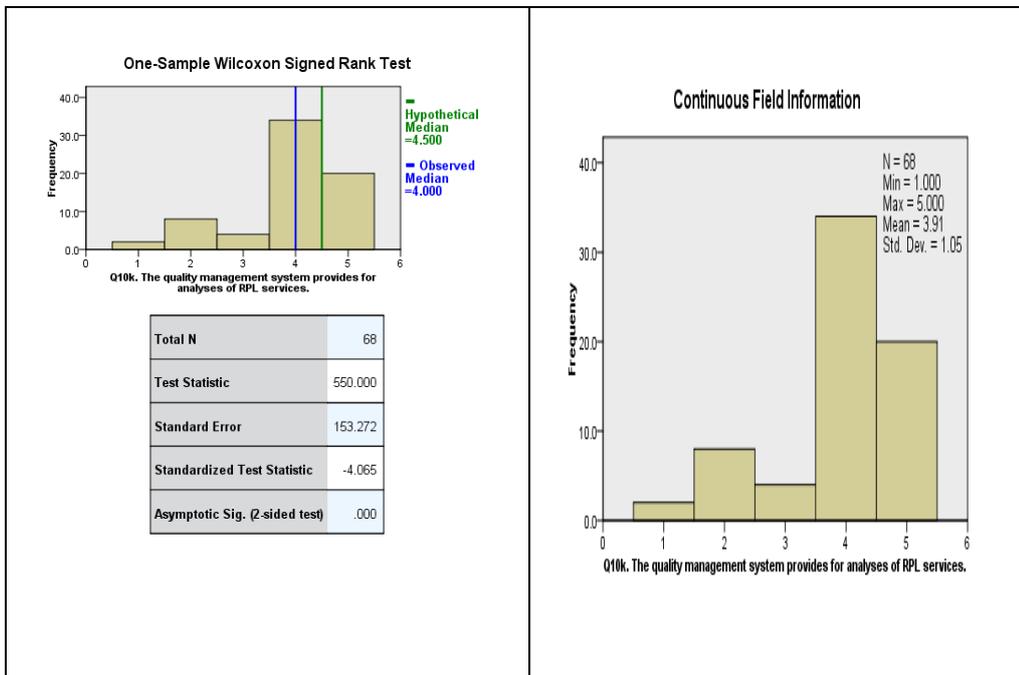
In terms of the aspect: the quality management system provided for the system to monitor the progress of candidates who enter learning programmes post-RPL; the hypothesised median was 5, that is, most policies were not indicating the aspect. However, the response showed the median was 4.00 indicating that the respondents were not in agreement. The information is shown in figure 4.17:



**Figure 4.17: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect monitoring the progress of candidates post-RPL**

The One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test gave a z-value = -6.393 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 5 (strongly disagree). One can conclude that the respondents did not agree that the quality management system provides for the system to monitor the progress of candidates who enter learning programmes post-RPL. Looking at the histogram one can conclude that the respondents were mainly concentrated on 4 and 5 (at least in disagreement).

In terms of the aspect: the quality management system provided for analyses of RPL services; the hypothesised median was 4.5, that is, the policy was not indicating the aspect. However, the observed median was 4.00 indicating that the respondents were in disagreement. The information is shown in figure 4.18:



**Figure 4.18: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the aspect the quality management system provides for analyses of RPL services**

The One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test gave a z-value = -4.605 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 5 (strongly disagree). One can conclude that the respondents did not agree that the quality management system provides for analyses of RPL services.

#### 4.5 Summary of the results

This section presents the summary of the results of the study starting with the institutional RPL policy analysis followed by the questionnaire survey:

##### 4.5.1 Institutional RPL policy analysis

This section presents the summary of the results of the institutional RPL policies used in the LIS schools in South Africa.

###### 4.5.1.1 RPL policy environment

This theme consisted of eight aspects. The aspects which had more than 70% of the respondents acknowledging were:

- the RPL policy was based on the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) policy of 2002 (94.1%);
  - there was an institutional 'will' to open up access to learners coming from diverse backgrounds, displaying diverse needs/capabilities (88.1%); and
  - the assessment policy expressed an explicit commitment to the principles of equity/ redress (70.6%).
- The aspects which had about 60% of the respondents acknowledging were:
- information about RPL assessment was not widely available to potential candidates (60.3%); and
  - admission procedures were relatively inclusive of non-matriculation learners (55.9%).

The respondents also had levels of acknowledgements of less than 40% on the following aspects:

- equal access existed to opportunities for support for all candidates seeking assessment (38.2%);
- organisational structures ensured that RPL personnel were given sufficient support for their services (27.9%); and
- formal agreements among the LIS schools were encouraged to ensure recognition of assessment results in the LIS sector (13.2%).

#### *4.5.1.2 Training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments*

This theme comprised of five aspects. About 75% of the respondents indicated that the criteria for the registration of assessors/moderators made explicit provision for the requisite certification in the relevant in the unit standard designed for that purpose. While about 70% indicated that the functions of evidence facilitators were not performed by the same person. A further 61.8% indicated that RPL policy review mechanisms were in place. However, only 40% indicated that RPL training plans encouraged mentoring relationships between personnel conducting RPL assessments and close to 30% indicated that quality assurance systems were

implemented in the LIS schools to ensure that they increasingly meet the development objectives as agreed with the ETQA.

#### 4.5.1.3 RPL assessment process

This theme comprised of nine aspects. The highly scoring aspects on RPL assessment process where the level of extent was greater than 80% were:

- the choice of assessment methods was fit for purpose to ensure credible assessment outcomes (86.6%);
- assessment plans indicated a variety of appropriate assessment methods/instruments to validate diverse types of learning (85.3%);
- moderation mechanisms were in place, including policies for evaluating assessment systems (85.3%) ; and
- an appeals process was made known to the candidate (82.4%).

The level of extent of all the other aspects was greater than 70% in the following:

- the candidate was actively involved in all aspects of the assessment process (79.5%);
- the purpose of assessment was clarified to the candidate upfront (77.9%);
- the quality of support to be provided to the candidate in preparing for the assessment was established (75%);
- assessment instruments were developed in compliance with the ETQA requirements (75%); and
- assessment reports indicated recommendations for further action to address identified gaps (75%).

#### 4.5.1.4 Quality management systems (QMS)

In terms of quality management and systems, there were eleven items. The only aspects with level of agreements of more 50% were:

- quality management systems for assessment were implemented in accordance with agreed criteria (58.8%);
- quality management systems ensured the refining of assessment procedures at all levels (51.5%); and
- assessment documentation was maintained in accordance with agreed criteria (50%).

All the other aspects had levels of extent of agreement below 50%. These included:

- information on RPL outcomes is maintained (48.5%);
- quality management systems provided for input from all key stakeholders, including representatives from the candidate community (38.2%);
- quality management systems provided for support in meetings developmental targets (20.6%);
- the quality management system provided for the system to monitor the progress of candidates who enter learning programmes post-RPL (17.6%);
- monitoring activities were clearly spelt out in the quality management system (QMS) (16.2%);
- the quality management system provided for analyses of RPL services (14.7%);
- RPL assessment monitoring activities ensured consistency within the sector (11.8%); and
- RPL results were recorded in accordance with the requirements of the SAQA'S NLRD (National Learners' Records Database) (8.8%).

#### **4.5.2 Questionnaire survey results**

These results were based on the data collected from the 68 respondents who participated in the survey:

##### *4.5.2.1 RPL policy environment*

The aspects in the institutional policy that were documented to be in place with acknowledgement level of 100% were:

- there was an institutional 'will' to open up access to learners coming from diverse backgrounds, displaying diverse needs/capabilities;
- the RPL policy was based on the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) policy of 2002);
- the assessment policy expressed an explicit commitment to the principles of equity/ redress; and
- equal access existed to opportunities for support for all candidates seeking assessment.

However, all the respondents indicated that there were no formal agreements were encouraged among the LIS schools to ensure recognition of assessment results in the LIS sector.

#### *4.5.2.2 Training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments*

Regarding the training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments the results indicated that:

- all the LIS schools (100%) indicated that the aspect: the criteria for the registration of assessors/moderators made explicit provision for the requisite certification in the relevant unit standard designed for that purpose; was not documented in the police; and
- RPL training plans encouraged mentoring relationships between personnel conducting RPL assessments recorded a level of acknowledgement of 80.0%.
- All other aspects had levels of acknowledgements of less than 50%.

#### *4.5.2.3 RPL assessment process*

The highly scoring aspects on RPL assessment process where the level of extent was greater than 70% were:

- the purpose of assessment was clarified to the candidate upfront (100.0%);
- the quality of support to be provided to the candidate in preparing for the assessment was established (100.0%); and
- an appeals process was in place and made known to the candidate (70.0%).
- However the following aspects had levels of extent of below 40%, indicating that there were not well documented in most universities:
- the choice of assessment methods was fit for purpose to ensure credible assessment outcomes (40.0%);
- moderation mechanisms were in place, including policies for evaluating assessment systems (40.0%);
- assessment plans indicated a variety of appropriate assessment methods/instruments to validate diverse types of learning (30.0%);
- assessment reports indicated the recommendations for further action to address identified gaps (30.0%); and

- the candidate was actively involved in all aspects of the assessment process (20.0%).

#### 4.5.2.4 Quality management systems (QMS)

- The quality management systems aspects that were documented in at least 70% of the universities were:
- quality management systems ensured the refining of assessment procedures at all levels (80.0%);
- information on RPL outcomes was maintained (80%); and
- quality management systems for assessment were implemented in accordance with agreed criteria (70%).

The following aspects were not documented by the majority of the universities in their institutional policies:

- assessment documentation was maintained in accordance with agreed criteria (26.4%);
- quality management systems provided for input from all key stakeholders, including representatives from the candidate community (40%);
- RPL assessment monitoring activities ensured consistency within the sector (30%);
- monitoring activities were clearly spelt out in the quality management systems (QMS) (20%);
- the quality management system provided for analyses of RPL services (20%);
- RPL results were recorded in accordance with the requirements of the SAQA'S NLRD (National Learners' Records Database) (10%); and
- the quality management system provided for the system to monitor the progress of candidates who enter learning programmes post-RPL (0%).

#### **4.5.3 Comparative analysis of institutional RPL policies and questionnaire survey results**

Correlation analysis was used to determine whether there was an association between the documentation on the policy and the responses from the questionnaires. A Spearman rank correlation was used. Wilcoxon signed rank test was also used to determine whether the level of extent depicted by policy was the

same as depicted by the respondents. On the whole, the comparative analysis of the questionnaire and the document analysis results indicated that:

- there was no relationship between the institutional policy analysis and response to questionnaire in terms of in terms of the institutional policy and environment;
- the document analysis and questionnaire respondents were in agreement on the RPL assessment process. The level of significance was 10% (positive);
- there was no relationship between institutional policy and response to questionnaire on training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments; and
- there was very little correlation between the questionnaire responses and document analysis in terms of quality management systems.

#### **4.6 Summary of the chapter**

This chapter presented the findings of the data collected with the aid of the questionnaire survey and document analysis. The presentation was based on the research objectives (themes). The objectives of this study were four fold. Firstly to determine whether the LIS schools were committed to providing an enabling environment for RPL practice, secondly to determine whether credible assessment processes were being followed in the LIS schools to ensure the integrity of the RPL system, thirdly to determine whether personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments were trained to ensure the quality of RPL assessments and lastly to determine whether quality management systems (QMS) were in place to ensure the continuous improvement of RPL system in LIS schools. In order to objectively answer these objectives the questionnaire survey and document analysis method were used to assist in determining the nature of RPL implementation in SA LIS schools. The methodological triangulation approach using questionnaires and document analysis was adopted in this study to enhance confidence (reliability and validity) of the ensuing findings. It is this researcher's conviction that the most persuasive evidence comes through a triangulation of methods. In this study, the questionnaire survey was used as the main method of collecting the primary data supplemented by the document analysis method in order to best answer the

research question. Consequently, to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings of the questionnaire, a comparative analysis was done to cross-check them against the findings of the document analysis.

The study found some inconsistencies between questionnaire and document analysis results which pointed to the fact some of the things in the policy documents were not implemented as such in practice. However, the study found that RPL assessment process in the LIS schools complied with the prescripts of the SAQA RPL policy (2002). The study also established that aspects of the policy environment, training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments and quality management systems needed to be urgently addressed to ensure an effective and efficient RPL implementation in the LIS schools in South Africa. In summation, while the findings largely point to 'islands of good practice', there were areas of weaknesses regarding RPL implementation in the LIS schools in South African.

## CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the interpretation and discussion of research findings based on the study objectives and research questions. The study used SAQA RPL policy as the main frame of reference and other international best practice to discuss the main themes of the study. The main research goal was to investigate the nature of RPL implementation in South African Library and Information Science (LIS) schools. The objectives of the study were as follows:

- to investigate whether LIS schools were committed to providing an enabling policy environment for RPL practice
- to determine whether personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments were trained to ensure the quality of RPL assessments
- to establish whether credible assessment processes were being followed in LIS schools to ensure the integrity of RPL system
- to determine whether quality management systems (QMS) were in place to ensure the continuous improvement of RPL system in LIS schools

### 5.2 Analysis of the results

The survey and document analysis results were integrated in this analysis to determine to the extent to which the findings of this study answer the research questions. The analysis was preceded by an overview of each objective/theme to capture the local and internal context. Below follow the analysis of the results:

#### **5.2.1 Policy environment for RPL practice**

SAQA RPL policy (2002:18) makes it explicitly clear that an enabling environment demonstrating commitment to RPL is essential. The document further states that unless proper policies, structures and resources were allocated to a credible assessment process, it can easily become an area of contestation and conflict. Kistan (2002) also contends that the mission statement, the admission policy,

curriculum, the programmes, the timetable, the assessment procedure, the staff, the learners, the mode of delivery and the environment were also affected by RPL policy. This above statement correctly suggests that commitment on the part of university and/ or LIS schools to provide an enabling policy environment is one of the critical pre-conditions for an effective and efficient RPL system. SAQA RPL policy (2002: 18-19), affirms that an enabling environment suggests a structure that will facilitate the development and implementation of RPL.

The purpose of having policies and procedures is to give legitimacy and structure to a process. This does not mean to say that policies should be rigid, but that these policies should encourage the would-be implementers of RPL to be very clear on the intended purpose and outcomes of the initiative. According to Whitaker (1989: 9 -10), even at the level of the learner 'policies and procedures applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available'. To attempt to answer the question: What is the nature of recognition of prior learning (RPL) implementation in Library and Information Science (LIS) schools in South Africa?, the results of the questionnaire and institutional RPL policy documents were analysed as shown below:

#### *5.2.1.1 Institutional 'will' to open up access to learners*

The main purpose of RPL in South Africa is among other things to open up access to education and training and redress of past injustices. In the legislation, regulations and criteria and guidelines documents (SAQA, 2002), RPL is put forward as one of the key strategies to ensure equitable access to higher education and training. In addition, RPL is seen as one of the mechanisms with the potential to ensure redress of past unjust educational practices in South Africa.

The study's results (table 4.9) indicated that 88.1% of the respondents acknowledged that there was an institutional 'will' in LIS schools to open up access to learners coming from diverse backgrounds, displaying diverse needs and capabilities. The comparative analysis indicated that this aspect is reflected in all the institutional RPL policy documents (100%) used in LIS schools (table 4.2). There seemed to be greater acknowledgement (88.1% as in table 4.9) in the LIS schools of RPL as a tool of access to learning in higher education. This will have the effect of

'helping a certain kind of school-leaver to gain successful access to higher education and training' as argued by Hendricks and Volbrecht (2003: 47).

A more central role of RPL in the LIS schools will not only widen access to higher education and training to the overwhelming majority of individuals who were previous disenfranchised by the previous apartheid dispensation, but will also be of great benefit to the LIS sector which is currently facing shortage of qualified staff as a result of declining student enrolments and impending retirement (Davids, 2006; Ocholla and Bothma, 2007; Stilwell, 2009; Department of Arts and Culture (DAC), 2010).

#### *5.2.1.2 Policy framework for RPL*

There was an indication in this study that RPL policies in LIS schools were based on the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) policy of 2002 as required by SAQA Act of 1995. The analysis of the institutional RPL policy documents further indicated that, in addition to SAQA act of 1995, some LIS schools also used several new regulations and Acts that capture the importance of RPL in South African Higher education and training. These Acts and regulations included: Employment Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998), Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998), Higher Education Act of 1997 and the National Plan for Higher Education (2001).

The survey results indicated that 94.1% (table 4.9) of the respondents acknowledged this statement. In addition, this statement was also reflected in all institutional RPL policy documents (table 4.2). These results showed that there was an overwhelming acceptance of the RPL policy framework in the LIS schools. However, the use of SAQA 2002 policy guidelines in formulation of institutional RPL policies and the inclusion of related Acts and regulations not only help standardise RPL practice in the LIS sector but also creates an enabling environment for effective and efficient RPL practice in LIS schools in South Africa.

#### *5.2.1.3 Commitment to the principles of equity/redress*

In the study the institutional policy documents (table 4.2) indicated that all LIS schools (100%) were committed to the principles of equity, redress and inclusion. However, when asked whether 'the assessment policy expresses an explicit commitment to the principles of equity, redress and inclusion', approximately 70.6%

of the respondents (table 4.9) indicated that RPL assessment policies in LIS schools complied with SAQA RPL policy (2002) requirement.

This show of greater commitment to the principles of equity/redress will benefit the following three RPL target groups as identified in SAQA RPL policy (2002) namely the access group: under-qualified adult learners wanting to up-skill and improve their qualifications, as well as candidates lacking minimum requirements for entry into a formal learning programme, the redress group: workers on the shop floor or in the workplace who may be semi-skilled and even unemployed – they may have worked for many years but were prevented from developing due to restrictive past policies and candidates who exit formal education prematurely and who have, over a number of years, built up learning through short learning programmes.

This commitment to the principles of equity/redress will not only contribute to social justice imperative goals of RPL but also add impetus to calls by Jansen (2002) and Andersson (2006) for higher education institutions to play a transformatory role.

In a country where 'the majority of the population in South Africa were denied access to quality formal education' (Breier,1997: 200), commitment to the principles of equity/redress by LIS schools contribute to the full personal development of each learner. This will have the effect of addressing the social justice goals while at the same time contributing to the economic development of the country.

#### *5.2.1.4 Admission procedures for RPL candidates*

The results of the survey (table 4.9) indicated that the admission procedures of about six LIS schools (55.9%) out of ten LIS schools were not inclusive of non-matriculation learners. This finding was a concern noting that not all LIS schools made reference to this aspect in their RPL policies. The institutional RPL document analysis (table 4.2) revealed that seven (70%) out of ten RPL policies used by LIS schools made reference to this aspect.

These results showed non-compliance to SAQA RPL policy (2002) which promotes access to candidates lacking the minimum requirements for entry into a formal learning programme (for example, matriculation endorsement). The results are also a contradiction to the principles of equity, redress and inclusion where all the

institutional RPL documents reflected these principles (table 4.2) in addition to the 70.6% commitment shown by the respondents (table 4.9).

What these results showed was that commitment to the principles of equity/redress does not readily translate into admission procedures that were inclusive of non-matriculation learners. This could be the effect of the Higher Education Act of 1997 which still 'allows individual universities to determine admission requirements subject to matriculation regulations'(Amoore, 2001:1) and/or just a case where the issue of matriculation exemption has become a social norm which has incontestable value for higher education (Hendricks, 2001).

By maintaining the status quo and not increasingly bleeding in new recruits in the system by widening opportunities for access to learning programmes through RPL admission procedures that are inclusive of non-matriculation learners, LIS schools risk the danger of being closed down with dire consequences to LIS sector as a whole.

#### *5.2.1.5 Equal access opportunities for RPL support*

The institutional RPL policy document analysis (table 4.2) indicated (100%) that equal access existed for all candidates seeking assessment, however, in practice; only 38.2% of the respondents (table 4.9) supported this statement. This means that approximately 61.8% of the respondents were of the view that equal access to opportunities for support for all candidates seeking assessment did not exist. This was despite SAQA RPL policy (2002:20) which states that the support services should consciously address the invisible barriers to successful assessment by including (1) advising services and programmes to assist learners in making effective choices; (2) assistance to learners in preparing for assessment; (3) removing time, place and other barriers to assessment; and (4) assistance by evidence facilitators to learners in preparing and presenting evidence.

While RPL candidates are responsible for providing the evidence for acquired competencies (Colley, Hodkinson, and Malcolm, 2002), it is the responsibility of LIS schools to give proper support to the candidates 'for all methods of collecting evidence of learning' (Colardyn and Bjornavold 2004: 69-89). The results indicated that there were no equal access opportunities for support provided to the candidates as required. Therefore, this lack of equal access opportunities for support, as

evidenced by a lower 38.2 % acknowledgement from the respondents (table 4.9), will discourage potential candidates from seeking RPL assessment in LIS schools. In addition, without sufficient support, RPL candidates were likely not going to be in good stead to deal with the very significant anxieties, traumas and non-technical barriers that arise when adult learners enter RPL arena (SAQA, 2002).

#### *5.2.1.6 Support for RPL personnel*

The results (table 4.9) indicated that the majority of the respondents (72.1%) felt that RPL personnel in LIS schools were not given sufficient support for their services while only 27.9% of the respondents felt they received the support. This means that although organisational support structures were mentioned in the majority of the institutional policy documents (70%), in practice, the key RPL personnel support was clearly not given much support for their services (table 4.2).

Lack of adequate support for RPL personnel conducting assessments can have dire consequences for RPL practice in LIS schools. Without proper support structures, key RPL personnel conducting assessment cannot critically engage with their proposed RPL assessment methods and instruments (SAQA, 2002). Not providing adequate support required by RPL personnel will therefore have the unintended consequences of inconsistency in the interpretation and assessment of learning.

#### *5.2.1.7 Availability of information about RPL services*

RPL providers were required to provide potential RPL candidates with information relating to the general overview of RPL services, details of costs, guidelines for collecting evidence and particulars about the application process (SAQA, 2002). In addition, the would-be implementers were required by the policy to inform clients about RPL prior to, and on enrolment.

The results of the study (table 4.9) indicated that only 60.3% of the respondents agreed that information about RPL services was widely available to potential candidates. However, only half (50%) of the institutional RPL policy documents analysed (table 4.2), contained promotional information about RPL assessment.

As indicated in the study, there seemed to be greater lack of awareness about RPL services and its benefits in LIS schools in South Africa. The study confirmed that 'most adult learners in South Africa have very little information on the nature and

form of RPL opportunities available to them at work or through the formal provider institutions' (SAQA, 2002:18).

Although the reasons for lack of awareness of RPL services by Bowman, *et al.*, (2003) such as registered training organisations have various views on RPL applicability; RPL outcomes were not valued as equal to training outcomes and individuals lack confidence to undertake the process or do not know about RPL, these reasons, nonetheless, have the potential to lower RPL uptake in the LIS sector.

#### *5.2.1.8 Formal agreements within LIS sector*

In this study, the survey results (table 4.9) indicated that only 13.2% of the respondents acknowledged that formal agreements among LIS schools while none of the institutional RPL policy document (0.0%) reflected any formal agreements among LIS schools (table 4.2). Further, using the Wilcoxon signed rank test to determine whether there was a correlation between the document analysis and the survey results, the spearman rank resulted in an  $r_s = 0.664$  and a  $p\text{-value} = 0.073$ . Since  $p\text{-value} = 0.073$  was greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis of no correlation was not rejected.

This means that there was no relationship between institutional policy document analysis and response to questionnaire survey on whether formal agreements among LIS schools were encouraged to ensure recognition of assessment results in LIS sector.

The results are therefore, a clear indication of deviation from SAQA RPL policy (2002) which requires LIS schools to establish formal agreements among themselves in relation to the chosen field of learning and qualifications. The importance of formal agreements among LIS schools was to ensure that recognition of assessment results in the LIS sector.

Despite 13.2% of the respondents indicating that there were formal agreements among LIS schools, it is clear that LIS schools did not comply with this SAQA RPL policy (2002) requirement as the study found that it was not reflected anywhere in the institutional RPL policy documents analysed. This implies that the mobility of

RPL candidates within LIS sector was curtailed as the results from one LIS school were not seen as having equal value and credit in another LIS school.

### **5.2.2 Training of RPL personnel**

SAQA RPL policy (2002: 38-43), is explicit about the need for appropriate training of staff that will be dealing with RPL process. The policy specifically requires advisors, assessors, moderators and verifiers to obtain appropriate training from education and training qualifications authority (ETQA). For example, an RPL assessor must be a subject matter expert in order to conduct assessments. However, the activities preceding and those coming after the actual assessment such as moderation are also critical in ensuring the quality of the RPL process. Aspects related to training of staff responsible for conducting RPL include:

#### *5.2.2.1 Registration of RPL assessors*

In terms of the registration of RPL assessors, SAQA RPL policy (2002:40) explicitly provides for the requisite certification in the relevant unit standard for purposes of conducting assessments.

In the study, when asked whether the criteria for the registration of assessors in LIS schools made explicit provision for the requisite certification in the relevant unit standard, 75% of respondents (table 4.10) acknowledged that it was taking place while this was not documented in the institutional RPL policy documents (table 4.3).

Using the Wilcoxon signed rank test to determine whether there was a correlation between the documentation and the survey results, the spearman rank resulted in an  $r_s = -0.300$  and a  $p\text{-value} = 0.624$ . Since  $p\text{-value} = 0.624$  was greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis of no correlation was not rejected.

Although 75% of the respondents acknowledged that assessors involved in RPL assessments possessed the requisite certification in the relevant unit standard, lack of documentation would make it difficult for LIS schools to enforce this SAQA RPL policy (2002) requirement. Furthermore, with about 25% of the respondents not acknowledging that assessors involved in RPL assessments possessed the requisite certification in the relevant unit standard, there was a chance that the quality and integrity of the RPL assessment practice in LIS schools could be compromised by

using assessors who did not go through the necessary training to obtain the requisite certification.

#### *5.2.2.2 Performance of the functions of evidence facilitators*

The SAQA's criteria and guidelines for the registration of assessors (2002:41) states that the functions of evidence facilitators should be performed by two different people to avoid potential conflict of interest and bias. However, where an assessor has to fulfil both the role of facilitator and assessor due to resource constraints, he/she will need to be competent in both evidence facilitation and assessment.

The results of the study revealed that 69.1% of respondents (table 4.10) indicated that the functions of evidence facilitation and assessment were clearly defined and, where possible, were not being performed by the same person. The analysis of the institutional RPL policy puts the figure even higher. The results showed that eight out of ten LIS schools (80%) were in compliance (table 4.3).

The fact that about 70% of the respondents indicated that the functions of facilitation and assessment were not performed by the same assessor was an indication of the appreciation among LIS schools of the impact of conflict of interest and bias on the integrity of the assessment outcomes. Of significance, this finding has the advantage instilling confidence in the RPL outcomes. This can serve as an impetus for potential RPL candidates to have their skills and knowledge assessed when they know that RPL assessments were carried out in a credible and accountable manner.

#### *5.2.2.3 RPL policy review mechanisms*

The SAQA RPL policy (2002: 33) makes it explicitly clear that an important part of the planning is the 'process whereby review and moderation of policies take place'. These policy review mechanisms include decisions about how often such reviews may take place, by which they will be conducted, and the size of the sample for moderation of assessment results.

The results of the study revealed that 61.8% of respondents (table 4.10) acknowledged that RPL policy review mechanisms were in place in LIS schools, while 38.2% of the respondents did not agree with the statement. The results of the

institutional RPL policy analysis showed that 70% of the institutional RPL policy documents contained reference to aspect (table 4.3).

This means that there was greater acknowledgement among the majority of LIS schools of the importance of putting RPL policy review mechanisms in place. The effect of this was that LIS schools were in a better position not only to monitor their processes but also to evaluate the performance of their assessors and moderations and other key RPL personnel to ensure the credibility of the assessment process.

#### *5.2.2.4 Training plans for RPL personnel*

The training plans for RPL personnel should encourage mentoring relationships between personnel with and those without RPL expertise (SAQA, 2002: 23). This policy requires that those with RPL expertise such as evidence facilitation, assessors and moderation to mentor administrative staff and those dealing with the transcription of credits.

In the majority of LIS schools no effort was made to encourage evidence facilitation, assessors and moderation to mentor and empower administrative staff and those dealing with the transcription of credits despite this being reflected in the policy documents.

The results showed that 60.3 % of the respondents (table 4.10) did not think that the training plans for RPL personnel in LIS schools encouraged mentoring relationships between RPL personnel with and those without RPL expertise. Only 39.7% of the respondents thought that this was happening. This was despite all the institutional RPL policy documents (100%) containing reference to the aspect (table 4.3).

This means that, in most cases, administrative staff and those dealing with the transcription of credits would not be up-to-date or even aware of some of the processes and procedures for dealing with RPL candidates. The fact that these administrative staff and personnel dealing with the transcription of credits cannot sustain currency of their knowledge and skills in RPL assessments, the quality and integrity of the RPL outcomes could be compromised.

#### **5.2.3 RPL assessment process**

The purpose of assessment is to confirm and recognise the competencies an individual has obtained through different modes and experiences. RPL assessment

process is viewed assessment as 'a structured process for gathering evidence and making judgments about an individual's performance in relation to registered national standards and qualifications' (SAQA, 2002:16). These competencies might have been acquired outside a formal education and training environment, through life or work experience.

Given the range of skills and competencies acquired through informal or non-formal training environment, institutions use a variety of assessment methods to assess the evidence presented by RPL candidates. Andersson and Fejes (2005: 3) emphasise the importance of selecting good methods for assessment by stating that 'assessment methods need to be appropriate to the subject matter under evaluation'. For Rutherford (1995:11), 'the assessment methods and their purposes' should be clearly understood and negotiated between the assessor and the candidate. The use of appropriate assessment methods was further reiterated by Duvekot, Kaeming and Pijls (2003) who stated that the assessment methods 'must be tailored to the individual learner and relationship to the actualities of workplace practice'. Whitaker (1989) also states that credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted. Examples of these methods include portfolios of evidence, assigned subject-related essays, projects, challenge examinations, interviews or oral examinations and testimonials (Cohen, *et al.*, 1994). Among these assessment methods, however, it would appear that the portfolio was commonly used to gather and present evidence for RPL assessment purposes (Michelson and Mandell, 2004; Bjornavold, 2001; Clarke and Warr, 1997).

To ensure the credibility of assessment results, SAQA RPL policy (2002:8) states that RPL assessment process should be governed by certain principles namely validity-how well the assessment matches what is being assessed; reliability- the consistency of the assessment outcome; sufficiency-relates to the amount of evidence needed during the assessment; authenticity- the 'ownership' of evidence; and currency- the recentness of the evidence. The policy further states that 'there is no fundamental difference in the assessment of previously acquired skills and knowledge and those acquired through the formal learning programmes'. Simosko and Cook (1996: 97-99) do not fully agree with SAQA (2002) policy statement and stated that 'to no small degree, the credibility of the outcome of RPL assessments

depends almost exclusively on the validity, reliability and fairness of the assessment processes.

Nevertheless, to ensure credibility of assessment outcomes, the Australian report written by Wheelahan ., (2003) emphasised that 'RPL assessment processes should be comparable to other assessment processes used to assess whether the learning or competency outcome in a subject, module, unit, course or qualification have been met'. In summation, to ensure a credible RPL assessment process, RPL policies, processes, procedures, practices and decisions should be transparent, rigorous, reliable, fair and accessible to individuals and stakeholders to ensure that users can be confident of the decisions and outcomes of RPL. Aspects of RPL assessment processes in the study results included:

#### *5.2.3.1. The purpose of RPL assessment*

SAQA RPL policy (2002:25) explicitly states that 'the purpose of assessment should be clarified upfront to the candidate'. This is done with a view to enable the candidate to gather information needed in preparing for the assessment.

The information that the candidates collect usually takes many forms and can be gathered from a number of sources. However, for assessment purposes, the only information that required is one which, when matched against the requirements of the unit of competency, provides proof of competence.

In the study, it would appear that in the majority of LIS schools, the purpose of assessment was clarified to the candidate upfront.

The study's results indicated that 77.9% of respondents (table 4.11) viewed the statement positively. In contrast, the results from the institutional policy documents analysis indicated a greater compliance of approximately 90% to SAQA RPL policy (2002) as indicated in table 4.4.

To determine whether the level of extent depicted by policy was the same as depicted by the respondents, the Wilcoxon signed rank test was used. The Wilcoxon signed rank test gave a z-value = 6.856 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 1(to a great extent). The test also indicated (figure 4.1) that the respondents were mainly concentrated on 2 (to a reasonable extent).

With regard to whether the purpose of assessment was clarified to the candidate upfront, the test indicated that the respondents did not think that this aspect was happening to a large extent but rather to a reasonable extent. However, it would appear that despite the statistical discrepancy in the findings, in practice, this aspect was adequately addressed by LIS schools. This was significant because if the purpose of assessment was not clarified from the outset, candidates might feel deceived and might want to question the integrity and validity of the system.

#### *5.2.3.2 Support for RPL candidates*

The learner or candidate support structures were critical as a preventative measure, for example, as a measure to enhance the success rate of candidates (SAQA, 2001:7). This was not only the case for adult learners and RPL candidates, but it applied to learners involved in full-time study programmes. Hence, the quality of support to be provided to the candidate in preparing for the assessment was needed to be established to ensure student achievement.

In the study the results indicated that 75% of respondents (table 4.11) viewed this aspect positively. In addition, there was 90% compliance from the institutional policy analysis (table 4.4). In the SAQA RPL policy (2002), the services and support to RPL candidates form part of pre-assessment advice including preparation for the assessment itself, educational planning, counselling as well as and post-assessment support.

To determine whether the level of extent depicted by policy was the same as depicted by the respondents, the Wilcoxon signed rank test was used. The test gave a z-value = 6.668 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 1(to a great extent).

With regard to the respondents, the test showed that responses (figure 4.2) were concentrated on a median of 2 (to a reasonable extent). As to whether the quality of support to be provided to the candidate in preparing for the assessment was established, the respondents thought that this aspect was happening to a reasonable extent and not to a large extent.

However, the results generally showed that the majority of LIS schools made provision for quality support to the candidate in preparation for the assessment. This

was significant in that unlike adults in full-time study, these adults had to face pressures of work and study.

#### *5.2.3.3 The involvement of RPL candidate in the assessment process*

The learner is an active participant in all aspects of the assessment process, such as identifying and collecting evidence, determining location and time of assessment, negotiating the provision for special needs (SAQA, 2002:21). ETQA registered moderators and verifiers were key role players in the final determination of what methods and instruments were used, how they were used, the decisions concerning candidates' competence, and that the processes of assessments were consistent and fair to all candidates (SAQA, 2002:21). However, assessors have the responsibility to ensure that while the assessment plan was been developed the special needs and circumstances of each candidate were addressed to ensure that the assessment was fair and transparent.

The study's results indicated that 79.5% of respondents (table 4.11) viewed the statement positively. In contrast, the results from the institutional policy documents analysis (table 4.4) indicated that there was very little compliance (20%) to SAQA RPL policy (2002).

To determine whether the level of extent depicted by policy was the same as depicted by the respondents, the Wilcoxon signed rank test was used. The test gave a z-value = -6.769 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 4 (to a very little a great extent). The median of the responses were 2 (to a reasonable extent) as depicted in figure 4.3. As to whether the candidate being assessed was actively involved in all aspects of the assessment process in LIS schools, the test indicated that the respondents think that this aspect was happening to a reasonable extent as opposed to a very little extent.

Although the majority of the respondents (79.5%) indicated that the candidate being assessed was actively involved in all aspects of the assessment process, there was an inherent risk to the consistency of the assessment process as there was very little compliance (20%) in terms of documenting these procedures.

#### *5.2.3.4 The choice of RPL assessment methods*

SAQA RPL policy (2002:15) makes it explicitly clear that RPL assessment plans must subscribe to principles of good assessment which actively promotes the use of variety of methods can be used to validate diverse types of learning, for example, portfolio reviews; exams developed by college department; essays; projects; oral presentations; interviews; demonstrations and performances (Cohen *et al.*, 1994). In addition, good assessment principles also include respect for the rights of RPL candidates to participate in the selection and use of assessment methods and instruments appropriate to their situation. However, this does not mean that such alternative methodologies were in any way inferior, but that it may be less threatening to the candidate.

In the study, 86.7% of respondents (table 4.11) agreed that in LIS schools, the choice of assessment methods was fit for purpose to ensure valid assessment outcomes. However, the results from the institutional policy documents analysis indicated that there was 40% compliance to SAQA RPL policy (2002) as indicated in 4.4. To determine whether the level of extent depicted by policy was the same as depicted by the respondents, the Wilcoxon signed rank test was used. The test gave a z-value = -6.242 with a p-value = 0.000. Since the p-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis of the median being equal to 3 (to some extent) was rejected. The median of the responses were concentrated on either 1 (to a great extent) or 2 (to a reasonable extent) as shown in figure 4.5.

According to the test the respondents think that the choice of assessment methods was fit for purpose to ensure valid assessment outcomes. The test also showed that in most of the institutional policy documents (60%), this aspect was not documented. However, despite the discrepancy, it is comforting to note that in practice (86,7%) of the respondents indicated that there was compliance to SAQA (2002) requirements on this aspect.

When asked whether assessment plans indicate a variety of appropriate assessment methods and instruments to validate diverse types of learning, 85.3% of respondents (table 4.11) positively acknowledged the statement. This means that the majority of the assessment plans in LIS schools complied with SAQA (2002) requirement. In contrast though, the results from the institutional policy documents analysis (table 4.4) indicated that there was 40% compliance to SAQA RPL policy (2002).

To determine whether the level of extent depicted by policy was the same as depicted by the respondents, the Wilcoxon signed rank test was used. The test gave a z-value = -6.965 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 4 (to a very little a great extent). The median of the responses were concentrated on 2 (to a reasonable extent) as depicted in figure 4.4.

As to whether the assessment plans indicated a variety of appropriate assessment methods/instruments to validate diverse types of learning, the results of the test indicated that the respondents think that this aspect was happening to a reasonable extent while the policy documents in most of the schools (60%) did not document this activity.

It was reassuring to note that the majority of the respondents (85.3%) indicated that a variety of appropriate assessment methods to validate diverse types of learning. This was significant because in some cases more than one assessment methods might be necessary to make a complete and fair assessment.

In terms of documentation, the fact that 60% of these activities were not documented was a matter of concern. The importance of documenting procedures such as standardisation, consistency, fairness cannot be overemphasised.

#### *5.2.3.5 The appeals process*

The study's results indicated that 82.3% of respondents (table 4.11) believed that an appeals process was in place in LIS schools and that it was also made known to the candidate. In the institutional RPL policy documents (table 4.4) this aspect was indicated by seven (70%) of the institutions.

The Wilcoxon signed rank test indicated that there was no difference between the policy document analysis and responses. The hypothetical medians of both the institutional policy documents and survey responses was two, indicating that making an appeal process known to the candidate in LIS schools occurred to a reasonable extent. There was little discrepancy between the survey results and documentation on this aspect.

It was significant to note that the appeals process was in place in the majority of LIS schools and that it was also documented. This was because an appeals process was

a critical issue supporting good assessment systems design and management. The RPL providers such as LIS schools were required to ensure that candidates have access to appeal an assessment outcome (SAQA, 2002). The candidates have the right to appeal against both the process and outcomes of RPL assessment. It is therefore, incumbent upon SA LIS schools to ensure that the appeal procedures were implemented in a fair and transparent fashion.

#### *5.2.3.6 The development of assessment instruments*

Assessment instruments refer to the nature of the assessment task given to the learner to do (SAQA, 2002:29). The LIS schools were required to ensure that the instruments were developed in such a way as to match the assessment criteria specified by ETQA.

In the study, when asked whether assessment instruments in LIS schools were developed in compliance with ETQA requirements, 75% of respondents (table 4.11) indicated that this was happening in LIS schools. However, only half of the institutional RPL policy documents (50%) made reference to this (table 4.4).

To determine whether the level of extent depicted by policy was the same as depicted by the respondents, the Wilcoxon signed rank test was used. The test gave a z-value = -2.040 with a p-value = 0.041, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 2.5 (to some extent). The observed median was two (to a reasonable extent) indicating that the respondents were agreeing to a reasonable extent that assessment instruments were developed in compliance with ETQA requirements (figure 4.6). In addition, the test suggested that there was no clear documentation in some LIS schools (50%) in support of this aspect.

The results showed that there was a high adherence to the required prescripts among LIS schools in compliance with ETQA requirements. Despite the fact that this aspect been adequately addressed in LIS schools (75%), half of the LIS schools did not document their practice suggesting that there might be inconsistency as depicted in the statistical analysis.

#### *5.2.3.7 The procedure for completing RPL assessment reports*

The assessors must complete assessment reports that indicate: the assessment plan, the evidence presented and the assessment outcome (SAQA, 2002: 21).

These assessment reports must, in addition, also include the development of a plan to identify gaps in skills/knowledge, a process for addressing the gap, and an opportunity for reassessment, where indicated.

When asked whether assessment whether the assessment reports indicate the recommendations for further action to address the identified gaps, 75% of respondents (table 4.11) indicated that this was taking place in LIS schools. However, this was in sharp contrast to the findings of the institutional RPL policy document analysis. The findings (table 4.4) indicated that only three out of ten LIS schools (30%) complied with SAQA RPL policy (2002) requirement on this aspect.

The Wilcoxon signed rank test was used to determine whether the level of extent depicted by policy was the same as depicted by the respondents. The test gave a z-value = -6.605 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of the median being equal to 3 (to a very little extent). The observed median was concentrated on 2 (to a reasonable extent) depicting that the respondents felt that assessment reports indicated to a reasonable extent the recommendations for further action to address identified gaps.

Despite the fact that the majority of the respondents (75%) indicating that assessment reports included the recommendations for further action to address the identified gaps, this was not documented in half of the institution RPL policies as confirmed by the statistical analysis. Not documenting procedures might reflect badly on the quality and integrity of the RPL outcomes.

#### *5.2.3.8 Moderation of assessment activities*

All assessment activities, processes and documents were subject to moderation in accordance with rules and regulations promulgated by the relevant SETAs (SAQA, 2002:21). This means that in LIS sector, ETQAs were responsible for the verification, evaluation and quality assurance of all assessments and assessment systems.

When asked whether moderation mechanisms were in place in LIS schools including policies for evaluating assessment systems, the majority of the respondents (table 4.11), 85.5% positively acknowledged the existence of these moderation mechanisms in LIS schools including policies for evaluating assessment systems.

Despite this greater compliance according to the respondents, the results of the institutional RPL policy document analysis painted a different picture. The results (table 4.4) showed that only four out of ten LIS schools (40%) complied with this SAQA (2002) requirement. Using the Wilcoxon signed rank test to determine whether the level of extent depicted by policy was the same as depicted by the respondents. The test gave a z-value = -6.914 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of the median being equal to 3 (to a very little extent).

Although the hypothetical median of the policy documents analysis indicated that this aspect documented to a very little extent (median of 3), the respondents felt that moderation mechanisms were in place in LIS schools, including policies for evaluating assessment systems.

Even though this aspect was positively acknowledged by the respondents (85, 5%), it was however, only reflected in 40% of the documentation as depicted in the statistical analysis. As indicated earlier, not documenting procedures might cause inconsistency of standards thus calling into question the quality and integrity of RPL outcomes.

#### **5.2.4 Quality management systems (QMS)**

SAQA RPL policy (2002) makes it explicitly clear that the quality management systems were critical for the integrity and validity of RPL outcomes. Internationally, a high premium is placed on the quality of RPL process to ensure that RPL providers, including higher education and training institutions do not offer a 'cheap' or 'easy' route to credit or qualifications (Simosko and Cook 1996). In South Africa, the emphasis is on the establishment of clear criteria for assessment and quality assurance measures to verify the credibility of the assessments (Heyns, 2004). In countries where RPL has been implemented on a large scale, sets of quality standards have been developed to ensure the integrity of their RPL systems. National organisations have funded the development of standards for RPL practices and quality audits to promote RPL best practices (Van Kleef, 1999). However, most of them were based on the standards developed by Whitaker (1989) for the Council for adult and experiential learning (CAEL).

#### *5.2.4.1. Quality management systems for RPL assessments*

SAQA RPL policy (2002:24) explicitly states that states that quality management systems for RPL should be designed, documented, and implemented at national, sector, and provider levels in accordance with agreed criteria and specifications.

In the study, 70% of the respondents (table 4.12) agreed when asked whether 'quality management systems for assessment were implemented in accordance with agreed criteria. However, the findings of the institutional RPL policy documents analysis (table 4.5) indicated that this aspect was reflected in six out of ten (58.9%) of the policies.

To account for this discrepancy, the Wilcoxon signed rank test was used to determine whether the level of agreement depicted by policy was the same as depicted by the respondents. The hypothesised median was 2, that is, the policy was in agreement and the observed median was also 2.00 (figure 4.9). However, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test also gave a z-value = -4.827 with a p-value = 0.000 with an observed median of close to 40% of the respondents not agreeing that this was happening in practice.

Therefore, this statistical analysis served to confirm that there was low level of compliance to SAQA (2002) requirement in this respect and that what was happening in LIS schools was not documented in the policies. This raises concern as without proper quality assurance system in place the integrity and quality of assessments would be compromised by inconsistent practices.

#### *5.2.4.2 Refining RPL assessment procedures*

SAQA RPL policy (2002:24) states it explicitly clear 'that RPL providers must use the information gained from the quality management system to evaluate and refine assessment procedures at all levels.

In the study the results indicated that 52% of the respondents (table 4.12) agreed when asked whether quality management systems ensured the refining of assessment procedures at all levels.

This was in sharp contrast to the findings of the institutional RPL policy documents analysis (table 4.5) in which the majority of the policies, eight out of ten policies (80%) made reference to this aspect.

Also, when using the Wilcoxon signed rank test to determine whether the level of agreement depicted by policy was the same as depicted by the respondents, the test gave a z-value = 5.198 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 2 (agree) indicating that the respondents thought that quality management systems ensured the refining of assessment procedures at all levels.

The results showed that, in practice, the level of compliance is relatively low at 52% compared to 80% compliance in terms of written documentation. Proper documentation needed to be kept in terms of quality management system but only 58.9% (section 5.2.41) of LIS schools complied which makes it difficult to use the information gained from the quality management system to refine assessment procedures and services at all levels and to plan for further development aimed at meeting RPL targets for delivery.

#### *5.2.4.3 Input from key stakeholders*

SAQA RPL policy (2002:24) makes it clear that 'accredited RPL providers that quality management systems should be inclusive of all key stakeholders in RPL process, including representatives from the learner candidate community'. The policy further states that the roles and responsibilities of all key stakeholders and structures should be clearly defined in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.

The results showed that 38.2% of the respondents (table 4.12) indicated that LIS schools did not comply with this SAQA RPL policy (2002) requirement on this aspect. Similarly, 40% of the institutional RPL policy documents analysis (table 4.5) reflected this statement.

To determine whether the level of agreement depicted by policy was the same as depicted by the respondents, the Wilcoxon signed rank test was used. The test gave a z-value = -4.097 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 4 (disagree) indicating that the respondents think that in practice the key stakeholders did not provide input about quality management systems and that this aspect was also not documented in the institutional policies of most schools. The results showed that level of compliance in terms of both practice and documentation as confirmed by the above statistical analysis.

It is clear from the results of this study that quality management systems in LIS schools did not provide for input from all key stakeholders, including representatives from the candidate community. This was an opportunity missed for LIS schools as they would not be able to benefit from the multiplicity of views so as to augment and strengthen their practices.

#### *5.2.4.4 Meeting RPL developmental targets*

In terms of meeting RPL developmental targets through quality management systems the results indicated that the majority of LIS schools did not comply with this requirement.

The results indicated that 76.5% of the respondents (table 4.12) viewed the statement negatively. The results of the institutional RPL policies analysis (table 4.5) also reflected this where only one out of ten (10%) of the policies made reference to this aspect.

To determine whether the level of agreement depicted by policy was the same as depicted by the respondents, the Wilcoxon signed rank test was used. The test gave a z-value = 6.705 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 2 (agree).

The statistical analysis also confirmed that quality management systems in LIS schools did not provide for support in meetings developmental targets. The fact that this aspect was not documented in the institutional policy could be that LIS schools did not know that it is the responsibility of ETQAs to provide development support to assist accredited providers in meeting RPL development targets.

#### *5.2.4.5 Monitoring activities in the quality management system*

The SAQA RPL policy (2002:24) explicitly states that evaluation and monitoring activities must be clearly spelt out in the quality management systems.

The survey results showed that only 9.1% of respondents (table 4.12) noted that this was taking place when asked whether 'monitoring activities were clearly spelt out in the quality management system (QMS). Similarly, the results of the institutional policy analysis (table 4.5) indicated that only two of ten (20%) of the policies noted this aspect.

Using the Wilcoxon signed rank test to determine whether the level of agreement depicted by policy was the same as depicted by the respondents, the test gave a z-value = -6.893 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 5 (strongly disagree) (figure 4.13), statistically confirming that the respondents did not think that monitoring activities were clearly spelt out in the quality management system and that this aspect was not documented in the institutional policy.

It is clear from the results that monitoring activities in LIS schools were not clearly spelt out in the quality management system (QMS). This made it difficult to systematically undertake diagnostic, formative and summative activities of quality management systems especially if these activities were not clearly spelt out in the documentation as was the case in the majority of LIS schools in this study.

#### *5.2.4.6 RPL assessment monitoring activities within LIS sector*

In the study, the results showed that 76.5% of the respondents (table 4.12) did not agree when asked whether 'RPL assessment monitoring activities were ensured within LIS sector.

The results of the institutional RPL policy document analysis also supported this trend. In the analysis (table 4.5), only three out of ten (30%) policies contained this aspect. To determine whether the level of agreement depicted by policy was the same as depicted by the respondents, the Wilcoxon signed rank test was used. The results (figure 4.9) led to the null hypothesis of equal medians not being rejected. The medians were 4 (to a very little extent) indicating statistically that the respondents felt that RPL assessment monitoring activities did not ensure consistency within the sector and that similarly, this aspect was documented to a very little extent in most of the policies.

The results indicated there was lack of monitoring in terms of RPL assessment within LIS sector despite it being clearly stated in SAQA RPL policy (2002:24). This means that LIS schools were operating management systems for RPL that were not internally consistent within LIS sector, and which did not meet the criteria and specifications for quality assurance as set out in ETQA's guidelines.

#### *5.2.4.7 Maintenance of assessment documentation*

SAQA RPL policy (2002:23) states that RPL documentation, reports, and sources of evidence should be maintained in accordance with ETQA approved criteria and specifications.

The results of the study showed that in most cases this was not taking place in LIS schools. The results (table 4.12) indicated that 72.1% of the respondents did not think that LIS schools complied with this requirement. The results of the institutional RPL policy document analysis (table 4.5) also indicated that this was documented in only five out of ten policies (50%).

Using the Wilcoxon signed rank test, the level of agreement depicted by policy and the respondents was determined. The test gave a z-value = 6.000 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 2.5 (neutral). However, the respondents were mainly concentrated at in response 4 or 5 (in disagreement) (figure 4.14).

This statistical analysis showed that that the respondents felt that assessment documentation was not being maintained in accordance with agreed criteria and that this was the feeling among the respondents. This not only compromises the quality management of RPL data but it also makes it difficult to retrieve assessment information when needed for future reference.

#### *5.2.4.8 The recording of RPL outcomes/results*

SAQA RPL policy (2002:24) states that reporting and record-keeping should be designed as an integral part of the QMS. In terms of the recording of RPL outcomes/results, the policy specifically states that providers must ensure that all RPL results were recorded accordance with the requirements of SAQA's National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) and the constituent ETQA.

In the study, it would appear that RPL results in LIS schools were not recorded in accordance with the requirements of SAQA's National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) as required.

In the study, only 8.8% of the respondents (table 4.12) noted this was taking place when asked whether RPL results were recorded in accordance with the requirements of SAQA's National Learners' Records Database (NLRD). A similar trend was also observed from the institutional RPL policy document analysis. The results of the analysis (table 4.5) showed that only one out of ten (10%) policies specifically mentioned this aspect.

To determine the level of agreement depicted by policy and the respondents, the Wilcoxon signed rank test was used (figure 4.15). The test gave a z-value = -6.724 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 5 (disagreement). The results showed that the respondents did not agree that RPL results were recorded in accordance with the requirements of the SAQA'S NLRD (National Learners' Records Database), and that the institutional RPL policy documents did not reflect this aspect.

Since RPL results in LIS schools were not recorded in accordance with the requirements of SAQA's National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) as required, it would be difficult to use information gained from RPL outcomes to inform strategic planning requirements within LIS sector and at national level. In addition, this information was critical to ensure the quality and integrity of the RPL system in the sector.

The SAQA RPL policy (2002:23) also states that information on all candidates, including unsuccessful and successful applications, must be maintained in accordance with SAQA and ETQA regulations.

Asked whether information on RPL outcomes was maintained in accordance with SAQA and ETQA regulations, the results of the study revealed that only 51.5% of respondents (table 4.12) viewed the agreed that this was taking place in LIS schools, despite this being recorded in eight out of ten (80%) institutional RPL policy documents (table 4.5).

Using the Wilcoxon signed rank test, the level of agreement depicted by policy and the respondents was determined (figure 4.16). The test gave a z-value = 5.370 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 2 (agree). Statistically, the respondents did not agree that information

on RPL outcomes was maintained. However, the statistical analysis did confirm that this aspect was indeed documented in eight out of ten (80%) policies.

The results showed that although the procedures on information on RPL outcomes were documented in the majority of LIS schools, there was still a challenge in terms of the actual maintenance of this in accordance with the SAQA and ETQA regulations. This has the potential to affect the quality of RPL outcomes data rendering it unreliable and consequently not viable for future use.

#### *5.2.4.9 Monitoring the progress of RPL candidates post-RPL*

Every RPL provider is required to have systems and facilities to monitor the progress of RPL candidates who enter learning programmes post-RPL assessment as part of the QMS at provider institutions in order to facilitate and streamline all moderation, management, and reporting procedures. (SAQA, 2002:23-25).

The study results revealed that the majority of LIS schools did not comply with this requirement. In the study, the results indicated that 79.2% of the respondents (table 4.12) did not believe that the quality management system in LIS schools provided for the system to monitor the progress of candidates who enter learning programmes post-RPL. Similarly, none of the institutional RPL policy documents (0%0 mentioned this aspect (table 4.5).

Using the Wilcoxon signed rank test, there level of agreement depicted by policy and the respondents was strong indicating low level of compliance regarding this aspect. The test gave a z-value = -6.393 with a p-value = 0.000, thus resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 5 (strongly disagree) (figure 4.17). The respondents were mainly concentrated on 4 and 5 (at least in disagreement), indicating that the respondents did not agree that the quality management system provides for the system to monitor the progress of candidates who the respondents enter learning programmes post-RPL. Therefore, the statistical analysis was able to confirm the low level of compliance indicated in the results.

The results showed that that 79.2% of the respondents (table 4.12) acknowledged that the quality management system in LIS schools did not provide for the system to monitor the progress of candidates who enter learning programmes post-RPL. In addition, this was also not documented anywhere in the institutional policies. The

result of this was that many RPL candidates might find themselves lost in the system with no support necessary to ensure successful progression in their chosen fields of study.

#### *5.2.4.10 The analyses of RPL services*

In terms of analysis of RPL services, SAQA RPL policy (2002:24) states that 'providers should include a holistic analysis of RPL services and results in the quality assurance reports to ETQAs'. It is the responsibility of RPL service providers such as LIS schools to ensure that there is proper consistency and alignment between different systems of providers and their ETQAs'.

In the study, only 20.8% of respondents (table 4.12) to the survey question about whether the quality management system provides for analyses of RPL services note that their LIS schools had processes in place provide for the analyses of RPL services. A similar trend was observed from the analysis of the institutional RPL policy documents (table 4.5). The observed rate of compliance was also 20%, that is, only two out of ten policies complied with SAQA RPL policy (2002) regarding this aspect.

With the use of the Wilcoxon signed rank test, there level of agreement depicted by policy and the respondents was determined (figure 4.18). The test gave a z-value = -4.605 with a p-value = 0.000, resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis of median being equal to 5 (strongly disagree). This statistical analysis confirmed that the respondents did not agree that the quality management system provides for analyses of RPL services.

The results of the study showed that there was lack of formal evaluation of RPL services. The LIS schools will not be able to identify areas of weaknesses in RPL services provided when there was no regular monitoring and evaluation activities built into their quality management systems.

### **5.3 Summary of the chapter**

This chapter presented the analysis of the results of the study according research objectives. The results indicated that there were islands of good RPL practice in LIS schools in South Africa specifically with regard to RPL assessment process. However, certain weaknesses were identified in other aspects of RPL implementation in LIS schools including the policy environment, training of personnel conducting RPL assessment and the quality management systems.

On several occasions though, certain things were done in practice which were not documented in the institutional RPL policies as required.

## **CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the findings of the study were summarised according to the objectives of the study. The findings relate to policy environment for RPL practice; training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments; RPL assessment processes; and quality management systems (QMS).

In addition, conclusions were made about the research objectives to determine to what extent the objectives of the study have been met. This was followed by recommendations for areas where weaknesses were identified.

The contribution of the study was also discussed with reference to its implications for policy, theory and practice. This was followed by the final conclusion of the study.

### **6.2 Summary of research findings**

In this section, the summary of research findings was discussed according to the objectives of the study.

#### ***6.2.1 Policy environment for RPL practice***

There was a clear indication in the study that there was an institutional 'will' in the LIS schools to open up access to learners who come from diverse backgrounds and have diverse needs and capabilities, as required by the SAQA RPL policy (2002). The institutional RPL policies used by the LIS schools were also in line with the SAQA RPL policy (2002). The policies and procedures were clearly spelt out and were based on the NQF principles of equity of access and redress.

However, the results also showed that while the RPL policies were inclusive of non-traditional learners wanting to enter education and training, in practice, not much was happening. In addition, assessment opportunities for potential candidates were not promoted; formal agreements among the LIS schools were non-existent, and organisational support for those providing RPL services was also lacking.

### **6.2.2 Training of RPL personnel**

The SAQA RPL policy (2002) requires that appropriate training be given to personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments. The results of the study indicated that this requirement was being met.

In addition, the assessors are certified in the relevant Unit Standards and registered. The functions of evidence facilitation and assessment are not performed by the same person. Policies regarding evidence facilitators, assessors, moderators and other key personnel were continually monitored and reviewed to ensure valid and credible assessments, in line with the SAQA RPL policy.

However, the results also showed that development objectives as agreed with the Education and Training Quality Assurance body (ETQA) were not being met and that there was lack of formal mentoring relationships between personnel conducting RPL assessments.

### **6.2.3 RPL assessment process**

The results showed that information on policies and procedures for assessment was made available to candidates, including provision for appeal and support in preparing for the assessment. The assessment process was conducted by subject specialists/experts as required by law. Assessment instruments also validated to ensure they were for purpose. A variety of methods were also used, depending on the learning outcomes.

Furthermore, the assessments process regularly monitored and evaluated to adapt to changes in the environment. The candidate was also actively involved in the assessment to ensure a fair and transparent process.

At the end of the assessment process, assessment reports were issued which indicated, among other things, the assessment plan, the evidence presented, the assessment outcome and the recommendations for further action, including additional training and/or reassessment. This requirement was made explicit in the SAQA RPL policy (2002).

#### **6.2.4 Quality management systems (QMS)**

The results showed that quality management systems (QMS) in the LIS schools were not adequate. There was compliance in the LIS schools in terms of implementing quality management systems (QMS) for assessment in accordance with agreed criteria, and refining of assessment procedures at all levels.

In addition, 50% of the LIS schools maintain information on RPL outcomes. However, the results also showed that there were issues regarding quality management systems (QMS) in the LIS schools that must be addressed to ensure an effective and efficient RPL implementation. These included recording of RPL results in the National Learners Records Database (NLRD); analysing the RPL results; providing support structures in meeting developmental targets; monitoring the progress of candidates who enter learning programmes post-RPL; achieving consistency within the LIS sector; clearly spelling out monitoring activities in the QMS documentation; and providing for input from all key stakeholders.

### **6.3 Conclusions about research objectives**

This section discusses the conclusions about the research objectives of the study.

#### **6.3.1 Policy environment for RPL practice**

The research objective was to investigate whether the LIS schools are committed to providing an enabling environment for RPL practice.

The study's results suggested that there was an institutional 'will' in the LIS schools to open up access to learners who come from diverse backgrounds, and have different needs and capabilities. It was also found that the LIS schools have aligned most of their institutional RPL policies and procedures with their constituent ETQAs, as required by the SAQA RPL policy (2002).

The RPL policies and procedures in the LIS schools express an explicit commitment to the principles of equity of access and redress. Despite this, the results also revealed that there was a low level of compliance regarding certain aspects of the

policy environment. It would appear from the results that equal access to opportunities for support for all candidates seeking assessment did not exist.

The assessment results were also not recognised within the LIS sector, as there were no formal agreements among the LIS schools. The impact of this on RPL candidates was that RPL outcomes were not transferrable from one LIS schools to another.

In addition, LIS schools did not make information about assessment opportunities widely available or actively promote RPL services. As a result, many potential candidates are unaware of RPL services.

Furthermore, the results suggest that most of the non-traditional learners wanting to enter education and training were denied access. It would appear that most of the candidates granted access through RPL do have a matric certificate but do not meet the academic requirements of matriculation exemption. This was incongruent with the LIS schools' notion of creating an enabling environment and their supposed commitment to the principles of equity, redress and inclusion. Another issue is that key personnel responsible for RPL services were not given sufficient support, which was critical in developing a cadre of RPL specialist practitioners.

### **6.3.2 Training of RPL personnel**

The objective of the study was to determine whether assessors/other personnel involved in assessment are trained in order to ensure the quality of RPL assessments. The results indicated that appropriate training was given to assessors and staff dealing with the RPL process, and that there was an understanding among LIS schools that to ensure a fair and credible assessment process, assessors must obtain the requisite certification in the relevant Unit Standards before being registered.

The SAQA RPL policy (2002) advises that the functions of evidence facilitation and assessment should, where possible, be performed by different people. Approximately 70% of the LIS schools recognise the need to deal with potential conflicts of interest and bias in the assessment process and that therefore evidence facilitation and assessment should not be performed by the same person.

Furthermore, the results showed that the policies and review mechanisms regarding monitoring and quality assurance of evidence facilitators, assessors, moderators and other key personnel are in place in most of the LIS schools (61.8%). However, there are still some challenges in certain areas.

In terms of quality management, the development objectives agreed with ETQA were not being met. There was also very few mentoring relationships in place between personnel conducting RPL assessments.

### **6.3.3 RPL assessment process**

The objective of the study was to establish whether credible assessment processes are being followed in the LIS schools to ensure the integrity of the RPL system.

The study results strongly indicated that this indeed the case. There was a high rate of compliance in the LIS schools with all aspects relating to RPL assessment. The study responses indicated that the policies and procedures applied to assessment were made available to candidates, including provision for appeal.

This is to avoid misleading learners and thereby encouraging unrealistic expectations.

The study also found that there was an indication that the candidates given the necessary support in preparing for the assessment.

In line with the ETQA, schools used a variety of assessment methods were used in LIS schools to ensure fair assessment. The assessment instruments were also validated before being used. In addition, the LIS schools seem to take extra care to ensure that the choice of assessment methods was fit for purpose and that the candidate was actively involved in all aspects of the assessment process, thus making it fair and transparent. This aspect was essential not only to ensure both reliable and valid assessment outcomes but also to ensure that possible barriers to fair assessment are identified and addressed (SAQA, 2002).

RPL assessment processes in the LIS schools were also found to be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated and revised to reflect changes according to changed/reviewed standards and qualifications as prescribed by the SAQA RPL policy of 2002. In addition, the assessors used by the LIS schools are subject-matter

experts/academics who have received adequate training as per SAQA (2002) requirement. It was also remarkable to note that LIS schools also complied with the requirement to include recommendations for further action, including additional training and/or reassessment in their assessment reports.

#### **6.3.4 Quality management systems (QMS)**

The objective of the study was to determine whether quality management systems (QMS) are in place to ensure the continuous improvement of RPL system in the LIS schools.

The results indicated that quality management systems (QMS) currently in place in the LIS schools in South Africa were inadequate to ensure the continuous improvement of RPL system. Of the 11 aspects related to the quality management systems in the LIS schools, only three were rated between 50% and 60% by the respondents. The rest scored below 40%, with the lowest scoring 8,8%.

The quality management systems (QMS) aspect of the RPL practice in the LIS schools in South Africa seem to be the most challenging aspect of RPL practice in the LIS schools. The study found that aspects such as whether quality management systems (QMS) for assessment were implemented in accordance with agreed criteria; refining assessment procedures at all levels; and maintaining information on RPL outcomes were addressed to a moderate extent by half of the LIS schools.

However, all the LIS schools have serious challenges with regard to the structures and processes required for the implementation of quality assurance system (QMS), many of which are barely addressed. These included recording the RPL results in the National Learners' Record Database (NLRD); analysing the RPL results; providing support structures in meeting developmental targets; monitoring the progress of candidates who enter learning programmes post-RPL; ensuring consistency of quality management systems (QMS) within the LIS sector; clearly spelling out monitoring activities in the QMS documentation; and providing for input from all key stakeholders.

## **6.4 Recommendations**

The weaknesses identified in this study need to be addressed to ensure effective and efficient RPL implementation in the LIS schools in South Africa. No weaknesses were identified relating to the RPL assessment processes; however, weaknesses were identified relating to the policy environment, training of personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments and quality management systems (QMS) in LIS schools. The following recommendations are made for each area of weakness identified:

### ***6.4.1 Policy environment for RPL practice***

Despite the fact that there was an institutional 'will' in the LIS schools to open up access to learners from diverse backgrounds who have different needs and capabilities, the LIS schools do not comply with most aspects relating to the policy environment.

#### ***6.4.1.1 Admission procedures for RPL candidates***

The results showed that, even though 70% of the institutional RPL policy documents analysed refer to this statement, in practice, only five LIS schools include non-matriculated learners in their RPL process. The matriculation requirement has the effect of depriving RPL candidates of access to higher education and training and to better employment opportunities. Where a candidate can provide evidence of sufficient and current learning equivalent to matriculation-level learning, the LIS schools could grant access or credits to such a candidate on the basis of such evidence.

#### ***6.4.1.2 Equal access opportunities for RPL support***

The results indicated that 61.8% of the respondents stated that equal access to opportunities for support for all candidates seeking assessment did not exist. It is recommended that RPL support and assessment processes be streamlined to ensure more effective and accessible ways to provide support for all candidates seeking assessment. This requires mainstreaming and integrating policies and procedures regarding admissions, learning, teaching and assessment strategies and quality assurance mechanisms. Clear points of contact should also be created for potential applicants, existing students and LIS staff, to increase visibility of RPL

across the institution. Greater use of technology-enhanced RPL provision through e-portfolios could form part of this blended learning approach to support and assessment. Further, in terms of support to RPL candidates, Wood (1995) recommended psychometric testing for lowering cross-cultural barriers; use of bilingualism; presentation of direct evidence; use of role-play or simulation; use of video recording; use of a viewing and reviewing process; use of computer software and quality-assurance standards for language.

#### *6.4.1.3 Support for RPL personnel*

The majority of the respondents (72.1%) felt that RPL personnel in the LIS schools were not given sufficient support for their services. Developing appropriate assessment mechanisms and designing a curriculum that facilitates flexible entry and delivery are linked to the need in RPL for greater staff awareness, understanding and professional development in the LIS schools. It is therefore recommended that training opportunities for RPL personnel should be provided to build capacity and confidence in the process. Examples are institutional and sector workshops, seminars, reflective RPL practitioner modules, and virtual communities of practice (including cross- and inter-institutional peer support networks for staff engaged in RPL support and assessment).

#### *6.4.1.4 Availability of information about RPL services*

Only 60% of the respondents agreed that information about RPL services were widely available to potential candidates. A range of approaches were recommended to promote RPL services to potential candidates. Clearly identified contact points for potential applicants, existing students and staff is an important aspect of reducing barriers and creating a transparent and accessible RPL system. Recommendations are to use websites, prospectuses and university marketing material, as well as interaction with university staff in individual meetings or workshops, by e-mail or telephone, to spread RPL awareness to the target candidates.

#### *6.4.1.5 Formal agreements within LIS sector*

Only 13.2% of the respondents acknowledged that formal agreements exist among the LIS schools. The study strongly recommends setting up such formal agreements, as this will not only enable students to use RPL outcomes across the LIS schools, but will also encourage consistency within the LIS sector.

#### **6.4.2 Training of RPL personnel**

Most aspects of training personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments were sufficiently addressed in the LIS schools. However, for effective and efficient RPL implementation, the following recommendations are made:

##### *6.4.2.1 Training plans for RPL personnel*

RPL training plans in the LIS schools did not encourage mentoring relationships between personnel conducting RPL assessments. In the study, only 39.7% of the respondents agreed that this was happening. It is recommended that mentorship programmes should be developed to encourage the transfer of knowledge and skills between experienced staff and those without assessment expertise. Ideally, a mentor should be assigned to an individual or group of staff to assist with assessment.

#### **6.4.4 Quality management systems for assessment (QMS)**

Most of the issues regarding quality management systems (QMS) in the LIS schools were not adequately addressed. The following recommendations with regard to QMS are intended to ensure that RPL is implemented effectively and efficiently in the LIS schools in South Africa.

##### *6.4.4.1 Refining RPL assessment procedures*

Close to 50% of the LIS schools did not refine their assessment procedures at all levels. It is recommended that assessment procedures in the LIS schools be refined regularly at all levels to reflect changes in the needs being served by the assessment. Data gathering and analysis of assessment procedures should form part of the quality management process in order to review and enhance RPL practice.

##### *6.4.4.2 Input from key stakeholders*

The results clearly showed that quality management systems (QMS) in the LIS schools did not provide for input from all key stakeholders, including representatives from the candidate community. It is recommended that all key stakeholders in the RPL process should be included in the quality management systems (QMS). This will benefit the LIS schools in terms of the variety of views regarding planning and implementation of the system. Each stakeholder should be given specific roles and responsibilities to perform according to their expertise.

#### *6.4.4.3 Meeting RPL developmental targets*

Only 20% of the respondents indicated that this was happening. It is therefore recommended that formal liaison channels be introduced between LIS schools and their ETQAs regarding RPL assessments. By law, ETQAs were responsible for providing support to the LIS schools to meet developmental targets.

#### *6.4.4.4 Monitoring activities in the quality management system (QMS)*

The results revealed that only two institutional RPL policy documents (20%) included monitoring activities in their quality management system (QMS). To encourage LIS schools to monitor their quality management system (QMS), it is recommended that these monitoring mechanisms be clearly spelt out in the institutional RPL policies, for the sake of consistency and to facilitate implementation.

#### *6.4.4.5 RPL assessment monitoring activities within LIS sector*

There was approximately 76.5% non-compliance with the requirement that RPL assessment-monitoring activities should be consistent within the sector. There should be advocacy and cooperation among the LIS schools regarding RPL practice to ensure consistency of standards within the sector.

#### *6.4.4.6 Maintenance of assessment documentation*

The results indicated that RPL documentation, reports and sources of evidence in the LIS schools not maintained in accordance with the ETQA-approved criteria and specifications. To ensure quality management of all RPL data, it is recommended that responsibility for the administration of RPL documentation be delegated to a specific person within the school/department.

#### *6.4.4.7 The recording of RPL outcomes/results*

Very often, RPL results in the LIS schools were not recorded in accordance with the requirements of SAQA's National Learners Records Database (NLRD). The results indicated that only 8.8% of the respondents (table 4.12) of the LIS schools complied with this SAQA RPL policy requirement.

It is recommended that even when RPL outcomes are captured in an institution's integrated student management information systems, like all other formal assessment results, these results must still be captured in the National Learners Records Database (NLRD) for safekeeping. The must also be regularly updated and maintained to avoid litigation and/or disputes arising from inaccurate records.

#### *6.4.4.8 Monitoring the progress of candidates post-RPL*

The study results revealed that most of the LIS schools do not comply with this requirement. It is recommended that the institution's integrated student management

system be used to monitor the progression of RPL candidates' post-RPL through the formal academic system. This will enable the LIS schools to offer the advice and support needed to cope with the formal learning programmes.

#### *6.4.4.9 The analyses of RPL services*

The results indicated there is a need to enhance RPL monitoring mechanisms and data capture to facilitate analyses of RPL services. The LIS schools should first capture the RPL outcomes on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) as required by the SAQA RPL policy (2002). Using the system, the LIS schools will be able to monitor the success rate of RPL outcomes and record the number of learners using RPL services. In addition to improved data capture and analysis, the LIS schools can also use the system for progression, completion of RPL processes and to inform further planning and evaluation processes.

### **6.5 Implications for policy, theory and practice**

The theoretical basis for the current study is that experiential learning must be credited as being of equal value to the knowledge gained in more traditional teaching and learning situations, to address the challenges facing the LIS schools. According to adult education theorists such as Dewey, Freire, Mezirow and Knowles, adults learn from life and work (Conrad and Wardrop, 2010; Jarvis, 2004; Wheelahan, 2006).

However, the general practice of RPL was informed by Kolb's theory of experiential learning. This theory has been used extensively to provide justification for the use of RPL in formal education (Wong, 2011). RPL is widely used by people who have a wealth of knowledge that they have acquired throughout their lives to gain access or to return to further or higher education (Lueddeke, 1997).

In South Africa RPL has a specific agenda, that of opening access to higher education and training as well as accelerating redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment (SAQA, 2002).

The findings of the study indicated that there is shared commitment on the part of the LIS schools to provide an enabling environment for learning and assessment. In this regard, the study found that there is an institutional 'will' to open up access to learners who come from diverse backgrounds and who have different needs and

capabilities. This finding constitutes a fundamental contribution to the experiential learning theory, as it affirms the importance of the knowledge and skills gained in the workplace and in life.

In terms of policy, this study has confirmed that when policies and regulations foster equitable opportunities, good planning principles which facilitate broad participation in higher education and training are enhanced.

The experiential learning theory acknowledges the limitations of giving RPL a full practical expression in higher education and training. This aspect was of relevance to this study in that several weaknesses were also identified in the implementation of RPL practice in LIS schools in South Africa. As indicated in the study, these weaknesses relate to policy environment, training of key personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments and quality management systems (QMS) currently in place in the LIS schools.

Nonetheless, certain strategies were recommended in each area of weakness to contribute towards an effective and efficient RPL practice in LIS schools in South Africa. In addition, the study further recommended that further studies be carried out to accelerate islands of good RPL practice in the LIS sector.

## **6.6 Final conclusion**

The study investigated RPL practice in Library and Information Science (LIS) schools in South Africa in order to establish the nature of its implementation. The study investigated whether the LIS schools were committed to providing an enabling environment for RPL practice; determine whether assessors/other personnel involved in assessment were trained to ensure the quality of RPL assessments; establish whether credible assessment processes were being followed in LIS schools to ensure the integrity of the RPL system; and to determine whether quality management systems (QMS) were in place to ensure the continuous improvement of RPL system in the LIS schools.

The results of the investigation were analysed to establish the nature of RPL implementation in Library and Information Science (LIS) schools in South Africa. In spite of a number of weaknesses identified in the system, there were islands of good practice in the implementation of RPL in Library and Information Science schools in

South Africa. The study established that credible assessment processes were being followed in the LIS schools to ensure the integrity of the RPL system.

However, certain weaknesses were identified relating to policy environment, training of key personnel responsible for conducting RPL assessments and quality management systems (QMS). Appropriate measures were recommended to deal with specific areas of concern or weakness identified under each objective to ensure effective and efficient RPL implementation in LIS schools in South Africa.

Based on the findings of the study, further areas of research were recommended. In relation to experiential learning theory, the study found that there was still difficulty in articulating certain aspects of experiential learning in the RPL process in LIS schools in South Africa. In addition, a shared commitment to principles of learning and assessment were critical to ensuring that effective and efficient RPL implementation was not impeded in LIS schools in South Africa.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX A: Covering letter for the questionnaire**

Dear Colleague,

I kindly request your participation as well as your staff in this questionnaire which forms part of my doctoral study on: **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) implementation in Library and Information Science (LIS) schools in South African**. I am a student of the Department of Information Science at UNISA, and your contribution will be essential to the development of a discipline-specific RPL management approach for effective RPL practice in South African LIS schools. This study was cleared by the Ethics Committee at the University of South Africa.

All the LIS schools were selected for this study. Participants include Heads of LIS schools or departments, academic staff and RPL officials. Confidentiality is ensured to all participants and the information and personal particulars supplied will be used only for research purposes. Please note that you may withdraw or discontinue your participation at any stage of the research.

To participate in the survey you will need to do the following:

- give your formal consent to participation in the survey by accepting this email invitation (keeping in mind you may withdraw at any time); and
- please complete the questionnaire (see link below) before **[13 June 2013]**.

#### **LINK TO QUESTIONNAIRE:**

<http://surveys.unisa.ac.za/index.php?sid=43878&lang=en>

A copy of the final research findings will be made available to all participants upon request.

I look forward to hearing from you and thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,

**Ike Hlongwane (Mr)**

Information Search Librarian

University of South Africa (UNISA)

**APPENDIX B: Questionnaire**

**QUESTIONNAIRE  
THE STATUS OF RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) IMPLEMENTATION IN  
SOUTH  
AFRICAN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE SCHOOLS**

**PART I  
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

1. **Please** indicate your position in the institution

Please mark the appropriate box

Professor	
Associate professor	
Senior lecturer	
Lecturer	
Junior lecturer	
RPL official	

2. **Please** indicate your highest qualification

Doctorate/PhD Degree	
Masters Degree	
Honours/BTech Degree	
Bachelors Degree	

3. How long have you served in this position?

Less than 10 years	
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11- 20 years	
21-30 years	
More than 30 years	

4. **Please** indicate the name of the university

Durban University of Technology (DUT)	
University of Cape Town (UCT)	
University of Johannesburg (UJ)	
University of Fort Hare (UFH)	
University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)	
University of Limpopo (UL)	
University of Pretoria (UP)	
University of South Africa (UNISA)	
University of Zululand (UZ)	
Stellenbosch University (SU)	
Walter Sisulu University (WSU)	
University of Western Cape (UWC)	

5. **Please** indicate your gender

Male	
Female	

6. **Please** indicate your age group

Less than 25 yrs	26-30 yrs	31-35yrs	36-40yrs	41-45 yrs	46-50 yrs	More than 50 yrs
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**PART II****RPL POLICY ENVIRONMENT**

Please mark YES or NO to the statement best describing the institutional policy and environment in the school/department.

		YES	NO
1	There is an institutional 'will' to open up access to learners coming from diverse backgrounds, displaying diverse needs and capabilities.		
2	Policies and procedures are clearly spelt out and are based on the principles of equity of access and redress.		
3	The assessment policy expresses an explicit commitment to the principles of equity, redress and inclusion.		
4	The assessment policy reflects planning and management in accordance with relevant legislation and policy.		
5	Information about assessment opportunities and services is widely available and actively promoted.		
6	Admission procedures and systems are accessible and inclusive of non-matric learners		
7	Equal access exists to opportunities for advice, support, time and resources for all candidates seeking assessment.		
8	Organisational structures ensure that evidence facilitators, assessors and moderators and other key personnel, such as advisors, are given sufficient support, resources and recognition for their services		
9	Formal agreements between ETQAs, providers and workplaces are encouraged to ensure effective validation, articulation and recognition of assessment results.		

**PART III****TRAINING FOR RPL PERSONNEL**

Please mark Yes or No to the statement best describing the state of RPL training in the school/department.

1	The criteria for the registration of assessors and moderators makes explicit provision for the requisite certification in the relevant unit standards designed for that purpose, in accordance with the relevant principles and standards for assessment and moderation as set out in SAQA and other policy documents.	3	4
2	Policies and review mechanisms regarding monitoring and quality assurance of evidence facilitators, assessors, moderators and other key personnel are in place.	3	4
3	The functions of evidence facilitation, assessment and advising are clearly defined and, where possible, should not be performed by the same person.	3	4
4	Training and development encourage mentoring relationships between staff with and those without assessment expertise.	3	4
5	Quality assurance systems are implemented by all training providers to ensure that they increasingly meet the developmental objectives as agreed with the ETQA.	3	4

**PART IV****RPL ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

**Please** check the number that best describes the level to which you agree with the following statements. Use 1= Not at all 2= To a very little extent 3= To a reasonable extent 4= To a great extent

1	The purpose of assessment and the expectations of the candidate are clarified Assessment plans take into account the form, quality and sources of evidence required.	1	2	3	4
2	The form and quality of support to be provided to the candidate in preparing for the assessment are established	1	2	3	4
3	The candidate is actively involved in all aspects of the assessment process to ensure that the assessment is fair and transparent. Possible barriers to fair assessment are identified and addressed.	1	2	3	4
4	Assessment plans indicate a variety of appropriate assessment methods and instruments to validate diverse types of learning.	1	2	3	4
5	The choice of assessment methods is fit for purpose and ensures reliable and valid assessment outcomes.	1	2	3	4
6	An appeals process is in place and made known to the candidate.	1	2	3	4
7	Assessment instruments and exemplars are developed and moderated in compliance with the ETQA requirements.	1	2	3	4
8	Assessment reports indicate the assessment plan, the evidence presented, the assessment outcome and recommendations for further action, including additional training and/or reassessment.	1	2	3	4
9	Moderation and review mechanisms are in place, including policies for verification, evaluation and quality assurance of assessments and assessment systems.	1	2	3	4

**PART V****QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (QMS)**

**Please** check the number that best describes the level to which you agree with the following statements. Use 1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Strongly Disagree 4= Disagree

1	Quality management systems for assessment are designed, documented and implemented in accordance with agreed criteria and specifications.	1	2	3	4
2	Quality management systems ensure the refining of assessment policies, procedures and services at all levels and inform planning for further development aimed at meeting agreed targets.	1	2	3	4
3	Quality management systems provide for input from all key stakeholders, including representatives from the candidate community.	1	2	3	4
4	Quality management systems provide for support in meeting developmental targets, including evaluation and monitoring activities.	1	2	3	4
5	Evaluation and monitoring activities are clearly spelt out in the QMS documentation, including diagnostic, formative and summative activities.	1	2	3	4
6	Evaluation and monitoring activities ensure consistency within a sector.	1	2	3	4
7	Assessment documentation, reports and sources of evidence are maintained in	1	2	3	4

		accordance with agreed criteria and specifications.				
8		RPL results are recorded in accordance with the requirements of the ETQA and SAQA's NLRD (National Learners' Records Database)	1	2	3	4
9		Information on RPL outcomes, including unsuccessful and successful applications are maintained.	1	2	3	4
10		The QMS provides for systems to monitor the progress of candidates who enter learning programmes post-RPL.	1	2	3	4
11		The QMS provides for analyses and reporting of services and results.	1	2	3	4

## **APPENDIX C: Principles of good assessment (SAQA, 2001: 15-19)**

### **Fairness**

An assessment should not in any way hinder or advantage a learner.

Unfairness in assessment would constitute:

- Inequality of opportunities, resources and appropriate teaching and learning approaches in terms of acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills
- Bias in respect of ethnicity, gender, age, disability, social class and race in so far as that the assessment approaches, methods, instruments and materials do not take into account these differences
- Lack of clarity in terms of what is being assessed
- Comparison of learners' work with other learners, particularly in terms of diversity of learning styles, home language, values, gender, race, life experiences, etc.

### **Validity**

Validity in assessment refers to measuring what it says it is measuring, be it knowledge, understanding, subject content, skill, information, behaviours, etc.

Validity in assessment would constitute:

- Assessment procedures, methods, instruments and materials having to match what is being assessed.

In order to achieve validity in the assessment, assessors should:

- state clearly what outcome(s) is/are being assessed;
- use an appropriate type or source of evidence;
- use an appropriate method of assessment; and
- select an appropriate instrument of assessment.

### **Reliability**

Reliability in assessment is about consistency. Consistency refers to the same judgements being made in the same, or similar, contexts each time a particular assessment for specified stated intentions is administered.

Assessment results should not be perceived to have been influenced by variables such as:

- assessor bias in terms of the learners' gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religion, likes/dislikes, appearance and such like;
- different assessors interpreting unit standards or qualifications inconsistently;
- different assessors applying different standards;
- assessor stress and fatigue;
- insufficient evidence gathered; and
- assessor assumptions about the learner, based on previous (good or bad) performance.

**Practicability**

Practicability refers to ensuring that assessments take into account the available financial resources, facilities, equipment and time. Assessment that requires elaborate arrangements for equipment and facilities, as well as being costly, will make the assessment system fail.

#### **APPENDIX D: Ten quality assurance standards for RPL (Whitaker, 1989: 9-10)**

1. Credit should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience.
2. College credit should be awarded only for college-level learning.
3. Credit should be awarded only for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the subject, between theory and practical application.
4. The determination of competence levels and of credit awards must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic experts.
5. Credit should be appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted.
6. Credit awards and their transcript entries should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.
7. Policies and procedures applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available.
8. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
9. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should receive adequate training for the functions they perform, and there should be provision for their continued professional development.
10. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served and in the state of the assessment arts.